

# The Content Marketing Cookbook

By Kevin Lee  
[Didit.com](http://Didit.com)





# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction: Why Invest in Content?</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>3</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 1: Creating Content That Satisfies</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>6</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 2: Use Emotion to "Spice up" Content</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>10</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 3: Use the Yearbook Approach</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>13</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 4: Tap the Power of Arguments</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>18</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 5: Banish Bland, Boring B2B Content</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>24</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 6: Five Techniques For Beating Writer's Block</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>28</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 7: Ramping Up Content Production</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>32</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 8: Why Blogging Still Matters</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>36</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 9: Guest Blogging and Syndication</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>39</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 10: Developing a Diversified Content Portfolio</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>43</u></a></b>
<b>Chapter 11: Budgeting for Content Marketing</b>	<b><a href="#"><u>46</u></a></b>



# Introduction

## Why Create Content?

In the same way that a good meal must satisfy the body, good content must satisfy the mind. And while there is no official definition of the term "Content Marketing," Wikipedia's definition is both instructive and accurate:

*Content marketing is any marketing that that involves the creation and sharing of media and publishing content in order to acquire and retain customers. This information can be presented in a variety of formats, including news, video, white papers, e-books, infographics, case studies, how-to guides, question and answer guides, photos, etc.*

While the term "Content Marketing" is a new term, most of the practices it describes certainly aren't. Businesses have been mass-serving sales literature, brochures, handouts, white papers, and case studies for years. What's changed in the past few years -- and it's a big change -- is the mindset of those creating such content, which now reflects the fact that the online audience is looking for content that is both useful and can be *trusted*. Study after study demonstrates that searchers prefer organic links over paid links; those seeking authoritative information on companies and products prefer neutral 3rd-party assessments to one-sided white papers generated by the business. This quest for authoritative quality is aligned with and reinforced by the bias of search engines toward "trusted, link-worthy content."



## Think Like a Publisher

Too many businesses owners continue to make the mistake of believing they can simply repurpose sales-oriented content, shovel it online, and expect people (and search engines) to trust it and consider it “relevant.” To create and market content that truly engages today's truth-seeking audience, one must think of content in a totally different way.

The best newspaper and magazine publishers have always understood that the trust built between publisher and reader constitutes a nearly sacred bond. This bond may take years to build (and can be shattered in a moment), But if this bond is maintained, it can provide a foundation strong enough to build an empire on.

A good publisher will run an article because it's a good article that helps the reader, not because it will necessarily boost circulation for that issue. In this context, content is generated not to generate a sale, but because it serves some larger purpose – to inform, to address an issue, and to tell the truth.

In today's data-driven, instant-ROI-obsessed world of online marketing, such a viewpoint might seem quaintly altruistic. But this is exactly the mindset you must be in if you are going to generate high-quality content that is shared, linked to, referred to, and respected online.

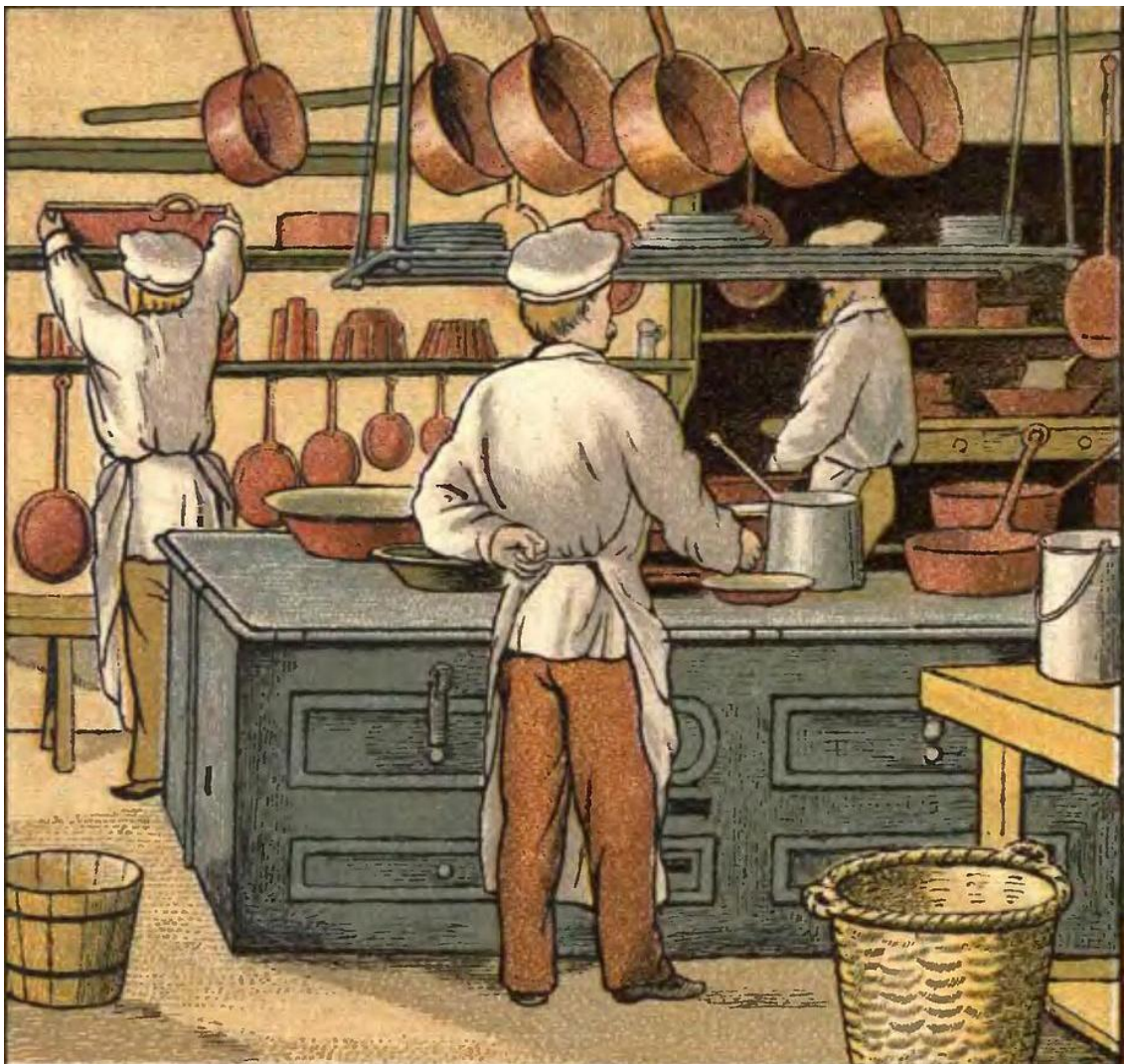
## Trustworthy Content Builds Relationships

You will be using content marketing to build an enduring network of connections and relationships, and building this network requires an *investment* that will not likely be recouped in a few months. Without metrics and attribution models to justify your efforts, your battle against the short-term thinkers and number-crunching data geeks may be lonely and at times hopeless. But if you understand what you are doing, think like a publisher, make your case, and never doubt the fact that that your content is a valuable asset whose value – in the form of sales, profitability, and market share — will realize itself in time, you will not fail.



In the following pages, you'll learn how to create content that satisfies, and, in so doing, builds affinity, loyalty, and hunger in your audience for more. All of the techniques I'm going to be telling you about have been proven in the field.

Welcome to the Content Marketing Kitchen. Let's get cooking.





