

Anna Rogan on Time-Based Services

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You're listening to business dad Asri the audio advice column for your online business. I'm Kirsty Denton.



00:12

And I'm Amy Posner. We're talking bite sized episodes that solve real world problems with a no holds barred. tell it like it is kind of approach.



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Today we have our first ever special guest on business badassery. And it is of all wonderful Anna Rogen, Amy and I are so excited to have you here Anna, who, if you're listening have not heard of Anna before. She is a self confessed silly dickhead and copywriting jewel of all trades, brand voice and messaging strategies, sales pages, and launch copy emails, websites and UX. She does it all. And it helps small businesses sound just like themselves only better in their copy so they can get out into the world and cause a raucous welcome, Anna.



00:56

Hi, thanks for having me. I'm so excited to be here.



01:00

And we are so thrilled to have you really excited and you know, you're kind of you're kind of a buzzword, you people are talking about you and one of the one of the things that they talk about a lot is the fact that you work on time based services. And that's a very interesting and different way to work. And, you know, we get asked about this all the time, and people talk about about day rates, they talk about, you know, things that are, you know, inside of a container that might make life neater or easier or more predictable. And since you're the expert, I mean, I feel like you were the one who kind of created this out of thin air. If you would

be so kind, we kind of want the big picture like how does it work? How did you get here? Like, how do you how did you create the services? How do you look the services? What what is your business look like? And I know that's a lot of questions. But if you would just give us a like sort of the big picture overview, that would be fab.

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So I definitely didn't create time based bookings, like out of thin air. I think it's definitely time based work is I think it's more agency land, you see a lot of time based work happening. And it's definitely I think, where a lot of copywriters start in terms of how they quote, quote projects, is that they'll go right, well, you know, writing a web page takes me approximately whatever, an hour. So if I have 20 web pages to write, you know, we all sort of start from that place where the way we work out how much a project should be booked, should should cost or how much we're going to put on a project is we work out how much time it's going to take us. And I think a lot of copywriters kind of have that hourly rate in their mind that they're trying to work towards or trying to quote for. So they base project based bookings off that as a starting point anyway, is that how you guys work?

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Yes, absolutely. So especially as you say, at least when I started, and I think I got this advice from you, Amy, was to have an internal hourly rate. So an idea of what amount I needed to make per client hour to cover expenses, including, you know, my own salary. So absolutely having that back of mind, particularly as you say, when I when I first started.

 03:16

Yeah, yeah, that's what I did. That's what I teach you. Otherwise, else do? You know, it's not in the dark otherwise? Yeah,

 03:23

exactly. Yeah. And so I think, you know, I was doing this thing where I was trying to work to a certain amount of hours, and then you know, you're trying to book that time in your calendar. So you know, roughly how long things take, you know, roughly how much you need a quote for your clients. And I was using toggle, which is an online tool to time how long projects would take me to try to, you know, make sure that I was profitable, basically, and getting that hourly rate and not, you know, ending up working two or three times the amount of hours on things. So, I think, you know, I was working in a time based way anyway. And I think lots of people do. And yeah, I was taught to start that way, as well as to, you know, have that int, internal hourly rate. And what I was finding is, you know, big, lots of admin with onboarding new clients, you know, they come in, they do the discovery call, you pull together a quote or a proposal for them, it has all the terms and conditions, you know, they go away and look at it, they have to, you know, review everything, sign it, how many revisions are they going to get, you know, it's a whole big scoping probe bigger projects was a whole nother task in itself before you even get to start the project. You know, how, what should we include what you know, it was a lot of

admin around managing projects. Also, I have ADHD. And so my brain would be like, Let's have 10 or 20 projects on the go. We can do it. We'll just find the time. And a lot of the time I would find the time because I would just, you know, use anxiety as a fuel to like, actually complete projects instead of managing my calendar in a really sensible way. And because understanding how long things take, and time blindness is a real thing when you have a neurodivergent. Brain. So what I was finding is I'd had lots of repeat clients, they were coming back to me. And I'd be like, Yeah, well, you know, we already had the relationship that already, you know, signed, all the contracts, were already well underway. And they'd say, I need this article edited, or I need to add an extra page to my website, or I'm watching this new program, and I need a sales page or whatever it looked like. And I ended up saying to those clients, well, I think that's going to be a day of my time. So why don't we just put it that way, I'll get what I get done in a day. And then this is what it's going to cost. And clients really liked that it kind of cut through all of the scoping and project management stuff, at the end of the day, they'd get a beautiful piece of work completed like that. It was just done no back and forth. And more and more I was working with that way with clients, and then new clients were coming on board, and I'm like, Why aren't I just working this way with them? And I started trialing it, and it worked. So and the benefits of it, you know, our Amy, you know, you mentioned that one of the things that lots of people are really interested in when they talk to me about my business is how I've managed to make it work around my kids and my and the farm that I live on. And you know, my life and working in really kind of this strict, bounded way in terms of the hours that I work, and part of that is that it's all time based. So it's there, it's you know, you get me for those hours, and I work really hard for those hours, and then they're done.



