

That's So Sweet: Where Writing Research Stops (and Starts) for Cheesecake

Angela Sheets

Angela Sheets met with twenty-four-year-old Lindsay Bachman, owner of That's So Sweet, a cheesecake shop in Lexington, IL. They met at the now-closed Normal, IL, satellite branch of the shop and chatted about how writing and writing research are an everyday part of running a business.

ANGELA: What types of writing or materials do you produce?

LINDSAY: A lot of our writing tends to be on the social media spectrum: Facebook posts, things like that. It's a lot of figuring out what's appropriate and what's not, what to say, and what to draw people in and get people's attention. I also do a lot of quick little e-mails back and forth. Things as simple as that. I have written and come up with all of our printed materials too, like our printed menu (Figure 1). I'm working right now on a pamphlet that's just wedding-oriented, because we do a lot of wedding things. When it came time to opening the Normal store, there was more proposal writing and things like that than I had ever done. So that's not on an everyday basis, but I've done that.

ANGELA: Can you tell me more about that proposal you had to do to open the Uptown Normal shop?

LINDSAY: Right. I did that quickly. I looked at this space late morning of one day, and I sent my proposal in at like 6 or 7 a.m. the next day. I just really wanted to move on this space, so I didn't give myself a whole lot of time to go



Figure 1: That's So Sweet menu.

back and rework things. It was simple enough that I didn't have to do that. I knew they wanted it brief, and I tend to get fairly wordy (*laughs*), so that was difficult. They didn't want to read more than a page. They just wanted to know things like potential hours, days of the week, what we would be selling. I think I did a brief little paragraph about the store that was already running in Lexington. I told a little bit about us and just tried to sound more professional than I had done before. Two guys that work for the town gave me some ideas, but nothing super extensive to go off of. So I had to figure out what they wanted to hear without saying too much but saying enough to give them a good idea of what I did and what we were going to do with the space.

ANGELA: It was a competition for the space, wasn't it? Do you know who you beat out?

LINDSAY: There were four of us: me, a photographer, a hair salon, and a cupcake shop. They made us wait four weeks before they made a decision. So, I had kind of gotten to the point where I thought if it had been that long I probably wasn't going to get it. And then they didn't go into a whole lot of detail when they sent the e-mail that they had chosen me. And then, after I found out that we had the space, everything following that was a different proposal and a different approval process. We did some painting on the front of the building. Even my sign had to be approved. Everything. So that was all its own proposal. And it's just really brief, almost little blurbs just explaining what you're going to do.

ANGELA: For those proposals, were there forms for you to fill out or did you have to create your own formal documents from scratch?

LINDSAY: I created the formal proposal [for the space], and that was kind of nerve-wracking because I wasn't sure what that was supposed to look like.

But then there were forms for the painting and there's a sign permit form and things like that. So that was all easier.

ANGELA: Sounds like you do a lot of writing!

LINDSAY: Yeah, none of it is too extravagant or extensive, but there's a lot.

ANGELA: It doesn't have to be long to be complicated. I think about those social media posts, for example.

LINDSAY: They're harder than you would think. But if you do it right, it's the best form of advertising there is.

ANGELA: Would you consider your writing to be workplace-related, school-related, community, social, or maybe a mix of these?

LINDSAY: Workplace, some community, and some social, probably. When I think of workplace I think of—that's my platform for doing everything—it's *my* workplace, it's not necessarily other people's workplace. We do a lot of community events and we've done a couple things recently that we've gotten the community involved in. Social—I try to find a good balance between “Yes, we make cheesecakes, but there's people behind these cheesecakes,” and “This is what we do sometimes when we're not making them.” Or, I just took my staff away for a weekend and I shared some of that. I think people like to see things other than our actual product.

ANGELA: How does your writing function? What does it do or make possible?

LINDSAY: As far as social media and posting, it could be something as simple as one sentence that might draw somebody in the door. I will write more lengthy posts if I really want to talk about something. For instance, we did a fundraiser for the family of a boy who was killed by a drunk driver. He was a family friend, so I went into a little detail about that. But I would say mostly as far as social media and on a day-to-day posting basis, just drawing people in: this is what we're up to, this is what we're doing. Obviously with the printed materials, you want them to look nice enough and sound nice enough that somebody might come in and not purchase anything, but grab a menu and come back because they were impressed by that. Invitations and things like that, obviously, are drawing people to whatever you're doing. And then, as far as day-to-day e-mailing, it could be a potential bride, it could be—like you and I were e-mailing back and forth. When I was doing the process to get into this store there was a lot of e-mailing about the legal aspects and the lease and all that kind of thing down here. So that was new to me. My process for getting the building in Lexington was much different and much less formal.

