

the
GORILLA
GUIDE[®] to...



SECOND EDITION

Content Marketing

**Using Content to Capture
Demand and Empower Sales**

**JAMES GREEN &
STEPHANIE DIAMOND**

POWERED BY

 **ActualTech**
MEDIA

the
GORILLA
GUIDE[®] to...



Content Marketing

By James Green & Stephanie Diamond

POWERED BY  **ActualTech**
MEDIA

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Full 7th Floor
130 West 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036

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www.actualtechmedia.com

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ENTERING THE JUNGLE

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CALLOUTS USED IN THIS BOOK



SCHOOL HOUSE

In this callout, you'll gain insight into topics that may be outside the main subject but are still important.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This is a special place where you can learn a bit more about ancillary topics presented in the book.



BRIGHT IDEA

When we have a great thought, we express them through a series of grunts in the Bright Idea section.



DEEP DIVE

Takes you into the deep, dark depths of a particular topic.



EXECUTIVE CORNER

Discusses items of strategic interest to business leaders.



DEFINITION

Defines a word, phrase, or concept.



GPS

We'll help you navigate your knowledge to the right place.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Tests your knowledge of what you've read.



WATCH OUT!

Make sure you read this so you don't make a critical error!



PAY ATTENTION

We want to make sure you see this!



TIP

A helpful piece of advice based on what you've read.

CHAPTER 1

Content Marketing (CM) in 2023 and the Future

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Understanding what's changed in 2022
- Looking at the 5 Steps of the Content Marketing Model for technology companies
- Learning about customer intent

In 2020 the world changed forever. A global pandemic hit, causing everyone to rethink how they live, work, and play. As a technology company, you're affected by this massive disruption in myriad ways. To ensure you don't get left behind, you need to develop stronger, more effective ways of directly reaching your audience with the solutions they need. Namely, yours.

Let's begin by looking at how business conditions have changed in 2022, and what steps you need to take to accommodate this new reality.



Content marketing has always been an important part of technology marketing. And in this environment, doubling down on content marketing will be your most effective strategy.

Marketplace Changes Require a Revised Plan

1. The massive disruption caused by work from home (WFH) means that some offices may never return to full capacity. This lack of in-person contact creates a gaping hole in your relationship-building efforts. Content marketers are revising both short- and long-term strategies to accommodate this change, so you'll need to step up your efforts to become a trusted thought leader in your industry. To address the sweeping changes, we've created a **5 Step Content Marketing Model** to fill your sales pipeline and achieve your annual goals. In this chapter, we look at **Step 1: Planning for Change**.



Step 1: Planning for Change



Step 2: Creating the Right Customer Experience



Step 3: Focusing on Content Creation



Step 4: Promoting your Content



Step 5: Analyzing and Revising for Success



According to MarTech, a study done by FocusVision in 2020 found that B2B buyers read approximately 13 pieces of content before deciding to buy. Not surprisingly, 8 out of the 13 were direct from the vendor. The study also found that it was necessary to vary the format of the information (e.g., webinars, posts). Additionally, at the beginning of their buyer's journey, high-level thought leadership and third-party analysis were essential.

2. B2B buyers have high expectations about how you'll serve their needs. In this climate, they have even less time to understand your messaging and compare your products, and they want service *now*. You must clearly deliver the right message to the buyer's journey at every touchpoint. In **Step 2: Creating the Right Customer Experience**, we look at the customer experience along the buyer's journey and bring your targeted audience to you with inbound marketing.
3. People are more risk-averse than usual amid this uncertainty. Making decisions about what and when to invest in new products makes the decision to buy even more difficult. This elongates your sales cycle even further. Trust is a crucial ingredient here. In **Step 3: Focusing on Content Creation**, we discuss how to create online content that keeps you top of mind during the longer sales cycle (a process that will probably involve more decision makers).
4. Everyone's attention is fragmented, and routines are interrupted. People may not regularly visit their previously preferred channels. Attracting the properly qualified audience is crucial. Spinning your wheels, looking for alternate ways to fill your sales pipeline, will be costly. You need to hyper-focus on the right tactics. In **Step 4: Promoting**

Your Content, we look at how to reach a qualified audience waiting to hear your message. You need to proactively reach your prospects on your sites, or sites that consistently deliver your content in context.

5. Because of the continuing lack of in-person contact, finding new ways to get feedback from your prospects is essential. You want to be able to course-correct and ensure that you give your customers the solutions they want and need. In addition, because most budgets were reduced during the pandemic, and many never recovered to the pre-pandemic level again, you need to sharpen your tactics to use what works. The potential good news is that attendees may be a bit more eager to share their opinions, since they have had less social interaction. In **Step 5: Analyzing and Revising for Success**, we look at ways to gather analytics directly from your target customers and make revisions as necessary.

Step 1: Planning for Change

Let's begin by looking at what goes into planning a typical product marketing strategy, then see how content marketing fits into the big picture. Your goals in creating a strategy include:

- **Knowing what your brand stands for.** To begin, you need to assess your brand mission, values, and purpose. Without this, you can't guide your audience along your buyer's journey to select the right product for them.
- **Knowing your audience.** Understand user preferences, objections, and pain points. Continually source as much information and direct feedback from your target audience as possible. Conditions change very quickly, especially in this uncertain climate, so don't get caught short. You need to play the long game.

- **Aligning the wants and needs of a target audience with a product's offerings.** Demonstrate that you understand what your prospect needs, and that you have the best solution. Make sure they see lots of success stories about how you've helped others.
- **Identifying gaps in the market that you can fulfill.** Check in with customer service and tech support in addition to sales and marketing to determine if new problems have arisen.
- **Increase awareness about any offering (current or new).** Don't stop creating new educational content about your products. You want your customers to be well-educated before engaging in sales discussions—more about this in Step 3: Content Creation (**CHAPTER 3**).
- **Increase revenue tied to a specific product.** Continually explore new ways to enhance your products by regularly engaging with your top customers.

Take action: Evaluate how your brand is judged by your audience and be clear about who they are and what they need from you. Create product messaging that everyone understands and agrees to.

Traditionally, the go-to approach for marketing a product is by creating a solution that addresses a real problem, going all in on highlighting the features, and differentiating it from the competition. That's straightforward.

However, as we've noted, those tactics aren't enough in 2022, especially if you're pitching to a buying group where each stakeholder has a different set of concerns and motivations. Your ideal prospects need to know exactly what your product can do for *them*, how it can solve *their* problems, and (in a new wrinkle) what the social implications of choosing your product might be.

Done right, content marketing can help you achieve (or get closer to attaining) your product marketing goals, regardless of where you stand in the product lifecycle.

Why Content Marketing Is Your Best Bet Now



Current market conditions are perfect for creating all kinds of new content that can reach prospects wherever or whenever they're online. For SEO and ranking in the search engines, Google recommends focusing on creating Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness—or EAT—when developing quality content. Let's see what that means for you:

- **Expertise:** Expertise refers to the person who's creating the content. Google will rate text created by someone with the knowledge and experience to provide helpful content over someone who merely has an interest in the subject. Of course, expertise depends on the specific topic. Some subjects don't require extensive training, and personal experience can be acceptable.
- **Authority:** Being an authority in your industry is judged on several things. For example, the number of backlinks from other sites is vital. When other sites link to your content, that's a plus. But, of course, the type of backlinks must be related to your content. Unrelated sites linking to you could do more harm than good.
- **Trustworthiness:** This type of content includes reviews and other positive comments. Google wants to know that other people think your products and services are trusted.

Why Content Marketing Matters

You create a demand for your

product: If you're launching a cutting-edge product that addresses a unique problem (something your prospects aren't aware of), you'll need to create demand for it. By producing content that discusses their existing and invisible pain points through articles, blog posts, infographics, and other content assets, you can make your prospects "problem-aware," forcing them to look for a solution.

You position yourself as the perfect solution: By creating content around the pain points you're attempting to solve, over time, you'll establish authority over your niche. After doing that, when your prospects think about solving a particular problem, who do you think they'll turn to? That's right—you! For more about the value of being a thought leader, check out **CHAPTER 2**.

You spark conversations and gather insights: By talking with your paying customers, you can gather critical data that can help you improve your product and keep it relevant.

All in all, content marketing efforts can make your product shine while strategically guiding your prospects through their buyer's journey. We'll look at the buyer's journey in detail in Step 2.



CHAPTER 3 shows how to focus on content creation using the three “E’s”: Entertaining, Educational, and Engaging. Here’s why this content works:

- **Entertaining content differentiates your company.** Entertaining content helps you stand out from industry competitors. This could include funny videos, memes, jokes, and more.
- **Educational content adds credibility.** Educational content helps increase your credibility. It can be as simple as explaining how something works or giving tips on using a product.
- **Engaging content holds attention longer.** Engaging content keeps people on your website longer. A good headline or introduction, for instance, makes people want to read the article. You can also use an interactive quiz or poll to engage prospective buyers.

Understanding the Value of Inbound vs. Outbound Marketing

So how should you frame your marketing efforts? Today, people care less about the actual product you pitch and more about the problems you solve. This shift from being *company-obsessed* to being *solution-focused* is what gave rise to the concept of “inbound marketing”—a methodology, illustrated in **FIGURE 1**, that focuses on attracting customers to your business instead of actively pursuing them using interruptive/outbound tactics.



Inbound Marketing

- Focused on drawing the prospects toward your brand
- Places emphasis on providing value to the right person, at the right time
- Executed through content marketing, SEO, social media marketing, email marketing, and sometimes even ads



Outbound Marketing

- Focused on going after prospects using interruptive tactics
- Places emphasis on pushing messages and reaching as many people as possible
- Executed through above-the-line (TV, print, radio, etc.) ads, cold calls, and generic emails

FIGURE 1: Inbound vs. outbound marketing

This is especially true in the technology sphere, where, on average, six to eight¹ individuals are actively involved in the buying process (and buyers complete 60%² of the process before they even approach a vendor).

As a result, brands focus more on pushing insightful, relevant, and creative content that grabs their audience's attention and compels them to engage. In other words, brands are focusing more on **content marketing**.

¹ <https://blogs.gartner.com/hank-barnes/2017/10/31/personalities-trump-personas/>

² <https://blog.topohq.com/saas-buying-experience-mapping-businesses-buy-software/>

Content marketing is the art and science of creating and promoting content that your target audience finds useful and/or entertaining. While the underlying goals vary from strategy to strategy, content marketing, when executed correctly, can boost brand awareness, drive conversions, facilitate customer advocacy, and—most importantly—help establish your company as a thought leader in its domain.

According to the Technology Content Marketing 2020³ report by the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), the biggest challenge for 59% of tech marketers was creating content that appealed to multiple roles in target organizations.



Did you know that 70%¹ of 3,400 marketers surveyed by HubSpot were actively investing in content marketing in 2020? That's just a small reflection of how popular content marketing has become over the years, resulting from changing consumer preferences and buying behaviors.

¹ <https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>

Mastering User Intent To Create Impactful Content

Content marketing is a user-centric art. To achieve your business goals, craft creative gems that provide something of value to your target audience. And the only way to do that is by focusing on *user intent*.

³ https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/1624046/2020_CMI%20Technology_Research_Final.pdf

As the name suggests, user intent is the motivation that drives a prospect to seek specific information. Content marketing boils down to providing something (other than your main products) that your audience actually cares about, such as educational content that provides them with solutions to existing pain points, new perspectives, or new approaches to try. This content can be delivered through anything from informative posts to free tools they can use.

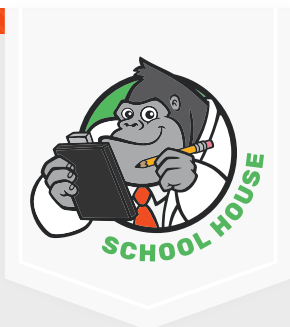
User Intent Is the Same as 'Search Intent'

Over the years, SEO evolved from being a set of activities focused on gaming search engine algorithms to becoming a science focused on understanding user intent (or search intent, if you will). When a user types a query into a search engine, they expect to receive results that match their intent.

For example, a person searching for “*what is hyperconverged infrastructure?*” doesn’t want to see a page that sells hyperconverged infrastructure or one that doesn’t correctly define the term.

Search engines can understand the intent hidden behind different queries, and display pages best suited to answer them, based primarily on the page’s actual content (along with many other factors).

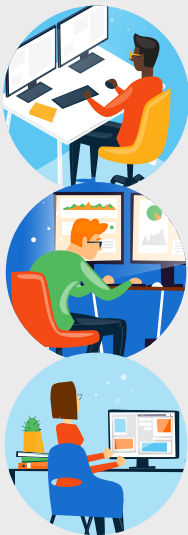
Therefore, even if you do sell hyperconverged infrastructure, you have an excellent opportunity to capture attention by creating helpful content on how hyperconverged infrastructure differs from traditional infrastructure, the different types of hyperconverged infrastructure architecture, the kinds of questions to ask a hyperconverged infrastructure vendor, and so on. This will be much more effective than just trying to sell people a hyperconverged infrastructure solution.



The goal is to consistently provide this value to build up trust gradually, eventually turning qualified prospects into paying customers and ultimately turning customers into brand advocates. The critical thing to remember is that it all begins by understanding what your audience wants.

In fact, according to CMI’s Technology Content Marketing report, 36% of marketers felt that better understanding or knowing their audiences would be one of their priorities for 2020, whereas 34% were going to prioritize capturing better data.

The end goal? To focus on creating content centered on user intent, guiding buyers through the entire process, and converting them into loyal customers.



“How can I code quickly and efficiently while remaining secure and compliant?”

“How can I enable my development team to produce more secure code over time?”

“How can we easily audit our enterprise applications for compliance on a regular basis and provide reports to the Board?”

FIGURE 2: An example of how the user intent varies from role to role within the same target organization

A typical technology vendor has to create content for multiple roles within the same prospect organization, with each role having a different intent (as illustrated in **FIGURE 2**).

As marketers, you need to ensure that you're targeting these intents with different content assets across various channels.

There are many ways to collect data that will help you understand what your audience is looking for, ranging from utilizing specific online search tools to analyzing the conversations your prospects and customers have with your sales reps. For now, let's take a look at it from the perspective of a prospect looking up something on Google.

THE 4 MAIN TYPES OF CUSTOMER INTENT THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

To gain better clarity on intent and craft content that really hits the spot, SEO specialists classify search intent into the following categories:

- **Informational:** Queries with this intent are usually posed as questions, often beginning with "who, what, when, where, why, how." The intent here is to find information for purely educational reasons. The ideal content that matches this intent should clearly answer the questions while keeping the user engaged. Users consuming informational content are usually at the very top of the marketing funnel. A chief technology officer, for example, might type the query, "What is Kubernetes?"
- **Navigational:** Here, the intent is to help the user navigate to a desired location, i.e., a webpage, such as a blog, a login page, and so on. Imagine someone searching for "Facebook" on Google (this is why they're also sometimes referred to as "navigational brand queries"). As long as you own the brand, you'll always show up first in the search results for your brand's navigational queries.

In our Kubernetes example, the query could simply be “Kubernetes” when the user is trying to navigate to The Linux Foundation’s website <https://kubernetes.io/>.

- **Commercial:** When there’s commercial intent behind a query, the user is currently in the process of evaluating different options to make a purchase. Or you can say that they’re in the *consideration* phase of the marketing funnel (more on this in **CHAPTER 2**). These queries usually include terms such as “reviews,” “best,” and so on. There is some overlap between informational and commercial intents, as the content that targets the latter also provides information and helps answer questions (the only difference here is how qualified the prospect is, i.e., how much they already know and how prepared they are to convert into a paying customer). A sample search query might be “best container orchestration platform.”
- **Transactional:** When a user is ready to make a purchase, their intent is purely transactional. This is the final stage of user intent, and signifies that they’re ready to convert. As a result, this content is usually referred to as the bottom of the funnel. At this point, our fictional CTO might be searching for “Kubernetes demo from Vendor X.”

