

The Soar Podcast E50 - Ashlee Sang

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SPEAKERS

Rai Cornell, Ashlee Sang



Rai Cornell 00:02

Welcome to Season Two of the SOAR podcast, the place for creative entrepreneurs who want to build healthier, happier, more profitable, self employed businesses. I'm your host Rai Hyde Cornell, business mentor at Chiron consulting and CEO and senior copywriter at Cornell content marketing, get ready to soar. Welcome to the SOAR podcast. On today's episode, we have Ashlee Sang. Ashley, tell our listeners what it is you do.



Ashlee Sang 00:39

Hi, thanks so much for having me. I am Ashlee Sang and I run Ashlee Sang consulting. And basically, I work with conscious and caring business owners who want to not only grow their business, but also grow their impact. And so the way I do that with these types of clients is through brand messaging strategy. Basically, I take everything that's in their head and heart. And I distill it so that they're able to connect with the people that they want to be connecting with.



Rai Cornell 01:11

Excellent. And you and I actually met when you were freelance writing. And so tell me a little bit about the evolution of your business. How did you go from being a freelance writer to a full time brand consultant?



Ashlee Sang 01:24

Yeah, so I was doing a lot of done for you work. Lots of website copy, marketing collateral, design work, you know I am by no means a designer. But you know, where it's sort of like, well, I could do it better than the business owner could. So yeah, sure, I can step in, or I can figure

this out along the way. And so along the way, some of the projects I took on were brand messaging, long term projects, or one off sort of guides or whatever it is that the scope of work included, often it was as a subcontractor. And the more I got my hands in brand messaging strategy, the more I realized A, how fundamental it is to every single business, but B, how important it is. So that business owners aren't wasting their money on contractors like I was. So for example, people would hire me to write a blog post, but they had zero strategy behind what the blog post was leading people toward, who the blog post was for, how it aligned with their offers, they just sort of thought, well, I need a blog post. And there was no more intention behind it beyond that. So the more I did strategy work, the more I saw how everything was connected. And the more that I realized, oh I'm really, really good at getting to the heart of what the business owner is trying to put out to the world, really seeing their vision and putting words to it, the more I realized, alright, this is where I want to be, I want to be in the strategy realm, and I want to move away from done for you work. And it was sort of simultaneous with also being pregnant all last year, and really wanting my business to fit the lifestyle I want and need. So I did a lot of planning and transitioning from this done for you work to exclusively doing strategic intensives. And so that's what I do now. So it definitely has been an evolution. And I'm really liking the direction that I'm going now.



Rai Cornell 03:37

And how did that evolution get you out of because, you know, you started out freelance, you started in this kind of like project based on for you world, which is very inconsistent. You have to constantly be chasing down new clients, you have to constantly be filling your pipeline. And that's what a lot of freelancers entrepreneurs burn out on. They love the creative work. They don't love, the sales, the marketing of themselves, the lead generation, they don't love that part. So how did this evolution of your services and you really figuring out what you enjoy, and getting out of kind of that hamster wheel of the doing work? How did that affect your stability and your ability to go full time into your business?



Ashlee Sang 04:26

It really came down to clarity, consistency and confidence. So these are really three things that I help clients work with. Like having a brand messaging strategy to rely on gives you those three things. But having offers for me really gave me those three components, right. So before it was literally anything under the sun that I thought I could either learn or draw from past experience on I would raise my hand and say yes, I can do that. Here's a portfolio that backs that up, or maybe some references, that sort of thing, right? It became very complicated very quickly, lots of proposals that are custom. And even if you have templates, it takes hours to complete, lots of perusing job forums and just sort of waiting for opportunities to come about. And when I really got clear on my offers, and the type of business and the stage of business where I can intervene best, that's where everything got easier, it's easier for me to create workshops now that I know are relevant, it's easier for me to find referral partners. And I've had some really great relationships this year, specifically, realizing that alright, brand messaging strategy really supports so many other service providers. So how can you prioritize in your business and plan for your next 90 days or your next year, however, if you don't know what your mission is, what your values are, who your audience is, right? So the brand messaging strategy comes before the ops planning, or web design, right? It is so much easier for a web designer or a copywriter or a graphic designer or any other service provider to bring your vision

to life visually, if they know what it is that you're trying to represent in the world. And so that representation, that perception that we're building, and that vision that we're making a reality, that is what we do together. And then it's so much more insightful, and intentional when you work with anyone subsequently.



