

Jess Novak


Strategic Communications & Narrative Lead


Strategic communications and narrative leader with deep experience across brand positioning, editorial strategy, audience development, executive communications, SEO, AI search, and thought leadership.


Drawing on an extensive journalism background interviewing executives, technical experts, creatives, and industry leaders, I translate complex ideas into clear, compelling narratives and develop messaging frameworks that align business priorities, audience needs, and organizational expertise. Known for uncovering the story beneath the expertise, I help organizations build trust, sharpen positioning, and drive growth through strategic communications.

Based in New York, New York

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SKILLS

Strategy & Communications

Brand Positioning • Narrative Development • Executive Communications • Thought Leadership • Editorial Strategy • Content Strategy • Audience Development • Messaging Frameworks • Campaign Development • Internal Comms

Growth & Performance

SEO / AEO / GEO • Organic Growth • Audience Development • Competitive Analysis • Search Intent & Discoverability Strategy • Analytics & Performance Reporting • AI-Assisted Content Strategy • Editorial AI Integration • Human-in-the-Loop Content Systems • AI-Augmented Research & Ideation • Prompt Development • Content Operations Optimization • Generative AI Platforms (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity) • AI-Enabled Prototyping & Creative Workflows (Lovable)

Creative & Editorial

Brand Voice Development • UX Writing • Storytelling • Interview Development • Long-Form Editorial • Content Marketing • Cross-Channel Content Systems

Leadership & Operations

Cross-Functional Leadership • Team Management • Stakeholder Alignment • Freelancer Management • Editorial Operations • Training & Workshops

EXPERIENCE

DeSantis-Breindel

Director of Content and Audience Development

January 2024-Present

- Lead brand narrative, messaging, and audience strategy engagements for B2B organizations across industries including energy, engineering, consulting, healthcare, and professional services
- Develop positioning frameworks, executive messaging, thought leadership platforms, and integrated content strategies for rebrands, website launches, and go-to-market initiatives
- Partner directly with executive stakeholders and subject matter experts to translate complex technical and operational expertise into accessible, audience-driven narratives
- Shape multi-channel communications programs spanning websites, social strategy, SEO, newsletters, internal communications, employer brand, and campaign development
- Conduct competitive analysis, content audits, and audience research to identify strategic opportunities and strengthen market positioning
- Lead editorial direction and content systems for large-scale website redesigns and brand transformations
- Develop strategic communications for organizational change initiatives, leadership communications, and internal culture campaigns

Independent Consultant

Brand, Editorial, and Content Strategy

2012-2025

- Built brand voice, content ecosystems, organic growth strategies, and audience acquisition frameworks for early-stage and pre-launch companies, including Complete Sleep
- Advised brands, agencies, startups, and executives on brand narrative, editorial strategy, audience growth, SEO, thought leadership, and strategic communications
- Developed messaging frameworks, launch strategies, newsletters, and cross-channel content systems for B2B, healthcare, lifestyle, media, and DTC organizations
- Interviewed founders, executives, engineers, creatives, and subject matter experts to translate complex expertise into clear, audience-focused narratives
- Led SEO and audience development initiatives for editorial and branded content programs, strengthening discoverability and long-term organic growth
- Created campaigns, editorial franchises, and content marketing systems for clients including Ford Motor Company, Highmark Health, Bumble, Citarella, Weber, and The U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Contributed reported features, essays, and cultural journalism to publications including SELF, Men's Journal, Thrillist, Fatherly, Maxim, Greatist, Brooklyn Magazine, and NYCGo

Clean Plates

Head of Content and Audience Development

September 2021-September 2022

- Developed audience growth strategy spanning SEO, newsletters, and social channels
- Conducted competitive analysis and content audits to identify growth opportunities and strengthen engagement
- Led editorial operations for an in-house team and network of 40+ freelancers
- Developed branded campaign concepts and audience engagement initiatives
- Saw an increase in organic search traffic by 26.46% YoY September 2021 - September 2022, social by 31.55%, and average session duration by 26.16%

BDG (Bustle Digital Group)

Director of Audience Development — SEO

November 2020-September 2021

- Developed SEO strategy for portfolio of BDG brands
- Innovated new systems to simplify utilization of best practices
- Audited teams and made recommendations based on competitive research
- Identified emerging trends for lifestyle brands, including Bustle, Elite Daily, The Zoe Report, and W, and created content concepts to keep content ahead of the curve
- Created and presented interactive SEO trainings across brands
- Used Google Analytics, Parse.ly, Semrush, Ahrefs, Chartbeat, and Google Search Console on daily basis
- Saw an increase in search traffic of 181% for our portfolio of new brands from Q1 & Q2 2020 to Q1 & Q2 2021 (an increase of 78% across the brands overall)

Contributing SEO Manager

August 2019-November 2020

- Worked across brands to do page audits and make recommendations for improvement
- Provided guidance to grow readership and increase search value
- Created roadmap for BDG's affiliate team around Culture and Innovation's brand positioning for affiliate content and keyword and content guidance for SEO
- Saw an overall increase in traffic of 15% from Q4 2019 to Q1 2020
- Was promoted to Director of Audience Development — SEO

Inverse

Ecommerce Content Consultant

March 2019-August 2019

- Developed ecommerce editorial strategy informed by audience analytics, affiliate performance, and emerging consumer interest trends
- Built relationships with affiliate networks, retail partners, and contributors to expand commerce content opportunities and revenue growth
- Expanded contributor network from three writers to a team of 15+, increasing content production by 150%
- Helped increase ecommerce content revenue by 20%, surpassing quarterly revenue goals for two consecutive quarters
- Used analytics and audience behavior insights to identify undervalued content opportunities and develop new affiliate growth initiatives
- Following Inverse's acquisition by BDG (Bustle Digital Group), was promoted to Contributing SEO Manager

Greatist

Senior Editor, Health Science and Lifestyle

November 2016-February 2019

- Edited, packaged, and managed health science and lifestyle content; oversaw digital staff of 50+
- Maintained editorial calendar and managed editorial budget for health science and lifestyle content
- Combed analytics for insights to inform editorial decisions; used traffic reports to generate strategies for growth, collaborated with the audience development team to grow readership
- Wrote and hosted biweekly beauty show, *Glamourish*
- Worked with sales team to develop branded content strategies and branded packages; oversaw content for branded packages and external partnerships

- Increased sessions in my section by 32% and new users to the site by 60%. Under my leadership, my section improved 15% in bounce rate, 34% in time spent on articles, and 15% in pages per session. My articles converted users to loyal products like email 25% better. I drove category-leading engagement: an average of seven minutes spent per article

Thrillist

Cities Senior Editor

2015-2016

Developed story concepts, grew freelance team to 40+, maintained editorial calendar, edited stories

EDUCATION

Florida State University

Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing

College of William and Mary

B.A. Literary and Cultural Studies

B.A. English Literature

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- Adjunct professor of English literature, composition, and research and analysis. As a university instructor, I built skills that now help me mentor junior employees develop and grow in their careers.
- Freelance art director, production designer, and set stylist on music videos, commercials, and short- and feature-length films. The experience taught me skills I apply towards managing visual elements of editorial and marketing projects.