# Chapter 1

## Creating Content That Satisfies



Creating content that truly satisfies your target audience isn't easy. Early in 2014, Forrester Research took a look at how well B2B firms were doing in respect to supplying content that connected with their audiences, and the results were dismal: of 30 companies evaluated, only four companies passed its test. "When marketers don't recognize that their charter is to produce content buyers want, then content marketing quickly degrades to talking about products, features, and what the company has to offer," wrote Forrester.





Talking endlessly about concerns shared by nobody outside the organization is a recipe for bland, inward-looking content that won't satisfy anyone. Every business is different and there's no single template for creating content that moves your audience down the funnel from awareness to action. Still, there are many things that you can do to increase the effectiveness of your content marketing efforts, and they begin with realizing the following three facts:

**1. Your prospects expect to get immediately something of value from you.** Like it or not, today prospects have been conditioned to expect much more than a flashy display of how great your products and services are. These people wouldn't be browsing your site or checking out your social channels if they weren't in a state of hungry pain, and it's your job to ameliorate it, not by delivering a brochure on how great our own brand of medicine is, but by delivering the nutritional medicine itself -- at least enough of it to accomplish a modicum of healing on its own.

Ask yourself whether there are resources that you can deploy that can address these immediate needs. By this I mean problem-solving e-books, informative SlideShare presentations, video how-to's, and other helpful content. Creating these long-form assets is harder than creating a series of blog posts (although it's possible to repurpose a series of thematically related posts into such an asset at minimal incremental cost).





In exchange for consuming such content (provided it has real value), your prospects will be typically willing to hand over their email addresses, which gives you some level of permission to follow up with them later. Don't abuse this privilege by being spammy, but don't ignore the opportunity it gives you to notify them that you've got additional content available that they'd likely be interested in.

**2. The best way to find out what your "secret sauce" should be is to experiment.** Most B2Bs assume that they know what kind of content will be effective with their target audiences, but many of these assumptions may be wrong, and the only way you'll really know is to create, deploy, and test the results. Here, social media can have enormous value serving as a virtual focus group.

On several occasions, my own team has been genuinely surprised by the response of certain kinds of content on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and SlideShare, and this feedback has been of great value in terms of planning additional content that's better tuned to audience need. If your social media presence is weak, consider allocating some small part of your budget to paid/promotional posts; a small but not insignificant ancillary benefit of doing this is that you will likely grow your list of followers and fans by doing so.







**3. Don't be afraid of showing prospects how you do things.** While there are a few businesses out there that might bridle at the prospect of actually showing the public how they solve problems because of the use of trade secrets, most B2Bs are distinguishable because of the quality of their execution, not because of some proprietary "secret sauce." For example, in SEO, most firms use the same toolsets to prepare audits, use the same methods to obtain and optimize sites, and use similar approaches to obtain inbound links. What distinguishes one firm from another is the *quality of execution*, not some mythical patented method, and most prospects know this.

So don't be afraid of showing your prospects how you approach a problem, and don't be afraid of directing them to helpful resources they can use on their own. While it's theoretically possible that you'll lose a sale or two, you'll more likely gain trust by becoming widely known as a "straight shooter who shares," and building trust, after all, is what effective content marketing is all about.

# Chapter 2

## Use Emotion to "Spice up" Content



In early 2014, researchers working with [Facebook published a controversial study](#) whose findings were based on an experiment involving the deliberate manipulation of users' News Feeds. One interesting finding of this study pertains to the degree to which exposure to emotional content influences engagement with the social network itself. The researchers noted that "people who were exposed to fewer emotional posts in their News Feed were less expressive overall in the following days." In other words, emotional content drives social network engagement in a way that emotionally neutral content does not. One could say that emotional content is built into the DNA of social media itself.



## Why Emotion Drives Engagement

Facebook's findings are consistent with other research. People are aroused to act when they get emotional, whether they've arrived in this state on their own or because they've been exposed to "computer-mediated emotional contagion." Creating positive perceptions to motivate positive audience behavior has been a core task of advertising and PR for hundreds of years. At Cannes each spring, emotionally charged advertising wins the awards. Emotion works because it cuts through the clutter. People want to feel something - a tingle somewhere in their hearts - and places like Facebook are where they get this little thrill.

Of course, emotion -- especially on the Internet -- is widely abused (how many "you'll cry tears of joy when you see this link" info-ads must one view in a single lifetime?). The more hyperbolic Internet content gets, the more it's likely that people will tune out all of the thousands of emotional screams for attention. But emotional content can drive lead-form completion actions on Web pages, e-commerce shopping cart checkouts, and other positive behavior that can cause you to stand out from your competitors less willing to inject life into their content.

If you're interested in upping the valence of your content, here are some great recommendations. They're based on research done in 2011 by [two researchers at Wharton](#), Jonah Berger and Katherine L. Milkman, who studied exactly why certain content goes viral. For three months, Berger and Milkman studied the most widely shared content on *The New York Times* site, analyzed and classified this content, and published their results. Here's what they learned:



## **Positivity Rules**

Like it or not, positivity rules in social media, and content that is designed to elicit a happy emotion in the content consumer is far more likely to get passed along. Facebook's study suggests the same thing: that social media networks may have an inbuilt incentive to encourage exactly this kind of behavior, because emotional affect is so closely tied to system usage. The fact that people respond well to positive content doesn't mean that every piece of content you serve needs to be a Happy Meal. But if the content you're generating makes people smile, laugh, or feel better, it's more likely to be passed along to others.

## **The Value of Awe and Surprise**

Wharton's researchers noted that content with unusual statistics (think *Freakonomics*) is more likely to go viral than content that simply summarizes the obvious. Critics of this trend might say that the Web has been reduced to a worldwide version of Ripley's "Believe it or Not," but there's no question that people have endless capacity to be awed, and when they find themselves in such a mental state, they're more likely to click on the "forward/share" button. Furthermore, it's clear that people share interesting links to demonstrate the fact that they're interesting people. So sharing awesome, surprising content may support one's "expert" status in any online community -- a prized feeling for many.

## **Fear, Anger, and Anxiety**

While social media has a general bias toward positivity, content that causes the consumer to feel fear, anger, or anxiety is more likely to be passed along because of the high arousal state of the recipient. Anger "wants to be shared" and so does anxiety and fear. Whether marketers are well-advised to create anxiety-generating content is debatable (but the life insurance, legal, and financial industries have been doing this for years). Conflict means drama, and marketers might consider the deliberate initiation of an online controversy to capitalize on this kind of emotional power, a point we'll expand on in Chapter 4.

What's the bottom line? Emotion-driven marketing is something that should whet your appetite.



# Chapter 3

## Using the "Yearbook" Approach to Content Marketing



One major problem for content marketers is extending the reach of their content beyond their own existing circle of friends, fans, followers, and subscribers. There are many ways to attack this problem, including article syndication, PR mentions, and through paid media (provided that one has the budget for this), but one economical method that my team has used successfully is what I call the "Yearbook Approach."

Why do I call it this? Because, just like an entry in a high school or college yearbook, it elevates the status of the person it's about and highlights their achievements and contributions. Consequently, it has a high likelihood of being shared widely by the subject and his/her fans online.





## Why It Works

The Yearbook Approach leverages an ancient, elemental truth of human behavior, which Dale Carnegie summed up as follows in his 'How to Win Friends and Influence People:'

*Remember that a man's name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language.*

In a content marketing context, executing the Yearbook Approach begins with identifying influencers willing to consent to an interview with one's content team. Once this interview is published (and provided that its content is satisfactory to the interviewee), it can be expected that the interviewee will do his/her part to promote the article to his/her own network, which may be much larger than that maintained by the content marketer. We've created content using this approach many times, and it consistently outperforms content that, while being useful and informative, lacks the built-in virality possible with the Yearbook Approach.