Rai Cornell 06:41

Yeah, so your lead generation got easier through referral partners, your proposals got easier by simplifying your offers, your sales got easier because like you just said, this has to come before all the other things that you want to do in your business. So how did you actually go about finding this niche for yourself and carving this out? What advice would you give to someone who's listening to this and goes, Wow, that sounds like a dream come true. If I could just simplify what I'm doing, get out of the doing, and get more into the thinking in the strategy side of things.



Ashlee Sang 07:16

Yeah, so one of my brand values is exploration, I really like the ability to explore and be part of something that is bigger than myself and not be tied down, right, so many of us are multi-passionate, so many of us don't want to be put in the box. That's why we left a job to create a business. And so I do think there's absolutely value, especially as a beginning freelancer, or like not even necessarily beginning skill level, but just new to the field of freelancing or doing services online. I do think there is some value in experimentation. And really trying out, you don't know, if you like email copy versus website copy until you take on a project of each. You don't know that. You don't know if you're a great project manager until you've had the opportunity to do so. So I do think there's absolutely value in dabbling at the beginning. But that is not a sustainable way, at least not that I have found to really grow your business. So once you have dabbled enough, once you have had experience with good and bad projects and clients, once you know where your specific, perfect mind in meshing happens, then you are able to really narrow down. And so it is through sort of ad hoc strategy projects that I was brought into that I was able to realize, alright, this is really where I'm able to do something that not everyone else can do. And it feels a lot more impactful. If my goal is to have vicarious impact working with people and businesses that are doing great things in this world, really taking care of our clients or working towards some sort of social mission, then, if I'm able to facilitate that growth to make these businesses and these people that much more effective and reach the people they want to be reaching, then I'm having an impact too. And that's my whole goal. So in terms of advice, I would say experiment, and then get clear on your mission, your audience and your values. So the three very fundamental things that I include in all of my brand messaging strategy, and I think are essential for every business and every service provider. If you're clear on those three aspects. Every decision instantly gets easier. You can put it through the filter of does this align with my values? Does this bring me closer to my mission? And is this what my audience wants and needs from me. If you're able to answer yeses to all those, then that decision is an easy Yes. And if it's a no, then it's a quick No. So I really think having an internal gut check filter is really, really useful.



Rai Cornell 10:17

And I love that basically, what you're saying is try everything. Try everything and figure out

what you love. Because you wouldn't have known that you enjoy the strategy piece if you had said, Oh, no client, like, I've never done strategy before. So I'm just not even gonna participate in this project. But you said, I think I can do that. I think I might be good at that. I think I think I think let me try it. And actually, we talked about this a lot in the To niche or not to niche episode that we did in season one. And it's really exactly what you're saying, try everything, try a little bit of everything. But then when do you know when that threshold is when you go, Okay, I've tried enough things. Now, I think I'm ready to niche down, to specialize, to focus, to fine tune, refine, and it sounds like what you're saying is, it's once you identify that thing that you love, that you're passionate about, and that really aligns with your values. That means you can do that sustainably long term.

A

Ashlee Sang 11:19

Yeah. And you can also if you're good at reflecting or if you have a business bestie or a consultant or a coach, then you can also find patterns. So yes, explore. Yes, experiment. But also take the time to step back and realize, it seems like a lot of my clients recently have been in this industry or asked for this type of result. Or it seems like I keep coming back to this framework of X, Y, or Z. Like, for example, I didn't know brand messaging strategy existed a few years ago, I did not know it existed. And so the more I realized, this keeps coming up, the more I dug into it. And even more recently, I've really been leaning into this concept of values and values aligned decision making, and leading with your values and values led messaging. And so all of a sudden, I have sort of branded myself as the values lady, right? And there's so much space for me to dive into that. And so often with niching, and I'm 100% guilty of this, we feel like oh, no, I'm gonna put a label on myself, or I'm gonna put myself in this little box, and I don't want to be there. But so often the result of niching, especially if it's intentional, and based on experience, the result is that we actually have so much more freedom. So now all of a sudden, if I have brand messaging strategy and values as two guiding pillars, how much content could I possibly create around those? So much content right? How many workshops could I do around that? How many offers could I create around that at various price points, or for various audiences? There's so much more flexibility, once you have some sort of anchor to guide you.



