

# How to Double The Results of Your Marketing Campaigns

# ROBERT W. BLY

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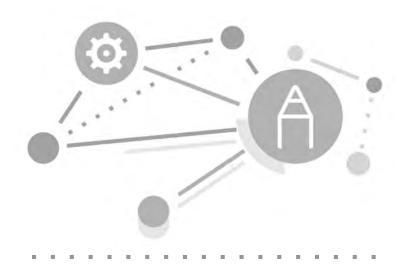
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To Matt Zagula—a true marketing pro and master of his field



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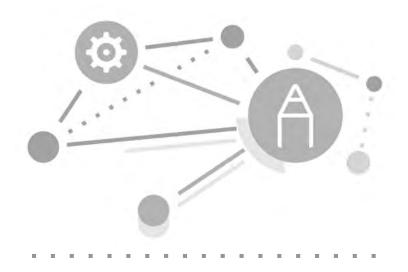
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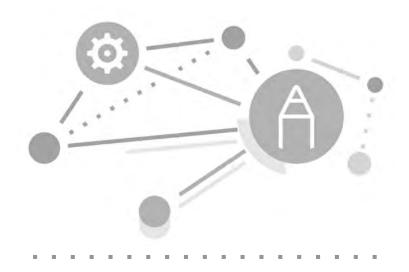


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# Preface

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f the megatrends in marketing today—which include search engine optimization (SEO), online video, social media, mobile marketing, ad retargeting, and infographics—content marketing is emerging as the new "killer app" in the marketing world.

Although content marketing has been used profitably for more than a century, its popularity has exploded in the past couple of decades: According to the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), as of 2017, almost nine out of ten B2B companies were using content marketing.

The CMI also says corporations spend more than one-quarter of their promotional budgets on content marketing. According to market research company Forrester, in 2016, U.S. businesses spent a total of \$10 billion on content marketing. Content marketing was forecast to be a \$300 billion industry in 2019.

Yet many content strategists and advocates get one part of marketing entirely wrong: They tell unsuspecting businesspeople that it is no longer effective to sell or persuade, and instead advise them to think of themselves as publishers instead of marketers.

The error in this method, of course, is that businesses exist to sell customers products and services they want and need, and for which they will pay a price that allows the seller to make a profit. Businesses' purpose is *not* to give away free information, which is essentially what content marketing is.

Content marketing is not an end unto itself. It is a *means* to an end—to sell products. Content is not the be-all and end-all of marketing, either. It's just one of many methods that can be used to get customers, orders, and sales.

Content marketing is most effective when it's integrated with a multichannel campaign that not only educates consumers (with content) but also offers that content with various direct response methods both online and offline to generate leads, prospects, and sales. This is the approach you will read about in this book.

In this handbook, I share lessons from my four decades of experience planning and producing hundreds of content marketing campaigns. In these pages, you will discover:

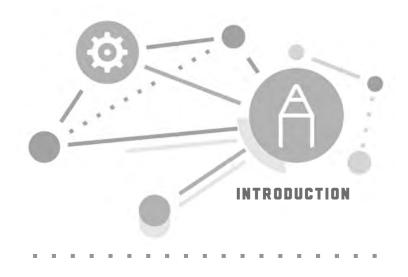
- Why content marketing is so effective and economical
- Which types of businesses and organizations can benefit most from content marketing campaigns
- How to create A-level content that gets noticed, gets read, gets your message across, and eliminates "content pollution"

#### TIP

URLs change all the time, which means many URLs in published works quickly become outdated and nonfunctional. To keep The Content Marketing Handbook as up-to-date as possible, I periodically send the new URLs to my readers. To get them at no charge, just subscribe to my free online newsletter The Direct Response Letter (https:// www.bly.com/reports/). Another way to find the updated URL is to Google the source by name or even by the old URL.

