

# *Business901* Podcast Transcription

*Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*



## Be Effective, Be Brief

Guest was Joseph McCormack

*Business901*

### Related Podcast:

[Say More by Saying Less](#)



[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Joe McCormack is on a mission to help organizations master the art of the short story. In an age of shrinking attention spans, non-stop interruptions, floods of information, the messages business leaders send out are getting lost in a sea of words. An experienced marketing executive, successful entrepreneur and author, Joe is recognized for his work in narrative messaging and corporate storytelling. His new book, [Brief: Make a Bigger Impact by Saying Less](#) (Wiley & Sons, 2014) tackles the timeliness of the “less is more” mandate.

*Note: This is a transcription of a podcast. It has not gone through a professional editing process and may contain grammatical errors or incorrect formatting.*

### Transcription of the Podcast

**Joe:** *I learn something. That’s always the best part of doing these podcasts.*

**Joseph:** I don’t know exactly when or how I found you but I was doing research and it was around Lean. This is just a little bit of background. But from the beginning writing this book, I’ve had a very strong inclination or like an affinity to people that philosophically embrace Lean because I thought that there would be a strong connection with some of the tenants in the books and people that philosophically ever embraced Lean. One of my clients is a manufacturing company in Wisconsin. I suggested the same thought and he was like “Absolutely.” He’s like “I am always looking for inefficiencies in the company and ways to drive out inefficiencies and we’re looking at this as another opportunity.” So that was the background of why I was doing that kind of research.

[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



**Joe Dager:** Welcome everyone! This is Joe Dager the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Joseph McCormack. He is the founder and CEO of Sheffield Marketing Partners. Sheffield is a boutique agency that helps organizations get clarity when they need it most. Joe I'd like to welcome you and congratulate you on your new book. Why don't you tell me about Sheffield and give me the elevator speech real quick.

**Joseph McCormack:** Sheffield is a boutique agency. We're based in Chicago and we help organizations with their messaging. So organizations, there are key moments when they need to get clarity and consensus around new product launches, strategic initiatives, vision, mission, and major initiatives. Where the leadership can't get ten people on the same page and we work closely with them to help them use narratives or storytelling as a way to increase clarity and help them with their message. And related to that is we do a layer of visual storytelling, videos, and animations to help that clarity translate into how they connect with their audiences. We've been in business for about eight years.

**Joe:** Well it sounds like a lot of things and what I take from that isn't necessarily someone that's ready to write a book about being brief. Do you condense all that stuff?

**Joseph:** The concept of brief in the book intimately connected with our business because when you're focusing on messaging, specifically storytelling, people's attention spans come right into the formula right out of the gate. So the messages have got to be concise, they have to be clear, and they have to be compelling. And those three elements about being clear, concise, and compelling are all about brevity. So it's about satisfying an audience's need to understand. But at the same time those people have a very burdened attention

# Business901

Podcast Transcription



## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

span and that's always something that we're dealing with is how to make the message easy for people to consume.

**Joe:** *Well your book is broken into four parts I believe. Of course being a Lean guy and everything the Discipline part was my favorite needless to say. And just to get us started right out of the blocks here is that you had something called the Brief Box which I thought was nice. It was a real simple mapping tool that you use. Can you explain what that is?*

**Joseph:** One of the challenges that people have with getting their point across is people have tendencies to not use outlines to prepare to be clear and concise. So they think by being brief that's just being concise. I created a tool. It's a mind mapping, or visual mapping outline tool that allows you to draw out on a piece of paper your communication and organize it in advance so that when you're communicating it, it's very logical for the person that you're talking to. And in the center of that map is a Brief Box or a headline. And around that are supporting messages that you've identified as being the key essential information that you need to communicate right out of the box. And these tools are very, very helpful for people that are updating their boss, or announcing a big initiative, or writing an email, or doing a presentation that they organized in advance using a visual outline on the key points they want to make.