## 1. Choose Your Influencer With Care

Unless you're hooked into the celebrity circuit, you're not going to be able to score an interview with a top-tier celebrity. For most if you it's not about reach alone, it's about quality of the interview and a specific focus. So, don't use *People Magazine* as your hunting grounds; instead compare your marketing plan to those with clout (and perhaps Klout) in your sector. Look for people active in your business space who are saying interesting things but who aren't yet on the CNN/Bloomberg/Huffington Post circuit. These folks would likely appreciate some added attention -- even if it comes from outside parties lacking established media brand names. Independent consultants are often good choices because they realize that additional exposure has a direct impact on their bottom line. People active on social media who prize growing their follower/fan base are excellent targets for the Yearbook Approach.

Ideally, you want your interview target to be someone in your industry who is not a direct competitor (or if he/she is, operates in a different geographical region so there's no business conflict), is well-spoken, and has invested in developing a quality online audience, particularly on social media.

## 2. Think Hard About Your Questions

You'll spend most a fair amount of time researching your interview target, getting to know him/her as well as you can, and probing deeply into his/her worldview. A few "softball questions" are OK, but try to draw your target out a bit by referencing provocative quotes they've made on Twitter, on their blogs, or in press interviews.

Shoot for 10 to 15 questions; no more. You want to have enough questions to give your interview target a chance to be discursive, but not so many that it becomes a burden. Once you've got them ready, fire them off. It's usually a good idea to allot at least a week for turnaround (although some interview targets respond very quickly).



### 3. Show Respect

Once you've gotten your questions returned, use them to create a good-looking blog article that they'll have no reservation sharing with their audiences. Your biggest editorial task will be to write a suitable intro. Here's a sample intro to an article we did that establishes the frame for the interview, while positioning the interview target as a thought leader in her field:

*Rhea Drysdale has been helping clients achieve organic visibility for nearly a decade. She is sometimes referred to as “the woman who saved the SEO industry,” an allusion to [her expensive, but ultimately successful 2010 battle to keep the term from being trademarked](#). Today Rhea is CEO of her own agency, [Outspoken Media](#), based in Troy, New York. As part of our continuing series of interviews with industry experts, Didit reached out to Rhea for commentary on critical issues affecting the SEO industry today.*

A good intro statement does something beyond merely positioning your interview target as an authority in his/her field. It also establishes -- in a very subtle way -- your firm as an *authority on authorities*. Be honoring other peoples' achievements, you are simultaneously elevating your own stature. While the term "kingmaker" might be too strong to apply to what you're doing here, there is no question that the Yearbook Approach can be used to elevate your own industry standing.



#### **4. Get Signoff Before (or Soon After) Publishing**

Unless you're working with someone who's big enough to demand a preview prior to publishing, giving your target a tipoff that "the article is live" will likely suffice in terms of getting his/her buy in. Don't ignore this step: it shows courtesy as well as providing a final chance to check for any content errors introduced in the production process. In many cases, your interview target will grant you access to use his/her photos on your blog. If these images aren't impressive, go the extra mile and create unique graphics that highlight his/her stature. Use callouts to illustrate particularly provocative points made by your interviewee.

#### **5. Don't Ask for a Link Back**

Asking or demanding links back in return for a yearbook-style article is risky as well as rude. One wouldn't want there to be a presumption -- on the part of any human and certainly on the part of any search engine -- that there was a shady "quid pro" in operation. Admittedly a link might produce some SEO value, but embark on this initiative with the idea of great content first. Besides, if your article has done its job, it will attract the attention it deserves from your target and his/her network, and links will materialize on their own.

One question I've gotten from those considering the Yearbook Approach is whether or not to interview competitors. My response is that generally that's fine. If you want to appease the vice president, chief marketing officer, or business owner, consider interviewing competition that serve a different geography than you, or service a different sector of the market. There are often also suppliers you can interview.

The Yearbook Approach is highly effective, but because it's somewhat labor-intensive (especially in respect to the research, question-generating phase), you may lack the bandwidth to produce such articles every week. But even if your output of such articles is monthly or less frequently, it's worth adding this approach to your content marketing toolkit because the potential for gaining added reach and influence for your content is so great.



# Chapter 4

## Tap the Power of Arguments



Every content marketing team is subject to writer's block. When attempting to break the creative logjam, one worthy approach is to start an argument. When one person speaks, it's a monologue you can either pay attention to or ignore. But when two people are hashing out an issue in public - especially if there's something real at stake and passions begin to heat up - a crowd will quickly gather.





Many of us work in industries that are "boring," at least by comparison to those professions we see glamorized on television (e.g. cops, bounty hunters, spies, soldiers, etc.). But if you talk to anyone who actually works in law enforcement or espionage, you'll quickly learn that these professions are probably just as boring as the one you're in -- maybe more so.

Controversy is almost always interesting and share-worthy, especially when the kind of content your audience is usually exposed to is bland and dull. The truth is that there's drama, conflict, and arguments everywhere, in every profession. You just have to look a bit harder. There are issues - burning ones - in every business, and if you want to tap into the power of arguments, your job is to dig them up, frame them, show your audience what's at stake, and show your audience why things have to be reformed.

Not every argument you start will go viral or elicit the response you expect, however, arguments certainly break your team out of their writer's block. Here are some tips about finding controversy and mining the power of arguments in whatever business you're in:

### **1. Start With the Data**

Editorials are easy to write if they are simple opinion, and those may work in some instances. However, if you are looking to build respect, better to start with data. Nobody cares very much about assertions ("I think the sky is red, not green."). But if you can find data showing that "20 percent of New Yorkers think the sky is gray," you've got an argument. Case in point -- [the great "SEO Isn't Rocket Science" controversy](#) of several years back. If my partner Dave hadn't had data at his disposal showing that SEOs weren't doing well, the whole argument would have collapsed, and the publicity groundswell that followed would never have happened. But because the data cited by Dave was from an objective source, it formed the foundation of an argument that



went on for weeks -- even months. Data -- even if it's wrong (and Dave's data wasn't wrong) is an essential seed around which arguments may crystallize, gain momentum, and occasionally explode.

## **2. Follow Up**

Once you've got a genuine argument happening, make the most of it. You can't control where the argument is going to go, but you can influence how it's framed. Write some follow-up articles that amplify and support your argument. These can take the form of Q&As or interviews with people who have "skin in the game." Get a press release out announcing that you are "sticking to your guns;" and reiterate the data you used in your "argument." If you move quickly, you can have a lot of fun at this stage.

## **3. Know When to Walk Away**

No argument goes on forever, and it's a mistake to prolong any controversy once the world has moved on. Don't worry about "settling" the argument online -- you never will. Once you've made all the points you want to make, walk away and move on before things get stale. Write one more article summing up the debate/argument/controversy, and shift gears -- either by starting another argument or taking a break.

## **4. Respect the Opposing View**

Many will fight your data with opinion. They are likely wrong (assuming the data is accurate), but there is no need to get personal. Your online opponent may appear frightening and monster-like (especially because such opponents usually go by anonymized, sometimes mockingly named pseudonyms), but there is a real human being there, and this person may be secretly ambivalent about the position they've taken against you. One can point out the folly of an opinion-based argument without crossing the line of personal attacks (even if they use personal attacks against you).