ANGELA: You say were e-mailing people about legal stuff. Do you work with a lawyer?

LINDSAY: I do. I work with somebody specifically on contracts and things like that. I have gotten to a point where I'm going to have my employees sign a non-compete, just basically they're not going to take my recipes and go sell them somewhere else. The lawyer also does things like lease revisions and reading over things. We purchased the building that the Lexington store is in, so we just have an attorney to handle all of that stuff.

ANGELA: What tools do you use as you produce your texts? And by texts, we can mean anything. So on your pamphlets, for example, you have visuals, which we could categorize as a type of text. So what tools do you think come into the production process?

LINDSAY: As far as designing, and that sort of thing, I leave that up to a professional. I like to think I'm fairly good with the word part of things and the writing part of things, and I know what I want things to say, but as far as laying out and designing them, I actually use Fabulous Affairs, a business down the street. They do that for me. I'm not as technologically savvy as I would like to be.

ANGELA: What other tools do you use? Like, when you're engaging in social media, are you doing that primarily on your phone, on a laptop?

LINDSAY: I use my phone. I have a laptop at the Lexington store but I don't tend to carry that with me just because iPhones can do everything that a laptop can. I have a page manager app on Facebook that lets me go into pages I'm the admin of. I have one for here [in Normal] and Lexington has

its own page. And that's helpful. And I can write three days' worth of posts and schedule when I want them to post, and that's been a time saver, because there are mornings where it's eleven o'clock and we opened at ten and I'm like, "Oh shoot, I didn't post the chalkboard yet," or "People don't know what we've got today." So kind of lining that up and preparing myself for a busier day.

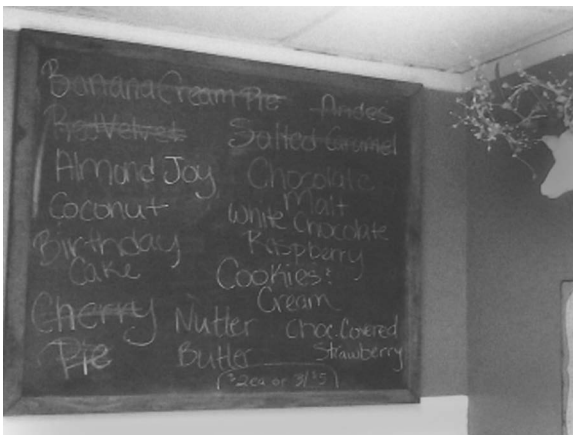


Figure 2: The chalkboard at That's So Sweet.

ANGELA: What's the chalkboard?

LINDSAY: We write our flavors on it (Figure 2) and every morning we just take a picture of that and post it to Facebook (Figure 3) and that's how people know. If they don't want to call in or just take their chances, they can check our Facebook page. And we post that every day.

ANGELA: So, another piece of writing to do each day.

LINDSAY: Yes, yes (*laughs*), something as simple as scribbling on a chalkboard, I guess.

ANGELA: Yeah. If you didn't have that it would be really difficult to communicate. That's why we say it doesn't really matter the size of the text that you're using. I mean, you talk about how a sentence or two on Facebook might be the thing that draws people in.

LINDSAY: Right. Exactly. And I think the chalkboard thing, people have kind of started to associate that with us. I have a chalkboard in Lexington and that's what they know to look at when they come in.

ANGELA: Are other tools involved in your writing process?

LINDSAY: As I opened this store, I had somebody in a manager position and I gave her the logins to everything, our Instagram and our Facebook, and she's an admin on the Facebook page, so she does the posting to this store. And that's—I wouldn't have thought of another person as a tool, but it is. (*laughs*) And, honestly, I'm a pen and paper person. I would much rather sit down and handwrite something than type it. And I don't know why. I just like it. So I usually have a notebook with me. It's weird. I could be, like, driving in the car and think of something that I want to post the next day, or trying to go to sleep at night, and—and I don't sleep with the notebook (*laughs*)—my husband might not like that—it's just a good way to kind of collect random thoughts, because we all have them. And I sometimes, if I think of something and don't have my notebook with me, I'll use the notepad app on my phone. I'm a list person, to-do lists.