07:00

So question how do you how do people know what might get done inside of a window.



07:06

So I have a pretty hefty sales page on my website that kind of goes through a lot of the detail of approximately how long our thing might take. People do tend to come in, you know, lots of my clients are still coming in the way they used to come in to me when I used to work in a project based way. And they'll say I want a five page website, or I want a sales page. And then I talked to them about okay, well, the sales page takes me approximately this amount of time or, and I think I've been doing it long enough. Now that I'm very good at estimating how long a project might take, especially in those discovery calls. Or even sometimes, like people can book my time straight off my website, they don't necessarily have to come through a discovery call. And I do get new clients who have never spoken to me, never reached out to me and DMS on Instagram never, you know, never once had contact with me buying full weeks and two weeks of bookings straight off my website, which always blows my mind. But my intake form is pretty thorough, and my discovery calls are pretty thorough for me to be able to spot some of the I guess early, not necessarily red flags, but just the early indicators that a project might need more time. Things like extra stakeholders, or, you know, then they need a bit more on the strategy end of things to work out their messaging, or they haven't quite, you know, resolved what their service menu might be, you know, there's lots of reasons why projects might not fit into sort of the standard time slot. And I'm pretty good at picking up those things early on, and estimating how long a project might take.



08:51

That's so cool. And I love because I just have that too when people would Book Day rates without ever having speak spoken with an interaction with me. And it always feels like a bit of magic. You're like, whoa, like something's working about my marketing. It's amazing. But my question for you is, I love that your process means that your sounds like you're quite able to spot situations where someone might have under booked you in terms of times required for the things they want done. Have you ever been in a situation where you've actually underestimated the time that you need? Or you haven't got the deliverable finished in the set time? And if so, how have you handled that? Because I think that's the that's the fear right around these time based services is that you'll be in that situation and something bad will happen. So can you talk us through that?



09:41

Totally. Yep. So it took me a while to refine what my working schedule needed to look like. But now I have time. So I work school terms and take school holidays off. So I basically work in 12 week blocks, and I have a couple of weeks in the middle of the 12 Quick block and a couple of weeks at the end of the 12 week block where no client bookings can be made. And I use that time as overflow for if people haven't booked enough time with me, or, for example, we've been quite good at estimating how long they'll make made for the website. But once the websites delivered, they're like, Oh, Anna, now I can see what you do, I want you to do all my email flows. And it's better for me if I can do that quickly. Because for me, I'm already in your brand voice, I already understand your business like switching away from you and you booking next term, for example, like in 12 weeks time, I've got to get back into the back into the flow of your brand back into the flow of your brand voice. If I can do it in two weeks time, I'm going to be much more efficient, it's going to be better for me, because I'm in the momentum of what you need to get that all delivered for you quickly. So I book out time that people clients can't book. And I also have time in each week that I can use for just quick, half hour or hour extra. So it's it isn't super common, but it does happen that people need more time. And then, on the flip side, people booking more time than they need. Again, that's, that's actually pretty rare. But what I do, there's always extra that I can give to people. So if I write your five page page website, and I still have hours left in the week, I will offer to write your social media BIOS or take a look at the blogs that are currently on your website that we're going to bring across and edit some of them for you. Or I will run a strategy session with you like there's, there's always, once you're working with a client, you can see a dozen things a dozen ways you can add value to their business. And so I'm always thrilled when there's extra time because I can go back to the client and say, let me like we've got a couple of hours, here's what I think we should do with them. But you tell me what's a priority for you. And quite often with my clients, especially return clients, is we'll have a little to do list going in there. I use dubsado for my client management. And so we have like a, like a jobs wish list in their dubsado. And they'll just like add to it. So we might finish up our week together. And then they'll start popping things in there like an email flow that they've written or this that or the other and then they'll message me or I'll message them and say, Hey, I noticed a few jobs go in there. I've got some time coming up. Do you want to book a day and I can knock knock them over for you? Or they'll get in touch with me and say hey, that that to do list is getting pretty long? Can we you know, when can I book you in? And we yet just get what done? get done? What needs to be done?





12:46

Oh, this is such a beautifully thought through system.



