

# CONTENT MARKETING PLAYBOOK

Master **Content Marketing**.  
Boost **Traffic**.  
Grow **Your Business**.

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# INTRODUCTION

Maybe you've tried all sorts of methods to bring attention to your brand.

When it comes to reaching your audience of potential customers online, traditional advertising isn't as effective. According to [research by Forrester](#), only 10% of people trust banner ads. You need to find a way to get your message out that doesn't push consumers away or seem to much about about self promotion.

Inbound marketing, which is what content marketing is, has some good news for you in light of that customer distrust of traditional marketing.

[Kapost](#) research has revealed that inbound marketing delivers 54% more leads into your marketing funnel than traditional marketing. [According to Hubspot](#), inbound leads are 61% less expensive than the leads you get from traditional outbound marketing. [75% of business-to-business \(B2B\) buyers](#) rely on content to research before buying than they did in 2013.

Content marketing is powerful and affordable. Customers are coming to expect it, not willing to buy without content to reference. Content marketing is not something that you can ignore.

But here's the problem most people face: it's not easy to know where to start, and it's even harder to know where to go next once you do finally get the wheels rolling.

We wrote this book to help you understand how to master content marketing. In it, we're not just talking about the benefits and value of content marketing. We're revealing the actual strategies, processes, best practices, tips, and tools that we've both personally used (and continue to use) to help hundreds of companies boost web traffic, brand awareness, and conversions.

It's our hope that you take as much as you need from this book in order to hit the ground running, make the right moves, see real ROI, and use content marketing to take your business to the next level.

Good luck!

**SUJAN & ROB**



SECTION 1

# FINDING YOUR IDEAS

*As far as your content marketing possibilities are concerned, the world is a giant, blank slate. There are eyes waiting to read, ears waiting to hear.*

But what are you going to say?

That is a terrifying question for any content marketer, whether they're starting out new or are a veteran. Idea block and fear of the blank screen can pop up at any time. Busyness and distraction can overwhelm even your best attempts at creating regular content.

The key is finding ideas, and lots of them, ahead of time.

Difficulty in finding ideas for your content marketing efforts is a top struggle for many bloggers and content marketers. Getting started might be easy enough, but having enough ideas for the long-term can easily overwhelm you.

## BASE CONTENT VS. PERIPHERAL CONTENT

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*Your content will stem from two sources: your base content and your peripheral content. Your base content is what your niche is all about—that thing you do and care about. Your peripheral content is what your audience cares about. There should be overlap here, otherwise your audience wouldn't be interested in your content in the first place.*

For example, if you own a cooking school and you have a niche blog that focuses on baking, your base content will be recipes and other direct, baking-related content. Your peripheral content might include reviews of baking tools and ingredients, cookbooks, baking events, baking-related apparel and gifts, diet and health -- anything that someone who enjoys baking might also be interested in. If your blog is for your lawn care business, your base content is lawn care but your peripheral content might include gardening, homeowner's association lawn-related issues, lawnmower safety around kids, and so on.

Peripheral content has the ability to reach a broader spectrum of readers and pull them into the core of your content marketing, your base content.

### USING BASE CONTENT AND PERIPHERAL CONTENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR FINDING IDEAS REQUIRES THAT YOU:

1. **Know what you care about.** If you're dipping your toes into content marketing, you'd better understand what your niche is. You should be able to write a one-sentence summation of your main focus. (e.g. "I want to share baking recipes and tips so that my readers can be pastry chefs in their own homes.")
2. **Learn what your audience cares about.** Understanding who your audience is and what they want is something we'll cover in depth later, but you should know a bit about your reader (or, if you're a new content marketer, who your ideal reader would be) in order to understand what they care about.
3. **Determine the best mix.** Decide how much of your content should be base and how much should be peripheral. It might be guesswork at the start, but through careful tracking of your analytics, you'll see which content your audience likes the best.

Base and peripheral content ideas aren't difficult to find.

Base content ideas can be found in industry and professional resources that inform you of news, trends and topics, as well as your own expert experience. This may be in the form of printed or email newsletters, magazines, official blogs, and other distribution lists.

When using industry and expert resources for ideas, though, remember that you need to repackage them in a way that your readers will both understand and care about. Avoid jargon, speak plainly, and don't patronize.

Peripheral content ideas don't come from as obvious a source as your base content ideas do. You have to keep your eyes and ears open to what readers are saying and asking about in comments and conversation. You will want to regularly visit their blogs and social profiles and see where they link or what they talk about.

The key thing to remember, when it comes to finding ideas, is that your ideas should not be relegated to only what you are interested in. They need to address what your readers are interested in. Too many content marketers forget the latter and spend all their energy on the former.

## WHENIWORK.COM: CREATING CONTENT THEIR CUSTOMERS NEED.

**When I Work** is a handy app that businesses use to make scheduling and communicating with hourly employees easier. Their customers are interested in employee scheduling and the app itself, which could be considered their base content, but what about that peripheral content?

One look at the When I Work blog tells you that they understand the balance between base and peripheral content well. Their blog posts range from management skills, teenage employee issues, hiring employees, and even posts specific to industries where hourly employees are common (food, service). It's a great mix of base content, such as app updates, and peripheral content, that helpful information their customers are interested in.

# USE BRAINSTORMING AND IDEATION

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*The world is awash in different approaches to brainstorming and ideation. These techniques offer a good way to kickstart your creativity and exercise your creative muscles. They help you look for ideas in ways that aren't always obvious.*

The power lies in how these techniques help you get past mental and creative blocks methodically by circumventing the barriers you unconsciously put up in front of solutions and ideas.

## The Art Of Thinking Sideways

You'll often hear about the difficulty of coming up with good content marketing ideas for "boring" businesses. How do you brainstorm content ideas when you think your business is boring?

The Moz blog suggests you try thinking sideways.

Sideways thinking (sometimes called lateral thinking) is the idea that the solution requires reasoning that isn't obvious. Perhaps you are a more traditional problem solver, and like to use a logical step-by-step approach (vertical thinking). Thinking sideways is not linear. Many of the following brainstorming approaches use sideways thinking to help you find ideas in leaps that you couldn't not find with a vertical approach.

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### ASSOCIATION

Association is one of the most abstract methods of coming up with ideas for your content creation. It's a good approach if you're seriously blocked and unable to come up with anything to write about at all. It relies on speed and not over-thinking while performing the exercises. At the start, you will come up with obvious solutions. As you progress, though, and get past those initial ideas and on into desperation, you'll really start tapping into the ridiculous and...great ideas.

1. **Word banks.** A word bank is a collection of words that come to mind when you think about a specific topic or phrase. When creating a word bank, it's important to write down any word -- noun, verb, adjective, adverb -- that pops into your head. You can cross words off the list when you're done, but you need to avoid stopping the flow. As you get going, you'll be surprised at what comes to mind, but it's in that word bank that you'll find ideas or words to use in your copy. Set a time limit, don't stop, and build that bank.
2. **Rorschach.** Visual imagery can also help generate a word or phrase bank. Find an image, whether its the one you intend to use in your content or one related to your niche, and begin writing down the words and phrases that come to mind.

### MAPPING RELATED IDEAS

Mapping is different from associative brainstorming techniques in that it is a more conscious and purposeful approach to finding connections. Association depends on the random unknown, while mapping appeals a bit more to logic and control.

1. **Word map.** Write a word or phrase in the middle of your paper. Think of four ways to categorize that word. Write those words around it, connect with lines, and then repeat the process for those four new words. The idea is to discover the many ways to categorize a single word or phrase.
2. **Idea map.** An idea map is a bit like a visual outline. Start in the middle of a piece of paper with a broad topic idea. Break that down into a few smaller, related ideas, and connect with lines. Break those ideas down, and continue. Since specific topics of a "smaller" nature make for better content than too-broad topics, you'll find a multitude of things to write about in those sub ideas. It also helps you better understand the structure of that broader topic.

### CHANGE YOUR VANTAGE POINT

Creating great content means getting outside of your head. One content idea can end up being endless pieces of content when you put yourself in a different place or mindset. These exercises prod you to do exactly that.

1. **Time travel.** Think of a very general idea. Think about how you might have approached writing about it at a different time in your life. What would you have said 10 years ago? What would you say 10 years from now?
2. **Perspective.** Think about the idea from a different perspective. If you've written about a topic from the buyer's perspective, what about writing it from the perspective of the manufacturer? The seller? The supplier of the raw materials? One content idea can go a long way when considering all of the different perspectives.
3. **Question everything.** Be the newspaper reporter or the fiction writer, and ask the leading questions. Ask the questions a reader wants to know. And definitely ask "what if?", the classic question that has spurred on great writing for centuries. What if you used a different ingredient? What if WordPress went away?

## COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Using compare and contrast techniques, you can pit ideas or concepts against each other to determine which would be the best in a particular situation.

- **Pros and cons.** Creating a list of pros and cons for your idea will help you see visually which idea is strongest. For those of you who prefer to have a number to go by, simply associate points with the various pros and cons based on a standard scale you come up with, and use the tally at the end. Of course, pros and cons only work if you're completely honest about listing at the same level of detail. If you aren't honest, you'll purposefully push the pro or con list towards the idea you favor. Having someone help you make the list and call you on any "cheating" might make this method more reliable.

## MIX THINGS UP

Switching and mixing things up is a good way to kick yourself out of a particular mindset. With these brainstorming methods, you can take basic content ideas and refresh them in both point of view, tone, or approach.

1. **Change yourself.** Change one thing about you, in your mind. What if you were taller, older, richer, thinner, or a newbie? How would you write about your niche topics differently?
2. **Role playing.** Imagine if you were someone else, perhaps a celebrity or a specific reader who has commented on your content. How would you write about your niche topic?

# GET IDEAS FROM SEO TECHNIQUES AND TRENDS

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*Using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques and current trends can also spur on content marketing ideas. These are ideas that are highly tuned into what's hot now, and what people want to read.*

## Keyword Research

Using the [Google Keywords Planner](#), you can discover SEO-ready ideas and see how these ideas have performed and get a good picture on how they will perform when plugged into a search engine.

1. Using your word bank or other words and phrases that you've listed that are in your base and peripheral content, create a short list.
2. Click on "Search for new keyword and ad group idea."
3. You can either a word/phrase associated with your niche, your website in the "Your landing page" area, and your "product" category. Additionally, if there is a blog or other website whose content is similar to what you do (e.g. Wikipedia page on your niche, competitor or influencer's site), you can use their URL in the landing page bracket.
4. Google will return suggested keywords, and provide a rank of how they will fair.

Not only do you have an idea for content, but you also have keywords to use when it comes to writing that content. You may also want to do a simple Google search and scroll to the bottom of the page and look at the "recommended searches" listed. It's a great place to find ideas.

## Finding Trends

Using trending topics and ideas will help you capitalize on what's hot now, and may increase your ability to go viral. Trending topics might be anything from breaking news to a viral meme.

While trendy content doesn't usually stay evergreen and relevant once the trend is over, it can bring people to your content who might stick around after the trend is past.

### SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDING TOPICS

Social media networks do a good job of showing you what topics are trending on them at the current moment.

- **Facebook:** [Facebook's trending topics](#) reflect your interests, so you will not see the same trending topics as others. These topics are shown in the upper right sidebar of your news feed. You can [customize the kinds of topics](#) you see somewhat, though Facebook uses its own algorithm, ultimately.
- **Twitter:** [Twitter trending topics](#) are found in a few different places, depending on if you're using a mobile device or not. Though an algorithm is used to personalize trends based on who you follow and your geographic location, Twitter also shows trending topics beyond that scope. You can also set up tailored trends, and save that search for later use.
- **Google+:** Find out the [What's Hot](#) on the Google+ network, their version of trending topics, by viewing a collection of recent posts as well as the hashtags used.
- **Buzzsumo:** This app tracks content on all social networks, ranking it based on the number of shares. It can monitor content by topic or user, and delivers accurate results. With this tool, you can simplify monitoring, easily keep tabs on competitor's content, see what content types people prefer, see what influencer's are sharing -- just about anything.

### GOOGLE TRENDS

[Google Trends](#) is the place to go if you want to know what people are searching for on Google. You can fine-tune your quest for search-engine trends based on geographic location, date, in comparison to other search terms, what's trending on YouTube, and more.

Google Trends will not give you the finepoint detail for content marketing ideas, but it will show you what people have a growing (or dying) interest in.

If you're more of a visual person, try [Google Trends' visualizer](#). It's big, colorful, and bold. If it's a bit too bold (and it's possible), you'll probably want to use the [Google Trends Top Charts](#) page. If Google Trends are something you want to stay on top of, [you can subscribe](#) to the results and have them sent regularly to your Gmail.

### OTHER PLACES TO SPOT TRENDS

You can find trends with as much or as little work as you want. Some websites do the work for you, such as BuzzFeed, which has a [trending page](#) dedicated solely to what is currently the most popular on its own site. BuzzFeed is hugely popular, so those trends matter. You can manually spot trends if you are using aggregating tools, such as an RSS reader like [Feedly](#), and have categorized content well.

## Capitalizing On Dead Links

The [Search Engine Journal](#) has a great idea that uses dead links to generate both content ideas as well as great SEO. It all stems from the ever-popular Wikipedia which, unfortunately, often suffers from dead links in the references at the bottom of each article.

Wikipedia almost always turns up in a search on any particular term. It has high traffic. You can funnel this back towards your site by simply finding dead links that relate to your niche and industry. Blogger Anna Francis outlines a simple process to do this, though it does require you to have established yourself as a trusted account (with edits) on Wikipedia prior to trying:

1. **Find dead links.** Search Google with `site:wikipedia.org yourtopic "dead link"` to return a list of pages with dead links.
2. **Find out what content was on the page.** Copy the dead link URL into Archive.org to get a peek at what that page was all about.
3. **Swap in your new link.** Replace the dead link with a link to your new content.

Not everyone is actively involved in Wikipedia and may not be able to do this. But even simply creating content based on what you find on relevant Wikipedia page references will give you some ideas for your own content, whether it's based on this dead link process or not.

## GET IDEAS FROM OTHERS

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*Sometimes content marketers need to get out and actually talk to real people. There's a lot of myth about finding out what your reader really wants you to write about, much of it hinging on your ability to correctly interpret collected data.*

Instead of guessing or sifting through data constantly, try listening. People are already telling you what they'd like to read.

## Customer And Reader Input

Customers and readers are people who have already exhibited a tendency towards your business and your content. It is fitting to create content that will keep them there (new customer acquisition is, after all, much more expensive than keeping current customers), and it makes sense to listen to them.



### WHAT CUSTOMERS HAVE TO SAY.

If you have a brick-and-mortar store, what your customers are saying on the sales floor or to customer service tell you what they want to know. If you're a bit removed from your customers, ask your employees about customer concerns, comments, and complaints. Questions such as:

- Is this product safe?
- Who is this product for?
- Will this system work for me?
- Do I need something else to make this work?
- How do I choose which option to buy?

These are all questions that customers will also be asking when they make online searches. They are the perfect questions to answer with your content.

But this works even if you don't have an actual store. In a post written for Content Marketing Institute, [Michael Brenner](#), Head of Strategy for NewsCred, suggests turning your email outbox into blog posts. What questions do you continually seem to be answering via email to your customers or salespeople?

Or, proactively talk to your regular customers and readers directly, via an email newsletter, on social media, or a user survey. Ask them their opinion. Encourage them to provide you with input.

### WHAT READERS HAVE TO SAY.

If you have a blog or are active on social media, you're getting similar questions and comments in your blog comments section or in online conversations.

Be sure to look beyond just your blog's comment section. Find a direct competitor's blog, or a blog with the same focus as your blog. Read the comments and find the themes, questions, and statements their readers are making. Write content that would answer their questions.

## Online Discussions

Forums, discussion groups, online classes, and question-and-answer websites like Quora are a fabulous place to go digging for content marketing ideas. Most are free to join, and it's almost a sandbox where you can bounce questions and ideas off of others to help you as you flesh out your own ideas or approach to a topic.

Finding a forum is as simple as using a custom Google search (*niche topic + forum*), or using a website like [BoardReader](#) to search on relevant topics. Forums will be found everywhere, including on LinkedIn and online education sites such as Udemy or Coursera.

For Quora, simply sign up for a free account, and add interests to your profile that are related to your niche. Search the questions people have already asked, read the answers, and jot down ideas.

Not only will these kinds of sites help you find ideas, but you can also share your content with them (in a non-spamming way, of course) on related topics of discussion. It can help drive traffic to your site as well as give you content marketing ideas.

## Outside Reading

A serious content marketer should be regularly reading books, magazines, newspapers, and/or blogs that are outside the realm of both core and peripheral content. Gini Dietrich, from the Spin Sucks marketing blog, came up with a long (and impressive) list of [places to get ideas for shareable content](#). Dietrich's list is heavily populated with various newsletters, email lists, magazines, and blogs, many of which might seem "unrelated" to content marketing.

By exposing yourself to seemingly unrelated ideas, you keep your content from becoming increasingly narrow and repetitive. A book, quote, or resource that seems to have nothing to do with your base and peripheral content on the surface may have an abstract or larger metaphor that you can use to flesh out your content for better reader understanding.

THE IDEAS THAT MIGHT STEM FROM THIS OUTSIDE SOURCE MATERIAL WILL INSPIRE CONTENT THAT:

1. Reviews or recommends a book.
2. Explains what you learned.
3. Explains what your reader might learn.
4. Explains how this applies to your niche.
5. Shares your reaction and how it changed you.
6. Finds quotes from which you can base an idea.

You read the book, it had an impact, you had to share it, it changed you -- something like that.

When you create content that references or reacts to traditional media, such as a book, you both give your reader a suggestion on what to read as well as paint a more human picture. You also build a bit of trust because it's clear you're pursuing a form of "self improvement" for the reader's benefit, taking the time to do the reading and then providing a summary and context for your busy readers.

## What Others Have Already Said

Don't be afraid to base your content on something someone else already said.

Filmmaker Nina Paley created a short film to show how most creative work is based on something that already existed. Her point?

[Everything is a derivative.](#)

Thinking that every idea and piece of content you create must be the first of its kind is a trap. You will most certainly come up with your own ideas, but many great content marketing ideas are derivative or in reaction to the idea of another.