- O How to overcome the biggest weakness of content marketing
- How to double your marketing response rates with lead magnets, bonus reports, and other free content offers
- How to integrate content and direct response marketing to produce greater results than either can generate on their own
- How to use content to build your brand, enhance your reputation, and stand out from your competitors
- How to plan, execute, and measure content marketing in a multichannel environment
- When to stop giving away content (the easy part of marketing) and start asking for the order (where the money is made)

My aim is to show you content's true role in integrated multichannel marketing campaigns. This book can help you avoid wasting time and money by giving away content with no return on investment, and instead create and offer content that can build trust, stimulate interest, and ultimately get more orders—in a way that creates a stronger relationship with your buyers and helps them get maximum benefit from their purchase of your products.



# Content Marketing in the 21st Century

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C ontent marketing—giving away free information to build brand awareness, increase response to marketing campaigns, convert more online traffic, and educate prospects on your technology, methodology, products, services, and applications—is one of the hot trends in marketing today. Other marketing methods currently popular include online video, social media, QR codes, search engine optimization (SEO), live online chat, mobile marketing, and infographics. But, as the saying goes, content is king.

More than 8 out of 20 ecommerce shoppers conduct online searches before they make a purchase. And 7 out of 10 cite detailed product content as the number-one reason they buy one product over another. Brands that submit content for SEO can boost their sales more than 25 percent than retailers who just advertise.

Origins of new terms are often murky; *content marketing* may have been coined in 1996 at a roundtable for journalists held at the American Society of News Editors by John F. Oppedahl. In fact, content marketing has been used for far longer than that. It's only the name that is of recent vintage, not the method. I personally have been doing content marketing for four decades, and some marketers have been at it even longer. Online marketing expert Fred Gleeck calls it "edutainment" because the content ideally should be educational and entertaining.

Today, more attention than ever is being focused on content as a marketing tool. For instance, in August 2017, Apple announced the company was making a \$1 billion investment in original content for its Apple TV platform; by 2019, a report in the *Financial Times* estimated Apple's content investment at \$6 billion. In 2019, Forrester forecasted that by 2023, annual digital marketing dollars spent by businesses will reach \$146 billion.

The average American spends almost nine hours a day engaging with digital content, while Millennials spend even more: 11 hours. No wonder 53 percent of marketers consider articles and blog posts their most-used technique for inbound marketing.

I did my first content marketing campaign in 1980. I was advertising manager of Koch Engineering, an industrial manufacturer run by the late David Koch, who at the time was the Libertarian Party's nominee for vice president of the United States, back when he was relatively unknown. Later, of course, he became a household name as half of the infamous "billionaire Koch brothers."

One of the products we sold were various *tower internals*, and one type was the *tray*: circular metal disks with capped openings on their surfaces. The trays were placed inside refinery towers to enhance the distillation of crude oil into kerosene, gasoline, heating oil, jet fuel, and other petroleum-based products.

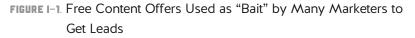
Specifying the correct configuration of trays for your refinery is a highly technical task, and the engineers in the refineries often needed instructions for how to do it correctly.

To assist them, we produced a technical manual that we dubbed the "tray manual," which cost several dollars per copy to print and bind. It

had stiff covers, a spiral binding, and fold-out blueprint drawings showing the configurations of various trays. The tray manual was not my idea; it was already in use when I joined the firm. It was wildly popular—by far our most requested piece of literature. Back then we didn't call it "content marketing." We called it "giving away free information." But the practice was the same. Copywriter Bob Martel says he called it "presales educational writing"—which, he notes, requires you to know something about both education and sales.

Content marketing has been used for more than a century. To test responses to his print ads, Claude Hopkins (1866–1932) offered free informational booklets in many of his ads. And in 1916, Campbell's began promoting its soups with content marketing by offering free booklets of recipes that used Campbell's soups.

Back in those days, this free content was simply called *free booklets* or *free information*. In the latter part of the 20th century, marketers referred to them as *bait pieces*, because they helped "hook" prospects and turn them into leads (see Figure I–1, below).





Today, the preferred term for free content is *lead magnet*, the idea being that the tempting offer of valuable free information is like a magnet that draws people into your ad and gets them to request the white paper or other free content. A content offer with multiple components (such as a product sample, brochure, and DVD) is called an *information kit*.