12:50

It is it has taken I reckon a year and a half of maybe even two. Anyway, approximately a year and a half of testing and of saying, Okay, this didn't work. How do I make that? You know, how do I account for that? Yeah, there's there's definitely been part parts where I've gone Oh, my God, what have I done? This is full on is this any better than the way that I was working before? But there's always been solutions to those little hiccups? And it is it is at a point now where it feels quite elegant. Really? I suppose. Yeah. School system knows.



13:33

Ah, elegant is a great word. How far out? Are people booking you in advance? Like, do you have availability? Or do people have to kind of wait and get on your calendar? How does that work? Yeah,



13:44

it's, it's funny, because I will I have had this year, a couple of times where I've started a month, a calendar month. And there are still bookings available for the end of the month. And I'm like, Oh, that feels like, you know, a better hustle. I'll just, I'll email my list, I'll see who needs work done or, you know, try to fill up those spots that's happened once or twice this year. But I would say generally speaking, I do a little bit of marketing at the end of the term or at the end of the term to say, hey, you know, next terms open, go ahead and book and that will generate a bit of interest. And I usually when I book out like that, usually I'm usually 12 weeks, eight to 12 weeks in advance booked. Right now it's a bit different because we're heading into our summer school holiday. So I'm about to have about six weeks of client work, which means I've got we're recording this in November and I have clients booked for February. I have one very special client who I absolutely adore, who has some launches booked for next year that she has planned for so she's booked me for June or July next year and I think It's just about you would have experienced this loads. Kirsty, I'm sure is that you do book out much further in advance when you're working on launch copy because they are planned further in advance. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I think people who, you know, want a website project, it's not until generally they're working with a designer, and the designer says, Oh, hey, how about like, tomorrow?



15:30

Yes, oh, can I just say I love hearing you talk about your schedule in terms because that tells me that you have absolutely built your quiet part of your business to fit in with your life at the moment, which is, of course, dictated by small humans who are at school, and their life happens in terms. So I love that this is how you're thinking about it and talking about it. I just think that's like, such a refreshing take. Because I feel like we're often told to think about our

business in terms of quarters or financial years, whatever it might be. But I just love that it's clearly so front of mind, for you that note, this has to work within my life, what else I got going on outside of work, so let's actually just make that the structure for this client work to fit into.



16:11

Totally. And one thing you really like Kirsty is that because I am doing those terms, like each term is a little bit different. There might be a school camp that I need to, you know, that I want to be a parent helper on, or my husband might be going away for work or whatever. So at the end of each term, when I'm booking when I'm opening up the next term, there's a natural reflection period that happens, or I'm like, Okay, what does next term look like? Where are the days? You know, where are the weeks? What are the spots that I want to open up? What are the what are the weeks that I want to hold back? What works for me this term? What didn't work? What do I need to adjust? What do I need to you know, there's just that lovely sort of natural point of reflection that happens when each term. And that's been really useful for some work. Yeah.



16:59

I love that flow about you know, I love a good reflective period.



17:05

So question for you for I'm thinking about someone listening and imagining them thinking, wow, this is so smart. And you have your business so dialed into what you like doing, right? Because, I mean, it's your life and your time, but it's also your you're working in a way that that really suits you. And so I'm, I'm wondering, you mentioned it took you I don't know, you said maybe a year and a half or two years to get it dialed in. Do you think that it's, do you think it's something that that anyone can do? And if they do, is it something that they should be patient and sort of take the time to build added on? Like, what would you recommend for someone like, here's what I'm imagining someone's listening, going, but yeah, I just like, I just want a client. Like, you've got your like, you know, orchestrating exactly how it goes, like, how do you get how do you get to be you? So like, anyone who's been there for someone who's listening and thinking, like, yeah, this would this would make my life so much easier and better? Like, how do you how do you start? What do you do?



18:09

Yeah. Okay. So there's a few questions that but I think the first one that I want to answer is, can anyone do this, and absolutely not, is definitely not a way of working that would suit everyone. And I'm not saying that's because I'm not special, like, there's nothing special about me that or, you know, like, better. There's no better way of working or better. We all have different strengths, and different weaknesses, for sure. That we should be aware of, and find ways to work around for our own happiness, and, you know, enjoyment and fulfillment of the work, even more than, you know, how productive or profitable or, you know, valuable we can beat for our clients. So the things that make, I think the things that make me particularly suited to this

style of working, like I work quite fast, and I can be very productive in very short periods of time, especially when I have a deadline. So having that like, every day, or every week, there is a built in deadline, and there is a client that I know is sitting behind their computer, waiting for me to drop this thing into their inbox is really motivating for me and helps me produce my best work. Lots of people I know don't work that way. Lots of people I know would feel that pressure of having someone sitting there waiting for the work to drop as would shut down their ability to work creatively and work well rather than enable their creativity and enable them to work that well. Um, so that definitely wouldn't be, you know, I wouldn't recommend it for somebody who maybe needs a little bit more time. Let's have a bit more mulling time doesn't like the idea of someone like owning their time. All of those things.