Ideas build on previous ideas. The ideas of others ignite your own thoughts, and you will feed into that process for others.

### THERE ARE TWO PLACES TO TURN TO WHEN IT COMES TO RESPONDING TO SOMETHING ALREADY SAID:

1. **Other content creators.** This might be on other blogs, social media posts, or blog comments. You can reference, quote, link, summarize, disagree, agree and elaborate -- just about anything.
2. **Your own content.** Just because you wrote it doesn't mean you can't reference and respond to an old piece of content. Perhaps your ideas have changed (or they haven't), you want to elaborate on something readers have expressed interest in, you want to put the topic in new context, you want to rework old (and poorer) writing, or you want to provide updated information.

When referencing other's content, you should always provide proper attribution by using their name (or their blog's name), and providing a link. Try to avoid copy-and-pasting massive chunks of their content, and definitely refrain from copying an entire piece of content. Quotes and snippets are fine, but anything else borders on infringement.

Avoid thinking that all of your ideas must be completely new. It will only lead you to stop creating content when the idea well periodically runs dry. If you've found a piece of content that someone else wrote, or remember something you wrote, by all means, build on it and turn it into something new.

## USE CONTENT TYPES TO GET IDEAS

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*There are many different ways to approach the same idea, and by understanding these, you can take one single idea and create a lot of content. Several of these content types have powerful data to show that these marketing approaches work in different scenarios.*

### Lists

Lists are popular with readers because they make it possible to scan content, get the gist of it, and go. The content is finite, and readers know it will be packaged tightly. Many readers don't have time to read everything. Lists posts break down the core information, present in an orderly list, and off they go.

Lists posts comprised of 25 items seem to get the best buzz, according to research on the [RJMetrics blog](#). That same research suggests that even if you can't hit 25 items in a list, having a list that ends in a 5 or a 0 is optimal. Whatever length your list ends up being, just remember that [the longer the list, the shorter the content](#) for each item ought to be.

### Interviews

Interviews are a wonderful way to approach a topic you may want to learn about yourself. Find an expert or influencer, conduct the interview, and share the content. Make an audio or video component of the interview, and use both that and a text transcript of the interview.

Interviews are great for bringing in additional traffic from the interviewee's fans and followers.

### Case Studies / Whitepapers

In the business-to-business marketing world, case studies and white papers reign. Before making a purchase, buyers in this world [would turn to](#) a whitepaper 78% of the time, and a case

study 73% of the time. However, whitepaper use is declining slightly, with readers more interested in interactive content.

Case studies and white papers show your reader that you are an expert.

They are attractive to an audience that wants numbers and proof. Create a hypothesis about a testable idea, and then set about testing. Use screenshots, graphics, charts, and anecdotes to tell your audience what you discovered at the end of all the testing.

## Collections Of Links

Every once in a while, compile a massive collection of links for a blog post. These might be to helpful apps, great online tools, the best blog posts on a particular subject -- anything. The larger the list and the more digging you do to find resources most people aren't aware of, the better.

Even your social media posts benefit from including links. Simply adding a URL to your tweet can [boost its retweet potential by 35%](#).

## Infographics

In 2014, [39% of business-to-business buyers shared infographics](#) on social media frequently. Infographics are consistently popular, particularly as social media leans toward imagery and less on text. The infographic is the way to tap into imagery and still get data out there.

Combining numbers, data, and great imagery into one package means you have the infographic, an eminently viral and shareable piece of content that can live on blogs and social media quite comfortably. Got some data you want to share? Tuck it into an infographic.

### THE PERIODIC TABLE OF CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketer Chris Lake created an exceptional infographic for the Econsultancy blog. Calling it "[The Periodic Table Of Content Marketing](#)", Lake found a way to present non-numeric data in an unusual and helpful way. Infographics can be used even if you do not have numerical data. Any topic that is complex and could be made easier with a visual approach is fair game.

## How To / Webinars

The beloved “how to” piece of content is a mainstay, and for good reason. People are consistently turning to the internet to figure out how to do something. How-to posts bring in search and social traffic by the ton.

Webinars take that how-to approach to the next level, integrating engagement, feedback, discussion, and live teaching. Webinars are particularly popular in the business-to-business world, where [67% of buyers will participate in a webinar](#) before buying.

## Humor

Everyone loves a good laugh, and if you can inject humor into your content, do it. Humorous content can easily stand out in a field of informative, industry, and other “serious” content. More than any other type of content, [humor tends to go viral](#).

You can inject humor into your content through:

- Graphics, such as memes.
- Funny anecdotes.
- Cartoons.
- Funny videos.
- Self-deprecation.
- [Tone and language](#).

Just about any topic can be humorous, depending upon how you choose to tell it.

### **MOVOTO.COM: A BRAND WITH A FUNNY BONE.**

Movoto.com is sleek website that makes it easy to find real estate based on location, but Movoto’s blog has gained serious traction in its own right, becoming known for a humorous and slightly irreverent take on real estate. The blog’s slogan states that it is “The Lighter Side Of Real Estate”, and its content backs it up. Its content, though funny, is still helpful, letting people know about restaurants or characteristics of living in different locales.

## **Announcements / News**

Too many businesses think that content marketing is all about press releases. While you shouldn't take that approach, it's OK to share announcements and news, particularly if you frame them in a story or how your audience will benefit. This includes sales, introducing new team members, product updates, or changed holiday hours.

## **Checklists / Worksheets**

Who doesn't love free stuff?! Create checklists and other worksheets to accompany content. These types of content pieces not only attract people, but they are good incentives to get sign-ups for your email list. Find a way to break an idea down into a useful printable piece of content.

## **Reviews / Comparison**

Whether you review a product or compare several products, this type of content is useful for an audience that is trying to make their own buy-in decision. You might even tweak this approach and compare a before and after story. For example, before you used Product A, this was what life was like. Now that you use Product B, this is how it is.

Reviews should be honest, impartial, and if you've been paid or given a product, you must let your readers know (that's the law!).

## **Anecdotes / Stories**

Everyone loves to read a real-life story. Tell the stories you experience in a way to support an idea or a larger blog post. Stories from customers, life, business experiences -- anything that your audience would benefit from.

Remember, though, that your stories aren't meant to be bragging so that you look good. They should be to help your audience.

## **Science / Research**

Content based on science and research have grown in popularity. You don't have to have your own lab or even be a scientist to make use of this technique. Simply approach a topic with questions on how the brain, psychology, physiology, stress, health, and so on might have an impact. There is a lot of fascinating material available online if you know where to look. Instead of telling your audience a plain fact, find the science to back it up.

Or, [gather up as many industry-related statistics](#) as you can, and create a comprehensive list of this research. These types of content are very good at getting inbound links, since other content marketers will be happy to build on the data you discovered.

## Ultimate Guides

Who doesn't love the ultimate guide? (You're reading one right now!)

If you're an expert in your niche (and you are), then you can write an ultimate guide. The ultimate guide to growing flowers, the ultimate guide to fishing, the ultimate guide to increasing sales -- these are powerful pieces of content that are readily shared.

## Video / Podcast

Video is a growing favorite of people. The amount of video, both from individual users and brands, [increased over 3.6 times](#) in the Facebook News feed! That's a *lot* of video that people are creating and watching. Even the business-to-business world has seen an increase of 8% who watch video content.

Creating video or audio versions of content isn't for everyone. You need the equipment and the skill to make it happen. Video in particular, though, travels well through the internet. For example, pairing how-to content with matching video content (even short videos) makes your original content all the more valuable. But just because video seems so popular, don't rule out podcasting.

Podcasts are still popular, even if it seems as if they have waned from their heyday. [Bernie Borges](#), CEO of Find and Convert, sees increasingly improved podcasting technology as one way he's become a better content marketer. Podcast audiences continue to *grow*, not diminish, with [25% of podcast listeners](#) plugging devices into their car to listen to podcasts while they drive. Apple has more than 1 *billion* subscriptions for podcasts in iTunes. People are listening, and [podcasts are back and making money](#).

Making your content audible for your audience on the go is a smart move.

## Long / Short Articles

Content marketer [Caleb Storkey](#) leaps into the debate of whether longer or shorter blog posts are best by saying that both are. He notes Seth Godin's famously short posts, and has good advice: if you can say something in 200 words, why use 2,000? And [95% of business readers](#), who are perhaps pressed for time, prefer the shorter format.



The long article definitely has its place, though. Packed with tons of information, long posts tend to give you a boost, according to Storkey, because they are so full of valuable content.

A mix of both types has a place on your blog.

## Images

Creating images for your social media content is getting to be almost necessary. According to [Hubspot](#), tweets with images receive 18% more clicks, 89% more favorites, and 150% more retweets. Facebook posts with photos saw 87% of the engagement on that network.

Images make people look, and they make them share. Adding an image to an otherwise plain text social post or to your blog posts is practically required. You won't be alone by planning an increase in imagery. [70% of marketers intend to do the same](#). Your text-only content will be lost if you don't use images.

### IDEA TOOLS:

**HubSpot's Blog Topic Generator:** A simple approach that asks you to input three nouns, and returns suggested headlines. While you'll want to tweak the returns, it may get you thinking of a new way to approach your topics.

**Portent's Content Idea Generator:** Similar to the HubSpot tool, you enter a word and the tool returns a suggested headline, detailing why the headline is powerful. You can refresh and get as many headlines from the word as you want.

**Content Marketing Ideas Generator:** This tool adds an SEO twist, asking you to input your target audience and returning content type ideas (not headlines).

SECTION 2:

# WRITING AND CREATING CONTENT

*Creating great content is a kind of magic mix of your skill, your understanding of your audience, and the nuts and bolts of how to write and get things done. Though there are many moving parts to content marketing, this is perhaps the most complex and important.*

So how do you go about doing it? In this section we'll share our ideas, our processes, and the tools we use every day to create content worth reading, engaging with, and sharing.

## UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

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*Do you know who you are writing to?*

In just about any content marketing article you read today, you'll see the inevitable "know your audience" phrase. It's almost a throwaway line and is not always backed up with an explanation on how you should go about gathering this understanding.

Yet, if you don't know who you are creating content for, you most definitely will miss the mark. According to popular content marketer [Andy Crestodina](#), empathy is the most important marketing skill.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR HUMAN AUDIENCE MEANS ASKING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS (AMONG *MANY* OTHERS):

- What do they need?
- What are they interested in?
- What makes them happy?
- What do they want to learn?
- Who are they?
- What do they worry about?
- Who do they want to be?

Consider that a short list, really.

The questions you'll ask will vary based on whether you are B2B (business to business) or B2C (business to customer). A B2B list might also include:

- Where do they work?
- Are they the top decision maker?
- Who else influences their buying decisions?

You must create content that fits this kind of list because those are all powerful emotional and psychological motivators for your audience.

## Putting A Face On Your Audience

You probably have a good understanding of your niche, otherwise you wouldn't be attempting to create content in it. You understand the general likes and interests and topics of interest. However, when you write, you don't write to a general crowd. You don't write to a niche.

You write to people.

You have to find a way to put a face on your audience.

## CONTENT MAPPING WITH USER PERSONAS.

The [content mapping approach](#) aims to inform you of the person who will consume your content, and how close that person is to buying. This starts with creating user personas.

[User personas](#) are similar to buyer personas. They are theoretical readers that you create (usually based on observation or other data) so that you can put a face to your audience. According to [Mashable](#), they are an important key to creating a content marketing strategy because they allow you to customize your strategy, conversion offers, social media activity, and so on all to fit the specific goals and needs of a persona. Don't ignore this crucial first step towards understanding your audience.

Personas are quite detailed, down to an actual name and information about their personal life, their concerns and interests, their limitations, and what they want and need as far as your niche is concerned. On my blog, I've (Sujan) come up with [150 questions](#) you might consider asking in order to create an accurate persona. For example, you might want to answer:

- What is their name?
- Where do they live?

- What do they do?
- What are their hobbies?
- What problems do they need help with?
- What is their worldview?
- What are their goals?

It is easier to write to a specific person when creating content rather than writing to a generic, nameless crowd. It will bring clarity to what and how you write. You will create content to meet specific needs and interests, not just what a crowd would want.

The second part of content mapping, after user personas, is to determine how close a person is to buying. According to [Hubspot](#), this can be broken into three stages:

- **Awareness:** A person is aware of a possible problem or opportunity in their life.
- **Consideration:** A person has clearly defined that problem or opportunity.
- **Decision:** A person knows what the solution is and will look like.

When you mix user personas with the stages each of those personas might be in, you can create nearly unlimited specific content that hits the sweet spot of your audience, and segments of your audience, every time.

## COMMENTERS AND THEIR BLOGS.

Readers leave comments on your blog. Do you simply respond with a quick reply, or do you stop to consider the actual person behind the comment?

By making notes of who comments, what topics they tend to comment on, and what they often say, you will learn a lot about not only specific readers, but other readers like them who are not prone to leaving blog comments. Most people are not unique in what they express on your blog. For every blog comment you get, realize there are likely many other readers with the same thoughts that are remaining quiet.

And don't forget to visit your reader's (and social follower's) blogs; they tell you as plain as day what they are interested in and the content that would meet their needs.

## COMPETITORS AND THEIR AUDIENCE.

Your competitors have done their homework (otherwise, they wouldn't be competitors). Check out their content. Who are they writing to? What are their blog commenters saying? What kinds of things are people saying on their social profiles?

Your competitor's audience is also your audience.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS.**

Social media is great for a lot of reasons, but when it comes to learning about your audience, it's fantastic.

You can discover interests that you never realized your audience had simply by seeing what your fans are sharing. You can have conversations with them and learn who they are. You can discover the blogs they read, the articles they tend to prefer -- all from what they share publicly on social media.

Part of your social media activity should be to make note of these things.

## **ASK YOUR READERS.**

Use surveys or other direct approaches and ask your readers to tell you about themselves. It's the most direct and obvious route, but some content marketers forget to use it, turning instead towards complex tools and guessing.

What do they do? What are they interested in? What do they need help with? What is their favorite type of content?

Use a survey, talk to readers on social media, or give them a chance to introduce themselves in the blog comments of a blog post. Talk to them in person. Just ask them!

## **Use Tools To Find Your Audience**

The tools you are using to track traffic and engagement can tell you something about your audience in a less-personal way than how you put a name and face on your audience. Tools return broad data, but it is quantifiable and measurable.

## **ANALYTICS TOOLS, LIKE GOOGLE DEMOGRAPHICS.**

You may be using tools such as Google Analytics or KISSmetrics to track traffic and user behavior on your website. These types of tools tell you a bit about your audience.

Google Analytics, for example, tells you what [market and affinity segment](#) your traffic falls into. While your content might not fit exactly into Google's categories, it is free information that may help you find a pattern about your readers.

You can also learn where your readers are coming from, and what kinds of devices they are using. You'll know if you're catering to a mobile or desktop crowd, and can tweak your content

to fit that format best. You can find out if your audience is male or female. Google basically provides you with a [broad sweep of demographic information](#).

If you've created user personas, you can use some of the information from these kinds of analytics to flesh them out. For example:

*John likes photography, and has a passion for news and weather. He spends a lot of time on his iPhone.*

## SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS.

Social media networks provide you with information on who is following and interacting with your content beyond the conversations you have on the front end.

Facebook has [Page Insights](#), for example, that tell you quite a bit about your fans and what content they prefer on that network. Twitter provides its own [dashboard for businesses](#), sharing the demographics, lifestyles, and consumer behavior of your followers.

Dig into your social media profiles and you'll discover a huge amount of information about your audience packaged up neatly.

## How to write for a specific audience.

After gathering all of the information and data on your audience, it's tempting to think of them as a set of stats. They aren't. Remember, you're creating content for *real people*. They aren't all the same, and they [might even be fragmented](#).

You'd be better off focusing on what needs your readers have rather than who they are. Knowing their demographics helps you better understand your readers, but it is less useful than knowing what your reader's specific needs are.

## WRITE IN SECOND PERSON.

Let's start off with the nuts and bolts part of writing directly to an audience. Using second-person "you" is the best way to connect. It's direct, it's conversational, it doesn't sound patronizing, and it makes your content seem as if it were meant for that specific reader.

## WRITE FOR A SPECIFIC PERSON.

This is where user personas, or familiarity with actual readers comes in handy. If you write for a specific person, it affects your content in a positive way. The tone is more conversational, the

information more detailed -- you're less apt to be careless or broad. Readers react well to content that has been written in this manner.

Be very careful that you don't veer in visualizing who you are creating content for. If you shift to another person, your content will reveal it.

### **WRITE FOR READERS, NOT PEERS.**

It's easy for content marketers to forget that they aren't writing for their peers. Actors on a stage perform for the audience, not for each other. Your writing must do the same. Be careful when you pick that specific person to write for that you pick an audience member and not a peer.

Also, remember that you are not writing for yourself. You are writing to meet other's needs, not your own.

### **WRITE IN THE SAME LANGUAGE.**

All of your audience research might have helped you nail the perfect content topic, but you need to approach that topic in a way relevant to your audience. There are limitless ways to talk about the same topic, but you need to use the illustrations, anecdotes, and language that your readers respond to. You need to use the format they prefer, whether video, image, or text.

# CONFRONTING CONTENT CREATION CHALLENGES

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*Every content marketer faces similar challenges, with more than half (54%) of marketers admitting that simply producing engaging content is the most problematic.*

## **Know Your Content Strengths**

Every writer has their own style. It's not something you can really choose because it tends to stem from your natural strengths. The way you approach a topic, the words you use -- this is all part of it.

By understanding what your strengths are as a writer, you'll know what approach you'll naturally take when creating content, the approach that comes easily. Additionally, you are also able to freshen up your content by writing in a style that you (and your readers) aren't used to as you foray outside of your strengths.

## **1. YOU LOVE TO TEACH.**

Perhaps you like to write how-to and review posts, because you like to teach people about something and help them learn. You're good at research, and you're good at breaking a process down into logical steps. You're good at using anecdotes, illustrations, and examples that help clarify difficult concepts.

You want to make sure the audience knows what you're talking about.