Now let’s look at how intent fits into the whole marketing puzzle.

The Importance of Thought Leadership Now

Thought leadership became even more critical during the pandemic. B2B buyers were looking for those who could help them navigate the changing environment. They also wanted to take advantage of the fact that people weren’t falling back on old routines. They wanted

fresh ideas and new ways to tackle problems. A thought leader who comes out with unique ideas or insightful ways to solve problems will have greater value.



In this uncertain climate, your content needs to do double duty: It needs to keep your brand top of mind when you can't schedule in-person visits with prospects, and to nurture existing customer relationships. Self-serve options need to be available for prospects when they want them.

One of B2B content marketing's primary goals—besides generating more revenue, of course—is to establish yourself as the go-to brand for resources related to your industry. Having a great *reputation* does a lot to grease the skids on sales.

Let's assume you offer enterprise security solutions. You're well-known for regularly publishing top-quality content around topics related to your domain, such as the modern threats to businesses, security mistakes that could increase your exposure, tips for protecting data from ransomware, and so on.

Who do you think decision makers will think of first when considering new enterprise security solutions? Is it you? Yes, *you!*

The day your prospects begin to recognize, recall, and recommend your brand is when you've successfully established yourself (or your brand) as a thought leader. However, there's more to it than just hitting the publish button (see **FIGURE 3**).



FIGURE 3: The different strategies of marketing that build thought leadership

Becoming the Go-To Thought Leader in Your Industry

Every single one of your competitors is publishing content, which creates a lot of white noise. The brands able to stand out have been in the game for a long time, have been publishing out-of-this-world content, or both.

Whether you're a veteran or a new player in the market, developing a thought leadership mindset can get you noticed and have prospects flocking to your website and social channels for more. But what does it mean to create content that's "thought leadership material?" Here are a few boxes you need to tick:

- **The content needs to be 100% original.** Look beyond the usual worn-out discussions and identify emerging topics by talking to your current clients and prospects. (Remember that vital connection to sales?)
- **It should answer the difficult questions your audience has, including questions none of your competitors are addressing.**
- **You have to find *new* and interesting ways to cover the hot topics in your industry.** Unless you have something new to add to the discussion, you might find it difficult to stand out.

Long-Term Benefits of Thought Leadership

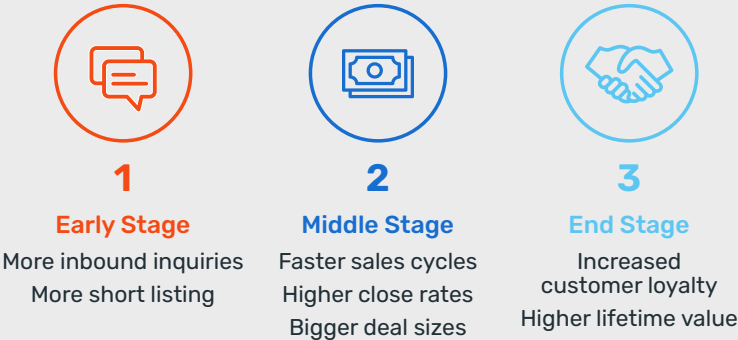


FIGURE 4: The long-term benefits of thought leadership

By publishing this kind of content, you can pave the way for new discussions, provide insights about emerging topics before they gain traction (and become one of the first companies to talk about them), build a loyal following, and even ignite new industry trends (**FIGURE 4**).

(Pro tip: Make sure that what you're publishing with the goal of thought leadership is actually that, and not "thought followership." If you're doing more of what's already been done, you're not leading anything; sadly, you're probably wasting valuable time and money.)

There's a time and place for emulating things that have been successful for competitors and deploying the Skyscraper Technique.⁴ But thought leadership is neither the time nor the place.

Establishing Thought Leadership with Gorilla Guides



You have amazing thoughts to share with your target audience. The problem lies with maintaining consistent content creation and promotion efforts using the limited resources at your disposal.

Investing in a Gorilla Guide program will equip you with a cornerstone content asset or seven, each meticulously crafted with in-depth information, original ideas, and helpful advice.

SEO aside, you can borrow the content from your Gorilla Guides and repurpose it for your thought leadership efforts. And, of course, if done right, these efforts will also compel your readers to check out the rest of your Guide, which is likely gated. Boom! New lead.

⁴ <https://backlinko.com/skyscraper-technique>

Here are some easy ways to re-deploy existing Gorilla Guide content to boost your reputation:

- **Extract Gorilla Guide content for ghostwriting contributed articles:** Having your thought leaders (executives in this case) featured on sites like Forbes Technology Council⁵ is a great way to exhibit thought leadership. Sourcing article ideas and content snippets from your Gorilla Guide will make preparing these articles easier and faster.
- **Repurpose into LinkedIn Posts:** Standard LinkedIn posts offer a quick and easy way to share your thoughts and engage with your connections/followers in 1,300 characters (or 700, if you're using your company's profile to post). Extract snippets of interesting information from your Gorilla Guide, and leave your followers wanting more.



When you want to share a link through a standard LinkedIn post, avoid including it in the body of the post. Instead, share the link in the comments of that post. Within the actual post, invite your followers to download and read the rest of your Guide. Here's an example that you can edit and integrate into your posts:

"Interested in learning more? Download the complete Gorilla Guide® To... XYZ. Link in the comments!"

Use the right hashtags to give the post an extra boost and spend a few bucks on promoting it.

⁵ <https://councils.forbes.com/forbestechcouncil>

- **Create a Slide Deck:** Using tidbits of content from your Gorilla Guide, you can create a “promo” slide deck. You can then upload it on different platforms, such as Slideshare,⁶ and embed it with CTAs leading to the landing page of your choice. Slides are great for folks who are trying to wrap their head around a new idea quickly. While they’re in that mode, you have a chance to become their thought leader!
- **Publish Medium Posts:** Leverage your Gorilla Guides to craft top-tier Medium posts, potentially rank for some competitive keywords, and invite readers to download the entire Guide. Because Medium is somewhat self-moderating, content that does well on Medium has great thought leadership credibility.
- **Create and Share Videos:** These don’t have to be high-budget assets. You could record a heart-to-heart conversation with an industry expert on a relevant topic (*and sneak in your content asset during the conversation!*). You can then add closed captions to that clip, upload it to your LinkedIn page, share the download link in the comments, and promote the post.

Next up: In Chapter 2, we look at Step 2: Creating the Right Customer Experience.

⁶ <https://www.slideshare.net/>

CHAPTER 2

Creating the Right Customer Experience

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Understanding the buyer's journey
- Looking at intent along the marketing funnel
- Introducing the Flywheel concept

In this chapter, we look at **Step 2: Creating the Right Customer Experience**. The values and mission you defined for your brand in Step 1 need to translate into action. Now that you've defined your target audience, you need to create the type of customer experience they'll have along each touchpoint toward a sale. This means determining what they want to know at each touchpoint, what experience and format that content should take, and making it easy to get what they need (including the quality of your customer service).



Touchpoints are all the places where your customer interacts with your brand. Defining each touchpoint's experience ensures that you know what the customer sees and does as they move along the buyer's journey. It also ensures that if you collect analytics from these interactions, you'll have the data you need to continually improve and fill your sales pipeline.

Step 2: Creating the Right Customer Experience

You've heard a lot about the importance of the customer experience (CX). Its importance has now increased. As a consumer yourself, you know that your expectations are very high. Amazon and other major online companies have trained consumers to get exactly what they want, when they want it. These expectations have spilled over into the B2B realm. That's why today, the secret sauce to nailing your marketing efforts is to focus on CX.

Assessing the User Experience

But we don't want to forget about user experience (UX). What does UX have to do with content? Everything. The way you design, structure, and deliver your content can make or break your efforts. This mainly involves two factors:

- **How fast your content loads:** 53%⁷ of mobile users will abandon a website if it takes more than three seconds to load).
- **How visually appealing it is:** About 75%⁸ of people will judge your business's credibility by the design of your website, while 38%⁹ will stop engaging if the layout is unattractive.

That stings.

⁷ <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-154/insights-inspiration/research-data/need-mobile-speed-how-mobile-latency-impacts-publisher-revenue/>

⁸ <https://dubub.com/75-of-consumers-admit-that-they-judge-a-business-credibility-based-on-their-website-design/>

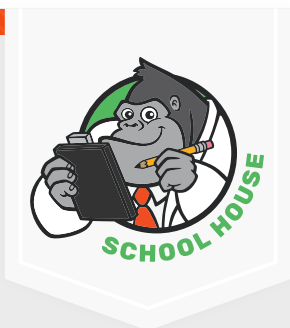
⁹ <https://blogs.adobe.com/creative/files/2015/12/Adobe-State-of-Content-Report.pdf>

To create and deliver a positive and memorable UX, marketers prioritize design, focusing on improving page speed (one of the many factors that search engines like Google use to rank pages in search results), and tracking buyer's journeys on their websites to optimize layouts.

In fact, all of this is becoming mandatory from an SEO perspective, as search engines reward websites that provide valuable content, load fast, and keep users engaged.

Your Website Has the Need for Speed

In a fast-paced world, your website needs to load within a few seconds. Search engines reward websites that load quickly—and your visitors expect it. Here are a few things you can do right now to optimize your website to load faster:



- **Compress all images and videos on your website.**
- **Minify your CSS and JavaScript by removing unnecessary characters and whitespace.**
- **Use a content distribution network (CDN) to accelerate the delivery of pages.**
- **Enable browser caching on your website. This way, every time a user *revisits* your website, their browser won't have to load all the content from scratch—cutting down on the loading time.**
- **Keep checking the overall health of your website on Google PageSpeed Insights. This tool scores your website on a scale of 0 to 100 and provides actionable tips on how you can improve it.**

By optimizing for UX, you're also, in a way, optimizing for search engines. However, keep in mind that UX is just one essential component of SEO—all of which revolves around content.

Here are some actionable tips that you can start implementing today:

- **Focus on search intent.** Create content that helps answer the questions your prospects are asking.
- **Link to relevant pages/content.** Make sure to link out to any other sources (whether on your website or an external channel) that are relevant and could provide more value to your users.
- **Use captivating visuals.** Incorporate eye-catching designs into all content assets.
- **Optimize for mobile.** Make sure your website is correctly optimized for mobile phones and tablets. This includes making CTA buttons bigger or smaller (find a balance between making them easy to tap but not too big as to result in accidental clicks), using responsive design (a design that adjusts according to the size of a user's screen), redesigning pop-ups for mobile screens, and making sure all text on the screen is easy to read.

Evaluating Touchpoints for CX

Now that you've addressed some of the most important aspects of UX, you need to look at your CX. It's time to determine what each of your touchpoints will deliver. Clearly, with the changing environment, you need to evaluate your touchpoints a bit differently and adjust.

The three types of touchpoints are:

- **Digital.** The pandemic brought these to the forefront. They include your website, social media, email, forums, webcasts, video messaging, and written content in the form of e-books, blogs, and so on. You may need to significantly step up your production of these.
- **In person.** The pandemic severely curbed the ability to meet customers at industry events, live sales interactions, and so forth, forcing companies to find substitutes. Those alternatives are cropping up everywhere, and should continue to be explored, but in-person contact is slowly starting to make a comeback as well.
- **Live virtual interactions.** These are the interactions that take the place of in-person contact that include virtual conferences, webinars, word of mouth, webcasts, personal chats, and so on. These should become an essential part of your new plan.

At each touchpoint, determine what content will meet the buyer's needs at that stage in their journey. This will make your content creation more straightforward, because you know who you're speaking to and at what stage they are in the buyer's journey.

The Buyer's Journey Through the Marketing Funnel

The "marketing funnel" is a theoretical journey that your customer takes from being a prospect (i.e., someone who fits your description of an "ideal customer") to becoming a paying customer. You can map out this journey graphically to help marketing and sales teams understand what messages to use at each stage.



According to the 2020 Content Marketing Institute’s “B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends” report,¹ of the top performers in the survey, 88% prioritized the audience’s needs over the organization’s sales and promotional messages. This should be the guiding principle for all the content along the buyer’s journey.

¹ <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/b2b-2021-research-final.pdf>

While marketers use different variations, and some marketers will argue that a new model is needed (see the Flywheel method below), a simplified version of the tried-and-true marketing funnel consists of the following three stages:

- **Awareness.** Also known as the “top of the funnel” (ToFu), the awareness stage is where a prospect identifies a need and seeks to be educated.
- **Consideration.** This is the intermediate stage, also known as the “middle of the funnel” (MoFu). At this stage, the prospect begins to evaluate different options to satisfy their need(s).
- **Conversion/Decision.** The last stage—or “bottom of the funnel” (BoFu)—is where the prospect chooses an option, makes the transaction, and converts into a paying customer.

In Chapter 1, we looked at customer intent. **FIGURE 5** illustrates how the different types of intent fit in the marketing funnel. Understanding intent is the first of many steps that will allow you to create impactful content that takes the user to the funnel’s next step.

Intent at Different Stages of the Marketing Funnel

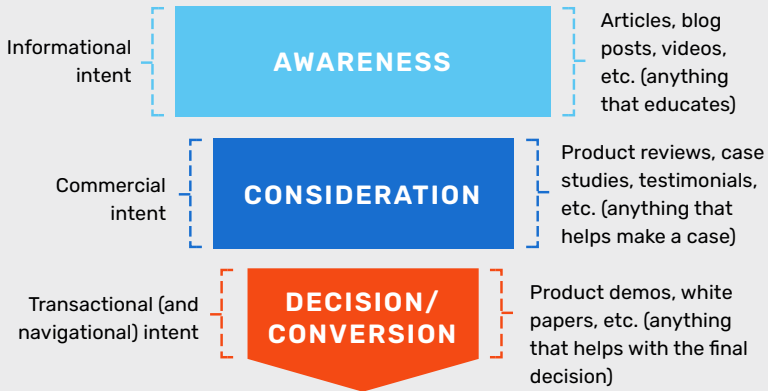


FIGURE 5: Where intent fits at different stages of the marketing funnel

Some brands are taking this to the next level by integrating a personal touch into the customer experience. A classic example from our day-to-day lives is Netflix, which has an advanced algorithm that suggests TV shows and movies based on the user's preferences.

From a B2B tech marketing lens, this could mean anything from sending personalized emails triggered by how they interact with your website to offering custom solutions that suit their enterprise needs. Whatever the case, at the most basic level, mastering intent will help you come up with fresh and creative ideas for content.

PSST ... HERE'S HOW TO USE GORILLA GUIDES FOR THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

A Gorilla Guide makes generating content for lead gen efforts and specific SEO goals a lot easier. You can extract ready-to-go reference articles (or at least, big chunks of ready-to-use information), optimize them for SEO, and publish them on your website or any third-party platforms, such as Medium or Substack, for link-building purposes.

If you're gating your Gorilla Guide for lead generation, don't worry about the reference articles cannibalizing your lead gen efforts. It's a common concern, but in practice, it doesn't happen.

If anything, the reference content will help you set the main stage for the actual Gorilla Guide, spark interest, and potentially bring in more prospects who will convert into leads.

By carefully extracting just the right amount of content from your articles and embedding enticing CTAs, you can compel your readers to check out the entire Guide. You can potentially kill two birds with one stone by ranking for competitive keywords and getting new leads in the process. **FIGURE 6** illustrates all kinds of ways that you can deploy or repurpose a Gorilla Guide. You'll see that SEO and paid search support are just a few of the myriad ways.