## **Some Words of Caution**

Arguments - if they're managed correctly - can gain you traffic, media interest, and distinguish you as someone who has a strong point of view who's unafraid to take on the status quo - in other words, a leader in your industry. Doing so, however, carries with it some inherent risks, including:

### **1. Clients**

Your clients may or may not enjoy being associated with a firm with a strong point of view. Some may not want to be associated with any kind of controversy at all. You'll never get client buy-in when you decide to launch an argument online. If you really can't afford to stick your neck out in this way, pull it back in, leave the arguing to firms better prepared to assume the risk, and keep things positive, by using, for example, Chapter 3's Yearbook Approach.



### **2. Competitors**

If you're arguing that "ad agency sites are horrible because they abuse Flash," make sure you're not doing the same thing. If you happen to score some real points against your competitors, expect them to strike back - that's what competitors do. Given that we live in a world that's becoming almost fully transparent, "opposition research" is something that's easier than ever to do. The old adage about people who live in glass houses directly applies here.



### 3. Control

Once an argument reaches critical mass, it could go in any direction (that's why people find arguments irresistible). Arguments can spin wildly, digress, and get very personal. Make sure you've got the stomach for this kind of unpredictable gladiatorial contest.

If you - or your firm - has a strong point of view, there's no better way to brand yourself as a leader than to throw down the gauntlet. While cultivating and curating arguments isn't for everybody, it can break through the clutter better than any other form of discourse. Plus, arguments get a lot of visibility, increasing awareness of you and your company, and do indeed often result in links, which still form the basis of SEO.





# Chapter 5

## Banish Bland, Boring B2B Content



We're all taught that content that isn't engaging, inspiring, satisfying, and helpful will cause users to hit the dreaded "back button." But the sad fact is that the majority of commercial content on the Web is dull and flavorless, falling flatter than a poorly prepared soufflé, even when it's accurately targeted at a given audience.

Every business is different (and some are inherently more boring than others), so there's no silver bullet capable of solving this problem. There are, however, a few tricks that businesses - or the agencies hired by them - can use to inject some spark, spice, and flavor into their B2B content. Here are five of them:





## 1. Personality-Driven Content

One important advantage that small and mid-sized B2Bs have over their larger brethren often lies in their founders, who are often charismatic, outspoken, and sometimes "over the top." While the executive boards of large companies sometimes have high charisma quotients, these executives are often muzzled by internal legal teams, risk-averse PR agencies, or simply by the fact that they don't deign to write, post, or tweet. If your firm has a "straight-talking" founder with a strong point of view, consider giving this individual a platform via a YouTube video series. While there's no guarantee that your CEO will become a viral sensation, a strong opinionated voice might be just what you need to set your brand apart on YouTube, the second biggest search engine in the world. As an added benefit, video shot for YouTube may provide topics and quotes that can be used on written content.

## 2. Behind-the-Scenes Content

In the same way that Hollywood is much more than movies and Washington is more than press conferences, legislation, and memos, your industry has a hidden side whose human dimension is invariably more compelling than anything manufactured for public consumption. (Take it from me: I've seen some incredibly weird scenes at SEM-related trade shows). Open your eyes and ears the next time that you attend an industry event, trade show, or conference. What's actually happening in the culture of your business vertical? Are people feeling exuberant? Paranoid? Optimistic? Racing for the exits? Use the [power of the anecdote](#) to make your point. Focusing on the human dimension will give your content a voice that's impossible to summon when you on abstract industry issues. Don't cross over into gossip, though, as there are legal and reputational issues related to non-verifiable information.



### 3. Out-of-the-Box Content

Too many B2B marketers put their content in a straitjacket by restricting its subject matter to that directly relating to the goods and services they sell. While B2B content shouldn't be "all over the map," neither should it monotonously hammer on the same narrow points ad nauseam. Here, the 80/20 rule is a good rule to abide by: for every four pieces of content you produce that are narrowly targeted to your service offerings, produce one that's less directly related, but more likely to be shared on social media and reach a wider audience, irrespective of whether these people are in-market for what you sell.



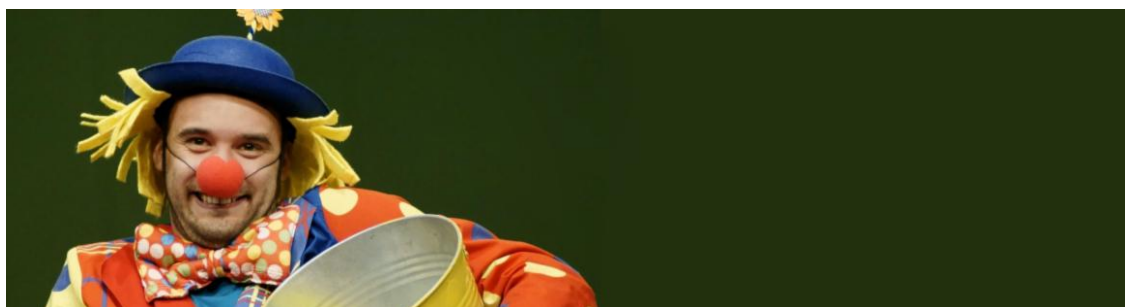
### 4. Obsessive Content

If you don't want to think outside the box, consider burrowing deeper within it. Many B2B solutions are inherently complicated, so consider becoming the subject matter expert on all of the minutia associated with a particular process. While there's zero chance that you'll snare general interest from the Web at large, you'll make clear to "passionistas" in your target market that nobody cares more or has greater in-depth knowledge about the subject. YouTube is an excellent place to "go granular." Even if your video doesn't get a lot of views, each of those views will be from someone who's almost as obsessed as you are.



## 5. Exotic Data-Driven Content

Everybody loves data-driven articles, but too many B2B data-driven articles use the same data served up by the same research firms. Instead of parroting the same numbers, think creatively about how you can tap into the Web's big data repositories to produce some relevant data that's never been seen before. Google Trends can be a good source of trend data for your vertical. Even if you don't have access to Twitter's API, it's fairly easy to mine data from Twitter using XML Include statements. Similarly, your own site analytics may be useful for developing this kind of data. Plus, you've got all the industry competitive intelligence tools to use. Just be sure you cite the data source.



## 6. Humor

People love to laugh and humor satisfies us in a way that people really appreciate and remember. But writing funny articles is serious business. Unless you have one or more people on your team who's got a rapier-like wit, I'd recommend that you steer clear of making humor articles a staple of the content you serve, because posting unintentionally unfunny articles is something that too many firms do. Sometimes, however, a funny idea just pops up on its own, and there's no reason to ignore this gift when it arrives. For example, a few members of my team were studying LinkedIn's algorithms recently, and happened to notice how the profile of LinkedIn's users tend to fall into a finite number of categories. The result was an article, [Top 10 LinkedIn Photo Portrait Types](#), that made fun of the way people brand themselves on LinkedIn. This article -- illustrated with photos from our own staff (to avoid hurting other people's feelings), resulted in one of the highest share counts we've gotten on a Digid.com article. Another article -- "[Top 10 Incredibly Lame Marketing Phrases](#)" -- was so popular that it launched a series.