There are all sorts of opinions and tests on the effectiveness of content marketing.

But let me sum up my experience in just two simple points. First, I can't remember the last time I did a B2B (business to business) or B2C (business to consumer) marketing campaign without a free content offer. For B2B, the lead magnet is often the primary offer that drives prospects to respond. For B2C, it is often a bonus report given along with their purchase of the product.

Second, adding a lead magnet to a B2B lead generation campaign can often double (or more) the number of inquiries instead of the same campaign without the free content offer.

In the "good old days" of B2B marketing, our primary offer was a *free color brochure* filled with sales copy about the product. It worked then, but today prospects respond better if you also promise to send them free how-to information, such as a special report or white paper, which will be useful to them in their job, rather than just selling them something. Customers want to get something from their content, and the statistics agree.

For instance:

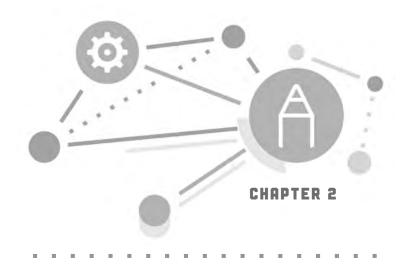
- Selection of Americans prefer a series of articles over an ad.
- Seventy percent say content marketing makes them feel closer to a product or business.
- Sixty percent credit content marketing for helping them make better purchase decisions.
- Ontent marketing costs 62 percent less than outbound marketing and generates three times as many leads.
- Ninety percent of the most successful B2B content marketers put their audience's information need over the company's sales and promotional messages.





Although a large number of B2B companies use content marketing, it is not in everyone's wheelhouse, and it may not be ideal for you. But if you want to gain content marketing skills, knowledge, and results, this book is a good place to start.

As you can see in Figure I–2 above, three of the top six challenges in B2B content marketing revolve around producing content. Chapters 2 and 3 address this challenge, and Chapters 5 through 14 give detailed instructions for implementing it. Measuring content effectiveness and ROI is covered in Chapters 16 and 17. Budget is discussed in Chapter 3, which is about planning your content marketing campaigns. All the top challenges for B2B content marketers, which I believe apply equally to consumer marketing, are covered in this book. Let's get started!

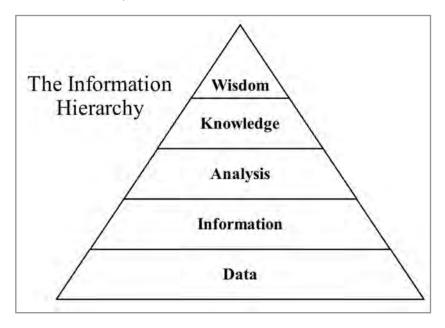


# How to Write Compelling Content

C ontent marketing is so much more than just "publishing information." There's way too much information available today. As I've said, your prospects are drowning in information, but they are starved for *knowledge*—ideas for how to solve problems and methods for doing their jobs better. You can add value to your content by not merely presenting information and data, but by analyzing the information and telling the reader what it means.

As shown in Figure 2–1 on page 30, the lowest level of content is pure data. Sometimes there is value in creating content that curates and assembles important subject data in one place, The problem is the reader can get the same or similar data with a quick Google search, so data-based content has limited value or exclusivity.

FIGURE 2-1. Hierarchy of Content Value



The next level up the content hierarchy is information, examples of which can include what something is, how it works, why it's good, who uses it, and where they use it. More interesting than data, well-crafted informational content can be both useful and engaging to prospects, especially those who are just beginning their search for solutions and need a basic understanding of the topic.

One step up is analysis. Analysis is the interpretation of the meaning, relevance, and significance of the information to your target audience. For instance, if the information is that gold and silver prices move in tandem, the analysis is that because gold prices are rising, silver prices will soon follow.