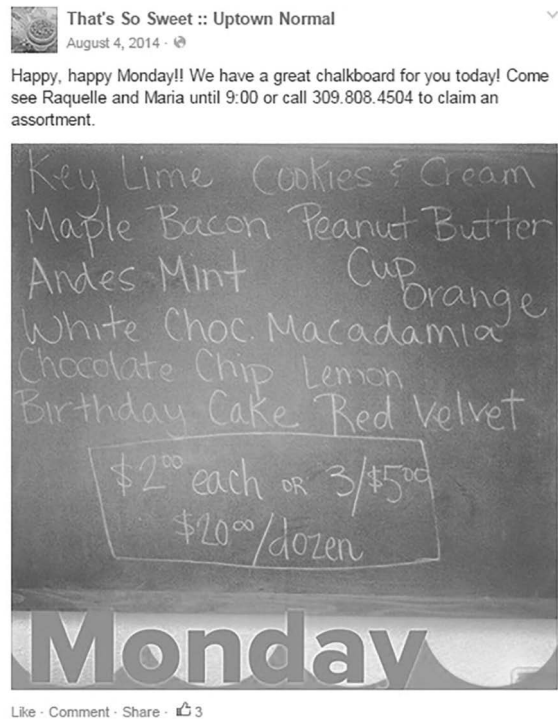


Figure 3: A Facebook post featuring the chalkboard.

ANGELA: What tool do you think is the most powerful for your writing?

LINDSAY: I couldn't do anything without my phone because that's how everything gets blasted out. Yeah. I honestly feel like I come up with my best ideas just when I'm doing something completely un-work-related: driving somewhere, trying to go to sleep at night, things like that. And that sounds kind of silly, but sometimes it's not a physical tool at all that makes you think of the best things.

ANGELA: So, like, having that downtime in your process, kind of?

LINDSAY: Yeah. Yeah, uh-huh. I think sometimes I have to be away from it all to really, truly think about all of it.

ANGELA: What would you consider as parts of your writing process that are particularly tangled, troublesome, difficult, or negative?

LINDSAY: As social media goes, I had to get over the fact that one person might not like what I'm saying, but 500 might like it at the same time. And that's okay. (*laughs*) Like if I post something and I wake up the next morning and we have, like, two less likes, I'm like, "Oh shoot, what did I say wrong?" (*laughs*) And sometimes it's just a lack of time or running around like crazy. And honestly, my least favorite thing is to sit down and respond to e-mails. I hate it. I hate it! (*laughs*)

ANGELA: You mentioned that you use social media for advertising, but what other mediums do you go through?

LINDSAY: I don't. I tried radio advertising. I took somebody up on a good deal and I did three months of radio advertising. And it wasn't by any means bad, but the return on investment wasn't enough to make me do it again. Honestly, word-of-mouth, people talking about good things, and Facebook are the best things. And I've really enjoyed Instagram. Sometimes I think, with our product, pictures speak louder than words.

ANGELA: I've looked up your Facebook page, and your photographs are really attractive. Is there any sort of special techniques you had to acquire to be able to make that sort of text—an attractive food photograph?

LINDSAY: I've heard from professionals that food photography is a lot more difficult than photographing people. I just have some really helpful apps that I like to use. And it's been trial and error. I might think something will look great in my head and then I actually snap the picture and it doesn't. But it's just practice. One of my favorite things to do is taking the pictures and

editing them. I have a nice camera that I don't use like I should, but for quick everyday shots, I use my iPhone.

ANGELA: Cool. So who all is involved in producing the texts that you produce?

LINDSAY: I use Fabulous Affairs for the design and printing. But the text, I've done myself, and just sent them what I wanted things to say. As far as social media posting, my manager down here does that in the mornings. Typically, she'll do the crucial morning post and if I want to add anything in the afternoon, I'll do it myself.

