



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Episode 127: Writing Compelling Subject Lines

Guest: Michelle Vroom, CEO, Vroom Communications

This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners, overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer three questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.

Debbie Albert: This episode of *Prove It!* is about writing compelling subject lines, and I couldn't be more pleased to welcome our guest, Michelle Vroom of Vroom Communications. She has over a decade of experience in marketing and public relations for non-profits and large corporations. But when she founded her own company, she decided to dedicate it to helping small businesses communicate effectively.

I asked Michelle to do an episode with us, because every time I get an email from her, I'm awed by her clever use of subject lines. For those of us in this business, and even if you're not, a compelling subject line in an email can be the make or break point for someone to open it. So, Michelle, welcome to Prove It!

Michelle Vroom: Thank you, Debbie, for having me.

Debbie Albert: I'm glad you're here, because I get emails from you regularly, and every single time, I smile when I see the subject line, because it makes me want to open the email.

Michelle Vroom: I'm so glad.

Debbie Albert: So, you know the format, I'm going to ask you a few questions, and then I'm going to ask you to prove your point. So, are you ready to get started?

Michelle Vroom: I'm ready.

Debbie Albert: Okay, so let's start with this one. Michelle, talk about what happens when you don't pay attention to your subject line, or your headlines. I know most of us have short attention spans these days, which is why this podcast is ten minutes long. So, **can you give us some insights from a 30,000-foot perspective about what happens when you don't pay attention to your subject lines?**

Michelle Vroom: Absolutely, when you don't pay attention, your audience doesn't pay attention to you. Attention spans are absolutely very short, they're becoming shorter and shorter. In fact, I was at a conference a few weeks ago, and heard that the latest stat says that attention spans are eight seconds long,



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and not only that, people are inundated with tons of messages, with tons of information. So, they have shorter attention spans, and a lot more information to sift through, which makes your subject lines that much more important to getting people to pay attention.

Debbie Albert: Boy, eight seconds, no wonder I'm having a hard time reading books these days.

Michelle Vroom: Yeah, it makes though, right?

Debbie Albert: Right, yeah, you sit your desk, you get a text. You get an email, you want to check something on Facebook. The phone rings, I mean, how can anyone ever figure out how to prioritize, let alone get work done? So, you're right, you have to stand out in a crowded field.

Michelle Vroom: You do, you do. And it shouldn't be a discouragement, I think a lot of people feel discouraged by that. It's simply the reality of what we face, and it's an opportunity to be better at what we do.

Debbie Albert: That's a very good point. **So, how are clients responding to your guidance when it comes to content in general, and especially your subject lines?**

Michelle Vroom: For my clients, a lot of them come to me already struggling to get people to pay attention. So, for them, it's an eye opener. It's something that they really don't think about. Most people, when they're developing an email, or a social post, but we're talking about email, of course. Most people focus on the actual copy, versus the subject line. So, the subject line is almost an afterthought, something that they develop last, and then just throw it out there, right?

For my clients, we're really looking at how can you make this compelling, how can you give people a reason to pay attention? And so, they're doing things a little differently whereas once before, they focused on the subject line last. Now they're spending a lot more time thinking about what reason they can give people to actually stop and read something that they're writing.

Debbie Albert: And so you find that to be true with email and social posts, and talk to me, I'm going to go down a different path for one minute, has the content, **have you been helping them shrink the content of their emails as well?**

Michelle Vroom: Yeah, I don't know that we've focused as much on shrinking, though in many cases, it needs to be shrunk, absolutely. I think what've been focusing on, Debbie, is really the *quality* of the content, right? So not necessarily paying as much attention to length, but what are you saying? Are you actually providing value, and helping people, or are you just pushing your own agenda? I think that's the biggest thing, and that is across the board. That's email, that's social, I do a lot of Facebook Live videos.



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So, in order for people to pay attention to watch my Lives, you better believe I have to have a really good subject line, right? I've got to give them a reason to stop scrolling, and pay attention. And so for my clients, it's a matter of like, what do you want to communicate, and how are you communicating it, so that you're putting the client first, versus your own needs first?

Debbie Albert: And Michelle, I think you also have to think about doing it in a way that's not deceptive.

Michelle Vroom: Exactly.

Debbie Albert: You want to have a subject line that's compelling, but it can't be something that brings them in under false pretenses.

Michelle Vroom: No, we are not talking about bait-and-switch. I do not subscribe to that, at all. That's the best way to kill your relationships, and to make people not trust you. If you're in marketing, you know that people need to trust you, and have confidence that you can deliver a solution for them. They're not going to have that confidence if this is a bait and switch. However, most people focus on their own needs, and what sounds good to them.

They don't think about, what do my clients need to hear? What does my audience need to hear? How can I start to frame things in their language, right, in the words that they would use? How can I connect with them on that level? That's what we're talking about. We are not talking about putting something out there that's not accurate.

Debbie Albert: Right, and also, speaking to a client's pain point.

Michelle Vroom: Oh, yes, yep. You've got to meet them where they're at first, and a lot of my clients, they're focused on like, the nitty-gritty of what they provide, like, well, I'm going to talk about the fact that I provide, you know, a certain amount of calls, and I'm like, nobody cares about calls. People care about their situation, and how are you going to make their situation better, right? What's the future look like for them? What do they want most, and how can you get them from their current situation, which I'll call point A, to their desired situation, to the future, which I'll call point B, right?

