

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

“Embarrassingly Simple”: How Kate Findley Gets Clients With LinkedIn Outreach

John Bejakovic interviews novelist, copywriter and content strategist Kate Findley about the no-frills cold outreach behind her client base

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability. Filler words, false starts and repetition have been removed; the substance is unchanged.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

We're here today with Kate Findley. Kate is a novelist, as well as a copywriter and content strategist for education brands. A few days ago, I wrote to my list and asked folks if they'd done cold outreach, and Kate replied that it's her primary way of getting clients. So I wanted to get Kate on a quick call and find out exactly what she does and how it's working for her, because I think a lot of people are interested in this. Thank you for being here, Kate.

KATE FINDLEY

Absolutely. Thank you.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

To start with, you work with education brands or education businesses. What kinds of services specifically do you offer them?

KATE FINDLEY

Primarily content marketing. To be more specific, a large part of what I do is writing content that goes on their websites. For universities, that means interviewing students, alumni and faculty, and these articles essentially function as case studies.

I think it's a great form of soft selling. If you just came out and said, “Look how great our school is,” some people might respond to that, but a lot of people would naturally be a bit skeptical. But if it's a student saying how much they love the school and what a great experience they've had, I think that's one of the strongest selling points. And I've noticed that when I talk to students, I hardly even have to prompt them. They're usually very eager to talk about their positive experiences.

I've done similar things with companies that weren't universities. At one company I used to work for, people would voluntarily send in testimonials about their positive experience.

Whenever we got a really good one, I would seek that person out and ask if they were open to an interview. Then I'd write a whole article about their experience — the whole story of what they were struggling with and how the experience transformed them. I think it's probably one of the most effective forms of “selling.”

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Excellent. You mentioned universities, but I also saw some marquee businesses on your LinkedIn profile as past clients. Give me some examples of the kinds of businesses you work with besides universities.

KATE FINDLEY

I use the term “education” broadly now. It can be universities, but it's not exclusive to them. For instance, I wrote for The Great Courses for a long time. You could call it an education company, but it's not a university. I've also written for Brian Tracy, who isn't a university either, but the content he and others in his niche produce — people like Tony Robbins — is still focused on education. So education is a useful umbrella, but it describes a pretty wide range of companies.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Let's talk specifically about cold outreach. You told me it's your primary method of getting clients. Out of the businesses you've worked with, which ones did you get via cold outreach? If you don't want to name names, just sketch the kind of business, and give a ballpark of how big the engagement was.

KATE FINDLEY

Honestly, pretty much all of them came from cold outreach. Every once in a while something else happens. Back in July, I believe, somebody actually reached out to me on LinkedIn, which was amazing, and I'd love for that to happen all the time. One of my very first clients I met while shopping at a store — we got to talking, he asked what I did, I said I was a copywriter, and he said, “I could use something like that right about now.” So these things do happen, but they're few and far between. I've learned I can't rely on them. For the most part, I have to be very proactive about getting clients.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Got it. So let's walk through that. How do you do cold outreach, and what's your process?

KATE FINDLEY

I got into copywriting over a decade ago. Some of the people I learned from were Bob Bly, AWAI — I took some of their programs — and a book called *The Well-Fed Writer* by Peter Bowerman, which was very influential. They all laid out basically the same outreach strategy: make a list of all the companies you want to work with, find the best point of contact, typically the marketing director or head of marketing, prepare a very basic template, and go down the list. It's a numbers game. You try to reach as many people as possible.

I was lucky when I was starting out — well, not lucky, since I worked very hard and reached out to a lot of people — but I got pretty good results pretty quickly. After a while, I found some clients who became regular clients, so I went a few years without feeling the need to do any outreach, because I had plenty of work.

When I started doing outreach again, I found it was more difficult than it used to be. There could be a lot of reasons. Maybe the market had gotten saturated. I know I get a ton of spam, so I think people in general get a lot of spam, and they're skeptical, for good reason.

So I hired an agency to handle my outreach. But when I looked behind the scenes, I noticed that what they were doing wasn't all that special. I thought I was hiring an agency, so it would be super sophisticated and high-tech, using all the latest AI. But it was basically just LinkedIn and one basic template they sent to everybody. They used LinkedIn's filters to find people in my industry — education — then filtered by title, like head of marketing or marketing director. That pulled up a list of leads, they saved the search, and they went through the contacts one by one.

Once I saw that, I thought, “I don't need an agency. I can easily do this myself.” I'll be honest: it is more difficult than in the early days of cold outreach. But I find it's much better than contacting people by email, because it's much less likely to go to spam or be viewed as spam. Even if people are skeptical, they can immediately go to my LinkedIn profile and see that I'm a real person. If they want to talk further, we usually connect over Zoom, and they can see I'm somebody they can trust.

Also, a big part of my time in the past went into finding contact information for these people. Now LinkedIn does that part for me. All in all, it's a much, much more efficient process.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Just to make it clear for people watching: when we exchanged emails, you said that all the outreach you're doing now is on LinkedIn.

KATE FINDLEY

Yes, exactly.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

So what's your cadence? Do you spend an hour a week on this? An hour a day? Do you only start reaching out when you need work? What's your process for keeping the pipeline full?

KATE FINDLEY

Currently I'm paying for LinkedIn Sales Navigator, their paid plan. To justify the expense, I try to hit my maximum. There's a limit on how many messages you can send each week. They don't give an exact figure, but I believe it's around 100 to 150 messages. It motivates me, because I'm paying for this plan, so I'd better use it. I try to hit the maximum every week, though I don't always manage it.

