

Content Rules

Subject: How to create and share remarkable blogs, podcasts, webinars, ebooks, and other web content to attract customers.

Businesses have to embrace becoming publishers.

Organizations often still see content as a commodity.

Content lives forever. Value! It's an information annuity.

Each piece of content should be viewed as a social object that exists beyond the platform it's published on.

Allow your audience to spread your message for you.

1. The Case for Content

Why invest so much in online content?

1. The notion of marketing to customers via interrupting them repeatedly with advertising or other marketing messages is not enough any more. The old choices were to buy expensive ads or get third-party ink from the media. The Web has changed the rules.
2. Customer behavior and expectations are shifting. People depend on search to help them shop online. So it's vital to create content and optimize it so it shows up on search results pages. (People are also depending on social media – word of mouth – so you have to engage there, too.)
3. Everyone is the media. Everyone is a publisher. Including your customers. You have to have a conversation.

Content: Anything uploaded to a web site.

Value of creating it: No expiration date! It will be searchable indefinitely.

Think of content as the soul of your brand.

Think of your business as a content-marketing company. Valuable content leads to sales.

2. The Content Rules

1. Embrace being a publisher.
2. Insight inspires originality. Know yourself and your brand. Keep your customers in mind – what problems they're having and what you're doing to help solve them.
3. Create with intent and always include triggers to action.
4. Speak simply and conversationally.
5. Re-imagine, don't recycle.
6. Share or solve – don't shill.
7. Show, don't just tell.
8. Do something unexpected.
9. Stoke the campfire. (Interact.)
10. Wings and roots. Ground your content in your brand, but make it shareable.

11. Play to your strengths. You don't have to do everything well. Do some things (at least one thing) really, really well.

3. Insight Inspires Originality

Begin with the why.

1. Why are you creating the content you're creating?
2. Who is your audience? And who are you? Whom are you trying to reach? Where do they spend their time online? How do they access the web? What are they craving? What do you want them to do? What content do you already have? Take an inventory.
3. What do you want the content to achieve? Measurable results.
4. When and how are you going to develop the content?
5. Where are you going to publish?

4. Who are You?

First, understand yourself.

Words matter. Write differently. Being faceless doesn't work any longer. Have a personality. Use the personality behind your brand to build a relationship with customers.

Use your own voice. It creates authenticity. Which people relate to.

Speak human. Voice guidelines:

- Relax.
- Be conversational.
- Avoid marketing-speak.
- Avoid press release franken quotes.
- Use colloquialisms or casual expressions.
- Break some rules.
- Show, don't tell.
- Worry more about creating remarkable content. Worry less about being professional.

Brand: It's the image people have of your company or product. And, it's a conversation.

Listen to the words that customers use: in person, and online.

Don't be afraid to polarize people.

6. Reimagine, Don't Recycle

Treat anything you develop as a piece of a larger whole.

Ask about purpose, goal. Include a call to action.

"Deconstruct that white paper and create an array of info snacks that you can sprinkle across the Web. ... Get more bait in the water."

Big Idea

Create an overall content plan fueled by a single big idea, or core message.

For example, an ebook, collection of case studies, or best-practices white paper feeds blog posts, video blog posts, newsletter articles, etc.

To find the big idea -- think about your customers, what you want them to do, what their problems are, and how you can help them solve those problems. You can also build it off keywords gleaned from SEO analysis.

Create a publishing schedule:

Model: 1-7-30-4-2-1

Daily (1):

- Tweet updates.
- Tweet or post to Facebook news items from elsewhere.
- Respond to comments – on blog, Facebook, Twitter.
- Cull UGC (text, video, images)

Weekly (7):

- Blog posts (1-3, or more)
- Short video. E.g. a presentation.
- How-to article.
- Participate in forums. E.g., Linked In

Monthly (30):

- Write a meatier blog post or article based on deeper research, or an interview with a subject matter expert.
- Newsletter.
- Higher-quality video.
- Audio podcast.
- Create a ppt and post to slide share.
- Organized a meetup.
- Contribute a guest post or article to another blog.
- Produce a webinar.
- Publish a case study or customer success story.

Quarterly (4):

- Publish a research-based white paper.
- Create a case study collection and distribute it as a pdf.
- Create an ebook and distribute as a pdf.
- Produce a video series.
- Produce a special issue of your e-newsletter.
- Make an announcement of contest or sweepstakes winners.

Annually (2 or 1):

- Live or virtual event. Video it!
- Executive roundtable.
- Annual industry white paper or ebook.
- Best-practices guide.
- Speak or present at an annual conference.

- Launch a contest.
- Update Web presence with new story feature, new tool set, or new functionality.
- Create an iPhone or Facebook app, tool or widget.
- Produce a game.

Theme: Be a resource. (Share or solve; don't shill.) But remember to include calls to action.

Feeding the Big Idea

- Start small: Start with smaller series of blog posts.
- Start smaller: Ask followers for their feedback.
- Bundle: Group blog posts into an ebook or white paper.
- Unbundle.
- Start a conversation.
- Tell client stories.
- Record presentations and speeches.
- Go mobile. Sms alerts.
- Share links to slideshare/scribd
- Go behind the scenes.
- Remake the news (borrow from news releases; put a spin on them)
- Curate Twitter posts.

Chapter 7: Share or Solve; Don't Shill

Your content should:

- Share a resource
- solve a problem
- help someone do their jobs better
- help them self-actualize (very important in the experience economy)

"No one cares about your products or services." (They care about getting their own problems solved.)

Tell stories about how your product exists in the world. How it helps people.

Characteristics of good content:

- True
- Relevant
- Human
- Passionate
- Original
- Surprising

Always ask why a customer should care about this content.

Where does content come from?

- Chat with customers.
- Interview luminaries.
- Share real-time photos.

- Ask customer service.
- Monitor search keywords.
- Monitor social media keywords.
- Research online.
- Trawl industry news.
- Trawl nonindustry news.
- Get inspired by your own passions.
- Go behind the scenes.
- Go to an event.
- How-to content.
- Best practices tips.
- Focus on community members.
- Dig into the archives.
- Invite guest posts.
- Check out competitors.
- Create a themed content series.
- Mine social networks.
- Start a meme.
- Offer your two cents.
- Take a contrarian view.
- Host an event.
- Curate the voices of many.
- Curate from elsewhere
- Book reviews.

Chapter 8: Create Wings and Roots

Root content in your voice and personality.

Let your content fly:

- *Findable*: Establish profiles on all the leading social networks: Twitter, Yelp, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
- *Accessible*: From multiple platforms (e.g., mobile devices); what kind of registration barriers do you have?
- *Shareable*: **Readers want to share articles that inspire awe, admiration, self-transcendence.** (From a U.Penn study of most-shared NYT articles.)

Chapter 9: The Care and Feeding of Fans

Create a “listening dashboard.”

- Google Reader (rss reader)
- Google Alerts. Enter search terms, URLs, phrases into a profile. Google will email you whenever its indexes turn up something new that matches the search parameters.
- Search.twitter.com. (Subscribe to a feed of a particular search.)
- Relevant blogs.

Notes from Success Stories

Content leads to engagement. (Free-to-paid model.)

Ideas to Steal

Have a point of view.
Have fun.
Play to your strengths.
Don't force viral, you may not need it.
Create calls to action.
Measure what works.
Focus, focus, focus.
Don't be afraid to call yourself an expert.
Hyperspecific blogs

Companies that blog generate 55 percent more website traffic than companies that don't, and they get 97 percent more links coming into their site.