KYLE GRAY

THE STORY ENGINE

AN ENTREPRENEUR'S GUIDE TO CONTENT STRATEGY AND BRAND STORYTELLING WITHOUT SPENDING ALL DAY WRITING

FOREWORD BY TOM MORKES

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Don’t forget to claim the templates and downloads that go with this book!

To help you put many of the ideas in the book into practice quickly, I have created some easy-to-use templates. They’re free to download and modify to fit your needs.

Grab them at

thestoryengine.co/resources

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Content marketing, a diamond in the rough

Content marketing is the most underrated and underutilized tool in the traditional online marketer’s toolkit.

That’s a shame because content marketing can be the most lucrative, compoundable form of marketing you can do for your business.

I’ll explain why in a second, but first, I think it’s worth exploring why so many people shy away from content marketing (at their own peril).

I’ve found there are two reasons why most people don’t invest in content marketing:

#1. Creating captivating and compelling content that turns new traffic into customers is hard. You can’t create great content that grows your business in 5 minutes a day (and anyone who promises something similar is lying). From strategy to execution, creating content that ranks in major search engines, gets readers to share and sign up for your list, and to eventually buy your products or services, takes time, money, and energy.

#2. You typically won’t find a profitable return on investment in the first month of deploying content. In most cases, it takes a great article or blog post about 6 to 12 months to generate enough traffic to validate the cost it will take to create it. This is a hard pill to swallow, especially when most marketers would reference the immediate ROI you could hypothetically get from paid advertising on platforms like Facebook or Google.

In other words: content marketing is for those who are playing the long game.

Most people just don’t want to invest months or years into something that may not turn a profit for many months or years down the road.

And that’s where you and I, if we’re willing to put in the work, can profit greatly.

In my own experience, content marketing is the reason I was able to go from $0 *year to multiple 6-figures* year in less than 3 years. And this growth is looking to continue.

Why?

Because great content gets more valuable over time.

Of course, the question then becomes: how do I create great content?

Enter: “The Story Engine” by Kyle Gray

I met Kyle Gray on a remote island in Thailand when Kyle first started working for Dan Norris. We were both doing the “digital nomad” thing and, as luck would have it, we both started working for Dan around the same time. My work was focused on positioning and marketing his first book “The 7 Day Startup.”

As Kyle highlights in “The Story Engine,” that book, which started as a series of blog posts on the WP Curve blog, went on to be a massively successful bestseller that generated new interest in WP Curve, as well as helped Dan spin off his own personal branded business.

This is one of many stories that Kyle shares in “The Story Engine” that both prove the point that content marketing is powerful, even beyond growing your business, and to demonstrate that there is a replicable system - a science - behind great content creation. This book will show you what that is, how it works, and how to implement it for your own business (or personal ambitions).

Too long, didn't read:

What I'm trying to say is this:

1. Everyone who is in business for the long haul should create content regularly.
2. Those who plan to create content regularly should read and follow this book.

"The Story Engine" will provide you the strategy, framework, and process to turn content marketing from a sometimes confusing, difficult task into a manageable process for growing business.

I highly recommend you buy a copy for yourself and everyone on your team who is involved in content creation. You won't be disappointed.

PART I - UN INTRODUCTION TO CONTENT MARKETING

Chapter 1 - Baptism by fire

I was on my way to Thailand to start working for a startup. I was going to meet my boss for the first time, in Bangkok at a conference for location-independent entrepreneurs.

The startup was called WP Curve. It was a small but rapidly growing company that provided “unlimited small WordPress fixes at a monthly membership fee.” In little more than a year, this startup had grown from a tiny bootstrapped team to a thriving company.

What was unique about this startup’s rapid progress was that its primary and exclusive driver for growth was content marketing. WP Curve’s content was getting the same results for pennies that most companies hope for when they sink thousands of dollars into advertising. My boss, Dan Norris, was a cofounder of WP Curve, and had spent many years carefully honing his craft in content marketing. His was a hard-won skill that came from trial and error, relentless attention to detail, and from a bold sense of generosity toward his audience.

As I was joining Dan’s company, all that hard work was all beginning to pay off. WP Curve was growing quickly, Dan had his first speaking opportunity at this conference in Bangkok, and he had just launched his first book (of many), “The 7 Day Startup,” which was wildly successful.

Content marketing is a demanding craft and it was difficult for Dan to balance it with the demands of managing a growing business and personal brand. That’s where I came in.

My job was to take over the content marketing operations for WP Curve, to transform the blog from a one-man show to a thriving and scalable team of writers. I was to do all of this without compromising the quality that had lead to the blog’s hard-earned recognition.

The plan was for me to work remotely from Thailand, which allowed for a good quality of life at a low cost, and which lined up nicely with the Australian time zone where Dan lived and worked.

The three days of the conference passed in a blur; there were documentaries being filmed, hundreds of fascinating conversations taking place, early risers looking to make new connections at the breakfast bar, and night owls ready to explore the Bangkok nightlife. Between sessions and meetups we would meet in his room to discuss our strategy and goals for WP Curve’s content. With our high energy and enthusiasm, ideas were flying and ambitious goals were set.

After the conference Dan returned to Australia and I remained in Thailand to begin my work.

The struggle begins

My performance metrics were simple: publish ten long-form blog posts a month on the WP Curve blog. I did not have to write all the posts myself, but I was ultimately responsible for ensuring that they met the quality standards Dan expected.

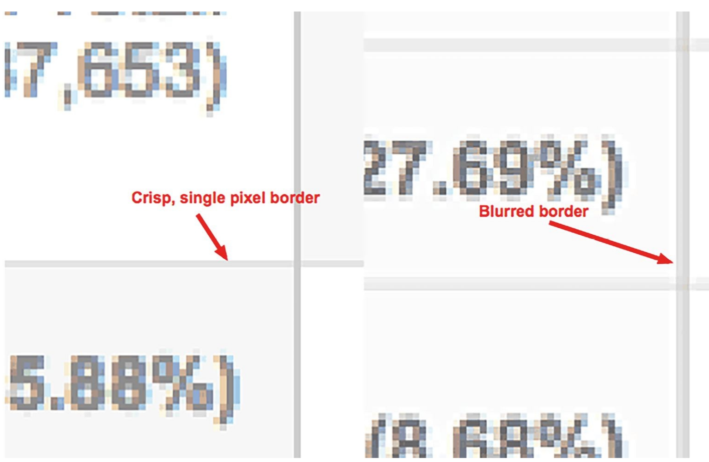
Looking back, I must admit that I had no idea what I was getting into. I had just finished a master's degree, so I had a great deal of writing under my belt. But writing for one professor or a small group of peers is completely different than writing for an audience of thousands of entrepreneurs, marketers, startup founders, and other ridiculously talented people. I had some experience in digital marketing, in running a business, as well as other foundational skills to draw upon, but it was clear that I had a lot more to learn about writing for and speaking to this audience.

My initial expectations were way out of line. I thought content marketing would be easy. I imagined I could sit down in the morning, whip up a great article and by the time I finished lunch it would be viral. I thought coming up with unique, valuable ideas would be easy for me. Before I started, I was sure I would achieve some degree of internet fame (because that's what's important) after only a few months of work. Finally, I expected that between all the spectacular content I was creating I'd have plenty of time to grow my own business. Not to mention time to enjoy the new exotic country I was living in.

I did not hit the ground running. The content I created came slowly at first. Where Dan could sit down and write 13 blog posts in a day (yes, he really did this), I had to fight for every word. On top of actually writing the post, there was graphic design, search engine optimization, social media and influencer outreach that needed to be considered for each post. Still, creating content wasn't even my biggest problem.

I had never worked remotely before. Learning how to effectively communicate with my team using tools like Slack and Trello was unexpectedly challenging. I quickly realized that many subtleties of tone and body language are lost in remote work, and that all remote communication needs to be geared toward producing results.

Dan had an unparalleled attention to detail, which at first, to me, was almost incomprehensible. He wanted quality on a pixel-by-pixel basis. For example, when we shared our monthly reports on the blog, we shared screenshots of our Google Analytics dashboard. Images to be posted on the blog needed to be pre-formatted to the exact width of our reading column (this helped the post load faster). At first, I would just try to resize them in photoshop, but Dan repeatedly rejected my images because they were "blurred."



My trying to meet and understand these quality standards lead to a lot of back and forth between me and Dan to create passable content. This challenge was compounded by my budding abilities with remote work.

Still more challenging was working with our guest writers. I needed to hold them to the same quality standards that I was attempting to achieve. Each writer had different needs and timelines to get their work done. But I had one timeline, one goal: to get those ten pieces of content published. My task often felt like herding cats with a sandstorm approaching.

Down for the count

After about three months working for WP Curve, I was ready to give up. I was frustrated, exhausted, and completely terrified to open my computer each morning. The clicking noise Slack made when I received a new message would make my heart skip a beat. I felt I was constantly on the edge of being fired, always fearing that my next mistake would be my last.

I had produced a few very good articles that were well-received by the audience, but I was nowhere near hitting our publishing goals.

Most of the time, it would take much longer to create the content than I expected.

Self-doubt had taken ahold of me and I wondered if I would ever be able to hit those goals. I began to doubt if content marketing was something I would ever be good at, or if I could make it in the fast-paced world of startups and entrepreneurship.

I decided to muster the courage I had left and to give it one more month. I would give it my all. But I knew a brute force attempt to create all the content myself would fail; I needed to revisit the systems that were in place and make them work for me.

The comeback

"Leadership must focus on improving processes, not on performing the work or on repeatedly snuffing out brushfires. Quality products or services, a stable staff, and profitability are the result of the quality systems that underlie them, not the reverse."

- Sam Carpenter, Work The System: The Simple Mechanics of Making More and Working Less

I started by digging into our standard operating procedures and documents, and then tailoring them to meet my needs and to reflect my understanding of the expectations for the blog. Before I began working on them, these documents were incomplete and vague. Dan was one of the best in the world at creating standard operating procedures, but he did not need them for creating content. That task specifically was effortless for him after spending years honing this craft. So, he had not spent much time documenting the process and procedures for his content strategy.

In his book "The 4-Hour Chef," Tim Ferriss explains an interesting paradox about masters when it comes to sharing their process with others:

> *"Then there is the second danger of hero worship, career specialists often can't externalise what they internalise, the second nature is very hard to teach and this is true across industries. As Erik Cosselmon, Executive Chef of Kokkari, my favourite Greek Restaurant in San Francisco said to me when I did my novice questioning 'the problem with me is that I have always been a cook, I don't remember ever wanting to be something else.'*
>
> *Daniel Burka a designer at Google and the cofounder of tech startup*

called Milk echoes the sentiment ‘I don’t think I would be particularly good at teaching the basics of CSS (a language used for the formatting of web pages), now I do twelve things at once and they all make sense. I can’t remember which one of those were confusing when I was just starting out.’

These top 1.0% have spent a lifetime honing their craft they are invaluable in later stages but they are not ideal if you want to rocket off the ground floor.”

In many ways, the inexperience that made my first few months so challenging made me the best person for this job. I had the advantage of “the beginner’s mind;” my ignorance was an asset.

I took nothing for granted--there was no part of the process that didn’t required thought and direct attention on my part. So, I was able to translate all of these necessary details into the documents to make them work. I needed every step spelled out for me, so I was able to spell out every step. To survive, I needed these documents to be effective, and they would not have worked if that need wasn’t ever-present as I made my revisions.

I reworked and reorganized the processes so they were easier for me to follow. I went back through all the feedback I had been given over the first few months and translated it into a style guide with detailed screenshots and checklists. Each document was numbered and organized so it could be cited: *“Check section 5-C for our image guidelines.”* I created timelines for each step of content creation process that I expected guest writers to follow.

I examined our editorial calendar in Trello and created a color coordinated labeling system so I could see at a glance the status of all of the posts that were planned and that were in the process of being created. I was able to plan out the month's content in advance and manage all of my communication with the writers in one place.

By focusing on these processes, I was finally able to hit my monthly goal of ten posts. Some of the best posts I would ever write on the WP Curve blog were written during that month.

One year later…

The following year I was able to hit our goals of creating content at the volume and quality that was expected. Traffic to the blog grew at about 10% month over month. Working with guest writers became almost effortless.

Our writers were also grateful for our systems, which eliminated most of the vagueness in expectations and back-and-forth that is a constant source of frustration for many freelance writers and content creators.

Our articles describing our content creation processes and how we managed our documentation became some of the most popular posts on the blog, and were consistently generating new leads and email subscribers who were interested in using them in their own businesses.

Content managers from brands like Foundr Magazine began to adopt our documents and systems to manage their publishing.

Don't reinvent the wheel

You're probably not as lucky as I was to have someone like Dan constantly pushing your limits and showing you what it takes to create truly great content. Instead of a mentor you probably only have silence and confusion as you work to get your content marketing campaign off the ground. That silence can be deafening if you have a growing business to worry about.

This book is what I wish I could have given to my starry-eyed self to read on the plane ride over to Thailand. Though I can’t go back in time to help myself out, I can help you.

I fear many people experience the same pains and frustrations that I did as they try to begin or to scale up their content marketing efforts. Many people give up before getting the results they seek, or before even establishing the systems necessary to reap the rewards of content. Most, like I did myself, put the cart before the horse when they approach content creation. Even as a one-person team, the right documentation can simplify and clarify your approach to content.

You don’t need to reinvent the wheel; most of the systems and templates I describe in this book can be applied to a lot of different businesses and brands with only a few small tweaks to make them fit with your own content marketing goals.

What you’ll find in this book

This book is broken up into 4 key sections, each a crucial aspect of content marketing. The chapters are arranged so that the ideas build on each other. The chapters each begin by first explaining foundational concepts and strategies, then later dive into specific tactics.

Part 1 - Introduces content marketing and what kinds of businesses should be using it.

Part 2 - Explores the “big picture” behind content marketing and helps you set up the foundational tools and strategies that ensure long-term success in your content marketing campaign.

Part 3 - Dives into content creation. We'll look at everything from coming up with unique ideas for new content, to breathing fresh life into old content.

Part 4 - Outlines various strategies and techniques you can use to support your content marketing campaign, from using paid traffic to promote your content to building a team of writers to help scale up your content creation.

How to use this book

There are several approaches to this book. It can be read front to back to explore all of content marketing or it can be used as a reference to solve specific problems that you're experiencing.

If you are new to content marketing - If you're totally new to content marketing and you want to understand the whole process I recommend reading this book front to back.

If you understand content marketing but want to get better - If you already practice content marketing and have a grasp on the fundamentals, then I recommend using this book as more of a playbook. Jump around to chapters that are most relevant to you and the challenges you're facing.

If you want to delegate your content marketing as soon as possible - Give this book a read-through so you understand the concepts and the language and then give it to the team member who will take on the responsibilities of content marketing.

I have templates that allow you to quickly put the ideas and strategies from this book into action. Each chapter in the Foundations section has a template that corresponds with it. These templates can be downloaded for free at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 2 - The invisible value of content

Content marketing is a black swan in the world of digital marketing. With an ever-growing suite of data-tracking tools out there, it seems that every individual action taken online can be measured out in dollar value. This is not so with content marketing; some of the highest-impact results of creating great content cannot be measured or even anticipated.

Often content marketing strategies are described and measured with philosophies adopted from others areas of digital marketing: conversion rates, customer avatars, sales cycles, clickthroughs and calls to action. All of these focus on an immediate and measureable ROI (return on investment). The result is that many of us see our content as little more than a landing page or sales letter. Though these are important things to consider, treating your content marketing like a landing page will undercut your results in the long run. By focusing so closely on this particular “tree,” you’ll miss the forest.

Patrick Hourihan writes about the unique nature of content in his article “How content marketing can deliver a new ROI – Return on Inspiration:”

> *“We are witnessing an evolution of the content marketing purchase cycle, where people are jumping in at various stages. The purchase funnel is becoming less linear, more organic and fluid, with content marketing helping brands drive other goals such as brand building and relationship building, as well as driving sales.”*

This presents a problem for most traditional marketing strategies that focus on targeting a specific pain point at a specific moment in the buyer's journey. The broader set of goals that content is driving also makes it difficult to pin a dollar value on interactions. The good news is that although they can be difficult to track, the rewards of content marketing go far beyond simple sales and conversions.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that your content should not be seen as a tool to generate traffic, leads, and revenue for your business. These are all essential functions of your content. But I would like you to consider a broader philosophy that will open you up to all the incredible serendipity and opportunity that content marketing uniquely provides, all while boosting those classic metrics.

Unfortunately many of these benefits can't be tracked in Google Analytics or anticipated with any degree of certainty. But with a few tweaks to some of the language you use surrounding your content, you should be able to aim for them and see them come to fruition.

To this end, consider the value of...

- ...a reader who is not an "ideal customer," but who is a raving fan, who promotes your content to others.
- ...a more talented recruiting pool that's inspired to work with you after reading your content.
- ...meeting future colleagues or business partners who are inspired to collaborate with you through content.
- ...new strategic partners for your business who noticed when you linked to them in a post they enjoyed.
- ...a new investor in your business who appreciates the quality of the content you create.

The common thread between all these possibilities suggests that content marketing is a tool for building relationships and creating awareness. Now, I can't guarantee to you that any of these things will happen, but they are much more likely to happen if you see the content you create as more than just a landing page. In this chapter, I'll discuss examples where these valuable opportunities arose for a few startups that chose to focus heavily on content marketing.

So, what's possible with content?

Content marketing casts a broad net to attract attention. Many of the readers you attract through content will not be ideal customers. Though they may not make a purchase with you, if they are engaged with what you are creating, they are likely to become brand ambassadors and to refer you to ideal customers whenever they have the chance. Most of these interactions will happen offsite or in-person, away from any tracking pixels.

Alex Turnbull, founder of GrooveHQ, mentions this in his post "How We Grow Our Business By Marketing To The "Wrong" People:"

> *"There are a tremendous number of readers who aren't Groove customers. But, through reading our content, they've become fans of Groove. While not all of these readers need customer support software, many of them have friends or coworkers that eventually do. And when they ask for recommendations, our readers are the first to jump in and suggest Groove."*

Dan Norris, found a cofounder for WP Curve with complementary skills through content marketing. In the post "Is startup validation bullshit?", Dan discusses his challenges getting traction with Informly despite meeting the criteria for a "lean startup." This post generated over a hundred comments and resonated with future WP Curve cofounder, Alex McClafferty. You can still see the beginnings of the partnership between Dan and Alex in the comments on that post. This partnership would eventually carry WP Curve to 7-figures in revenue and lead to the startup being acquired by GoDaddy. In the comments on that post, there's even some foreshadowing of Dan's book "The 7 Day Startup."

Alex Turnbull has had similar experiences with content driving the recruitment for his business. He writes, *"We have 3 full-time team members who all first heard about Groove from our blog. Each of them individually reached out to me at different times about working for us, and each of them turned out to be terrific hires. When you put yourself out there as a company, people really get to know you. So when a reader wants to work for you, they typically already know what you're all about, and the cultural fit tends to be much better than candidates who apply via a job posting site."*

Alex has even managed to build relationships with high profile entrepreneurs and attract their help through content marketing. Groove will shortly be announcing that a new investor and advisor is joining their team. They made this connection initially through their blog interview series.

How to optimize for the hidden value of content marketing

A common mistake most content marketers make is focusing on a customer avatar with specific pain points and trying to write directly to those pain points. This may work for a short term interaction like a Facebook ad, but as we have seen in the case studies above, content marketing is more about relationships. Some of your audience may follow you for years without converting.

Dan Norris mentions this in his book "Content Machine:"

"Some people in the community might end up becoming a customer. They might fit your profile directly. Most, however, will simply become consumers and advocates of your content. Some may read it and occasionally engage with it (comment or share). Others might become raving fans and share it with everyone they know. These are all good results, because they get your brand in front of more people through more sources."

Content as recruiting

One possible way to reframe the customer avatar is to define it as someone you would like to recruit to your team. You want to write content that inspires that person to join you in your vision. Writing in this way fundamentally changes how you write and what you write about. This team member could end up being a small advocate for your content or your next big investor.

Gregory Ciotti from Help Scout uses this strategy in his content and describes the process below.

> *"One of the most important 'jobs' content is responsible for is recruiting; well-written articles are absolutely a recruiting strategy and often a first impression. Whether they're introduced to your company through the blog or they've learned about how you work via pieces included in your job postings, curious candidates want to find out everything they can, and they'll do so with what you publish.*
>
> *With the 'content as recruiting' concept well understood, you'll keep higher standards for your publishing, you'll have an easier time encouraging your teammates to write, and you'll be more deliberate with transparency. If there's 1 "reader persona" to always be mindful of, it's the future talented teammate who may become attracted to your team and company because of what you publish. There's no way to measure that."*

The Help Scout team uses this 'content as recruiting' strategy in nearly every interaction with their readers, not just on the blog. In the post "Building a Newsletter Welcome Series from Scratch," Gregory describes how he continues to build trust in their newsletter welcome series. Each email gives you a glimpse into the culture of Help Scout and the people on the team.

Each email in their sequence strives not only to add value and share relevant content, but also fosters a personal connection with the reader. The content is not simply delivered as a list of links, but as a recommendation from a Help Scout employee. It builds trust when your readers can see that a real person enjoyed the article that they're about to read and it also gives your audience a glimpse at who that person is and what they value. The inverse is also true, your top-shelf content will lend credibility to the person that recommended it.

The lens of relationship-building

In later chapters, we'll get into more detailed strategies to apply this philosophy of "content as recruiting" to all elements of your content. I encourage you to see all the future chapters, strategies, and templates that I share through this lens. This perspective will change how you take in this information and how you design your future content. It will improve the quality of what you do and add deeper meaning to it.

For now, here are a few tips you can start to use right away:

Design for trust and readability - Don't bombard your audience with pop-ups or other distractions to the content they came for. Make your opt-ins timely and non-invasive so they appear as a logical next step to take after consuming your content.

Create content that allows for readers to grow into ideal customers - Meryl Johnson, CEO of Bean Ninjas, considers her ideal customer to be an online business that's making six figures. But her content strategy targets people in much earlier stages of their business. She has many great articles on how a bootstrapper can manage their bookkeeping with Xero. The bootstrapper she writes the article for may not be an ideal customer now, but they are on their way to becoming one. In 6-12 months, they may hit that 6 figure mark, and by then, they'll have a well-established relationship with Bean Ninjas and want to buy from them.

Be authentic and transparent - Tell stories that are relatable and that resonate with your audience. Don't only talk about victories; be honest about your mistakes and challenges, and share what you've learned from them. This often feels risky; content that is authentic and emotionally relatable can make you feel vulnerable. This fear is strongest when you're doing your best work.

Being authentic also means that you may need to share ideas that are contrarian or controversial. Peter Thiel puts it best when he asks, *"What important truth do very few people agree with you on?"* in the book "Zero to One." The posts where you truly speak your mind and share unpopular ideas or kill a "sacred cow" are the articles that energize your audience and create an emotional connection to your brand.

Give actionable advice - Be detailed when instructing or guiding your readers to a solution. By the time they finish reading your post, they should know exactly what steps they need to take to get a certain result.

Show that you care - Respond to comments, tweets and emails, and try to add more value if they ask a question. Also, ask people who share your content what they enjoyed most about it or if there is something else they are hoping to see on your blog.

Give your best stuff away - Try to give away as many useful things as you can. You don't always even need to ask for an email address. Create templates, guides, checklists; provide things that the reader can take away from the post.

Conclusion

In this age where data is king, it can be challenging for marketers to step away from the analytics dashboard and focus on the less tangible aspects of content marketing. However, it’s clear that the fruits of content marketing go far beyond simple leads and sales.

Writing to inspire, teach, and engage readers will enlist them in your vision and in your mission. If you focus on the relationship aspect of content marketing, you will experience a return on investment that cannot be measured.

Chapter 3 - What kinds of businesses should use content marketing?

Content marketing is a strategy with advantages and drawbacks. It’s well-suited for some types of businesses and not so well-suited for others. Certain aspects of your business will help you determine what your approach should be.

In this chapter we’ll explore some of the business models that tend to benefit the most from a strong content marketing campaign.

Digital products

Digital products like courses, online communities, and templates work well with content marketing because of how easily they scale. Digital products can add huge value to a customer but generally have very little overhead. This allows the business to focus a lot of investment--time and money--in marketing.

Some common digital products include:

- Online courses
- Ebooks
- Memberships and communities
- Software and tools

Digital products are also excellent for content marketing because they can instantly be delivered anywhere. With content marketing, you can target a global audience without worrying about expensive shipping or fulfillment.

Recurring revenue

Recurring revenue means your customers are paying on a monthly, quarterly or sometimes annual basis. Recurring revenue products often take the form of services, software, or online memberships.

Content marketing efforts are great for attracting customers to this type of business, but what's truly special about content for this type of business is that it can also help retain customers.

For recurring revenue businesses, the biggest threat to survival is churn. Churn is the rate at which people unsubscribe from a service. Most software as a service (SaaS) providers know this number well and spend a lot of time thinking about it.

Content marketing allows you to continually provide added value to your current customers as well as to your prospective customers. By creating content that helps customers be more successful (either when using your product or in related areas of life/business), you encourage your customers to stick around.

Good content can help with customer onboarding. When beginning to use SaaS products and online communities, new customers often become overwhelmed. By stringing some of your most helpful content together in a "bootcamp" style email series to introduce your product, you avoid overwhelming your customers and keep them from leaving.

High lifetime value customers

Lifetime value measures the value of customers over their whole relationship with you. Sometimes this can mean one purchase of a recurring product, or perhaps it means your customer is purchasing many products over time.

If you have customers with a high lifetime value, then content is a great play. High lifetime value usually comes from recurring revenue products like what we discussed, or from a suite of products ranging in price from low ($1-7) to very high (thousands to tens of thousands).

Such a big purchase is not a decision to be made lightly. Content helps to build trust with your potential clients, to educate them about your process and your brand, and to demonstrate your expertise in an area so they know they'll be getting good value with you.

Understanding the lifetime value of your customers allows you to be more generous with them through your content and in the early stages of your sales. It does not feel like such a big deal to give away a digital (or even physical) copy of the book that you worked hard to create if you know there's a good chance that you'll sell some of your more profitable products down the road as a result.

Businesses that benefit from educating their customers

Educating your customers with content that helps them understand and solve their problems is common in the B2B (business to business) world. However, many B2C (business to consumer) brands can benefit from content creation as well.

Daniel Galle from Nolah Mattress (http://nolahmattress.com/) creates content to help people make the right choice when buying a mattress online. He knows that most of his audience will be buying a mattress online for the first time, and may be hesitant. He provides great information to help guide a consumer through common pitfalls of buying a mattress online. This content would be helpful even if the reader didn't end up buying from him.

Kate Galliett from Fit For Real Life (http://fitforreallife.com/) is an online fitness and mobility coach. She helps people recover from the chronic aches and pains that people write off as "getting old" and to move and play like they were young again. She regularly publishes articles and videos with useful exercises for common problems. These posts bring a lot of awareness to her business, even if they don't always result in direct sales.

Amy Cazin from Primal Pit Paste (https://primalpitpaste.com/), a natural deodorant company, educates her audience on the health effects of artificial ingredients in personal care products. Illustrating some of the downsides of the big brands she competes with helps her to differentiate herself and to attract customers who are looking for healthier products.

All kinds of coaches and consultants can benefit from having content that tells their own stories and experiences. Often this means creating content that shows their target customer how to get the results the coach promises, all on their own. This generous sharing makes them feel more relatable and establishes credibility and expertise.

Local businesses

Local businesses that depend on a local audience are often limited in their options for content marketing. The broad net that content marketing casts is reduced by the need to focus on a specific area.

Tourism is a big exception to this. Businesses that work in tourism can create content to help incoming tourists plan their vacations and recreation activities. This kind of content gets their business offerings in front of the consumer at the perfect time.

Conclusion

If your business does not quite fit the mold for content marketing, it is possible to pivot into a model that does. Though I don’t recommend reinventing your business for the sake of your marketing strategy, you should be aware that you can always change course.

For example, Kate Galliett--the fitness coach mentioned above--used to own a brick and mortar gym. She had a strong local client base but was dissatisfied with the limitations of her business. So she closed the gym down and took a new direction. Over time, she developed a following online and created an online training program to replace her face-to-face personal training. Now most of her new customers discover her through her blog or through the videos that she shared.