## **2. YOU HAVE A PLATFORM.**

As an insider and an expert, you know you have a platform. What you write will be paid attention to. While what you write is teaching others, you write from a confident position of authority, clarifying important topics, correcting wrong information. As an expert, you likely find it easy to write on your specific area of expertise without a lot of time devoted to research and learning.

You already know what you're talking about.

## **3. YOU KNOW HOW TO SELL.**

Your skill is that you can write in a way that can sell anyone on anything. You have somehow managed to figure out the psychology behind selling, and know just how to write in order to tap into that.

You use the words that convince the audience.

## **4. YOU ARE A GREAT WORDSMITH.**

Your skill as a writer is that you are good with grammar and the mechanics of writing. You have a good vocabulary and find writing easy and natural. This skill allows you to write about many different topics, even if you aren't familiar with them, because you have the ability to understand and package information with clear writing and logical thinking.

You use the words that match the audience's language.

## **5. YOU KNOW HOW TO ASK QUESTIONS.**

Whether you are new to a topic, an expert, an outsider, or full of emotion, you have the ability to not only ask the questions your audience is asking, but also questions they had not thought of. You write in a way that insists on finding answers to tough questions.

You use the words your audience needed to hear.



## 6. A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING.

Most writers have a mix of the strengths listed here. If your weakness is as a wordsmith, you may need to find someone help you until it becomes a strength. If you are not great at selling with your content, you'll need to find help or instruction on how to do it right.

Know what you're good at, and what you can naturally do. Then get better at the things you lack.

## Stay Agile With Your Content

The inability to make changes on the fly can damage your content marketing efforts. Audiences, tastes, trends, and technology are always changing, and your content has to be able to make adjustments to fit.

[David Burn](#), founder of Bonehook.com, encourages content marketers to take an agile approach to what they do. The agile approach, which combines constant iteration, feedback, and testing to deliver the right product on time, is well-suited to content marketing.

Burn pinpoints the key reasons that agile is an appropriate approach as being that iteration, but also the flexibility, customer-centeredness, and high-value priorities. What does this look like for you?

1. **Start.** You start with simple and basic content, knowing that it will need improvement. The key here is that you must *start*.
2. **Publish.** Get your content published and out there, even if it isn't perfect. You can't make changes unless you've published.
3. **Get feedback.** Get feedback from your audience, you stats, your content team -- anyone involved, and begin making improvements based on that feedback.
4. **Make changes.** What does your feedback tell you? Make content changes according to that feedback.
5. **Repeat.** Keep doing this. You will stay flexible as you make changes to suit your audience.

Agile development recommends starting with a minimum viable product. For you, the content marketer, the goal is to start with a minimum viable audience.

# PLANNING YOUR CONTENT

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*You can know all you want to about the power of content marketing, but if you don't put it into practice, it doesn't matter.*

Planning your content all along the way is how it actually gets done for most content marketers. Without planning, you'll be hit-and-miss, and your topics and audience focus will be all over the place.

## Creating A Content Marketing Strategy

According to [Forbes](#), by simply planning your content marketing, you'll have a significant advantage over your competition, nearly half (42%) of whom haven't bothered to document their content marketing strategy. Perhaps that lack of willingness to document a strategy explains why [70% of marketers lack a consistent content strategy](#), and why [34% struggle](#) to develop a consistent strategy.

And let's not forget the need to actually write down that strategy. Content marketers who document their strategy are [64% more likely](#) to have a dedicated budget for it.

By simply having and documenting a content marketing strategy, you're ahead of the game

### YOUR STRATEGY SHOULD BE FOCUSED.

A content marketing strategy must have a focus. There must be a reason it exists.

That reason, of course, isn't to celebrate you. Your content marketing strategy must be about how great your customers are, not how great you are. The [Onboardly blog suggests](#) that as long as you rid your strategy of "I'm great" and turn the focus to "let me help you", you'll stay on track.

### YOUR STRATEGY WILL EMERGE AND CHANGE.

Do you have a strategy for what you want your content marketing to do? Do you even need one? The [WordStream blog](#) suggests that you don't need an overt strategy right off the bat, because your strategy will emerge as you go.

If you are trying to get started and creating a complex content marketing strategy is holding you back, forget the strategy and get started. You'll start to learn more about your audience and your own content marketing creation abilities, and create a strategy from that understanding as you go along.

At some point, however, you must have a content marketing strategy. That's where an editorial calendar comes in.

### USING ANALYTICS TO DETERMINE STRATEGY.

[Using your analytics](#) to help you find and define your content marketing strategy will help take the fear out of making that strategy. You'll be using actual data that shows what does and doesn't work, building on the success that emerge from that data.

[Hubspot suggests](#) that you use your analytics data to look for:

- Content that is popular with your readers.
- Content that drives conversions
- Content that performs well (traffic, social, etc.)
- Content that drives sales

As you can see, such an approach hits all the big "wants" most content marketers have: sales, conversions, audience growth.

### USING A SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT TO DETERMINE STRATEGY.

The [Social Media Examiner](#) suggests taking a unique approach, and using a social media audit to help determine your content strategy. The general idea is quite simple: take a serious look at what's happening on your social media to determine what direction your content should head. This is especially useful if social engagement is high on your list of goals for your content.

#### SOME OF THE METRICS YOU'LL BE LOOKING FOR ARE:

- **Conversation:** Determine how many conversations each post generated across all of your social networks.
- **Amplification:** Find out how often each post is reshared or retweeted.
- **Applause:** How many people liked, favorited, or +1'd your post?

Make note of how many total posts you are looking at when you compile these metrics so you can see the rate. Next, do the same process for a competitor to determine what is happening with their social media.

Do a deeper dive and segment your content into types and topics and see which content gets more engagement. Maybe your infographics killed it, or your long list posts. Do the same for your competitors.

If it makes it easier, setup a spreadsheet so that you can see your rates alongside a few competitors. You will see how you hold up next to your competitors, which social networks you excel at, which social networks your industry in general does best on, and what content types do well with your audience.

An audit like this takes time and effort, but when you are done you'll have the information you need to plan your content, knowing which content on which networks will give you the most bang for your buck.

## Using An Editorial Calendar

A lot of bloggers and content marketers treat content marketing as something to do by the seat of their pants. They don't put a huge amount of energy into planning their content, which probably explains why [50% of content marketers](#) struggle with creating consistent content. An editorial calendar helps close that consistency gap.

An editorial calendar does four key things that help you be more consistent:

1. **Know what you're going to write ahead of time.** By planning in advance, you put a stop to the frantic last-minute rush to create content. When you know what you'll be writing a week or more before you have to, you can gather research or see how content you're reading for fun might tie into future planned content.
2. **You can coordinate all your marketing.** By planning your content on a calendar, you can tie it into other marketing you may be doing, such as sales, advertisements, and so on.
3. **Themes become possible.** It's almost impossible to have themes across a broad swath of content (blogs, social media, ebooks) and other marketing if you aren't using a calendar.
4. **Your team is on the same page.** Editorial calendars help your team understand what content is on the schedule, what they should all be thinking about, and it also helps you say no to last-minute ideas that don't fit with what the strategy is. Without a plan, it's more difficult to focus a team full of ideas.

Using an editorial calendar is not the same thing as a strategy, though the two are closely linked. The calendar is the tool that helps you lay out your strategy in a way that makes sure it will actually happen. Strategy is the broad plan of attack, while assigning those strategic ideas a date and time is tool that puts that strategy into motion.

## CHOOSING AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR.

Editorial calendars can be as simple or as complicated as you want them to be, whether paper calendar or digital app.

### YOUR EDITORIAL CALENDAR WILL BE WHERE YOU WILL PLAN:

- Blog content
- Social content
- Content campaigns
- Ebooks, white papers, etc.
- Guest posts

An editorial calendar that will pull its weight is an editorial calendar that:

1. **Your whole team has access to.** Your entire content marketing team must have access to the editorial calendar. They need to know what has been assigned them, of course, but also put themes and content into context.
2. **Alerts team members to tasks.** A content team has members who are responsible for different tasks, many which are contingent on other team members complete their tasks first. You'll need a system that handles tasks and duties in an organized manner, whether through your calendar, or the workflow that you use to implement it.
3. **Gives you a place to plug in strategy.** Devoting time to strategy, content audits, and tracking metrics in order to determine future content is well-served by a calendar where you can turn that discovery into concrete content plans.
4. **Lets you plan multiple content types.** There are a lot of different approaches to content. Your calendar should allow you to plan social posts, blog posts, graphics, ebooks, and more.

If you are a solo content marketer, an editorial calendar is still helpful. It will keep you ahead of the content curve, and help you see a birds-eye-view of where your content is headed.

If you're weak on your editorial calendar abilities, take the [advice of Krista Neher](#) from ClickZ, and simply focus on posting great content without the fuss of a calendar. Let a goal of great content be the habit you make, and worry about formalizing it later, once you're in that habit.

### PLAN YOUR PUBLISHING FREQUENCY.

Publishing frequency across the broad spectrum of content marketers varies greatly. [For example](#), 16% of B2B marketers publish new content every day. 26% prefer to publish new content several times a week. 17% publish something new once a week, and 19% only aim to publish new content at least once a month. Your schedule may vary and fall anywhere in this list, but keep in mind that 91% of top-shelf bloggers publish *at least* once a week, usually more.

What dictates your publishing frequency?

1. **Content type.** Depending on what kind of content you will create, you may fall into any of those brackets. If you only produce high quality videos, once a month may be all you do. Case studies take time to acquire data. Each content type has a different time load required to make it.
2. **Team size.** Being realistic means taking into account what you or your team can handle. Scheduling four posts a day and then missing that goal sets yourself up for failure.
3. **Budget.** Your budget, both in regards to money *and* time, plays a role in how frequently you publish, particularly if you've never bothered to set a budget up. Allotting money and time to content marketing both makes sure it happens as well as that it happens without a negative impact on the rest of your business.
4. **Goals.** What do you hope to achieve from your content? According to the [2014 State Of Inbound survey](#), brands that create 15 blog posts each month will average about 1,200 new leads in that same time period. If leads are what you are after, you'll need to publish more frequently than not.

### USING AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR.

Once you have decided how frequently you will publish content, you can start using your editorial calendar. While there is no right or wrong way to approach your calendar, here are a few suggestions.

1. **Plan broad themes.** Some content marketers have broad themes that cover a larger chunk of time in the coming year. For example, you might have a different focus topic for each month, or for each quarter. Write these themes on your calendar for the coming year or other extended time period.
2. **Plan cyclical content.** These include holidays, product launches, contests, events and conferences, and so on. You may want to work with your advertising and marketing teams to be sure that you have content that fits with these cycles. Mark down the events, holidays, etc. on your calendar, and note which types of content need to be created for them. You don't have to have specific headlines, but just note the type of content that you'll need to plan for (e.g. video).

3. **Plan special content.** Creating ebooks, infographics, white papers, guest posts, and other similar content that takes a bit more time than a typical blog post or is outside of the “usual” realm of what your team does. You will often use this content as an incentive for reader action, so you want to make it a regular part of your calendar schedule. Plan when you will be releasing this type of content and write it on your calendar.
4. **Plan team events.** Key among this would be meetings or brainstorming sessions where you and your team will work on planning the specific content a week or more ahead of time. Plan when you and your team will analyze metrics and do social media audits. Put these meetings on your calendar. These are part of your content strategy, and should be on the calendar.
5. **Start collecting ideas.** Create a place where you can collect, store, and organize the ideas you will be coming up with. Now that your team can see the themes and types of content they will need to create, they can add content ideas to the pool. Make sure everyone can access both the calendar and this idea collection.
6. **Put the content on the calendar.** How far ahead you plan is up to you and your team, though you should be at least planning a week ahead. The larger your team and the more complex your content, the more you should plan ahead. Refer to the content publishing frequency that you determined to help you decide what to put where.

### EDITORIAL CALENDAR TOOLS:

**CoSchedule:** A robust WordPress-integrated editorial calendar that also has easy social publishing and strong teamwork features built in.

**Google Calendar:** A robust general calendar that can receive incoming calendars and allow for collaboration. Attaching documents and inviting team members help it to function as an editorial calendar.

**Sunrise Calendar:** By integrating with many services and apps, such as popular to-do apps like Trello or Asana, you can create a powerful editorial calendar that pulls all of your team planning together in a read-only calendar.

## How To Organize Your Ideas.

You've just brainstormed a ton of ideas. Now what will you do with them? Do you have a system in place to handle those ideas, deciding which will be used and when? Part of the trick of making an editorial calendar and all of that planning work is to find a way to organize and sift through the ideas that you come up with.

## CONTENT MARKETING PLAYBOOK

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Organization will make or break you. You might be great at creating ideas and content, but if you can't organize them, you'll never be able to really put them to use.

There is no one system for idea organization that works for everyone. You must determine your own system. However, there are a few factors that all systems will have in common.:

1. **They work how you do.** Whether you prefer paper or a digital app to capture your ideas, the system that will work the best for you will use the tools you are naturally inclined to use. If you like to make lists, find a tool that is geared for list-making. If you like to type more copy, find a tool that will let you do that.
2. **They can't be too complex.** Simpler is better. The more complicated and fussy your system is, the less likely you'll continue to use it. Complexity comes from too many steps and too many tools. Pare it down.
3. **They must allow for categorization.** Your ideas will not all be on the same topic or content type. Whether through tags, color coding, or another method, your system should allow for categorization.
4. **They have a date and time factor.** Ideas easily sink to the bottom, forgotten, and when they are finally found, are outdated. Your system must have a method for regularly refreshing your ideas, bringing the bottom up to the top and ascertaining if it's something you'll use.
5. **The must allow for deletion.** What seems like a great idea one day might seem less so when you refresh that old idea. Your system (and you, yourself) must be able to identify and delete ideas that aren't good. Otherwise, they simply clog up the gears.

Indefinite storage of ideas is not the goal. The goal is a place where you can quickly dump an idea when it comes to you, and a system that lets you go back regularly to re-evaluate and either use or remove.

### TOOLS FOR ORGANIZING CONTENT IDEAS:

**CoSchedule:** A robust WordPress-integrated editorial calendar that also has easy social publishing and strong teamwork features built in.

**Google Calendar:** A robust general calendar that can receive incoming calendars and allow for collaboration. Attaching documents and inviting team members help it to function as an editorial calendar.

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# CREATING SUCCESSFUL CONTENT

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*When it comes down to actually creating content, there are a few common questions that content marketers often end up asking.*

## How Should You Write?

There is no right or wrong way to write in regards to the tone and style. Good writing, though, has few typos, grammatical errors, and presents ideas clearly and logically.

### CHOOSING YOUR STYLE.

You don't choose your style. Your style chooses you.

Your style is uniquely yours. You might write copy that cajoles or confronts, that seems like a pleasant conversation or borders on bombastic. All of these have a place, depending on your brand and your audience.

Regardless of what style your writing takes, be sure your content is "humanized." Get rid of stiff business-speak with clunky words and phrases and the jargon or buzzwords that no one cares about. One of the easiest ways to humanize your writing is to write in second person (you, your, yours).

This leads to the next point: make sure your style is not about you, but is about the reader. If you find that your copy has a lot of "I" or "we", you might have lost focus on the reader and instead made everything about you.

Readers are easily turned off by copy that makes the author out to be higher, smarter, better, or smacks of pretension. While there are exceptions (e.g. an expert making big claims of success in order to establish credibility to the reader), your job isn't to isolate your reader or make them feel like less than you.

### YOU CREATE BARRIERS TO YOUR READER WHEN:

- Try to be too obscure or clever.
- Make them feel stupid.
- Get too personal with stories not for reader enlightenment, but to make you look better.
- Veer too often into the crude, profane, or insulting.

Your content is there to help, encourage, lift up, and show readers that what you are selling or claiming is completely possible for them. It is not there to establish that you are a really great and impressive person.

### THE WRITING PROCESS.

Not everyone writes in the same way, so you will have to adapt your own system of writing content. However, there are a few basics that will get you started and may even become a regular part of your own writing process.

1. **Write quickly at first.** When writing content, don't self-edit. Write as quickly as possible. You can go back and clean it up later. The important thing is to do away with the blank page and get the ideas out of your head as fast as you can before you lose any of it.
2. **Go back and clean up.** Go back to that first rushed (and messy) draft and clean it up. This is more than just looking for typos; you are also looking to tighten up the logic and flow of the copy. Do not be afraid to cut out sections of copy, even (or maybe, especially) if you love it. Remember, your copy is a slave to clarity for your reader; it's not about your beautiful purple prose.
3. **Wait, and go back again.** Write your second cleaned-up draft, and let it sit a day or two. Read it with fresh eyes. You'll find the mistakes you missed the first time.

### EDITING AND PROOFREADING.

Content that is riddled with errors not only doesn't look professional, but it also dings your reputation as a reliable expert.

But not every team has a professional editor or proofreader. Solo content marketers, especially, have to rely on a system to edit their own work. When it comes to editing and proofreading your copy, there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. **Automation doesn't always work.** Spellcheck and grammar check in word processing programs will only catch so much. One of the reasons it's important to plan and write in advance is because you have time to go back and read a draft before publishing.
2. **Read content out loud.** Hearing the words you've written out loud is the fastest way to find awkward phrasing or missed words. It's the best tool anyone can use to self-edit their copy.
3. **Watch out for fluff words.** An easy edit anyone can do is to go through copy and cut out fluff words that don't need to be there. Most adjectives and adverbs, for example, or cliches or phrases that could be said in a simpler manner. The phrases "I think" or "it's my opinion" aren't necessary, either. You are the author. The reader knows it is what you think.
4. **Look for reruns.** Watch out for repetition that isn't planned. Sometimes you use alliteration in sound and word for effect, but often it is accidental. Find the sentences or paragraphs that rehash what you already said. Find the words that pop up more than once in the same sentence or paragraph. Cut or rework.

By avoiding multitasking and distraction during each part of the writing process, you'll cut down on errors and ultimately make your editing and proofreading much easier.

### TOOLS FOR WRITING:

**Evernote:** For both writing, jotting ideas, and saving and organizing ideas.

**Inbound Writer:** Monitor topics and discover whether or not the content you want to write will have an impact on your audience or not before you write it.

**Hemingway Editor:** A low-distraction approach to writing your copy.

**Word2CleanHTML:** If you write in various word processing programs or apps, you can get clean HTML before pasting it into your site.