**Joe:** *Can I just sum that up saying that the first step in being brief is preparation?*

**Joseph:** Preparation is huge. I know in talking to people about this topic three consistent tendencies that people have that many people are not aware of. The first is the tendency

# Business901

## Podcast Transcription

### *Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*



to over explain. The second tendency is the tendency to under prepare; not taking more time. There's a famous quote that says "I would have written you a short letter if I had more time," attributed to Mark Twain, which is a great quote because it takes time to prepare. And then the third thing is missing the point completely; not knowing what the essential point is. But preparation is an absolute key element that people just don't spend nearly enough time doing.

**Joe:** *I think Winston Churchill has a great quote along that same line where he says, "If you want me to write or speak for twenty minutes," – I forgot how the quote goes – "I can do it right now. But if you want me to say it in a paragraph, it will take me a fortnight," or something to that line.*

**Joseph:** Exactly. What happens is it makes sense but people think about a short communication as being easy. Like "Oh I'm just going to talk to my boss for five minutes. I'm going to leave a quick voicemail. This is going to be a short part of the agenda." And the truth is the shorter you speak the harder it is to do it well. People need to spend more time upfront preparing it. They get lured into the false sense of "Oh because this is short I'll just wing it," and it gets people into a lot of trouble.

**Joe:** *A second part of what you go into in the Discipline part is the foundation of a story. You want to tell people in a story form but most stories seem to run on. How do I prevent that?*

**Joseph:** Make the distinction between a short story and a long story. So I think we're

# Business901

## Podcast Transcription

### *Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*



talking about the short story format which is perfectly suited for people's attention spans. People's attentions spans a decade ago were twelve seconds and now they're eight. So we need to put it into a smaller package. Stories are beautiful, people love them but you can't fall in love with them and tell the long version. You have to be gifted at cutting out the excess detail and giving people a nice concise narrative that hits the mark.

**Joe:** *But how do I keep discussions brief and to the point? Am I manipulating it? Is that what I'm doing? I'm trying to have a conversation, a dialogue?*

**Joseph:** Yes, I think that first of all nobody is nearly as interesting as they think they are. So part of it is –you're right – you want brevity to be "I'm saying a little. I want to invite a conversation." So brevity omits monologues. That's one of the benefits of being brief is it's not just you talking, you're having a conversation with somebody else. When you're in a conversation with somebody once you've made a point, stop talking and then have a person ask you a question and respond. And people fail to do that and then they ramble. It should just be brief interludes of a balanced conversation or two people are talking about the same thing, not waiting for their turn to talk.

**Joe:** *We went through the three parts of Map It, Tell It, Talk It, in very brief form here. And the next part that you say in the fourth point is to Show It. Everybody beats up on PowerPoint a lot but you still want to show images. You still want people to see things because that's how it embeds the learning a little bit. How do we do that effectively and is PowerPoint all that bad?*

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



**Joseph:** People blame PowerPoint for everything. It's not PowerPoint, it's the presenter. They try to cram everything on slides and there's not a lot of discipline there. It's not PowerPoint's fault. I think that the Show It part of being brief is "a picture is worth a thousand words." So if I'm going to make a presentation, I put myself in the shoes of the audience. A picture is worth a thousand words well then I should have a strong image on my slide instead of having a lot of text. So maybe less text and more images, and those images should be provocative and instructive and clarifying.

There's an interesting alternative to PowerPoint and it's called Haiku Deck. It's a software. It's free. It's a startup out of San Francisco. You type a headline, and the sub headline and you type in some keywords and it finds you license free images to use in your slides. It builds the PowerPoint presentation and allows you to explore them as PowerPoint or PDFs or even SlideShare presentations and they work beautifully because they have very, very strong visuals.

I think the first thing of showing it is give me a strong visual. Related to that are things like video. Using short videos like you could find on YouTube or you would create for YouTube. Typically two to three minutes is a good length. The third visual that I see quite a bit that was invented by USA Today is the infographic which is taking data and making it more visual and making it more meaningful or contextual. Any of those three things can help make a presentation or a point come to life for people.