20:17

What I'm thinking, you know, listening to you, you know, explain how it works. I'm thinking, I guess my question for you, it's a little bit different. I'm just gonna go sideways for a moment. Did when you got into business was? Did you have the idea that you wanted to craft it in a way that would really suit you? Or did you sort of come to that as you are building a business and you've like, we're sort of feeling your way into what would fit you or what would work? I think,



20:45

looking back, I really did go into the business thinking this needed to work for my lifestyle. So I absolutely love writing. I've always written I have a post grad diploma in writing, it's, you know, something that I really enjoy. So it was a natural skill for me to go freelance with. But the reason that I went freelance with it, and the reason that I started my business was that my partner and I were living in the city. We looked at City house prices, and we're just like, Nah, no way. He'd grown up in the country, we wanted to, we wanted to move out of the city. And we both had city based jobs. And we had our son at the time, and I was pregnant with my daughter, actually, when I started the business. So there was just this sense of us as a team that if we wanted to move away from the city, one of us needed to have a home based work. And I needed to not be commuting and that that person needed to be able to sort of be more flexible to daycare and school hours. So right from the very start. We knew that, like I went into the business with the intention of it being something that was going to fit around my life, it is absolutely not where it started, like the first two or three years of my business, I was working every imaginable minute. Like I had my three week old daughter in a bouncer next to me on the floor in the lounge room with the laptop propped up on the couch, like doing Instagram posts, I dragged her along to a copywriting conference and she was 12 weeks old, my mum came and like, I felt like Beyonce because she was looking after her in the hotel room and then would deliver her to me to get breastfeed in the. In the breaks, I was like, Oh, look at my nanny. So I was just, you know, I kind of threw myself into it fully, and working nights working weekends, like working 10 projects at a time because I just couldn't say no. And I really felt that I had to prove that I was able to make a proper living from it and make it profitable and make it a legitimate business to not go back to my corporate role, when my maternity leave, like my unpaid leave period was up. And I managed to do that. And I absolutely don't regret those first years because I have a fairly healthy savings in my bank account in my business bank account, and that allows me to look at that whenever I have a client that is offering me lots of money to you know, cross my boundaries and schedule work on weekends and that kind of thing. I can look at my bank account and go no, I don't need to. I can make risky decisions about my

schedule and try this time based way that might not work. I can you know, have these spots open in my calendar and think are people going to feel them and it'd be okay. Because I I have that little sort of safety net that I worked really really hard for. It does. It takes time. It does take time. It's that sucks. But

 24:30

but not that long. And I love this so much I love thank you so much for telling that story. That's what I that's what I wanted to know I that it's you know, I wanted people to know that there's that there's hard work behind it and all kinds of sacrifice, really. But you've managed to build something really amazing that really suits you. And it's not I mean, yes, it takes time. But I mean, like comparatively, I don't know, to take you as well probably take you a little bit longer. Maybe Then to get your graduate degree, maybe,

 25:02

maybe? Yeah, yeah, that's true.

 25:05

No, just think and Kirsty, I wouldn't bring this over to you. I feel like I'm the question hog here. So I'm just going to zip it for a little bit.

 25:12

No, not at all. I felt like always been the question hog earlier. And you asked excellent questions. So thank you so much for sharing all those questions and those answers and to you amazing. And I love that you, you said, you know, it takes time and that sucks. But I like, I don't know, if it's suck, I think it's just reality. And I think sometimes one of the problems with the industry at the moment, and having the perceived visibility into other people's businesses through social media and email lists, and those sorts of things, is that it's sometimes easy to get the message that anything is available to you right now. But as you you know, explain the reality is it takes reflection and hard work and testing hypothesis and been willing for those to be incorrect. And, you know, being willing to take missteps. And, you know, just keep reshaping things as you go until you get to a place that really does suit you and how you work. And I think the way in which you've done that Anna is just amazing. And I think, I don't know, I want if for anyone listening, you know, I think so much of what Anna shared is so helpful, regardless of whether the time based model is the best fit for you. Because I think the really key thing to take away from this conversation is that, you know, your business can take any shape that works for you. So it might not be the shape that Anna has. But hopefully it's given you permission to think about what best supports who you are as a person and the life you live or want to be living outside of your work. So I really hope if nothing else, that that is the big takeaway from this amazing conversation. So thank you so much for sharing all your gems,