Knowledge is a deeper understanding of the information and the conclusions reached by the analysis. In our example, the knowledge would be how to take advantage of and profit from a coming bull market in silver predicted by gold moving higher. For instance, should you buy stock in silver mines? Silver coins? Bullion? Silver ETFs? And how can you know whether the current price is low enough to enable a significant profit on your investment or how quickly silver will produce that return?

At the top of the content hierarchy is wisdom, which connotes an extraordinary degree of discernment, insight, and perception. Content with significant wisdom can usually only be prepared by subject matter experts with advanced education and long years of practice and study.

Virtually everyone in a business, industry, or profession has experience and knowledge, but they still find content creation difficult because they withhold their best ideas and methods out of fear prospects will no longer need their services. In fact, the opposite is true. When prospects read truly informative content, it convinces them you know your business, but they lack the skills or experience to feel confident about implementing your ideas. So they conclude that the project is too difficult to do internally and they are better off outsourcing. And to whom do they outsource? The expert who published the content: you.

In this chapter, I'll walk you through some best practices for writing stellar content so you can keep those orders and sales coming in. Let's start with the Five C's.

# The Five C's

I love formulas for writing, for two reasons.

First, the best formulas are simple, easy to remember, and rapidly mastered. Knowing them can enable you to create content and copy that's twice as effective in half the time.

Second, the reason they became formulas in the first place is that they work!

Old-timers like me know there are literally dozens of time-tested content and copywriting formulas out there. Yet most of today's newbie marketing writers have only heard of a handful . . . and have mastered even fewer.

Why is that bad? Because if you or your writer doesn't know all the writing formulas, you could be unnecessarily wasting your time reinventing the wheel with each promotion you write. You could also be writing inferior copy that diminishes your sales.

In my day, no self-respecting copywriter or marketer wrote copy without first studying the classic writing formulas and committing them to memory. One of the oldest formulas—and perhaps the most famous—is AIDA. AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. It says persuasive copy must first grab the reader's attention, then get them interested in what you are selling, then create a desire to own the product, and finally ask for action.

AIDA is one of my absolute favorite formulas, and I've been using it to write successful promotions for four decades. Even better, it works just as well for content. Yet in seminars today, when I ask attendees whether they know AIDA, not one in ten people raises their hand.

Less well-known than AIDA, but in its way almost as powerful, is the SELWAB formula. SELWAB is a mnemonic device to remind marketers what's most important to the prospect. It stands for "start every letter with a benefit."

Another useful—and little-known—copywriting formula is Star, Chain, and Hook. It says every letter needs a "star" to capture attention, a "chain" to pull readers along through the sales presentation without losing interest, and a "hook" that holds them until they are ready to take action.

Yet another writing formula I use—one I invented—is the Five C's. It says that every good piece of content is clear, concise, compelling, and credible, and has a call to action. Let's take a look at each element of the Five C's formula in a bit more detail.

#### Clear

Your writing must be clear to everyone who reads it—not just to you or the client or the marketing director or the product manager. There is an oft-quoted saying I like that defines clarity this way: "It is not enough to write so that you can be understood. You must write so that you cannot be misunderstood."

The typical advice given in writing classes about clarity is to use small words and short sentences, paragraphs, and sections. This is sensible, as they make your content easier to read.

But clear writing stems primarily from clear thinking, and the converse is also true. If you don't really understand what you are talking about, your writing will be weak, rambling, and obtuse. On the other hand, when you understand your subject matter, know your audience, and have a useful and important idea you want to convey, the clarity of your writing will inevitably reflect that.

## Concise

The key point is that *concise* and *brief* are not synonyms. *Brief* means "short." If you want to be brief, simply cut words until you reduce the composition to the desired length. *Concise* means telling the complete story in the fewest possible words—no rambling, no redundancy, no using three words when one will do.

## Compelling

It is not enough to make the content easy to read. It must also be so interesting, engaging, and informative that the reader cannot put it down—or, at minimum, feels compelled to at least skim it to glean the important points.

A major reason why so much content is not compelling is that it is written about things that interest the marketer, not the prospect. Marketers care about their products, their organizations, and in particular their "messaging"—the key points they want to get across to the reader. Unfortunately, readers aren't interested in any of these things. They care about their own problems, needs, fears, concerns, worries, challenges, interests, and desires.