ANGELA: Who else is involved in your writing processes for things like contracts or your lease or mortgage?

LINDSAY: For my insurance, we meet yearly to just to make sure that, if I've purchased equipment or purchased anything big enough to make insurance go up, we meet and make sure that that's all squared away. As far as opening this space (Figure 4), my lease actually did have to go to the town council meeting, and I was present. When it came to the mortgage for the building in Lexington, there was a lot of communication back and forth between me and the attorney and my banker.



Figure 4: Lindsay Bachman, owner of That's So Sweet.

ANGELA: What kinds of research are involved in developing your texts?

LINDSAY: I actually did a lot of research just for various things, into how other similar types of businesses were laid out—their promotional materials and things like that. I follow a lot of bloggers that have similar types of businesses that I am trying to model the website after. I've just tried to pick and choose what I like about what other people are doing and try to put everything together. As far as legal things, when it comes to things like a non-compete agreement or a bridal contract, we kind of took the bones of a simple, generic contract and personalized it a little bit.

ANGELA: What kinds of research go into developing your recipes?

LINDSAY: When I was still working out of my home, I basically tore the kitchen apart and figured out a base recipe that I could call my own. And it's really simple. And I think that's what makes it so good. And then, if we want to do a specific flavor, we might google a recipe for it and pick and choose what we think will work. And then it's just trial and error usually from there. But everything is just the same base recipe, and we have those written and in a safe place, but we don't have to look at them on a daily basis. But they are written down for future reference, we have it all in a notebook.

ANGELA: What kinds of skills did you need to produce the texts that you do? And did you need to learn anything new, or brush up on old skills?

LINDSAY: It's funny, a couple of weekends ago, my high school English teacher was in the store, and I was talking to her. Even just simple grammar like the different forms of your/you're, the different forms of their/they're/there—the things that you think are so simple, those are the most important. Because you could write something wonderful and spell three words wrong and people aren't going to take you as seriously as if it was completely correct.

ANGELA: Who has the most control over some of your writing activities?

LINDSAY: When it comes to Facebook posting, my audience definitely does. Because if I post something that doesn't go over well, then obviously I'm not going to do that again and they've had some control over that. I just went to a small business workshop in Chicago called Facebook Fit. And even the people on the panel discussions that have hundreds of thousands of followers said the same thing. They'll still try things that don't work. So I guess that made me feel better.

ANGELA: So, what would you consider are the goals of the writing pieces that you produce? And how do you know if you've achieved those goals?

LINDSAY: Just getting people in the door and relating to people. Likes on Facebook are also a direct reflection, if I post something that three or four

hundred people have liked, obviously it's going to show up on other feeds and other people are going to find us. The proposal got me the space (*laughs*), so I must have done something right. And I don't know if that was my writing or my type of business, but I think if I had a great business but wrote a really crappy proposal I probably wouldn't have gotten the space.

ANGELA: You mentioned that you feel like you're learning some things as you go: what are some of those things?

LINDSAY: The legal aspects of things, the insurance aspects of things. I mean, I'm insured for things I never thought I'd be insured for in my life. (*laughs*) Sometimes I think trial and error is the best way to do things, at the same time. Some of it truly takes some time management. Even things as simple as knowing when the most people will see a Facebook post. Seven o'clock at night is a lot better than seven o'clock in the morning; everybody's at home on their couches by that time.

ANGELA: Are there other types of writing that you anticipate doing later and where you feel that some of the skills and knowledge you've developed so far will help you?

LINDSAY: I think so. Something we've talked about doing in the near future is blogging. So that will again probably be trial and error.

ANGELA: So you anticipate using the same process that you've used before as you're developing your new process?

LINDSAY: Probably. I've even gone so far as to post on Facebook and ask people what they would like to read about on a blog. And people have some pretty fun ideas.

ANGELA: Well, thanks for taking the time to talk to me about all the writing you do.

LINDSAY: A lot of these things are not the type of writing that I would have thought of as writing. But it *is* writing.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Lindsay Bachman and Thaddeus Stoklasa for their help putting this article together.



Angela Sheets is a recently graduated MA student in Professional Writing at Illinois State University. She hails from the cornfields of Not Chicago, Illinois, and currently works as a training developer at COUNTRY Financial®. She has rarely met a tea she didn't like.