# Chapter 6

## Five Techniques For Beating Writer's Block



Writer's block is a deadly malaise that can shut down even the best-laid content marketing plans. It happens because writers aren't machines (even machines need a rest once in awhile). Since content is king across SEO and social media, as well as in traditional publishing and print newsletters, a steady stream of relevant, interesting, and engaging content is often expected from the writers on a marketing team of agency. Anyone with a deadline for journalistic or other forms of writing has likely experienced writer's block.

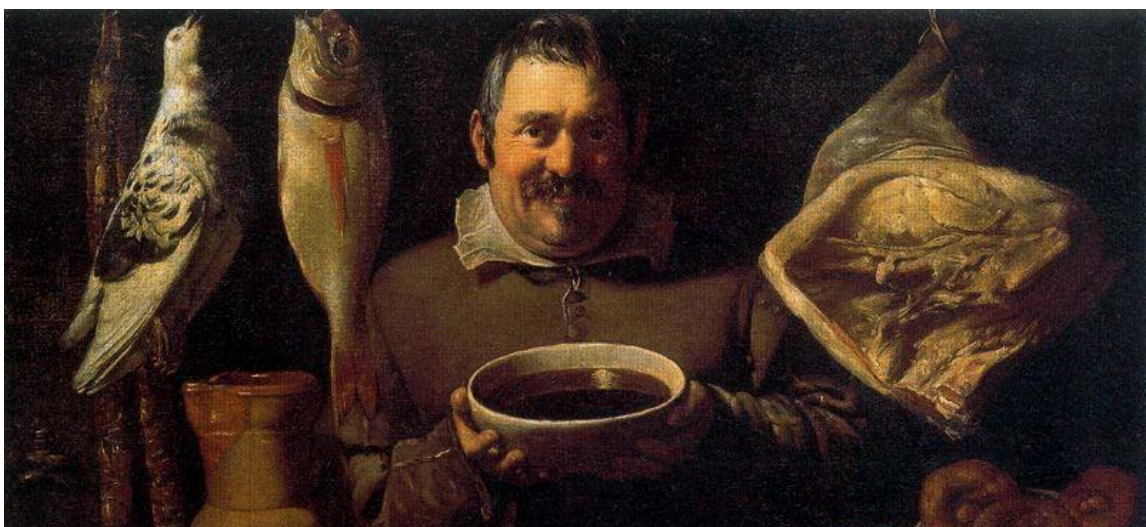


The problem can be especially serious for writers working for trade publications or specialized industry e-zines, where their command of a particular subject matter confines them to a granular content beat (like it or not, there's only so much one can say write about programmatic media buying, quality score, or multi-channel attribution without repeating oneself ad nauseam). The result is an increasingly erratic flow of tired, listless content that's agonizing to read (if it's even read at all).

Short of rest (hard to come by in today's relentless, 24/7 content-driven economy), I've found the following techniques to be effective in warding off writers' block and content marketing burnout:

### **1. Historical Analogies (Everything That's Old Is New Again)**

Americans don't have much of an interest in history (we like to think of ourselves as the land of the new and exceptional, not the old and predictable), but that doesn't mean that you can't use historical analogies to make your point. For example, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has been referred to as "[The Boy King](#)." Here, the writer is making a connection between today's "way new" world and that of Ancient Egypt, circa 3,000 B.C. What problems did young kings face in the past? What brought them to power? What character flaws or exogenous historical forces brought them down? Historical analogies can open up a trove of useful parallels that can kick-start creativity.







## 2. Contrarian Positions (Whatever It Is, I'm Against It)

If everybody agrees that, say the [death of Google Authorship](#) is a terrible thing, don't simply add your voice to the chorus. Was Joan Rivers the greatest comedienne of the 20th century? [Maybe not](#). Taking contrarian positions shows your audience that you don't automatically buy into groupthink (and neither should they). It also gives you the opportunity to skewer your opponents' position (Jonathan Swift's 1729 essay, [A Modest Proposal](#), is perhaps the best example of literature using this technique).

## 3. Personal Anecdotes

True story: one morning several months ago I paused at a busy New York crosswalk next to a young man who balanced a baby on his left arm while texting on his iPhone with his right. As his texting grew more intense, the baby became more unbalanced, slowly slipping from the guy's arm until the kid was almost upside down. A half-second before the baby was going to fall to the pavement, the young man jerked the youngster back into position. Then he returned to his texting and crossed the street, without ever taking his eyes of the iPhone's screen.

Obviously, this one anecdote could be spun into any one of a number of discussion topics, including:

1. Our society's elevation of "virtual" family above our real families.
2. Addiction to technology.
3. The idea that things (which are replaceable) are more important than people (which cannot be replaced).
4. The opportunity for app-builders to build apps that would warn people when they've become criminally careless.

Whatever point you're trying to make, a personal anecdote can drive it home because it bears the stamp of personal witnessing. Even if people don't agree with your point, nobody can deny that you had the experience you had.



#### 4. If People Were Like Things (or If Things Were Like People)

What kind of person would Google be if he/she was a person? Would you want to have a beer with him/her? If Facebook ran an airline, what kind of treatment could you expect in economy class? These kinds of odd comparisons can surface parallels that get the creative juices simmering. (By the way, I think Google would be a nice, very intelligent person, but no, I don't think I'll be flying Facebook Air anytime soon).

#### 5. News Hooks

News hooks are great, both for their inherent currency and SEO value. You will, however, need to be quick on the draw to exploit them (there's an entire content sub-industry specializing in "news-jacking;" *The Huffington Post* does this kind of thing exceptionally well).

You can get ahead of the curve if you time your content to events that you know will happen.

For example, if you're aware that, say, the FTC has scheduled a conference on Big Data that will get tons of major media press after the conference concludes, you can start preparing articles on this theme that will be visible on SERPs by the time the media attention starts. By doing this, you can lead the pack instead of following it.



# Chapter 7

## Ramping up Content Production



There's little doubt that there's a direct correlation between the business results you'll get from content marketing and the volume of the content you serve out to your target audience. So how can you increase your output?

Well, you'll need to build a bit of infrastructure and institute some processes that will let you scale up efficiently.



Make sure you establish a content calendar, using Excel, Google Docs, or a simple shareable Word document, and try to stick to it. Use personas (fictional personalities representing the kinds of people likely to be in-market for your business' offerings) and generate articles tailored for each audience segment. Also, it's crucial to establish an article flow process (otherwise known as a "copyflow" process) that tracks the development of each

After establishing this infrastructure, the question remains: how can you - with the limited resources available to you -- manage to produce the volume of content required to satisfy your target audience?

Many marketers tend to focus on attracting leads with content like blog posts and social media messages. This kind of content is called "wide funnel content" by marketers because its aim is to create awareness, the first stage in [the AIDA \(Awareness-Interest-Desire-Action\) funnel](#) describing the customer's journey.

Blog content is crucial because it's timely, scores well with search engines, and (hopefully) makes full use of the multimedia possibilities of the Web. But what about content for consumers who have already opted into your messaging in some way? This kind of content is known as "mid-funnel" content. It's important because most businesses serve (or would like to serve) more than one kind of customer.





For example, a psychologist might offer therapy programs for both individuals and families, and a digital marketing agency might offer SEO and social media services.

Some firms serve so many discrete market segments that they must create dozens of content libraries for each. Consequently, creating effective mid-funnel content can be expensive. And because creating mid-funnel content is an ongoing task that takes place alongside your wide-funnel activities, it can be challenging for a team to manage.