So how are you getting them from point A to point B, and a subject line is again, something that serves your audience, because if you can get them to stop and pay attention, read the amazing content that you're putting out, and your content should be amazing. If you can get them to do that, that's actually serving them, right? You're serving them by getting them to stop, to pause, and to pay attention to what you are putting out there, because they need to hear it.

Debbie Albert: So, what are some best practices in writing a subject line? What's the most important thing to consider? A lot of people who listen to the podcast are not people like us in the business, but



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they're people who are trying to do this on their own. They're small businesses, a lot of your clients, it would be, people who are just trying to get best practices from listening to this podcast. **So, what's the most important thing to consider when writing that subject line?**

Michelle Vroom: Keep it short, and do not write a novel in there. I mean, listen, when you think about what you're reading, and how you're scrolling through your inbox, are you going to read something that is a ten-word novel in a subject line? No, you're going to go, your eyes naturally gravitate towards shorter, punchier type things, right? So short things that really make an impact, and that leave you wanting more. If you give them everything in the subject line, what is the incentive for them to open up the email, right?

So you need to leave a little bit of mystery and intrigue, and again, not to bait-and-switch, but to, again, get them to read the rest, right? Because the way that you serve them is by having them read your entire email, all of your content. So, you need to leave them with a little bit of like, hm, I wonder what's inside of there.

Debbie Albert: Yeah, exactly.

Michelle Vroom: You also need to be thinking of course about their pain point, it should apply to where they are at now. So those are my top three, I think, for a lot of people, it's like, well, I have to have four or five words, and I need to have this, and it needs to be short, what short means for you can look a little different, but you absolutely should not be trying to put everything into the subject line.

Prove it!

Debbie Albert: That's great. So now that we've exhausted our eight seconds of attention span several times, let me get to the Prove It! point. This podcast is all about proving how this works. **So can you tell us about how a compelling subject line in an email made a difference either for you in your business, or for one of your clients?**

Michelle Vroom: Yeah, so I'll use an example from my business. This was an email that I sent out that immediately received a response from someone who wanted to book a call with me to talk about working together. This email, the subject line was, "Do It Scared." And that, number one-

Debbie Albert: Whoa, I would be like, what's that?

Michelle Vroom: Yeah, "Do It Scared." So that's three words, so right away, your eye is going to gravitate toward the shorter thing, right? And it's interesting because before this, I did a lot of questions, I would ask a question in my subject line. And those can be very effective, but for this, it was "Do It Scared" and it was punchy, it was effective because it left some of that mystery, where someone's like,



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wait, do what scared, tell me more. And then the entire email was about how people are held back by fear, right, and how they don't move forward with the things that will help grow their business because they're afraid.

So, this was "Do It Scared", and I'm tapping into something that everybody faces, right? Everyone can relate to feeling afraid, especially when you're talking about marketing, and putting yourself out there. And so I think the content of the email of course was what sealed the deal for this person, but she never would have opened it, if it weren't for that subject line.

Debbie Albert: So you had that great subject line, someone opened it, realized that you could bring value to their company, and she became your client.

Michelle Vroom: Yes, so she booked a call with me, yep, and ended up becoming a client, and part of all, another reason why this worked so well is that the subject line again, supported the content, right? So, "Do It Scared," and then the entire email, the tone of the email was, listen, if you're waiting to take action, until you're not afraid, you'll be waiting forever. It was very much what I will call "tough love" and I know you'll appreciate this, Debbie, the mix of tough love with encouragement. And that subject line was reflective of that. So, it felt consistent with the tone of the email, and when you can match those two up, that's very important. People also want consistency.

Debbie Albert: I think that's great, because everything is so focused on content right now, I always say, writers should be the happiest people on earth, and I think that people who run a business that's not related to marketing, or PR really have to understand the value that a good content writer can bring to them, and to invest in it, because it can really change their business.

Michelle Vroom: Absolutely, and a good content writer should also know how to bring out of you your own tone, right, like your own style, because people aren't just buying your service, or your product, or whatever you're putting out there. They are investing in you, and so I think for a lot of people, it's like, well, I just want to hire someone and make them just write something for me, and yes, a great content writer will write it for you, but they should be working with you to draw out your own way of saying things, your own way of expressing yourself, because there's far too much fake stuff online.

That's a whole another topic, Debbie, that I could get into, you know what I mean? There are so many people who are just saying things that they would never otherwise say. You need to have support, but support in the right way.

Debbie Albert: Perfect. We are out of our ten minutes, but I'm telling you right now in this podcast, I'm having you back, because you and I have a lot more that we could be talking about.

Michelle Vroom: We do.



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Debbie Albert: So I know our listeners will think twice when sending their next marketing-focused email, and I know I'll be keeping an eye out for them. And if you're interested in seeing Michelle's emails, Vroom Communications, the web link is on our podcast page, and you'll be doing yourself a favor because Michelle does not waste your time. So thank you, Michelle, and thank our listeners for listening to Prove It! If you have ideas for topics, or for guests, maybe even you, take care.

You just listened to Prove It, a production of Albert Communications. Find a transcript of this episode and more about this feisty creative team on the web@albertcommunications.com.

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