How to Use Your Gorilla Guide Book Throughout the Buyer's Journey



FIGURE 6: Ways to repurpose Gorilla Guide content throughout the buyer's journey

A Look at Flywheel Marketing

Changes in business post-pandemic are causing some marketers to look for additional ways to generate demand and convert prospects using a non-funnel model. One such model is the Flywheel method, initially introduced by Brian Halligan, CEO of HubSpot. In contrast to the marketing funnel, which puts prospects at the top and moves them down toward a sale, the Flywheel method puts customers at the center and focuses on their needs at each stage.



The term Flywheel is used because Flywheels store energy. They're also used to describe the process of getting something rolling. For example, when you throw a ball, the momentum causes it to go faster and faster until it reaches its maximum speed. When you stop throwing the ball, it keeps going like a flywheel. The same concept applies to marketing. Once you've started doing some marketing, it continues to build momentum. However, as soon as you stop, the momentum stops, too.

To use the Flywheel, you need to refocus your mindset. You need to ask how you can delight your customers with a great experience at each stage instead of looking inward at your products. The Flywheel's power depends on word of mouth (WOM) and having satisfied customers bring in new customers. The flywheel effect allows you to build awareness and interest around a specific subject matter. Once you've created a buzz around a particular topic, it's easier to find interested parties and turn them into customers.

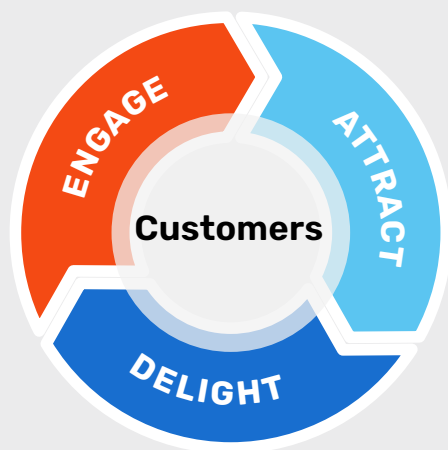


FIGURE 7: The flywheel method (source: Hubspot)

In **FIGURE 7** you see a visual depiction of a typical Flywheel. As different marketers use the model, they've added their own spin (no pun intended). The concept takes its name from a physical flywheel device that generates more energy as it rotates. Essentially, it gains momentum as it spins. Using the Flywheel method, you gain traction as you continually market your products and add new customers, instead of moving customers down a funnel.

How well you keep the wheel spinning depends on the degree to which you meet your customer's needs. The more you put into it, the faster it spins. This helps you gain popularity and fill your sales pipeline. It also enables you to distinguish between the content you create for brand awareness, demand generation, and continuing engagement.

The flywheel method is effective in 2022 because:

- 1. Businesses now want you to become their trusted advisor and help them customize the right solution.** The chaos of the current marketing environment is causing companies to rethink the value of content and “expert” salespeople.
- 2. Business audiences want you to demonstrate that you understand their particular needs.** For this reason you need to clearly define your audience personas and create content for each one at each buying stage.

One of the criticisms of the funnel model is that it forces sales to focus on quarterly efforts to close deals. Those that are not ready to close right then are typically shunted aside. When starting the next quarter, the sales team often has to start over. With the flywheel method, you continually engage customers, so there’s no loss of effort.

The flywheel method is gaining in popularity for two main reasons:

- **Marketing and sales can do something they never could before—collect data from every part of the customer journey and analyze it.** Companies can release their data from silos and share it across the enterprise. Once the data is analyzed, you can use it to improve the customer experience and deliver exactly what customers want. (See **CHAPTER 5** on Analyzing and Revising for Success.)
- **It doesn’t depend on face-to-face sales to keep the pipeline filled.** Instead, it depends more on the content you consistently produce and your reputation as a thought leader. This is critical at a time when meeting face to face can be problematic.

Content Marketing Using the Flywheel

ActualTech Media (ATM) uses the flywheel model for customers that request it. That's also why we emphasize helping you become a recognized thought leader, which impacts the spinning flywheel.

To see how the flywheel effect works, let's look at the three stages and see how content makes the difference:

- **Attract.** You grab your customers' attention by providing them with a great experience that creates brand awareness for your products and services. Your content should include everything a prospect would find helpful as they move toward a sale, including e-books, guides, blog posts, webinars, webcasts, presentations, collateral, and so on. ATM provides all of this content and more. The key here is to avoid friction by providing the right content to make it easy to get information from your website, social media, ads (paid and organic), search engines, and so forth.
- **Engage.** Customers need to be able to find (self-serve) your content and be interested in coming back for more. You need to nurture them and develop a relationship. The key at this stage is to collect feedback and data analytics from your content marketing efforts and make meaningful revisions. At ATM, we track your metrics for webcasts and other content to ensure that you can evaluate how well it meets your goals.
- **Delight.** Customers are seeking value. When they find it, they tell others. You want to make sure you provide an opportunity for others to leave good reviews. The key at this stage is to continue generating momentum by refining your content, bringing on customers who act as advocates and sales ambassadors.

If you've diligently worked each stage of the process, your flywheel should keep spinning with less effort from you and a more significant response from delighted customers.

Next, we look at how collaboration between sales and marketing can make a difference when it comes to content marketing.

Catalyst to Your Sales Success



Perhaps one of the biggest challenges that all B2B companies face is ensuring sales and marketing alignment. A lack of coordination and discrepancies between these departments can result in squandered sales potential. In this uncertain environment, this becomes even more important.

The struggle is real, and it costs businesses valuable resources. In fact, nearly 60% to 70%¹⁰ of content produced for B2B marketing is never used by sales.

There could be a number of reasons for that, but top candidates include a lack of internal awareness about the content, and content having low relevance to individual sales contacts.

Whatever the case, if you can successfully share amazing content with the sales organization, that content can be the catalyst to your sales success. Let's find out what it all means and how Gorilla Guides can help.

¹⁰ <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/02/moneyball-content-sales-team/>

Tunneling Between Sales and Content Marketing

The most prominent characteristic of modern B2B buying is that it's mostly research-based. On average, B2B buyers spend a *significant* amount of time consuming content before they even talk to a sales representative (71%¹¹ of B2B buyers begin the buying process with an unbranded or generic Google search). That makes content marketing more important than ever.

However, that's also not to say that sales is becoming redundant (*don't worry, sales, we got you!*). If anything, sales is becoming even more critical in this new age. It's just that the face of sales is changing.

The goal is to align your sales and marketing teams around a consistent narrative and buyer's journey. Content can improve your sales efforts by answering a) the right questions with b) the right messages at c) the right time.

Marketers, when focusing on the big picture, tend to over-generalize. Since your sales personnel are the ones actually listening to your prospects and understanding their pain points, they can offer some truly valuable first-hand information (queries, unique problems, and so on) that would otherwise be difficult, or even impossible, to turn up with SEO tools and such.

Your marketing team can use that information to create better MoFu and BoFu content—the foundation of which they can get from Gorilla Guides.

¹¹ <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/the-changing-face-b2b-marketing/>



FIGURE 8: How sales and content marketing can help each other

Additionally, using that information, marketing can also help sales understand how their content assets can help them nurture prospects in different stages of the buying cycle, and clear the way for the next step down the funnel. Over time, consistent efforts will result in better-informed prospects and well-equipped sales personnel, resulting in more sales (see **FIGURE 8**).

Again, this cycle's survival depends on the level of collaboration between these two teams or departments.

Catalyzing Direct Sales Efforts

With top-quality and in-depth ToFu and MoFu content, your B2B buyers will already have most of the information they need by the time they approach a rep. However, they'll still need you to guide them through the next step. That's where your sales team steps in.

The inbound methodology discussed in Chapter 1 also applies to sales. And it doesn't stop once the prospect approaches you—that's where all the real work begins, in fact. Instead of focusing on closing another sale, your reps should focus more on sincerely listening to the prospect's pain points and genuinely striving to solve their problems by offering the best solutions at their disposal.

If you have a sales force that's doing lots of face-to-face engagement, you could also consider stocking them with printed copies of Gorilla Guides to leave behind as food for thought for promising prospects. Gorilla Guides are extremely useful for getting those gears turning!

Use Gorilla Guides To Nurture Prospects

By leveraging you're the existing content of your Gorilla Guides, you can create different presentations/videos, whitepapers, and briefs for your sales team. Over time, you can even consider tweaking them by including real-life scenarios and your different prospects' pain points.

You could even consider having your sales reps share an ungated Gorilla Guide in its entirety with specific target organizations; that could help the key decision makers wrap their heads around a core concept/problem that you can solve.



And what better way to become trusted advisors than supplying the prospects with ultra-high-quality content that helps them frame and then resolve their challenges? By working closely with sales, marketing can develop content based on real-life scenarios. Furthermore, with the information collected by sales, they can create laser-focused, buyer-centric content assets that hit different personas and help convert them.

THE SUBTLE ART OF INDIRECTLY PITCHING YOUR CONTENT AND NURTURING PROSPECTS

To boost the nurturing process, have your sales team share valuable content assets with prospects, even if they don't ask for it—because they probably won't come right out and ask.

Here's a quick, non-interruptive way to accomplish such a feat:

- **Have your sales personnel use graphic email signatures and place a CTA that leads recipients to the download page of the Gorilla Guide.**
- **For attribution purposes, leverage Urchin Tracking Module (UTM) parameters in the signature links and see the effectiveness of your sales team's efforts.**

However you decide to do it, your best content assets—whether those are Gorilla Guides, presentations, videos, or a set of FAQs—should be easily accessible to the sales team. If your sales reps can't access valuable B2B content to answer the technical queries of prospects in a matter of seconds, you'll risk losing easy wins.

In that vein, investing in a decent CRM platform can help here. It allows you to automate the delivery of your best assets at the right time.

A Look at Sales Enablement

At this point, as we focus on the sales and marketing departments working well together, we also need to look at sales enablement from the buyer's point of view. According to the Gartner Inc. report, "Win More B2B Sales Deals,"¹² 77% of B2B buyers say that purchases are becoming more complex and challenging. You know it's true. More people are involved in the purchase process as budgets are tightened.

It's your job to simplify the process using content. You need to supply the types of content that make your products easy to buy. Gartner recommends that you create prescriptive advice (the "what") that helps buyers know what to do and how to do it. You also want to provide practical support (the "how") that helps them complete all the job-related activities required to buy.

Next up:

We look at Step 3: Focusing on Content Creation in Chapter 3.

¹² <https://www.gartner.com/en/sales/insights/win-more-b2b-sales-deals>

CHAPTER 3

Focusing on Content Creation

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Looking for ideas and building links
- Creating exceptional content
- Developing your SEO foundation

Next up, we focus on Step 3: Content Creation. You need to ask yourself what type of content your audience responds to. You should back up these decisions with data collected about all the content you previously created. This includes everything from registrations for webinars to email opens. (See Chapter 5 for more about analysis and revision.)

Content creation is a never-ending struggle. To stay relevant and maintain your brand's position as a thought leader, you need to consistently create content that “wows” your target audience.

That's easier said than done.

Thanks to the wide-scale acceptance of smartphones and the ubiquity of faster Internet connections, we're constantly exposed to content. As a result, we tune out lots of it by default. It's difficult to cut

through the noise and be heard by your prospects in such a highly connected world—the only way to do that is by coming up with unique ideas and topics to drive your content efforts.

Brainstorming for Ideas and Link-Driven Content Assets

According to CMI's Technology Content Marketing report,¹³ 90% of tech marketers currently use metrics like backlinks (linked referrals from third-party websites—more on this later), the number of people who viewed your website, and more, to measure content performance.

This indicates that tech marketers—like everyone else—prioritize link-driven content. But how do you develop content ideas that, when executed, are good enough to be linked to by others? In other words, what motivates third parties to say, *“This content is great—you should definitely check it out!”* to their audience?

Content Must-Haves

At the very least, your content ideas should:

- **Result in assets your target audience finds entertaining, educational, and engaging**
- **Be relevant to your business and your offerings**

¹³ <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-enterprise-research-final.pdf>

Again, it starts by understanding the user's pain points as they proceed from one stage of the customer journey to the next. This, in turn, will help you narrow down your focus and develop a fresh idea for an asset that could help solve that problem.

Here are some battle-tested tips to come up with unique ideas:

- **Begin by using keyword research tools to see what your prospects are searching for.** Or better yet, talk to your sales personnel and ask them to share their conversations with your prospects and existing customers (like email chains). That way, you can find out exactly *how* your customers describe their problems, what terminologies they use for your niche/the solution you're offering, etc. Then, you can shortlist the most commonly repeated terminology and questions and work from there.
- **Visit your competitors' blogs and social profiles to see what they've been up to lately.** It doesn't hurt to seek a little inspiration from time to time. You can be inspired by good ideas, and repelled by bad ones. Either way, you're learning.
- **Check social platforms (especially LinkedIn, Reddit, Quora, and Twitter) to discover trending and relevant content you can present in a better way or deliver a unique take on.**
- **Use web analytics tools to see how your audience interacts with your content.** For example, if an asset brings in a good amount of traffic or a significant percentage of visitors engage with a specific part of your content, try to milk the topics and develop related content pieces that deliver added value.
- **Create a shared idea tank** where you and your team members can conveniently add any unique ideas you have throughout the day.

When a content asset performs well, you should analyze it to find out why, create your own checklist of best practices to help future assets perform well, and continue to build on the process as you discover more reasons why your content was successful. This way, you'll be able to churn out high-ROI content consistently.

Your success will largely depend on how well you execute. For instance, there could be more than 10 different ways to discuss a problem and present its solution. The way you approach, package, and present it all will be the deciding factor in whether it performs and whether they see you as a thought leader.

Let's say you're crafting a blog post about ransomware. To make it stand out, go the extra mile and cover your topic from every angle (as in, understand the user intent behind the topic and provide insightful information on any question a reader may have about it).

You can include helpful, engaging, and visually appealing infographics, videos, and GIFs. Additionally, link to other relevant resources that go deeper. The type of content that could be useful in this example includes:

- **Case studies of ransomware victims**
- **Dramatic statistics on what ransomware has cost companies in terms of lost data and revenue**
- **Studies showing how quickly it's exploded in the last several years**

Make it educational, entertaining, and engaging (see The 3 E's of Exceptional Content). So many brands choose unoriginal, simple, and, unfortunately, boring.

Creating Exceptional Content

Content marketing is the art of copy that moves someone emotionally, combined with the science of where and how to use it. The science part includes picking the right distribution channels and targeting demographics and audience personas.

When the mushier side of old-school advertising combines with hardcore data-driven marketing, and you build relationships by delivering valuable content on top of that, you get content marketing.

The 3 E's of Exceptional Content

There are three key ingredients to creating content that performs really well. The content must be entertaining, educational, and engaging—in that order of priority. This “3 E’s” mnemonic is a helpful way to remember each ingredient.

IT MUST BE ENTERTAINING

We all have access to such a wealth of content these days that we don’t have time for reading something that isn’t entertaining.

The truth of this is seen in the fact that even when you know you need to glean the information in a boring article, you still struggle to make it through. You get distracted. You check your email. Your mind wanders.

In the sea of content in which we all swim, our pleasure-seeking brains only have time for content that’s actually enjoyable to read. (Don’t discount those dopamine hits.) That’s why it’s so critical that content marketers focus not only on creating helpful content that converts (the next two E’s), but that is legitimately fun to read. None of the other elements will matter if the content is boring.

IT MUST BE EDUCATIONAL

Most audiences content marketers target are going to read their content primarily to be educated. They're trying to learn. It's been said that "most of the value that someone gains from content is through the retention of new knowledge."