Here are some four ways to ramp up your mid-funnel content offerings for maximum impact at minimal cost:

### **1. Leverage E-Books**

Create a unique e-book for each of your audience segments. Even if this e-book isn't a 200-page opus, it should provide sufficient value for what your downloader paid for it (typically the right for you to contact him/her again). Most content marketing teams have access to the Microsoft Office suite, making the e-book creation process painless and efficient. Editing tasks are typically performed in Word, final formatting happens in PowerPoint, and the final result is a PDF. A few years back, creating large PDFs was not a best practice, but bandwidth constraints have eased, and the PDF has become a universally accepted method of distributing business documents.

### **2. Reprocess Your Wide-Funnel Content**

A blog post created a year ago to get buzz, search visibility, and generate awareness might be attracting no hits right now, but that doesn't mean that it's worthless. Such an article - when combined with other old articles written on the same theme - might provide enough heft for a credible mid-funnel content item such as an e-book.

This extraction-based approach doesn't work in every case. For example, an article written on SEO in 2009 would have very little applicability to today's world, and it would be better to simply throw it out than consider it a candidate for an e-book project.





Still, focusing on what you've already published and mining it for e-book content is a great way to jump-start the creative mid-funnel process. Sometimes all that's required is a mild updating and copy pass to create a new product that can be immediately put to work in the mid-funnel.

### **3. Use SlideShare**

This platform (with 60 million monthly users) is an ideal platform for showcasing your mid-funnel content. But it might be a mistake for you to upload your complete mid-funnel content library to the service, because it's harder to determine who watched it (whereas if you put the PDF on your site you can get as much insight as your own analytics provide). Recently, SlideShare has been making more "pro-level" features available to its regular users, including improved analytics, which is great. Consider creating an edited/abridged version of your e-book for SlideShare that shares value without "giving away the store."

### **4. Consider Video**

Video is an excellent medium for in-depth explanations of complex subjects. Because it's a sequential medium, it's uniquely suited for "step-by-step" instruction. While the production costs of creating a quality video are very high relative to e-books, an entertaining and informative video has almost unlimited potential. Furthermore, the definition of "quality video" has changed in the popular mind in the past several years. Sometimes "low-tech" (cell phone) videos are adequate to convey your story (although you'll still have to put as much thought into them as you'd put into a traditional big-budget shoot). Vine -- a short form (six-second) looping video service, can be used to circulate bite-sized nuggets of video content that have a distinct "real life" feel that can be a refreshing alternative to stodgy, over-produced video content.

To evaluate whether video content would be effective (both in its mid-funnel role and in terms of gaining wide-funnel awareness for your company), check YouTube for content in your business vertical. You might find that there are very few competitors using the service for the distribution of mid-funnel content, which means you've got an opportunity.



Check SlideShare as well, because it recently expanded its video capabilities, expanding file size to 500 MB, allowing much heftier videos to reside there. With Facebook tightening its organic brand post formula, cracking down on "overly promotional" brand posts you need to rethink every stage of the funnel.



# Chapter 8

## Why Blogging Still Matters



In October 2014, the Content Marketing Institute released a study on how marketers are using content marketing. Among the study's interesting findings is a small but measurable tactical shift away from long-form blog articles in favor of social media postings. According to the report, 93 percent of B2B marketers use social media in content marketing (up from 87 percent in 2013), whereas the use of blog/website-based articles has declined from 83 to 81 percent.



## Outdated or Simply "Uncool"?

Is blogging an outdated tactic? Among social media people, the answer is certainly "yes." When Didit surveyed the Top 100 Social Media Influencers early in 2014, we found that only 34 percent of these people maintained active blogs ("active blog" being defined as blog content less than seven days old). Their own behavior is consistent with the social media-heavy strategy they advise for their clients. And if the Content Marketing Institute's report accurately reflects their influence on budgets, these people are winning the battle right now.

I'd think twice, however, before you drink the social media Kool-Aid and abandon or de-emphasize your own blog content in favor of a beefed-up social media presence. While blogs and site-based articles might no longer be "cool," this established form of content marketing has a bunch of advantages that social media postings don't, among them being:

**1.Control.** On your own site, you control the look and feel, context, and type of experience you want your prospects to have. You can embed anything you want in your blog articles, link wherever you want, and precisely control the mix of editorial and marketing messaging. Social media platforms aren't set up to do this. For example, Facebook tightly restricts the amount of text that can be included in any posted image. Even LinkedIn's Publishing Platform -- a promising long-form content platform that's worth experimenting with -- puts your content into a branding strait-jacket in order to be consistent with LinkedIn's style. Advertising-supported social networks sprinkle ads (sometimes from direct competitors) around your content in a way that can distract from and diminish your messaging.



2. **Ease of Measurement.** B2B marketers use a myriad of metrics to establish content marketing ROI, including page views, time on site, whitepaper/e-book downloads, lead form completion, etc. Modern site-based analytics packages (including Google Analytics) provide clear visibility into the prospect's journey. They also give you a complete view of all sources (including social networks) contributing to article and site traffic. This functionality is much more extensive than metrics provided by social networks.
3. **Page Rank and Domain Authority.** Search engines assign merit both to individual articles and the domains upon which they reside. Link-worthy articles enhance domain authority; domain authority increases the chance of visibility of any given article. These SEO benefits do not accrue to the publisher when content is published to external platforms. Providing excellent content to social networks is very much like a "loft lease improvement" you make to property that reverts to the landlord once your lease is up.
4. **Accessibility.** Content marketers typically serve up a mix of content, not just one type. For example, news-oriented articles may be designed to ride the wave of popular trending interest in a given topic. "Evergreen"-style articles are designed to be relevant for a longer period of time. Each type of article can be categorized easily and naturally on a website, but not within social media's rapid scroll display presentation format.

Sometimes a similar piece of content should reside outside your blog, especially if you can get an external reputable publisher to allow you to contribute that article as a guest blogger. Guest blogging for SEO links has been slammed recently, but when a publisher other than yourself can get your article to rank when you couldn't and you get credit for that article, the PR and reputation-building impact is significant even if you get no links back from your externally published content.





# Chapter 9

## Developing a Diversified Content Portfolio



Content marketing isn't just about creating content -- it's about distributing it in a way that reaches one's target audience in an economical way. Unfortunately, marketers seeking to maximize return from a given communications channel -- for example, a particular social media platform -- can find themselves behind the 8-ball when that channel decides to change the rules.

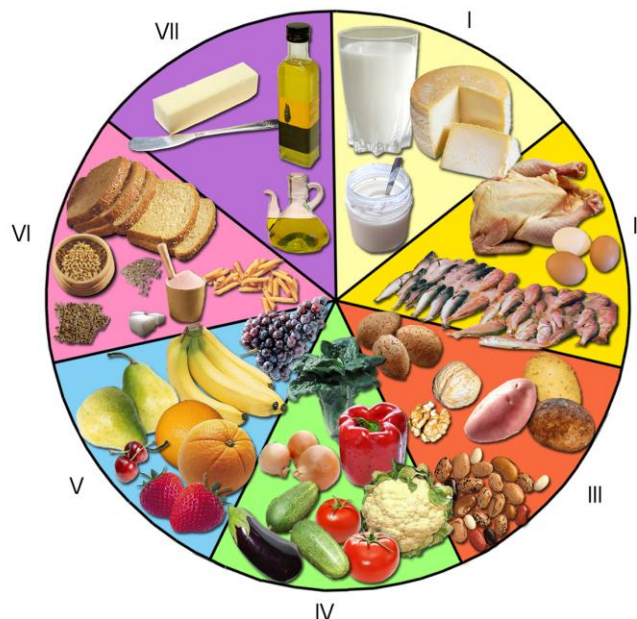
For example, many marketers felt both blindsided and betrayed when Facebook began throttling organic reach in late 2013. Rightly or wrongly, these marketers felt that their past efforts to build loyal followings on Facebook entitled them to be able to cheaply reach these people in the future (it didn't). Similar bad feelings have been generated in paid search when click prices go up or data that once flowed freely is restricted due to a change in engine policy.