As copywriter Don Hauptman has often said, the more your copy focuses on the prospect instead of the product, the more compelling it will be. The product is only relevant insofar as it addresses one of the reader's core concerns or desires.

## Credible

The late copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis noted that we live in an age of skepticism. Simply put, prospects are disinclined to believe what you say precisely because you are trying to sell them something.

Fortunately, there are a number of useful tools at your disposal for building your credibility and overcoming the reader's skepticism. Your prospects are wary of salespeople but are more inclined to trust advice from recognized experts in a field or industry. Therefore, you can overcome their doubt by establishing yourself or your organization as a thought leader in your market.

One way to do this is by publishing a lot of content. Prospects distrust advertising, but are somewhat more accepting of information sources such as websites, white papers, blogs, and magazine articles. Become an active publisher of valuable content in your niche. Communicate your key messages in documents that are published in editorial formats, such as webcasts and white papers. Not only will your prospects find the messages more credible, but these publications will also accelerate your ascent to subject matter expert (SME) status in your niche.

Another obvious but often overlooked means of building credibility is to offer a strong money-back guarantee and then, when customers ask for refunds, grant them quickly and cheerfully, without question or argument.

Rude, slow, or unresponsive customer

TIP

A proven way to build credibility is with customer testimonials. If you are not using them widely and proactively in your marketing, you are missing an easy and effective means of overcoming skepticism. And don't overlook the opportunity to have customers give vou video testimonials at your events, especially seminars you are videotaping. Post these video testimonials on your website and landing pages.

service can quickly destroy any credibility you have gained with your customer. In fact, take steps to resolve customer problems beyond what is required so that the customer feels you personally care about them and that they're getting more for their money than they have any right to expect.

### Call to Action

A call to action (CTA) tells the readers what action they should take and how to do it. These CTAs can appear throughout the text, or you can put them in a box or sidebar to make them stand out. Common CTAs include:

- Ownloading a free white paper or ebook
- Registering for a webinar or teleseminar
- Getting a password to access protected content on a website
- Requesting a free estimate

- Sking to get a phone call from a sales rep
- O Purchasing a product online from a shopping cart
- Subscribing to an online newsletter

# **Convey Sincerity and Enthusiasm**

All these elements of the Five C's can help you create winning content. But there are a couple of other huge factors that will help you get your message across.

Jason Stevens, an insurance agent, emailed me his thoughts about sincerity in marketing:

When I look at the best copywriters, I see a streak of sincerity that is undeniable . . . from [advertising executive] Bruce Barton's old ads through to [advertising icon] Ogilvy's ads and [famed copywriter] Gary Halbert's best pieces . . . which resonates with my own selling experience that says that people want to buy from real people . . . and that the closer we can get to a person-to-person conversation, the more successful the piece will be . . . especially when the offer is legitimately powerful and is truly newsworthy.

In other words, the key to sincerity is to believe in what you are saying. If you have doubts about the claims you're making, do some research to prove that your skepticism is unwarranted. If you find it impossible to change your mind, switch to a different project if you can.

For this reason, I urge you to write for an employer, client, or product you can really get behind. Something you think is cool or interesting, or that can deliver great value to users. Although it can be done, writing about things that bore you or that you don't believe in is arduous and rarely fun. The more enthusiastic you are about a product, the better your copy will be.

These days, I have the luxury, if you will, of picking and choosing my projects—so I pick the ones I am most enthusiastic about. But back in the day when I had to take on some copywriting assignments on products that didn't get me excited initially, I could still write about them with great enthusiasm.

You can, too, and here's the secret: temporary enthusiasm.

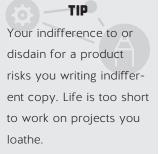
You don't have to love every subject, idea, cause, or technology you write about. What you do in such cases is manufacture *temporary enthusiasm*. You learn through experience to find that kernel of interest, even if you are not a regular consumer of the product.