One of the reasons educational content is so vital to content marketing is that seeking to answer a question is one of the primary ways people stumble upon new content. Remember "user intent?" They head to their favorite search engine (in all likelihood, that means Google) and search for their question.

They click on results that are likely to have the answer to their question. It stands to reason then that if you want your content to 1) be found and 2) perform, it should help people answer their questions.

That answer doesn't have to be in a "buyer's journey" sort of sense where your content answers a question a prospect would have about your product. It doesn't need to be nearly that self-serving in many cases—it merely needs to be helpful.



There can be value in a piece of content that's strictly entertaining. You can foster brand loyalty by being fun and giving people a much-needed reprieve from their daily grind, even if the informational/educational value of a particular bit of content is low. But the opportunities to do this and do it well are few and far between.

For example, educational content for a car dealership looking to get you to buy a minivan doesn't need to be "10 Reasons You'll Never Regret Buying a Minivan." In fact, it often should not be so self-serving.

More will likely be gained from your would-be minivan buyers by producing the article “Top 5 Leasing Mistakes You Should Never Make” and giving them constructive advice about how to get good terms on a new lease.

The goodwill that strong educational content builds with your prospect is invaluable.

Educating someone without asking for much or anything at all in exchange also leaves them in your debt.

On the other hand, if you do an above-and-beyond job of educating someone when they *don't* need something from you, they'll surely remember you fondly when they *do* need whatever it is you're selling.

IT MUST BE ENGAGING

Finally, this content creation is for naught if the content isn't engaging. In this case, *engaging* is an action—it moves the reader to engage with it. To do something.

Effectively, this means responding to a CTA. It could be anything from moving on to another article to a long-form fill where they share a bunch of personal information in exchange for even more in-depth and valuable content.

As content marketers, the art we create isn't worth much by itself; it must also convert.

However, if you can measure results that show that the art you create engages with humans on an emotional level that moves them to take action, you'll be a highly successful content marketer.

A safe way to ensure that your efforts gain traction over the long term is to focus on creating evergreen content. As the name suggests, evergreen content is any asset that remains relevant over time. Most of the content that we put out receives a stable flow of traffic for a few months (or even years) but then becomes obsolete and loses traction. This is one reason why it's crucial to upgrade your best-performing content assets from time to time.

Great evergreen content, on the other hand, continues to receive traffic and backlinks indefinitely.

Considering the jaw-dropping potential that evergreen content packs, marketers are shifting their focus from creating a high volume of ephemeral assets to a slow but steady creation of evergreen content that will stand the test of time. However, it's not easy to come up with topics or ideas that qualify as evergreen, which is why most brands end up producing generic content that doesn't really get them anywhere.

If the topic, for instance, is network security, you could do a series on securing various cloud environments, including hybrid cloud, public cloud, and multi-cloud. The need for that information won't grow stale for a decade or more.

Evergreen Content Is a Link Magnet

By publishing blog posts/articles centered on evergreen topics, you potentially set yourself up for a life-time of stable website traffic. Since an evergreen content asset is unaffected by time, people will always look it up, making it highly linkable and a magnet for prospects for years to come.



Here are some great examples of evergreen content:

- **Cisco’s “What Is Cybersecurity?”**¹ The content dives deep into the fairly basic topic of cybersecurity, discussing the main components and potential risks involved, making it a timeless asset. As of now, the content has more than 1,800 backlinks and receives more than 25,000 visitors every month.
- **Microsoft’s “What Is Cloud Computing?”**² This is another classic example of an evergreen content asset on a basic topic. The article is actually a supporting asset for Microsoft Azure, yet the product is only mentioned once throughout the actual body. As of now, the page has more than 1,400 backlinks and receives more than 19,000 visits every month.
- **Built In’s “What Is Artificial Intelligence?”**³ With total backlinks exceeding 3,800 at the time of writing and an overwhelming monthly traffic of 63,000 visitors, this stands as one of the best-performing content assets on AI. The content provides a detailed explanation of how AI works, how it’s used, and takes the readers through a historical tour—the perfect recipe for evergreen content.

¹ <https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/security/what-is-cybersecurity.html>

² <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/overview/what-is-cloud-computing/>

³ <https://builtin.com/artificial-intelligence>

Gamifying Content with Videos and Interactive Elements

Over the years, video content has seen nothing but growth. Even to this day, video continues to grow in popularity. In fact, according to HubSpot's State of Video Marketing in 2020¹⁴ report, 99% of marketers who create video content will continue to do so in 2020. And that statistic barely scratches the surface.

Check out **FIGURE 9** for some more eye-opening figures.

This is mostly due to the fact that we enjoy content that's engaging, immersive, and requires minimum effort to consume—all of which you can easily accomplish with a video.

A Glimpse of Where Video Marketing Stands

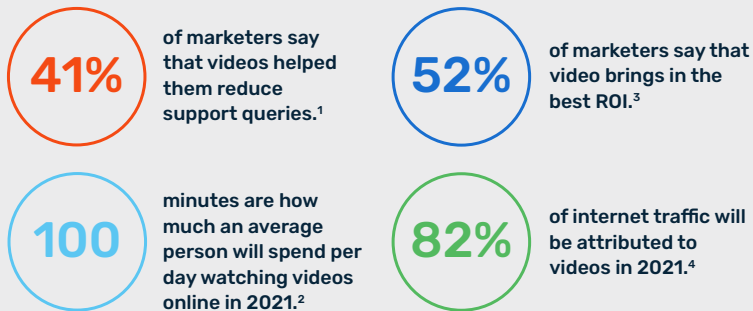


FIGURE 9: A glimpse of where video marketing stands

¹⁴ <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/state-of-video-marketing-new-data>

With great potential in terms of ROI, video remains the most sought-after content format to date. In fact, some marketers no longer re-engineer written content to videos—it's the other way around now. Video comes first.

As tech marketers, you should go all in on telling stories through your videos, and not pushing your brand too hard too soon (again, this goes back to the inbound mindset).

While we can't tell you exactly how to create those videos or what formats to use (as it will vary from reader to reader and business to business), what we can do is advise you on the messaging: Empathize with the audience by showcasing a problem or making them aware of a hidden problem, and then show them exactly *how* to solve that problem (either through video case studies/testimonials, animated explainer videos, or other formats).

Enterprise technology practitioners are hungry for this story, given how quickly the cloud, containers, AI, and other technologies are changing every aspect of business operations.

In addition to videos, marketers are also heavily investing in other visually appealing and immersive mediums. The two most popular formats include mini-games and interactive infographics. (According to statistics collected in 2022 by Demand Sage reports,¹⁵ infographics are rated as the most successful marketing content by 56% of content marketers that utilize them. Infographics significantly increase readers' understanding, as much as 50%).

¹⁵ <https://www.demandsage.com/content-marketing-statistics/#::-:text=Infographics%20is%20rated%20as%20the,boost%20their%20spending%20on%20infographics>.

Developing a Strong SEO Foundation

Search engines are easily one of the best things to happen to humanity. As key features in the Information Age, they're used by consumers and businesses alike to get instant access to any content that can help answer their questions.

In laymen's terms, search engines like Google are Internet directories that index and fetch information (webpages, images, videos, news, and more) that's most relevant to whatever you type in.



On average, Google processes around 40,000¹ search queries every single second. This translates to more than 3.5 billion searches per day.

This is a small glimpse of just how much we rely on search engines for finding information and discovering new things.

¹ <https://www.internetlivestats.com/google-search-statistics/>

Of course, how it all works is a lot more complicated than that. While they might make it seem simple, there are complex algorithms that work behind the scenes to display the most relevant results each time you type in a query—based mostly on the content that those sources have published.

Search engines analyze (or “crawl”) billions of live webpages on the Internet, store what they've learned about them in a database (a process called “indexing”), then decide which order to rank them in for various search queries. Ranking, as you'll soon see, depends on a bunch of different factors. The search engine's goal is to surface and rank the content that's most applicable to your query.

With potentially hundreds of websites producing content on similar topics and fighting to grab the attention of the same segments, businesses in every industry are collectively spending a fortune on understanding ever-changing search engine algorithms and experimenting with different tactics to appear on the first page of search results—the practice of *search engine optimization*, or *SEO*.

SEO is an experimental practice. Therefore, a particular set of tactics that work for one website may not necessarily work for another. Google has told us that rankings are based on hundreds of factors, but has never revealed (and will never reveal) exactly what those factors are. As a result, marketers have spent years trying to figure out (by experimenting) those ranking factors and how the algorithm works.

The fact is that modern SEO is more about understanding the *users* and less about trying to wrap your head around how the search engine algorithms work. This is something that even search engines have been struggling with for years.

B2B Marketers Are Going 'All In' on SEO

If you haven't focused on SEO lately, you're missing out on some serious conversion potential. Don't believe us? Here are some eye-opening statistics on just how effective SEO is in the B2B battleground:¹

- **Organic traffic is responsible for 53% of website traffic as of 2022.**
- **Paid traffic accounts for just 15%, and SEO-generated leads have a 15% closing rate.**

¹ <https://www.demandsage.com/seo-statistics/>



As a result, Google and other search engines roll out tons of algorithm updates throughout the year that bring them closer to understanding the search intents behind queries and the type of content that would be best suited to answer them.

At the end of the day, understanding search intent is an AI and Big Data problem. That's why companies like Google love to collect data. More data to train AI with means more accurate search results.

While there's still a lot of ground to cover, search engines have certainly come a long way. Today, a Google search almost always returns results that satisfy the intent a user had when conducting the search. All of this implies that, if you want prospects to visit your websites in droves, it's time to buckle down and focus on SEO.

Google Rolls Out Close to 1,000 Algorithm Updates Every Year

To stay on top of the search game, Google rolls out approximately 1,000 algorithm updates every year. Needless to say, this keeps the global SEO community on its feet, as some of the more major updates have huge implications for websites regarding rankings. That's why SEO isn't a "set it and forget it" kind of deal. You can find current information about this 2022 update on the Google Search Central site.¹



¹ <https://developers.google.com/search/updates/core-updates>

What Content Marketers Should Know About Google's 2022 Algorithm Update

For this update, Google has provided a self-assessment for your content that will help you analyze its quality. It wants you to focus on creating “helpful, reliable people-first content” written to help educate people, not to game search engines.¹⁶

Questions include:

- Does the content provide original information, reporting, research, or analysis?
- Does the content provide a substantial, complete, or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does the content provide insightful analysis or interesting information beyond the obvious?
- Is this content written by an expert or enthusiast who demonstrably knows the topic well?
- Does the content provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?

If you want more details about SEO specifics, check out the Google Starter Guide.¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/creating-helpful-content>

¹⁷ <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/seo-starter-guide>



At MozCon 2022, Dr. Pete Myers discussed an interesting aspect of Google's 2022 Algorithm Update in his talk on "How Google Pushes Us Down the Funnel." He pointed out that rather than sending you to a particular set of sites to explore, Google takes you to different SERPs further down the funnel to buy without ever having to leave Google. Google says, "Sometimes all it takes to make a big impact is to show up at the right time." So its goal is to be there when customers are ready to buy. For content marketers, Dr. Meyer advises that you shouldn't push content with a hard sell. Your best bet is to be on the journey with them from the start so that your relationship plays a role in their decision.

BREAKING DOWN SEO

Generally, SEO can be split into the following two categories:

- **On-page SEO:** This refers to all of the efforts that you make to post content to your website, tweak its source code to offer a smooth experience, and design your pages to deliver a memorable experience and make the users stick around.
- **Off-page SEO:** This includes all the efforts you make *outside* your website (hence the name "off-page") to generate links and boost the visibility of your content on different third-party platforms.

Check out **FIGURE 10** to learn more about the basic building blocks for any SEO strategy.



FIGURE 10: The basic building blocks for a typical SEO strategy

Since we've already discussed off-page SEO on link building, we'll keep most of the discussion limited to on-page SEO. As we pointed out earlier, there are several factors (more than 200,¹⁸ at least) that can affect the chances of your pages showing higher up in search results. A few of those that fall under on-page SEO include:

- **The Content Itself.** The depth and overall quality of your content matters a lot. The deeper you dive into a topic and produce content with user intent in mind, the more time your visitors will spend engaging with your website.
- **Keyword Usage.** The way you sprinkle your primary and secondary keywords (phrases that your target audience searches for) throughout your content matters a lot. We'll dive deeper into keyword technicalities shortly.

¹⁸ <https://backlinko.com/google-ranking-factors>

- **Site Speed.** The speed at which the website loads can make or break the positive experience that you wish to deliver. Did you know that a delay of just 100 milliseconds¹⁹ in the loading speed of your website can decrease conversions by 7%? Amazon and Walmart reported a 1% loss in revenue from a 100 millisecond delay.²⁰ Ouch!
- **Mobile Optimization.** Google implemented mobile-first indexing for all websites. Under this approach, while indexing and ranking pages, the search engine will first look at how well they're optimized for mobile users. For that reason, if your website doesn't load properly on (or isn't optimized for) mobile devices, now would be a good time to get on that.
- **URL Structuring.** Pages with shorter and memorable URLs that also include the primary keywords generally have better chances of ranking than pages whose URLs don't tick those boxes.
- **Security.** Google rewards websites that use secured socket layer (SSL) certificates.
- **Internal Links.** If a page has a good number of internal links from well-performing pages pointing toward it, its chances of ranking higher increase (*remember link juice?*).

And that barely scratches the surface. While improving any factor brings you one step closer to ranking higher in the SERPs, one thing that you absolutely can't compromise on (or can't even get anywhere without, for that matter) is—you guessed it—*content*.

You can have the fastest website with all of the technical variables taken care of, but if it doesn't have highly valuable content, it won't rank. Even if by some cosmic accident it does rank, you won't be able to engage, convince, or convert prospects. So let's look at the process of how you can create highly valuable *and* SEO-optimized content assets, from keyword research to actual creation.

¹⁹ <https://unbounce.com/landing-pages/7-page-speed-stats-for-marketers/>

²⁰ <https://www.webfx.com/blog/internet/website-page-load-time-conversions/>

The Must-Have SEO Stack for the Modern Marketer

Equip your team with the tools they need to plan out and execute their SEO strategy.



Some of the best resources include:

- **Ahrefs:**¹ One of two go-to platforms for top-of-the-line SEO tools (such as keyword research, link building, site audit, and more) and resources for millions of marketers around the globe.
- **SEMrush:**² The other go-to platform. A one-stop solution offering an extensive suite of SEO, PPC, and social media marketing tools.
- **BuzzSumo:**³ An online tool that scours the Internet for trending content and helps you discover new ideas.
- **Exploding Topics:**⁴ A free tool that lets you identify topics with trending potential from different industries.

¹ <https://ahrefs.com/>

² <https://www.semrush.com/>

³ <https://buzzsumo.com/>

⁴ <https://explodingtopics.com/>

Keywords, Keywords, and What? Keywords!

First and foremost, you have to start by discovering, identifying, and selecting key phrases that are closely related to what you do and what your ideal prospects usually search for—known as “keyword research.”

This is the most basic aspect of SEO, and lays the foundation for any comprehensive content strategy. Surprisingly, this also happens to be one of the things that most marketers get wrong. Since keyword research is an integral part of any SEO strategy, the practice has also evolved over the years. It deepened from only focusing on the individual keywords to understanding the reasons behind why anyone would search for it in the first place. See **FIGURE 11** for a quick comparison.