PART II - CONTENT MARKETING FOUNDATIONS

The point of this section is to identify many of the common reasons content marketing campaigns fail, and to help you create systems that protect against these. We'll learn how to ensure long-term success with your content and how to take advantage of the full spectrum of opportunities that content marketing can offer a business.

Most people who are new to content marketing dive into it head first. They get a sense of artistic zeal and start creating blog posts. They create when the feel inspired, but the “honeymoon” period wears off soon and the inspiration dries up.

Other business owners have incredible stories to tell, but are too busy managing their businesses to have time for writing. Writing has a steep learning curve, and spending several hours a day practicing is usually not an option. Although there are plenty of writers out there who could help the business person in need, a team of writers can be difficult to manage. Thus, that business owner's story goes untold.

Most blogs fail before they ever get a significant amount of traction. Here are a few reasons this commonly happens:

Shiny object syndrome - When inexperienced content creators discover a new trend, tool, or tactic, they often attempt to cram it into their content marketing systems. Their team has to change course to make the tool fit. The content changes so much that it can't get traction or build trust with the audience.

No differentiation - Content marketing is extremely competitive in most industries, and strategies that don't differentiate often don't rise above the noise.

Isolation - Often, an early blog will only focus on directly promoting a product and its features. This comes across as self promotional to the readers and typically does not get much traction.

Keywords over value - Many marketers are adept at finding great keywords to put into their articles, but don’t solve the problems that their audience is wrestling with.

Burnout - Content marketing can be demanding and time-intensive. Without a larger context and a “why?” behind the work, many people can burn out on content.

Can’t scale - Often a single founder will work on the blog. Over time that founder may want to make a hire to help create content, but their new hire can’t capture the original voice and spirit that the audience fell in love with in the first place.

In this section we’ll look at the foundations of your content strategy and set up the systems you’ll use to guide your content marketing campaign.

What’s the big picture?

This section does not focus on content creation; it looks at the systems and tools you’ll use behind the scenes of your content creation.

You will learn how to discover what topics your audience wants to hear about, and how to build your content around those topics.

Once these systems are set up, you’ll have a clear idea of the purpose of your content, as well as who you want to reach out to and collaborate with to serve that purpose. You’ll know how to take your vision and turn it into something bigger than yourself. You’ll create the storyline for your company.

These systems will become an asset that you can hand off to a content manager, thus enabling others to reliably create content that serves the original vision you created.

You'll learn how to create your own systems and processes that you can delegate to your team to save yourself time and to make sure tasks get carried out in a predictable way. This can have applications far beyond just content marketing.

You'll learn how to leverage your content to create opportunities to collaborate with other influencers in your space. This may result in thought leaders promoting your content. You may find yourself getting more search traffic, and other serendipitous opportunities might appear as a result of your collaboration.

You'll learn how a little bit of work up front can save countless hours down the road. This will streamline your content creation and allow you to scale that process quickly and easily.

What should you keep in mind while reading this section?

Though none of the documents or systems that we discuss in this section will be forward-facing, they are incredibly important. Investing in developing and mastering these tools now will save you hundreds if not thousands of hours in the long-run. You'll be able to grow and delegate to your content team with ease, while always understanding what's happening with your publishing.

Remember to be patient with yourself and to take a good amount of time putting together your content strategy. It probably won't be perfect at first, but over the course of months you'll hone in on what works for you.

As you're reading these chapters, think about your journey with your business; the victories, defeats, inspirations, frustrations, and lessons learned. Which of these stories do you like to tell? Which seem to capture the attention of the people you're speaking to? Which offer valuable nuggets of wisdom another business owner could use? These ideas and stories will come in handy as we create your strategy and find what you can uniquely offer the world through content.

Remember that many of the tools and systems like a content strategy, style guide, keyword bank, and key relationships are all available as templates at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Key terms and concepts

Before we dive in, let's prime you on a few terms so you'll be able to take in the ideas in the following chapters without having to research the definitions.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) - SEO is the practice of getting your content to appear in search engines when someone enters a specific term. The higher on the list of search results you can appear, the better.

Long Tail Keywords - Long tail keywords are common keywords with added descriptions. They don't get as much traffic as more general keywords, but because they are more specific, they are easier terms to target to achieve high search engine ranks. An example of a long tail keyword might be taking a keyword like "ski boots" and changing it to "blue cross country ski boots."

Lead magnet - This is a downloadable piece of content that your site visitors trade in exchange for granting you access to their contact information. To your visitors it's a helpful "next step" to take after reading a post; for you it serves the crucial role of gathering emails and building your list.

SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) - This is a written document, often step-by-step instructions, that explains how to carry out a certain task.

Let's get started!

Chapter 4 - What makes a successful content marketing strategy?

Four years ago Alex Turnbull, CEO & Founder of Groove, a customer service SaaS, hated Fridays. Friday was the day that their metrics provider would send a weekly summary of their numbers for that week. And those numbers reminded him that his company was on the edge of collapse, a few months away from running out of cash.

Up to this point, their marketing efforts hadn't been working. Nobody was visiting their site; nobody was buying their product. Faced with a "gun to the head" situation, they decided to rework their content marketing strategy. As Alex puts it, *"We realized that there was an entire world beneath the surface of content marketing strategy that we had been missing the entire time."*

They ditched their blog that focused on customer service and started to research and talk with businesses about what they actually needed help with. They found most businesses had problems just like theirs; challenges like cash flow, hiring, marketing. So Groove reworked their strategy to genuinely help people with these issues:

> *"Just as we did with our product, we decided to rebuild our content marketing strategy from the ground up with an eye towards what could actually help our market, rather than what we thought might look nice*

on a blog" (Alex Turnbull).

Three years after making this transformation, Groove now has a quarter million visits each month and 5 million dollars in annual recurring revenue. They credit this all to the changes they made to their content marketing strategy.

"You can find this full story on the Groove blog in the article titled: Behind the Scenes: "How We've Built a $5M/Year Business in 3 Years With Content Marketing.""

When most people start with content marketing they think that they just need to start writing. So they write, write, and write until their hands fall off. Many people start content marketing by just creating only when they feel inspired. Their content ends up being scattered and never gets any traction. While the ability to produce a lot of content is certainly valuable, that alone will not get you the results you are looking for.

Content marketing is a long-term marketing play. It takes a while to see results. The impact of each piece of content is subtle. Your content builds up over time and each piece adds to the cumulative effect.

If your content focuses on a certain audience and goal, each piece will contribute toward achieving those goals, like a team of rowers in sync. Unfocused content without defined goals is more like a tug of war game, a lot of effort but little movement.

A documented content marketing strategy gives you the focus and clarity to create content that moves your business forward.

Why should you have a content strategy?

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." –

Yogi Berra

A strategy keeps you consistent; it crystallizes your ideas and your vision, and it enables you to share that vision in a clear way. It protects you from the risk of getting caught up in “shiny object syndrome,” following whatever new marketing trend appears. Having a written strategy document also gives you a tool to make decisions on your content.

Your strategy is also the foundation for building a content marketing team. It creates something bigger than yourself that your team members can understand, identify with, and reference in their work.

Your strategy must be documented

Take a look at these statistics from the B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America showing the dramatic difference a well-articulated, documented content marketing strategy can make for your business.

> *"Last year, 35% of B2B marketers had a documented content strategy, 48% had a verbal-only strategy, and 14% had no strategy. A documented content marketing strategy impacts effectiveness:*
>
> - *53% of the most effective marketers have a documented content marketing strategy*
> - *40% of the least effective marketers have no strategy at all."*

Just by having a documented strategy you put yourself at a big advantage compared to most companies.

Here's an exercise to demonstrate what might get lost in translation with a verbal-only strategy. Recall a picture of a landscape with many distinctive features. Maybe from a vacation you enjoyed.

Now, call a friend who is great at drawing and ask her to draw a picture of that landscape for you, using simply the description that you provide over the phone. Take as much time as you can describing it to her.

Once you're done, have your friend send you the picture. Most likely it's nothing at all like what you thought you were describing.

If you do this exercise, please let me know, I would love to see the results!

The same inaccurate results will happen with a verbal-only strategy. We think we're very clear when we explain our vision and branding for our content to the people we work with, but then are constantly frustrated when the results don't match up with what we were aiming for.

Having a strategy written down means you can get specific with your team on the details of your strategy and you can make sure you're all on the same page. Someone can point out a specific section and say "I'm not clear on this."

Having something in writing also means it can be improved over time. New ideas can fortify and enhance your strategy without burying your vision or distracting from previous elements of your strategy.

How to create a content strategy

Now that we've established the value and necessity of having a written strategy, let's consider what actually goes into creating a strategy. The following is a list of questions that outline the important building-blocks of a successful content strategy. As you read the rest of this chapter, jot down notes and questions, or download the content strategy template at thestoryengine.co/resources and work through it as you read.

What is the mission of your content?

When asked to define the mission or purpose of their content, many business owners would respond that the goal is "to get more customers." While I agree that content should be driving customers to your business, it's shortsighted and ineffective to have this as your mission; most readers can see through content centered only on that goal, and will move on very quickly.

You need to have a clear vision for your content; the content you generate should serve a purpose, and have a mission apart from the rest of the operations of your business. This means that while your content will serve the end-goal of your business, the mission of your content should not be identical to that ultimate goal--your content should have its own purpose.

How do you want to change the world with your content? What is your exciting, inspiring vision that you would like to share? How will you capture the imagination of your readers so they want to be a part of what you are doing? Imagine yourself five years from now speaking on stage about your blog. The blog is at it's full potential with thousands or millions of readers who listen carefully to you.

Remember, the mission of your blog does not have to be a long or complex statement in order for it to be compelling. In fact, in many ways, simple is better.

Who is your target reader?

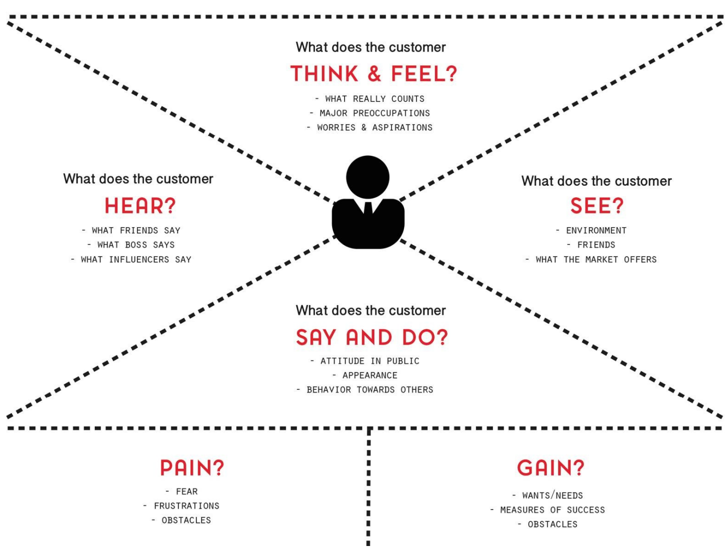
The target audience for your blog may be different than the target customer for your business. Content marketing is a "broad net" you cast and is a long-term play. The people who start reading your blog may not become customers for months or years, or they may never become customers at all, but they may refer close friends to you after reading your blog.

For example, Meryl Johnson, CEO of Bean Ninjas, who we mentioned in an earlier chapter, serves online business making 6 figures or more. But her content strategy also targets people in much earlier stages of their businesses. She creates content that allows readers to grow into her ideal customers over time. So when they hit that 6 figure mark they'll know who to trust for help with their bookkeeping.

Empathy maps for your audience

An empathy map is a way to describe the state of mind and experience of someone visiting your site. With an empathy map you'll describe many different sensations someone on your site will feel, thus considering what your readers may be thinking, seeing, feeling, fearing, and desiring.

An empathy map can be a great tool for bringing on writers and designers, and for giving them a fast way to understand the needs of your audience. Your map can influence how your new hires research, create content, design images, as well as impacting the tone and language they choose to use as they generate your content.



Below is an example of the empathy map we used for WP Curve to brief our writers on our audience:

Thinks: Our readers have hopes of creating and growing their own business to a point where it can support them and maybe their families. But they constantly fear it could fail, or that their competition is too strong, or that they won't be able to stand out online. They have some basic experience creating websites in WordPress, but there is still a lot that seems foreign to them.

Hears: Our readers hear about a product like WP Curve, making things easier for them by taking care of all the small fixes their site needs. This lets them focus on marketing, sales and moving their business forward. Instead of learning how to code or hiring an expensive developer.

They hear (read) plain and clear language on our blog, not business-y or marketing buzzwords.

Sees: When people read the blog they see a clean reading experience. The introductions are straightforward. There are no pop ups or other distractions in the sidebar. Just simple content and clean design.

They don’t notice it, but they see high quality images that are consistent in size. Images are relevant and add to the value of the writing or the emotional pull of the story.

Feels: Our readers feel safe on our site because we are not trying to force conversions. They have a sense of authenticity from our content, and feel that value is being generously offered to them.

For example, this comment appeared on a post: “Wow. This is exactly what I needed. At this exact moment. Cheers man.”

We value trust and transparency. We are honest in our content, whether it is describing how we do something or our progress for the month.

This comment appeared on a post: “Terrific! Thanks for pulling back the corner of your drapes to let us see in. Definitely some good stuff here.”

They feel a personal connection. When they comment, they get a fast and thoughtful response.

Pains:

- **Short on cash** – They are bootstrapping a business and need to get value out of every penny and out of every moment.
- **Non-technical** – They need help with their website. They can put the basics together but having someone available to fix the technical problems is helpful.
- **Too much garbage content to sift through** – There is so much poor information, cheap copies of content and click bait online, it's difficult to find any information that's worthwhile.
- **Hard to work with freelancers** – There are so many low-quality developers just looking to give a quick solution to a problem in order to make a fast profit; it is hard to know who to go to for help with their website problems.

Gains (motivations):

- Creating their own sources of income
- Freeing up their time and effort trying to fix their website to work on growing their business
- Doing what they are passionate about
- Growing their business

Remember that an empathy map is a useful exercise even if you don't have any writers or team members to help you with content yet. Creating the map will help you understand and anticipate the mindset of your customers and to serve them better.

What are the problems that your content will solve?

A strong understanding of your target reader will help you identify the problems that they need help with. These problems don't have to be the exact same ones your product or service solves, but they should be related.

For example, Meryl Johnston from Bean Ninjas has a bookkeeping service, but on her blog she often talks about business growth. Why? Because someone who is considering hiring her for bookkeeping is probably faced with many decisions around business growth each day. They're constantly considering whether a new hire, a new tool, or outsourcing is the best option to fill the gaps in the growing business. Meryl understands these problems because she also has to face them.

By discussing business growth on her site, Meryl opens up new opportunities to capture the attention of her ideal customer while still addressing issues relevant to her central product.

To find these kind of relevant issues for your own content, consider four or five problems that are specific enough to be recognizable and visceral for your audience, yet are broad enough that you can create many different pieces of content on the topics.

Choosing problems to target allows you to create a structure and coherence to your blog. It also makes it easy for you to create content that resonates with your audience.

We'll talk more in depth about this in the next chapter.

What makes your content unique?

Literally millions of blog posts are written each day. The best and fastest way to cut through the noise is to be unique.

Do you have any skills or technical advantages you can use? Perhaps you can do video better than anyone else in your niche. Or if everyone in your industry is doing written content, can you do a podcast instead? Perhaps you've got a good taste for design and can create visuals to support your content that look more professional and get more attention than your competitor's content does.

There's nothing more unique than your own story and experience. There's only one you. Many successful content marketers like Alex Turnbull from Groove share their experiences in growing and managing their businesses. They're transparent and vulnerable with their information. They share some of the numbers of their businesses, the problems that they have faced, even their failures and shortcomings.

Your beliefs and perspectives can also give you an advantage, especially around ideas that are polarizing. Can you take a controversial or contrarian stance on a topic that is important to your audience? What are most people in your industry doing wrong that you do differently?

What are your goals for your content?

The goals you have for your content marketing will determine many different facets of your strategy. Is your primary goal to build awareness for your brand, or to generate leads for your business? Prioritizing one goal over another will impact how you execute and plan your content. It will impact where you invest your time and money. As you set your goals, you will consider:

- How many team members you need
- What kind of content you will create
- Who you will target for collaboration and outreach

Here are some examples of goals you could choose for your content:

- Improve the quality of leads for your business
- Increase the quantity of leads for your business
- Drive more traffic to your site
- Rank for certain SEO keywords
- Increase your presence on social media

All of these goals have specific and measureable metrics associated with them. It's important to associate metrics with your goals so that you can know whether or not you are succeeding, and so that you can measure that success without any bias.

Ongoing vs. milestones

There are two different ways to track progress on your content goals. The first method is ongoing goals, the second is milestones. Each have advantages. Ongoing goals provide a consistent challenge; they don't need to be changed often, and grow with you. Milestones can be a source of motivation and create a sense of progress or urgency, but they need to be planned and updated over time.

Examples of ongoing goals include things like:

- 10% month over month growth in traffic
- 5% conversion rates on your lead magnets

Examples of milestones:

- Reach 7,000 monthly visitors by August 2018
- Generate 1,000 new leads from our lead magnets in three months

Reviewing and revising your strategy

You probably won’t get everything right the first time. Over the span of months you’ll learn new things about your audience, changes will happen in the marketplace, and your business might evolve as well.

Your strategy should evolve with it. Every couple of months you should set aside a few hours to meet with your content team to review the strategy and to ensure that everything in there is aligned with what is actually happening. Having your team involved in this process will give them more of a sense of ownership with your strategy and invite new perspectives that you may not have considered before.

However, it’s important to be conservative in how much you change your strategy. Don’t allow the next “shiny object” to sidetrack you, and don’t make sweeping changes on a whim. Any modifications to your strategy should be carefully chosen and should have good reasoning behind them.

Conclusion

A content strategy is the foundation for all of your content marketing. It should inform every decision you make for your content. Having your strategy written out in a way that's easy to understand means you can enroll others into your vision and scale up your content team with ease.

Remember that content marketing is a long-term strategy, designed to build relationships with your audience over time, and to cultivate trust along the way. Don't jump into content marketing expecting immediate results.

If you want some help getting started with your strategy you can download a Content Strategy Template on thestoryengine.co/resources. This document includes sections with prompt questions for all the points mentioned above, as well as a video tutorial to show you how to fill it out.

Chapter 5 - How to build your content around your reader's core problems

One of the reasons many content marketing campaigns fail is because they lack focus in their content creation. This flaw occurs when each piece of content created is well-intentioned and addresses problems readers have, but when there's no continuity between the posts. Each post pulls the reader in a different direction or attempts to solve a new problem.

This is where the "core problems" section of your content strategy comes into play. It enables you to see "the forest for the trees" in terms of your content. Instead of solving one problem at a time with your posts, you can plan out many posts that all address the same problem from different angles.

What I love about the "core problem" philosophy is that it helps you with much more than content creation. It enables you to create consistent messaging throughout your entire sales funnel. It also allows you to front-load a lot of the work that is necessary for putting together good content.

In this chapter we'll discuss how the "core problem" philosophy can inform and direct almost every branch of your content marketing. We'll touch on many different areas of your campaign lightly. We'll break down the details for how to manage each of these different areas in later chapters, but for now the focus is on how the "core problem" will be the common thread between all of your content.

Identify the core problems you want to solve for your target reader

In terms of content-generation, if there's one element of your target persona that you must emphasize and understand, it's their "core problems."

A core problem is a persistent challenge that your audience faces. As you are identifying and outlining this problem for your own strategic purposes, remember that it should be specific enough that people immediately understand it, but broad enough that you'll be able to create lots of variations of content for it. Each core problem you develop content around should have clear connections with the problem your service solves so you can be sure you're attracting the right kind of attention to your business.

Here are some examples of core problems from WP Curve. You'll notice that even though our service was for fixing WordPress sites, only one of our categories directly addresses WordPress. We understood that many people who would be a good fit for the service had many other things in common; they shared other "core problems" that could overlap with the problem that our business was designed to address.

- **Content marketing** - WP Curve is a great service for bootstrapping startups because it keeps developer costs low. Content marketing is a popular play for bootstrappers looking for traffic without a big budget for advertising.
- **Driving traffic to your site** - If they have a website, they're looking for ways to drive traffic to it. So we discussed strategies

and tactics--like SEO, paid traffic, and email marketing--that can drive more traffic to a site.

- **Starting / launching a business** - WP Curve was known for its launch story (told in Dan Norris' book "The 7 Day Startup")Many of our clients used our service to keep costs low on new product launches. So we discussed how to successfully launch a business and the many key decisions that need to be made before you launch.
- **Business growth** - There are countless strategies and tactics to grow a business online, but with limited resources, an entrepreneur needs to identify the most effective from these and not waste time on the rest.
- **Improving your WordPress site** - Common WordPress issues that entrepreneurs face on their sites, like optimizing for site speed.

Your core problems should become a framework for how you organize the categories on your blog. Each problem gets its own category. All of the content you create should fit nicely into one of these categories. This gives you several advantages down the road:

- You're able to see which categories or core problems are resonating with your audience.
- You're able to hone in your messaging based on the core problem the viewer has.
- You can retarget people based on the core problem they resonate with.

Build relationships with influencers who can speak to each

problem

The “core problems philosophy” gives you a new framework with which to seek out and build relationships with influencers. Instead of just looking for people who solve a similar problem to the one your business addresses (these people may be direct competitors and not always comfortable working with you), you are able target people who address the core problems you target. It’s likely you’ll have enough common ground in terms of audiences that it’s worth collaborating, but not so much that you’re in direct competition with each other.

Each of your core problems should have a unique set of influencers and thought leaders related to it. We’ll explore some tactics and approaches for collaborating with influencers in a later chapter.

Identify keywords related to each problem

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and keyword research are usually high priorities for content marketers. Knowing your core problems allows you to do keyword research for entire categories instead of individual posts. You can create a long-term SEO strategy instead of just trying to create content around single keywords.

Many of the most desirable keywords will be very competitive and you won’t be able to rank for them by just creating a single post. But consistently targeting these high-value keywords over time will allow you to slowly gain search traction.

Create a list of keywords you would want to target for each core problem. Include these keywords in your documented strategy. Each time you write a post, you can sprinkle a few of these keywords in to slowly climb the search rankings for these keywords and related ones.

These keywords should also help you frame the messaging on your landing pages, email series and the lead magnets that you develop for that core problem.

We’ll discuss more about how to do keyword research and other SEO tactics for your content in another chapter.

Create a lead magnet that helps with each problem

A lead magnet is crucial for building an email list, nurturing your audience, and developing customers from your visitors. Once you have your core problems determined, create an attractive lead magnet for each problem. The lead magnet should clearly relate to the core problem and give actionable advice on how to solve a very specific and common aspect of the problem.

One of the most important factors in determining conversion rates for lead magnets and other onsite opt-ins is relevance. Using the “core problems philosophy” with your lead magnets, you’ll be able to boost your conversions by displaying lead magnets that solve the underlying problems of the main categories.

A lead magnet does not have to be a long ebook; make your lead magnet short. This increases the chances that the people who download your lead magnets will use them and be successful with them. If a lead magnet is too long, someone may start reading but never finish or take action, which does not help your brand.

We’ll talk more about specific types of lead magnets you can create and some best practices in a later chapter.

Create a welcome series for each core problem

The “core problem philosophy” also gives you a way to segment your messaging to your audience. If people download a lead magnet for a specific core problem, they’re sending you a specific signal about their wants, needs, and the current state of their businesses. This gives you an opportunity to send them more content related to that core problem.

For each core problem and lead magnet you develop, you should create a simple email series to follow up, introduce yourself and your team, and suggest more content that they might find useful.

These series should consist of 3-5 emails, each discussing different aspects of the core problem. Since they’ve already pointed out the core problem that’s on their minds currently, it’s more than likely that they’ll find another piece of content in this category helpful. This will keep them engaged with your brand, amazed at how you seem to be reading their minds, and more likely to advocate for you or become a customer.

We’ll get more in-depth on creating email series in later chapters, for now it’s just important to recognize how your core problems will influence how you develop your emails.

Gasoline on the fire - boost your content with paid traffic

Now that we have this content marketing strategy and campaign set up, we can start driving some traffic to it. All of the work you have done up to this point will make it easier to setup your ads, and will make them more effective in the long-run.

Before dive into specific tactics, let’s define two different kinds of traffic that you’ll target.

“Cold traffic” refers to people who are unaware of you, and have never interacted with you before. This kind of traffic needs to “get to know you” before they will consider sharing their email or making a purchase.

“Warm traffic” are people who are aware of your brand, have seen and maybe engaged with some of your content and a small amount of trust has been established. This kind of traffic are not yet a customer of yours, but would probably be open to sharing their email, or making a small purchase.

“Hot traffic” refers to the people who have already made a purchase from you. Which means they trust you and are likely to make another purchase if it’s well positioned. We won’t discuss “hot traffic” in this chapter, but it’s good to understand the three different levels.

Cold traffic

The first step in reaching this group is to send cold traffic to your best posts.

You can define your “best” posts in a few ways:

- Posts that speak to an urgent problem in your audience
- Posts with the most search traffic
- Posts with the highest conversion rates for lead magnet downloads
- Posts that have the highest rate of social shares and engagement

Sending cold traffic to content is less expensive than trying to generate leads; people are less skeptical when they see an ad for content instead of something trying to capture their email. Don’t worry about conversion from the traffic you drive at this stage. You’ll be able to retarget them in the future and move them forward. For now, you just want your content to make a good first impression with your audience.

If you need help with targeting for cold traffic, check out “Why Retargeting Isn’t the End All to Facebook Ads (And How to Get Cold Traffic That Is)”.

Use your keywords - The keywords that you have found for your core problem are also useful for your ad copy. Since those are the words people are searching for when looking for a solution to the core problem you solve, including them in your ads is a no-brainer.

Using the same keywords throughout your campaign from ad to content to your lead magnet also builds up consistency and familiarity in your messaging. Consistency builds trust, and trust is the foundation of a successful content marketing campaign.

Target the influencers you mention - Target the followers of the same influencers you are building relationships with and mentioning in your content. Seeing people they already know and trust quoted and mentioned in your content will help readers to cultivate a sense of familiarity with your blog, even if it’s their first visit.

Warm Traffic

If you have a good amount of traffic flowing to your site, you can set up some warm traffic campaigns.

Create ads for your lead magnets that send people to the landing page for the lead magnet. You can retarget people who have visited posts in the category that corresponds with the core problem the lead magnet solves. Since the people have read or at least visited your content, there’s a good chance they’re feeling the pain from that core problem you’re discussing and are looking for ways to solve it.

You’ll want to carefully watch the frequency of your ads here. With a small audience size (3-10k), it’s easy to over-send ads to your audience and frustrate them. You’ll want to exclude anyone who has visited the “thank you” page for your lead magnet. Since they’ve already converted, there’s no sense in sending ads to them. You may want to exclude anyone who has visited your landing page within the past week as well. This will keep people from seeing your ad so much it annoys them but still leaves room for “second chances” to convert.

If you’re starting with a small audience size, I recommend choosing your highest converting lead magnet and retargeting all of your visitors. As traffic grows over time, you can start to segment your traffic and test new lead magnets.

Conclusion

By focusing on the core problems of your audience, you'll be able to create content that truly helps your readers. You're able to get much more specific on the content you create, the messaging you send and how you present yourself to your audience.

We touched on many different aspects of content marketing in this chapter. It can feel overwhelming to imagine all these different moving parts in your content campaigns. Don't worry, we'll dive into each of the different areas of your content in later chapters in this book and explain the how to approach them in a manageable and effective way.

Chapter 6 - How to use content marketing as a tool to build relationships

If there's one skill that can have an outsized impact on your business (and life outside of business), it's relationship building. Think back to one of the big turning points of your life--that first customer, that new job, closing that deal--it probably happened as a result of a relationship you built.