Here are some of the things I use to create the temporary enthusiasm I need to do the best writing job possible:

- Sascinating technology
- O Little-known facts
- Good personal chemistry with the client
- Interesting or unusual marketing challenge
- A product or service that is a new idea
- O An innovation that is a game changer
- A new methodology or solution for a pressing problem
- Interesting stories
- News
- O Human interest

Of course, if the topic is something you are naturally interested in, your enthusiasm is already present, and does not have to be generated through deliberate effort.

The technique of creating temporary enthusiasm allows you to write the content



as if you did love the subject. The attitude only has to last as long as it takes to complete the assignment. After that, it can recede until you need to call on it again.

As for using temporary enthusiasm on products, ideas, and beliefs you actively dislike, I don't do that. Instead, I pass on the project. For instance, early in my career I was offered a lucrative assignment by a book publisher who needed five direct-mail packages to sell five different books. I love books, but when I asked what they were about, the client replied, "Hunting."

Now, I don't think hunting is immoral. If someone wants to hunt, they should go hunt. But because I find it personally unappealing, I knew there was no way I could write strong copy for it. I turned down the job.

# **Contrarian Content**

On the opposite side of sincerity and enthusiasm lies contrarianism. This technique lies in being deliberately controversial: getting attention for yourself, your business, or your product or service by focusing on an emotional, important, or timely issue in your content—and taking sides. It works best if you disagree with popular opinion. Or, as author F. Scott Fitzgerald put it: "The cleverly expressed opposite of any generally accepted human idea is worth a fortune."

Marketing expert Marcia Yudkin gives us a great example of this principle in action. She writes about Bob Baker, who—with three colleagues in the music business—collaborated on a press release titled "What's Wrong with *American Idol*?"

"Their press release," Yudkin writes, "criticized the popular U.S. talent show for misleading aspiring musicians and the public about what it takes to succeed in music. Baker's reward for stirring up controversy: five radio interviews that highlighted his status as an expert on careers in music."

So how can you use this principle in your PR to get media attention? Yudkin suggests taking issue with a survey result, disagreeing with a common belief, counteracting a stereotype, championing an underdog, exposing flaws in something assumed to be beneficial, or describing the dark underside of something popular.

For example, when desktop publishing software became widely available, thousands of businesspeople gained the tools needed to design their own documents. During that time, a graphic design consultant selfpublished a little book titled *The Awful Truth about Desktop Publishing*. His premise was that amateurs who used the software without proper training in design fundamentals risked producing sloppy, amateurish documents. It gained him significant publicity as well as a number of paid speaking engagements.

In marketing, a lot of consultants make a living selling unsuspecting clients on the hot new technology of the month—sometimes referred to as *bright shiny objects* (BSOs)—even if the technology is unproven and has not generated significant ROI for any of their clients.

Many years ago, I wrote an article for the trade newspaper of the direct-marketing industry, saying that blogs were an unproven marketing

medium and nothing to get excited about. Not knowing how many new media evangelists there are, I was completely surprised when my article generated a massive debate in the blogosphere (with most people saying I didn't "get" blogging). Tad Clarke, who was at the time editor in chief of *DM News*, said it generated the most reader response of any article they published that year.

What I discovered (or, more accurately, rediscovered, since I had known it but forgotten it) was the corollary to Fitzgerald's rule about controversy being profitable. I am sure you've heard it many times before: *"Any* publicity is good publicity."

And it's true: If you come out on one side of an issue, half the market will revile you. But the other half will think you're wise beyond your years and strive to do business with you.

Should you worry about half the market rejecting you because of your controversial opinions? Well, if half think you're all wet, and half think you walk on water, that's a 50 percent market share. I'll take that any day of the week.

For the suggested length of blog posts and other online content, see Table 2–1, on page 39.

# The Content Writing Process

When you are writing content as part of a team, the project typically has definite steps, some of which are laid out in the content writing flowchart (see Figure 2–2, on page 40). As the writer, I begin by gathering source material on the topic. Today, you can find what seems like an almost infinite amount of content on the web on almost any subject. For instance, I just searched "time management," and instantly found 4.76 billion sources on the web that cover or at least mention time management.