**WordCounter:** Count the words in your post before submitting it.

**Grammarly:** Find mistakes and errors your writing software might have missed.

**Correctica:** Find writing errors on your site or documents so that you can fix them.

## How Long Should Your Content Be?

First, before getting too far into how long your content should be, let me be clear: it depends. It depends on a lot of factors, from audience, platform, network, budget, time, team, content goals -- all of that and more. Though there is much research available, it doesn't all agree.

Look at these suggestions instead as guidelines that can help you determine where to start and what might be the best fit.

### IDEAL HEADLINE, EMAIL SUBJECT LINE, AND SOCIAL POST LENGTH.

With traditional media, headlines were shorter and matched patterns that readers expected, using information-rich keywords.

That has changed somewhat, particularly because of social media. I included email subject lines and social post length in the headline section because the headline you use on your blog post content often do double duty as social posts or email subject lines.

First, let's start with social media. The [Buffer blog](#) pulled together data to determine what the optimal length was for social posts. They discovered:

- Twitter: 71-100 characters
- Facebook: 40 characters
- Google+: 60 characters
- LinkedIn: 80-120 characters, or 25 word longer posts.
- Email subject lines: 28-39 characters

That, of course, is only Buffer's findings. In the end, Buffer determined that a good goal was a six-word headline. But your data may reveal something different. eConsultancy uses a "[65 Character Rule](#)" with headlines to ensure they fare well in any situation.

While you certainly can customize your social content, the truth is that you don't always have the time or motivation. If you rely on an automated social publishing platform of any sort, you will want to be sure that your blog post headlines conform to social powerhouse standards.

With email subject lines, there is some leeway. [MailChimp determined](#) that email subject length has very little bearing on the success of your email. Keep in mind that extremely long email subjects may get cut off in email software. Load the front of your subject with the most important keywords and emotional impact in case it gets truncated.

Search engines may not "prefer" any particular length of a headline, but they do return results that, like email, can truncate the longer headlines. The [Powermapper blog](#) suggested some

guidelines based on various search engine limitations, determining that both Bing and Google will show about 70 characters headlines in their SERPs.

### IDEAL BLOG POST LENGTH.

Finding the ideal blog post length is turning into the Holy Grail for content marketers. Let's take a look at just a few of the differing opinions from leading content marketers.

- [Buffer](#): 1,600 words
- Neil Patel: [2,000 or more](#).
- Neil Patel: [It doesn't have to be 2,000](#).
- Moz: [Long-form is better](#).
- Garrett Moon: [500 words is not enough](#).

The truth is, they're all correct. They analyzed their own data to come up with these discoveries and learned what works on their blog. The key here is understanding what you're able to handle, what you want your blog content to achieve, and what is actually happening in your blog's data. Do you want higher search traffic? More reading? Increased shares? What content gets that?

In general, there seems to be a pattern of search engines looking favorably on *quality* longer content. Some people will read longer content, but some simply will not. Shorter content can get lots of loyal reader traffic (see: [Seth Godin](#)). You may not be able to handle lots of 2,000+ word blog posts at first, and simply need to build up a solid and frequent schedule of blogging to get some content on your blog. *These are all valid reasons for blogging both shorter and longer content.*

Your main goal is to write high quality blog posts. Worry about word counts after you have collected your own data and understand what your audience prefers.

## How Do You Write To Get More Traffic And Leads?

Content marketing would not be worth the time if it wasn't able to bring more traffic to your site, and then to generate actual leads, whether sales or email sign-ups, once that traffic got there. Not all copy does a great job at generating traffic and leads, however.

### GENERATE MORE TRAFFIC WITH YOUR CONTENT.

Probably the most common response, when asking anyone why they use content marketing, is to bring more traffic to their site. The [QuickSprout blog](#) has some great advice on how to drive organic traffic to your content.

1. **Content is evergreen.** Evergreen content is always fresh and relevant, and does not contain data, copy, or information that is trendy or has a short shelf life. It sits there on your blog and continues to build inbound links, traffic patterns, and social shares long after you wrote it.
2. **Content is optimized for long-tail keywords.** We'll cover this in greater depth later, but the gist of it is that your content is carefully planned around what search engines are looking for and how your audience is using search engines to do that looking. No longer are you building content around simple keywords, but instead, the longer phrases that people are now using when they search. General is gone, specific is now the rule.
3. **Content has lots of backlinks.** Backlinks are those inbound links I mentioned for evergreen content. These happen when other content marketers link to your content from their own sites. Your content must be of high quality and it must be easily discovered for that to happen. You can help increase backlinks by using social media, sharing articles directly with influencers or other possibly interested marketers, and repurposing your content -- but be careful. Be sure your backlink efforts are above board so that you don't incur the wrath of search engines on the lookout for someone trying to game the system.

### GENERATE MORE LEADS WITH YOUR CONTENT.

When it comes to acquiring leads, the sales funnel has to be in play. That funnel is the way visitors become readers become customers. It starts with people being aware of your brand and ultimately taking action and buying in.

How do you make your copy do it? [Social Media Examiner](#) outlined a simple plan of attack.

1. **Make them aware.** At the broad top of the funnel, your goal is to make visitors aware. This is when you get their attention and establish expertise and relevance to whatever brought the visitor to your site (e.g. search terms). Again, we'll talk about keyword research later, but that plays a critical role here. You can also raise awareness through guest posting, networking, leaving comments in forums or on other blogs, and so on.
2. **Draw them in.** It does no good if your visitors get no further than awareness. They have to go further into the funnel. That's where in-depth how-to or super-helpful blog content really shines. Or, you may have conversations with them on social media or respond personally to them in the blog comments. Getting your visitors to sign up for your email, email courses, or to access downloads is a further way to get them into the funnel.

3. **Meet them at the bottom.** The bottom of the funnel is where the leads convert. That's where you show the value of the product or service, you use anecdotes or testimonials from real customers, embed a call-to-action, or direct them to landing pages.

Your entire site is centered around this funnel, but so is each individual blog post. You should always keep an eye towards creating content that fits into the funnel as well as contains the full funnel itself.

## Creating Great Headlines

We've already talked about headline length, but what does it take to actually write a great headline, beyond mere character count? The [eConsultancy blog](#) points out that what worked in traditional media doesn't always fare well on the web.

Brian Clark, from Copyblogger, understands the importance of headlines, devoting much of his well-trafficked site to the topic of [creating headlines](#) and making them work. [According to Clark](#), headlines are the first and, potentially, last thing people will see of your content because they are skimming across social feeds, email inboxes, and RSS readers. Your headline is often the only thing that determines if people will continue reading. You have to get this right.

We've talked about headline length, but what else makes a great headline?

- **Words and adjectives that are interesting.** Words can be interesting because of sound, because they haven't been overused, or because you've put words together in an unusual pattern.
- **Words that tap into our emotions.** Whether those emotions are insecurities (use negative wording), hope (positive wording), curiosity, and anything in between, emotion is the key element. Words like No, Stop, and Without [receive more social shares](#).
- **Words that are actually numbers.** Numbers suggest lists, and people like list posts. However, don't write the number out as a word -- use the actual number. People can read and process it faster.
- **Words that fit the content.** Whatever you do, don't create headlines that have little to do with the actual content. Headlines must truthfully tell the reader what to expect, and not just serve as clickbait.
- **Words that are clear.** Your headline needs to pique curiosity, but it also needs to be specific enough that the reader has an idea of what to expect. Curiosity doesn't arise out of vagueness, but out of specifics.

Neil Patel has gone as far as suggesting a [headline formula](#), and it looks like this:

Number/trigger word + Adjective + Keyword + Promise

Now, there's no guarantee that will work every time, but it might be useful to help you start thinking of headlines in a way that points you in the right direction.

### TOOLS FOR CREATING HEADLINES:

**Headline Analyzer:** Enter your headline and see how it performs according to key variables.

## How To Do Content Research

Researching for your content marketing is how you get quality content. While some of your content will be based solely on what you already know in your head or on anecdotes and experience, you should include a healthy amount of content that is based on research. Remember, you're here to be helpful. Help your readers learn something new by doing the hard research for them.

- **Ask good questions.** Know how to ask questions, not just of others, but of yourself. What key piece of information is missing? What isn't clear? Ask the questions you want answered, do the research, and you'll end up answering most of your reader's questions, too.
- **Be an excellent curator.** By collecting, curating, reading, and sharing other's content, you'll stumble onto material that you can link to or reference in your own content.
- **Look for patterns.** One reason it is helpful to plan your content in advance is that you know what you'll be writing about. With that in mind, you'll start to see patterns that fit with upcoming content in what you're reading, experiencing, seeing, or the conversations you're having. As blogger [David Meerman Scott](#) points out, just about everything around you can be used in content.
- **Be careful of easy sources.** Wikipedia is not the answer to all research. It is more of a dictionary than anything, best there to help you understand a topic enough that you can ask questions that lead you to more authoritative sources. Use other sources such as Google Scholar, Google Books, research or science journals, or government sites.
- **Keep an eye to science.** Readers love posts that are tied to science and psychology. Add "science" or "psychology" to your search terms and see what data comes up.
- **Mine your own data.** You have a lot of data that can be used for content as well. You might want to share which products customers love, and why. Or, which blog posts or emails do better, and how you did A/B testing to determine why this was.



All the great research in the world does your reader no good if you can't distill it down to something clear and easy to understand. If you don't understand the research yourself or can't find another way to explain it, consider a different approach. Don't use research as an excuse to link and dump data into a post in the hopes of appearing intelligent. Readers can see through that.

### TOOLS FOR RESEARCHING:

**Google Drive Research Tool**: Research where you are writing.

**Feedly**: Load up this RSS reader according to topic, and always have fresh research and ideas available.

**Do a Site:Search**: Research in a specific site.

**Percent Change Calculator**: Get help with troublesome calculations.

**Search In A Giphy**: Find the perfect animated GIF

## Creating Powerful Images For Your Content

Content without images is like a sailboat without wind. It doesn't go far. Articles with images get [94% more views](#) than those that have none. Of course, not all images are created equal. [HubSpot](#) has come up with some simple tips to make sure your images pull the most weight possible:

1. **Use real people.** People like to look at other people. Research has shown we'll look at pictures of people more than any text. Whenever possible, use images that have people in them. Be sure you have permission to use the images or that the people in the photos (if you took them yourself) have given you permission to use their image. Traditional stock photos of people aren't as effective, as we've been trained to ignore stock photos.
2. **Put text with photos.** People will be more likely to remember your text information if an image is accompanying it.
3. **Make sure images load quickly.** Image loading time affects SEO, but it also affects whether people will stick around or not. About half of web users want a 2-second load time or they leave, according to [Akamai](#), so if your images are too slow, they've actually done the opposite of what you wanted them to do.
4. **Make pictures from data.** Create graphics that are visual versions of your data, and readers will love you for it.

5. **Use great images.** Shoddy images, pixelation, poor composition, and anything clearly amateur or low-end will destroy your credibility. You must use high quality imagery and design.
6. **Use images for leads.** Images are more than just a photo at the top of a blog post. Use them to increase leads for your call-to-action. Images help persuade.
7. **Image location matters.** [Buffer](#) suggests that an image to the right or left of the leading paragraph will get people to read the article.
8. **Use images based on content length.** HubSpot suggests using one image for every 350 words. While this is a rule of thumb, the idea is to not use too many or too few. Find what works for you, but do use more than one image per blog post. According to [Orbit Media](#), 44.5% of bloggers typically do.

### TOOLS FOR CREATING IMAGES:

**Canva:** Powerful cloud-based tool that makes creating images and graphics for blogs, social media, and more absolutely simple.

**Skitch:** Create screenshots, and add annotation marks or arrows, easily.

**ThingLink:** Create graphics that have interactive hotspots to link to other content.

**Infogr.am:** Create infographics easily.

**Meme Generator:** If you need to create a meme quickly, this site will help you do it.

**Haiku Deck:** Create beautiful presentations and slide decks easily.

**Visual.ly:** A full-service company that provides you with top-shelf image branding for a variety of content types and needs.

## Hiring Outside Content Creators

Hiring content creators outside of your team (or besides yourself, if you are a solo marketer) is always an option. Whether you turn to guest bloggers or paid writers, you must be sure that the content is high quality and that you keep an eye on the sites they link to. You don't want to damage your brand in the eyes of search engines because a content creator was gaming the system with bad links or anchor text.

How do you find content creators

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1. **Find blogs you like.** Look at the writers of blogs you read. Contact the contributors whose style would fit your brand and ask if they'd be interested in writing for you.
2. **Let readers know you're looking for content.** This is probably going to be the least successful method, as guest blogging has become overrun with spammers. However, creating a "write for us" page is still an option.
3. **Look to social media.** Do you have followers on social media that you engage with? See if they have a blog, and check out their work. Consider asking them if they would be interested in writing for your blog.
4. **Use apps and services.** There are several services that help match writers with brands, and we've included them here. Keep in mind these are writers who will need to be paid, so you'll want to have a budget in place.

### TOOLS FOR FINDING CONTENT CREATORS:

**Contently:** A service that matches up great content creators with brands to help them tell their stories, including a custom project management and workflow dashboard.

**Skyword:** Businesses can connect with a variety of content services, including some stock imagery.

SECTION 3

# PRE-PROMOTION

*Will people magically discover your content the day you publish it?*

That is highly unlikely. While people will continue to discover your content over time, a characteristic of successful content is a high discovery and adoption rate early on, when the content is fresh.

That's where pre-promotion comes in, serving up success as soon as your content is live.

## UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF PRE-PROMOTION

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*The timeline for successful content creation isn't "create, then promote."*

Instead, you must do some pre-promotion work before your content goes live. Successful promotion of your content starts before your content is even ready to be seen by readers.

Doing some of the promotion work ahead of time is how you hit the ground running when your content is ready to be launched. It helps you save time for future content promotion, builds a permission-based network of contacts, and generates buzz for your content.

### What Is Pre-Promotion?

Pre-promotion is, quite simply, getting your promotional efforts ready before you need them. It's giving your promotion plan as much attention and effort as you give to your content plan. And that's the key to remember: plan.

Whether your pre-promotion approach is all about behind-the-scenes planning so you're ready to launch enforce the day of publish, or if you include some published teasers and hints at upcoming content releases, the goal is the same. You are getting the wheels turning before launch to keep your content from being dead (or sluggish) in the water on launch day.

We'll tell you about creating a pre-promotion plan in just a bit, but remember that successful content promotion doesn't simply happen. It must be planned.

## Why Is Pre-Promotion Important?

If you've spent a lot of time on a blog post or ebook, you want the day of publication or launch to happen with a bang instead of spending that initial and important launch day frantically pulling together direct and indirect promotion efforts. You don't want to waste time trying to whet appetites for your content while it's sitting out on the buffet line, getting cold. You want people to be lining up before you bring it out to serve.

If you plan your promotion before your content is live, you'll be able to:

- **Connect with personas.** Remember those personas you set up? Pre-promotion taps into what you learned there, and helps you plan on multi-pronged promotional tactics that reach them distinctively.
- **Fall in line with events.** Holidays, conferences, and other events are on your calendar, as is your content launch. Pre-promotion turns to that same calendar and figures out how to promote not just the day of content launch, but after it as well, according to the events happening on the calendar.
- **Generate buzz.** Pre-promotion has an almost teaser effect if you include methods that publicly alert your audience to upcoming content. Get other people to talk about your upcoming content or sign up to be alerted for its release. You can use that momentum on launch day, and you can also compound on it early on as a prod to encourage others to fall for that buzz (e.g. "Join 5,000 readers and get notified when my ebook launches!")
- **Measure audience interest.** Depending on the pre-promotion approach you use, you can measure how interested your audience is in the content that you're creating. Surveys, landing pages with a sign-up form to gain exclusive or early access, reduced price (for content that you are selling), or partial content (e.g. Chapter 1 of your ebook) to help you determine who is interested, why they are interested, and if you need to make any final tweaks to increase interest before publishing your content.
- **Improve content.** The research and planning you do for pre-promotion will help you improve your content quality while you're creating it. This is through the "skyscraper technique" (which I'll talk about in just a moment) among others. The idea is that as you research similar content to find influencers, link partners, and more, you get a better idea of the content that is available that is similar to yours. You can make it better or more targeted, depending on what that research reveals.
- **Alert influencers.** You'll be letting influencers know when your content goes live, but pre-promotion allows you to alert them ahead of time so that they can plan to use what you're going to publish in their own future content. It also helps prepare the ground so that instead of a cold email that says "I just published content!" you let them know what you'll be doing and offer to show them research or gain exclusive access early.

Without pre-promotion, launch day is going to be frantic and you're going to forget about your content, the star of the show, and instead worry about a lack of traction.

## How Should You Approach It?

In some sense, you are always working on two things at once: the next piece of content, and its promotion. Your approach is simultaneous, and not consecutive.

While you'll definitely be doing some promotion after the content is launched, much of the prep happens right alongside the creation of it. Working on the promotion as you create the content is a wise approach for a few reasons:

1. **The content is fresh in your mind.** As you create your content, the ideas are fresh in your mind. It is easier to create social posts, emails, and other promotional content that relates if you do it while you are creating. Waiting until the end means you may miss out on something you thought of while creating the content originally.
2. **You save yourself time later.** One of the things I'll be talking about is the need to alert influencers and people you mention or reference in your content. Creating and listing these people as you create the content is a better use of your time than going back after you're through and sifting through content to find those you should mention.

Knowing how you're going to "sell" your content will help you create better content. Working on the promotion angle at the same time helps you do exactly that.

## PRE-PROMOTION RESEARCH

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Pre-promotion research lets you tap into something called the "[skyscraper technique](#)." The skyscraper technique is a concept introduced by Brian Dean of Backlinko and can help your content gain more backlinks as well as increased search results. But it requires specific research and action *before* your content goes live.

### Finding Similar Content

Start by finding content that is similar to yours both in topic and in high quality. Ideally, you want to find top-performing content both on social media and in search engines. Social search engines, such as [Topsy](#), can help you find the best content, or you can use the search functions on the networks themselves. Do the same by performing searches on search engines, or use something like [BuzzSumo](#) to find high-performing content based on topic or competitor.