How Keyword Research & Usage Has Evolved Over the Years



- Emphasis only on search volume
- Keyword stuffing
- Relevance with content wasn't important



- Emphasis on intent and topical relevance
- Using relevant keywords for different stages of the buying cycle to target the right intent

FIGURE 11: The evolution of keyword research

By identifying the right keywords, you'll get a roadmap (or topics) for your on-page and off-page content efforts. Here's a complete breakdown of the keyword research process:

1. CREATE A LIST OF GENERIC TOPICS

Before anything else, start by brainstorming topics related to your niche. For now, don't worry about digging deep—just think of the terms that your target audience would search for off the top of their heads. For instance, if you offer hyperconverged infrastructure solutions, a few base topics could be:

- **HCI architecture**
- **Edge computing**
- **VDI and DaaS**

Get Base Topic Ideas from Gorilla Guides

While you can extract complete articles from one, a Gorilla Guide that discusses your areas of specialty in great depth can also provide you with some great ideas for base topics for SEO efforts. A quick overview of the table of contents can help you identify promising starting points for your keyword research process.

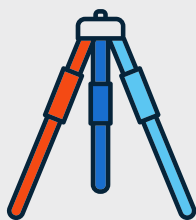


2. DISCOVER ACTUAL KEYWORDS TO TARGET

With a list of base topics at your disposal, it's time to pick out specific keywords to target. Before we discuss the actual steps, it's important to familiarize yourself with two of the most critical metrics that you'll come across while conducting keyword research:

- **Keyword Difficulty (KD):** Measured as a percentage, keyword difficulty reflects how challenging it would be to rank for a particular keyword. Websites with high DAs usually find it easier to rank for high difficulty keywords, whereas others have to craft out-of-this-world content and garner good backlinks to even come close. KD is calculated using factors such as the quality of the existing content, the DAs of the websites currently ranking for them, and the number of people searching for that keyword.
- **Search Volume:** This shows how many times the keyword is searched for by users (usually on a monthly basis). The higher the search volume, the more potential a keyword packs for bringing in that sweet, sweet traffic.

The Tripod Rule of Keyword Research



The ideal keyword must be:

■ **Popular**

The keyword has a high-enough search volume

■ **Rankable**

The SEO difficulty isn't too high

■ **Relevant**

The search intent complies with your content

FIGURE 12: The Tripod Rule of keyword research

With that in mind, it's often useful to target keywords with low difficulty scores and high search volumes. Unless you already have a stellar DA, you don't want to go after keywords with 40+ KD scores. At the same time, you don't want to write content on stuff that no one is searching for in the first place. To find the perfect difficulty-to-volume balance, use the Tripod Rule shown in **FIGURE 12**.

Next, it's time to plug in your base topics to the keyword research tool of your choice and extract related keywords. To help you narrow down your focus even further, here's a quick breakdown of the main types of keywords by length:

- **Short-Tail:** Also known as "head" or "broad" keywords, these are really short key phrases (one or two words long) that are usually the main topics within a niche (e.g., "VDI"). These keywords are very difficult to rank for and have high search volumes.
- **Long-Tail:** As opposed to short-tail, these keywords are longer (four words or more) and are more specific in nature (e.g., "how to do 3D modeling in VDI environments"). Long-tail keywords are queries that usually begin with words like who, what, when, why, how, and so on. Due to their specific nature, long-tail keywords are generally less competitive and usually have lower search volumes than their short-tail counterparts, as illustrated in **FIGURE 13**.

If you already have existing content assets at your disposal, you can potentially stumble upon long-tail keyword ideas that you can elaborate on. For example, the callouts in our Gorilla Guides might help turn up great long-tail keyword material.

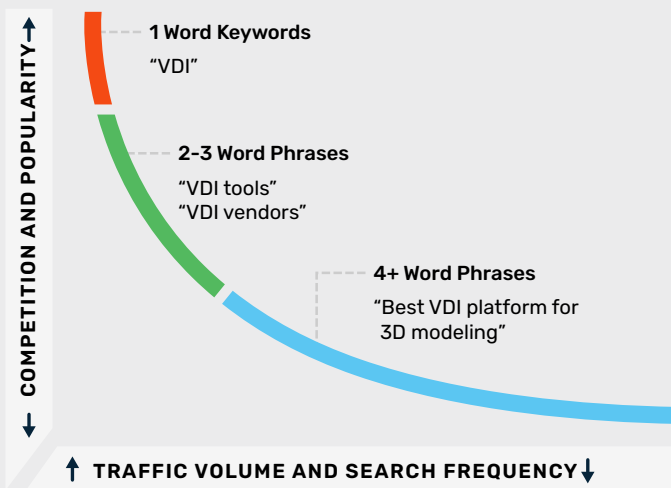


FIGURE 13: The Tripod Rule of keyword research

(Note: At one point, marketers were obsessed with Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) keywords. These are words that are closely related to your keywords. However, John Mueller, a Webmaster Trends Analyst at Google, came out and said that LSI keywords weren't a thing.²¹)



²¹ <https://www.seroundtable.com/google-lsi-keywords-27970.html>

Since search engines have become smart enough to understand the intent behind search queries, they look for any relevant phrases that might help them in displaying the perfect results.

For instance, “networking” can either mean building profitable business relationships or a system used to transmit bits of data over wires. Including words like “TCP/IP” and “computer” will let the search engine know that the content is about the latter. The search engine will then use this information when deciding to show results each time a user types in a relevant query.

BONUS: LOOK FOR KEYWORD IDEAS ON OTHER PLATFORMS

At times, when you’re digging for new keyword/topic ideas, the typical keyword research tools don’t cut it. That’s because these tools focus on just numbers. Sometimes you need inspiration!

If you’re in a niche like software-defined storage for containers, chances are you don’t have hundreds of thousands of people searching for the keywords related to your business. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that those keywords aren’t worth chasing after.

To discover these untapped opportunities, look for themes and trends on other platforms that aren’t primarily meant for keyword research.

Some of these platforms include:

- **Quora**
- **Reddit**
- **Google Trends**
- **Tech journals**

With a little research, you’ll be able to discover emerging, low-competition topics that might be of interest to your target audience.

Craft Content with SEO Best Practices in Mind

With a list of keywords and potential topics at your disposal, it's time to get to work and craft quality content that will rank higher in the SERPs. Here are some not-so-secret secrets for crafting content that will rank:

FOCUS ON QUALITY, NOT LENGTH

A common mistake that most content creators make is thinking that longer content will always perform better than shorter assets. While this may be true for certain topics that demand a good few thousand words to do them justice, hitting a certain word count should be the least of your concerns when writing most content.

The thing is, a lot of *good* content goes in depth and covers everything relevant or related to a topic in detail, providing unique perspectives and insights along the way. This naturally leads to longer content. Sometimes, though, content is lengthened with a lot of unnecessary filler just to make it long. This shortchanges the audience, which makes them less likely to become customers or repeat visitors.

Therefore, instead of *length*, you should focus more on **quality** and **depth**. Here are some quick tips to help you do that:

- **Find new and interesting angles to cover a topic compared to everything else out there.** At the very least, cover everything in an engaging and entertaining way.
- **Analyze the top-ranking content from your competitors on the same topic.** What makes their content so great? How can you make it even better? If possible, try providing something that others can't replicate—such as original data, custom infographics, videos, or your own unique analysis.

- **Write with search intent in mind.** What does the user expect to see before clicking on a link? What's the best way to satisfy that intent while also accomplishing your underlying goals?
- **Focus on aesthetics.** Don't compromise on the design of your content (or website, in general, for that matter). It does matter when it comes to engagement.

BE SMART WITH YOUR KEYWORDS

While crafting your content, and certainly before hitting publish, there are a few things that could give you that extra push and help you cross the finish line.

First, make sure your content is written naturally, with the first priority being satisfying the user intent. But don't forget that the proper usage of your focus keyword is important in getting the content to rank. In most cases, you should include your main keyword in:

- **The title tag (see FIGURE 14)**
- **In the first 100 words of your content**
- **The meta title and description**
- **Low-level header tags (H2 and H3)**

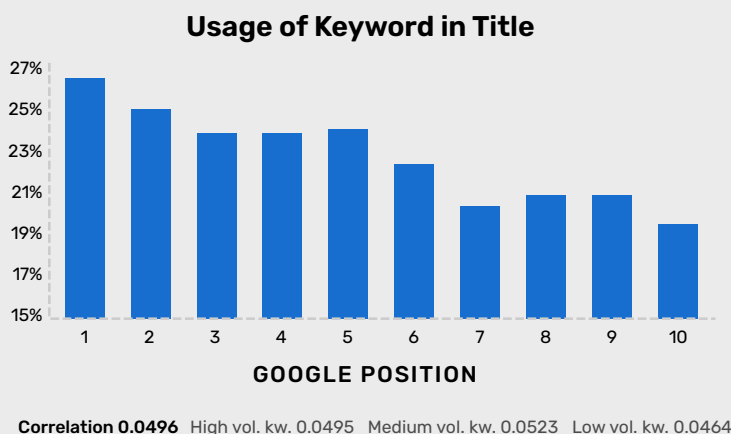


FIGURE 14: The correlation between usage of keywords in titles and Google rankings

OPTIMIZE FOR PAGE SPEED

Once you hit that publish button, run over to Google PageSpeed Insights²² to check for any speed issues. Some potential issues (and their fixes) include:

- Large media files (compress all images and videos)
- Large scripts (minify the CSS and JavaScript)
- Poorly written plugins (remove/replace them)

²² <https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>

Your Action Item: Perform an Audit

If you don't have an existing blog or other resources on your website, feel free to skip this section. For everyone else, performing a quick audit can reveal some amazing opportunities to further perfect your existing content and plan out your future assets.

It will also help you decide which content assets to keep, which ones to update, and which ones to remove. Here's how to do a proper audit.

- **Create a list of all your existing content on a spreadsheet.** This should also include the keywords they're targeting and currently ranking for. You may have to leverage a third-party tool (like SEMrush or Screamingfrog) for this purpose. Check out the detailed template created by Buffer,²³ which you can use to organize the data (you can modify it to your liking).
- **Next, extract and slot in data that reflects the performance of your content.** Some essential numbers that you should look at include rankings, organic traffic, bounce rate, average time spent on page, and page speed. If you have an analytics tool set up, such as Google Analytics, this information is simple to retrieve. If not, you can acquire the historical data from a conventional SEO tool (such as the Traffic Analytics²⁴ feature of SEMrush).
- **Categorize and deal with your content pieces on the basis of their "health."**
- **Leave your best-performing content assets untouched.**

²³ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WQJp8Fprx-qKAcbZVe3dHJ9Qmn2LhEze1hFsLF2p0E/edit#gid=0>

²⁴ <https://www.semrush.com/analytics/traffic/>

- **Consider updating the content assets that perform well, but not as good as you'd hope for.**
- **Remove any assets that don't bring anything to the table.**

Performing a content audit like this on a regular basis gives you the data needed to make informed decisions about your SEO strategy moving forward.

The next step after creating all that great content is to let people know where it is, and how to find it. That's the focus of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Promoting Your Content

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Ways to promote content across the web
- Looking at email outreach
- Creating backlinks

Here we are at **Step 4: Promoting Your Content**. At this point, you need to decide where to promote your content to reach the majority of your audience. There are tried and true methods that produce results—if you’re diligent about consistently promoting your assets.

Promoting Your Content to Infinity and Beyond

You can’t just create content, hit publish, and be done with it. That’s like inviting a bunch of people to a dinner party, cooking up a meal everyone will love and devour, then leaving it in the kitchen. After going through all the trouble of crafting content, you need to make some active efforts to kick things off and get people consuming. That’s where content promotion with both paid and organic distribution comes in.

Content Promotion

- Email campaigns
- Paid social
- Organic social
- Content syndication
- Display ads
- Webinar handout
- Sales follow-up
- Trade show handouts
- Chatbot sequence

FIGURE 15: Content promotion tactics

Promotion is an essential piece of the content marketing puzzle. You can't just rely on search engines alone to bring in traffic, and tapping into additional channels—such as social media, email campaigns, and content syndication partners—gives your content a boost and can work wonders in terms of attracting qualified leads.

Remember that promotion doesn't necessarily have to betray the essence of inbound. This means that you can promote your content without being interruptive—as long as the people to whom you're pitching care about it (again, this goes back to user intent).

Let's talk about some of the best content promotion tactics that should work for most brands. **FIGURE 15** lists different content promotion tactics.

CONTENT SYNDICATION

Even if you publish high-quality content online, there's no guarantee it will perform just as well as you hoped. It might need a bit of help. One tactic to instantly gain traction is *content syndication*.

Content syndication refers to publishing the same content (usually an article or a guide) to other websites and databases. As a bonus to syndication, you may also receive a backlink and a mention on that article, resulting in increased awareness, an influx of web traffic, and new leads.



Don't confuse "content syndication" with "guest posting." While the basic concept is the same—i.e., posting your content on other websites—there's a fundamental difference when it comes to the actual substance.

With content syndication, you essentially republish existing content on other platforms (while clearly stating that the content was originally published on your website). In contrast, with guest posting, you craft an original asset from scratch to be posted solely on another platform under your name. The intended outcomes and level of effort are different.

This is a win-win situation. The platform where your content is syndicated leverages your content to attract traffic, and you leverage the popularity of that platform to increase your visibility.

Some content syndication partners like ATM guarantee results. When you syndicate high-quality content with our audience, ATM guarantees a minimum number of fresh leads.

CONTENT REPURPOSING

If you have some high-performing content assets—blog posts, an e-book, a printed guide, and so on—why not tweak or reuse them to reach your target audience through other channels? That's where

content repurposing comes in. Content repurposing refers to changing some or all elements of a content asset and using it on a different channel in the appropriate format.

For example, if you have an in-depth guide to digital transformation, you can repurpose it as a video (or even multiple short videos) you can use during presentations, conferences, and trade shows. You can also upload the video(s) to YouTube and other social networks and use those clips to drive traffic to the landing page to download the full guide.

DISTRIBUTING CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

You're missing a big opportunity if you neglect social media channels today. Select the appropriate platforms that your target audience is active on (for most B2B marketers, the go-to platform is LinkedIn), and determine the ideal times to share content, along with a proper frequency.

Write insightful posts, abiding by the customs on that social network, that provide a glimpse of what your content is about—insightful enough to get the attention of your audience, and suspenseful enough to make them click (what tech pro wouldn't click on the headline “The 5 Biggest Backup/Disaster Recovery Mistakes You're Probably Making,” for instance?). If organic reach is limited, leverage paid ads, but make sure to target the right audience.

REACHING OUT TO OTHER CONTENT PUBLISHERS

This tactic involves actively seeking out content publishers/other blog owners who share the same or a similar audience as yours, and proposing that they share your content (which will be valuable to your audience). If they're going to give you access to their audience, you need to come forward with something super valuable.

Using Classic Email Outreach To Get Noticed and Build Authority

Earlier, we mentioned using outreach tactics to distribute content and build links in the process. To recap, *outreach*, in the context of content marketing, refers to reaching out to influencers, bloggers, and publishers through cold emails (or utilizing existing relationships), and asking them to share a piece of (relevant) content on their website to provide you with a link.

There are many ways you can approach content publishers for this purpose, such as with an original idea/data/content or asset that they can share on their website. See **FIGURE 16** for some examples.



FIGURE 16: The different goals for email outreach

While it may be difficult and time-consuming, email outreach, when done right, can help you create some really high-quality backlinks for your website, establish long-term relationships, and get new leads in the process.

Here are some of the best practices and insider secrets to help you hit the ground running.

FIND THE PERFECT PROSPECTS

Your outreach efforts should begin by creating a list of potential prospects to reach out to. After all, you can't just reach out to any website that you come across, right? That would be like throwing darts in the dark and hoping that you hit the bullseye.