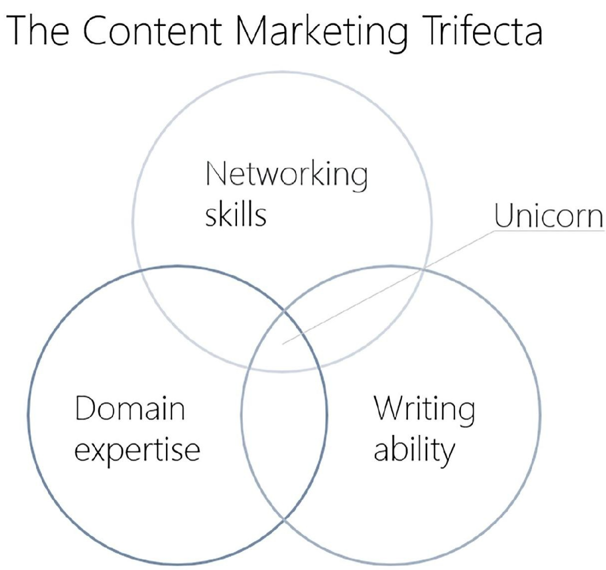
One of my favorite quotes that captures this idea is by Kare Anderson - *"When you connect with people around a shared interest and action, you're accustomed to serendipitous things happening into the future."* So how can we make more of this magic happen?

Building and maintaining relationships is the core skill of a content marketer. A successful content marketing strategy needs to build and strengthen relationships. Relationships provide a wealth of content and provide the opportunity to cross-pollinate your audiences.

This chapter will guide you in building relationships through content marketing. I'll give you some simple strategies and tactics to build relationships, and provide you with a tool to keep track of all of the interesting people you meet as you grow your business.

Why you should proactively build relationships

In his post "Why is Hiring a Great Content Marketer So Difficult?", Gregory Ciotti outlines the core skills of a "unicorn" content marketer.



Notice that networking is one of the three vital skills. Gregory explains that "Industry leaders in any topic all know and regularly chat with each other; content marketers should know how to connect with up-and-comers and bigger players."

In the nascent stages of a content marketing campaign, you'll need to rely heavily on networking and relationship-building to get some early wins on your blog. Until you develop organic traffic flow or a list to draw on, your relationships will have the biggest impact on the success of your content.

You'll need to start making connections with influencers in your niche and find opportunities to collaborate with them. Having influencers share and link to your content will probably be the first traffic you see flowing to your site. You'll need to make this happen consistently to begin growing your own audience.

In later stages of content, the opportunities to build relationships only grow and diversify. You can aim higher for the people you reach out to, and many people will begin to approach you with opportunities to collaborate.

Like all other key elements of your content marketing campaign, it’s important to have a system that keeps you consistent in your approach and keeps you from repeating your work. This may seem odd to use tools and have a systematic approach to developing relationships, especially if you are someone who is extroverted like me. But it is far too easy to lose track of valuable relationships with so many distractions these days. You need a simple system to visualize the tribe you are building and to help support you in reaching out to them.

Where to find influencers

If you are new to a niche or industry, you may not know anyone in your space to connect with. Don’t panic. No man is an island, and there are ways for you to meet influencers using connections or means already within your grasp:

Ask your customers or followers

If you already have a few good customers or followers, hop on a call with them and ask them where they get their information, who they follow, and who they think you should know. Here’s a few sample questions you could use:

- What blogs are you currently reading?
- Who are the up-and-coming people in your niche who are doing something unique?
- What podcasts are you listening to?
- Are you reading any interesting books on topics related to your work?
- What events have you attended in the last year? Were there any speakers or people you met who impressed you?

Tools to find influencers

Sooner or later you may want to expand your horizons beyond the awareness of your current audience. Here's a few tools that will help you do that.

Followerwonk (https://moz.com/followerwonk/) - A Twitter analytics tool that helps you identify influencers in your niche. It gives interesting breakdowns and data on different influencers in your space and contrasts your audiences. This information can help you strategically reach new people, or to cross-pollinate with influencers who your current audience already knows and loves.

Littlebird (http://www.getlittlebird.com/) - This is a great tool that helps you find influencers based on content. It was recently acquired by Sprinklr, an enterprise social media tool, so keep an eye out for Littlebird to appear on their features list soon.

iTunes Podcasts - Podcasts have a wealth of information on influencers. A single podcast that's relevant to your business could have dozens of guests who would make for good people to collaborate with. Don't forget that podcast hosts themselves are influencers as well.

Facebook groups - Find Facebook groups related to your niche and identify the owners and the influencers who post within the groups. It's easy to search for these groups by keywords but make sure you do your due diligence in terms of research on each group. Remember that engagement (posts from many different people, lots of comments and likes on the content, frequent posting) is much more important than the number of people in the group.

Paid communities - Private forums and paid communities are good places to connect with people. It tends to be a bit easier to reach out since there is a small barrier to entry.

Quora (http://quora.com/) - Quora is a site where people go to ask questions. The questions are open for almost anyone to answer. This is a popular place used by some influencers to drive traffic to their sites by answering questions related to their areas of expertise. Search for keywords related to your niche and look for people who have lots of upvotes on answers to popular questions.

Offline places to find influencers

Even if your business is entirely online, you should still find ways to make connections in offline environments. Meeting people in-person can develop a relationship much faster than can exclusively collaborating online.

Conferences - Look for events and conferences related to your niche or industry. These can vary in ticket price but are often well worth the investment. Plus, they can be lots of fun!

Masterminds, workshops and small events - If you can find an intimate setting with people in your industry or niche, I highly recommend taking advantage of the opportunity. Meeting regularly with a group of high caliber people and discussing each other's challenges can quickly set the foundations for strong relationships.

Pay for a coach - A good coach can provide many benefits and insights to your business. A coach is also likely to have a well-developed network that he or she can introduce you to. Be wary and judicious about who you choose to invest in though; there are good coaches and there are bad ones. Remember that you don't necessarily have to reach out to someone who calls him/herself a coach. Your "coach" could be someone who is a few years ahead of you in terms of business knowledge and acumen. Offer to pay this person generously for a monthly phone call.

How to build relationships using content

Content is an excellent tool that can be used to break the ice with influencers and to plant seeds for strategic partnerships and other opportunities down the road. No matter what your approach is to building relationships, you should be sure to focus on adding value for the people you are connecting with, rather than taking it away.

Keep in mind that the person you want to reach out to is probably bombarded with, “Can I pick your brain?” requests on a daily basis. He or she can spot someone trying to take advantage from miles away and will likely ignore those kinds of requests.

To avoid this, find ways that you can be a genuine help to the people you want to connect with. Don’t worry about getting compensated for the value you add. You should trust that the rewards for building this relationship will come in the future and remember that they may not come in the form of something you’re expecting or even aware of right now. The relationship itself and the trust you build between you will open doors to more interesting and serendipitous opportunities in the future.

Link to their content

This is the foundational move; it's easy to do, you don't need to take up anyone else's time to do it, and everybody loves a backlink. This also reinforces your content and makes it look higher quality by having alignment and input with others in your space.

If you quote someone, make sure to not only include the quote and a link, but to create an image with the quote. The image can be a picture of the author if there's a high resolution one easily available. If you can't find a photograph of the author, consider using a nice landscape or background image that's blurred slightly and that allows the text to stand out. Make sure it looks good on social media too.

When you decide to quote someone in your content, another nice gesture is to consider adding a "click to tweet" with the quote that mentions the author's name. This sends the person you are quoting a little reminder that people are resonating with his or her message and it tells that person that your content is drawing attention to his/her work.

Finally, once your post is published, send the author who you quoted a quick email letting him or her know you mentioned their work. If you used an image, attach the image to make sure they're happy with it. You can include a "click to tweet" (http://clicktotweet.com/) link in the email as well to make it super easy for that person to share your post without being pushy by requesting it directly.

Build relationships by promoting others' content

Promoting content is an endless task. Showing your support for someone by promoting their content is an easy way to earn a bit of gratitude. Doing this consistently over a long period of time will help foster a relationship.

This also helps your relationship with your audience; you don’t want to be promoting your own content all the time. That comes off as tacky and selfish. Having a diverse set of ideas and voices coming from your feeds will build more trust and engagement with your audience.

Share content

You should be keeping a good pulse on the content and influencers in your niche. If you see something that interests you, see if there's someone you want to connect with who may also be interested in that material. You can email it to them or share it with them on social media. Use the content as a conversation starter. Pose a question to the person you want to connect with:

- Is there an idea in the content that you find controversial?
- Maybe there are some ideas that you found lacking?
- Is there anything you would do differently?

These are all good conversation-starters and can help you break the ice as you reach out to others in your field.

As you get to know people better, you will discover other interests they have outside of their industry. They may have a passion for skiing or their favorite book might be *Dune*. If you come across content that relates to these passions, you'll have an opportunity to build more of a personal connection and cut through the noise.

Create guest content

Writing guest posts for other influencers in your space is one of the most time-honored ways to build a relationship. You do someone a big favor when you can create something great that resonates with their audience. Plus, this gets you in front of their audience which helps expand your reach and develop brand awareness.

In order to get the ball rolling on creating a guest post, look up the most popular content using BuzzSumo (http://buzzsumo.com/) for the blog which you'd like to contribute to. Look for a way that you can add a unique twist to the content that is performing well on their site with your skillset. When offering to do a guest post, don't be afraid to ask questions about what they think the best content on their blog had been. Sometimes social shares, traffic, or even number of comments can be misleading in terms of what content is truly performing the best for them.

Co-create content

Another opportunity to both flatter and help an influencer you want to connect with is by inviting them to co-create content with you. This could be as simple as asking them a few interview questions for a roundup post. A roundup post is a collection of ideas from different influencers on a certain topic. An example would be asking different entrepreneurs about their morning routines like I did here: http://wpcurve.com/morning-routines-of-entrepreneurs/

Another method would be to offer to interview influencers for a case study or to collect their thoughts on an article you are writing. Reach out to them and set up a call on Skype. Let them know that you will be recording the call (I recommend the eCamm call recorder). Ask them a few questions and start a conversation.

Repurpose successful content

An easy win could be looking up some of the top content that influencers have created in your area and simply repurpose it to another medium. If it's a popular piece of content, chances are it will do well in another medium and will help build awareness for the original piece in a new way:

Have some pre-written questions ready to ask and when they say something that's interesting, ask them follow-up questions and get them to go deeper. Since you're recording, you won't need to take notes. A quick 15-30 minute call can turn into dozens of great quotes to draw from for the content you create in the future. Just make sure you give them credit for their ideas.

- If it's a video or a podcast, turn it into a great article.
- Take an amazing blog post and offer to turn it into an infographic or a slideshare.
- Take a great infographic and turn it into an email course that they can use as a lead-generation tool.

Whatever you create, ask the original creators to host it on their site and publish it. Make sure they link back to you and negotiate how they'll attribute credit to you.

Keeping track of your relationships

Having a system to track the relationships you are developing may seem unnecessary. But over the course of months and years, your content marketing will provide you with dozens of opportunities to collaborate and build relationships. If you don't have a way to keep these relationships organized, some will slip through the cracks.

This process becomes even more complex as you start to grow a content marketing team.

To track and manage the relationships for my content marketing, I use a tool called the "Key Relationships Document." I list influencers I currently know as well as those who I want to reach out to in the future. On my list, I include some basic information about everyone:

- Their sites / social media channels
- Contact information
- A brief description of who they are
- Notes detailing my last interaction with them

Don't keep everyone in one big list; I recommend organizing them by core problems. This way, each influencer is listed under the core problem most relevant to them. This makes it easy for someone on a content team to know who to reference, collaborate with, as well as where to find their content, and how to contact them. This document makes it easy for my team to build and develop relationships without much management on my part.

Conclusion

No matter how brilliant a writer you are, nor how interesting your ideas, without building relationships your content will not go far.

Remember to focus on adding value first when building relationships. Through true connections based on trust and value, you can open doors to grow your brand sustainably.

It takes a lot of effort to maintain and grow relationships; use a system to help you keep track. You can find tools like the Key Relationships Document and SOP, as well as a list of tools I mentioned in this chapter and throughout the book at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 7 - Simple SEO for busy founders

One of the first acronyms you learn as you begin to study online marketing is SEO. Search Engine Optimization is one of the most desired, yet least understood, marketing tactics.

After being introduced to the concept of SEO, most people seem to think that plugging a few keywords into their website will turn on traffic like turning on a faucet. That may have been the case 10 years ago, in the early days of SEO. But search engines have dramatically improved since then, and the process of directing traffic through search engines has become much more difficult than it was in the past.

This is good news in many ways: it’s much more difficult for scams and poor quality content to rank using “tricks” and “hacks” to steal traffic away from legitimate sources. With an understanding of what search engines want, you can integrate a simple, yet robust SEO strategy into your content marketing.

What search engines want

Understanding the purpose of search engines will help you be more effective in your keyword strategy. Remember that what search engines want to do is to connect people with high-quality content. Everything that search engines measure when they decide what should appear at the top of their search results is designed to determine how much value people are getting out of the content.

This means that your empathy and understanding of your customers will be your compass through the dark, strange lands of SEO. Knowledge of common and persistent problems that your audience experiences is where you will start with your development of keyword ideas.

Keyword research tools and tactics

Google Keyword Planner - (https://adwords.google.com/ko/KeywordPlanner) This keyword tool is free and easy to use once you understand the basics. It is designed to help advertisers pick out valuable keywords to target for paid ads, but you can use the same information to help with your SEO. You'll need to create an Adwords account to use the tool, but you don't need to have ads running.

The keyword tool gives you a few basic stats on keywords including:

- **Search volume** - A rough estimate of how many searches a keyword gets each month.
- **Advertiser competition** - How many people are bidding on these keywords. This is a good proxy for how competitive organic search will be as well.

Keyword Tool - (http://keywordtool.io/) Keyword Tool can provide a lot of good keyword suggestions for free. It can often find a wider variety of long tail keywords from a single search than can the Google Keyword Planner. This tool is also nice because you can test different search engines, such as Youtube, the App Store, or Amazon.

You'll need a Pro account to get data like search volume. But you can take what you find from Keyword Tool and plug those terms into the Google Keyword Planner to get that additional information for free.

Moz Pro - (https://moz.com) This is my favorite keyword research tool out there. It does most of what the aforementioned tools and tactics do, all in one place.

One of my favorite things about the Moz tool is that it tells you who is currently ranking highest for the keywords you're researching. The people that appear at the top of the ranks for your high-value keywords are excellent candidates for new relationships. Research some of the top-ranking sites for keywords you want to target, and look for opportunities to collaborate through content.

Related searches in the Google search engine - If you search for something in Google and scroll to the bottom of the page, you'll see a set of related searches. Google displays this to help you find what you're looking for by showing other common searches. They get these recommendations from search data they've collected. This means you can reverse engineer these helpful suggestions into keyword research. Take these suggestions and plug them into your keyword research tools to see if they're good opportunities.

Check the autocomplete suggestions in Google - As you type into the search bar in Google, you'll notice that it provides suggestions as to what it predicts you might be searching for. These suggestions are often good sources for keywords because if they're appearing in the autocomplete function, it means many other people have been searching using those specific keywords.

What makes a good keyword?

Specificity

Many keywords may mean different things to different people, so you want to make sure the keywords you are looking for are very specific.

For example: The search for “best keynote speaker” could be a search made by someone looking for information on speakers. Or the searcher could be looking for information on how to become the best keynote speaker. If you have an article that targets one interpretation of a search but most of the search volume is focused on the other, then your article won’t perform very well.

Usually a broad keyword can have some detail added to it to make it more specific to the problem you discuss in your content.

Let’s look at how we could to that with our “best keynote speaker” keyword to make it a better fit for us. If we are offering a service that helps people deliver awesome keynotes, we could try “best keynote speaker training” or “best keynote speaker course.” If we were providing a service to event planners looking for keynote speakers, we could try something like “top 10 best keynote speakers” or “best keynote speaker directory.”

We could get even more specific and add terms that specify the location or audience.

Searching for a solution

Most people get hung up on how much traffic they want to drive to their sites. Remember that there is little value in ranking for a keyword that drives a lot of traffic, but does not attract the right people to your site.

Different search terms have different motivations behind them. Sometimes people are just doing basic research on a concept or idea. Other times they are searching for a solution to a specific problem or need, this is called “buying intent” or “problem solving intent.”

Targeting a keyword that does not get much traffic, but has a clear buying intent can be much more valuable than targeting a keyword with massive traffic, but no intent. With buying intent people are primed to take action with you.

For example: Let’s imagine you help people with product launches. “Ways to make money online” is a keyword with lots of competition and searches, and it does have a slight problem-solving intent, but it would not be a good keyword for your business. People searching this phrase are not looking for a focused solution, and are probably not thinking about launching a product at the moment, even if what you do does help people “make money online.”

Compare that with the search keyword phrase “product launch plan template” which gets much fewer searches, but has less competition and is laser focused on a problem you can solve. In the end, this keyword phrase will be more effective at driving lucrative traffic to your site.

Don’t forget the long tail

High search volume and high competition keywords will be difficult to rank for early on, but you should still actively target them. Keep in mind that for every high value keyword there are dozens of long tail variations that you could rank for as well. Long tail keywords contain three or more words. They are used to target specific niches rather than mass audiences.

Long tail keywords get much less traffic than the high-profile keywords you come across, but they're also less competitive. Over time as you start to rank for more keywords and drive more traffic to your site, you'll slowly become a better contender for the more challenging keywords.

For example: "Ski boots" as a search term might be very competitive with a lot of traffic. "Blue ski boots" could have fewer searches each month, but will have less competition as well. Another long-tail variation could be adjusting "Best email marketing software" to "Best email marketing software 2017."

Determining what you can rank for

The tools and tactics mentioned above are good for identifying keywords, but they aren't helpful for discovering if you can rank for these keywords. To this end, I recommend downloading the Moz Bar plugin (https://moz.com/products/pro/seo-toolbar). This tool will allow you to see the domain and page authority scores of the site you are currently visiting. Domain and page authority are both scored from 1-100. Page authority ranks an individual page, and domain is for the entire website. A newer site that's just getting established might have a domain authority of 10 while a high-profile news site like Forbes, might have over 90.

Enter a promising keyword into the Google Search engine and take a look at what appears as the top ranking sites. From this page you can get a lot of good information on how well these results are optimized for that keyword.

- Keyword in the headline
- Keyword in the URL
- Keyword in the description

Finally you can click the link to each of the sites that appear in the search results and check their domain and page authority scores. A promising keyword that you can rank for will have poorly optimized sites at the top with low authority scores.

Record winning keywords in your keyword bank

Keyword research is time consuming and is best done in batches every few months. Instead of researching for an individual post, look for a broader set of keywords that relate to the core problems you are targeting.

I recommend keeping a list of keywords to which you and your team can refer periodically when creating content. Keep your keywords divided into separate sections for each core problem. In my work, I call this list the Keyword Bank. Our document lists a few high-priority keywords that we are actively trying to rank for (primary keywords) and also includes a longer list of other keywords that we aren't heavily targeting, but that should still be added into posts when possible (secondary keywords).

With a keyword bank set up, a content creator can write an article, and then refer to the bank for keywords to sprinkle into the content where relevant. With a diverse list of keywords for each core problem, your writers should be able to consistently include keywords into your content and you will start to climb up the rankings.

Use keywords to find people to collaborate with

One of the fastest ways to develop SEO traction is to identify who is currently ranking for the keywords you are targeting and have them link to you. By collecting links from some of the top ranking sites for related keywords, you will increase your rankings and draw some traffic from the articles that link to you.

But getting a link is not always easy. Linking to another site is in many ways a vote of trust; people spend years carefully building the trust of their audience and they are careful about protecting that. This means you’ll have to earn their trust first.

Finding people to collaborate with

Once you have a list of keywords you want to target, enter them into a search engine and look at the top 10 results. Some will be Wikipedia articles. Others will likely be from big publications like Forbes. But it’s also likely you’ll find some small businesses and influencers with content ranking for each keyword as well. These people are great candidates for your list of key relationships and people you want to collaborate with on your content.

If you want to be even more strategic, you can use Moz Pro’s keyword explorer to get additional information on who is ranking for the keyword, such as how much “authority” each site ranking for the keyword has. More authority means that a link from them will be more valuable, but it could also mean they’re going to be more difficult to collaborate with.

Conclusion

People tend to over-focus on SEO and keywords at the expense of the quality of their content. It's relatively easy and straightforward to find and target specific keywords compared to creating something that is truly unique and relevant to your audience. But usually this approach results in content that feels inauthentic and stuffed with keywords. On the other hand, if you focus on creating detailed and actionable content for your audience, you're likely to hit on long tail keywords without even realizing it.

If you consider keywords as a small component of what makes great content and as a compass to point you to who you should be collaborating with, you'll have much more success and create more valuable opportunities for yourself in the long run.

Chapter 8 - How to capture your voice in a style guide

A style guide is a tool you can use to walk your writers through every step of creating content. Your style guide can help with everything from doing research that meets your quality expectations, to making your brand special, to putting the final touches on a post before it is published.

In this chapter we will talk about some of the crucial elements of a good style guide; we will review the ways that you can make it easy for your writers to craft content in your voice thus minimizing the amount of work you will need to do to get each post ready for publishing.

Present your brand & expectations

The first section of your style guide should provide a brief summary of your content strategy and a link to your documented strategy (discussed in chapter 4) so that your writers can get an idea for the big picture of your business.

What makes your best posts the best?

A great way to educate your writers on what you expect is to list a few of your favorite posts. It’s preferable if these posts are on your own blog. However, if you are just starting out, feel free to use others’ posts as examples for your writers to aspire to. How you define “favorite” is up to you, but here are a few examples of elements that you may look for in great posts:

- The post is getting a lot of organic search traffic
- The post is generating high conversion rates
- The post has been shared many times on social media
- The post received and generated good comments

When you list examples of your favorite posts in your style guide, provide a brief description of why you think each post is strong. The more you can articulate the details that you think lead to the post's success, the easier it will be for a writer to emulate those winning elements.

Quality checklist

Next, create for your style guide a checklist of everything that you expect to see in a high quality post. Items on the checklist can be broad descriptions like:

- The content is easy to read with lots of bullets and descriptive headers.
- Each post provides clear action steps that someone can use right away.

Or, the items on your checklist can be highly specific and technical:

- Expected word count for a post
- How many images go into a post
- How many external links expected in each post

Drafting the content

Now that your writers have a good idea of what you are looking for, they’re ready to get started drafting a post.

Make it clear what format you want to see the draft in. Personally I prefer Google Docs, because it’s easy to share documents and to leave comments and suggestions. I have chosen not to accept drafts in Microsoft Word documents or in any other format. Whatever you decide, make sure that your expectations are clearly outlined for your writers in the style guide. This will eliminate unnecessary back-and-forth later in the process.

Common language

What language do you commonly use in your business, when you are working with clients, or in your content? Your writer should understand the communication style of your business. Do you prefer your communications and posts to be in formal, elevated language? Or is your approach more casual?

Do you have branded processes or products that you'll discuss often but that a new writer may not be able to immediately recognize or understand? Be sure to outline and define these processes or products for your writers so that they are fully informed. You want to enable your writers to correctly employ the terms and vocabulary that make sense for your audience and for your business.

Headers and text

It’s worth noting very granular details during the drafting process to reduce the amount of back-and-forth later on. Most of these details seem unimportant at first, but they can add up as you are scaling up your content team.

Consider the ideal formatting for your posts, and remember the value of consistency. Answer the following types of questions for your writers in the style guide:

- When you use headers for different sections of your content, will you use H2 or H3 headers?
- Will your headers be written in sentence case (First letter of the first word capitalized) or title case (the first letter in each word is capitalized)?
- Is there a specific way you’ll mention related articles in each post?

Images

Getting detailed on how you expect your images to look is one of the most important parts of the style guide. I have found that this is often one area where it is challenging for my writers be consistent and uniform across their work. To my mind, this is a battle worth fighting because images are such an important aspect of good content.

You'll want to detail what dimensions and file sizes you are expecting for your images. You should be clear that you want these images pre-formatted to specific dimensions before they are uploaded to your site. Here's a few reasons why:

Often people will upload a 4000 x 4000 image for a picture that will end up being displayed as a 100 x 100 thumbnail. Using unnecessarily large images like this slows your load times, hurts your SEO and makes it less pleasant for readers to navigate your site.

This second mistake can be less egregious, but even uploading an image that's 900px wide when the reading column on your site is 800px will cause subtle pixelation and blurring. The best blogs out there are aware of this and upload the correct image sizes to begin with to avoid this problem.

Image format is important for file size and for image quality. Many people don't know the difference between a PNG, JPG or GIF image type. But using the wrong format for an image can make the file size unnecessarily large, or can lower the quality of the image. The difference in size may only be a fraction of a megabyte, but if you are planning on creating a lot of content over time, then this extra space can add up, gradually impacting site speed, search traffic, hosting costs, and much more.

Here’s a simple guide as to when you should employ different image formats:

JPEG - Good for photos of people, places or things. Bad for screenshots of apps and websites or for images of text.

PNG - Good for screenshots of apps and websites with gradients. Can be problematic due to the generally larger file size.

GIF - Good for flat images with no gradients. Also good for short animations. Very bad for pictures of people or for images with lots of colors or texture. When using GIF images, watch out for poor-quality representations of small images inside a screenshot-- like a profile picture--or a gradient like the top bar of a browser.

Featured image

The featured image deserves its own section in your style guide and needs its own specifications because it serves a very important purpose. It's likely that this featured image is the one that will appear on social media when your post is shared. Because of this, the featured image will play a large role in capturing the attention of the reader and drawing her in.

I recommend setting the dimensions of a featured image so that it looks great on social media. You can be more flexible regarding the upper limits of your file size with this image because of its increased importance.

Decide if you want text to appear in your featured images, and if you do, give specifics on what font is allowed and what colors the font can be.

Excerpts and blurbs for social media

You may want to ask your writers to provide a brief excerpt to explain each post and to serve as a meta description that will appear on your blogroll and will appear in search results for the post.

You can also ask for a few tweets, or text for a Facebook post, to be listed at the bottom of the finished document that your writers will submit to you. This can help make your promotion easy and streamlined.

Proofing

Once the draft is complete, let the writer know what the proofing and editing process will look like.

Your writers should expect some “concept editing” from you or your content manager. Concept editing is focused on the quality and clarity of the ideas in the post and on the structure of the piece as a whole. This phase of editing should come first; the concepts need to be strong before you do proofreading, otherwise you may need to rewrite some sections and proof them twice.

Once the concepts and structure of a post are solid, then you can send it to the proofer for the final polishing.

Publishing a blog post

The job is not finished once the writing is done. There are many details that go into transferring the finished post from a document to a post on your site.

Depending on your team and on your preferences, you can choose to have the writer of each post upload their own articles, or you may opt to have a team member who is specifically tasked with editing and formatting the posts be responsible for posting them online as well.

Either way, you’ll need some form of documentation. If you plan to assign formatting and posting to your writers, then you’ll keep these instructions in the same style guide document. If the post is going to go to someone else to be published, it may be better to have separate documents detailing the actual posting process.

Transitioning from Google Docs to the WordPress editor can sometimes be a sticky process. Make sure you are clear in articulating how you want your posts to appear in their final form.

Backend info

The final section of your style guide should have a checklist for everything that needs to be done on the backend to have the post ready to be published. This list includes:

- Ensuring the post is optimized for the SEO keyword(s) you’re targeting
- Assigning the category of the post
- Writing an excerpt for the post
- Adding “click to tweets” (http://clicktotweet.com/) to the post to make it easy for people to share
- Defining what the “slug” (URL) of the post will be
- Ensuring that all the links in the post are set to “Open in new window”

Conclusion

Like many of the other documents we discuss in this book, it will take some time to really get your style guide dialed in. Remember that every edit made on a post is an opportunity to improve the clarity and detail of your style guide.

Be sure to make your writers feel empowered to make suggestions and edits to the guide so it's easier for them to use too. You want this document and this process to be something they can take ownership of, not something that is forced on them.

Putting all of these ideas together in one easy-to-use document can be challenging. Luckily, you don't have to do the hard work of figuring that out. I have a style guide template available at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 9 - How to delegate, automate, and scale up your content marketing

No matter if you're a solo founder or a content manager on a larger team, you should be entrepreneurial in your approach to content. You should be consistently solving new problems, improving systems, and developing relationships. These kinds of tasks represent you working "on your business" and creating opportunities for growth.

If you spend all of your time on tasks that you are familiar with, that have a predictable outcome and are well-understood, then you are spending time working "in your business." Time spent on tasks like this does not often lead to growth or progress. You won't be able to completely eliminate this kind of work from your life, but you can delegate a majority of it.

The key to delegating and creating a scalable content marketing campaign lies in documenting standard operating procedures (SOP). SOPs are something many entrepreneurs are familiar with, but for most the creation of these procedures does not come naturally.