What you'll learn from these searches is what kind of content performs well, what you need to do to outperform it, and possible promotion partners (we'll talk about that next).

Take a look at that high-performing content. You can out-perform it by:

- Making your content longer.
- Creating content that is more up-to-date.
- Creating more or better graphics.
- Improving on the keyword or SEO.
- Writing a better headline.

Essentially, you're going to analyze that great content down to the last thing you can think of, and consider how you can make your content even better. Remember, you're not copying. You're simply understanding why that piece of content did so well and what you can do that's even better.

Once you've both found top-performing content and know what makes it tick, you're ready to consider *where* you found it and what that means for pre-promotion.

## Finding Promotion Partners

Promotion partners are crucial to helping your content be found. Word-of-mouth, blog mentions, links, inbound traffic -- they are how you make all of that happen.

You will find important promotion partners from:

- **Influencers or companies mentioned in your content.** Keep a list of the apps, businesses, brands, bloggers, and other influencers that you mention and link to in your content. You will want to let them know, via email and/or social media, that you've done so.
- **Similar blogs and websites as yours.** Blogs that cover the same niche and topics as you do will certainly be interested in your content since you would have audience overlap. Every content marketer appreciates a heads up on relevant content to curate, mention, or base their own content off of. You're doing them a favor. You may have found some of these during your earlier top-performing content search.
- **Bloggers or websites that have linked to similar content.** Find other content similar to what you are creating, and see who has linked or talked about it. You may have found some of these during your earlier top-performing content search. Contact these bloggers and websites and let them know you are creating similar content. Be specific as to what your content is similar to, noting the URL in which they linked in the past.

- **Active social followers of influencers.** Check the social accounts of big-name influencers. Look for active social followers there, and consider adding them to a list. They've demonstrated an interest in the niche and a willingness to spread the word and engage.

You'll use these promotional partners to make promotion easier and faster down the road.

### CONTENT MARKETER: FINDING AND REACHING OUT TO INFLUENCERS.

[ContentMarketer.io](#) was designed to make connecting with important influencers much easier. By entering a URL (either your own, or a relevant post elsewhere), you will receive a list of influencers (including emails and Twitter usernames) that are associated with that type of content. You can remove and edit this list as you see fit to make sure you don't spam anyone.

The next step is where Content Marketer really shines: it provides the ability to reach out to those you've selected right from the system. There are proven effective templates that can be used, too. Easy [step-by-step instructions for using Content Marketer](#) are available.

## Organizing Your Lists

Once you have assembled your lists of different promotion partners, you will need to organize them according to who they are, how you will contact them, what you are asking them to do, and their response. By doing this, you will be able to target promotion partners as tightly as you do your audience. Their audience is your target, after all.

Organizing according to who they are might include:

- **Niche.** What niche do they create content in? Food? Marketing? Startups? You may develop content that overlaps other niches (e.g. content marketing and startups) and knowing which promotion partners belong in which niche helps.
- **Name.** You gotta know their name. Content marketing is about permission and about being personal. Know their name and how they preferred to be referred to.
- **Company/Position.** Know the name of the company or brand each person works for. It is also helpful to know their job or position. Some positions are better poised to share your content than others.
- **Influence.** What network do they influence? Are they big on Twitter? Instagram? Among developers? Dog lovers? Categorize what *kind* of influence they have.



- **Interests/Activity.** Without being too stalker-ish, it's helpful to know something about them. Are they going to a conference in the coming months? Are they coming to a city near you? You'll put this to use in your email, so include this information in your research.

Organizing by how you will contact them might include:

- **Email.** Are you going to email them? Do they prefer email (maybe they like phone calls)? Then you'll need their email address.
- **Social media.** Which social accounts are they most active on? Which social networks do you hope they share your content on? Is there overlap?

Finally, consider what you are going to ask these promotion partners to do. A few examples might include:

- Get early and exclusive access to the full content for feedback, review, commentary, or mention to their audience.
- An offer to provide a version or format of the content that is repackaged specifically for them to use on their blog (e.g. infographic).
- A request to consider mentioning or linking to your content.
- A request to share the content with their audience.

You'll also want to track the responses, both during pre-promotion and after content launch. Did these promotion partners respond? Did they ask you not to email them again? Were they enthusiastic? Did they do as you asked? Did you see measurable success once the content went live that can be traced back? This kind of information is helpful the next time you turn to the list so that you know which promotion partners to turn to and which are clearly not interested.

Whether you use a database, apps like Podio or Trello, your CRM, or a basic spreadsheet, organize your list of promotion partners so that you can easily create applicable lists for future content promotion. You may end up forming strategic partnerships with them over the use of this or other content down the road.

## DEVELOPING YOUR PLAN

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*Creating your pre-promotion plan will involve planning what you will say in your emails, who you will send them to, and how you will respond. You will also create the schedule for both pre-promotion activities as well as your promotional efforts after your content has launched.*

## Writing Preliminary Outreach Templates

Before you create outreach emails, understand why you are doing it.

Emailing promotion partners and influencers isn't something you do because you're desperate for shares. If you approach your emails with that idea, you will fail. Instead, you have to approach it from the understanding that you are looking to make a real relationship, and that you want to be helpful.

Consider that you might want to sweeten the pot before sending out any "cold" emails by actively mentioning or promoting these influencers in your social media or blog posts before your email outreach begins. This helps familiarize you to them.

### **YOUR EMAILS WILL BE CUSTOMIZED.**

Though you will be creating templates to help organize the outreach process, these are merely a guideline. You should tweak the email so that it is specific to the person receiving it instead of locked into a template.

You want to be personal, not methodical.

You are trying to form a real relationship, not merely target and send.

This, of course, is where that well-organized list comes in handy. You can customize your emails to make sense and appeal to the recipient by taking into account their niche, their interests, their audience, and any other characteristics you've noted.

### **YOUR EMAIL SHOULD BE CLEAR.**

Your outreach emails should clearly explain what it is you want to accomplish.

Be clear about what you want the recipient to do. Show them why it matters to them, and to their audience. Show them how it could help them. Explain why you thought they would be interested in your content.

There's no reason they should care about your content; you have to provide the reason. And then, let them know you are available for questions.

### **YOU SHOULD PLAN FOR REASONABLE FOLLOW-UP.**

Be sure to create follow-up templates, or at least plan to touch base if you don't hear back. You're not looking at a hit-and-run method of email, nor are you trying to spam or annoy someone, but are trying to form a relationship. You will want to follow up with an email.

In the same vein, you must respond to emails that come your way. Don't let them stagnate and get buried in your inbox.

### YOUR EMAIL SHOULD LOOK LIKE THIS:

So, let's put that all together into an outreach email that works. [Rand Fishkin](#), from Moz, outlines an excellent approach:

1. **Use their first name.** One part of being personal is to use the recipient's first name. Not "to whom it may concern" or "dear CEO". "Hey Jim" works great.
2. **Start with details.** Your intro needs to show you did your homework on someone, that you took the time to learn about them. "I read that you'll be attending Conference X in June. I'll be there, too. Maybe we can connect!" or "I see you're a fan of craft beer. A friend of mine recommends Brewery X, which isn't too far from where your office is. Have you tried it?"
3. **Make your request.** Get to the point and be clear and succinct about what you want. Keep it short, make it simple, be brief. Don't take up too much of your recipient's time, and don't make the request confusing. If you have a link you want them to share, embed a sharable link. Remove any barrier that would keep them from complying.
4. **Show you're a team player.** This is where curating, sharing, and otherwise genuinely promoting the content of these promotion partners *before* sending the outreach email will help you. For example, you might mention that you enjoyed a particular piece of content, and that you shared it with your readers and on social media. Make it personal, and avoid saying something as simple as "we linked to you, now you should link to us" because an influencer, frankly, doesn't need your link.
5. **End lightly.** End with a bit of humor or trivia that still relates to the recipient's interests, location, or niche.
6. **Use your name and position.** Close with your name and your position and/or website so they know who you are.

As you can see, the template is a structure, but you really must do some research in order to personalize your outreach emails. I'll talk a bit more about outreach emails in the section on post-publishing promotion, but the key here is to do research ahead of time to make your emails stand out.

## Finalizing Your Promotion Schedule

The last aspect of pre-promotion is to plan your entire promotion schedule. We'll cover the details of promoting your content in greater detail a bit later, but for now, understand that you'll need to make plans for promotion involving at least two main approaches:

## CONTENT MARKETING PLAYBOOK

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- **Social media.** This includes promotion of your content on social media through regular social posts, as well as using paid promotion on social networks. You'll want to account for mentions of influencers, buzz-building teaser messages about your upcoming content launch, and custom social messages to target specific audiences who will be interested in your content.
- **Email.** You will be promoting your content via email using your regular newsletter list as well as through the outreach emails.

### YOUR GENERAL PLAN MIGHT FOLLOW SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

- Hint at the upcoming content and build buzz through email and social media.
- Reach out to influencers with email.
- Announce the now-published content on social media and email. Mention influencers via social media.
- Follow-up with influencers via email.
- Repackage your content for social networks.
- Engage with readers in blog comments, social media, etc. responding to content.
- Mention people who have shared or talked about your content via social media.
- Continue to reference content via social media.

Social media, especially, benefits from a plan. As I'll talk about later, you'll want to create multiple messages on social media, promoting your content in different ways and repeatedly. A promotion schedule that calls for one social update is a failed promotion schedule.

### TOOLS FOR PRE-PROMOTION:

**Topsy**: Research high performing content on social media to find promotion partners and to help you create your own high-performing content.

**BuzzSumo**: Find out what kind of content performs well based on topic or on competitor. It's a great way to find top-performing content.

**Boomerang**: This Gmail add-in helps you remember to circle back to people at designated times. It will help you with your follow-up emails.

SECTION 4

# PUBLISHING YOUR CONTENT

*Publishing your content is more than simply clicking the “publish” button on your blog or social message. In order for your content to stand a chance in a world already full of content, you need to properly prepare it to be found.*

This starts with search engine optimization (SEO), which helps your content get discovered by search engines. It ends with knowing when to publish your content so that it gets the best chance possible.

## USING SEO WITH YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

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*While much of your time is going to be dedicated to creating great content, you’ll want to give a fair share towards SEO as well. If search engines can’t find the content you’ve created, your best efforts aren’t going to be enjoyed by much of an audience. There has to be a balance between the two.*

### SEO Has Changed

Search engines used to return results that were an exact match for the words a person searched. Now they return results based on pages that are *about* what a person searched. This is a huge difference. [Neil Patel](#) created an excellent infographic which shows how SEO has changed, breaking it down into several approaches:

1. **Mindset:** In early SEO, the focus was on keywords and ranking. As things changed, the goal was more on how people reacted and engaged with content, and the ensuing ROI.
2. **Keywords:** Early SEO focused on specific (and single) keywords. Now, however, the focus is on long-tail keywords, and trying to match content with user intent instead of specific words.

3. **Content:** In the beginning, SEO cared less about the quality of content and focused solely on getting search engine traffic to sites. Now, however, the quality of content matters. Creating helpful content and connecting it with a relevant audience is paramount.
4. **Linkbuilding:** When SEO began, quantity of backlinks -- whether spammy or not -- was the most important thing. Now, however, backlinks must be about quality and are often built on relationships and networking.

What Patel is clearly saying is that SEO changed as the value of true content marketing became apparent. Additionally, search engines like Google have both adapted to or caused these changes as they adjust algorithms to make sure users get the best search results.

Staying on top of the latest trends and recommendations of search engines isn't an option for content marketers. Search engines are always changing, and what they do affects what you do.

How can you possibly stay on top of it all?

[Andy Crestodina](#), co-founder and strategic director at Orbit Media, suggests that content marketers create a variety of content forms that answer detailed questions and really provide useful information. As search engines "close the loopholes" that allowed for SEO tricks and system gaming in prior years, the only option for content marketers now is to do the hard work and create truly valuable content. In doing that, no matter what changes come down the pipe, your content will fare well.

## Working With Keywords

It would seem that Google was doing its best to [negate keywords](#). In 2011, the Panda update attacked poor quality content, followed up by Penguin in 2012, which aggressively went after sites using black-hat keyword and link techniques. In 2013, Google introduced the in-depth article into its search returns, and then later that same year released Hummingbird, which made the search engine understand more than simple words but full sentences. By the end of 2013, keyword data was no longer showing up in Google Analytics.

Keywords are not dead, despite all of this.

What Google is trying to do is provide context to what users are searching for instead of simply matching up the words they type into the search engine. When a person types "calories banana", Google wants to return pages that answer the question "how many calories are in a banana", which is most likely what the person wanted to know, instead of pages that match the individual words of "calories" or "banana."

And, of course, Google even provides [Google Keyword Planner](#), a keyword planning tool. We can't talk about keywords without mentioning it. Clearly, keywords still matter to Google.

### FINDING RELEVANT KEYWORDS.

This newly revamped Google Keyword Planner tool can provide you with traffic-related data, traffic forecasts, geo-targeted research, new keyword ideas, and much more. While the tool is [quite extensive](#) and offers you a lot of data, there are two important functions that make it useful for content marketers.

#### KEYWORD PLANNER LETS YOU:

1. **Get new keyword ideas.** In the “Search for new keyword and ad group ideas” section of the planner, you can find keywords that are based on a topic, your niche, or your website. You can even enter the URL of a [landing page or competitor’s website](#) and get a return of suggested keywords. Google allows you to narrow down the results by geography and excluded words.
2. **Assess your keywords.** By using the “Get search volume for a list of keywords...” option, you can upload or paste in a list of keywords that you’ve collected and find out how popular they would be and how well they might perform.

Keyword Planner will return a similar results page no matter how you use the tool. You’ll see how often a keyword is searched for (“Avg. monthly searches”) and related search trends (click on the small graph next to “Avg. monthly searches”).

If you have a keyword and you’re not sure how to incorporate it into a post or want additional ideas, a nice little shortcut is to drop the keyword into a plain Google search. Jump down to the bottom and look at the recommended searches. You’ll see the phrases people are using in search that are related to that keyword.

Using keyword planning in your content marketing will help you keep a narrow focus on a topic, and it will also help you discover topics that are of interest to your audience that you might not have known.

### PUTTING YOUR KEYWORDS TO WORK.

Keyword research won’t do any good if you don’t put those keywords to work.

1. **Use them in planning.** Now that you have a list of suggested keywords, you ought to keep it handy. Create a list or spreadsheet of the keywords that you discover through research. Use it when you plan topics on your editorial calendar.

2. **Use them in multiple places.** Your keywords should be found in the headline, URL (if possible), body content, and meta description.
3. **Use them to stay focused.** Keywords are not just a search engine gimmick. In a way, they help you answer the question of what you're trying to achieve with your content before you sit down to writing it. They force you to consider carefully what and how you write.

The important thing here is to make certain that you do something with those keywords, particularly in the planning of your content. The keywords should come first. They shouldn't be an afterthought that you load into an already planned or finished post if you want the post to flow naturally around the keywords and phrases you've discovered.

### **BUILDING A KEYWORD NARRATIVE.**

[Sparksheet](#) suggests that you take keywords even further and build a keyword narrative that goes beyond single pieces of content and affects your entire content approach.

Running on the assumption that you've gotten to know your audience through personas, and that you know what types of content appeal to each of those persona groups, you can do keyword research around the themes they prefer.

It's a kind of reverse approach; instead of your keywords telling you what content to create, your content is telling you what keywords to research. By understanding what content will have the most potential monthly traffic based on that keyword research, you can organize your editorial calendar accordingly. You would devote more content to the potentially higher-traffic topics.

Essentially, you use what you already know about your audience, and do some SEO research around those knowns.

## **Make Each Post SEO Friendly**

The Hubspot blog came up with a [great checklist](#) to make sure that each and every blog post you write is SEO friendly.

### **1. FOCUS ON ONE OR TWO LONG-TAIL KEYWORDS.**

Gone are the days of excessive keyword stuffing, where entire blog posts were little more than keywords strung together. Instead, choose one or two keywords and avoid penalties that search engines like to hand out to anyone seen as gaming the keyword system. Get your keyword in your title, body, URL, and meta description as much as naturally possible.

Long-tail keywords are longer than a traditional, singular keyword. They tend to be the phrases that people use when they are close to buying or looking for very specific information. Instead of a keyword of "radiator", for example, you might use something like "replacing a radiator."



Long-tail keywords bring in traffic that is less likely to bounce out, because your content is specific to an audience's current need.

## 2. BE SURE YOUR CONTENT IS MOBILE FRIENDLY.

Part of making your content SEO friendly has to do with how it performs on mobile devices. Your audience is definitely on their mobile device, if you consider that 62% of all emails opened happen on a [mobile device](#). 57% of users won't recommend a business to someone if that business's mobile website is poorly executed. [61% of mobile visitors](#) will hit the back button and find a more readable site if they come to a non-mobile-friendly web page.

But you already knew you needed to make your content mobile-friendly. You probably have similar browsing habits. What you may not have realized is that a mobile-friendly site has an impact on your SEO.

[Google announced](#) towards the end of 2014 that they were going to be adding a "mobile-friendly" label to mobile search results. Then, in April of 2015, [they announced](#) that mobile-friendly sites would get a ranking boost on mobile search results.

Be sure that your website content is easily accessible on mobile devices. It's no longer just a matter of suggestion, but it could have an impact on whether visitors even find your site. Use [Google's mobile-friendly test tool](#) to see if your website is making the grade.

## 3. LINK TO YOUR OWN INTERNAL CONTENT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

Linking to your own content helps search engines find and index where your content is, and what it is relevant to. Your site is going to continue to grow, and internal linking is [the only way you'll be sure your entire site is indexed](#).

There are other benefits, too. You know your own content best, so linking to past articles and static pages that are related (and that's the key word here) keeps you from having to explain things repeatedly while helping your reader.

When linking internally, you should make sure that the anchor text (the text you create the link with) is relevant to the page you are linking to. Just be careful to not so meticulously optimize and choose your anchor text that you are seen as gaming SEO. Overly rich anchor text can penalize you.

As to how many internal links you should include, Google's advice is that you use a "[reasonable amount](#)." In other words, don't get carried away. Link to be helpful, not to trick search engines. Link naturally, with the first goal being that of helping your reader.