To make your efforts count, you need to go after the right prospects, i.e., those who would be interested in covering your content and whose coverage would send meaningful attention your direction. Here are some quick tips to help you get started:

- **Use Google search operators to find bloggers or publishers that may be interested in providing coverage.** Put your keywords in quotations while searching or use the *"inurl:website.com keyword"* operator to see if a particular website has recently published any post that's relevant to your topic.
- **Check the backlinks of your competitors for similar content.** You can use any SEO tool, such as Ahrefs,²⁵ for this purpose. Websites linking to similar content may also be interested in publishing content that you have to offer.

²⁵ <https://ahrefs.com/>

- **Check over the latest content on the website.** Just because a potential prospect covered a topic similar to what you have to pitch a few years ago, it doesn't guarantee that they'd be interested in doing the same again. Analyze their posts to see if they'd be interested in covering similar content at the moment.

USE COMPELLING EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

Vetting recipients and sending out the emails is the easy part. Why? Because it's under your control.

When the ball is in your prospect's court, though, there's no guarantee that they'll even bother opening your email in the first place. In fact, the average open rate for emails in all industries is just 17.92%²⁶ (*in other words, you're probably going to get ignored*).

For that reason, you need to write the perfect email subject line—one that grabs attention and compels the recipient to open your email.

Here's the secret recipe for composing a compelling email subject line:

- **Make it personal by adding the name of the website to your subject line.**
- **Avoid anything that gives off the impression that you're spamming the recipient. Keep the subject lines descriptive and realistic, but also brief.**

WRITING THE PERFECT EMAIL BODY

Last, but not least, make the actual email body count. Getting a prospect to open your email doesn't mean that they'll consider the content you're pitching. One wrong move can put them off, and result in them sending your email straight to the trash folder—or worse, mark you as spam.

²⁶ <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/guides/email-marketing-benchmarks/>

In effective outreach, both parties (the content marketer and the prospect) have something to gain. However, the prospect has the upper hand in this transaction, as they're probably getting approached by hundreds of other marketers with similar pitches. Here's how you stand out:

- **Make it personal by mentioning a piece of content that the prospect's recently published, and is preferably relevant to what you're about to pitch.** This gives the impression that you've done your homework and piques the prospect's interest. (*Who doesn't like receiving praise? Just be sure it's genuine.*)
- **Using the personal element as a foundation, proceed to mention the content that you're about to pitch and provide the link to it (it could be an e-book, a video, a whitepaper, or any other asset).** However, don't be abrupt, as you don't want to seem desperate. Make sure that the transition from the personal element to the actual point is smooth.
- **Avoid beating around the bush.** Don't make your email long-winded. Get to the point as quickly and naturally as possible.
- **Finally, make it clear that if they find it interesting, they're welcome to share/cover it on their website.**

Using User-Based Websites for Distributing Your Content

Besides promoting your content on platforms that monitor and approve every piece of content that gets published, you can also look toward websites that invite user-generated content.

Classic examples of such websites are Reddit and Quora. These websites allow you to publish relevant content whenever you want, and are essentially self-moderating. However, due to the freedom that these platforms offer, your posts should be able to stand out from the crowd or they'll quickly be buried.

For instance, when answering questions on Quora, make sure to be as descriptive, empathetic, and helpful as possible. Don't try to blatantly place links and push your agenda. Instead, channel your inner content marketer: Answer questions related to your area of expertise by leveraging the content that you've already published, build authority, and then watch that goodwill roll in.

When you publish content on a regular basis on these websites, you can acquire an appreciable amount of links. However, most of these will have the nofollow attribute. Nonetheless, they pack serious potential in terms of bringing traffic to your website. In addition to these avenues, you can find relevant forums and go all in on helping the community and build your brand in the process.

Create a Solid Program for Content Outreach and Link Building

If you're not going to be the one implementing what was discussed in this chapter, the final piece of the puzzle is to build a scalable program for content outreach and link building—a framework based on the resources you're willing to put in. There are two ways you can go about creating one:

1. CREATE AND RUN AN IN-HOUSE PROGRAM (WHICH MAY INCLUDE CONTRACTORS)

Your first option is to create an in-house team that handles all of the content outreach and link building efforts. Of course, this will entail recruiting a team from scratch, probably consisting of at least the following roles:

- **Content Marketers:** It goes without saying that you'll need to hire expert content marketers who can not only produce outstanding content assets for your brand, but are also well-versed in the art of outreach, email marketing, and other link building tactics. In a very technical field like IT, finding an experienced content marketer who can adequately “talk the talk” can be expensive.
- **SEO Analyst(s):** For most teams, a single SEO analyst is more than enough. This individual can assist your content marketers with their content creation and link building efforts by identifying promising topics and scoping out third-party websites to go after, in addition to keeping an eye on your backlink profile (a “portfolio” of all the websites linking to your domain, making it easier to identify good links and bad). Additionally, they can assist you with other, on-page SEO-related efforts.

Once you create a team of experts, the next step is to set some goals for them. If you're just starting out, it would be better to stick with simple objectives. You can always count on the SMART methodology, which states that your goals should be *simple*, *measurable*, *attainable*, *relevant*, and *time-bound*. Here are a few examples of SMART goals for a content marketing team:

- **To create X number of links from 60+ DA (discussed later in this chapter) websites in Y months**
- **To increase the DA score of a website by 10 in X months**
- **To boost the organic traffic coming from external websites by X% in Y months**

Finally, if you're creating a program from scratch for the first time, it's best to approach already experienced marketers for recruitment and test them on the best practices of content marketing, outreach, and/or SEO prior to hiring them. Once everything's set and you're cruising, then consider developing a training program and hiring fresh talent you can train to do it your way.

2. OUTSOURCE THE WHOLE JOB TO AN AGENCY

While having an in-house program gives you more control over your efforts, it's not always feasible to build one from scratch. Money, time, and expertise often stand in the way.

If you don't have the resources to create an in-house outreach and link building program, you can always outsource to a content marketing/link building service.

Fortunately, there are agencies (and solo freelancers) out there for almost every budget.

Beware, though, as there are plenty of services with cheap, pre-made "packages" that will do more harm than good.

Here are some quick tips on choosing an agency/freelancer that offers content outreach and/or link building services:

- **Avoid Pre-Made Packages:** A quick and easy way to narrow down your options is to avoid services with pre-made packages. For example, if an agency claims that they'll help you build X number of links for Y dollars—run! That's because if the goal is to create “high-quality” links, it's nearly impossible to guarantee a fixed number of backlinks. The volume of quality backlinks they can generate is also highly dependent on how good the content you give them to work with is. Therefore, reputable agencies tend to work on a retainer basis.
- **Kill Two Birds with One Stone:** Look for agencies that can not only help with the promotion and distribution of your content, but also with its production. It's best to do a quick Google search for something like “IT content marketing agency,” and then find the ones ranking at the top (which provides evidence that they know SEO, since they achieved good ranking for a highly competitive term). Great content and great promotion expertise are synergistic, and the outcome is often greater than the sum of its parts.

Once you've shortlisted the agencies you think would be a good fit, reach out to them, spark up a conversation, and see if their services align your goals and budget.

Using Outreach for Content Marketing

We've discussed the essentials of content marketing and how it can seamlessly integrate into your overall strategy. However, most of the principles, best practices, and examples highlighted only cover one

aspect of content marketing: the actual creation of content. Now we'll dive deeper into another part that's equally critical and can make or break your strategy—outreach and promotion.

Creating Buzz

Marketing, like most things in life, is a popularity contest. Whether you're selling cookies in your neighborhood or pitching your software to global enterprises, the more you get acknowledged and recognized with a positive sentiment, the more likely you are to succeed in achieving your business goals.

From the lens of an SEO-focused content marketer, this involves getting other websites to link to your website, which we've already explained is link building. By acquiring hyperlinks (or backlinks) from other websites, you can attract relevant audiences from similar or related sources to your own website. This way, others will essentially be endorsing your brand or content.

The primary purpose of link building, though, is to increase your odds of ranking higher in the search engine results pages (or SERPs). Google and others see backlinks as “votes of confidence.” PageRank (an algorithm that Google uses to rank pages in the search results) considers the quality and number of backlinks a major ranking factor.

WHY DOES QUALITY MATTER WHEN CREATING BACKLINKS?

Once upon a time, link building was all about acquiring as many links as possible by doing whatever it took. SEOs didn't care much about *where* they were generating links from, and they were only concerned about hitting their monthly targets by leaving comments and publishing sub-par content on other websites to generate a backlink.

Link Building Efforts Play a Major Role in Determining Your Success



Link building is the primary component of any “off-page” SEO strategy that involves using different tactics to acquire hyperlinks from other websites that link back to you (also known as “backlinks”). These links help both users and search engine crawlers—programs that scour the Internet for webpages, analyze them, and then add them to their search engine’s index—navigate from website to website. The more links you build for your content, the more likely it is to show up on the first page in the search engine rankings for relevant keywords.

Today, the *quality* of your links matters more to search engines than the quantity.

But what does quality even mean in this context? Quality here refers to acquiring backlinks from domains that are considered trustworthy by search engines and are known for publishing popular content.

How do you know if a website is worth getting linked from? A tried-and-tested way is to look at its domain authority (DA, also known as domain rating), which is a score (from 0 to 100) that’s calculated using the number of links and the quality of linking sources.

It reflects the chances of a website to rank higher on the SERP: The higher the DA, the greater the chances of ranking even for the most difficult keywords. It’s important to remember that DA itself isn’t a direct ranking factor, but a good indicator of a website’s

overall standing or “reputation.” That being said, your ultimate focus shouldn’t be to increase your own DA score, but rather to get high-DA websites to give you links.

Think about it: Whose word holds more weight? A well-known, seasoned professional with a reputation talking about their area of expertise, or a nobody with no significant experience or reputation speaking on the same subject? Of course you’d bet your money on the first option (unless you enjoy losing bets—we’re not judging).



A question: If website A has 100 backlinks and website B has more than 300, which one of them would have a better chance at ranking?

The answer: It depends (trick question!). Remember that it’s not just the volume of backlinks that counts, but also the quality. Website A could win out if the quality of its links is significantly higher.

Search engines work in a similar way while analyzing the backlink profiles of websites.

“If website A is trustworthy and is sending me to website B, it must mean that the latter is trustworthy as well.” This is an over-simplified way of explaining how search engine algorithms work while analyzing links. Consider that the more links you have from high-DA websites, the more credible and trustworthy you’ll appear.

Here are some of the top-ranking, high-DA websites that you could consider acquiring backlinks from:

- **G2**
- **Enterprise CIO**
- **Fast Company**
- **BizTech Magazine**
- **eWeek**
- **PCMag**
- **TechCrunch**
- **InformationWeek**
- **Data Center Knowledge**
- **VentureBeat**
- **MIT Technology Review**
- **The Next Web (TNW)**
- **WIRED**
- **Forbes**
- **Gigaom**

To keep track of everything, search engine crawlers pass some of the PageRank (equity or value) from the linking domains to the linked sources—a process that’s sometimes jokingly referred to as “link juice.” It’s this *link juice* that search engines consider when determining rankings.

As illustrated in **FIGURE 17**, links essentially work as “pipes” to transfer equity or juice. This concept also applies to internal links, which is one of the reasons why it’s crucial to branch out and connect your webpages with each other.

While acquiring a link from any website, make sure they don’t use the nofollow attribute. This attribute is added to the hyperlink in the HTML source code, and prevents search engine crawlers from passing any equity.

To find out if a website adds the nofollow attribute, you can either simply ask the person managing it or access the source code of any page on your browser and look at an external link.

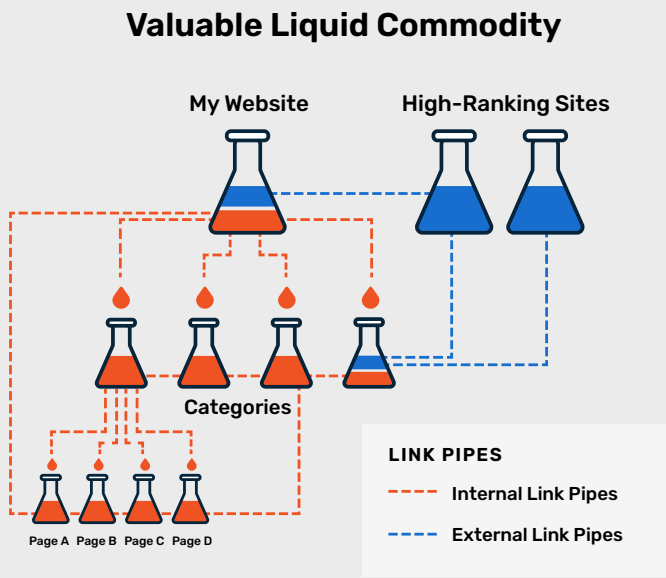


FIGURE 17: How link juice works



“Nofollow links” aren’t necessarily bad. When clicking on them, the users don’t notice any difference and can use them to navigate to the linked destinations. Keeping that in mind, if you’re able to acquire a link from a website that receives hundreds of thousands of visitors on a monthly basis, it doesn’t matter if it impacts your backlink profile, as you’ll be setting yourself up to potentially receive a decent chunk of that traffic.

Additionally, analyzing your backlink profile with tools such as Ahrefs and SEMrush²⁷ will also tell you which links are follow and nofollow. Adding the nofollow attribute to external links is a way of telling search engines that you don’t trust the linked source. It is, therefore, advised that you try your best to acquire links from websites that don’t use this attribute by default.

HOW DO YOU GET LINKS? CREATE LINKABLE CONTENT!

There are many tactics that you can use to generate links to your website. It all depends on the level of resources that you have. A few tried-and-tested techniques that work for most businesses include:

- **Guest Posting.** This refers to publishing original content on other websites as a contributor. In exchange, you get to place a link or two (either in your bio or within the actual content) back to your own website. Try to contribute on major publisher websites and tech journals since they tend to have high DA scores (this is why marketers and PR firms obsess over becoming contributors to sites like Forbes and

²⁷ <https://www.semrush.com/>

Entrepreneur). If you're a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) company, consider writing for software review websites, such as G2.

- **Broken Link Building.** This is a quick way to get a link. It involves finding a relevant webpage with a broken link (a link to a page that's no longer available or moved to another location), creating similar content (or selecting an existing asset that's a perfect replacement), and requesting the owner of the website to replace the broken (dead-end) link with your fresh and available resource. There are many online tools that can help you instantly find broken links on any domain or page.
- **Repurpose Content.** If you've published an in-depth blog post, you can *repurpose* it into an infographic (or any other format), publish it on a popular third-party platform, and link back to your original post. Or you could share slides from a recent presentation.
- **Reclaim Lost Links.** Over time, you can lose some of the backlinks that you've made along the way. Instead of getting upset over it, you can investigate why you lost those links (did a competitor sweep in and take your place?), contact the person managing the linking website, and either request them to give you the link back or provide them with a fresh content asset that they could link to through a separate page.

Now that we've gone over some different link building tactics, how can you ensure that you'll get linked to in the first place? You'd be right if you guess that you do this by creating exceptionally valuable content. (Perhaps you're sensing a theme here.) To be more precise, to increase your chances of getting backlinks, you need to make your content *linkable*.

There's no universal definition of a linkable content asset. A content asset that might seem worthy of linking to one person might not be good enough or even relevant to another. However, there are a few

elements that, when incorporated while crafting your asset, can increase your chances of getting links. Some of them include (you don't necessarily have to include all of them):

- **Original Data:** Statistics and other data on your industry that you collect yourself (or have someone else collect on your behalf) through surveys and studies can help you gain links from related websites over the course of many years.
- **Custom Illustrations and Charts:** To increase the *shareability* of your content, you can include custom illustrations, charts, and infographics that help get the point across.
- **Word from the Wise:** Another great way to make your content linkable is by asking industry leaders for their opinion or advice on a relevant subject, and including them in your asset. That way, other content publishers, when discussing the same subject and referring to their quotes, will mention your brand and link to your content.
- **Unique Take and Concrete Advice:** Last, but not least, taking a unique approach when covering a subject or a topic that has already been covered countless times by other publishers will help. Others will see this fresh perspective as an original thought. Furthermore, be sure to include actionable advice (like an insider secret) that your audience can use right away.