Having good SOPs can allow for much more freedom and flexibility in how you work with your teams. SOPs can shift your focus from managing people or managing processes, allowing you to spend more time growing your business instead of managing repetitive tasks.

Good documentation allows you to plug new people into your business without taking a lot of time to get them onboarded; you can have large teams all working from the same documents and getting consistent results.

The power of delegation and documentation stretches far beyond content marketing, but for the purpose of this book we are going to focus on how to apply these systems to your content marketing approach.

Programming for humans

While creating SOPs, think of yourself as a programmer. The process of coding is basically the creation of a set of instructions and commands for a computer. Often there is more than one way to solve a problem with programming; some ways are just more efficient and more stable than others.

Like a programmer, when you are developing SOPs, your goal is to make a task as intuitive as possible and to reduce or eliminate the need for future critical thinking. Critical thinking is a limited resource; each day each person can only make so many decisions. Thinking that is used to make a decision that has already been made is effort wasted.

For example: Would you rather have a team member spend time thinking about what dimensions a graphic should be for a blog post, or focusing on how to make that graphic more beautiful and interesting? To free up the time and energy you and your team need to make creative, significant decisions, you will develop SOPs that include instructions to delineate the framework for simple tasks.

How to create an SOP

Step 1 - Identify the task

You need to find a task that is suitable to build an SOP around. This sounds simple, but it can be more difficult than you think. A good task for an SOP has a clear beginning and a consistent result at the end.

To have an effective SOP, the starting point for the task should be fairly predictable. Usually a task is triggered by something happening (receiving an email from someone wanting to write a guest post for you) or is a recurring task that is required on a daily, weekly or monthly basis (updating the countdown timer on your weekly webinar).

A task should also be small. Each task should take no more than 10 steps to complete. Usually a task that requires more can be broken down into a few separate, smaller tasks.

Here are a few examples of tasks to help you can get an idea of the scope:

- Creating an image in Canva
- Creating a “click to tweet” (http://clicktotweet.com/)
- Doing an SEO check for an article that’s ready to publish
- Promoting new content across social media channels
- Doing a weekly check on your content’s performance for a report

Step 2 - Do the task and take notes

To create a good SOP, you need to understand what it takes to execute the specific task that the SOP will address. Start by actually doing the task yourself and documenting each step with as much detail as possible.

I recommend taking notes as you go, and storing your SOPs in Google Docs. This makes your documentation easy to share with your team and helps facilitate collaboration.

Every action you take as you complete the task should be recorded in your notes. Anything that causes a change is considered an action. For example:

- Clicking a button
- Opening a website or app
- Filling out a form
- Saving a file

The more granular and detailed you can be as you note your actions, the better. You might be surprised at how wildly different people's approaches to the same task can be. By documenting each action in good detail, you can cut down on variability.

Note what tools, websites, or apps you need to use to do this task. List these at the top of the SOP so that the people who use the SOP can know what they need to have ready in order to complete the task. There should also be a link to login information if they are using company accounts.

Provide examples of what a successfully completed execution of the SOP (or steps within the SOP) would look like. Examples can be screenshots of completed tasks with actual details to accompany them.

Step 3 - Make the SOP organized and easy to use

It is helpful to include some information on the purpose or goal of the

SOP. As your library of SOPs starts to grow, some may become obsolete or redundant. When you include information on why an SOP is done, you can assess whether an SOP is still relevant or optimal for the task.

Giving context to how an SOP fits into the bigger mission also helps team members stay motivated and to feel like they are contributing value to the business.

Wherever possible, add screenshots, examples, or videos to make the task more clear.

To make the SOP easy to navigate, create a table of contents at the top with links that allow a reader to jump to different sections quickly. You can add a table of contents using the “Insert” menu in Google Docs.

Step 4 - Have a team member do the task

Once you have drafted your new SOP, have a friend or team member go through it step-by-step. The less familiar with the task that person is, the better. This unfamiliarity will help to make sure your SOP is clear, and will prevent your guinea pig from relying on past knowledge to walk through the steps.

Schedule a specific time for your team member to go through the SOP. You should be available to help during this time. If possible, be in the same room with your tester or do a screenshare using Skype or Google hangouts to watch that person complete the SOP.

While observing, you may be tempted to help or guide your team member if he or she starts to go off track. Resist the urge to jump in and help; instead, note down where he or she seems to be getting confused. These are areas where you can improve the clarity of your process.

Ignorance is your best asset: Make sure your team member knows that the main goal of this exercise is to identify flaws in the SOP. His or her ignorance of the SOP will test the clarity of your writing. This person should know that there is 0 responsibility to do any interpretation or guessing. If there’s any time where he or she isn’t absolutely clear about what to do next, have him or her leave a comment on the confusing step. Encourage as many questions as possible.

Step 5 - Revise the SOP

Wherever your guinea pig makes a mistake or something seems unclear, revise the SOP. Add screenshots or additional explanation if necessary. For particularly complex or difficult areas, you can create a video demonstrating how the task is carried out.

Once you have updated and addressed all the problems, repeat step 4 with a new team member if possible.

Delegating ownership of the processes

What will ultimately determine the long-term success of an SOP is whether or not you are able to not only delegate the task, but also to pass along a sense of ownership of the process itself. The best person to own the SOP is the person who is actually carrying out the task.

Over time an SOP will need updates and revisions and you can’t let yourself be a bottleneck to that. You want your team members to feel empowered to make improvements on the SOPs where they see fit.

This can be a difficult transition, especially in the early stages of building a process-driven culture in your business, and with new hires. It may take some encouragement and practice to get your team members actively looking for ways that they can manage and improve their own SOPs.

Tips for writing good SOPs

Be clear about accountability - Make sure it's crystal clear who is ultimately responsible to see the task completed and who is the owner of each SOP. The person accountable does not necessarily have to do all the work him/herself, but that person needs to know that if the task does not get done, s/he will have to explain why. List the name of the person responsible at the top of each process or put the name in parenthesis in the title of the document.

Front-load information - Most people will start executing on an SOP before they've read through the whole thing. So make sure to provide any key information needed to carry out the steps before listing the steps themselves. Anticipate common problems, error messages and mistakes, and make sure your team members are prepared for these in advance by discussing them at the top of the SOP.

Understand the task before you create the SOP - If you don't have a solid understanding of the task before you create your SOP, then you're probably building bad habits and inefficiency into your business. Make sure you have a solid understanding of the task and how to do it before you start documenting.

Keep your SOPs short - The longer an SOP is, the more likely someone will rush through it, skip steps or miss key information. It's also difficult to keep long processes written clearly. Keep your processes short, and provide links to related SOPs where relevant.

Use simple language - You want to optimize for ease-of-use and understanding. Formal language and jargon can be distracting.

Explain the "Why?" behind the process - Understanding how this task fits in with the bigger picture of the business and why it’s important will help your team members take ownership of the process and stay motivated in their work. If they understand what the purpose of the process is, instead of just how to carry it out, it will also make it easier for them to find ways to improve the SOP or to remove it if it has become obsolete.

Focus on positive actions - Always try to specify what people should do, as opposed to what they should not do.

Conclusion

Good documentation is the key to scaling your content marketing. These systems also work for many other areas of your business. Good SOPs can become some of the most valuable assets in your business and can save you many hours of putting out fires each week.

SOPs are a fine art and can take a lot of practice to do well. To help you get started in your SOP creation, I have drafted a “How to create an SOP” SOP that you can download at thestoryengine.co/resources.

If you’re looking for a deeper dive into how to create these processes, I recommend Sam Carpenter’s book “Work the System.”

PART III - CONTENT CREATION

One of my favorite books is “The War of Art” by Steven Pressfield. In this book, Pressfield describes the struggle that creators like you and me face everyday. He calls it “the resistance.” The resistance is that subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) impulse to do anything other than create, when we know we should be creating. One of my favorite quotes from the book is, *“It’s not the writing part that’s hard. What’s hard is sitting down to write.”*

Does that resonate with you?

By the end of this section you should be equipped with tools and strategies to make content creation easier. You’ll start to reap some of the rewards of the foundational work you did in the last section. You know your mission and your vision for your content; now we can start making. This section is all about content creation:

- The many mediums and forms content can take
- How to make content out of your business’ journey
- How to come up with endless ideas to explore
- How to plan out content weeks in advance
- How to breathe new life into old content
- How to get your team members to help you with your content creation and promotion

When you are through reading this, you’ll be able to come up with a dozen ideas for content, to quickly research the discussions that are happening around each, and to plan out when each piece of content should be published.

You’ll know how to create lead magnets that capture email addresses and allow you to start communicating with your audience directly.

We’ll be clear on the details of what the end product of the content you create will look like; this clarity will enable you to start bringing on writers. You’ll have the structure and the know-how to plug in team members when needed to help with your content creation, or you can opt to outsource entirely.

What should you keep in mind when reading this section?

We’ll be discussing the specifics of hiring writers and content managers in the next section. But before we do, and as you read this section, remember that you have a powerful resource in your current team members. The more your team understands the value of your content marketing campaign and the many ways that they can contribute, the stronger your content will be and the more help you will have in creating it.

Key terms and concepts

Virtual Assistant (VA) - An assistant who works online/remotely for you and who can help you carry out time-intensive and repetitive tasks.

Sales Funnel - An automated sales system. Usually a series of landing pages, email automations and content that make a series of offers to a visitor.

Editorial Calendar - This is a tool you use to plan out content and track its progress.

Chapter 10 - How to plan and strategize content creation with an editorial calendar

If you're just getting started with content marketing and you are creating content by yourself, you might not need an editorial calendar. However, this tool becomes essential as you start to add more people to your content team. An editorial calendar allows you to plan out your content and to manage every step of its creation from a single place.

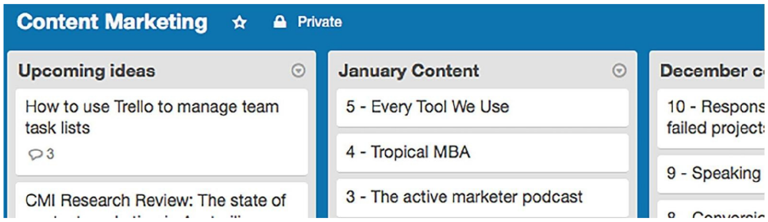
Many marketers find it difficult to get ahead of their publishing goals; they often rush to get content ready but can rarely produce more than a week or two ahead. Given this rush, many people get lost in the weeds of their daily content production and miss big opportunities. Marketers may belatedly realize a big conference or product launch is happening; by the time people see events on their own calendars, it's often too late to create something tailored to that opportunity.

An organized editorial calendar enables you and your team to anticipate launches, events, and holidays. You can be ready to take advantage of these opportunities and can start creating content well in advance. The result? Timely, professional, and polished content.

Editorial calendar tools

There are dozens of tools out there for content planning. For the sake of simplicity we'll explore two of my personal favorites. If neither of these options seems to fit your needs, I encourage you to research other tools on your own.

Trello



Trello is an online project management tool that is incredibly versatile and flexible. It’s easy to tailor Trello to your style or to the demands of your project. Trello’s simple interface makes it easy to visualize your content production, and to take in a lot of information at a glance.

Trello is a system of boards, lists, and cards. This creates a framework that allows for individuals or teams to track a project and collaborate or contribute where they can be most useful or where it is most needed.

Board - A Trello board typically represents a project or product that is under development or consistently being worked on. A board has specific members who can see it and control the creation and flow of cards between the lists. Members can add themselves or others to cards, begin conversations on the cards, add attachments, and create checklists.

List - A list is a way to divide a board into different categories. Typically a list represents a stage of progress (to do, in progress, finished).

Card - A card is the most basic and flexible part of the system. It represents a specific element of a project (a new feature, a software bug, research for a post). Cards can be moved between lists as they progress.

Trello’s big advantages are:

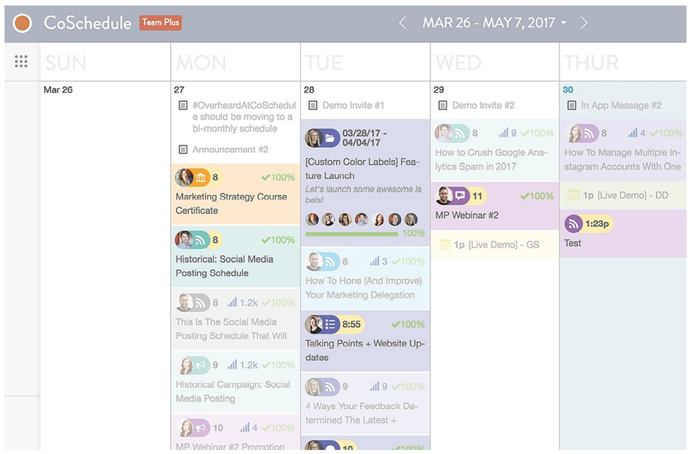
- **Customizability** - Trello can switch between a list and calendar view; each has its advantages. You can set up your Trello board in many different ways to suit your work style.

- **User friendly** - Trello’s interface is very simple and intuitive. Even people who have never worked with project management software before can easily dive in and contribute without trouble.
- **Collaboration** - Trello’s features and integrations allow for very easy and effective collaboration on a team.

Best of all, the essential features of Trello are free.

CoSchedule

CoSchedule is an editorial calendar for WordPress that lets you schedule content, manage team tasks and batch your content promotion all from inside WordPress.



CoSchedule's advantages are:

- **Social media** - You can schedule weeks of social media promotion for a post right inside the app. You can see what social media has been scheduled alongside the content you are creating in the calendar view. I particularly like the "soft scheduling" feature that allows you to schedule social media relative to when the post was created. This makes it very easy for those who are less savvy with social media to promote their content.

  It's often easier to think "I want to schedule tweets 6 hours, 1 day, 7 days, and 20 days after this post has been published." Compared to "I just published this post, so I need to schedule Tweets for 6pm today, 4pm tomorrow, on the 24th of this month and the 7th of next." CoSchedule enables this kind of timely and streamlined approach to social media promotion.

- **Analytics** - CoSchedule displays a lot of information at a glance. It can give you a count of how many social shares a published post is getting and is also integrated with Google Analytics.
- **Working directly in WordPress** - For those who prefer to keep everything in WordPress, CoScheudle is a great choice. This tool allows you manage almost every aspect of your content creation within WordPress itself.

Personally I prefer Trello because of its flexibility and because I use it for many other areas of my work. There are many other programs similar to Trello like Asana and Basecamp that have the same functionality, and if you are already familiar with one of those then I recommend adapting what I do with Trello to your program.

But for just $10 a month[*], CoSchedule is one of the most powerful, versatile, and valuable tools you can have in your content marketing arsenal.

Calendar models

There are two different ways that you can organize your calendar.

It can be tough to grasp and understand the features and functions of each of these calendars at first glance. But at the end of this chapter I'll share templates for both with video tutorials that can show you how both of these work in action.

Kanban style calendar

Imagine a whiteboard with three columns. The first column is titled “To do” the second “doing” and the third “done.” Trello is a digital version of this Kanban system (where each column on your imaginary whiteboard is a list in Trello) and it makes for a good model for editorial calendars.

The kanban style calendar uses a series of columns to mark the status of content in development. This style is good for a team with many specialists who each manage one part of the content. You may have a writer, a designer, and a social media marketer all on your content team. Each person is responsible for whatever content is in their column. With this system, each person will be able to better focus on what is relevant to them.

Here are some examples of columns you can create for your kanban editorial calendar:

- Open ideas
- Researching
- Drafting
- Graphics and illustrations
- SEO / keyword optimization
- Editing
- Publishing
- Promotion

Classic calendar

The classic calendar marks deadlines for when a post should be published, and displays these deadlines on a calendar. CoSchedule uses this model for their tool and with the “calendar powerup,” Trello can do the same.

This model is good for small teams with individual creators who manage the entire content creation process from ideation to publishing. Everyone knows what content they are creating and when it’s going to be published.

In Trello, the calendar view does not give as much information as the lists view, but it can display colored labels. I recommend assigning labels to communicate the status of the post, like how the lists in the Kanban Calendar are organized.

With these labels you’ll have a rough idea of how much more work is needed to finish a post. This is useful from a managerial standpoint; you’ll be able to see what content is falling behind, who is ahead of schedule, or who needs more work.

Set a weekly time to review and develop your calendar

To be useful, an editorial calendar is something that needs to be constantly maintained.

Set aside a certain time each week to review and develop your calendar. I recommend doing this near the end of the week so you can start each week with a fresh plan for your content production.

You can start planning out content two or more weeks in advance once you have a good idea of what your creation capacity is.

Know your limits

If you’re new to content marketing, you may not have a clear idea of how much content you can realistically produce in a week. Figuring out what your capacity is will be a great way for you to practice using an editorial calendar.

During your review process look back at the previous week and examine how much content was created. If you hit all your goals and it was easy to do, plan more content out for the following week. You want to try to push yourself to failure so you can understand your capacity. If you missed some deadlines or didn’t produce content at the level of quality you want, then dial back.

Plan out content a week at a time, set specific goals for what you plan to achieve this coming week. Make sure your account for everything that goes into the content-creation process. It may take some practice to ensure that you are accounting for every step. Take detailed notes each week about what you missed, and which steps you potentially over-or under-estimated for in terms of time allotted. This trial-and-error process will lead to a custom calendar that is perfectly tailored to schedule your team’s content creation.

Check for repurposing opportunities

It's not always ideal to create brand new content; sometimes it's better to repurpose old content into a new medium.

During your weekly review of your calendar, take some time to look through content that was published a few months back. Look for content that performed well, or for content that might translate well into a new medium. Check the comments in the posts for any questions or suggestions from your audience and consider how you could address these in your repurposed content.

We'll talk more about how to repurpose content in later chapters.

Have a place to store ideas

It's important to have a place to store all of your ideas for new content in one place.

While most beginners complain that they don't have enough ideas for content, more experienced marketers seem to have more ideas than they can handle. If they don't have a way to manage all these ideas then many get forgotten or lost.

An editorial calendar allows you to collect your ideas and your notes all in one place. With all your ideas for content in one place, your content creation team always knows where to go to find a new project to work on.

Content ideas can come to you at any time of day or at any place. You are not always sitting at your desk brainstorming when a good idea arises. Trello has a feature that allows you to create a card via email. They also have a mobile app. So even if you are away from your computer you can easily store your great content ideas.

Getting others on board with the calendar

The true value of an editorial calendar becomes clear once you start to develop a team around your content marketing. As you start to increase how much content you produce, it will become more and more difficult to keep track of it all.

In your calendar, you should be able to see an overview of everything coming up in the next few weeks, as well as the current status of each piece of content. The different stages of content creation should be distinguished clearly for you and your team. It should also be very clear who is responsible for moving content from one stage to the next.

Both Trello and CoSchedule have checklists and ways to assign a task to someone. They each have commenting systems as well so discussion around the development of each post can be tracked in a single location.

You don’t want to manage content creation from your email; it’s too easy to lose track of things in your inbox. This task becomes even more complicated when you have several people that a piece of content must go through before it is completed. Make it clear to your team that any communication on content creation must be done through the editorial calendar.

This way all communication related to the content is found in one place; people know where to go to find it, and no one is left out of the loop.

Plan ahead for events

One of the key ingredients in good content is timeliness. This means providing your content at just the right time for your audience, when their interest is at its peak. Sometimes you can’t predict when a post will be timely, but there are also many opportunities that you can plan for well in advance.

Along with managing your week-by-week or month-by-month content production, you should set aside time to look through industry events, holidays, launches, and any other future events to plan content built around them.

Conclusion

For each person you add to your content team, a new layer of complexity is added as well. Without a good editorial calendar you'll quickly find yourself lost in a jungle of half-finished and confused content.

Though it takes some time to set up and maintain, an editorial calendar can save you a great deal of stress and time in the long run. To make creating your calendar easier, I have some calendar templates and a list of all the tools mentioned available at thestoryengine.co/resources.

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* This is the price at the time of writing and it is subject to change

Chapter 11 - How to become a content idea machine

One of the biggest challenges in the early stages of content marketing is coming up with ideas for content. It can be difficult to know what you should discuss, and it can sometimes feel like everything has been done before.

Before we go deep into some content idea generation tactics, I want to let you off the hook. Your first few posts don't need to be paradigm-shifting epiphanies. They don't need to change your industry. Remember that even if there are other businesses that target audiences similar to yours with great blogs, your customers may not know about them at all. And, there is always time to learn and grow. Your ideas will develop and become more sophisticated once you get in the habit of generating strong content.

Idea generation is one of the biggest limiting factors when it comes to content marketing. If you can't come up with new ideas, then your blog will wither away. But if you can consistently come up with great ideas, then the only limit is your (or your team's) capacity to create.

Batch idea generation

A big creativity killer is opening up a blank document without any previous preparation and asking yourself “what am I going to create today?” You only have so much smartness in a day-- every decision you make drains your reserves. Coming up with a topic, an angle on that topic, and then researching that topic all takes time and energy.

Generating ideas is a different process than executing and writing out those ideas. Switching between these two tasks is also draining.

If you set aside some time every few weeks or once a month to brainstorm ideas, you can get a good rhythm going and come up with enough ideas to fuel your content for the next month.

Then when you show up to start creating you have an idea, and it is one that’s been incubating in your mind for a while. Hitting the keyboard should feel easier.

Create consistently

When asked about his creative process, William Faulkner said “I only write when inspiration strikes. Fortunately it strikes at nine every morning.”

Sometimes it’s not a lack of ideas that causes writer’s block, but a lack of motivation. Many people only create when they feel inspired to do so, or when they feel they have some extra time. Unfortunately the creative muse is often difficult to work with.

Creating a first draft of anything is often a struggle. This is where most people feel writer’s block. They’re fighting through a new piece of content, but getting each word out is a pain and the post as a whole feels ugly. As you know if you’ve been in this position before, you have to stick with an idea and wrestle with it for a while in order to create something that you’re proud of.

Having a consistent writing practice keeps you coming back day after day to create. This will help you get through those difficult first drafts and get you in the habit of coming up with new ideas and creating things. You will also become more skilled at drafting and revising once these tasks become regular habits. It can be helpful to think of writing as a trade or a craft, rather than as an art form. Approach your writing with the same diligence that you would use to approach learning any new skill.

Find new ways to approach an old topic

A common mistake is to think that after you’ve discussed a topic on your blog once, that you can’t address it again.

You can always find new ways to approach a topic that you’ve already covered. Here are some strategies for re-thinking topics that you've addressed before:

Experimental vs Evergreen - What are the cutting edge ideas around this topic? How do they compare to the classic approach?

Example vs Warning - What are some case studies you can use to show how to do (or not to do) something?

Review vs Guide - Are you discussing something that you think of a tool, and how useful it is for solving a problem? Or are you describing how to use that tool to get results?

Evidence vs Opinions - Are you collecting data and evidence to support your ideas or comparing the opinions of thought leaders?

If you are familiar with a lot of different kinds of content, you can examine a basic topic and quickly come up with many different angles and twists that can generate new approaches.

Another way to take a new approach to an idea you've already covered is to choose a different emotion to focus on as it relates to that topic.

Rotate broad themes in your content

Sometimes too many options can make it difficult to choose any of them. By giving yourself some restrictions, you will inspire creative problem solving which may help ideas flow. In addition, having lots of interrelated content will help you in terms of targeting keywords and driving search traffic to your site.

Consider choosing a theme for each month, quarter, or whatever period of time you feel is appropriate; focus on your selected theme for that amount of time. Once you have a theme picked out, write a broad comprehensive post to introduce it. Then try to find as many different approaches to the topic as you can.

Know what is working for competitors and allies

There are many different tools you can use to analyze a competitor and see what content of theirs is performing well. One of my favorite tools for this is BuzzSumo (http://buzzsumo.com/). BuzzSumo can analyze a domain or keyword and show the most popular posts according to social shares on some of the top social media sites (Facebook, Google +, Pinterest, Linkedin and Twitter).

The Skyscraper method

The Skyscraper Method is a tactic coined by Brian Dean of Backlinko. The method is easy to understand and get started with.

Basically the Skyscraper Method can be summed up as “Find the best content out there addressing a problem you want to discuss, and make something better than that.” Look for content with lots of social shares, backlinks, and comments. A good tool to use for this research is **alltop** (http://alltop.com/), which aggregates some of the best content from around the web.

Once you’ve found great content, there are a few ways to work on making it “better”:

Make it longer - This approach is perfect for those who like to “hustle”; just take a post that’s doing well and find ways to add even more useful information, value and length to your post.

Make it current - People these days will see a blog post that’s two or three years old and write it off as outdated. It is likely that since such a post was written, new solutions, strategies, tools, and perspectives have developed.

Make it look better - Creating content with better looking design, layout, and graphics can give you an edge.

The key to this strategy is not the content, but the promotion. You need to get links pointed to your own content to start out-ranking your target. Find influencers in your niche who could get value out of what you are creating and share it with them.

You can be very aggressive in this approach and use a tools like **Ahrefs** (http://ahrefs.com/) to see who is linking to the content you're targeting and reach out to them first. Let them know you noticed they linked to the post you're targeting and mention that you have recently created something better. Be sure to explain why it is better.

If you can successfully steal away links or go out and get your own, you'll be very successful with the SkyScraper Technique. But remember that you'll need to do more than copy & paste an article or directly plagiarize ideas for this tactic to work. Google harshly penalizes duplicate content, and you set yourself up for a backlash on social media if someone notices that you've copied someone else's work.

Keyword Research

A simple and pragmatic approach to coming up with ideas for content is building content that directly addresses the keywords you want to target. Tools like Ubersuggest (http://ubersuggest.org/) can turn basic keywords into dozens, if not hundreds, of blog post ideas by suggesting variations on the keyword.

You know people are searching for these solutions so this is one of the most promising sources of good content ideas.

The drawback here is you need to be very adept at determining which keywords will be good to target and which ones you will be competitive enough to rank for.

Look in the comments

Good content usually attracts good comments. Look through comments in your own content or on content of other influencers in your niche. Seek out comments that are long or that have a lot of replies to them.

People will often comment and add their own perspectives, ask follow up questions or mention what their favorite part of the post was. These are all ripe areas to explore for content ideas of your own.

Consider the speaking topics at industry events

Search for trade shows, industry events, and conferences in your niche. Check the schedules or the speaker bio pages to see what topics will be discussed at the conferences.

If an idea is one that's gotten into a conference, then it is likely the topic is worth discussing.

Look at the table of contents for the top books in your niche

For most books, Amazon offers a "look inside" feature to preview a book. You can usually find the table of contents for books without making a purchase. Look for chapters or themes that you can discuss on your own site.

Seek out popular podcast episodes

Use the iTunes search feature and browse through different podcasts and individual episodes based on keywords; look for the most popular episodes. iTunes makes this easy by revealing the relative popularity of every episode it lists in the search. Topics covered in popular podcasts can make great topics for your online content.

Check your email

Seeds for great ideas can crop up in your inbox. As you look through emails your customers or colleagues have sent you, keep an eye out for questions that required a long response on your part.

Look for similar questions that have cropped up a few times from different people. It's likely that you'll get more of this same question in the future.

This is a perfect opportunity to create some content. Plus, next time you get that question in your email, you'll be able to delight your contact with a fantastic post that solves her problem.

Quora

Quora is a website where people go to ask questions. A relevant question will get lots of upvotes and responses. Popular questions have potential to make for popular content.

Also consider looking through the responses to the questions for some inspiration.

Search for questions related to the core problems you want to solve. Look for questions that have gotten a lot of upvotes and responses.

If you end up creating content that addresses a question you saw on Quora, be sure to circle back and respond to the question yourself. Quora can be a good source of traffic if you have good responses to popular questions.

Conclusion

Without content ideas, your marketing won't get very far. Fortunately, with a consistent and organized approach to idea generation you won't hit the common pitfalls for writer's block.

Some of these sources of inspiration will be more effective than others depending on your industry, so make sure you experiment.

For further reading and tools for coming up with great ideas for content, check out Dan Norris' book "Content Machine." You can find a link to this book and all the tools mentioned in this chapter at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 12 - Killer content research tactics

To create consistently great content you need to always be pushing the limits of your knowledge. Well-researched content increases your credibility and gives you the opportunity to borrow the authority of others to support your ideas.