Rai Cornell 13:22

Yeah, and not only does it anchor you, but it gives your audience something to grab on to. Because if you are the go to do all writer who does emails and website copy and works b2b and b2c, and in this industry and that industry, and you do all the things because you're still in that dabbling try everything phase, that you need to do that for a little while, but it gives your target audience nothing to hold on to, because who are you, you're the jack of all trades, Jane of all trades. Whereas once you do get to the point where you've identified a niche that's right for you, then they go, Oh, that's the right person. And I love that you mentioned bringing up patterns, because that's exactly the same process that I went through. I had a business mentor, who I was bitching and moaning about, oh, I don't like this client and this client and this client. She goes, Okay, well tell me about the clients that you do like, and I said, Okay, I like this one, I like this one. I like pretty literally like Vine box. I like real paper. She goes, you realize those are all subscriptions, right? And I was like, Whoa, no, I had no idea. I was too close to it. And so that was years ago, and since then I've niched down into the subscription industry, but sometimes we are just too immersed in our work. And we realize, okay, well this client is

John and this client is Sally and we don't realize, oh, this client is actually a subscription brand or actually, it's a nonprofit or actually, it's a very, you know, social justice oriented sort of brand. You don't realize those things. When you're, you know, nose to toes with it and you need someone else to kind of reflect back to you what they see from that eagle eye view. So I want to get more into talking about your values work specifically, we are going to take a super short break and we'll be right back. Hey, Rai Hyde Cornell here. If you're tired of doing it all yourself all on your own, and you want a supportive, high vibe place to call your home, then the Archer Mastermind is where you belong. This small group program includes monthly business building trainings designed specifically for you and where you are in your business, Chiron counsel group coaching sessions, motivating co working sessions, special ticket prices for retreats in Colorado Springs, Las Vegas, Sedona plus free access to business building week and everything inside the Chiron Academy which includes all of my workshops and courses to help you make massive leaps forward quickly. The Archer Mastermind is the ideal place for creative entrepreneurs who are ready to take their businesses seriously and remove roadblocks to success every single day. earlybird pricing is open now through November 30. And if you're listening to this after November 30, you can still get in, we open the doors for the Q1/Q2 mastermind cohort on January 1. So check it out, learn more and apply at [Chironconsulting.us](https://chironconsulting.us). Forward slash mastermind. All right, we are back with Ashlee Sang. So Ashlee, your specialty is in focusing around values. That means a lot on a personal level. Tell me what that means in your business. And in working with companies.

A

Ashlee Sang 16:57

Yeah, so for me, brand values are absolutely what make you stand out. If you think about it, there are so many other podcast hosts or copywriters, or massage therapist, whatever it is, right. So there are so many other businesses that do something very similar to you at similar price points for similar audiences. So what sets you apart is really your values. It's how you make people feel, it's what you stand for in the world. And so if you're able to put a stake in the ground and say, We're this type of company, or I'm this type of founder or this type of service provider, then your audience is going to be naturally attracted to that, which is exactly what you want and repelled, which is also what you want, right. So you want to be attracting the people who fully align with your values, whether their shared values, like absolute overlap between what you care about as a founder and a company, and what your audience cares about, or whether it's just similar enough that they can get on board, right? Like they don't necessarily have to have the exact same three to five, you know, primary values that are guiding their life, they just have to really be on board with what you're putting out in the world, right, and the way that you're making them feel. Whereas if you do take a strong stand for transparency, for example, and you're sharing income reports, and you're sharing horrible experiences with vendors, and you're sharing personal health journeys. And that might repel some people, some people might be like, You know what, keep those doors closed, I don't want to know that from my service provider that's too close to personal, that's fine. That's not your ideal client, right? So and the way you live out your values, is so important. So it's a question of establishing your brand values, really knowing what they are, internalizing them, sharing them with your team, if you have one, sharing them for sure with your audience, but then also defining those values, because you and I might both care about exploration, for example, but it might manifest in completely different ways. So it's really how we define it for ourselves and our brand and our clients that's most important. And then it's about how we apply it. So it's really a question of looking at our marketing, our operations, and figuring out how can my values shine through where can I live out those values in every single aspect of my business. And the more consistent you are with those values, the more consistent your messaging is

going to be easier, making sales is going to be, because you're going to be qualifying people ahead of time. And you're going to be keeping the right people in the fold and keeping away the wrong people.