So the idea that you need to read everything in existence on your subject is patently absurd. Instead, be selective. Scan through articles and web pages until you find half a dozen or so that give you what you're looking for.

When you are writing for your employer or a client, they may provide a lot of the source material you need, both from content they have previously published as well as content they have collected. As you read

Type of Content	Length
Blog posts (for search engine ranking)	1,500 words
Email subject lines (for open rates)	50 characters or less
Line of text	12 words
Paragraph	4 lines or less
YouTube video (for views)	3 to 3.5 minutes
Podcast	22 minutes
Title tags	55 characters
Meta description	155 characters (maximum)
Facebook post (for likes and shares)	100-140 characters
Tweets (for retweets)	280 characters
Domain name	8 characters or less

TRBLE 2-1. Word Count for Common Content Pieces

Good Content, by Ann Handley, Wiley, 2014, p.184

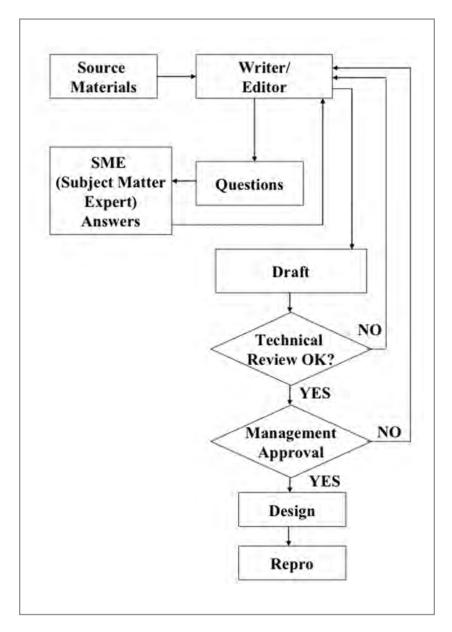
the source material, keep a list of questions that occur to you. Typically your client will arrange to have one or more SMEs provide answers and clarification.

Once you have all the information you need, write a first draft. When you finish, the boss, client, or SME reviews it for technical accuracy.

After you correct any technical errors and add any important missing information, submit the draft to one or more reviewers for approval. These might include the company owner or CEO, product manager, and marketing manager. Make any requested revisions, and the revised document is again reviewed, with the aim of finishing the document and signing off on it.

Once the finished draft is approved, and depending on the format (white paper, data sheet, infographic) and the topic, a graphic designer or someone with desktop publishing skills puts it into a layout. The last step is reproduction, and the method of duplication depends on the size, color, graphics, audience, and number of copies needed (if you are printing physical copies). An internal report for your ten team members can be run off on your printer or copier. A 500-page product guide would go to an offset or print-on-demand (POD) printer. Or you can always choose to go paperless and keep it as a PDF file.

FIGURE 2-2. Content Writing Process Flowchart



### **PROOFREADING YOUR CONTENT**

Here are seven steps you should take when having your content proofread, based on a list originally published by freelance editor and writer Mark Nichol:

- Use a checklist, grammar book, or style guide to ensure correct usage of grammar, punctuation, technical terms, and numbering.
- 2. Ask an SME to fact-check, especially for technical data accuracy, equations, and numbers.
- Spell check using your computer. However, keep in mind that the spell-checker often does not recognize technical terms. So use an industry-specific dictionary as well.
- Read the document aloud. This enables you to catch errors you might gloss over when reading silently or that the spell-checker may get wrong.
- Proofread backwards. This makes you focus on one word at a time, which helps you catch typos you might otherwise skim over.
- Check formatting, including page numbering, headers and footers, column alignment, typefaces, fonts, footnotes, and captions.
- Have someone else proofread the document: a colleague, your spouse, or a professional proofreader.

# Treasure Your Company's Content Gold Mine

For content writers and marketers, content you have already created and own is solid gold. Much of that content is locked away in your brain in the form of experience, skill, knowledge, and memory. Naturally, your recall and retrieval is imperfect.