Having a strong process for content research will help you gather information from great sources quickly. This will also speed up your content creation. A content idea with a few good sources to reference and quote is much easier to develop.

The biggest challenge with automating or outsourcing content research is that you need to make sure the articles you’re referencing are legitimate. Fortunately there are many ways we can quickly vet and process a lot of different content to find the cutting-edge conversations happening around a topic.

The benefits of content research

- **Less writer's block** - The more you immerse yourself in the conversations your audience is having, you more ideas and unique angles you will have to fill out your content.
- **Better results from your content** - Well-researched content consistently drives more traffic, ranks better in search engines, gets more social shares, and has high opt-in rates.
- **Delighted customers** - Insights you gain from your research will give you a clear view of your customers and their problems. This makes for good content, but it also empowers you and your team to better address your customers' problems with your products or services.
- **Gain an edge on your competition** - You'll understand the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors. You'll find opportunities to leverage their weaknesses and capture more of your market.

What you'll learn through research

- **How to support your ideas** - The most obvious purpose of research is to find content and ideas that support and contrast your own.
- **Your audience's mindset** - You'll uncover the perspectives and mindset of your audience. You will learn what is important to them, what kind of people they admire, what their values are.
- **Keywords** - Through the research process you'll start to learn the common language of your audience. The better you understand

the language people use to describe the problems you want to solve, the more effective you will be at finding good keywords to target.

- **New problems to solve and ideas for content** - Through your research process you’ll discover problems that aren’t being addressed in your industry, and you’ll learn how you can handle or address them better.

Though each of these facets of content research are unique, they all also inform and enhance each other. Finding a good keyword can reveal a discussion around a new problem you can solve, which points you to a new community of people who could use your help.

Good places for research

Reddit (http://reddit.com/)

Though sometimes written off as a distraction site, Reddit has many threads and areas that focus on a variety of productive topics as well. It's likely that whatever your niche or industry is you'll be able to find some good ideas here.

Quora (http://quora.com/)

We discussed Quora in previous chapters regarding the process for discovering influencers. Quora is also great for content research because it gives you several different ways that you can research and discover content:

The questions feed - Searching in Quora will bring up a questions feed related to your keywords.

You can identify engaging questions by noting how many upvotes each question has. Look for questions with relatively high upvotes compared to the average on the feed.

Most viewed writers - When browsing through questions on a certain topic you can see a "most viewed writers" section in the right column. This is a gold mine for many reasons. You get to see who the thought leaders are on a certain topic, you can go to their profile and see all of the questions they have answered. These thought leaders are also likely to link to their own sites, which could provide some good research opportunities as well. Some of the people you come across could be candidates for your Key Relationships document as well.

iTunes

Podcasts are becoming more and more popular; no matter what you want to talk about, there's probably a podcast on it. Enter keywords into the search section in iTunes and filter for podcast episodes. Then arrange them by popularity.

Once you find a podcast episode that looks popular and addresses your topic, look for the show notes page for the podcast online. Most podcasts have a page dedicated to each episode with a synopsis, transcripts of the episode, links to things mentioned in the episode and a comments section for discussion. You can use the resources listed in these notes--as well as the podcast itself--as a source of research material and idea-generation for your own content.

Buzzsumo (http://buzzsumo.com/)

You can use this tool to search a domain or a keyword and get a breakdown of the most popular content (according to social shares) for that site or keyword.

Facebook and Linkedin Groups

You can find a Facebook or Linkedin group dedicated to almost any topic. There are groups of people with certain professions, of people interested in a skill, people who are all using a certain tool.

You want to look for groups that are highly active and engaged. Often you'll come across groups that are inactive or that are filled with spam and self-promotion; avoid these. Look for groups with lots of recent posts that have high engagement.

Once you find a good group, you can search it for threads or discussions related to the content you're researching. Sometimes you can outright mention you're creating something and ask what the group thinks some good places to look would be.

Growthhackers (http://growthhackers.com/)

GrowthHackers is a community of marketers all focused on quickly growing businesses. This site features many different case studies, guides, and discussions around many cutting edge topics for businesses. The community is very active and engaged, and the best posts rise to the top of the site through their upvoting system. This is a great place for B2B businesses to research content.

Inbound (http://inbound.org/)

This site aggregates the best marketing articles from around the web and delivers them in a daily or weekly digest. It also has a very large community where you can ask questions and participate in discussions around some of the cutting edge topics in marketing.

Look for content from your key relationships

Once you have put together your list of key relationships, this will be one of your best places to go for content research.

People who have made it onto this list should be people who you respect and want to get closer to.

Since your key relationships are organized by your core problems, a lot of the leg work with sorting and sifting through potential places to research has already been done.

If you’ve already identified a blog or other content channel for your key relationships document, start searching there. Find an internal search feature on the site and start plugging in keywords related to the content you’re researching.

If the person does not have a content channel, then use a search engine and type their name + keywords related to the topic you’re researching. You may find guest content, podcast interviews, or features in big publications.

Gather intelligence on your competitors

In the early days of your content marketing, it will be difficult to get a pulse on what will work well for you and the audience you're targeting. It may take time to build up enough attention to get insights from your own work and from the audience's response to it. Your competitors can provide insights into where they are thriving and struggling, and where the opportunities lie.

Many of the techniques listed to research conversations around a certain topic can also be used to gather intelligence on what your competitors are doing:

- **What content is performing best on social media** - Buzzsumo can reveal top posts.
- **Their content strategies** - There may be a thread connecting all of a competitor's best content. Perhaps all their most successful posts are roundup posts featuring many influencers. Or perhaps they are good at newsjacking. Finding out what your competitors are doing better than you are can point to ways to improve your own work.
- **Their SEO strategies** - The Google Keyword planner can analyze sites and provide keyword suggestions. These will often be the keywords that your competitors are targeting.
- **Their allies** - You can also see who a competitor is allied with by looking at who is linking to their content. Moz's Open Site Explorer can reveal how many backlinks a site or post has and who is linking to them.
- **Who is writing for them** - Check the bylines of their popular

content. They may have talented guest writers who are creating some of their best content. These guest writers might be willing to work for you as well.

Understanding your competitors will give you many opportunities to practice “The Skyscraper Method” mentioned in the previous chapter. Find what they’re doing well, adapt it to your audience, and make it better.

Check comments for ideas on how to improve

Sometimes the best ideas and inspiration come not from content itself, but from the comments sections. As you read your competitors’ content and review your own, don’t forget to comb the comments section for ideas.

People will often respond the in comments section, adding their perspectives or asking questions. Sometimes these turn into threads of responses, other times comments go unanswered. But within your readers’ comments are usually great ideas to add into your own content to improve it.

How to outsource your research

Content research can be a very time-intensive process. This is especially true as you start to scale up your content marketing, produce more content, and bring more writers onto your team.

I recommend getting some help with going through all these sites and gathering raw information.

Create a checklist for a virtual assistant (VA) or team member to follow that will send them to the sites mentioned above and have them start collecting information. Give them one or several keywords to start with. Have them gather all the information they find in a single place, like a Google Doc.

I have a template for an SOP that helps your researcher do just that. It will guide someone through research on many of the sites mentioned above and have them collect all the information in a single sheet for you to review. The SOP includes a video tutorial to help someone start using it right away.

You can download this process for free along with many other resources at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Ongoing content research

Content research is not something that can be completely outsourced. While the systems I mention above are great for gathering initial information and for market research, you should always be personally tuned in to the conversation.

Through these content research processes, you should uncover a few communities online where there are people who need your help and who are discussing your problems. These communities could be manifested in a topic on Quora, a Facebook Group, a lively comment discussion on a blog you follow, or in a Reddit community.

Pick out at least one of these communities and strive to answer questions, start conversations and help others in the group.

As you become better known in the group, people will be more willing to help you with your research, to share articles and ideas with you freely, and to come to you with questions.

Conclusion

A good process for content research can really enhance your ability to scale up your content marketing. You'll be able to research for multiple posts and have will have good references prepared weeks or months ahead of time. In the long run, this will make creating content much easier and faster.

This process also helps you discover new influencers, and to create new opportunities to build relationships with them. As you're looking through these various sources for the topics you want to discuss, you'll no doubt start to see patterns as to who is contributing to the conversation.

Though it's possible to outsource some of the legwork on your content research, it's still important to put careful consideration into the content that you reference. Being active in communities online and pushing the limits of your own knowledge consistently will help keep you on the bleeding edge on the conversations in your industry and the content you create.

For an easy approach to outsourcing your content research, you can download a template and process at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 13 - How to spice up your content with visuals

Visual content is a vital component of a good written blog. It's essential for a good reading experience. Visuals help break up blocks of text and make it easier to take in ideas. Visual content often gets shared on social media and creates a first impression, driving people back to your site.

There are many different approaches to visual content depending on your audience and the personality of your blog. Some approaches will work better for you than others. For example, good-looking charts explain tough concepts better than words, and memes add comic relief and connect your story with other familiar characters in pop-culture. You will select the method that makes the most sense for your tone, your audience, and the content of your post.

In this chapter we'll talk about some of the strategies behind creating and selecting visual content, as well as some different types of visuals that you can use to add depth to your content.

Differentiation through visuals

The style of your visual content is a great way to differentiate yourself from others. The color schemes, artistic style, themes, and information you convey can all be leveraged to make your blog have a distinct look and feel.

A unique art style that appears throughout your posts adds personality in a way that most other elements of the content can't.

Wait, but why visual content?

The blog "Wait But Why" (http://waitbutwhy.com/) is an excellent example of great differentiation through visual content. Even though the blog gets hundreds of thousands of views each month, it's still filled with simple stick figure illustrations.

If you have never been to this site, I recommend that you check it out. "Wait But Why" is a long form written blog that breaks down diverse topics relating to subtle things in life. Some posts are on science and others are on quirks in our interpersonal relationships.

"Wait But Why" masterfully uses visual content to help clarify the written ideas, to add comic relief, and to break up the long form posts into smaller chunks with pleasant visuals and very few paragraphs.

What makes the "Wait But Why" visual content endearing is the use of simple stick figures and illustrations that look like they were created by the team especially for that post. Despite their "low budget" appearance, the images add a lot of value to the content. Through their simplicity, the images actually do a very good job of communicating ideas quickly.


Here drink this I heard it's good for you.
waitbutwhy.com

Storytelling with visual content

There are many different ways visual content can help you tell a better story.

AdEspresso (http://adespresso.com/) has a character that appears in almost all of the featured images on their blog. In many ways this character acts like a mascot for the company, creating something consistent that followers can relate to.

Having a recurring character is not the only way to create this kind of consistency; Baremetrics (http://baremetrics.com/) and Groove (http://groovehq.com/) both have custom featured images created for their posts. Baremtrics does not have a character, but the characters that appear in their images all have the same art style. Groove often has a serene beach scene with an object in it that represents the main idea of the content.

Fit the visuals to the audience

Visual content can backfire if it does not resonate with your audience.

The Empire Flippers (http://empireflippers.com/) is a startup that runs a marketplace for buying and selling niche websites. A good site in their marketplace can sell for six or seven figures.

For many years they had distinctive visuals that appeared in featured images in their podcast and in their branding on their site. The visuals were cartoon caricatures of the founders, often seen on a beach with a large sand castle representing the concept of an "empire."

Eventually, they discovered these visuals were damaging trust with their customers, who found it difficult to to list a website or work with the

Empire Flippers while seeing those cartoon characters on their site.

After a rebrand, they eliminated the character and created a minimalist look and feel that fit the audience’s expectations better. Almost immediately after their rebrand they noticed more growth and faster deal flow in their business. Shortly after this change, the Empire flippers were listed as one of INC 500’s fastest growing companies.

Types of visual content

Featured images

Featured images sum up the concept of the post and act as the main billboard for the content. These images are especially important because they are one of the only things people will get to see before they make the decision to read more (or not). Your featured image will appear in your blogroll and as the preview image when a link to the content is shared across social media.

If you want to create your own featured images, but don't have much background in design, I recommend using Canva (http://canva.com/). Canva is a great design tool that makes it very easy to create or modify many types of visual content. It has a huge library of stock photos and illustrations that you can use for free.

Infographics

A good infographic is one of the most powerful forms of visual content. Use of infographics in a post will often lead to lots of good links and fresh traffic to your site.

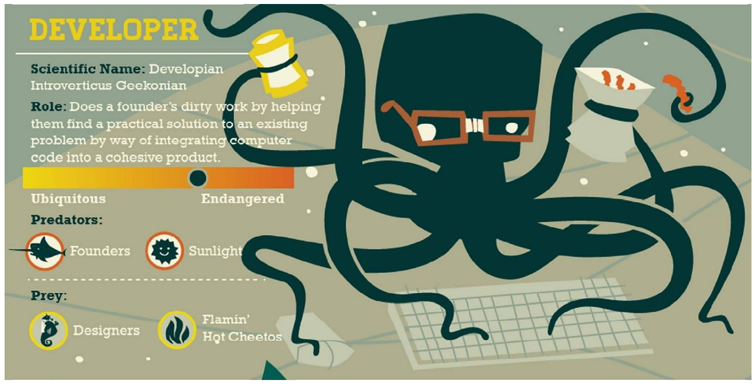
Infographics are also one of the hardest pieces of content to make well. They can be outsourced, and there are many companies that offer designed infographics. But even if you want to contract someone else to do an infographic for you, you should understand what really makes a good one so that you know what to ask for.

Data - Infographics need data to support the claims and information that they share. This data is also the main source of an infographic's credibility. Without good data, your infographic is just a liability. The data used is the foundation for many other key elements of an infographic like design and story. The data you collect should come from reliable sources and should be current.

Story - The data needs to be woven into a story. And, the story should be about a topic or problem that your audience is currently facing and is interested in.

Without a good story, your infographic could be boring. Your story will keep people scrolling through your infographic and bring context to the data you present.

Story can also be how you relate two ideas. For example, Udemy (http://udemy.com/) did an infographic comparing fish and other marine life to the startup ecosystem. It was interesting and entertaining to read through the comparisons of different archetypes and learn about their predators and prey. I put a small sample below, but you can check out the full infograhpic at (https://blog.udemy.com/startup-ecosystem-infographic/)



Design - The design of your infographic will make it easy to consume the data and will help relate to the story.

Design is a mix of the fonts, colors, layout and overall theme of your infographic.

Shareability - Shareability of an infographic has a lot of factors at play. SEO is a good place to start; make sure there's text on the page and in the meta description where your infographic lives so search engines can get good data.

Timeliness is also a key factor. For example, a tribute infographic to Steve Jobs was created in 2011 shortly after his death. It portrayed his lifetime as a timeline with many facts about his legacy, family, and the products he worked on. This was one of the most popular infographics of that year because of its timeliness.

The same things that make up a good infographic will also apply to many other types of visual content.

Screenshots

You don’t need to be artistic to have great visual content. A good screenshot with a few helpful annotations and arrows can work wonders for content. Screenshots are also very useful for creating SOPs and internal documents.

A great tool for screenshot annotations is Skitch (http://skitch.com/). It had nice looking arrows and text that stands out nicely in screenshots.

Quote images

You often see quote images on inspirational Facebook and Instagram feeds. Usually the quotes are from well known historical figures, famous celebrities, or athletes. Quote images are very popular on social media because they capture a feeling or idea and make it easy to share.

It's easy to create quote images in your content. You can make the person you're quoting feel great for appearing on your blog and you will have great social media content that gets shared and drives more traffic back to your original content.

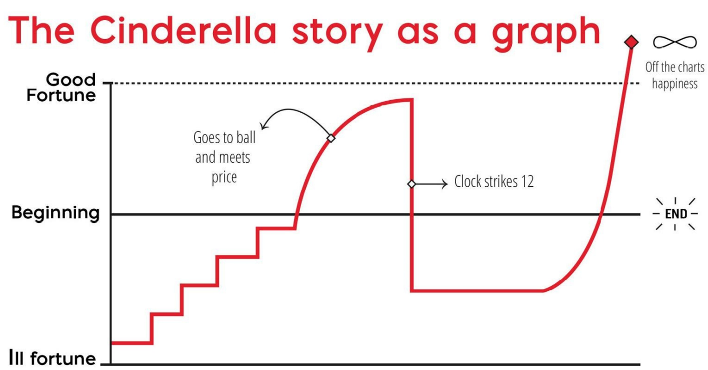
These quote images are incredibly easy to make in Canva. Just get a good picture of the person, pick a nice looking font, and add a quote over it.

If you don't have a nice picture of the person, you can use a good looking landscape picture with a slight blur to make the words pop out.

Charts and graphs

All you need to tell a story is one good line with the right curves. Graphs are great because they combine time and something measurable to show its change over time.

Kurt Vonnegut once gave a talk where he traced lines to represent some of the most famous stories like Cinderella. As the character found good fortune the line would travel upward and when problems happened the line would drop down. It’s easy to follow a graph like this and understand their story through the movement of the line.



A graph can symbolize a story for you. Find a metric that symbolizes your good or bad fortune in a situation and use is as a simple way to represent your story.

Canva has some good tools for creating charts and graphs. But even the basic charts available in Google Docs can be used to tell a compelling story.

Animated GIFs

Animated GIFs aren't used very often but they can be a very powerful form of visual content. They're most often used to capture small clips of movies or other videos and turn them into memes, but I think they're great as "moving screenshots."

An animated GIF can act like a micro video to capture an action or a piece of a workflow on the screen. They can often be sped up 2-8 times the normal playback speed so you can get a lot of detail into one image.

I recommend an app called GIPHY Capture (The URL for this one is ugly, but I link to it on the tools list found at thestoryengine.co/resources) for Mac users. It's available for free in the app store, as of the time of writing this book. For windows users I recommend Screen to GIF (http://www.screentogif.com/), also free to use.

Slideshares

Slideshare (http://slideshare.net/) is often written off as nothing more than an easy tool to share slides after a presentation. But there is much more potential here than that. Slideshares are great for short tutorials, list posts, and storytelling.

A deck optimized for slide share will be very different than a normal presentation deck. The main difference is that a slideshare deck should stand on its own. It should not need a presenter or narration to fully convey its message.

The key to a good slideshare is the pacing of information. Each slide should present enough information to move the "big idea" of your presentation forward, but it should never give enough to resolve the thought. Each slide should leave the person craving a little bit more information.

Conclusion

Visual content is a crucial element to making your content marketing stand out in a noisy world. Though there are many different approaches and styles, I recommend choosing just two or three to work with; master a few techniques rather than dabbling in them all. Experiment over time to see what works for your audience and what fits best with your story.

I mentioned a lot of tools in this chapter. To find links to all the tools I mention throughout this book, you can check out thestoryengine.co/resources, which contains a list of recommended tools for content marketers.

Chapter 14 - Telling your business's story through transparency

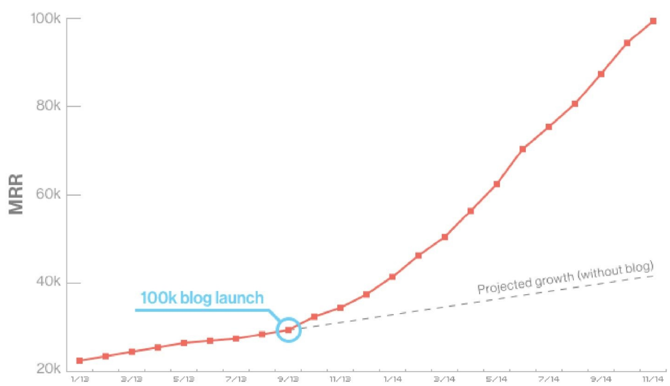
A few chapters back we discussed how in 2013 Alex Turnbull was considering shutting down his startup, Groove. His content was not getting any traction and growth was too slow to be sustainable. Alex had a goal to reach 100k in monthly recurring revenue, but the customer support SaaS space is extremely competitive and already had a few big players. To break into this space, Alex had to do something very different.

He asked dozens of marketers and entrepreneurs for their advice on content-creation, inquiring as to what they thought the world was looking for. Through these conversations he discovered the perfect way to change his content strategy. There was plenty of content on customer support already existing, but Alex discovered that few people were talking about what was happening behind the scenes in their businesses. So he decided to blog about his 100k goal and discuss what he was doing to achieve it. He introduced this new direction in the first post (https://www.groovehq.com/blog/100k) of his blog "Startup Journey":

"This is the blog I wish I had read the first time I started a company. It's going to cover the lessons we learn from our own experiences, including our tests, our wins and our fails, backed up with real numbers. Everything from design, development, strategy, marketing, sales, growth hacking, hiring, fundraising, culture, customer support

and more."

In a little more than a year, Groove went from 30k to 100k in monthly recurring revenue. This was years sooner than Alex had expected. In the chart below, you can see how growth started accelerating soon after he launched his transparency blog.



People want to hear your story

One of the most abundant sources of content is your own story about the journey that got you to where you are today. Although many people feel like they don't have any interesting stories to share, most businesses and people have plenty to teach.

Entrepreneurship is a journey; there are always ups and downs, unexpected problems, triumphs and crises. Many people try to downplay their weaknesses and the challenges they have faced in their businesses. But shortcomings and failures can be sources of power and wealth if you know how to use them.

The internet is saturated with "hype marketing" that tries to cover up any flaws and makes outrageous claims of success. People are fed up with the hype and crave real stories and honest accounts of a company's journey, warts and all.

Benefits of transparency

Most startups and entrepreneurs practicing transparency see it as a personal value or moral, not as strategic marketing. Nevertheless there are many benefits to being transparent in your business and marketing.

You build trust with your audience and team members

Transparency is one of the fastest ways to build trust with your audience. An entrepreneur’s most valuable asset is trust. Trust brings opportunity, assistance, loyalty, and enthusiasm. Customers will notice and appreciate your transparency in your stories and will be more inclined to work with you.

This trust extends beyond your audience; transparency will send a strong message of trust to your employees as well, as it opens up new opportunities for honest dialog internally. Reporting on things like salaries, investors, core values, and revenue can bring a sense of justice and ownership to your team. It eliminates many of the root causes of corrosive culture that can hinder your growth.

Your team will also feel a sense of participation in your transparency reporting as well. Even if they’re not writing it, they know that they play a role in what gets reported. For our WP Curve monthly report, our developers were always excited to see our customer satisfaction score each month and to read what the featured happy customer had to say.

Crowdsource your problems

Transparency with the challenges you're facing invites a community of problem solvers to help your business. If you discuss your current problems or future goals, your audience may provide insights or offer solutions that you would not have considered otherwise.

Higher standards

The awareness that you are sharing your story publicly helps encourage you to hold yourself to a higher standard, and helps to keep you accountable. Knowing that you'll share information on the decisions you make will change the way you make decisions. This is often a subtle motivator to make better choices, big and small.

Some companies, like Buffer, make all their emails viewable by their whole team. This holds everyone to higher standards and gives people access to the information they need to make better decisions. As Keith Rabios, COO of Square, wrote, *"Ultimately, if you want people to make smart decisions, they need context and all available information. And certainly if you want people to make the same decisions that you would make, but in a more scalable way, you have to give them the same information you have."*

Give back to the entrepreneurial community

Transparency is a powerful way to build relationships with potential customers and other entrepreneurs or businesses in your space. Entrepreneurship and startups are very popular currently, and people are constantly seeking good information and case studies to benchmark their own progress, and to guide them through the decisions they face. By sharing your story, numbers, failures, or by making the software you create open-source, you provide other entrepreneurs with good information they can use for their own businesses.

Risks of transparency

Though they are often far outweighed by the benefits, there are indeed risks to transparency that you should be aware of before you begin sharing details about your business.

Copycat businesses

If your business is particularly successful and you're broadcasting both your profits and how you're earning them, it's likely you'll start to see copycat businesses appear. For service businesses, personal brands, and coaches, copycats don't typically pose a threat. They can, however, threaten brands with physical products, ecommerce stores, or anything that can be easily copied.

Recently there have been kickstarter campaigns that have had their product ideas stolen and brought to market faster than the original creators were able to manage, even if their campaign ended successfully. The same could happen with a popular piece of content that shares a little too much about your prototype. You may not want to give away the "secret sauce" recipe until you feel your brand is established and defensible.

Bad suggestions

Many people will be moved to offer their thoughts on your business once you start sharing your numbers. Sometimes this information could be very valuable and relevant. Other times it may be misleading and unhelpful. Exercise caution. It can be easy to get wrapped up in what others think of your business, and that attitude can have an impact on your decisions.

Once you start sharing, it will be up to you to filter through feedback and respond appropriately. You don’t want to shut down the people who are giving you feedback, because there’s often gold nuggets of information hidden in all that feedback. Always listen and acknowledge feedback, but be discerning about what you actually take to heart and implement.

Types of transparency content

If you decide that creating transparent content presents benefits for your business that outweigh the risks, there are a few different approaches to sharing your story. Depending on your business model and audience, some approaches will resonate more than others.

Company culture

Transparency is a great way to show how you stand behind your own values. You can simply state your values, or you can show the numbers that prove how you measure up.

Buffer has a full dashboard (https://buffer.com/transparency) that displays salaries, equity, their core values, even the books they're currently reading.

Another powerful example at the crossroads of transparency and culture is Automattic's (the company behind WordPress) transparency report (https://transparency.automattic.com/). Automattic and WordPress are built around open-source and transparent values. They periodically share the number of requests they receive from government agencies. These requests are often for information on users or to remove content they or their users have published.

Though this strategy causes tension between the government and Automattic, it goes a long way to reinforcing trust with their user base.

Monthly reports

A monthly report is a simple and powerful way to tell your business' story. A monthly report is a review of some of the key areas of your business and a discussion around some of the progress you made and problems you faced over the month.

This is a particularly good strategy for startups or businesses with the goal of getting funding, or being acquired by a larger company. A consistent report each month about your business leaves a trail of breadcrumbs indicating how you got to where you are. Investors love to see this information when reviewing your business.

At WP Curve, our monthly report was centered around key metrics, primarily our growth. We also added an overview of the month's content we published and its performance, any problems we were working on solving, and our customer satisfaction.

Here are a few of the items we consistently covered and discussed in the reports:

- **Monthly revenue** - How much revenue growth we experienced and why.
- **Team** - New hires, and any news or updates on how we work with our team.
- **Product** - We measured our customer satisfaction each month and reported that score. Reported the total number of people we served and how fast our response times were for customer support. Finally, we discussed anything around the process and systems we used to fulfill our product.
- **Traffic** - We shared updates on how much web traffic we were

receiving, where it was coming from and what pages people were viewing the most.

- **Content** - An overview of all the content we published during the month and a breakdown of its performance.

If you're in the early stages of your business, it could be tempting to hold off on reporting like this until you feel like you have some revenue or other "good looking" numbers to report on. But only reporting when time are good or on good numbers is not transparency, it's just showing off. Dan Norris was bold with WP Curve and started his report when his business was only making a few hundred dollars. Alex Turnbull also started reporting during a crisis point in his business when it was not a proud time to be sharing.

Annual / Birthday review

A good piece of content for businesses and personal brands alike is the annual review. Drafting an annual review encourages you to take a look back at the past year, and to examine whether or not you achieved the goals you set out to achieve. This is also a chance to reflect on what was and continues to be important to you. Though this is a common strategy for individuals, it can easily be applied to a business as well.

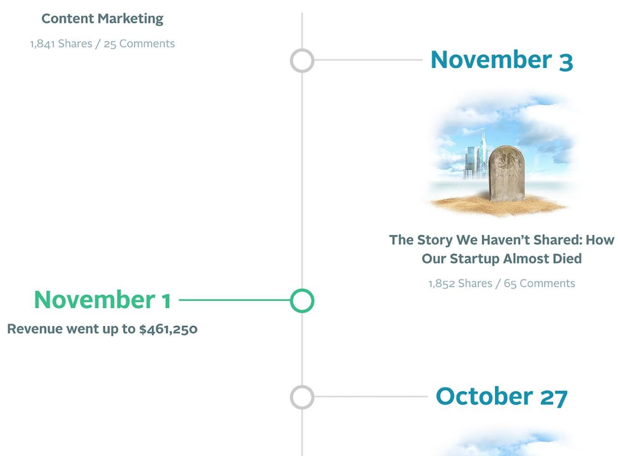
Matt Mullenweg, creator of WordPress, has been doing an annual review since he was 19. He tries to measure what has changed in his life, lists how many books he read in the past year, explores what is important to him and his aspirations for the following year. He finds it not only is a useful exercise for his own personal growth, but also helps to apply many of his open-source and transparency values to his personal life.