Rai Cornell 19:56

So as you're talking about values, it's reminded me a lot of Simon Sinek Start With Why. And his whole philosophy is, people don't buy what you have to sell, they buy, why you do it, they don't buy what you do they buy why you do it. So how does why compare to values and you see one as stronger or more versatile for a business to lead with than another?



Ashlee Sang 20:25

Yeah, so it is so intertwined. Everything that I do is tied back to that why. So for me, your audience is very clearly who you're showing up for. Your values for me are how you're showing up. Your mission is why you're showing up. And then your vision is what you're showing up for. That transformation that you're aiming to create in the world, in the marketplace, in your clients lives. That's your vision. And so that mission component is that sandwiched in between how you're living out your values, how you're making that why possible, and the reason why you want that what vision to happen. So if you are clear on the who, the what, the why, and the how, it is so much easier to make these decisions to carve out a space online or on Main Street or wherever it is that you're showing up. It's really easy to be confident in the message that you're sharing, when you have a strong why to bolster that up.



Rai Cornell 21:40

Yeah. So this makes a lot of sense for those very, what am I trying to say, like philanthropic brands, you know, I'm thinking of, is it a TOMS shoes and you know, brands like that, that they have a very clear give back where consumer you buy XYZ, and we as a company are going to give ABC to this underprivileged community or this impoverished country or this nonprofit organization. Those values really come into play. What about for brands, and maybe even for freelancers, and solopreneurs, who don't have so strong and so forward of a social justice or philanthropic mission, how do values apply to them.



Ashlee Sang 22:35

So they still apply. Values are there whether you're consciously enacting them or not, they're creating your company culture regardless. So all the better if you're intentional about it, but it's gonna be there regardless, right? So you don't have to necessarily have sort of cause champion to really lean into your values. A lot of my clients, I have found actually recently, value simplicity. That's so simple, right? Like, it's not a complex idea. But having a value of simplicity can be really powerful. It can guide how you create offers, it can guide your user experience, it can guide the team structure you create, it can guide every single aspect of your business. So having that value of simplicity, is actually really, really useful, and doesn't have to be tied necessarily to any sort of social cause. It is simply how you want to run your business and how again, you want your customer to feel and your partners to feel. So having values is essential,

whether you want your business to be actively business for good, or whether you want it to be sort of, you know, standard business, I'm in this to make money, you know, or anywhere in between, your values can absolutely shine through.



Rai Cornell 24:15

Yeah, and I love what you said about your values are going to shape your company culture, whether you're conscious of it or not, whether you're doing it intentionally or not. And I'll use my own company as an example. So at Cornell, one of our values is excellence. We consider ourselves an elite squad of content creators because our standards are through the roof. We hold ourselves to way higher standards than even our clients hold us to. And if I wasn't deliberate about communicating that with our team members, the moment they show interest in joining the team in the company overview I send them, in the training materials that they go through when they're onboarding, if I wasn't very clear about this is an intentional value that we hold, the perception would be holy shit, this bitch is a slave driver, like she's got like insane standards like there's no pleasing her, this is just, you know, irrational or it may come across as harsh or you know, we're taking ourselves too seriously. But because we've taken that time to be very clear about No, this is deliberate because this is our brand, our brand is not to just be a content mill, our brand is to be the best source of content creation that you can possibly get on the web. Then there's that investment from our team that goes, Oh, that's pretty cool, okay, I want to be a part of that, okay, I'm gonna continue to push myself and elevate and improve my skills, and I'm more receptive to feedback. And it's all for that constructive purpose of serving that brand value. So everyone is on board, as opposed to feeling attacked. And of course, you know, there's things like your tone of voice when you give constructive feedback, and all of that that comes into play. But you see what I mean, where if it's not clear, intentional, and explicitly stated, people are still going to perceive it, and you have no control over how they perceive it. So it could go very badly.



Ashlee Sang 26:21

Yeah, so not only in sustaining the company culture, but also, again, in attracting customers and the team, you want the team to be on board with those values, otherwise, you know, it's not going to be a good fit, right. And so again, they don't have to all have the same core values as the business, they just have to understand it, they have to be willing to implement on it, they have to be willing to carry that out across their work. And sometimes a team member or an audience segment, or just people outside of you, the founder, are able to bring new values to light. So it's not that the values are set in stone by any means. They are simply the guiding force and the filter. And so periodically, you can review, reflect, evaluate, is this still the direction I want to be moving? Are these still the values that I want to be known for, that I want to stand for that I want to be representing in the world? And then you adjust accordingly. And you know, if excellence somehow falls off your radar, what is it that's replacing it, right? Because there's always something that you're going to be prioritizing. And generally, I like to stick to three to five values that you're really putting at the forefront that everyone can feel and everyone can make decisions around.