**Joe:** *I'm going to ask for your advice on giving a presentation. You have a little experience in that area I would assume. I have a real monotone voice. I talk longer than two or three*

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



*minutes. It just blends. How do I help myself out?*

**Joseph:** I think that everybody has got a different communication style and one isn't necessarily better than another. It's what's yours. They call it finding your voice. I think one of the things that help people become more effective when they communicate and they present is the power of the pause and looking at silence as interludes in presentations where you can create pauses in your presentations that gives people a chance for your words to sink in. So it's not necessarily what you're saying but giving them time to hear it. When you feel like you're hitting a note – you hear this sometimes in music where you hit notes and there's silence in between the notes, it's to have that moment. You don't talk through it but you let people's hearing absorb it and do something with it. In that way I think that's an often overlooked technique of just using pauses, inserting pauses to have people appreciate more of what you said and how they can hear it and digest it and chew on it.

**Joe:** *We'll both be using pauses the rest of this conversation probably.*

**Joseph:** It's funny because I was doing a podcast not too long ago. It was a live webinar. I was doing that and I was talking about the importance of pausing. Afterwards the producer said "Don't do that." And I said, "Why?" He says, "Because when you have pauses in live events people think that they're audio went out. Because it was a webinar connection and people were connected through the internet so pauses often mean "I've lost my internet connection." There's times I guess even where pausing might not work. And people's styles is to insert those things. From time to time give people a chance to have that moment. It's

[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)



# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



like pouring water on sand. Let it soak in a bit and settle.

**Joe:** *It brings me to part three of your book and that was Decisiveness.*

**Joseph:** The way the book is organized – you’re right. It’s organized in four parts. The first part is “Why is Brevity Important?” So why is it needed today more than ever? We’re living in a complex economy and people’s natural struggles with it. The second part is the Discipline. You mentioned how to be brief and some specific techniques. The third part of the book is Decisiveness and it points to when and where I need to be brief. Because I don’t want people to think that neurotically we need to be brief 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are key moments in my career when I need to be brief, so I’ve isolated about ten of them. Those are emails, meetings, presentations, sharing updates, sales presentations, sharing good news, sharing bad news, interviews. It’s things like that and that’s what I mean to be decisiveness is to know when I need to use this discipline for clear and concise communication.

**Joe:** *So you’re saying there is particular times it should not be brief?*

**Joseph:** There is a time and a place for long conversations. I had one this morning with somebody in my network and we were talking about strategies and business issues and it was an hour and half conversation. It was a nice good, long conversation. The key though is knowing when to have long conversations and when they need to be brief. And people don’t know that so they have long conversations when they need to be short and then they have short conversations when they need to be longer. So the decisiveness is knowing

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



when those moments come that I'm prepared – to your point earlier – I'm prepared for them. I have clarity. I can be succinct. I can create the context and then I'm done. It's easy to get to the point.

**Joe:** *I have one criticism of the book. I thought it was a great book by the way. I enjoyed it. But if I have criticism is that you left me with like a twenty step action plan in the back and I didn't think that was very brief.*

**Joseph:** I'll give you the background of why I did that. The instructions of the action plan it was stated to pick a few of them to work on at any given time. I wrote the book as a helpful tool for my clients. My clients are Fortune 500 companies but I also have clients in the military. I teach courses to special operations. The reason I wrote the book was because my clients were asking me for a book. Specifically there was a day that I was teaching a workshop down at Fort Bragg and one of the guys in the class says "Give me something to work on," and this was way before I started writing the book. I wrote out an action plan of twenty things. I said, "Pick two to work on at any moment in time and work on it for a few months until you feel like you've got that muscle." Then later on you can pick the book up and say pick two other things. Because when it comes to brevity we can always be better. The idea of the twenty is not to work on all of them at once but this is a book that you would have nearby and you'd grab it and say "Which ones do I want to work on at any given point in time that I could be better at?" That was why I had a list of twenty.