 26:53

you're welcome. I just want to also add that you never arrive. I just want anyone listening to this thinking. And it's got all sorts of, you know, she's got this wonderful business model like Tony was, I just want you to know that for the last two or three years, I've also been trying to work out how I get a one to many offer out into the market, because it's a smart idea, and coming up against so many roadblocks, because I'm just not ready yet. And I want to do something good. And I've been very impatient about it. And there's just no like, you never, there's always more that you could be doing. And if you are an ambitious person in your business, or you're a smart person, and you are surrounded by, like you say everything just feels so available. And you can see, well, if my branding was spot on, if I had my schedule sorted out if I had this if I had that, like if I had a one to many offer in the market. But you there's always the next thing that you could be doing. Yeah, there's no arriving. There's always something that you Yeah, that you sort of working towards next.

 28:06

But I also I don't know about you, too, but I kind of love that. Because I think God, wouldn't it be boring to arrive somewhere and then just have to bloody stay there forever? Like, do you want the next challenge or like the next race shaping of things? Because your life is evolving? And you're evolving? And the business is evolving? Like, I don't know, maybe that's just me. Am I being weird? Or is this non arrival? actually kind of cool?

 28:29

No, I agree with you. That's part of the evolving, right. That's part of the point, isn't it? I mean, and I think that's, I mean, I think that's sort of also the entrepreneurial urge. It's like, we're not really satisfied, and we have ideas and like, let's make it better and do it different. And yeah, I feel like that's what that's what fuels it. Yeah, yeah.

 28:47

Yay. Okay, good. I mean, good company.

 28:51

It does feel really nice to be in a place where I'm like, oh, okay, the client schedule stuff, the model of how I work that feels pretty, like that's a pretty foundational piece. And that feels pretty sorted. So maybe now I am in a really good place to look around and go, Okay, what can I put out? That's one too many. What can I do next? Because this part is quite settled, like and successful and working really? Well?

 29:18

Yes, absolutely. And needs less of your brain space to sort of, you know, keep going. And also, as you say, feels like a nice safety net, I guess, in a way for whatever other experiments you might want to, you might want to



29:30

play with it. Yeah.



29:32

And you created it. You built it. I mean, I think that it's just so damn satisfying. I mean, you know, yeah, there was time and there was all this shaping and experimenting and you know, sort of pushing back against what you don't like and getting more of what you do, but like, like, how great is that? Like, you build it? It's yours. I mean, it's it's unique to you. It's like no, no, I just think it's one of the most sort of fun and rewarding things but I'm that nerd. So here you are. I love that men.



30:04

Oh, well, thank you so much for joining us, Anna as our first ever guest, we are so excited to have you and thank you so much for sharing all of your thoughts and experiences so generously. Where can people find you?



30:20

Hmm. They can find me at Anna.rogen.com or on Instagram at Anna Rogen writer. I mainly show up in emails so you can get the sign up link to my email list on my Instagram link or on my website, the sort of signup forms everywhere. So I'll add that your also,



30:45

emails are really amusing and funny. So if you need a little levity in your life, you might just want to sign up just for that reason.



30:53

Totally agree. And your Instagram is also epic. You dropped some amazing knowledge nuggets on there regularly. So yes, if anyone wants to check her out, I can highly recommend following her on all the platforms.



31:04

I have been repurposing all of my like insider secret, I have been repurposing all of my email content in my Instagram. And PayPal are my engagement is just bonkers. Like, I'm like you guys have seen this. But it's not as a different audience and I repackaging it in a different way.

That's a lot more sort of bite, and easy to digest. So anyway, squeeze as much juice as you can out of your content people. That's just all I want to say.

 31:33

Yes. And I had that same experience. And I want my theory is that because you do like I just literally repurpose every email I send but they get so much engagement and it's like I feel like it's the thing where like, you know, if you find a cool new show on Netflix, but you have no one to tell about it. It's just a conversation inside your head. But if it's out there and you can like be like, Yes, I watched this thing like how good was this, then I feel like it's that kind of phenomenon just like on a business level.

 31:57

It makes it social when you put it on social media. Funny isn't it?

 32:05

All right, and I will we will wrap things up there. If you're listening have enjoyed this episode. Let us know leave us a review subscribe to the podcast. Our plan is to have one guest a month from here on in unless we hear otherwise. But thanks so much again, Anna. It has been an absolute pleasure to chat with you today. And we will talk to you soon.

 32:25

Thank you so much. Thank you Bye