Rai Cornell 27:48

Yeah. And I'm an Uber Capricorn. So I don't think that value is going anywhere, anytime soon.

But on that note, what would your advice be for not just business owners who have these entities and have these teams and have these like very forward public brands, but also for solopreneurs, creative freelancers, creative entrepreneurs, what would be your advice, to helping them start to figure out what their values are and how they can communicate those through their brand, so that they can start attracting in those right fit clients?

A

Ashlee Sang 28:22

Yeah, so it's still absolutely relevant for solopreneurs. For freelancers, knowing your values, is still going to be your differentiator, especially because you're working likely one on one with clients. And so your personality, your voice, the messages that you put out into the world, the way you frame your offers, and the way you frame exactly how you're able to accomplish that transformation for your client. It all comes back to your values. Really, values work is reflection work. You have to sit and think about it. And we've talked about external perspective before, it's so helpful, we are so close to our values, our business, the vision that we want to put out into the world that sometimes we need that reflection back to us. We can live in our heads for so long, without putting anything out into the world. So if you have a business bestie, if you're part of a mastermind, if you have a consultant that you trust or a coach that you work with, getting outside perspective is really really helpful once you've done the internal reflection. But you can ask yourself questions like What are things that I absolutely do not put up with? That shows you what you do value, right, you can ask yourself, all right, when I see a news article or or a new company pop up or something like that, what really lights up my fire, it lights me up, I'm so excited to see more of that, right? If you are able to think about causes that you support as a philanthropist, as a volunteer, or partnerships that really just feel good, you're able to sort of tease out these values. And it's a lot easier said than done. I have a whole half day intensive specifically around this, I have a whole workbook specifically around this because it's not so easy as just like sitting and thinking, what five words represent me? Or what do I want my brand to represent? And then just like, you know, writing it out. But the good news is, no value is inherently good or bad. So like, if you take the idea of inclusivity, for example, at face value, you might think that that's super important. So if you have a membership community, and you want as many different points of view and perspectives and life paths, and that's really going to enrich the community, but inclusivity is wonderful and beautiful. But if you have an intimate group coaching package, and you need everyone in that group to feel like they're in an extremely safe place, and have very similar life experiences, maybe because it was traumatic, or because you are able to intervene on that one very unique part of their identity, then inclusivity is not the right fit, you want it to be highly exclusive, right? So inclusivity, exclusivity aren't necessarily good or bad. It's, again, how you define it for your business, how it aligns with your audience, and how you live out that value that's most important. So as you're doing this values work, really think about not only what do I want to stand for, what do I want to be known for? But also how do I want people to feel when they interact with my brand?



Rai Cornell 32:06

Yeah, that is a fantastic example of inclusivity exclusivity as the application of the value really shaping the experience people have with your brand. And on that note, where can people check you out Ashlee? And where can they learn more about this values worky ou do?



A

Ashlee Sang 32:23

Yeah, so my website is AshleeSang.com Ashlee with two E's, Sang, like sang a song. It'll be in the show notes too. But that's sort of where you can get a high level overview of what I stand for. And then I'm most active on Instagram at [ashleesangconsulting](https://www.instagram.com/ashleesangconsulting) and LinkedIn just under my name, Ashlee Sang, and if this type of values aligned work resonates with you and the business that you want to create, I do have a free workbook available at AshleySang.com/soar. Like the podcast to get you reflecting on some of these brand messaging principles. And then most importantly, it comes with a consistency checklist. So that you are actually implementing on the strategic work because a strategy is only as good as it is implemented. So I really would love for you to be taking action, and then report back if you have any breakthroughs. I always love to hear what your values are or what steps you're taking in your business.



Rai Cornell 33:30

Fantastic. Thank you so much for making that available for our listeners. Thank you Ashlee for being here.

A

Ashlee Sang 33:36

Yeah, thanks so much for having me.



Rai Cornell 33:50

Hey, Ray here again, thanks for listening. If you liked this episode, please subscribe and rate us in your favorite podcasting platform. Want to be a guest on the show or know someone who has an amazing story of entrepreneurship? Apply on our website at Chironconsulting.us/podcast