Ideally I'd break it up into chunks of 30 minutes to an hour each day. But some days I get busy and that doesn't happen, so a lot of times I'm putting in crunch hours on the weekend, messaging as many people as possible. That's generally how I do it.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Understood. I don't want to ask for the specifics of your template, but what's the general process from reaching out to someone to turning them into a client? Are you very direct up front — “I'm a copywriter, I offer these services, I might be a fit”? Or do you connect more softly and indirectly, commenting on their posts and engaging over a longer period, then working your way into what they might need?

KATE FINDLEY

I'm much more direct. That wouldn't have been my intuition, but the agency I worked with was very direct. Their message was basically, “This is what I do,” and they didn't bother to personalize at all. Part of the reasoning was that personalizing takes a lot more time, which is true.

Over the years I'd tried a lot of different approaches. I tried personalization. I tried just connecting with people and commenting on their posts. I found I was putting in a lot of hours and it wasn't getting me anywhere.

Now, if I've hit my maximum number of messages and I have some extra time, I might comment on posts. And if I send someone a very basic message and they bother to reply, that shows they're interested, and it's worth engaging with them. For those people I make the extra effort to get to know them better — reading their posts and, if they're going to connect with me over Zoom, reading some of their articles to see what they're all about.

But one thing I learned from the agency is that for the initial contact, it's best and most efficient to reach as many people as possible. Over time you start to gauge interest, and with the people who are interested, you build those deeper connections.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

That completely makes sense. Can you give me a rough idea of how many calls you're getting? If you're sending out 150 messages, what happens after that? One call a month? One a week? Several a week?

KATE FINDLEY

It really varies. And to be clear, I only started working with the agency a few months ago, and it was probably in July that I took things over myself. Another reason I took over is that I realized I know my business best, so it makes the most sense for me to handle it. But I did learn a lot from them, including the outreach approach.

So it's hard to say. Some weeks a good percentage of people reply and show interest, and I might get anywhere from two to four calls booked in a single week, which I consider a really good week. Then a couple of weeks might go by where I don't hear anything. It's hard to gauge at this point. But I figure if a client comes out of it, especially one with a big project or one who becomes a regular client, it's definitely going to be worthwhile.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

I absolutely agree, particularly because you're sending very templated messages and not spending a ton of time researching people.

KATE FINDLEY

Exactly.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

One final question before we wrap up. It seems like there are two broad schools of cold outreach. One is the less personalized, broader approach you're taking. The other is where people do a lot of research and approach fewer people. Since you're sending out a lot of messages: I know a lot of people have psychological barriers to sending lots of messages, not getting responses, maybe occasionally getting blocked. Copywriters are a sensitive bunch, and I feel like there's emotional resistance. What's been your experience? How do you look at it psychologically? Did you have a change of perspective that helped you say, "I'm fine doing this"?

KATE FINDLEY

That's a great question, and honestly, that was one of my blocks for a long time. A large part of it was thinking I was wasting my time, especially in weeks when I was doing a lot of outreach and not getting much in return.

Probably the biggest thing I learned from working with that agency was that they weren't doing anything special — they were just working at very large volume. What I took from that was that I wasn't doing anything wrong. I just wasn't doing enough.

In most cases, people simply ignore the request. Every once in a while I might get a harsh comment, but it's surprisingly rare. Sometimes people say something like, "I'm not in the market for this right now." And I just say, "Okay, thanks for letting me know." I feel like the more volume you put out, the less sensitive you are, and the easier it is to just keep moving.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Absolutely agree. That's been my experience as well. Kate, thank you very much for doing this. Where can folks find you, follow you, hire you?

KATE FINDLEY

Probably my LinkedIn profile. Do you have it, or do you want me to send you the link?

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

I have it, and I'll include it when I post this video.

KATE FINDLEY

Okay, great.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Thank you for sharing how you're getting clients this way. It's very interesting. I think a lot of folks will relate to your experience: you just needed to see what the agency was doing, see that it was working, and realize that what you were doing wasn't wrong in any way. You just needed to do more of it — to be more persistent, or more aggressive, or whatever the right adjective is. I think a lot of people need to hear that message: they're doing the right thing, they just need to scale it up or stick with it longer. Stories like yours definitely help with that.

KATE FINDLEY

Totally. One other thing I want to add along those lines. Like I said, I learned the fundamentals a long time ago. When things started to feel less effective, I began hearing people say, "Cold outreach doesn't work anymore," or "You need more sophisticated approaches." So I tried all these fancier approaches. I even tried sending snail mail to people. I tried pretty much everything under the sun, and I didn't get results from any of those other things.

So I think sometimes it's about sticking to the fundamentals, or whatever works best for you, and not chasing trends. Everybody is going to have an opinion, and if you listen to everybody, you'll just go in circles.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

That's a great point. Actually, when we were exchanging emails, you said it was "embarrassingly simple." I feel like a lot of people get turned off by how simple it is.

KATE FINDLEY

Exactly. Even with the agency, at first I was kind of dismayed. I thought, “Really? This is what I’m paying them the big bucks for?” But I came to the conclusion that sometimes the simplest approach is the most effective.

JOHN BEJAKOVIC

Excellent. Kate, thank you very much for this. We’ll wrap up on that.