**Joe:** *I think you mentioned something there that's key is working with the military is very*

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



*interesting because I think they get it about being brief. Don't they?*

**Joseph:** Conceptually, yes. Practically, no. Conceptually they do briefings and they understand how important it is to be concise. But practically they're briefings are never brief. They're rarely brief. Practically their PowerPoints are much worse than corporate PowerPoints. They're jam-packed with information. Practically they don't know how to communicate with the same level of discipline they use in an operation. So the reception that they've had to the book and some of the principles in the book has been, strong because they understand discipline and training. In the same way you have twenty things in an action plan one of the things that I have noticed in the military that is remarkable is that they're constantly training and retraining on things that they already know. That's what makes them, especially the Special Operations community so good at what they do. It's because they do it over and over and over again. When it comes to this muscle of brevity, pick one or two things to work on in the same way that they would do with practicing a mission or doing parachuting or entry into a building or whatever type of mission. They're practicing that all the time. It's remarkable how they're willing to practice and get it right.

**Joe:** *I think that's a key. One of the things I'll say about your summary and your action plan is that there wasn't like there was this earth shattering secret there. It's like going to one of these presentations you walk out of, "I know that. I'm just not doing it."*

**Joseph:** Yes, things in the book that I think will trigger people to look at life differently and there's other things that I tell people. This is a reminder of things that you already know

[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



but you have to be aware that I need to be better at it. Brevity is an essential skill in the 21st century. It's not just for long-winded people. It's for everybody because if you can't get to the point and you can't be clear and concise, you're going to be ignored or people are going to turn you out because their attention span is so weak. They're flooded with the information.

That's where the whole connection with Lean is powerful because Lean communication is driving the inefficiency out of that element of my life. Certainly email is a perfect example. I was quoted recently in Fortune Magazine and the author was talking about email. It's a bane of a lot of people's existence; the inefficiencies in email day to day or how much time it wastes.

**Joe:** *I can agree with you on that one. But one thing I want to ask you before I leave you go is, how do you know you're condensing things for the right message? I'm not leaving something out that is important. Are there any signs or warning that crop up if you're being too brief?*

**Joseph:** So that's a great question. The question is can you be too brief and the answer is yes. The way I define to be brief is a balance between being clear and concise. And if you just look at being brief as concise you could be too concise. It's about how clear I am. The best indication that I've seen if a person is being brief is when you finish talking somebody asks you a good question, because what you're doing is you're saying less and less is more. But the less I say the more people will want. That's the irony of the whole reason to be brief is the less I say well, the more people want to hear. There's a famous expression

[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)

# Business901

## Podcast Transcription

### *Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*



on Broadway that is “always leaving wanting more.” So how do I achieve a level of clarity and be concise so people want more? I think a question is the best indicator.

**Joe:** *A good measure maybe of how good my presentation is, is how much response I get from the audience.*

**Joseph:** I would say that’s the only way you’ll know. In a corporate environment, if you don’t get any questions you have to assume that they don’t understand. No matter how many people are smiling and nodding their heads, that is not an indication they understand because their mind is flooding with information and you are competing with a very, very small attention span. It’s like a joke. If somebody doesn’t laugh at the end of a joke – a slight smile isn’t an indication. They have to laugh out loud. In a presentation or a conversation, if they don’t ask a question or respond, you have to assume that they don’t understand.

**Joe:** *What would you like to add that maybe I didn’t ask? What about the book could you tell me and make someone want to go out and buy it?*

**Joseph:** What may seem obvious is people might think about the topic of brevity and some people might go “Oh my gosh I have a problem.” But there might be some people who say, “I don’t have a problem; I’m not long-winded.” I didn’t write the book with a long-winded person in mind, I wrote it because somebody told me a few years ago “Where do I go to learn how to do this?” The book was written as an essential skill to help people be better in this area. It’s not written for long-winded people. So I would say that anybody

# Business901

## Podcast Transcription

### *Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*



listening who is saying “Well this isn’t for me,” this is an essential skill for a professional, just like being punctual, being diligent, or being persistent. This is a skill that everyone needs to master.