## 4. CREATE META OPTIMIZATIONS.

Creating a meta description for each post gives you the chance to control the description that appears on search results. Potential visitors make decisions on a screen full of possible options, so a great meta description can be the deciding factor.

When creating this meta content, be sure to include your long-tail keyword. Words that are used in a search will be made bold if it matches what's in your description.

Blogging platforms, such as WordPress, have plugins or other ways to create custom meta descriptions.

## 5. MAKE SURE YOUR IMAGES ARE OPTIMIZED.

Visitors often use image searches to find what they are looking for, and then click through to the page the image can be found on. To help search engines return your images, be sure to:

- **Include alt text.** Search engines use alt text to help know if an image is a relevant return. Be sure to use relevant and succinct alt text for each image, describing the image.
- **Choose a good file name.** Name your image file according to what you'd like that image to rank or return for. No more "DSC7892" or nonsensical file names.
- **Check file size.** Page load times also factor into SEO, and while it's true we're not in the dial-up era anymore, you should still keep your image sizes reasonable. Slow-loading pages [cost Amazon over a \\$1 billion a year](#). Try to keep your image sizes below 70kb. Don't resize them in the source code, but resize the actual image.

Your images aren't just for your human audience; they have an important part in SEO, too.

## 6. GET YOUR URLS IN ORDER.

Helpful URLs indicate to your visitor what to expect from a link even before the click on a link. For example, a URL that says "http://test.com/gp/item/B952J6/yy8e-?v=glance" is confusing to a visitor. They have no idea what to expect. A URL that says "http://test.com/store/item/", on the other hand, is readable.

While that in and of itself won't impact your SEO, having reader-friendly URLs often means you include keywords in the URL. And that *will* help your SEO.

## Maintain a balance between SEO and content marketing.

Content marketers tend to err on the side of focusing solely on content, while SEO experts tend to err on the side of focusing on search engines. There has to be balance; you need to have both skills.

[Matt Southern](#), familiar with both blogging and SEO, suggests that the perfect mix of the two is to have a strong grasp of using keywords and keyword research, understanding Google's best practices and following them, and creating content around high demand topics in a way that your audience loves. We would add to that list the need to do some [follow-up measurement](#) of your content to better understand how successful you were in reaching both search engines and your audience so that you can make necessary adjustments.

### SEO TOOLS:

**SEMrush:** This great tool shows you which keywords your website ranks for, and the number of searches done for those keywords each month.

**Yoast:** A popular SEO plugin for WordPress that makes it easy to be sure your posts are search-engine friendly.

**Soovle:** By entering your keywords, Soovle uses Google Suggest to return results based on popularity.

## WHEN TO PUBLISH YOUR CONTENT

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*When it comes to discussing the best times to publish content, there will never be perfect agreement. This is simply because not everyone has the same audience, audiences are worldwide (and different time zones), and not everyone is publishing the same quantity of content.*

Some of the questions you'll need to answer, in regards to the best time to publish content, are:

- What time of day is my audience online?
- What days of the week are they online?
- When are they most active (and prone to open/read) online?
- Do content types affect audience engagement?
- When does my audience tend to share the most?
- When does my audience tend to read the most?
- Where is my audience mostly located (time zone issues)?

The best time for a blog post to be read or an email to be opened might not be the same time when content gets the most shares on social media. A “how-to” blog post might do better on a Wednesday, while a product review does better on a Monday.

Every audience is different. Knowing that, let’s take a look at some of the research out there that might be helpful in guiding you at least in getting started until you gather your own data.

## The Best Time To Publish Blog Content

In a [seriously helpful study](#) done by KISSmetrics, Dan Zarrella, Search Engine Land, and HubSpot, there’s a bit of clarity about when to publish your blog post.

### WHAT DID THEY DISCOVER?

- Most users read blogs in the morning.
- More men than women read blogs in the evening or at night.
- Most blogs get the highest traffic on Mondays.
- 11 am EST is when most blogs get their highest traffic.
- Most blogs get their highest amount of comments on Saturdays.
- Most blogs get inbound links on Mondays and Thursdays.
- Most blogs get those inbound links around 7 am EST.

“Most blogs” might not perfectly fit your blog, but this is a very handy guide to use as you get started blogging so that you can gather your own data to see when your traffic and reader

engagement happens. And, of course, your goals may be different (e.g. not include lots of comments and so you would not care about when commenting would be highest).

[TrackMaven](#) also did some research into the best times to publish a blog post, and came up with some helpful data:

- 87% of blog posts are published during the workweek, with Fridays slightly lower than the rest.
- Most blog posts are published during the hours of 11 - noon EST.
- Blog posts published on weekends received much higher social engagement.
- Despite most blog posts being published during the work hours, social shares were highest for posts published between 9 pm - midnight, as well as 4 - 6 am EST (probably the start of the European work day).

TrackMaven pointed out that there is a noticeable difference between the times that people are publishing their blog posts and the times when readers have a chance to dive in and read them. Content marketers tend to approach their content creation and publication as their “day job” but the truth is that readers aren’t necessarily consuming that content accordingly. It is often after hours when blog posts get picked up.

[SocialFresh](#) takes a different approach, tracking data based on what you hope to accomplish with your blog content and how that would relate to publishing times:

- **Social shares.** If it’s social shares you’re after, you should publish between 8 am and 12 pm. Publish especially on Thursdays.
- **Pageviews.** If it’s pageviews you seek, consider publishing between 7 am through 1 pm Monday through Thursday, but especially on Monday.

Remember, the peak time to publish is also the highest competition. Your content is going live at the same time as many others. It likely matters less when you publish your blog post as it does when you promote the post and share it on social media.

One thing you can see is that the three studies don’t perfectly match up in what they found. We can’t stress enough how important it is to measure what is happening on *your* blog, and to do some A/B testing to determine if you could improve results by adjusting publishing times. You should conduct your own study on your own blog to see when your readers are most active. Look at your Google Analytics and see what days and time you seem to get the most pageviews and the most visits.

Something these three studies don’t really tell you is when the best time for conversions will occur. That, too, you can find out for your own blog inside Google Analytics. The CoSchedule blog [created a custom report](#) that can help you discover what hour of the day and what day of the week your blog sees the most conversions.

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## The Best Time To Publish Social Content

There are several studies and articles that talk about the best time to publish social content. Let's start with a [study by SurePayroll and Ghergich & Co](#), which broke up the results based on social network. By doing this, you can see the evidence of how each social network is different in terms of how its users actually use it (e.g. LinkedIn is the professional network, while Pinterest is great for hobbies, food, shopping, etc.).

- **Facebook:** 1 - 4 pm had the highest click-through rate with Wednesday at 3 pm the best performer. The worst times to publish were on the weekends, before 8 am and after 8 pm.
- **Twitter:** Monday - Thursday, 1 - 3 pm were the best times to publish content, with 9 am - 3 pm being the peak. The worst time to publish are any day after 8 pm, or Fridays after 3 pm.
- **LinkedIn:** Tuesday - Thursday were the best time to publish, with noon and between 5 - 6 pm as the peak. The worst time to publish is on Mondays and Fridays 10 pm - 6 am.
- **Pinterest:** The best time to publish is on a Saturday morning, though Fridays at 3 pm were great for fashion and retail. Publishing during normal working hour was the worst time to publish.
- **Google+:** The best time to publish is between 9 - 10 am, with the peak happening on Wednesdays at 9 am. Early mornings and evenings are the worst time to publish.

But that's just one study. Dan Zarrella and HubSpot did [another study](#) in regards to publishing social content.

### THEIR RESULTS WERE:

- 5 pm EST is the best time to send a tweet.
- 1 to 4 tweets per hour is the optimal tweeting rate.
- The best day to share content on Facebook is Saturday.
- Noon EST is the best time of day to share content on Facebook.
- The best sharing frequency on Facebook is .5 posts per day (a rather challenging feat)

As you can see, the studies don't perfectly line up. One approach is to see what times your competitors, or leading blogs similar to yours, are publishing. Mimic their approach and watch your analytics carefully. Pay attention to your social media and see when people share and respond the most often.

## The Best Time To Publish Email Content

Sending your email newsletter at the right time can be the difference between being junked, and a great click-through rate. With email, you are taking into account both open rates and click-through rates, the latter in particular if you have action you want the reader to take or you don't have the full content in the email.

[WordStream](#) suggests that the first and most obvious answer is that you should send your email out during the daytime as opposed to at night. If you have subscribers around the world, you'll want to adjust your email sending application to take into account time zones. In addition to that rule of thumb:

- Avoid sending email on Mondays and weekends. People are busy on both. Tuesday through Thursday is your best bet.
- 9-11 am , or 1-2 pm are the best times of day. People are in the office and not out on break.

Popular email provider [MailChimp](#) has additional data based on billions of emails sent from their system. They clarify that they industry you are in (and therefore the topic of your emails) will have some impact on the optimal sending time. Business-related content should go out during traditional business hours, while recreation or food related emails might do better on a weekend. The idea is that the more your content is about free time, fun, and hobbies, the more likely the weekend will give the best results.

### WHAT ELSE DID MAILCHIMP DISCOVER?

- 10 am (in respective time zones) is the best time to send an email, though for hobby-related emails, 8 am works, too.
- However, geographic location matters, as different cultures break up their day differently.
- Age matters, too. The younger your audience, the later in the day you might want to send your email.

[Customer.io](#) agrees with the the idea of leaving Monday alone, with Tuesday getting the best open rate out of any of the workweek days. However, Saturday got the best open rate of all. Is it because there is less email competition on a Saturday? Additionally, they found:

- Educational emails work better earlier in the week, while action-based emails are better towards the end of the week.

- If open rates are important to you (and they should be), the afternoon is the best time to send.
- If reply rates are important, send your emails in the evening.

Again, it's clear that not everyone agrees. Luckily, most email systems provide you with great data on who is opening, who is clicking, and when. Test your email methodically, changing the day and time you send and letting that time gather data that will help you see when you should publish your email.



SECTION 5:

# PROMOTION AND OUTREACH

*You've created the content. Now how do you get people to see it?*

Promoting your content is, according to the [Duct Tape Marketing blog](#), part of “creating the impression your brand is everywhere.”

To do this, 94% of bloggers turn to social media to drive most of their traffic to their content. 51% use SEO, while 35% turn to email marketing, according to [Orbit Media](#). Those three approaches -- social, search, and email -- are the most common paths. We've already talked about SEO, so let's take a look at social media and email.

## PROMOTE YOUR CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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According to [Social Media Examiner](#), after investing just six hours a week in social media marketing, 84% of marketers saw an increase in traffic.

Yet perhaps you've been taken in by social media myths, convinced that social media doesn't really have the huge returns promised. Content expert [Jay Baer](#) puts those worries to rest on his “Convince and Convert” blog, addressing some common myths about social media.

- **Your customers aren't social.** Baer points out that 72% of American adults who are online use social networking sites. Yes, the people you are trying to reach are social, and are using social media.
- **You can't measure social.** Oh, but you can. The tools are there, and you can use tracking, analytics, and careful testing to determine if your social campaigns are bringing in leads. Social media [does have an ROI](#), and that means you can measure it.

Content marketer [John Jantsch](#) sums up marketing well, saying it's all about finding someone who has a need, and taking the opportunity to get them to know, like, and trust you. Then you turn that into a sale. And then a referral. And then you repeat. Social media is one of the best ways you can make this happen.

## Using Social Media Successfully

Using social media successfully is something you do purposefully. Social media content is part of your overall content marketing planning process, and should be included in your strategy and your editorial calendar.

### SHARING MORE THAN ONCE.

Social news feeds move quickly, and sharing your content only once will reduce the chances that it will be seen by the maximum number of people.

[Leo Widrich](#), from Buffer, collected data to show that sharing content on social media more than once is how you get traction from that content. Widrich finds that when you share content more than once, you:

- Get more traffic.
- Hit multiple time zones.
- Reach your new followers.

In Widrich's example, retweeting the same blog post brought in 75% as many retweets from fans each time as the time before. CoSchedule found that [multiple shares could double traffic](#).

#### SHARING CONTENT MORE THAN ONCE WORKS, AS LONG AS YOU:

- **Take the network into account.** News feeds on different social networks behave differently. Twitter feeds move quickly, especially if a person is following many people. Facebook and Pinterest function differently. You might be able to share the same content multiple times a day on Twitter, but would want a different approach with Pinterest.
- **Change up the content.** You can share the same blog post multiple times by reworking the image and text that go with a social message. This is also an ideal way to do some testing to see what version gets the most engagement.
- **Remember the time zones.** Sharing has to take into account different time zones, so do share even during the times when you are asleep. You'll need a tool that allows you to schedule social shares in order to do this.
- **Dig up old content.** Part of your process should be digging up old content that is still relevant, and including that in your sharing schedule. New readers and fans may not be aware that content even exists.

## ALERT PEOPLE YOU MENTION.

If the blog post you are sharing mentions someone in the post, particularly an influencer, be sure to let them know. Tag them using their social profile username.

To avoid being a pest, though, use this technique only if the person is quoted, interviewed, linked to, or actually mentioned as an integral part of the content. You do not want to spam people on social media by constantly tagging them for every post you think they might be interested in.

## TAKE IT EASY ON THE HASHTAGS.

Social networks make using hashtags for putting your content into context easy. Maybe too easy. Content specialist [Alina Bradford](#) recommends taking it easy on hashtags and only using hashtags that are relevant to your actual content. No one likes reading a social post that is almost all hashtags.

Tools such as [Hashtags.org](#) can make it easy for you to find relevant hashtags, but if your content is overloaded with hashtags, not only is it difficult for people to read, but you hurt your engagement. [Buffer discovered](#) that hashtags do increase engagement, but that keeping your hashtag use to just one or two will provide a 21% higher engagement than if you used more than that.

## Paid Promotion For Your Content

Social media has opened the door towards seriously targeted paid promotion, whether through sponsored posts or as paid ads. It is the third part of the “owned-earned-paid” model, where owned media is the content you create and earned media is when people share and talk about your content.

Social media ad buys are expected to hit [\\$14 billion by 2018](#), and for good reason: social media allows you to accurately target an audience like never before.

## PROMOTE ON NETWORKS YOUR AUDIENCE IS USING.

When it comes to paid promotion for their content, [90% of marketers turn to Facebook ads](#). LinkedIn and Twitter ads are a distant second, with about 20% preferring those networks. YouTube ads lag at 11%. For B2B, however, LinkedIn [generates more leads](#) than do the other social networks. In other words, not every network fits every market.

You need to know where your audience is before diving into paid promotion.

## PROMOTE YOUR MOST POPULAR CONTENT.

When choosing content that you want to pay to promote, choose content that has already proven popular. Use analytics to determine what content has done well on that social network. Think of your regular social media posts as your “free” ads, tracking which posts are clicked, shared, or commented on. High performers are your best bet for paid ads.

There is no sense in paying to promote content people have already indicated they aren't interested in.

## TARGET, TEST, AND ROTATE YOUR ADS.

It's the targeting ability that makes social paid promotion far superior to traditional online advertising. Social networks have gathered a lot of data on their users, and are able to offer up almost any kind of demographic information. Use the targeting options provided by each network to really focus on the audience you want. Targeting too broadly will only end up costing you money.

Keep your ads fresh. Running the same ad for too long a time will train people to ignore it. If your audience is used to seeing your ad, they will stop clicking on it. When this happens, some networks (like Facebook) will penalize you in that your cost per click (CPC) will increase. Consider changing out your ad at least every week.

By changing your ad, you also open the door to A/B testing, finding out which images and copy do better at bringing clicks.

## CREATE LANDING PAGES FOR YOUR ADS.

Instead of sending users to your front page and hoping that they'll figure out what they are to do, create individual landing pages for each ad. Consider who you've targeted the ad towards, and create a landing page that caters to that demographic.

Be sure you have a clear call-to-action and that what you want the visitor to do, once **arriving** on your landing page, is clear.

## SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION AND MANAGEMENT TOOLS:

**ContentMarketer.io:** This app makes it simple to alert people you've mentioned in your content. It automatically finds the email addresses and Twitter handles. Templates make it easy to send emails and tweets to them.

**Nimble:** A leading CRM that helps you understand your relationships with customers in context, manage these relationships, and listen and connect on social networks.

**Hootsuite:** Schedule, publish, manage, and monitor conversations across all of your social platforms.

**Buffer:** Schedule both your own and curated content easily for all of your social networks. Buffer helps you find the ideal times as well as suggests content to curate.

**Storify:** An app that lets you collect and share, based on whatever topic you choose, what people are saying on the web.

**Bundlr:** Create pages with photos, videos, tweets, articles, etc., easily sharing them with your fans and followers.

**Flipboard:** Create a digital magazine out of your content, as well as the content you curate.

# USING EMAIL TO PROMOTE CONTENT

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*Perhaps you've heard the saying that "the money is in the email list." There's truth to that; email is still a consistent winner for content marketing. We're not just talking cold-call emails (though that can work when done right). Email is a tool that can build trust and convert readers.*

## How To Use Your Email List

Your email list can be used in several different ways, each serving a specific purpose when it comes to promoting your content.

## REGULAR CONTENT UPDATES.

Perhaps the most common approach is to send a regular email that contains the content that was published on your blog that week. [21% of business bloggers](#) send posts via email newsletter to their subscribers every week.

What qualifies as “regular updates” is up for debate. While it’s true you actually need to send email frequently enough that you stay in the forefront of your reader’s memory, [MailChimp](#) has discovered that sending email updates too often can result in a lack of engagement per email campaign.

A good rule of thumb is to start out reasonably, say once a week, and watch your data. If you increase to twice a week, do you get more engagement? More unsubscribes? More feedback? Pay close attention to your own data.

### EMAIL TOOLS:

**MailChimp:** A super-easy email marketing platform that makes managing your subscriber list and sending email simple.

## CONTACTING INFLUENCERS WITH OUTREACH EMAILS.

We covered this a bit back in the pre-promotion section, including a template to use for these types of emails, but this approach also fits during your promotional phase after your content has launched. If you took the time to do pre-promotion right, you’ve already built a list of influencers that is ready to go.