Real time stats

Some companies like Baremetrics and Buffer have real-time dashboards that display their revenue. In fact, Baremetrics has been a leader in the “Open Startup” movement and currently have a page on their site (https://baremetrics.com/open) with real time stats of total customers and monthly revenue. Some even display more detailed stats such as churn rate.

The Open Status page is populated with mature startups making over a million each month and brand new companies just getting their first customers.

Groove displays their monthly revenue as a thermometer on their transparency blog. Over the past 3 years this bar has been moving steadily upward, and as you scroll back through the blog you see the date when it was published. They also highlight dates when they hit certain milestones in their revenue. This adds more context to their live stats and creates a whole new experience for someone browsing through old posts.



Crisis points

It’s often the case that the things you’re most afraid of sharing and the posts that you’re the most nervous about publishing are the ones that are best received by your audience. This means sharing stories around crisis points in your business. A crisis point is where you felt your business was facing a big challenge that you weren’t sure how to solve.

These make for great content because people are naturally attracted to stories with a crisis. The “down for the count” moments and the comebacks you share make your readers start hoping for your success like they root for their favorite sports teams. A crisis also reveals valuable lessons that others could benefit from, to be better prepared for a similar situation. These moments are often difficult to talk about, and take courage to discuss even with close friends and colleagues. So sharing them with the internet can seem like a crazy move.

Often, the content that you’re afraid to share because of how vulnerable it makes you feel turns out to be a hit. Your courage and willingness to share will pay big dividends in trust and engagement in the long run.

Experiments & discoveries

There’s big opportunity for transparency with data-driven companies that like to run a lot experiments. You can use a split test on a landing page, comparing several tools, changing part of your service.

Share your expectations before the experiment, include how you set it up, the results you got, what surprised you, and what you learned.

Open source software

Open source means that anyone can have access to the source code that makes up the software and use it as they see fit. It’s the startup equivalent of a chef sharing the recipes of what’s on the menu at his restaurant. It’s also a philosophy--many influential minds identify with open source as a personal value. Matt Mullenweg often describes it as part of his morality: “for me, open source is a moral thing.” By sharing their source code, businesses open the door for others to not only use what they have created, but to improve and innovate on it, further advancing their craft.

Many companies share their code on GitHub to make it easy for other developers to take what they have already created and adapt it. Making your software open source is a powerful way to give back to the community of entrepreneurs and developers, to allow others to build on the foundations you’ve created.

Conclusion

Despite the benefits, most of the leaders in the transparency movement don't see their transparency as a marketing strategy. Transparency is first and foremost a core value of your company, not a marketing plan.

If you choose transparency as a marketing strategy but not as a core value, you'll set yourself up for problems. Inevitably there will come a time when something will be happening in your life or business that you won't want to share. But selective transparency will only place you in the category of "hype marketers." You will risk losing the trust of your readers.

If you do choose to make transparency part of your core values, there's little downside in the long run. It can build trust and brand loyalty better than almost anything else.

Chapter 15 - How to build your email list with lead magnets

Most online businesses use one of several sales funnels to drive customers. Sales funnels are usually a combination of content, emails, and landing pages. Over a period of time funnels give customers information about your products and services, build desire for a solution to a problem, and then make the customer an offer.

A sales funnel carries a visitor through several different steps of the "customer journey" to convert them into a customer. This journey includes:

- **Awareness** - The visitor needs to know who you are, what you do, and how you can help them.
- **Nurture** - Trust between you and the visitor must be built. A sense of urgency to solve the problem that your product addresses must also be fostered here.
- **Convert** - The visitor becomes a customer when she makes a purchase.

Lead magnets help visitors go from consuming your content (awareness), to granting you permission to start messaging them about your premium products or services (nurture). Most sales funnels need email addresses to deliver their messaging. Lead magnets are the tools used to capture those email addresses.

In many ways a lead magnet is your first sale. Even though no money is being exchanged, you are asking visitors to trust you with their information and attention.

Taking action

Good lead magnets can have a powerful impact on the success of your content marketing.

They not only are used to collect emails and get people into your sales funnel; the big value comes with actually getting people to take steps toward solving a problem.

At any given time a person (especially a business owner) has dozens, if not hundreds, of problems she needs to balance. She won't have time to solve them all, so she picks out a select few that seem promising, and ignores the rest.

A good lead magnet will persuade someone to take action and start solving the problem--a problem related to your business. Your lead magnet convinces your visitor that a problem is solvable, and is worth solving.

Someone who has just upgraded the problem you solve from "I'll get to it someday" to "let's get this done" is much more likely to become a customer.

If customers can get some small early wins with your lead magnet, then they are most likely to trust that you can deliver with your other products and services.

Types of lead magnets

Checklists

Checklists are a favorite tool of pilots and doctors to ensure they don’t miss any critical details in their work. Although these people are professional and very experienced, they still use checklists to keep them consistent.

A checklist can make a for great lead magnet because it guides people through a process. A checklist breaks down a complicated task into easy steps. Checklists are most useful when outlining a process that has several steps. They can be used for something done once (setting up a profile on social media), or something that is done repeatedly (promoting a post on social media, or preparing for tax season).

Cheat Sheet

A cheat sheet also helps your audience through a process, but the main difference is that a cheat sheet does not always have to be used in a sequence. Cheat sheets distill complex ideas into a simple and actionable format.

For example, WP Curve has a cheat sheet for copywriting called “The Wheel Of Copy,” which lists persuasive words that target several useful emotions. It can be used as a reference when creating a title for a post, writing emails, or composing tweets, but there aren’t sequential steps that need to be followed.

Templates

Templates provide structure and frameworks that people can easily adapt to their own work. They're designed to save your reader's time and to remove a lot of the critical thinking required to solve a certain problem. Templates save your visitor from having to "reinvent the wheel."

Templates work nicely with data. A spreadsheet with pre-filled formulas that someone can plug data into is a very useful tool. Most people are intimidated by numbers and spreadsheets; if you can give them something easy to work with, you'll build their confidence and trust.

You can also create a template with scripts for emails, landing pages, webinars, and many other tools. Make it easy for readers to plug in their own information by adding prompts in parenthesis or brackets.

Here's an example from a sales email template:

> *For the next 5 days, I am making "***[product]***" available to you for only $XXX.*
>
> *Why would I cut the price so drastically, especially when you know I don't believe discounts or sales are in the best interest of you and your business?*
>
> • *Because I see now that I need to prove to you what I'm telling you is true.*
>
> • *Because you are a subscriber and I believe in rewarding loyalty.*
>
> • *…and because I believe once you see the value in this, you'll be ready - even eager - to invest in some of my more intense trainings and*

products.

For those reasons, you have until Friday at midnight Pacific to get "[product]" for 90% off… just $XXX instead of the usual $XXX.

[Link to sales page]

[Sign off]

[P.S. one more line to persuade them to buy and another link]

Swipe files

Swipe files work similarly to templates. Instead of encouraging readers to work from a single script and plug in their own information, swipe files give many examples that people can pick and choose from to build their own results.

Swipe files are a great fit for lead magnets that help with copywriting, design, paid traffic, social media, email marketing, programming, and more. People with these skills often have vast collections of swipe files and are always looking to expand their collection.

Here are a few examples of swipe files:

- Top performing facebook ads for supplements
- Email subject lines with the best open rates
- Great logo designs
- Stories and parables to allude to in writing
- Code snippets
- Scripts for cold calling

eBooks

Books holds more psychological weight than blog posts typically do. Often, people see books as something longer that take more attention and care to create than a blog post does; so they value books more.

eBooks are typically made from a collection of a few past articles from your site. Take a few common articles that share a theme, and make each article a chapter in your eBook. If the content is high-quality, your readers will appreciate the effort and will view this eBook as added value.

Courses

A short online course with a series of educational emails, videos, downloads, and interactive elements is a good way to start training and educating people with your process.

A course could be a simple as a series of emails that discuss a certain topic and take someone through a process. Or it can be more robust with a series of videos and interactive content.

The beauty of a course is that you can drip out the content over a few days, giving participants little bites to work on each day. This keeps you at the front of readers' minds longer and sends periodic reminders to them to take action each time a new module for your course is available.

A great example of this is Melissa Griffin's post "10 Clever Ways to Use Social Media to Grow Your Email List" (http://www.melyssagriffin.com/social-media-grow-your-email-list/) where she creates a detailed post filled with tatics and case studies, then offers a related 6 day email course called "The blog audience blueprint" as a perfect follow up to this post.

Reports

A report is an analysis of the trends happening in an industry or niche. Good reports include a lot of data and frame the analysis in a way that provides insight.

Reports are useful for understanding trends, benchmarks, and common pitfalls. They allow people to compare their work or business with the trends, and help them in making strategic decisions.

Reports can also outline an opportunity, providing a series of case studies and data which highlight an opening or trend and reinforce why it’s a good option to pursue.

Tools and quizzes

Calculators make for good tools, enabling visitors to enter a few pieces of data and to receive some new insight into their business. Tools and quizzes are exciting and interesting because they can be personalized and interactive. While most of the other lead magnets listed above are unchanging, these adapt to the customer.

A few examples of tools:

- CoSchedule has a headline analyzer tool (http://coschedule.com/headline-analyzer) that breaks down a title for a blog post, or email subject line and scores it based on the use of words, length and tone.
- WP Curve created a Cost Per Acquisition calculator. This took a concept that is difficult for many business owners to understand and make it accessible with just a few pieces of information.

Quizzes work very similarly to online tools; you can put together a series of questions that assess a need or a problem in your audience. Quizzes can give insight or recommendations based on how the questions are answered.

Examples of effective online quizzes:

- Helping customers choose a backpack based on their fitness levels, the terrain, and the kinds of trips they want to take. This quiz then provided a suggestion for what backpack would work best.
- A quiz that tests people's knowledge of paid traffic. It asks questions like "What level of certainty do you need to know if an

ad is performing better than a different variation? 90% or 95%?”

The added benefits of tools and quizzes is that you usually get more data than just email addresses when your readers participate. You can collect and analyze the information that people are entering into your tool or quiz, and then get good intelligence on your audience.

Webinars

Webinars are online presentations and discussions, usually focused on how to solve a problem. Webinars are powerful because they usually last between 30-60 minutes, which is a very long time to have the captive attention of your audience. This gives your audience a chance to get to know you, perhaps to hear some of your personal stories, and to experience your expertise first-hand.

Webinars have a few downsides, however. If you decide to conduct a live webinar, then it will necessarily happen at a certain time. The time-sensitive nature of a webinar means that your viewer probably won't immediately get access to your content at the moment when they choose to register for the webinar. They will need to make sure they're available during that future time in order to attend.

Webinars also require a much bigger commitment than the typical lead magnet. 30-60 minutes of attention is a long time for most people with busy schedules. So the promise you make needs to be very visceral to get people to show up and stay for the whole presentation.

I recommend the tool Zoom (http://zoom.us/) for conducting webinars.

Good lead magnet design

Focused on one problem - The more focused and specific you can be about the problem you promise to solve, the more likely it is that people will convert.

Not too long - People have very short attention spans; when they see a long eBook, or a long webinar, they start to tune out. Specificity will help keep your lead magnets concise.

Add value today - When considering lead magnets, it’s better to help your audience get a small win immediately than a big win in a few months or years. A quick win will build your audience’s trust that you will be able to deliver bigger wins to them in the future.

Balance utility and design - A lead magnet needs to be useful and easy to use, but it also needs to look good. Typically, making something like a cheat sheet into a nice-looking PDF file will make for good design, but it also adds a few barriers: the viewer needs to print out PDFs, or create some sort of digital verson that they can fill out from their computer.

Include social proof - A good lead magnet will use social proof to help encourage people to download it. But you can also bake social proof for your business into your lead magnet by adding case studies, testimonials, and facts about your business that will entice the audience to become customers.

What you need to support your lead magnets

Landing Pages

Every lead magnet needs a landing page to promote it. Often these pages are very short, and they make a specific promise or outline some benefits.

Thank you pages

Thank you pages are where people are redirected once they opt to receive your lead magnet. These pages serve a few very important purposes:

- **Confirm success** - Let visitors know they have successfully done what is necessary to get the lead magnet.
- **Set Expectations** - Is the lead magnet going to be delivered to their inbox? How long will it take? What email should they expect to see it from? What should they do if they don’t get it?
- **Make suggestions** - Suggest other content for readers to check out while they’re waiting for their lead magnet to arrive in their inboxes. Suggest content that’s closely related to the problem that your lead magnet addresses.
- **Track customer behavior** - Having a unique thank you page for each lead magnet will allow you to track what lead magnets are performing best, how your visitors found the lead magnets, and what they do before and after converting. We’ll talk more about this in a later chapter.

Sidebar graphics

One of the simplest and most effective ways to get people to notice your lead magnets is to put a small ad for them in the sidebar of your blog content. Making use of the sidebar is less disruptive than pop-ups or so-called "welcome gates." Some people show ads for several lead magnets across their whole blog. I recommend only showing one ad for the most relevant lead magnet for each post.

You can use Q2W3 Fixed Widget to make sure your opt-in box stays visible and scrolls with the viewer as they go down your post.

One great thing about sidebar graphics is that you can use WordPress plugins like Widget Context to have particular sidebar ads appear on specific pages, or for specific categories on your blog. This makes it easy to have the most relevant ad appear on each of your blog posts.

In-post links and graphics

Another possible tactic for presenting your lead magnets is to weave promotions into your content. Usually, this takes the form of a short in-line promotion for your lead magnet where relevant.

If done well these kind of promotions are effective because you can make your reader aware of your lead magnet at critical points in your posts. Right at the moment when the pain feels the most urgent, or when the desire is strongest, you provide a great solution. This moment might be at the end of a story, when you mention a successful case study, or when you are describing a common problem.

The downside to using in-post links is that this approach is not very scaleable. With sidebars you can manage what graphic appears on hundreds of posts simultaneously. In-post links work best when they’re built right into the blog post, so they can really only be managed one at a time.

Pop ups

Many people choose to promote their lead magnets via pop-ups on their sites. While this is a good way build awareness of the lead magnet, I don’t think it’s a good tactic overall.

Consider how your readers experience pop ups. People arrive on your site to consume your content. They’ve come to you with a problem they hope you can solve. They start reading your content and then get interrupted by a pop up. Now they need to assess the offer, figure out how to close the pop-up box (which is designed to be difficult) then get back into the groove reading your post.

Conclusion

A good lead magnet is crucial for getting value from your content marketing. Lead magnets enable you to build your email list and position you to place your offers in front of your customers.

Start with one good lead magnet that you can advertise across your entire blog, then expand to develop lead magnets that solve each of your core problems. Once you have all your core problems covered, you can consider making specific lead magnets tailored to your most popular blog posts.

I mention a lot of tools and resources in this chapter. To make it easy for you to access all these tools, I have created a downloadable list of the tools mentioned in this book at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Chapter 16 - Breathe new life into old content with repurposing

Let’s face it, it can be difficult to come up with fresh ideas for content all the time. Many people have this unconscious expectation that once you create a piece of content on a topic or idea, then you can’t ever discuss it again. It’s already been covered.

The good news is, you don’t always have to come up with brand new ideas for your content, and there are ways to take the content you already have and create dozens of new pieces of content from it. This is called repurposing.

Repurposing is the process of taking an existing piece of content and creating variations and adaptations of it. This can give you access to new audiences, new sources of traffic, and new opportunities to collaborate.

Benefits of repurposing

There are many benefits to repurposing that make it an excellent play for most content marketing campaigns. Here are just a few:

- **Good for SEO** - Repurposing content can allow you to attract search traffic on many different variations of a theme. You can target slightly different keywords and open up entirely new streams of traffic.
- **You get a better understanding of your audience** - Repurposing will allow you to compare and contrast different approaches to your content and discover what works well for your audience.
- **It reinforces your core messaging** - Through repurposing, you'll address the same message and idea from many different angles. This will help establish you as an authority on these topics and will make your core message stronger through repetition.
- **Easy to scale** - It's easier to delegate content repurposing to your team than it is to assign the creation of original content. Your team members start with the foundational content to work from and reference. This is particularly good for new team members who may not have a good feel for your brand yet, and who need a little guidance.
- **Conserves resources** - Coming up with brand new content all the time can be incredibly taxing on your creativity. Repurposing content that you already know is performing well requires only a fraction of the critical thinking that exploring and researching a new idea would.

Examples of repurposing

There are many different approaches to repurposing. Some approaches will suit your skillsets and audience better than others. Let’s explore some of the different strategies available for repurposing.

To help visualize how these work, let’s examine each approach through the lens of an SaaS company creating content around “customer success.”

Top down repurposing

This process starts with the creation of a foundational piece of content that broadly covers a topic. Then you and your team can find ways to spin off smaller pieces of content in different formats based on ideas outlined in the foundational piece.

Bottom up repurposing

If you have several small pieces of content that all address a particular theme, consider creating a large asset by combining them. It may take a little bit of work to make the concepts from all the content fit together in a coherent way, but it will be much less work than creating something from scratch.

Adapting content to a new medium

Not everyone consumes content in the same way. Some people prefer podcasts, some prefer reading, some prefer videos. By creating content in many different mediums, you open up new opportunities to capture attention.

You could take a blog post and record a video on the same topic. Or you could take a successful podcast episode you recorded and turn it into a slide deck with the highlights from the episode.

Update an old post with the latest information

Perhaps you had a great post a few years back that was well-received by your audience. But over time it has started to lose its traction. Technology is changing the landscape of the business world so quickly these days that a post that's even 2 years old can be seen as “outdated.”

Revisiting great content and updating it with the latest information can bring it back to life.

Applying a familiar concept to a new audience

Let's say you wrote an excellent post on customer service for SaaS companies that did very well. The concepts that you cover in your post could apply to a service business. By changing the audience you target and address in repurposing, you can take the hard work you put into creating one piece of content and easily create several other iterations.

Make free content from premium content

Perhaps you have a paid community as part of your business. Your members get access to some of your best content. You can create a condensed version of your premium content and make it free.

Use this free content to promote your membership community and attract people who want to see more of that kind of content.

The reverse is also possible if you have some high quality free content that you can add more information to or expand on in some way.

Address different skill levels

If you've created an amazing "beginner's guide to X," examine how you can make an advanced version of the same content. You'll address the needs of a broader audience and give people the opportunity to progress with you.

Collaborating to add new perspectives

Mixing your ideas with those of other influencers in your space can breathe new life into an old topic. Collaborating to repurpose content can add new perspectives, insights, stories, and strategies to the content you share.

Repurposing like this is a good strategy to build relationships. Especially if the content you are repurposing has a lot of traction already. It will make it an easy sell to whoever you reach out to-- they'll see the already-successful content on the subject.

Best practices for repurposing

There are right and wrong ways to repurpose. Here are some of the best practices you can use to make the most of your repurposed content:

- **Create with repurposing in mind** - Even if you're creating original content, keep in mind how you may be able to repurpose it in the future. As you're creating your original posts, you'll make more opportunities for repurposing down the line
- **Plan for repurposing** - Even though it's less work than creating original content, repurposing content still takes work and effort. Be sure to leave room in your editorial calendar for repurposing so that you have the time and energy to make it happen.
- **Repurpose with the customer in mind** - Keep your content relevant to your customer. People will be able to tell if you're just repurposing to lock down a few new keywords for SEO. People won't engage with that content and you won't get the results you were hoping for anyway.
- **Add more value with every repurposing** - Be sure that there's something fresh in every piece of repurposed content.
- **Use analytics and engagement to find repurposing opportunities** - It's best to start repurposing with content that is popular and has traction. Look through your analytics, comments, and social media to find your top performing content.
- **Cross-promote your content** - As you start repurposing content, make sure one piece is promoting another. If people are interested in one piece of content it's likely they'll be interested in the repurposed version.

- **Repurpose evergreen content** - Focus on repurposing content that will stay relevant for many years to come. This kind of content often includes high level ideas and principles that hold true even as trends and technology change.
- **Modify and adapt the content to the medium** - Different channels and mediums for content have unique advantages and traits. Videos are great for demonstrating a process or workflow while infographics are great at telling a story through data. Make sure you understand the medium you're repurposing your content to and leverage its unique advantages.

Conclusion

Repurposing your content can simultaneously make your work easier and bring you more results from the hard work you’ve already invested into your content creation. Make it an integral part of your strategy and look for opportunities for easy wins with your audience.

PART VI - HOW TO SUPPORT AND SCALE YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

Creating good content alone is not enough to reach the full potential of your content marketing campaign. You need to be able to understand what content is performing well, and to create opportunities for your audience to become your customers.

This section is all about scaling up your content marketing campaign. We'll examine several systems you can use that will turn a little bit of work up front into your own "story engine." We'll discuss:

- How to understand what content is performing best and how people are interacting with your website.
- How to create automated email sequences that build relationships with your audience, suggest content, and present your most relevant offers to them.
- Paid traffic strategies to promote your content to a broad audience.
- Hiring writers and a content manager to help remove yourself from the time-consuming elements of the process.

What's the big picture?

These days, tasks that once took giant sales teams can now be done with a few pieces of (relatively) cheap software. Even better, most of these systems thrive when combined with great content. Your content can reduce the cost of using paid traffic to drive people to your site, and can increase clickthroughs from your emails.

These systems will also help you come up with new ideas for content. You'll be able to start conversations with your visitors through email and ask them directly what they want to see. You'll see which pieces of content are achieving the best results and you will know where to invest more time and energy in terms of creation.

What should you keep in mind when reading this section?

Remember that hiring a writer or content manager probably won't solve your problems overnight. The results your writers get will only be as good as the SOPs you create. If you want to take full advantage of freelancers and remote teams, your processes need to be tight. Fortunately, every interaction with freelancers or team members will create an opportunity to improve your processes. Remember, "fix the process, not the person."

What should you look forward to once you've finished reading this section?

Once you have implemented the strategies in this section, your "story engine" should be running and purring like a kitten. Much of the work that goes into content creation will be automated or outsourced. This will leave you with more time to work on your business and you will feel comfortable knowing that your team is creating exactly what you want.

Key terms and concepts

Email Autoresponder - An email autoresponder sends pre-written emails, helping to keep your audience and customers engaged.

Affiliate marketing - Affiliate marketing incentivizes others to sell your products for you by offering a commission or share of the revenue for every sale they make.

Retargeting - The process of sending specific ads to someone who has already visited your website, or a specific page on your website.

Chapter 17 - Content marketing is a team sport

Your content can become more interesting, more diverse, and more engaging with buy-in from your team.

With more team members onboard with your content marketing campaign, you can share more stories and insights from all areas of your business. When you include multiple viewpoints from multiple people, you'll increase the quality of your content and be able to go deeper in more areas.

Having many perspectives from the many faces on your team also makes your team and brand more likeable. For most online brands, the only time there's a human connection is when a sales or customer service call is happening. Neither are particularly great times for first impressions. Take advantage of your content as an opportunity for members of your team to build strong, human connections with your customers.

There are opportunities for great content happening in all branches of your company, not just in marketing. If your team is engaged with your content marketing, they'll start to listen for opportunities to turn a part of their work into content.

Help your team understand content marketing

Your team may not have your same understanding of the value and best practices behind content marketing. You'll need to educate them on why you are doing this to get them to buy into the campaign. The more invested and empowered they can feel the in content marketing processes, the more engaged they will be.

You’ll need to start with key decision makers in your organization. Writing needs to be seen as a good use of time across the company, not just in the marketing department.

Here’s a few ways you can do that:

- Connect what you are doing in your content strategy to their own goals.
- Share case studies of similar companies getting results that your team members want, with the help of content marketing.
- Share your vision and the “why” behind your content to build an emotional connection and a sense of purpose behind the work you are doing.

Documents like your content strategy and style guide are also useful for helping your team understand how the publishing process works and where they can fit into that picture. Sharing these documents with your team is also a good test to make sure they are easy to use and easy to understand even for someone who does not have a background in writing or marketing.

Make it easy to collect ideas from the team

Once your team understands and appreciates the value of the content marketing campaign they’ll be interested in contributing some of their time and energy to help it succeed. But they probably won’t take action unless you make it easy for them to do so.

Here are a few strategies that you can use to get your team to help you with your content creation and with inspiration for new posts.

Idea collection templates

Give your team members templates that they can use to easily hash out an idea into an outline with the key points and takeaways that make up the meat of the content.

Consider what essential information you would need from them to be able to determine if this story fits in the content strategy and could be worked into a good blog post.

Include plenty of prompt questions and examples to help guide them through the creation process.

Here’s what I would recommend asking for people to include when they fill in the template:

- A brief summary of the post
    - What problem does this solve?
    - Who would read this?
    - Is there a story from our past that we can tell to relate to this?
- 3-5 key takeaways, lessons, or action items

Recurring content brainstorms

Another strategy would be to schedule a recurring meeting where you can get the team together and ask them to brainstorm with you.

Allow for the team members to guide this process at first, but if there are no ideas forthcoming then you can start to list some of the topics you want to discuss to see if those subjects spark any conversations.

Be sure to record these meetings so that you can focus on being engaged in the conversation and not frantically taking down notes.

Develop a knowledge base

When involving your entire team in the process of creating content, it is important to remember that all of your publishing does not have to be forward facing; many of your team members may have deep areas of expertise, even if writing is not one of those areas. Publishing blog content may even be intimidating to some. Encouraging your team to build an internal knowledge base will give everyone the opportunity to write and share their thoughts without having to be incredible writers, and without the pressure of publishing.

In fact, to contribute to the knowledge base, your team members may not need to write at all. In some cases, it may be easier and more efficient to ask people to create audio recordings of what they learned, and then have it transcribed later. If you record calls for sales or customer service, you can capture the recordings, add a few notes and then store that. Another possibility is doing a screen recording of a workflow or process.

An internal knowledge base--a repository of the collective know-how and skills of your team-- has many uses that stretch beyond content marketing. Consider the usefulness of an organized collection of your team's knowledge for things like team onboarding, training, and team alignment.

Here are a few examples of what you can add to your knowledge base:

- **Mini case studies and reflections** – Perhaps a team member was working on a new customer onboarding process this week (the last one was a pain). They're getting much better results than they expected. Notes from their process and any insights they have will be very beneficial for others down the line.

- **Internal knowledge** – Be sure to include things like your company's history/timeline, key dates and developments in your story, your business processes and philosophy.
- **Industry knowledge** – Major developments within your company's space, industry trends, news, and projections. Be sure to also include thought leadership on the biggest issues within your industry (Pro tip: write about issues no one else in your industry will talk about).
- **Factual data and opinions** – This includes actual hard data; reports, studies and interviews that inform your company's opinions on industry issues and affect your business practices.

I'm sure you see where this is going. In addition to creating a powerful tool to help with the internal functioning of your organization, this knowledge base will become a great source of content for you and your writers. Each mini case study, unique insight, collection of data, or interview has the potential to become your next great post. A well-organized knowledge base can also help you see patterns in your business or industry that may lead to new themes for your content strategy.

Community posts / roundups

If you have a large team with diverse skillsets, consider doing a community roundup post as a piece of content. Large teams do well with this because you can rotate who appears in the posts. These posts help your customers get to know your team and do not require much work from the people you are featuring in order to add value.

Roundup posts combine into one post many opinions and perspectives on a specific topic. For a community post with your team, consider discussing different facets of your team culture. Think about what makes your company unique. What gives you a competitive edge over other businesses? Why do people love working at your business?

Here are a few ideas for great community/roundup posts:

- How do you manage your team communication?
- How do you manage remote team members?
- How are new team members onboarded?
- How do people spend time outside the office and how does it contribute to their work?
- How do different team members stay productive?
- How do individuals bring their own personality into their work?

As you would with normal roundup posts, I recommend having one writer send out a series of questions to the team and then working to string the responses together in a compelling way.

A good example of a successful community roundup post is here, where the team at Buffer shares a pinterest board with all of the books the team is currently reading (https://www.pinterest.com/bufferapp/what-buffer-is-reading/). This is engaging because it shows some of the personalities of the team while simultaneously sharing interesting and helpful information.

Team content promotion

Another “low hanging fruit” in terms of involving your team in content production is to have a system that makes it easy for everyone to participate in the promotion of your content. Even small teams can have a relatively large influence if they pool their collective reach on social media. Having everyone participate in the content promotion process can help each new post published get some early momentum and attention.