Because any given channel that's profitable today may be unprofitable tomorrow, it's important for marketers to develop risk mitigation strategies to limit downside exposure. One useful strategy is to use the "hub-and-spoke" model. This is a very simple model that's laid out like a bicycle wheel with radiating spokes.

The "hub" represents the unique intellectual property your firm owns or licenses. This is the "content" that remains "king" because it offers your firm's special gift to the world. Such content usually exists in the form of original articles, whitepapers, presentations, sales collateral, blog posts, and perhaps product documentation. This "hub" content is typically located on a single web site on a unique domain somewhere on the World Wide Web. All links, regardless of which "spoke" they originate from, point toward the unique URLs of each content element on such a site. If this content is good, it can serve as an honest, powerful lure to attract visitors to draw closer to your firm's offerings. If it's not good -- and let's be frank: most B2B content isn't very good -- even the best "spokes" won't help it.

The "spokes" in this wheel represent the communications channels you currently use to market your products and services. These channels will come and go, whereas the "hub" will remain fixed, under your control, at your own domain and site.





A typical B2B firm will typically use a number of such spokes that can be divided into "unpaid" (earned) and "paid" (rented) categories.

**"Unpaid" spokes typically include:**

1. Traffic organically acquired through search engines
2. Traffic originating from editorial links to content placed on reputable sites
3. Organic social traffic from social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.
4. Brand-term related traffic (otherwise known as "direct" traffic arising when a user directly enters the marketer's domain name into the browser address bar).
5. Traffic from email messages sent to a subscriber/opted-in list.

**"Paid" spokes typically include:**

1. PPC ads on search engines or search networks
2. Promoted social media posts
3. Banner ads
4. Other paid media such as TV/radio spots, newspaper ads, etc.
5. Press releases syndicated through paid services
6. Branded apps

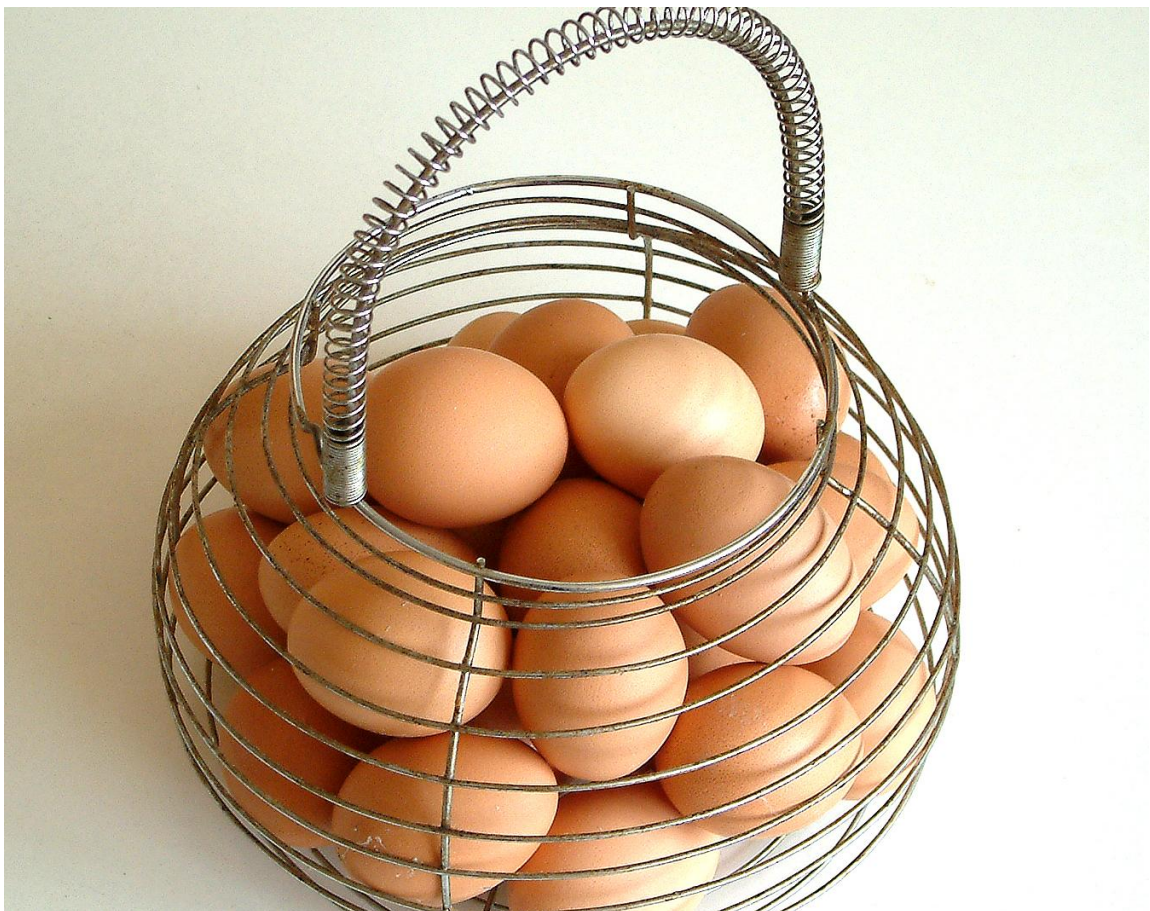
The hub-and-spoke approach is effective for three reasons:

1. By concentrating all your crucial assets on your site, instead of dispersing them across disparate networks, you make the task of monitoring your content's performance much easier. At any given moment in time, you can clearly see traffic resulting from efforts made to promote it on each "spoke" and "double down" if results from a given spoke are resulting in improved conversions.
2. By creating a diversified portfolio of traffic-generating sources, and balancing marketing efforts among each of them, one can "keep the lights on" when marketing activity on a single spoke becomes unsustainable.



3. By using a model encouraging you to investigate and become fluent with emergent channels before they reach critical mass, your firm will be ready to achieve first-mover advantage when "the next hot marketing channel" appears over the horizon.

No two marketers will have an identical profile in respect to the amount of budget allocated to any given spoke. The smart ones, however, will realize that it's risky that "putting too many eggs in one basket" is a bad mistake in an environment in which consumers are constantly moving from channel to channel and the terms of service on any marketing channel is entirely fluid. By having "more than one iron in the fire," you'll never feel burned when a given social media channel, search engine, or other traffic provider changes its rules on the fly.







# Chapter 10

## Guest Blogging and Syndication



If your company is regularly publishing good content on your site, you might consider syndicating a portion of this content out to third parties, for example, to online publications in your business vertical.

### Why Syndicate or Guest Blog?

**More Visibility.** Although you may have put a lot of SEO effort into your business domain, few business sites have the site authority of a dedicated content site. By sharing content with a site with higher authority than your own, your content will be more visible in search engines. Additionally, the site you syndicate to may aggressively promote your content via its own promotional apparatus, which often includes emails sent to large subscriber lists and posts to high-traffic social channels. Syndication can extend your reach to audiences that might otherwise be completely unaware of what your business does.