The Relationship Between Media Buying and Content Marketing

B2B brands are ditching traditional paid marketing tactics/media buying in favor of a more permissive content marketing approach. In an effort to make them seem *less interruptive*, the concept of native ads (promotional/sponsored messages that are designed to fit right into the platform they appear on) emerged. Reddit ads are perfect examples (see **FIGURE 18** for an example from Adobe).

Well-executed native ads blend content marketing and paid advertising and can be highly effective. This modern approach to distributing content is likely to be more effective than generic PPC. According to CMI, content marketing can help generate more than three times²⁸ the leads that paid search ads can.

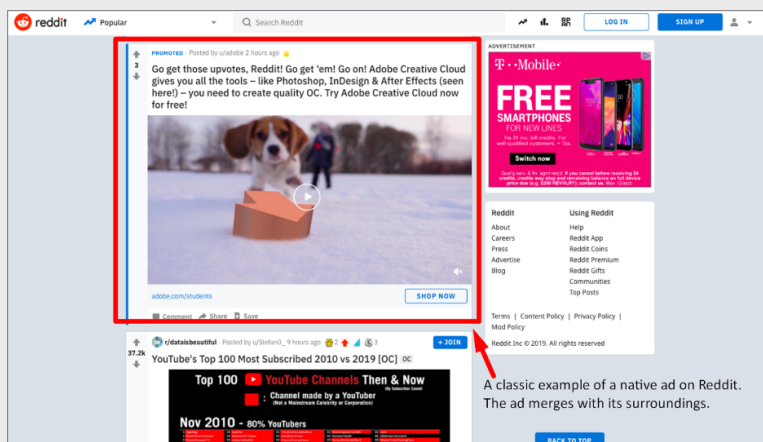


FIGURE 18: An example of a native ad on Reddit

²⁸ <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2017/10/stats-invest-content-marketing/>

Defining ATL and BTL

“Above-the-Line” (ATL) is an advertising term that refers to the type of advertisements that target a broad audience with no discrimination. TV, radio, and billboard ads are classic examples of ATL advertisements.



On the flip side, “Below-the-Line” (BTL) advertising is more targeted, and therefore, reaches a comparatively smaller audience. The ads you see on social networks and search engines are examples of contemporary BTL advertisements.

Native ads perfectly illustrate the fact that paid marketing is not inherently bad, and demonstrate that high-octane content marketing need not be organic.

While considering the traditional definition of inbound marketing, using ads to deliver your messages might raise a few eyebrows. However, as long as you respect the underlying goal of helping your target audience, you’re good. In fact, when done right, you can convert your paid media into temporary but high-value content assets that can quickly hit those KPIs. Here are some quick tips to help you do that:

- **Craft messages that address core issues or gaps that you’re capitalizing on.** Avoid blatant promotions or empty messages that don’t deliver any concrete value. You can do that with both online/BTL and traditional ATL ads.
- **Get as specific as possible when targeting your prospects.** Use the targeting tools provided by most online advertising platforms to reach the right people with appropriate messages. Additionally, incorporate a

tracking pixel, which is a special code that goes on your website, collects fresh user data, provides insights on user behavior, shows you what content they engage with, and creates “sub-audiences” based on that information. Every advertising platform has its own pixel (such as the “Facebook Pixel” and the “LinkedIn Insight Tag”). For instance, there will be some people who make it to your sales page, but leave without proceeding/filling a contact form. A tracking pixel (let’s say, LinkedIn’s Insight Tag) can help you retarget those prospects with relevant ads and special messages later on.

You can go one step further and do A/B testing to see which messages resonate well with your audiences. Again, your chances of success go back to your ability to craft impactful content in the first place.

Whether it’s in support of product launches or as an extension of paid advertising, content marketing is a permanent fixture in the big picture marketing playbook for most organizations.

Building Attention-Retaining Drip Campaigns

Lead nurturing is a slow process that requires a lot of patience and good content that takes your leads further down the funnel. Marketers have to be extra careful with how frequently they interact with their leads and with what messages. A promising (and steady) way of accomplishing this is through drip marketing.

A Brief Introduction to Drip Marketing

Also known as a drip campaign and lifecycle email marketing, drip marketing refers to strategically sending out snackable content assets to your leads—usually through emails—with each meant to build interest and motivate them to take the next step in the buying cycle.

As shown in **FIGURE 19**, these small snippets of information are most commonly sent out over a fixed period of time (as scheduled emails), or based on how the leads interact with certain landing pages on your website. Drip marketing can also be a combination of both—it's completely up to you.

Common Approaches to Drip Marketing

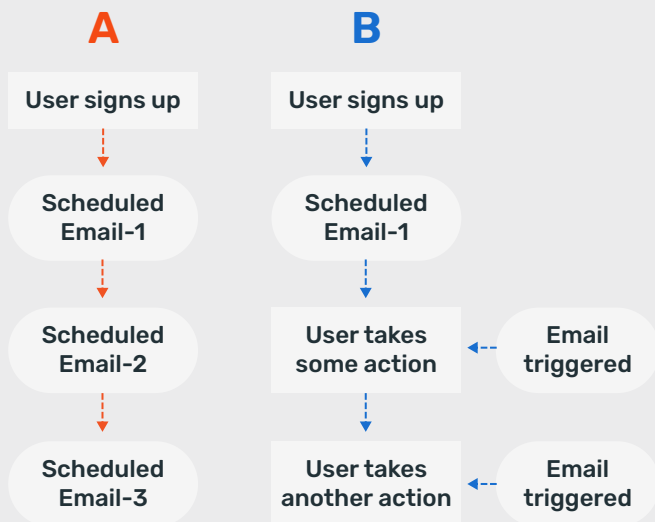


FIGURE 19: The two main approaches to drip marketing

Drip marketing enables you to reach out to prospects who consent to receiving your marketing messages and updates.

It also allows you to create and control the flow of how you want your leads to proceed from one step to another with hyper-targeted content, resulting in more conversions. According to HubSpot Research,²⁹ 64% of B2B marketers say their email marketing strategy was effective for meeting business goals in 2021.

But how do you create the perfect drip marketing campaign in a world of short attention spans?

By nurturing your audience, via numerous methods including:

- **User onboarding**
- **Renewals**
- **Customer engagement**
- **Shopping cart abandonment and retargeting (for technology vendors, this could refer to abandoning demo request forms)**

The Secret Sauce To Successful Drip Campaigns

Nurturing refers to building lasting relationships with your leads/prospects, by sending out relevant messages/content at different stages until they convert into paying customers, as illustrated in **FIGURE 20**.

²⁹ https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/hubspot-blog-marketing-industry-trends-report?_ga=2.125310921.2116605659.1655405116-782004359.1655405116

Lead Nurturing

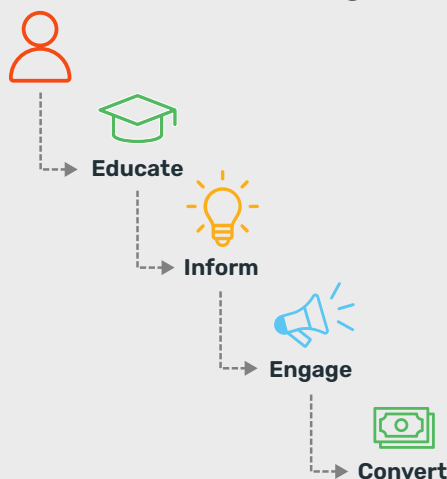


FIGURE 20: Lead nurturing

You might recognize this as essentially the standard marketing funnel, but lead nurturing slowly coaxes leads further down funnel by giving them exactly the content they need at the stage they're at.

For any drip campaign, you're going to need the following essential ingredients:

- **A Landing Page.** First and foremost, you need a place where users can provide their email addresses and willingly enter your drip marketing campaign. Of course, you'll need to offer something in return to get them to sign up, which brings us to ...
- **Your Drip Offer.** This is usually a gated e-book or a report you give to users as an incentive for signing up. However, it could also be the promise of an educational/informative journey (or course) that you intend on offering through your drip emails.

- **Map Out the Nurture Flow.** The next step is to map out all the possible journeys a lead could experience in your drip campaign. This involves looking at the different triggers or steps that a lead could take, all leading to a destination that nurtures them. For instance, the drip could start with a whitepaper. Depending on whether or not they open it, you could either send them an e-book or an engaging video that summarizes everything. From there, you can branch out even further. See **FIGURE 21** for more details.
- **The Actual Emails.** Prepare the actual content and design of the emails you'll be sending out to your prospects.

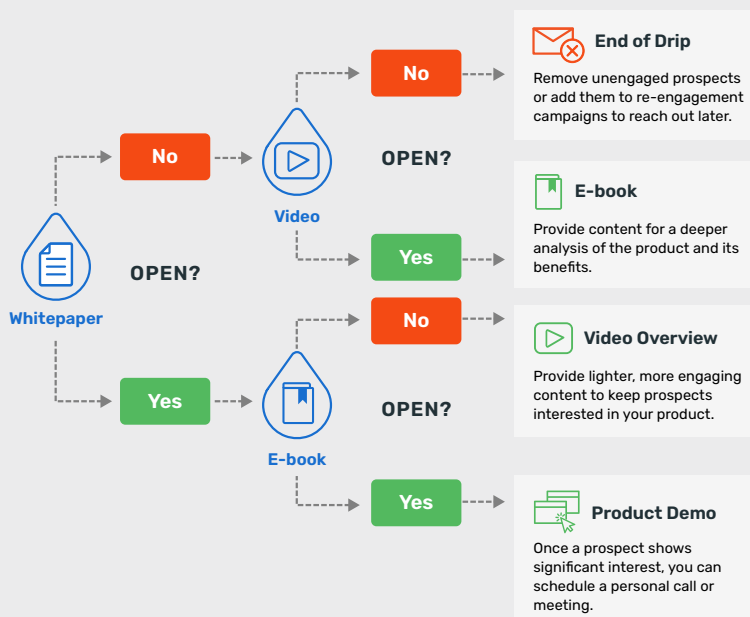


FIGURE 21: An email drip campaign

Once you have all these essential ingredients, it's time to get to work and bring your drip marketing campaign to life:

1. CRAFT THE EMAILS.

You might expect that it would make the most sense to create the landing page first, and then work on developing your messages. However, the bottom-to-top approach works well for drip campaigns.

This is where things can get tricky: You'll have to decide *how* to utilize your content resources. For example, if you have a comprehensive asset like a Gorilla Guide, it makes sense to use it as the drip offer.

Alternatively, you could use that Gorilla Guide to extract the actual content for your drip emails, and use something else as the incentive. Think carefully about how you want to proceed.

Each email should be crafted with a clear goal in mind. What do you hope to accomplish with the particular message you're creating?

- **What stage of the buying cycle is it meant to target?**
- **Is it meant to educate your leads about a problem they might not be aware of?**
- **Do you want to introduce them to a solution and invite them to visit a certain landing page?**
- **Is there a particular action you'd like readers to take?**

Craft the right messages, strategically place your CTAs, and decide on the frequency and/or triggers for your emails.

2. BUILD A LANDING PAGE.

With your drip emails locked and loaded, it's time to build the landing page. This is where your future leads will begin their journey with your brand, so it's important to make a good first impression. Make sure that the CTAs are visible and the offers are clear.

If you're giving a single content piece as the drip offer (a video, Gorilla Guide, and so on), give users the choice to opt for receiving updates (i.e., your drip emails).

If you're offering an educational experience through daily emails, give them a compelling and concise reason to sign up. Perhaps something along the lines of *"By the end of this X-day journey, you'll understand ..."* You can use any platform, such as MailChimp, to create a custom landing page for this purpose.

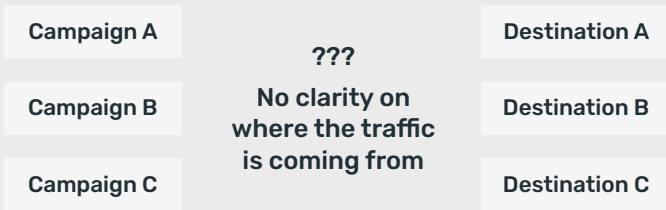
3. MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR CAMPAIGN.

Finally, you should have a system in place that helps you measure the effectiveness of your drip campaign. While there are many metrics that you could use for this purpose, you should mainly focus on the click-through rate (CTR).

You measure CTR by using UTM codes in the URLs that you plan on sharing in your drip emails.

These codes will help you track the source of the traffic coming to certain landing pages, allowing you to see how much of it came through your drip campaign. See **FIGURE 22**.

Without UTM



With UTM

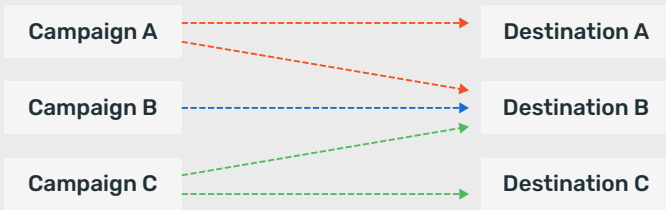


FIGURE 22: How UTM helps you pinpoint the exact source of traffic coming to your destination pages

DRIP CAMPAIGN QUICK TIPS

Setting up a drip campaign typically isn't a problem. The real problem is kick-starting it (and gaining traction). See **FIGURE 23** to see how an automated drip campaign works.

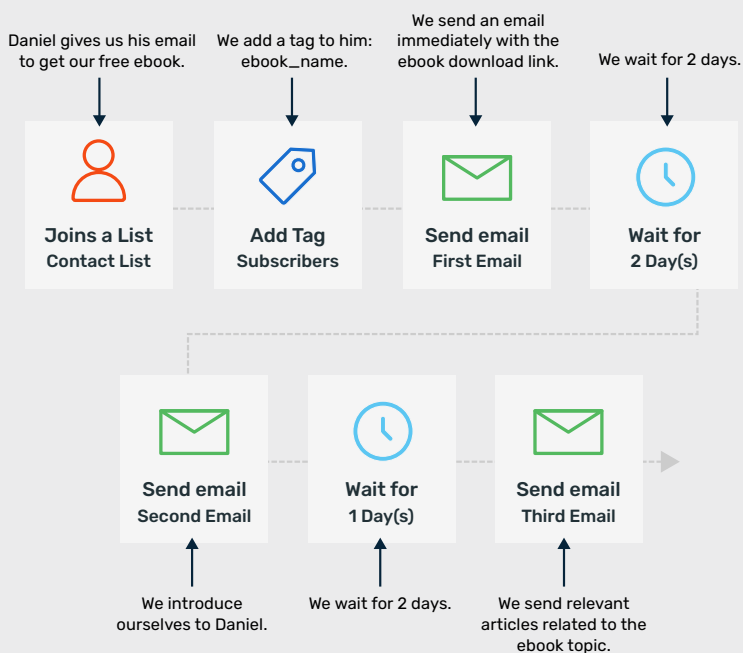


FIGURE 23: An example of an automated drip campaign

Here are some quick tips from our marketers to help you hit the ground running:

- **Opt for daily drips if you're serious about establishing that top-of-mind awareness.** This is easier said than done, and then some. It takes a lot of great content to pull off a daily drip. But if you nail it, the long-term benefits will be worth it.
- **Leverage LinkedIn lead generation forms to instantly collect information and build a database.** These are customizable forms you can use in your sponsored posts

or message ads. They can be pre-filled with the information of your users. Target your audience with appropriate parameters and link these forms with your drip marketing platform (*at ATM, we use Zapier³⁰ for the heavy lifting*).