There are many ways to do this, but I recommend sending an email to your entire team every time content is published. Make it as easy as possible to share the content and get the message out.

To do so, include links to:

- A facebook post they can share on their personal pages or in groups.
- Content sites like Inbound, Reddit and Growth Hackers so they can upvote it.
- A “click to tweet” (http://clicktotweet.com/) ready with hashtags that they can instantly publish to their twitter. You could even create several variations with different hashtags to reach a broader audience.
- Off-site content where someone mentioned or praised you.
- Sample text for an email that they could use to send the new post to their contacts personally.
- Graphics, quotes and highlights of the post so they can create their own social media content if they want.

Share results and celebrate together

A great way to keep your team involved and to show them the impact they are having is to share the results you are getting and celebrate any milestones you hit.

Can you offer team or individual incentives for certain content milestones? Maybe buy lunch for the team if you get a certain amount of new subscribers?

Conclusion

Content marketing can be a burden if everything is heaped on one person. But if a team unites around a vision for content, it can energise a team and get everyone involved. You'll benefit from having diverse voices in your content, and your audience will trust you more since they get to know your team through your content.

There are stories happening in every corner of your company. If your team understands how they can contribute their stories and experiences, you'll find a powerful resource for content creation.

Chapter 18 - How to scale your messaging with an email autoresponder

After a few months or years of consistent content creation, some of your best posts will be buried in the archives of your blog. Unless they generate organic search traffic, it's likely people will miss them. You can't expect a new visitor to look back through several pages in your archives to find that life-changing article you wrote last year. It's also unlikely that they'll use your site's search feature to find it. Fortunately there's a tool that can help solve this problem: the autoresponder.

An autoresponder is like having an extra member on your team. But this team member doesn't get tired of your message, take days off, or get sick.

A great series of emails will create a good experience for everyone, from your first subscriber to your millionth. In your emails you should strive to be helpful and to anticipate the needs of the reader as well as to set their expectations for what's to come.

A well-written email will take the reader's spark of curiosity and ignite your visitor into a fan.

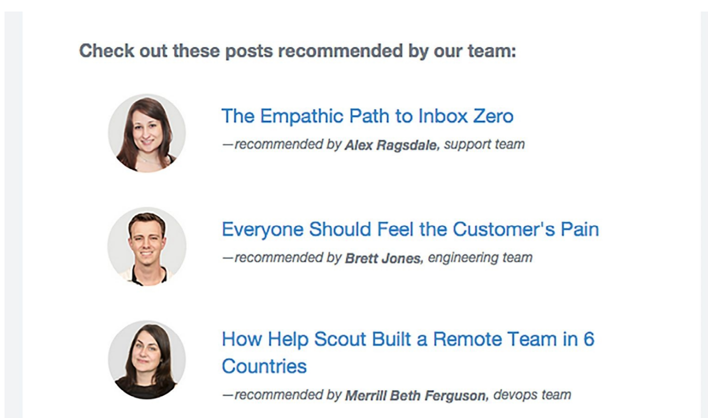
Email sequences every business should have

Welcome series

A welcome series is a good way to introduce yourself for the first time to new subscribers. The welcome series can set expectations for your visitor, present some of your very best content, and start conversations.

It’s important that you set expectations early in this series. You want your visitors to know how many emails are coming, how often those emails will come, and what they’ll contain. You want to build some anticipation and excitement for the series to keep your subscribers opening the emails.

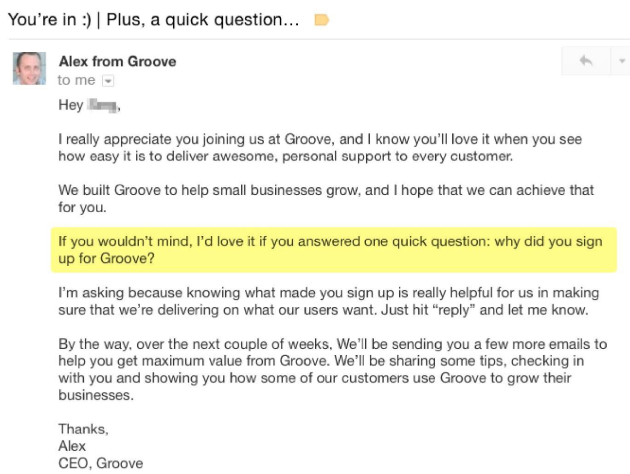
Your visitors don’t want to be blasted with emails filled with a bunch of content links. So be considerate in how you frame up your content suggestions. A good way to do this is to introduce different members of your team and have them suggest their favorite posts. This puts faces to the names of your team, and casts a helpful light on your team since they’re the ones suggesting the content. This also helps to make the content suggestions feel personal and unique, rather than like a shameless ploy to direct traffic to your posts.



Too much automation can backfire with subscribers, so you want to create opportunities for authentic interactions.

Your welcome series is a great place to collect some market research and to add a personal touch at the same time. The easiest way to do so is just through asking your audience a question:

- Why did you sign up for my product/service?
- What problem do you have that I can help with?
- What do you want to see on the blog next?



You're in :) | Plus, a quick question...

Alex from Groove
to me

Hey [redacted],

I really appreciate you joining us at Groove, and I know you'll love it when you see how easy it is to deliver awesome, personal support to every customer.

We built Groove to help small businesses grow, and I hope that we can achieve that for you.

If you wouldn't mind, I'd love it if you answered one quick question: why did you sign up for Groove?

I'm asking because knowing what made you sign up is really helpful for us in making sure that we're delivering on what our users want. Just hit "reply" and let me know.

By the way, over the next couple of weeks, We'll be sending you a few more emails to help you get maximum value from Groove. We'll be sharing some tips, checking in with you and showing you how some of our customers use Groove to grow their businesses.

Thanks,
Alex
CEO, Groove

Email tutorials

Email sequences can be framed as tutorials or courses that guide someone through a process. This is one of the best ways to drip out your content, keeping people excited for the next email.

In a tutorial series, each email should string together a few bite-sized tips and should point readers to one of your pillar pieces of content as a recommended deeper dive into the subject. If possible, organize your series in a way that creates a sense of progress and advancement. Start with basic ideas early on, and then move onto more complex subjects. This sense of progress goes a long way in keeping your reader interested and in creating a sense of trust, because it’s you who’s helping them advance.

Another great advantage to email courses is that they can double as lead magnets. People need to provide you with their email addresses to get the series, after all.

Lead nurture

The core problem philosophy discussed earlier in this book primes your blog for good lead nurture sequences. When someone downloads a lead magnet related to a certain core problem, she is effectually raising her hand to get more help and information on that problem.

For each lead magnet you have on your blog, you should have a lead nurture series tailored to the core problem the lead magnet targets. These series can suggest new content, give unique tips, and frame your product or service as a potential solution to that specific problem.

Ambassador

Most email automation software offers a “lead scoring” feature. This measures and assigns point values to actions a visitor takes (how often they open emails, click links, visit your site).

This means you can create a series for your most engaged visitors. When crafting this series, I recommend a mix of asking the readers questions about what their current problems are and what they want to see on the blog next, as well as giving them opportunities to promote some of your best content.

If you have an affiliate program you should suggest it to this group; this will help incentivise their evangelism. Or you could request testimonials from active clients who seem to be enjoying your product. The ambassador series should make your most engaged visitors feel heard and appreciated.

Re-engagement series

You can also use the tracking features in your email automation system to target people who have not opened emails or interacted with you in a while. You can build a series that aims to bring them back to your site before the trail goes too cold.

Often what works best for these series is to present some of the newer content that you have which these inactive visitors may have “missed out on.”

The downside to this series is that it needs to be updated a little more frequently than the others if you always want to be presenting your newest content.

Affiliate training

Affiliate programs are a powerful way to enlist other people and brands to help grow your business. Most businesses approach this strategy by simply providing a link to their affiliates and leave the rest up to the affiliate. You can use an email sequence to brief a new affiliate and to help them succeed.

You should prepare your affiliates with all your best content, audience information, swipe files, and anything else that they could use as a tool to help sell your product.

Customer success / onboarding

Remember that content can help to not only generate sales, but also to retain current customers.

Think about the common problems or hang-ups your customers have when getting started with your product or service. Can you create an email series that helps minimize those problems and maximize their delight?

Events and product launches

You can use an email sequence to prime someone who signs up for a webinar you're hosting, or someone who has indicated interest in an upcoming product you're about to launch.

Your emails can be timed to coincide with key milestones such as "1 hour 'til the webinar goes live" or "we're launching next week."

General tips for email automation success

Because there are so many different email programs out there, it is hard to get too specific on the features and advantages of each program. But there are many universal tactics that you can apply to almost any tool you use.

I have several suggestions for email automation tools in my recommended tools list available at thestoryengine.co/resources.

Come up with a scoring system

Most email automation platforms have a scoring system. Every opened email, link clicked, page visited has a point value that adds into someone's "lead score." It's up to you to determine the point values of different interactions.

Once a customer or visitor reaches certain scores, you can trigger different interactions, such as notifying a member of your sales team that this person is engaged, or that someone has not used your product for a while.

Create opportunities to activate new sequences

Throughout your email sequences, you should create opportunities for your readers to activate new sequences that interest them. Once you have someone's contact information, all the person needs to do to activate a new sequence is click a link.

This strategy is good for stringing together several email courses. Once someone has opted in to be educated and solve a problem, she is likely going to be willing to get another course if she liked your content.

Offering your customer opportunities to activate new sequences is particularly effective at the end of email series. You want to keep sending each reader emails as long as the emails are being read and as long as the customer is getting value out of them. So never end a series without creating opportunities to start a new one.

Check in

If your subscribers do not opt in to a new series, create a “check in” email that follows up after 30 days to see how they are doing. Avoid any pitches in this email, just use plain text to ask how they are doing, if they’ve had any recent successes or if they’re facing new challenges.

Surprise them

Sometimes it’s nice to throw an unexpected bonus gift into your series. Give your readers something that will delight them, something that’s relevant to whatever they opted in for or purchased.

You want your readerss to feel happy that they took action and to inspire more of the same. This is true even if they have not made a purchase with you yet.

Optimize for sharing

Help your readers to promote the content you suggest for them. You can make it easy by adding "click to tweet" (http://clicktotweet.com/) links inside your emails.

You must also anticipate that some of your readers will forward your emails to friends and colleagues. Make it easy for this new recipient to opt into the sequence as well. This is usually done by adding a little "P.S." at the end of your email like:

"Did you get this email from a friend? You can get the rest of this series on X by clicking here."

Don't stop at the sale

Create email sequences specifically for your current customers as well. Set these series up to help your customers succeed with your product, to look for opportunities to upsell, and to gather intelligence that you can apply to your prospective clients.

Conclusion

Email is one of the most powerful and easy-to-scale tools available to you. Paired with a deep understanding of your customer and audience, it can become one of the most valuable assets in your business.

A word of warning: You will not be able to completely automate your messaging without some drawbacks. You should be making an effort to personally connect with customers or your automation will come across as stale, and you will lose touch with your audience.

Chapter 19 - Analytics made easy

The analytics on your site are like the instruments a pilot uses to fly at night or in low-visibility conditions. These instruments are crucial for safely navigating, landing, and taking off. Without these instruments, flying would be very risky and unpredictable; without them, you could only fly on clear days.

Unfortunately, there’s no such thing as a clear day online. You always need your instruments to see how visitors to your site are behaving, to know which content is performing the best, and to understand how people are making purchases.

In this chapter we’ll discuss the foundations of analytics and what you need to do to understand your audience.

“Thank you” pages

When someone visits your site, and chooses to purchase a product, register for a webinar, or downloads a lead magnet, they should be taken to a “thank you page.”

For the visitor, thank you pages confirm that they’ve completed what they needed to do to get what they wanted. It sets expectations for what happens next (Will the product arrive by email? Should they check their spam folder? What should they do if they can’t find it?). The thank you page can also suggest related content or products to supplement whatever the customer just downloaded.

For you, a thank you page marks a successful completion of an action. The only time someone arrives on this page will be after they've made a purchase or filled out a form. These pages are a critical point of reference for tracking customer behavior.

Most tracking and ads software like Google Analytics and Facebook's ad platform use thank you pages to collect information.

We'll discuss more specifics of how thank you pages and tracking software work together later in this chapter.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics is the foundational tracking program. It's free, it's powerful, and almost everyone is using it. It's easy to install the code directly on your site but there are many lightweight plugins for WordPress that make it even easier.

If you're totally new to Google Analytics, I recommend taking a look at the "Google Analytics for Beginners" course (https://analytics.google.com/analytics/academy/). This course will show you how to use the tool to carry out the strategies outlined in this chapter.

Traffic volume

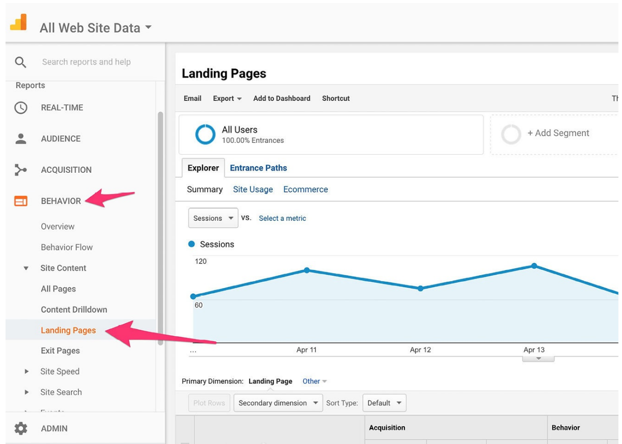
The default page you see when you log into Google Analytics gives you an overview of the last 30 days of traffic. Total traffic is mostly a vanity metric, but let's be honest here, we're still going to look at it and give ourselves a pat on the back each month our numbers go up significantly. Just remember that you don't want to base any important decisions on broad vanity metrics. Simply because your traffic is going up does not mean you're on track to getting more customers.

How to see what pages people are landing on

When someone "lands" on a page, it means they arrive on that page from another website. Knowing where people are landing on your site is very important in order to understand how content is performing.

Knowing what pages your readers are landing on is great for seeing how new content is performing, and for determining whether or not old content is continuing to drive traffic. This information can help you make better decisions about what content to create in the future, based on what is resonating with your audience.

There are a few ways you can get this information; I like to use the Behavior menu to access the Landing Pages description:

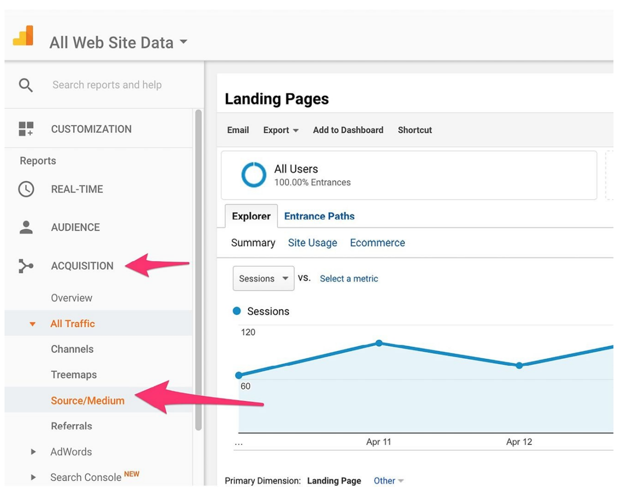

All Web Site Data
Search reports and help
Reports
REAL-TIME
AUDIENCE
ACQUISITION
BEHAVIOR
Overview
Behavior Flow
Site Content
All Pages
Content Drilldown
Landing Pages
Exit Pages
Site Speed
Site Search
ADMIN
Landing Pages
Email
Export
Add to Dashboard
Shortcut
All Users
100.00% Entrances
+ Add Segment
Explorer
Entrance Paths
Summary
Site Usage
Ecommerce
Sessions
VS.
Select a metric
Sessions
120
60
Apr 11
Apr 12
Apr 13
Primary Dimension: Landing Page
Other
Plot Rows
Secondary dimension
Sort Type:
Default
Acquisition
Behavior

Where are people coming from

The Acquisition view in Google Analytics has information about where your visitors are coming from. This will help you determine if you're ranking for the SEO keywords that you're targeting, and if sites are linking to your content or referring traffic to you.

This is very useful for seeing if any "key relationships" are paying off in the form of traffic, for identifying which off-site guest posts are performing well, and for understanding which keywords you're ranking for.

For answering these questions, I use the Acquisition view and select Source/Medium:



How to set goals to trigger with your thank you pages

Goals are useful for drilling down and understanding who makes up the traffic that is converting on your site. You'll create goals for successful actions like:

- Someone downloads a lead magnet
- A visitor fills out a contact form

- A customer makes a purchase

Once a goal is triggered, you can work backwards to see information like which pages visitors landed on, how many times each reader visited your site, and where that reader came from before landing on your site. This will help you hone in on the very best opportunities for your marketing campaign.

You can create a goal that is triggered once someone arrives on a thank you page. This is known as a “destination goal.” Destination goals are easy to set up, but can be inaccurate if people find a way to arrive on your “thank you” page without going through the conversion process.

There are also “event goals” in Google Analytics. These are often more accurate than destination goals, but will require help from a developer to get the code set up. Creating an event goal places code on your site that will fire when specific elements on a page are used. Events can include actions like button clicks.

Pixels

Facebook

Facebook's Pixel cross-references a visitor on your site with his or her Facebook profile. You have probably witnessed Pixel in action if, after visiting a website, you started to see ads for that site appear on your newsfeed.

Even if you don't currently have a desire to start a paid traffic campaign, it's a good idea to get a Facebook Pixel on your site. Most people don't install the Facebook Pixel until they're ready for ads, but this means they start their paid traffic campaigns with no data, and need to wait several months before they have enough data to successfully retarget.

If you build the Facebook Pixel into your site early on, you'll build up data on your audience over time and if/when you decide to turn on ads, you'll have a nice log of traffic ready to go for retargeting.

You can get unique insights from your Facebook Pixel even without running ads. From the Facebook Ads platform you can use the Audience Insights tool to look at demographics, locations, interests, and other patterns in your audience. This information can help you make decisions about your content.

For example: Perhaps you have a product on your site that you believe is something that men would be interested in. After checking your audience insights you find that 40% of your traffic is from women. That's a significant portion of your audience, and you start creating some content specifically for women to create a better experience for them.

Another possibility could be that after a few months of collecting data on your pixel, you find that most of your audience are fans of a certain influencer. This could point to a good collaboration opportunity.

Perfect Audience

The Perfect Audience Pixel works in a similar way to the Facebook Pixel. Instead of showing ads on Facebook, this pixel it will enable you to display ads on sites across the web. This is useful because you many not want to solely rely on Facebook to drive traffic to your site.

Though PA does not have audience insights, it’s still worthwhile to install it early on your site. These pixels are free and easy to install with basic WordPress skills.

In the next chapter we’ll discuss how you can start using the data you are collecting from your pixels to start paid traffic campaigns.

Link tracking

Link tracking is a powerful way to gain insight into how people behave with your content. This is a more advanced technique; while it is easy to do, it can be time-intensive to manage.

To explain the benefits of link tracking, let's consider the following hypothetical situation. Imagine you have a sales page and you're looking at the analytics for it. You see that the page got 100 visits yesterday and 10 of those visitors made a purchase. You see that you have traffic to this page coming from a link to a guest post that you wrote, from a recent webinar you hosted, and from a paid traffic campaign.

With no link tracking - You might think to yourself: 10% conversion rate? Not bad! Since this page is converting so well, why not send more traffic to it? So you boost your paid traffic budget.

With link tracking - The 10% conversion rate is good news, but you discover that 50 people came from your paid traffic, and none of them made a purchase. You see that another 40 came from your guest post and 5 made a purchase. The last 10 came from that webinar, and 5 of them converted.

If you did not use link tracking in this case, you'd spend money and probably not get any additional results. With the link tracking you'd see that it might be a good idea to try another webinar soon, rather than to purchase traffic through Facebook.

With the Google URL Builder (https://ga-dev-tools.appspot.com/campaign-url-builder/) you can create specific links with tags that will help identify and track traffic on your site.

You can add several pieces of information to your links that will appear in Google Analytics:

- **Campaign source** - This marks where the traffic is coming from. Potential sources might include your newsletter, an email campaign, paid ads, or a guest post.
- **Campaign medium** - This is slightly different that the actual source. It is the medium that this traffic comes from. So it could be email, paid traffic, *etc.* Think of the medium as the larger umbrella category which includes the source.
- **Campaign name** - You can use a campaign name in your URL to differentiate and compare several different campaigns.
- **Campaign terms** - It can be useful to include campaign terms in URLs for paid traffic that target specific keywords.

Conclusion

A lightweight knowledge of how to use analytics is all you need to get powerful insights that will guide your content marketing. Without these insights, you'll only have a limited picture of how people are interacting with you site; you'll be "flying blind."

Even if you have no interest in digging through the data on your website, you should still set up your tracking and pixels as early as possible. You can collect the data and have it ready for another team member to handle when the time for detailed analysis arises.

If you're absolutely overwhelmed when you think about analysing data, I recommend just starting with creating your thank you pages, and setting up goals in Google Analytics. The rest you can add and develop as you become more comfortable with these tools.

Chapter 20 - Simple strategies to boost your content with paid traffic

There are many synergies between content marketing and paid traffic strategies. Adding a little bit of paid traffic to the right piece of content can be like pouring gasoline onto a fire. And of course, good content reduces the costs of a paid traffic campaign.

In this chapter we'll discuss a few lightweight paid traffic strategies you can use to boost your content, grow your email list, and drive customers to your business.

Before you start sending traffic

Paid traffic is not always a good investment. It often requires some experimentation, and thus mistakes, to be run profitably. You need to have a few things in place to make the most of your investment in paid traffic.

Below are some of the minimum requirements I would recommend having in place before you begin a lightweight campaign like the ones outlined in this chapter. As the amount of money you use in your paid traffic goes up, so should the sophistication of your tracking and automation.

Something to sell

You should have a product that you can sell to justify investing in paid traffic. Often it's best to have products that address several price points from a $5-10 impulse buy, to a high-end sale.

Analytics to track success

You need to be able to track and measure the success of your paid traffic campaigns. Without analytics you'll just be throwing your money out the window.

A basic email sequence

Before using purchase paid traffic, you should have a basic email sequence set up; any time you get a new email address from traffic, that customer should receive some information. Your email sequence should tell your new visitor what to expect, information about you, and some next steps (registering for a webinar, checking out more content, making a small purchase).

Retargeting

Retargeting is a popular tactic for eCommerce stores, used to address the situation when someone visits a product page but does not make a purchase. When someone visits a certain product page, there's a good chance that he or she was thinking about buying that product. Many businesses follow up with ads related to the product, to try to encourage the visitor pull the trigger on the purchase.

With retargeting you can focus on very specific segments of your traffic and send personalized messaging and ads. You can apply the same tactics an eCommerce store owner uses to your content marketing campaigns.

Facebook retargeting methods

There are a few ways you can develop an audience to focus on as you retarget. I recommend testing them all and comparing the results you get from each.

List retargeting

You can upload an email list into Facebook and it will cross reference those emails with Facebook profiles. This way you can send Facebook ads to anyone on your email list.

Pixel retargeting

Pixels will collect information from site visitors. You can use these pixels to target anyone who has visited your site, or even to target people who visited specific pages on your site.

Lookalike audiences

As we discussed in the last chapter, Facebook can see trends in your audience's demographics, interests, and behaviors. It can use these patterns to create groups of people who have not visited your site, but who fit a similar profile to your current visitors.

This is technically "cold traffic" but you know that there's a good chance the lookalike audience will be interested in what you're offering if they share a lot of similarities with your existing audience.

Retargeting strategies

Once you have used one of the above approaches to generate a list of readers to be retargeted, there are many ways to apply these retargeting methods.

Promote a lead magnet

If you have applied the “core problems” structure to your content (as discussed in the Foundations section), you can target people who visited one or several of your posts that solve a certain core problem. You can send these visitors ads for the lead magnet that also addresses that specific core problem.

Since someone who visited those pages is very likely looking for the solution to that problem, you can be confident that he or she will be interested in your lead magnet.

This means you can capture email addresses and grow your list at a very low price.

Promote related content

You can use this same tactic to promote content blog posts to your audience. This works well if you have one post that gets a lot of organic search traffic and other great content that is not getting organic traffic, but is still highly valuable and converts well.

Target visitors of a post that gets a lot of traffic, and then promote some of your posts that are very valuable and solve the same core problem. This keeps people coming back to your site and helps them discover useful content that they may not have found otherwise.

Promote fresh content to your list and past visitors

A good way to drive some traffic to a new post is to use retargeting to promote it to your past visitors. This is a good way to reach people who may have had your emails filtered by a spam blocker and don't see your newsletter anymore.

Why retargeting isn't all you need

Retargeting by definition means displaying offers only to people who have connected with your content before, whether this connection was through a video on Facebook, or a post on your website. This kind of renewed connection is great, and it does normally help get high conversion rates. The problem is that retargeting only appeals to the traffic you currently have.

Retargeting needs a steady stream of fresh traffic to be worthwhile. This usually means lots of organic search traffic, or a large email list. The majority of small and medium businesses don't have these resources. Even with a few thousand visitors to your site each month, you'll quickly exhaust retargeting opportunities.

If this sounds like it describes your business, then your marketing efforts need to be focused on getting that new traffic to your site and adding new names to your lists. This generation of new traffic is how your business will grow—and it'll give you a bigger list to retarget in the future.

Strategies for making "first contact" with cold traffic

You can't pitch cold traffic in the same way you would with retargeted people who have visited your site before or are already part of your email list. However, promoting your content to cold traffic will help you build up your audience data for retargeting. You'll send people to popular posts on your site, your pixels will track each new visitor; once you have tracked a visitor, you can start retargeting that person.

Remember that you need to add value first; new visitors don't know you or trust you yet. It will be difficult to get new visitors to make a purchase right away, even if you have a great offer.Here are a couple ideas for how to add value up front:

- **Give away a great lead magnet in exchange for their information** - Choose a popular download or resource from your site and promote it with ads. If you don't have a lead magnet currently, a great place to start is by creating a resource for one of your most popular blog posts. Check out chapter 15 for more information on lead magnets.

- **Share content on a video ad** - Give away some of your best ideas or content in a video ad. Include a short call to action at the end of the video so people can dig deeper. This will give people a chance to get to know you before they click away from Facebook. If your video resonates with the people you are targeting, they'll share it and give you some free advertising as well. You'll also be collecting audience data on the video engagement, which you can use for retargeting or lookalike audiences later.

Facebook recently added a new feature that allows you to create custom audiences from video viewers. This is an excellent source for retargeting traffic. You can choose to target people who have seen your video, or even segment down to anyone who watched the full video.

- **Promote one of your best posts** - Send cold traffic to a high-converting or high-value post on your blog. It will be much cheaper to send traffic to a blog post instead of aiming for a conversion. According to the Content Marketing Institute and several studies, it often takes 6 to 8 interactions before a visitor will be ready to make a buying decision or even share their information with you. Sending a steady stream of content to your target audience will allow you to build a relationship with them.

Conclusion

If you have a good foundation, paid traffic provides opportunities for almost any audience size at almost any budget. Paid traffic can breathe fresh life into old blog posts, bring new visitors to your site, and remind your long-time followers when you've created something new.

Remember to have a scientific attitude when starting with paid traffic; test many different ideas and be prepared to have a few of them fail, losing a bit of money in the short run. With consistent review and accurate insights you'll find the opportunities that work best for you.

Chapter 21 - How to hire and work with writers

Adding a good writer to your team can lead to a dramatic increase in how much content you can create. Writing is typically one of the most time-consuming and challenging tasks in the creation process. Writing strong content takes critical thinking and extended focus. Both are precious resources for an entrepreneur at the helm of a growing business.

Fortunately, it has never been easier to hire and work with writers who can take the genius out of your head and put it into words. There are many different platforms to find and hire writers with a broad spectrum of interests and skills. A writer who fits your needs and budget is usually only a job posting away.

If you've started working on the tools and documents mentioned earlier in this book, you'll be in a unique position to delight the writers you work with. Most of the systems we've discussed are designed to make a writer's job easier. These tools provide writers with most of what they will need to create content that fits your strategy.

In this chapter we'll discuss where to find writers, and how to work with them.

Places to find writers

Problogger Jobs Board (https://problogger.com/jobs/) - For $70, you can post a job to one of the most popular writer sites out there.