The truth is, reaching out to influencers and connecting with them about your content, via email, is an often ignored tactic. Perhaps people are afraid to seem spammy, or to make a request directly. That’s a shame -- it’s a powerful technique, and we’ve used [outreach emails](#) to great success ourselves. In order for such emails to work, you need to be able to offer the recipient:

- **Proprietary data.** Who wouldn’t want access to data that no one else has?
- **Complementary resources.** Maybe you have something that relates to their work or a problem they’re trying to solve.
- **Unique expertise.** Do you have an exclusive quote or other service you can offer them?
- **An offer to contribute.** Let them know you’re willing to help them if they need it.

[Social Media Today](#) suggests that you make a list of all of the outside references and link that you use in your blog content. When the post is published, send those blogs or influencers and email and let them know directly that you referenced them.

The goal is that some will share your content with their own audience. In order to avoid seeming like a spammer, you *must maintain the relationships that you create*. This is easier when you contact influencers because you genuinely have something they might be interested in, not because you are desperate for shares or attention.

### **BUILD A TRACTION LIST.**

An email traction list is a list that is created by finding the influencers, journalists, evangelists, and super fans that can help your product or app gain traction. You should have already created this traction list if you did your pre-promotion correctly. However, you may find additional people to add to your traction list once your content is released and others discover it.

The [Startup Workout](#) has used the traction list approach to great success, and suggests a simple approach to building your own list.

1. **Find influencers in friends and colleagues.** These are people who already know you and what you can do. Since they care about you to some degree, they are natural evangelists. Find those who are “connectors”, those people who have a network or the ability to network and truly get your information out to people.
2. **Find industry discussions.** Whether through Slack chats, Inbound.org, social media, or some other forum, find related industry discussions. Meet new people who would be interested in what you are doing.

Contact these people personally, as explained in the section on pre-promotion, and ask for feedback. People love to give advice, and it’s a good way to make them aware of your product. Plus...you get some great advice.

## ENGAGING YOUR AUDIENCE

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*Creating relationships is one of the best ways to promote your content, but relationship-building can’t be automated. It involves conversation and interaction...and time.*

There are several ways you can engage your audience and build trust and a fan base.

## Conversation on blogs and social media.

Conversations will spring up naturally in your blog's comment section and on social media. That, in and of itself, will build relationships with people. These conversations can:

- **Create brand evangelists.** By singling out readers and followers and promoting or highlighting them in your own channels, you create super fans that will be happy to sing your praises to their own networks.
- **Find out what works.** Through conversations, you can learn of problems or positives much quicker than tedious data collection. People will tell you point blank.
- **Build customer profiles.** The information you learn from conversations is valuable if you're tracking customers. Add them to your customer relationship management (CRM) app. If you haven't got a CRM in place, consider getting one.

## User-generated content.

User-generated content is any content that your readers help to create. It can be a tricky approach, as management can quickly make it onerous. You want to be sure that you have clear guidelines as to what kind of content is allowed or appropriate. This includes:

- Offensive content
- Proprietary content
- Libelous content
- How much weight you give content (re: reviews)
- Moderation approach

User-generated content, often in the form of reviews or forums, have sparked lawsuits in the past. It's important for you to decide if your brand needs this type of content or not. For example, [QuickSprout used to have a forum](#), but decided that it had a negative impact rather than a positive one. Users abused the forum and created spam content, which search engines like Google don't look kindly on. They also discovered that even the best quality user-generated content failed to perform as well as their blog posts, and that even though it was an easy way to build more pages of content than they could on their own, it wasn't worth it. However, QuickSprout was able to build brand loyalty by taking part in every forum discussion.

User-generated content may not be the best approach for high SEO goals, but the conversations you have (and the fact that you bother to respond at all) *do* count for something in the eyes of your audience.



# CREATING CONTENT UPGRADES

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*Content upgrades are a way to give your readers extra information in return for something, such as sharing your content on social media, giving you an email address, or filling out a survey.*

According to [Authority Hacker](#), content upgrades work best when they are:

- **Complementary and clearly related to the content.** This is not the time to hand out broad or bland free reports. The content must be tied directly to what the reader just finished reading.
- **Found at the end of the content.** Build up to the offering so that, by the time the reader is confronted with it, they can't help but find out the rest of the story.
- **Don't ask too much of your reader.** Reduce the barrier to accepting your content upgrade by not asking too much of your reader. A simple email address, a click-to-share, a one-question survey -- nothing too complicated.
- **The extra content is easy to consume.** Make the content upgrade fast and easy to read or watch. The bulk of the content was already consumed; this is just a little bit extra before they go.

The idea is to create content in such a way that, when your reader gets to the end, they are extremely interested in getting “all” of the content. It's a form of exclusivity (a powerful motivator), suggesting that only those who do what you request will be given that extra information.

With content upgrades, you can increase conversions as well as promote your content. By using this technique, [Brian Dean at Backlinko](#) saw a *785% increase in conversions!* Dean suggests that the success of this technique is partly due to the fact that the extra content you're giving away is directly related to the content the reader came to read. Instead of handing away generic “free downloads” and “free reports”, you're offering something the reader wants right then and there.

Of course, using this technique will be a waste of time if you don't have great content that actually drives readers to want more of it, and if you don't have your email autoresponder set up to deliver what you promise if you asked for the reader's email.

# CURATING OUTSIDE CONTENT

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Curating content is often the forgotten path for beginning content marketers. Much of your focus will, of course, be on creating your own great content. But curating, sharing, and promoting the content that others create benefits you, too. In fact, [82% of marketers](#) curate outside content.

## Content Curation Increases Exposure

It might sound counter-intuitive, pushing the content of someone else to your audience, but by doing so, you promote your own content in several ways.

1. **You care about your audience.** When your audience sees that you care enough about their interests that you'd take the time to wade into the vast amount of content and find the good stuff, and that you're willing to share that good stuff even if you don't benefit from it, they trust you.
2. **You build your network.** Sharing and promoting the content others create is an act of goodwill. They will notice, they may connect, and you will form a relationship that will benefit you in the long run. You become the content marketer that everyone loves to love, and whose own content will soon be shared by others, too.
3. **You increase your visibility.** As you build your network, you also increase your brand's visibility and sales. [Over 50%](#) of marketers who curate agree that content curation has done exactly that.

## How To Curate Content For Maximum Benefit

How much outside content should you curate?

The [target content marketing mix](#) by top content marketers is 65% created, 25% curated, and less than 10% syndicated. Some content marketers curate every day, while [nearly half curate outside content](#) at least once a week.

Curating content, if you use the right tools, is not difficult. The trick is to find high quality content to share. Anything less and you'll turn your audience off. Remember, you're doing this to help them, so you must devote time to find the best content for them.

Find great content to curate in:

- **RSS feeds:** When you find a blog that consistently puts out great content, save that feed to your feed reader. And, be sure to categorize your feeds in that reader so you can quickly find content based on topics of interest. For example, you might have categories for

“desserts” and for “paleo” and for “gluten free” that you can share with your food blog audience based on your content strategy.

- **Google Alerts:** Creating a [Google Alert](#), which can be sent to your email or to your RSS reader, is a passive way to discover content. Depending on your settings and how specific you are in the search terms you ask Google to return content for will determine how useful it is. Overly broad terms will return a lot of junk that you’ll have to sift through. Specific is better.
- **Email newsletters.** You should be signing up for great email newsletters whenever you get the chance. Choose from high quality blogs, or other content curators who daily send out an email with interesting links.
- **Social media links.** It goes without saying that you can find helpful content through social media, whether shared by the people you follow or through paying close attention to trends and hashtags.

### CONTENT CURATION TOOLS:

**Swayy:** Find the best-performing content on social media, and easily share the content that matters to your niche.

**Feedly:** This RSS reader makes it easy to categorize and manage the feeds you have saved.

SECTION 6:

# REPURPOSING YOUR CONTENT

*Content is costly to create. After spending so much time, money, and effort in creating content, neglecting to put it to further use is a huge waste. Nearly every piece of content that you create can be repurposed and its shelf-life can be extended by turning it into something else.*

Look back at that list of different content types in section one. You can remake just about any piece of content into a different type! For example: a blog post to a podcast to an infographic -- three pieces of content out of one.

When it comes to repurposing your content, though, you'll most often be dealing with evergreen content.

## THE VALUE OF EVERGREEN CONTENT

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*Evergreen content is content that never gets old. It is always relevant for your readers. Content that covers topics that are “timeless” will always apply, whether you wrote it five minutes or five months ago. A blog full of evergreen content is highly useful.*

Not all content is evergreen, of course, but that doesn't mean you should avoid those topics. Examples of non-evergreen content include:

- News articles.
- Trends-based content.
- Data or statistics-based content.
- Seasonal content

There is a place for non-evergreen content. The key is to have a mix of both in your overall content plan.

## Putting Evergreen Content To Work

Evergreen content are those pieces which continue to pull in traffic, get inbound links, and get mentioned and shared by readers. Having evergreen content is not only great for readers and for traffic, though. It helps you in a different way: you have a library to refer your readers to.

Imagine having to explain the same topic over and over in every blog post you write. Wouldn't it be nice if you could reference, with one link, a blog post that covers that topic in detail so that you could continue on with the topic at hand?

Evergreen content is powerful, if you put it to work for you.

### EVERGREEN CONTENT IDEAS.

How do you approach an idea if you want to make it evergreen?

Blogger Kevan Lee, on the [Buffer blog](#), suggests that there is a three-pronged approach when it comes to writing evergreen content.

1. **Be the definitive source.** Consider your evergreen posts to be the foundation of any future need to reference that topic. Create content that others, including yourself, can constantly link to and reference. Be the Bible for that topic.
2. **Write for beginners.** Evergreen content is, generally, more for beginners. As Lee points out, experts aren't looking for your help. Beginners are. Create content that makes beginners into experts.
3. **Narrow your topic.** Be very specific in how you approach your topic. If you do evergreen content well, you can easily pull together related posts and call it a series.

EVERGREEN TOPICS ARE VARIED, BUT A FEW APPROACHES SEEM TO WORK BEST. ACCORDING TO LEE, THE BEST APPROACHES ARE:

- How-to posts and tutorials. (Keep in mind that tutorials based on non-evergreen topics, such as software or gadgets, won't fit into this category.)
- Origin stories of your brand.
- Historical articles for your industry.
- "The Complete Guide To \_\_\_\_"
- Tips that are timeless.
- Answers to industry related FAQs.

## SHOWCASING YOUR EVERGREEN CONTENT.

Evergreen content that know one knows about doesn't do you much good. You have to find a way to let new readers know about your content, and remind longtime readers of those greatest hits.

There are several ways you can bring that older, evergreen content to your readers' attention:

- Show related posts, with images and links, at the bottom of each blog post.
- Have featured posts in a prominent position, such as a slider.
- Point out evergreen posts with top comments or traffic in your sidebar.
- Feature an old post at the bottom of your weekly email.
- Link consistently to valuable evergreen posts.
- Regularly share old evergreen posts on social media.
- Create an email course out of related evergreen content.

Whatever method you choose, you should make a regular habit of identifying and recirculating your evergreen content, keeping it in front of your audience wherever you publish content.

## REDIRECT OLD POSTS TO NEW.

You may have a popular old post on your blog that has outdated information. Yet, you hate to lose the traffic that you're receiving for it. Create new, evergreen content on the same or related topic, and use a 301 redirect to point that traffic to the new post.

[According to Google's Matt Cutts](#), a 301 redirect will not cause you to lose much page rank. Rather than delete old content and lose the traffic, you'd be better off redirecting it to a related and updated evergreen version of the same topic.

# HOW TO REPURPOSE YOUR CONTENT

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*Evergreen content is easily repurposed, but non-evergreen content can sometimes be reworked in a way that you can use it again, too. The idea behind re*

## Guest Posts

You can repurpose a blog post that you've run on your blog, and turn it into a great guest post. Establishing yourself as an expert on a popular blog builds your reputation and, in turn, builds your own blog both in traffic and in repute.

However, keep in mind a few best practices.

1. **Rework, not copy.** Remember, repurposing content doesn't mean copying and pasting word-for-word somewhere else. It may be reusing an idea, reworking it and updating it, to give it a new home. So, even if the host blog asks that guest posts not be published elsewhere, your reworked post is acceptable.
2. **Exposure, not SEO.** Ann Smarty, SEO expert and founder of MyBlogU, experienced [Google's punishment](#) in March 2014 for the active guest blogging network she had founded. Google is aggressively working to put an end to anyone abusing guest blogging purely to get links, whether that was the goal or not. You must guest blog for the exposure and to benefit that new audience, not to benefit from links back to your site.
3. **Upwards, not down.** Choose blogs that are higher in traffic, readership, and reputation than your own. Creating guest post content for any other type of blog won't do you much good.

## Email Courses

An [email autoresponder course](#) is a form of online learning, where a reader signs up for the course and is then automatically delivered topically relevant emails over time.

The money is in your email list, or so many marketers say. Growing that email list is a huge focus for most content marketers, and offering email autoresponder courses is a great way to do it.

Email courses are the perfect fit for repurposed content, and they also allow you to segment your email list based on interests. By creating several distinct email courses, you can build sub-lists that indicate reader interest. This allows you to target those sub-lists later with emails containing a call to action that you know the recipient is interested in.

To build your email course, ask:

- **What is it about?** Choose a topic that you want your email course to be on. (e.g. "Everything You Need To Know To Get Started Blogging")
- **What will it look like?** Create an outline of what that course would look like. Consider who would be interested in your course, and what kind of information they would need.

- **What's in it?** Find evergreen blog posts that would fit this topic.
- If there are gaps in what you have available and what you need, create the content to fit that gap before starting the auto responder.
- **How long will it be?** Decide how long your emails will be, how often they will be delivered, and how long the course will be. Courses can range from a few lessons to perpetual (where you keep adding related blog posts to the end of the course). Your emails can contain the information in full, or they might contain a snippet and direct readers to your website (more traffic).

An email course is, as we mentioned earlier, a good way to churn older evergreen posts back up to the top. The email provider you are currently using to deliver your regular emails likely has an autoresponder option.

### THE ONLINE COURSE: TURNING YOUR CONTENT INTO TRAINING.

Your content can serve as online training outside of the email autoresponder. Online learning has exploded in popularity, and there are several sites that make it easy for you to create an online course out of your current content.

**Udemy:** Udemy is a rising star for online learning. They require a heavy video component in order to comply with their guidelines, but they have a large platform that enables you to create a course you can charge for or make available freely.

**Guides.co:** This platform is free and extremely simple to use. You can easily copy and paste your content and create an online class with discussion and resource options.

**Skillshare:** You'll need to apply in order to be accepted as a teacher, but once you are, you will become part of an online community of experts who are interested in teaching students.

## Syndication

Syndication is when you allow your content to be reused elsewhere, as is. It gives your content exposure to new readers and an entirely different audience. Syndication might be manual, where you copy/paste or send the content to the new source, or it might be automatic, drawing from your blog's RSS feed.



### CREATE FULL RSS FEEDS.

While not everyone turns to feed readers to get content, those that do most likely find it frustrating when you only send out teaser content.

[Mike Sansone](#) compares truncated RSS feeds of your blog content to a sales phone call that you cut short and ask the customer to call you back. The message you're sending, Sansone says, is that you're more concerned about yourself (and getting traffic back to your blog) than you are your reader.

While some of your content may be behind a paywall or an email signup form, much of it must be freely available. It's about exposure, after all. Send out full feeds instead of partial ones and get your full content in front of your reader without making them do extra work. Because they probably won't. If you're relying on your RSS feed to send content for potential re-publishing, it goes without saying that partial feeds won't work.

### CHOOSE YOUR PROFESSIONAL CONTENT.

Some of your content makes a better candidate for syndication than others. For example, your rants or business announcements are not ideal.

According to content marketer [Jeff Bullas](#), the key to remember, particularly when syndicating on a site such as LinkedIn where your content is directly associated with your profile, is to make sure you remain professional. That is, your content should be of the best quality both in topic, research, and writing (grammar, typos, etc.).

### CHOOSE WEBSITES THAT ARE UPWARD.

There are no shortage of sites eager (and sometimes desperate) for content. There will always be someone who wants to syndicate your content. That doesn't mean that you should.

Always syndicate your content to a website that has a higher authority than your own. You should never syndicate "backwards", but always go up. And understand that someone who is scraping content from your site without your permission is not doing you any favors. Scraping is not syndication, and no reputable site will do it.

### IS DUPLICATE CONTENT BAD?

While some bloggers worry about the problem of duplicate content, this should not be an issue as long as you have the new site use the rel=canonical tag pointing back to your original article. This lets search engines know that this is just a copy, and that you are the original publisher. It will help you benefit from any links that come into that syndicated copy of your content.

The increased exposure and audience you can get from syndicating your content is well worth it.

### PLACES TO SYNDICATE YOUR CONTENT:

Industry newsletters or websites: If you are blogging in an industry with a newsletter, magazine, or other publication, contact them and offer your content.

**Medium.com:** This free blogging platform lets you publish beautiful blog posts that can be discovered by an entirely new audience. Readers can bookmark, comment, and share your posts.

**LinkedIn:** While the ability to blog on this social network originally was reserved for “influencers”, all users are now able to blog. It’s both a great way to build your profile and show your expertise as well as find a new audience.

**Business 2 Community:** If accepted, you can publish on this popular site either as a contributing writer or direct syndication, though you must make sure that your content follows their guidelines.

**Quora:** This social question and answer site is a good place to build a reputation as an expert. If you have content that answers a question, use it as an answer.

**Social Media Today:** By creating an account and connecting your blog’s RSS feed, posts that Social Media Today deems relevant to their audience will be republished on their site to a massive audience.

**Inbound.org:** You can share your own content on this great community for marketers, but be careful that you also share plenty of other content or you’ll be removed for spamming the board.

## Graphics / Slide Decks / Video

Blog posts with images and graphics get [94% more views](#) than those without. It’s no secret that images are powerful, particularly as social networks like Facebook and Twitter continue to adapt in order to highlight imagery more. Turning your written content into visual content is a great idea.

## THE POWER OF VIDEO.

According to [Fast Company](#), YouTube is seen by more adults between the ages of 18-34 than any cable TV network. While no one is promising that your video will go viral, you should definitely have a video presence.