- **Include CTAs in every message/email, leading users to a certain landing page.**

Finally, if you're offering a mini-resource (such as a PDF handout from a webinar, a report, or a smaller guide) in one of your emails, consider copying and pasting the actual content in the body of the email (if possible), along with attaching the resource as a separate PDF file. Some folks find that people don't want to *leave* their inbox to read your content, so putting it right in the body of the message ensures that it gets read.

Next up, we'll take a look at how to analyze your campaigns and make them even more successful in the future.

³⁰ <https://zapier.com/home>

CHAPTER 5

Analyzing and Revising for Success

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Actionable tips for data collection
- Deciding what questions to ask
- Getting feedback and making revisions

We're in the home stretch now. First, we looked at the importance of using Inbound Marketing and becoming a thought leader. Now, we're finishing up our content marketing model with Step 5: Analyzing and Revising for Success.

Let's begin by looking at the main reasons you need to closely analyze all your content, including events, webinars, and blog posts. No matter how you evaluated your performance in the past, the pandemic upended everyone's routine. Now you must be agile and focus on testing, optimizing, and experimenting.

For example, if you targeted podcasts to be listened to at people's commute times, you may want to rethink that. You need to figure out where to distribute your content to get it to your customers when and where they want it. Experimentation is essential, because you don't know how your audience is changing their habits.

Taking Action with Analytics Now

Collecting and analyzing data has always been important, but now it's crucial, for numerous reasons:

- **Content performance.** You want to evaluate content performance anew in real time, and prioritize opportunities that present themselves.
- **Messaging.** You need to determine how your message is received by people who are harried and have many new responsibilities. Can you tighten up messaging to speak directly to prospects with these new problems?
- **Feedback.** Direct feedback is critical. Getting instant feedback from webcasts and live interviews is a key to filling the pipeline.
- **Friction.** You need to see where people are experiencing friction across the buyer's journey, and fix those bottle-necks ASAP.
- **Competition.** Can you take a measure of what your competitors are doing? Who is the audience turning to for thought leadership? How can you make sure they're turning to you?
- **Internal learning.** You need to compare events to each other. Did something that went exceptionally well several months ago fall flat now? If so, you need to make swift changes.
- **Repurpose and distribute content.** You want to keep all your content circulating now. If you see format types or topics resonating, repurpose what you have and put them back out.
- **Revenue.** You're in business to make money. Can you tie any specific actions to revenue now?

POST EVENT ACTION REPORT

As an example of the potential of strong data analysis, let’s see how you can make metrics actionable after a webinar using ATM’s *Post Event Action Report*.

FIGURE 24 shows feedback in the form of actionable metrics you can use to follow up with your hottest leads. You see specific registrants who:

- **Want to learn more immediately, and the time frame in which they plan to buy.** This lets you Identify who’s ready to move to the sales or nurturing list.



FIGURE 24: ATM’s PEAR Report

- **Who to send content to (and what type) after the event to get more direct information.** The metrics of content requested also allow you to continue the nurture process and learn what your customers want in the way of more education. This helps ensure you prioritize the content you need to satisfy your buyers.

With this data in hand, you can take targeted actions by following up with meaningful activities to convert your leads.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR CONTENT

Next, let's look at the questions and associated metrics you should consider when analyzing your content marketing for success.

Are you being seen online? Can people find you and identify your brand?

- **Metrics to consider:** Content engagement, registrations, email opens, leads, polls

Thought leader: Are you being asked to participate in events? Do customers search your company out for advice? Does your audience recognize you as an expert?

- **Metrics to consider:** Guest posts, requests, and downloads of e-books and other special content

Can you demonstrate that your products solve real problems? Are there other customers whose problems you've solved?

- **Metrics to consider:** Case studies, testimonials, upsells

Are you generating sales leads and wins?

- **Metrics to consider:** Increase in revenue, number of conversions

FLYWHEEL METRICS TO CONSIDER

(See Chapter 2 on the flywheel method)

- **Attract:** Number of leads; website downloads, social media engagement
- **Engage:** Email stats like open rates, conversion rates
- **Delight:** Net promoter score, positive reviews, increased revenue per client

Most importantly, can you directly track your efforts to revenue?

EXPERIMENTING AND OPTIMIZING

To continually improve your content's performance, you need to experiment. Experiments allow you to test your assumptions about your audience, product, and content.

For example, you can experiment to determine which types of content attract more attention and which generate sales. You can also experiment to see if particular messages are more effective than others. For instance, try testing different headlines, images, videos, and copy. Experiment with different formats as well, like infographics, e-books, podcasts, and webinars. These experiments can help you to create more engaging content and increase conversions.

Here's a solid methodology for effective experimentation:

- **Create a hypothesis.** Determine your goals for the test. Are they tied to business objectives? What do you want to know?
- **Measure results.** Evaluate which channels drive the most traffic and conversions for your content. Is there an opportunity to focus on a particular channel or diversify your distribution channels?

- **Analyze data.** Look at your data to determine what content is performing well and what needs improvement. For example, are there specific topics or formats that consistently perform better?
- **Revise your strategies.** Monitor changes in audience demographics and behavior and adjust your content strategy accordingly.

Test and refine your content strategy regularly to ensure maximum effectiveness and continued success. Conditions and audiences change, and what was effective in 2020 may not be effective in 2024.



A content marketing experiment allows you to measure your changes' impact. For example, you can compare the results of your old content against your new content. This enables you to learn more about your customers and which kinds of content are most successful. You can also use experimentation to discover which parts of your website convert visitors into buyers. You can use this information to optimize your site and improve your ads' conversion rates.

Final Takeaways: What You Need Your Content To Do To Be Successful

1. Provide buyers with the easiest path to understand what matters when purchasing your solution
2. Make it easy for the decision makers by providing them with the information they need to get buy-in and shorten their sales cycle
3. Be clear about the financial benefits provided by purchasing your solution
4. Demonstrate how your offerings can future-proof their organization
5. Ensure that your team's perceived experts are answering their questions

It's All About the Content

Congratulations! You made it through the jungle, and with the intrepid Gorilla as your guide, you now have a firm grasp of what content marketing is, and how to do it right.

These chapters have taken you through every major aspect of content marketing in the current age, one that's much different from the pre-pandemic days. But even though some aspects of content marketing have changed (and drastically at that), one thing remains the same, and always will:

Great content marketing starts with great content.

There are no shortcuts here, no ways to produce mediocre content or “just OK” content that will serve your ultimate goal of capturing your audience’s attention, and turning them into paying customers. If your focus from the start is *anything* other than creating clean, clear, engaging, and impactful content, you need to start over at the beginning.

Once you have that content, the question becomes how to best use it. But don’t put the cart before the horse. Before you undertake new and expensive efforts at effective SEO, link building, drip marketing, and all the rest, ensure that you have top-notch people creating content that’ll be irresistible to anyone reading or viewing it.

And remember that ActualTech Media has the experience and talent to partner with you for some (or even all!) of that great content. We’ve been producing Gorilla Guides for many years now, with a long roster of satisfied clients. We’re here to help, and would love the opportunity to show you what we can do.

That’s all for now, fellow traveler. Good luck on your content marketing journey!

GLOSSARY

A

A/B Testing: A “conversion rate optimization” tool/practice that allows you to test multiple variations of a webpage or a piece of content on the same audience to gain insights and find out which one works best.

Above the Line (ATL): A term that refers to the type of advertisements that target a broad audience with no discrimination. TV, radio, and billboard ads are classic examples of ATL advertisement.

B

Backlink Profile: A report that shows the overall quality and quantity of inbound links pointing to your website. You can improve your backlink profile by building high-quality links (i.e. those acquired from high-DA websites relevant to your niche).

Backlinks: Inbound links (i.e. links coming from external websites) pointing to your website.

Below the Line (BTL): Refers to the type of advertisements that are more targeted and, therefore, reach a comparatively smaller audience when compared to ATL. The ads you see on social networks and search engines are the best examples of contemporary BTL advertisements.

Buying Cycle: The entire process that a customer goes through when purchasing a product or a service. It involves different stages, including awareness, consideration, and purchase.

C

Call to Action (CTA): Any button and/or copy on a webpage, email, or any other content asset that compels the user to “click” on it or take any other desired “action.”

Chatbot: A software that conducts online chats with customers through automated responses, removing the need for human support.

Content Marketer: A professional who is well-versed in crafting content assets keeping the needs of a target audience (or multiple audiences) in mind and promoting those assets.

Content Marketing: The art and science of creating and promoting content that your target audience finds useful and/or entertaining.

Content Repurposing: Refers to changing some or all elements of a content asset and using it on a different channel in the appropriate format.

Content Syndication: Content syndication refers to publishing the same piece of content (usually an article or a guide) to other websites that receive a decent amount of traffic.

Conversion Rate Optimization: The art and science of tweaking webpages and content assets (using data and actionable insights) to drive more people from your target audience(s) to take desirable actions (such as clicking on a CTA button).

Crawling: A process through which search engines discover webpages on the internet.

D

Direct Ranking Factor: An element that is directly linked to your chances of ranking higher in the search engine results pages.

Distribution: The process of sharing your content on different platforms so that it reaches more people.

Domain Authority: A ranking score (developed by Moz) that shows the overall “authority” or “influence” of a website in its niche. The higher the DA score, the more likely the website is to rank for different keywords on search engines.

Domain Rating: A ranking score (developed by Ahrefs) that is similar to DA. DR shows the overall authority of a website by assessing its backlink profile.

Drip Marketing: A communication strategy (that is mostly conducted through automated emails), drip marketing sends out pre-planned and/or scheduled bits of information to people who have signed up for it. The goal of drip marketing is to slowly take a prospect through different stages of the buying cycle.

Drip Offer: A drip offer is anything that you promise to offer through your drip campaign (such as weekly insights, lessons, or reports).

E

Evergreen Content: A piece of content that stands the test of time and stays relevant for several years.

External Linking: This refers to linking out to an external website/resource.

F

FlyWheel Marketing: The flywheel marketing method takes its name from a physical flywheel device that generates more energy as it rotates. Essentially it gains momentum as it spins. So, when you use the Flywheel method, you gain traction as you continually market your products and add new customers instead of moving customers down a funnel.

Funnel: A “funnel” is a mapped-out representation of all of the steps that a customer takes from being a prospect to becoming a paying customer. Funnels may vary from company to company, but usually,

it begins from the awareness stage (where the prospect finds out about a problem or your brand), moves on to the consideration stage (where the prospect evaluates their options), and then finally to the conversion stage (where they convert into a paying customer or become a lead).

G

Gorilla Guide: ActualTech Media's brand of in-depth e-books that explore different IT-related topics.

I

Inbound Marketing: A marketing methodology that focuses on drawing prospects towards a business, instead of actively pursuing them using interruptive/outbound tactics.

Indexing: The process that involves search engines storing web-pages/content (which they find during crawling) to their databases.

Internal Linking: The process of linking to another page on your website within your content.

K

Keyword Difficulty: A score (from 0 to 100) that reflects how difficult it is to rank for a certain keyword.

Keyword Research: The process of discovering and shortlisting key phrases to be used in your content.

Keyword Volume: The estimated number of people searching for a certain keyword on a monthly basis.

L

Landing Page: A webpage on your site that is designed to convert visitors into leads. Landing pages usually include a form that enables visitors to exchange their information for an offer, such as a downloadable e-book, a whitepaper, etc.

Lead Generation: The process of collecting the information of prospects who are likely to sign up for your service, purchase your product, etc.

Lead Magnet: An asset (e-book, whitepaper, report, template, etc.) that users can download in exchange for their information. These “magnets” are helpful in converting visitors into leads by providing them with a source of value.

Lead Nurturing: The strategic process of building long-term relationships with your prospects by engaging with them at every stage of the funnel.

Lead: A person that has provided their contact information.

Link Building: The strategic process of building high-quality and relevant backlinks for your website.

Link Equity (Link Juice): The equity or the “vote of confidence” that flows from one page to another via a link.

M

Mobile Optimization: The process of making your website run smoother and function properly on mobile devices.

SQL: A marketing qualified lead is any lead who, according to your marketing team, shows ample interest in what you have to offer or is likely to become a customer.

N

Native Ads: Promotional/sponsored messages that are designed to fit right into the platform they appear on.

Nurture Flow: The possible journey(s) a lead could experience or the different stages a prospect goes through in your drip/email marketing campaign.

O

Off-Page SEO: This includes all the efforts you make outside your website (hence the name “off-page”) to generate links and boost the visibility of your content on different third-party platforms.

On-Page SEO: This refers to all of the efforts that you make to post content on your website, tweak its source code to offer a smooth experience, and design your pages to deliver a memorable experience to encourage users to stick around.

Outbound Marketing: The “traditional” marketing methodology that relies on interruptive tactics to push your messages to an audience (TV and billboard ads are classic examples of this type of marketing).

Outreach: In the context of content marketing and SEO, outreach refers to reaching out to different people who’d be interested in sharing your content on their website (providing you with a backlink in the process).

P

Page Speed: A score that shows how fast one of your webpages load. Page speed is a direct ranking factor.

Permission-Based Marketing: A type of marketing in which prospects willingly sign up to receive offers and other messages.

Prospect: An individual who shows interest in your business and what it offers.

R

Rank: This refers to where your website stands in the search engine results for a specific keyword.

Retargeting: A marketing tactic that targets a prospect—who came close to converting/taking a desirable action on your website (such as signing up as a lead or filling out a form), but left without completing said action—with special ads and offers.

S

Search Engine Algorithm: A complex set of instructions or a process that search engines use to analyze and rank webpages/content.

Search Engine Crawlers: Special programs (also known as “search engine spiders”) that analyze new or updated webpages/content to be indexed by search engines.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): The art and science of optimizing your website/content and building high-quality backlinks to increase your chances of showing higher up in the search engine result pages for targeted keywords.

Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs): These are the pages you see after you type in a query on a search engine.

Search Engines: A special program that stores information in a database and retrieves it whenever someone searches for anything that's remotely relevant (Google, Bing, and Yahoo! are search engines).

Search Intent: The intent with which a user looks up something on a search engine.

Site Speed: A score that shows how fast your website loads. Like Page Speed, Site Speed is also a direct ranking factor.

SQL (Sales Qualified Lead): These are the MQLs that are recognized by your sales team as individuals who show great interest in your business offerings.

SSL: SSL refers to “secured sockets layer” and is a form of encryption that protects the communication between a user and a web server. Search engines encourage website owners to use SSL certificates on their websites.

T

Thought Leadership: The ideal scenario where a brand is seen as the go-to-source for helpful information or final verdicts on certain topics.

Tracking Pixel: A special code that goes on your website, collects fresh user data, provides insights on how they behave, shows you what content they engage with, and creates “sub-audiences” based on that information for retargeting purposes.

U

User Experience (UX): The overall experience or “feel” that you deliver to a user through your website, content, campaign, or your product.

UTM Parameters: Special parameters that are used by marketers to track the sources of incoming web traffic, making it easier to attribute their success to specific campaigns/efforts.

ABOUT ACTUALTECH MEDIA



ActualTech Media, a Future company, is a B2B tech marketing company that connects enterprise IT vendors with IT buyers through innovative lead generation programs and compelling custom content services.

ActualTech Media's team speaks to the enterprise IT audience because we've been the enterprise IT audience.

Our leadership team is stacked with former CIOs, IT managers, architects, subject matter experts and marketing professionals that help our clients spend less time explaining what their technology does and more time creating strategies that drive results.

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