Zerys (http://www.zerys.com/) - Connects you with an editor and over 60,000 writers. This tool is free to use; you pay at the end of the process, when you're happy with the product and with the writing that has been generated.

Upwork (http://upwork.com/) - A popular site for freelancers where you can post a job or project and test out some writers.

Guest content on other blogs - Look for guest articles on sites that discuss similar topics to yours. You can often find guest writers who are happy to write for you as well. This is a win-win partnership; the guest writers are excited to develop more content, and to get their name out there. They are happy to associate with strong, successful businesses. And you get great content written by writers who are already recognized as thought leaders in your industry.

What to look for in a good writer

- **Native english speaker** - For long form, highly detailed content, it's important to have a writer who has a native grasp on English (or your blog's primary language).
- **Experience publishing on sites similar to yours** - Ask for work samples in your job posting. The writers you hire should have articles similar in style, length, and subject to the content you want to create.
- **Engagement** - The work samples the writers send should display

signs of engagement. Examples of reader engagement are things like social shares (paste the link into http://likeexplorer.com/ to investigate the number and kind of social shares that a post has garnered) or comments.

- **Ability to follow instructions** - The more closely and precisely your writers can follow your style guide, the easier your life will be. Before you make an agreement with a writer, ask him or her to review you style guide and to agree to follow it. Most writers will probably be relieved and excited to have something like this to follow.
- **Capacity** - This one will be difficult to tell during the application process, but you need a writer who has the time and energy available to get content turned around quickly. Some writers have taken on too much work and won't be able to turn a quality article around quickly; some can take several weeks to generate a strong article. Make sure your applicant is clear on your timeline expectations and is confident that he or she can hit those goals. Keep an eye out for timeliness with the first few articles you have each writer work on.

Bonuses

There are some qualities that would be nice to have in a writer, but aren't absolutely necessary. These include:

- **A grasp of SEO** - A writer with a basic understand of how SEO works, how to research keywords, and how to optimize a post will go a long way in ensuring the success of your content.
- **Design skills** - Finding a writer who is able to create simple graphics in Canva would be a big benefit to you. Plus a grasp on design will usually translate into good formatting and nice appearance for your post.
- **Social media marketing** - Writers with an understanding of social media marketing and what gets people to share and engage with content will help create content that earns those results. However, you should not expect your writers to promote your posts automatically.

How to structure your contract

I recommend creating an agreement where each writer will be paid on an article-by-article basis. How much you pay your writers depends on the industry and their experience, but you should expect to pay somewhere between $70-350 for an article ranging from 1700-2200+ words.

When a writer is just starting out with you, assign one article at a time. If the writer continues to perform well, you can plan out several pieces of content for her to work on over the course of a few weeks or months.

How to determine the price you'll pay for an article

- **Technical knowledge** - The more specific and technical a topic is, the more you will need to pay a writer to discuss the topic.
- **Research and support** - If you have a lot of research and source materials already prepared for your articles, then it will be much easier to create. This high level of preparation means you can offer a lower payment and the rate will still be a good deal for your writers since it means less work for them.
- **Timeframe** - The faster you want an article done, the more you will need to pay. Generally 3-5 business days is a fair turnaround time to expect.

Onboarding your writers

Make sure your writers have access to all the relevant tools and folders they will need to do their jobs. The better you can set your writers up with the information they need to create something that fits in your brand, the less time you'll need to spend going back and forth with revisions. Your writers will need:

- Access to Trello or whatever system you use to keep your editorial calendar
- Access to a Google Drive folder with your strategy and other documents
- An account for your WordPress site

Walk your writers through your content strategy, style guide, keyword bank, and key relationships documents. Make sure writers understand the purpose of each of these documents and when they will find each document useful. Encourage writers to ask questions and to leave comments where things aren't clear.

Emphasize the importance of the style guide to their work. Make sure writers understand that it functions as a timeline (the first section is focused on ideation, the second on drafting, the third on publishing); this makes it easy for everyone to find relevant information.

Start with lots of hand holding

It's best to start a new writer out with work that does not leave much room for interpretation. Provide new writers with a detailed outline, or a good recorded interview to work from.

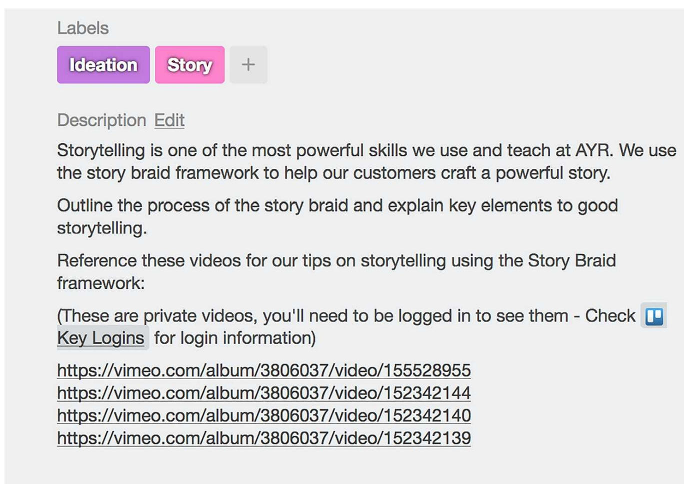
As your writers become more familiar with your system and with your voice, you can start to allow them more freedom to do their own research and to work on content of their choosing.

Blog post setup

When creating a blog post idea you want to make it as easy as possible for your writer to get started and to get the article right the first time.

When creating a new card in your editorial calendar (if you are using Trello) for a blog post idea, include a summary of the post in the description, as well as links to any relevant content (videos, case studies, webinars, podcasts etc.) that would help the writer draft the post.

You may also want to create a small outline or abstract of the post that highlights the main points you want covered.



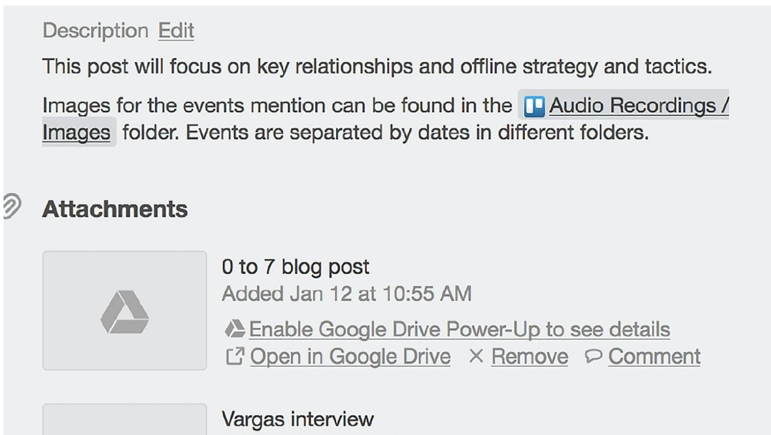
Make it easy to reference existing content

If you have an online course, videos, podcasts, webinars, or other forms of content that your writers could use or reference, make it easy for them to find. Collect all the links, login info, and recordings into a knowledge base that your writers can use for reference.

Create a card in your Resources / Reference list in your editorial calendar with links:

- For images, documents, audio recordings add them all into a folder in Google Drive
- Include links to your Vimeo or Youtube channel (and login information if the videos are private)

When adding ideas to your content calendar, be sure to mention where in your knowledge base your writers may be able to find useful information.



Make sure your non-content team members understand why and how to add content that may be useful for your writers to the knowledge base.

Record interviews for original content

One of the easiest ways to provide good source material for your writers is to record an interview. A 30-60 minute call can serve as a foundation for a detailed guide. Keep in mind that your writers are not simply going to transcribe the recordings into articles. They'll take the key ideas and turn them into posts:

1. Hop on a call with an influencer or colleague and discuss a topic or idea.
2. Talk with your writer on a call about an idea you want to develop for a post.

I recommend Ecamm Call Recorder for Skype or Facetime.This can record both audio and video if necessary. Video may be useful when demonstrating a process or workflow, or if you want to embed the original recorded conversation as a video into the post you create.

You should record even if you're just brainstorming an idea with your writer. Recording the interview will make it easy for your writer to go back through the interview later and stay focused during the recording.

There are a few ways to set up your content discovery calls.

Office hours - Set up a few slots in your calendar where your writer or influencer can book an interview with you at their convenience. I recommend Calendly (http://calendly.com/) for call scheduling. I recommend you have a special link just for content calls.

Recurring events - Setting up a recurring event each week where you and your writer can do an interview is beneficial because you both know when the event is happening each week and can prepare in advance.

Sample interview questions

Here are some questions that your writer can use to interview you and draw out the details of the post. With a little bit of modification you can use these to interview influencers as well. They may not all be relevant depending on the topic, but as the interview progresses you should be able to find a nice groove.

- Can you summarize the main idea of this post in a few sentences?
- Describe the problem that someone would want to solve when reading this post? Why is this important to solve?
- Do you have any personal stories that relate to this problem? How did you realize you had this problem?
- What makes your perspective unique in this post? Do you have a controversial belief or stance? Do you have a unique approach?
- Can you describe what life / business looks like before the problem is solved? And after the problem is solved?
- What results can someone expect if they apply these ideas to their business?
- What is the first step that someone can do today to start getting these results?
- Is there something most people do wrong when trying to solve this problem?

An example to aspire to

In the post "The Complete Guide to Amazon Kindle SEO for Self-Publishers" Tom Morkes has a very detailed breakdown of keyword research. But there are two very long videos near the top of the post that most of the information is based off. One is a 60 minute presentation and another is a 15 minute interview with an expert.

How to work with guest writers

As your brand and content marketing campaign start to grow you will begin to receive offers for guest articles.

The process of working with a guest writer will be very similar to working with one of your paid writers. Guest writers usually offer their work for free, but often they put a lot of extra time and effort into making a good article. They bring unique perspectives and information to the conversation.

Even though their work is free, guest writers are looking for one or several of the following things:

- **Exposure to your audience** - They want your audience to know who they are and what they do.
- **Links to their site** - They're going to sprinkle in links to their own content and try and boost their rank for certain keywords they're targeting.
- **To promote a product or service** - They may be launching something soon and want to generate as much awareness as possible through guest content.
- **Generate leads** - They may mention some of their lead magnets

in the guest post and try to capture some of your audience’s email addresses through their blog post.

Remember that the most valuable resource you create with your content marketing is trust from your audience. Sometimes what a guest writer wants could damage this trust. You must defend this trust zealously. This can be done by creating a few rules that your guest writers need to adhere to in order to get their work published on your site.

- **They need to follow the style guide like the rest of your writers** - Your guest writers should go through the same process as every other writer. Giving them special treatment will confuse your workflow and add unnecessary work.
- **No links to gated content in the post** - Gated content is content that requires visitors to enter an email address, or pay money, to access. You want your writers to focus on adding value, not getting sales. Their bio at the end of the post can be open for the inclusion of these links, though.

Make it easy to onboard a guest writer

If they’re willing to comply with your system, then guest writers should be treated very well and you should make their job as easy as possible. There are a couple of ways to make it easy to provide the writers with everything they need to get started.

- **Create an email template** - The simplest solution to working with guest writers is to create an email template to send when they reach out. The email provides a guest writer with everything they need to create a post (your strategy, style guide, FAQs, and rules). This makes adding a guest writer into your system as simple as copy & paste.

- **Create a guest writer page for your site** - This information could also be contained on a page with information for guest writers. At the bottom of the page you could also include an application form that collects information from the writer. This information could include things like what they want, and what they're offering.

With either of these systems in place, you can minimize the amount of work you need to do to get guest content on your site, and your guest writers are happy because they know your expectations.

Reviewing content from your writers

When you are starting out with a new writer, he or she may not be able to perfectly capture your voice right off the bat. Remember that each time you review an article from a writer is an opportunity to improve your style guide as you notice areas that are creating confusion or generating inconsistent results.

If you are using Google Docs to draft your content, I recommend adding comments and suggestions to the post to indicate where you would like things to be improved or clarified. Have your Branding / Style Guide open as you make these so you can reference it.

If your writer does something that does not comply with the style guide, leave a comment and let her know where in the style guide she can go to fix it.

Example: *"This image does not fit with the style guide, check "Drafting - Section 2" in our style guide for info on images [Link to style guide]."*

The style guide template available in thestoryengine.co/resources is already organized in a way that makes it easy to reference specific sections like this.

If you have feedback about a change a writer needs to make to the content, look for a place in your style guide where you can make the reasons for this change clear, and to help the writer avoid this mistake in the future. Also leave a comment on the style guide where you updated it and mention the writers so they are aware of the update.

Example: *"Hey [writer]. I updated the style guide here based on the feedback from [post]. Let me know if this is not clear. Please resolve this* *comment to confirm you saw this update."*

Positive feedback should also be recorded and referenced in the style guide. If the writer says something that you enjoy, or something that is close to what your voice is, copy it and paste it as a sample to the "Language we commonly use" section.

Over time your writer will get a better feel for your voice and system. They'll be able to create content faster and will gradually need less feedback.

Conclusion

As you begin the process of bringing one or more writers on board, you'll really start to feel the power of the systems you've developed for your marketing campaign. Hiring a writer can free up huge amounts of time and brainpower which you can dedicate to other areas of your growing business.

Remember to start slowly, and to provide your writers with as much support as they need for their first few posts with you. Use any mistakes or miscommunications as a way to improve your strategy or style guide.

Chapter 22 - How to hire a content manager

A content manager is the central pillar of all of your content marketing efforts. This person will manage the content team and ensure all of the aspects of your campaign run smoothly. This person will be a critical piece of making your marketing scaleable.

Unlike the writers we discussed in the last chapter, a content manager should be a permanent hire and integrated into your team.

The specific roles and responsibilities of the content manager vary from team to team. This role and skillset are relatively new. This is good news because you can tailor the position to fit your needs, but you also need to be very specific about what you're looking for so that you can find a good fit.

Before you hire your content manager

There are a few things you should have in place before you bring on a content manager. You want to make it easy for your manager to succeed without needing your help or attention all the time.

- **Your content system** - You don't want to leave your brand open to interpretation. Your strategy, style guide, editorial calendar, key relationships, and keyword bank should all be set up and functional before you hand content marketing off to someone else. This will allow your content manager to execute your vision the way you want it to be done.

- **Product market fit** - It will be difficult to carry out a good content marketing campaign if you're constantly pivoting your business. You also don't want to have the expectation or hope that hiring a content marketer will be the thing that finally makes your business work. Your business should be running and growing before you make this hire.
- **Sales funnel (optional)** - If you have a system set up to generate customers from the content you create, your content manager will be able to add value faster.

The role of a content manager

The content manager position is a hybrid role that involves skills in marketing and in project management. This role will require a jack-of-all-trades with a diverse skillset who can fill and adapt to many roles.

The strengths and weaknesses of your manager will determine who you will decide to hire next. You'll want to fill any gaps the content manager has and find ways to support his/her unique strengths.

When looking for a content manager you want to keep an eye out for these general traits:

- **Leadership** - Ability to manage a team and juggle multiple projects.
- **Creativity** - Your content manager may or may not be creating content--depending on your needs and limits--but content marketing is at its core an art.
- **Organizational Skills** - Ability to manage many different demands, deadlines, and priorities.

- **Independence** - There will be many tiny decisions that happen in the work of a manager; you need someone who is able to field most of these without falling back on you.
- **Systems-driven approach** - Ability to follow the instructions of the SOPs you have created and also be able to update and create new ones as needed.
- **Empathy** - Your content manager needs to have an understanding of your audience and their needs.

Remote or not?

Depending on your current team structure and culture, you should consider hiring a content manager to work remotely for you.

Pros:

- **A broader talent pool -** Not being limited to the local talent in your city can be a huge advantage when making a hire that fits your needs.
- **Flexible workforce** - Hiring remote means you get access to unique team members. For example, stay-at-home moms may not be able to make it to an office during regular hours, but are often hard working, brilliant, and excited for a challenge.
- **Better at managing a remote team** - Unless you’re a very large organization, it’s likely that the rest of your content team will be remote as well. Having someone who understands the intricacies of remote work will make it easier for that individual to manage the rest of the team.

Cons:

- **Culture gap** - If your team is not used to working with remote team members it may be difficult to immerse your content manager into your culture and keep that person in the loop on everything that's happening. Consider having your remote manager periodically spend time in-person with you and your team. This will help your manager build bonds with your team so everyone can do their jobs better.
- **Onboarding** - There are many subtle elements to your team that someone working remotely won't be able to pick up as quickly. This means your processes and documents will need to be strong.

How much should I pay a content manager?

There are a lot of factors that will come into play when considering how much you'll pay your manager. It's difficult to give exact numbers for recommendations here because these numbers vary greatly depending on the needs of the business. There are, however, a few common factors that should be evaluated:

Experience level - The average salary for a content manager in the US is over 60K a year. However, this would be for a full-time position at a large company. A bootstrapping entrepreneur would wince at this price. Fortunately with some good systems in-place and a thorough hiring process, you'll be able to find someone who could work part-time or who is starting with less experience and can still be successful.

Brand strength - If you have a strong brand that's well-recognized you may be able to attract young talent at a low price.

Apprenticeship or a job? - Holding the role of content manager creates a powerful opportunity to grow a network, get noticed in a certain industry, and develop a highly-valued skillset. These can be very compelling reasons for someone who's just getting started and who is willing to work hard to build a reputation. If you frame the position as an apprenticeship, then you can offer a lower salary in exchange for the opportunity. Keep in mind that this less-experienced person may need some extra help early on in getting up to speed.

Your current content team size - If your content manager is your first hire on the content team and is only responsible for managing a few writers, then s/he won't need much of a salary. If you're expecting this new hire to take over managing a large team of creatives, then you'll need to compensate appropriately.

Part time or full time?

The amount of work necessary to manage a content marketing campaign can vary greatly depending on your strategy and goals.

If you are just starting with content marketing and are new to working with a content manager, I recommend starting the position as part-time with a small workload. This will give you a chance to make sure all your systems are working properly and gives your manager a bit of breathing room to learn about your business.

You can scale up the work and compensation as needed once your manager demonstrates that she's up to the task.

A part time manager should be able to manage 4-10 blog posts a month without too much trouble.

You'll also want to consider your budget for content marketing. You'll want to make sure your manager is equipped with resources to purchase tools, hire creatives, and do the job well. Make sure you have a budget that can match your expectations.

All of this being said, you could find a talented freelancer on Upwork to do part-time content management for your for as little as $1,500/mo. With the right systems (your content strategy, editorial calendar, style guide, etc.) they'll be able to drive a lot of value and you could expect them to get one piece of content published a week. There's always room for growth in this position if they perform well.

A full-time seasoned professional manager can command a 90k salary, and you could expect them to build a large editorial team that could rival your local news outlet in terms of publishing capacity. For most, I would probably recommend leaning more toward the former, especially if you're still new to content marketing.

Where to look for a content manager

The best place to recruit is from a pool of people who already know you, who love your brand and who want to be a part of what you are doing. If you already have a list, some brand traction, and a following, you should use your blog as a platform for your job posting. Publish the listing as a post. These types of posts are popular to share, especially if it's a remote work opportunity.

The ProBlogger Jobs board is also a good place to post.

You can share your job posting from your blog on Facebook and in Linkedin groups that discuss content marketing.

If you want to hire locally, find marketing groups on Facebook or Linkedin and share your posting there. They're usually easy to find by searching "[city/state] digital marketers."

What does the job posting look like?

Who you are

Describe your company and your vision for the company. Explain why you are excited to be doing what you’re doing and give potential candidates reasons why they should be excited too.

Mention the team, taking extra time to introduce the individuals who the new manager will be working closely with.

Describe the role

A content manager's main focus is making sure that the content marketing efforts are driving value.

Describe the key metrics you have set in your content strategy and let candidates know that this will be how their work is measured.

Use bullets to list some of the common tasks. Here are a few examples:

- Create a few pieces of content
- Manage our social media channels
- Manage guest writers and contributors
- Handle the editorial calendar
- Maintain relationships with influencers via our content

Here is an example post from WP Curve for your reference: http://wpcurve.com/were-hiring/.

It is also wise to mention limitations to the role. For example, the job could be remote, but you may still expect your hire to be in a nearby time-zone or to work similar hours to the rest of the team.

Fill out a form

Create an application form for candidates to complete. You want to create something that is easy-to-use and that looks professional. I like using a tool called Typeform (http://typeform.com/) to quickly create good looking forms that can export results to a spreadsheet.

A few questions I recommend are:

Why do you want to work for our company?

Why do you think you’re a good fit for this job? List some qualities and experiences that have prepared you for this role.

What’s your current employment situation? - This is likely a part-time role and you want to understand how this job will fit in with their other responsibilities. Though this job may not take all their time, it will be demanding on their critical thinking.

Test projects for applicants

There are three good ways I have used to test applicants for content management. These do wonders to filter out bad applicants and let the great ones shine.

Consider using one of these in your first round of applications, and the others in a second or third round depending on how many people have applied.

Option 1 - The video

As an option, tell applicants that they can create a 90 second video to introduce themselves, and to add some depth to their applications. Let them know that the video does not need to be fancy; a simple video recorded on a phone will be enough.

Ask applicants to upload the video as an "unlisted" video to YouTube or Vimeo. This will make it so it can only be found with the proper link.

A video can be surprisingly effective at screening out bad candidates. Most won't take the time to do this, and thus flag themselves as low-interest applicants.

Others may create an absolute disaster of a video-- I'm talking shirtless, picking their teeth on camera disaster. Though you don't want to hire these people, watching these videos will at least make your job a little more entertaining.

Some may try really hard to create something amazing to get your attention. You might see high quality footage, random stunts to catch your attention, intense emotions, special effects. Trying "too hard" could be a red flag, unless there's a clear way you could apply these unsolicited talents to the work they're applying for.

You're looking for a simple video where the person is talking into the camera, reinforcing the statements they made on their application, and expanding on why this job is a "good fit" for them. You want a calm and relaxed attitude that demonstrates the applicant is confident in her experience.

Option 2 - What are their ideas for content strategy?

Depending on the size of your application pool, you may want to do a second round to narrow down your options.

Ask applicants to create a one-page content marketing strategy that they would use to get the results you listed in the job posting.

This will test their:

- Resourcefulness
- Attention to detail
- Strategic thinking
- Understanding of your goals

This also gives candidates an opportunity to surprise you. They may be able to see an opportunity or approach that you had not previously considered.

Option 3 - Create a post based on the style guide / strategy

Give your applicants a link to your style guide and ask them to create a sample post. Make it a very basic post - "10 ideas for better X," where X is something that would be useful to your audience and easy to research.

Though the content of the post will hopefully be interesting, the main thing you are looking for in this test project is how well each individual can follow your instructions:

- Did they follow instructions on your header style?
- Did they use a font you specified?
- Did they emulate your voice?
- Did they curse or use unprofessional language?

Onboarding your content manager

Depending on your new hire's experience level, it may be a good idea to invest in a few online courses that can provide additional training. This can be perfect if you've chosen the "apprenticeship" style position for your manager.

It's essential that your new content manager is clear on your company's culture, values, mission, and priorities. The more your manager understands your business and it's story, they better he or she will be able to do the job.

If your content manager is working remotely, it may be worthwhile to have her come spend time working with you in-person. There are subtle things that can be learned only by working in the same location; these lessons do not translate well online.

The top priority is that your content manager understands the systems and documents that she will be responsible for. Take time to go through every document and tool carefully and explain when and how each document should be used. You should also help your new manager feel empowered to modify what you have created as s/he see fit. This will help your manager take full ownership of the content marketing campaign. You don't want the tedious work of editing SOPs or fixing systems to fall back on you once your manager is in place.

Like with any other team member, it's beneficial that you both understand each other as people. Be upfront and frank about learning your new employee's emotional and psychological landscape. By understanding the broader context of this person's life, you'll find ways to make him or her a better member of your team. If your content manager is having relationship issues or trouble paying rent, then it will be difficult for her to to succeed and be creative. Of course, there’s a fine line here; you don’t need to be a friend or therapist.

Conclusion

Getting your content manager in place will allow you to step away from directly managing your content marketing campaign. This will free up tremendous amounts of time for you to focus on other areas of your business while being comfortable knowing that your content is in good hands.

The time you invested developing your systems like the content strategy and your style guide will pay off here. These will be the main tools your content manager uses to carry out your vision.

Chapter 23 - The end

Congratulations! You've made it to the end. You now have the tools and knowledge you need to build your very own "story engine."

Remember that content marketing is a long game strategy. This should take some of the pressure off; you don't need to have everything perfect the first time. Give yourself plenty of room to experiment with these strategies, find what works for you, and adapt as necessary.

You have much more to offer your audience and your customers than just a product or a service. Your story can impact others in ways that you can't anticipate. I hope this book helps you share your story with those who need it most. I hope that the abundant gifts that come from your story not only benefit you, but the thousands or millions of people you will touch with your content.

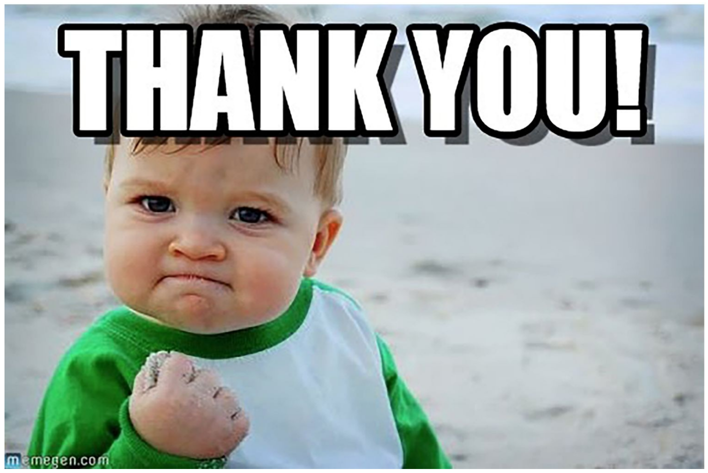
I salute you and your courage to share yourself with the world though content marketing.

Please keep in touch! I am interested in following your progress. I am open as ever to suggestions-- let me know how anything I have shared with you can be improved. You can reach me at thestoryengine.co.

Cheers,

Kyle

Thanks for reading The Story Engine



I appreciate all of your feedback and love hearing what you have to say.

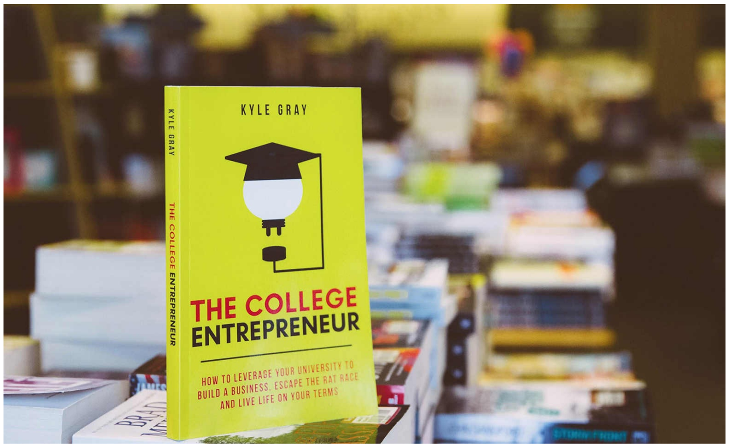
I need your input to make the next version of this book even better.

Please leave me a helpful review on Amazon letting me know what you think of the book.

Thanks so much!!!

Kyle Gray

Do you know a young future entrepreneur who's considering college?



After graduating, many students are struggling to find work that is interesting and rewarding. You can't follow the same well-worn path of "getting good grades and a degree" and expect different results. In fact, the most of the value and opportunities that a university has to offer lie outside of the classroom.

The College Entrepreneur is about discovering your passion, connecting with mentors and leveraging your university's resources to build a thriving business or personal brand before you graduate. By starting a business while in school you'll learn key skills and develop relationships that will lead to opportunities to do work that you love.

This book provides simple strategies you can use to access little-known resources at your university, break free of the status quo and take control of your education to get results that you want.

"Upon finishing reading this I have to admit I seriously underestimated how significantly impactful university can be to grow your skillsets, build

connections, and gain a wide range of experiences that will equip you for the real world whether you're going to become an entrepreneur and start your own business or to get into the career you are aiming for."

- A reader and university student.

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