**Joe:** *I think you’re so right there Joe because I took a lot more from it than just being brief in conversation. It was brief in a lot of things that I do. Preparation is of course one of the keys. That’s what we talk about in Lean and continuous improvement is the preparation part. I think we’ve lost a little of that. A lot of us think we just need to do it.*

**Joseph:** The whole emphasis of Lean is about efficiency and effectiveness. So in the same way the book picks up on that in saying I have to be efficient and effective and I can always be a bit better. There’s always continuous improvement and that’s why I think the similarities are super powerful.

**Joe:** *One other question I notice is that you talk a lot about stories and visualization. How does all that kind of fit in? Can you give me a summary and tie this together.*

**Joseph:** I’ll show you how it fits in. Imagine a corporate setting where an executive team is trying to lay out a strategy and they’re going to go out and put it into a PowerPoint presentation and roll it out to their senior management team. You have to assume that the people that you’re talking to may or may not be listening, they have a hard time paying attention, and they’ve got a lot on their mind, the information overload, that whole environment that you’re communicating in. So my recommendation is if you could turn that strategy into a narrative, into a short story, if you can illustrate it in a way and make

# Business901

Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



it visual, a couple things happen. Number one is you do that and you condense it down so it can be short. It becomes very meaningful so the messages aren't generic corporate speak but you have some very meaningful information in the story. The people in the audience are now listening, they're engaged, they're not distracted anymore, they're completely in and they're focused. Laser focused and they can see it. They're not distracted, they're buying in, and they know what to do.

Stories are very powerful and visuals make stories even more powerful. That's why we like going to the movies. So in corporations there's a huge opportunity to use those devices as a way of communicating things which otherwise might be confusing, dry, convoluted, hard to follow. Putting them in a story and making it visual makes it more effective and a more efficient way of communicating that information in the same circumstance. I've seen time and time again where it works beautifully.

**Joe:** *I had a lot of fun on your website scooting around, looking at things and everything. I encourage everybody to go to [sheffieldcompany.com](http://sheffieldcompany.com). The book I assume is published by Wiley and is on Amazon. What's the best way to contact you?*

**Joseph:** Information specific about the book. We have a website, a part of Sheffield called the Brief Lab, the [brieflab.com](http://brieflab.com). So we have a resources on there. We have writings, a blog, videos, certainly the book. There's links to where to buy the book. You can buy it at Barnes and Noble, Amazon, other retailers. Reviews. There's plenty of resources there. There's tools that you can download – these Brief mapping tools that you mentioned. They are all available as researches on the website at the [brieflab.com](http://brieflab.com).

[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)

# Business901

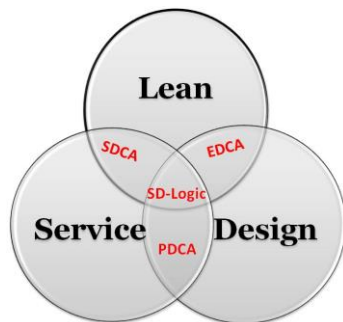
Podcast Transcription

## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



**Joe:** I would like to thank you very much. The podcast will be available on the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 website. So thanks again Joe.

**Joseph:** Thank you Joe.



Business901

Joseph T. Dager

Business901

Phone: 260-918-0438

Skype: Biz901

Fax: 260-818-2022

Email: [jtdager@business901.com](mailto:jtdager@business901.com)

Website: <http://www.business901.com>

Twitter: [@business901](https://twitter.com/business901)

Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

*[Say More by Saying Less](#)  
[Copyright Business901](#)*