Turn how-to content into helpful video tutorials. Create videos from your reviews, demonstrating products for your customers on camera. Create videos of your podcasts, or share your most popular content in the form of a teaching video.

### TOOLS FOR CREATING VIDEO:

YouTube has its own video editing and creation abilities, but if you want more than what they offer, or use video in a unique way, there are many options.

**Nutshell:** This iOS app creates fun and simple videos with captions and graphics that you can then easily share on social media.

**Magisto:** A simple, low-cost video editing available for mobile and desktop platforms using photos and videos, along with effects and sound.

**Meerkat** and **Periscope:** These apps are a bit different in that they offer live video footage in your Twitter stream. They make it easy for you to share live events with your followers.

**Vine:** This app allows you to create short, looping videos that you can easily share on social media.

## Bundled Content

Building a collection out of your old content creates something new. It's called a content bundle, and it taps into two classic marketing techniques: cross selling and upselling. These techniques convince customers to buy related products or higher end products.

Your content can do the same, with your old content adding value to your new content.

To create a content bundle, use your old content and:

1. Bundle with a service.
2. Bundle with related content.
3. Bundle with unrelated content.

“Like this post? You’ll love this ebook!” Or maybe “If you enjoyed our blog series, sign up for our free webinar and learn even more!”

The key is that your content bundle must be more valuable than each piece would be alone (upselling), it must be related to content the reader just consumed (cross selling), and it must be helpful to them.

By asking your audience to do something to access your content bundle, such as giving you their email list, answering a survey, or sharing a link on social media, you increase conversions.

### TOOLS TO BUNDLE YOUR CONTENT:

**Uberflip:** This service allows you to create hubs, which bundle your content (articles, social posts, video, ebooks, etc.) along with CTAs, in one mobile-responsive location.

## Ebooks

Free ebooks are ubiquitous on the web, and for good reason. They are a great tool for content marketers looking to build their email lists and reputation, and readers love the convenience of in-depth information in one download.

Pulling together content across a category on your blog, or from a series, is a smart way to repackage your content. In some way, you are writing ebooks chapter by chapter every time you write a blog post. Get in the habit of seeing your blog content as the foundation for many future ebooks.

### LAUNCHING YOUR EBOOK.

In January 2015, the first ebook we wrote together, 100 Days of Growth was downloaded over [1,000 times](#) in the first week it was released. How did we make this happen?

1. **The ebook was on a topic people were interested in.** This meant that it would also have high SEO value as well as be easy to promote.
2. **We built and launched a landing page for the book immediately, even before it was released.** We needed to create some buzz. It’s tempting to wait until the ebook is finished, but you end up launching to a “cold” audience instead of one primed for the ebook.
3. **We created a pre-order offer.** Because the landing page was live before the book was ready, we created a way for people to pre-order the ebook and get it for ½ the price. This

gave us an idea of how many people were interested in the book (justifying the cost put into creating it) as well as boost our credibility.

4. **We reached out to our network.** Using email, texting, social media, phone calls, and in-person conversations, we let people know about our book. That's how we built our initial traction.
5. **We made new connections.** By reaching out to new networks (Slack, social media, Quora, etc.), we kept the momentum rolling.
6. **The ebook was made for promotion.** Inside the ebook, we linked to studies, apps, influencers -- all kinds of useful resources for readers. By doing this, it was possible to reach out to everyone we mentioned in the book so that they could share it with their networks.
7. **We gave away a free sample.** Readers could download free chapters and get an idea of what content was in the full ebook.
8. **We participated in online communities.** By taking part in conversations happening in various online communities in an authentic way (and not spamming them with links to our landing page), we strengthened our reputation as experts.
9. **We talked about it everywhere.** In the week before launch, we didn't stay quiet. We talked and shared information about our ebook wherever we could.
10. **Launch day was a big deal.** On the day of launch, we didn't hold back. We texted, emailed, and were active on social media. We made sure everyone knew that today the ebook was available.

One key takeaway from this experience is that people are willing to help you launch a successful ebook if you ask them to in a real way. Relationships and authentic networks are valuable for this.

Also, the pre-launch efforts were also vital to our success. [Gabriel Weinberg](#), in discussing the launch of the ebook "Traction", agrees that was part of how they managed to surpass their goal of 10,000 ebook sales and actually sell over 12,000. The work you do before you launch is so important -- I can't overstate that enough. From data tracking to email traction lists, you need to prepare your audience for your ebook long before it's actually available.

## PLACE YOUR EBOOK WITH OTHER EBOOKS.

People won't find your ebook on their own. Where you make it available matters.

Your ebook belongs where all the other ebooks belong. In other words, you want to make your ebook available where people are looking for them. Weinberg's "Traction" ebook was available on Amazon, accounting for 4,500 ebook sales.

While your audience is looking for your ebook on your website and social profiles, they are also looking for them on places like iTunes and Amazon. Why not make your ebook freely available there, too? You might find new readers who would otherwise never find your site.

Your ebook belongs with other ebooks.

### TOOLS FOR CREATING AND DISTRIBUTING EBOOKS:

**PressBooks**: Built on the WordPress platform, PressBooks makes it extremely easy to create an ebook and effortlessly format it for PDF, EPUB, and MOBI. It comes with highly professional templates.

**Liber.io**: This service will convert your copy from Google Drive, Dropbox, and many more sources into an ebook.

**Papyrus Editor**: Easily import blog posts and convert them, using just the URL, into an ebook.

**Scribd**: What started out as document storage has grown to include a robust ebook distribution system. Upload your ebook and make it free, or for sale, easily.

**Smashwords**: This service works both a bit like a publisher and a distributor. Once your ebook is in their system, they will help you distribute it to online resellers.

**Blurb**: Blurb can create both ebooks and actual paper books using their BookWright software. They have a variety of distribution options.

## A New Audience

You can also repurpose your content for a new audience. Whichever content format you choose, you can target a different persona or subset of your audience.

For example, perhaps your content targeted an expert segment of your audience, or maybe males. Rework the content with an eye towards a the reader who is a beginner, or female.

Simply changing who you are thinking about as you rework the content will allow you to repurpose it into something brand new based on work and research you've already done. If you have different segments to your total email list, consider repurposing your content to target one of those segments, and targeting them with an email containing the new content.

SECTION 7:

# MEASURING SUCCESS

According to [Curata](#), the most common metrics bloggers use to measure success today are page views, shares or likes, and the time visitors spend on a site. An increasingly important addition to that list is to determine how their blog is affecting their sales funnel directly. Every content marketer has [their own favorite technique](#) in regards to SEO, content creation, promotion and so on, but however they choose to define and measure success, it *must be measured*.

Surprisingly, though, [49% of bloggers don't even check their analytics](#) to see how they are doing.

Without gathering data and monitoring how your content is performing, you simply cannot know when, where, or how to make changes. You won't know what works, what doesn't, and what your audience wants. In other words, you are creating content blindly.

## HOW AND WHAT YOU SHOULD MEASURE

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*The process of measuring how successful your content is starts with a definition of what success looks like, and then moves on to determining how you might measure that. Measurement isn't the end, though. You'll want to have a method to test and experiment to see if you can't get better results.*

### Define What Success Is

How do you define success? As with anything, you need to start with a definition of what you want to achieve. Measuring without knowing what you're looking for is a waste of your time, and, according to [ProBlogger](#), you won't know what to measure. You likely had reasons for starting content marketing. Did you want to:

- Generate income?
- Increase traffic?
- Get better user engagement?

- Increase social shares?
- Get more email subscribers?

If you don't know how you define success, you can't measure it. Write down what you want to achieve. You can change it later after you achieve your initial goal.

## Choose Your Metrics

Curata breaks content marketing metrics down into [eight possibilities](#):

1. **Consumption metrics.** These metrics answer how many people consume your content, as well as how frequently and in-depth they do so.
2. **Sharing metrics.** These metrics specify which content pieces get shared, as well as who is doing it and how it is done.
3. **Lead metrics.** These metrics indicate how well your content is generating leads.
4. **Sales metrics.** These metrics indicate how well your content is generating sales and income.
5. **Retention metrics.** These metrics will tell you how long your content holds your audience's attention span.
6. **Engagement metrics.** These metrics might be confused with sharing, but it's not the same. They indicate what readers are doing with your content beyond just social sharing, and how often they do it. QuickSprout founder [Neil Patel](#) looks at how many comments he gets on each post to determine an engaged audience. Without that, Patel asserts, you'll never convert readers to customers.
7. **Production metrics.** These metrics assess how well you or your team do in creating content. This includes content consistency, meeting deadlines, how long it takes you to create content, and so on.
8. **Cost metrics.** These metrics will help you see if you have a return on your investment when it comes to content marketing, and include how much each piece of content costs you to create.

The last two, production and cost, are unique in that they aren't measuring what your audience does, but how you and your team are doing. That's valuable insight, particularly if you are trying to determine if you need to make a change in how you approach content marketing.

You might not track all of these metrics, particularly if you are just starting out or the analytics tools you use can't provide this data. But this list is handy to have as far as suggesting the many possibilities you could use in your approach to what data you look for.



## Use A/B Testing

A/B testing is key to how you use your data to make changes. Data that you don't use to take action is dead data. But, when taking action, you have to do it in a controlled way so that you know precisely what changes do and do not work.

A/B testing is, essentially, two versions that you will test, and you have a definition of success with which to compare them two. Both versions are pitted against each other at the same time or in the same set of circumstances, and the winner will emerge.

A/B testing will often seek to find which color, placement, copy, wording, or offer gets the best results. A/B testing is commonly used with:

- Call-to-action buttons
- Headline versions
- Email subject line versions
- Website design
- Landing page copy
- Promotions and offers

That, by no means, is all you can A/B test. For example, [Buffer A/B tests everything](#) from the images they use in social media to publishing schedules. If you're looking to improve some aspect of your content marketing, test it.

A/B tests work best when done simultaneously, because it provides a better control. However, depending on the tool you are using or the test you are running, that may not always be possible.

Whatever the case, be sure you don't end your A/B test too early. The longer you let it run, the more data you can collect. More data provides confidence in what that data is telling you, and helps eliminate "coincidences" or data that doesn't actually show anything of significance in the long run. Less time equals less data equals higher margin of interpretive error.

Conversely, running a test too long means you'll lose conversions as visitors who see the less-preferred option will not convert as well as those seeing the other. [HubSpot](#), for example, doesn't recommend running an A/B test until you have at least 1,000 addresses on your list, and then uses different variables to determine how long the test should run based on analytics you've collected that tell you when your site visitors or email readers are most accurate.

Sometimes the results of an A/B test are surprising, but do trust the data. You may have preferred a different result, but go by data, not by a hunch or a gut feeling. You can't make data-driven decisions about your content marketing if you don't have the data, and A/B testing is a way to get directly comparative data.

### A/B TESTING TOOLS:

**Optimizely:** A full-featured service that gives you the ability to conduct a variety of tests, including A/B, on both your website and iOS apps.

**A/B Testing Calculator:** This handy calculator helps you determine how long you should run your A/B test without quitting too early or running it too long.

## IS YOUR CONTENT CONVERTING?

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How do you know if the content you create is converting readers into customers?

[Derek Edmond](#), for the Content Marketing Institute, points out that not every piece of content will convert in the same (and obvious) way because not every piece of content is meant to drive a direct sale. It's trickier to know if that type of content is pulling its weight and helping acclimate your audience to the possibility of a sale. Remember, the sales funnel starts with awareness, leads to consideration, and ends with a closing sale. Your content will be found all along that line.

So the answer of "yes" to the question of whether your content is converting will have a different set of variable depending where it is found along that sale funnel.

That's where key performance indicators (KPIs) come into play.

[Cathy McPhillips](#), also with the Content Marketing Institute, suggests a basic list of KPIs and how they might be measured:

- **Brand awareness.** Website traffic is a good indicator of brand awareness, as are page, video, and document views and downloads. Also consider how many fans are talking about your brand on social media, and how many referral links (if you offer them) are coming in.
- **Engagement.** Comments on your blog, any social activity, or inbound links from others writing about your brand are an indicator of how engaged your audience is.

- **Lead generation.** Email and blog subscriptions, completed surveys and forms -- measure how these lead generation techniques are faring.
- **Sales.** Whether online or offline, or even just anecdotal evidence of customers who have purchased, tracking who, when, how, and why will give you a better idea on what's going on with what's probably the most important income goal: your sales.
- **Loyalty.** Are your customers renewing subscription services? Do they keep responding to your blog month after month? Are they regularly promoting and conversing with you on social media? Think of all the ways your customers show loyalty. Measure it.

While many of these metrics are probably being measured already (e.g. website traffic), thinking of them in terms of KPIs and even creating a spreadsheet with this list in mind gives you a way to look at that data in light of how your content converts.

## USING GOOGLE ANALYTICS

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Google Analytics, though free, is a powerful tool for measurement that can do much of what we've mentioned. It will provide you with a variety of data (almost overwhelmingly so). Setting your dashboard up correctly is important if you want to accrue data that matters.

[Orbit Media](#) broke down the necessary steps you need to get going with Google Analytics, using a five-pronged approach.

1. **Set up goals.** When you set up goals in Google Analytics, you are preparing to gather the data that answers your definition of what success is. You may set up goals that show visitor activity, or how many people end up on your landing page.
2. **Set up filters.** Without filters, all traffic shows up in your data. That includes you, and any other team members. You want to keep your data clean and not skew it because of your own activity. Filters help you do this.
3. **Set up site search.** By using site search, you can gather data on what people are looking for on your site. This is useful in making future content decisions as well as pinpointing problems people have in finding information.
4. **Connect to Google Webmaster Tools.** It's a good idea to set up your site in [Google Webmaster Tools](#) anyway, but when you connect it to Google Analytics, the two will share data with each other. More data is good.
5. **Create dashboards.** Google Analytics allows you to create custom data dashboards for your website (or install dashboards others have created). Dashboards parse your data and make it easy to see key information at a glance.

Once you have everything set up, let the data accumulate so you can start to see patterns emerge. The [Content Marketing Institute](#) suggests three basic ways to use Google Analytics to measure your success.

- Traffic and time on a page.
- Referral traffic.
- Number of downloads.

Every content marketer, though, has a [different metric that they prefer to track](#). Your preference will differ from other content marketers because your definition of success isn't identical. As content analyst [Rebecca Lieb](#) has noted, it doesn't matter what other content marketers consider important metrics. The question you should be most concerned with is what metric or performance indicator is important to *your* business?

### TOOLS TO GROW YOUR AUDIENCE:

**Narrow.io:** This tool helps you build a targeted Twitter following by making it easy for you to connect with Twitter users who are interested in what you're promoting based on keywords or hashtags you provide.

**Moz:** One of the leading inbound marketing analytics services measuring how trustworthy a site is, popular search trends, SEO auditing tools, and more. Its mozRank is considered an alternative to Google's own PageRank.

## CONCLUSION

Content marketing, when seen as a whole, can seem incredibly complicated. Breaking it down, as we've done in this book, will help keep you from feeling overwhelmed.

It starts with ideas, always, and then flows into a process of good planning, organization, a healthy habit of promotion and data collection.

For the beginning content marketer, the key is to start, and to do so with a good foundational understanding. As you get more accustomed to creating content, you'll feel more confident about adding in the next layers.

# APPENDIX: REAL WORLD EXAMPLES OF CONTENT THAT WORKED

Sometimes content works, sometimes it doesn't. It's helpful to look at brands who struck gold and figure out why their content works. What's surprising is how different each brand approached their content, and how that unique approach worked for them *and* their audience.

## Making Content Your Product

The [Content Marketing Institute](#) featured The Waffle Shop, a Pittsburgh eatery, as an example of a business who made their content part of their core product. The Waffle Shop obviously sold waffles, but they also live-stream a talk show with their customers. Using an editorial calendar, they have segments such as "CookSpeak" and "Open Talk", among others. Each segment has its own audience (teens, general customers, foodies).



Instead of merely blogging about waffles and news, The Waffle Shop turned their content into their product. If you catch the show, you'll notice something important: their restaurant is packed.

## Playing Off Of Peripheral Content

At the start of this ebook, we talked about the value of peripheral content. Anthropologie, an American clothing and accessories retailer targeting women, stretched that periphery to the limit. They regularly create [blog posts about drinks](#) (with how-to recipes) that fit with current seasons and trends. That's very similar to their clothes -- seasonal and trendy.



As blogger [Heike Young](#) points out, Anthropologie isn't selling the ingredients that go into these trendy mixed drinks. They won't make money off of these recipes. Instead, they're selling their *brand*. They know their audience and they know they would be interested in these drinks. They are selling a lifestyle that fits with the customer who might buy their clothes.

## Complex Content And Product Integrations

The [#lookup campaign from British Airways](#) features digital billboards that actually interact with real flights going overhead.

British Airways #lookup campaign is beyond the technical capability and budget of most content marketers, but there is still something key to take from it: integrating your content directly with your product.

Seeing content as mere outside marketing approach limits both what it can do, and the ideas you might come up with in creating more. For British Airways, it wasn't enough to simply make a video. Instead, that video interacted with real flights, and it alerted viewers of the video which flight was going overhead.

Why not include a basic how-to blog post in the tag of a jacket you're selling? Or print a copy of your blog post on "Packing Light For A Long Trip" and package it inside that travel journal you're selling. Integrate your content with your product so the customer sees your content as integral to your product.

Interested in reading about more content marketing examples that were a success? Check out these resources. See if you can figure out what made the content work, remembering to note both the actual content as well as how it fit with a specific audience. Not every example will apply to your brand or niche, but you can learn a lot about product-market fit.

- [100 Content Marketing Examples](#) (CMI)
- [15 Great Content Marketing Examples from 2014](#) (CMI)
- [30 Genius Content Marketing Examples from 2014](#) (ExactTarget)
- [9 Of The Best Content Examples from 2013](#) (Econsultancy)
- [20 Epic Examples of Content Marketing](#) (Joe Pulizzi)
- [16 Content Marketing Examples That Hit The Sweet Spot](#) (Econsultancy)
- [20 Amazing Examples of Brand Content Marketing Hubs](#) (B2B Marketing Insider)
- [12 B2B Content Marketing Examples and Case Studies for 2014](#) (TopRank Blog)