**Added Prestige.** If you can strike a deal with a first-rate publisher, for example *The Huffington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, or equivalent, your business may be the beneficiary of a prestige boost. Many online publishers are extremely picky about who they allow into their pages; if your content makes the cut, it's definitely something that marks your brand as "elite." You can promote the fact that your work appears in a given high-profile publisher site in your own marketing collateral and on your blog.

**Editorial Assistance.** While some outlets will accept whatever words you send their way without adding any value, first-rate publishers will provide an additional layer of copy-editing to ensure that the quality is up to snuff.

## Caveats

**No Direct SEO Benefit.** When Google's Matt Cutts wrote "*stick a fork in it: guest blogging is done*" back in January, 2014, he wasn't bashing content syndication or guest blogging, only the use of this tactic as a link-building scheme. While many publishers will allow a "hard" link back to your site for navigation purposes, many people recommend that this link should be a "no follow" link so that it does not confer any Page Rank. I'm of the opinion that a hard link in your bio probably won't do any SEO harm and may in fact provide some SEO benefit.

**No Self-Promotion.** Just like Google, the editors of online syndication outlets want you to write about interesting things in the world, not promote yourself. If your normal editorial voice is self-promotional, tone it down: you're guest blogging/syndicating to share your wisdom and help people, not make sales.

**Less Topical Control.** Once a third-party site selects you to write on a given topic, you're going to have to stick to that topic. Many sites specialize in very granular, technical topics, and it's rare that you'll be allowed to divert from this topic unless you demand an editorial "beat" that's wide-ranging at the outset of your relationship.



## Best Practices

Here are some recommendations for business people who want to extend their reach via guest blogging and content syndication.

**Pace Yourself.** While you have complete freedom to publish (or not) to your own blog whenever you want, once you're engaged with a third party you're bound to delivering content that's in good shape and delivered on time. If you have an aggressive (five-day/week) blog content calendar, consider scaling this schedule back until you're comfortable meeting deadlines set by a 3rd-party.

**Use News Hooks and Anecdotes.** Especially if you're confined to a very narrow beat, it can be daunting to create content that's enthused and exciting over time. Consider reaching beyond your narrow industry to personal experiences you've had or issues in the news. Doing this can boost the energy of your content and avoid the "I've said this 100 times before" trap. (See Chapter 6 for some "unconventional" article ideas that can start creative juices flowing)

**Be Yourself.** Avoid a stuffy "know-it-all" tone (even if you really do know it all). Approach your audience as equals, and open up your topic for discussion (if the third-party site provides for commenting).

**Promote Your Partner.** It's always good to create an excerpt (not a copy) of your syndicated post and promote the fact that it's been published on a third-party site through your social channels.

## Is Syndication for You?

Content syndication can extend your reach, add prestige, and create new possibilities to engage with qualified audiences whose members would never visit your business blog on their own. Doing so can also deliver a branding boost and elevate your status as a "thought leader" in your industry vertical in a way similar to Chapter 3's "Yearbook Approach." Just because syndication conveys no direct SEO benefits doesn't mean that one should "stick a fork in it." Publishing thought-leading content has benefits that range far beyond SEO.



# Chapter 11

## Budgeting for Content Marketing



Content Marketing is a worthy endeavor with distinct long-term benefits, some of which I've identified in this e-book. But there's no question that content marketing can be expensive. Finding writers and interactive producers who "get" what your business is about and can consistently produce content that reaches its target audience can't be found on Fiver.



The costs of content creation are usually allocated to search engine optimization (SEO). After all, now that "content marketing" is officially hot again due to the intersection of social media and SEO, generally the SEO teams and their supervisors and often the VP of marketing (wearing an SEO/social media hat) determine what gets written about and how much content should be written. However, great content doesn't only empower SEO and social media. When properly managed, great content also empowers your paid search campaign.

One useful rule of thumb comes from Stacey Roarty London, of TextBroker. Stacey postulates that the vast majority of online marketers are significantly under-investing in content both on the SEO/social and search engine marketing (SEM) sides of their marketing initiatives. Stacey proposes a 50-15 rule: fifty percent of SEO investment should be in content creation and 15 percent of SEM budget should be allocated to content creation.

Generally I greet the idea of a one-size-fits-all rule of thumb with skepticism, a host of caveats, and conditions. However, because so many marketers and advertisers under-invest in content, I found myself thinking about all the reasons why those under-investing in content should consider ramping up that investment and how a rule-of-thumb might help them.

Below, I'll cover primarily pay per click (PPC)-specific reasons to invest more in content creation, but as you might imagine, the same content investment can benefit both the paid and organic/social sides of the online marketing initiatives. Here are my five reasons and the rationales behind those reasons:

**Early lifecycle in content investment.** If you've under-invested in content thus far, you may be far behind where you should be from the perspective of content for SEO and PPC. In the case where you've significantly under-invested, it's easy to see where one could allocate based on a 50-15 rule. Start with content that surrounds your brand and primary product and service offering because that content will serve a dual SEO *and* PPC role.



**Brand-focused SEO isn't where it should be.** Google and Bing/Yahoo generally give brands a huge advantage in ranking for their own name, but sometimes that isn't enough when it comes to phrases that include your brand. If you haven't done the research to understand all the keyword permutations that include your brand (positive and negative included) and crafted a content creation plan around those phrases, you should probably invest more in that area. However, just because your SEO content ranks well for all that great content doesn't mean you shouldn't also bid on the brand phrases separately (with different ad copy than your organic listings) and even a different landing page. Repeated testing has shown that for the vast majority of online advertisers, the incrementality (removing click cannibalization) of bidding on brand keywords is still very positive, particularly when ad messages and landing pages are properly tuned and optimized.

**You have a content syndication opportunity.** Most people think about content creation purely from the perspective of SEO and visibility on their site. That is often short-sighted. If you have an opportunity to create content that will be published on a reputable site with great SEO, take that opportunity.

**Keywords "failing" and competitors are able to bid on keywords you can't buy because you don't have the content to support it.** Some keywords you want to bid on (or are bidding on now) may fail due to poor landing page match. Quality score may only be part of the reason. Sure, Google and adCenter may penalize your quality score slightly based on landing page relevance not being where it should be, but that penalty pales in comparison to the penalty your prospects and customers impart on you by clicking that back button after you already paid for the click. Revisit your most important and highest opportunity keywords to evaluate if your landing pages are all they can be.





**You have an opportunity to write content that's exciting and interesting and may have social media pass-along and link bait potential.** Many businesses are boring; it's a fact of business marketing, but you'd be surprised at the content and article ideas a creative team can come up with that might get the attention of the social media ecosystem or blogosphere, resulting in links and both direct traffic and the benefit of those links across your entire domain. These pages typically wouldn't be used in a PPC campaign due to low conversion rate, but when you're getting the traffic "free" (after investment in SEO and content) and the validation of that content externally, this can be a powerful strategy.

Each business is different and therefore its online marketing strategy is different as well. So, you'll have to evaluate the best investment levels for content creation for your specific business and where you are in the content creation lifecycle. Yet, when it comes to getting senior management to approve new budget, sometimes a rule of thumb gets you budget, other times even the most intelligent presentation as to the value of the investment of incremental budget alone might fall on deaf ears. So, feel free to use the 50-15 content investment rule of thumb or create your own.

---

## Have more questions about Content Marketing?

We can help! A digital marketing leader since 1996, [Didit](#) provides full-service online advertising and marketing services with award-winning expertise and innovation.

---

**CONTACT DIDIT**