But in the digital age, a lot of your knowledge is documented in writing: in emails, enewsletters, blog posts, tweets, articles, books, reports, PowerPoint presentations, and any other written content you have created.

Unlike the content in your brain, your written content can be retrieved in its accurate and original condition, provided it is stored in a manner that allows you to find it quickly, and in a format that makes it easy to use in your new writings.

If content is gold on the internet, your hard drives, network storage devices, and cloud-based data storage are the gold mine. Here are eight tips for using your digital content gold mine to your advantage:

- 1. Create a digital filing system, with directories and subdirectories organized in a manner that is logical and intuitive to you, regardless of whether it is to others.
- 2. When you create a document, type the file name in the upper-left corner of the first page. That way, when you have a hard copy, you will know the file name and can quickly search for and retrieve the electronic version from your drives.
- 3. Save any content related to your niche that you think might be useful someday. This includes your own writings as well as content from outside sources.
- 4. Always indicate on the file the date the content was created and, if taken from an outside source, details on the source (e.g., name of publication, issue date, page numbers, author, title). Without this information, you may not be able to use the material.
- 5. Convert materials you may want to use into file formats that are easy to paste into Word documents; for example, charts and graphs from PowerPoints.
- 6. When you acquire source documents, print and save the document in a file cabinet, but also save the electronic version so you can capture images (charts, graphs, photos, and diagrams) to use in your own writing. Of course you need the author's permission; you can credit them in footnotes or endnotes.

- 7. When in doubt, clip and save material you might want to refer to someday, but don't be like the infamous Collyer brothers, who saved every newspaper they ever bought in their Manhattan brownstone until it became a rat-infested fire hazard. (One brother died from starvation and the other was crushed when a stack of old newspapers fell on him.) When you want to save something, tear it out and save just the clipping. Make sure the publication name, date, and pages are noted on the clipping, and scan it to save it as a digital file. Similarly, for online content such as articles and posts, print them out and store the hard copy in binders.
- Back up your entire hard drive to a mirror device (a duplicate hard drive or to the cloud) every 24 hours. I automatically set mine to back up in the middle of the night.

TIP Your customers are not reading your content for your dazzling prose style. They are reading it for the valuable problem-solving information you provide. To make your writing more useful to these readers, you need solid content. Even if you are a subject matter expert yourself, your writing will be stronger when you augment your own knowledge with additional material. That's why every serious content writer must research and accumulate facts, knowledge, methods, strategies, and ideas to share with their readers.

# Content Recycling and Repurposing

One shortcut to keeping up with the constant demand for new content is to recycle and repurpose what you have already created from your content gold mine. *Recycling* means using the same piece of content in different places and ways. *Repurposing* means editing or rewriting the content to update it, give it new life, and allow it to be used in a new campaign.

I have recycled and repurposed much of my content, including transforming:

- o trade journal articles into multiple books, ebooks, and special reports
- o back issues of my enewsletter into more books
- o enewsletter articles into blog posts
- Sacebook posts into enewsletter articles
- Iive presentations into audio and video information products
- o webinars into streaming video content
- out-of-print books into ebooks and special reports
- o white papers into multiple shorter content pieces

Copywriter Gordon Graham suggest extracting and repurposing content from your white papers:

- Ochop it up into three to five blog posts.
- Oreate an infographic that covers the main points.
- Turn the white paper's content into a slide deck.
- Offer a free webinar based on that slide deck.
- Record the webinar and post it on the web.
- Promote each piece on social media.

All these pieces can be quickly extracted from the original white paper. With minimal research and writing, you get many new pieces of content, all in different mediums, for different channels.

Your content has more than just one life. What other ways can you think of to repurpose content for a bigger audience?

If you create small bits of fresh, relevant content with the latest information every day, you will have plenty of raw material you can easily assemble into various formats.

Writing a 20-page white paper is not easy, but writing short bits of content is quicker and simpler. You can get into this habit by creating a daily or weekly schedule for writing short blog posts, social media posts, and enewsletters, for starters.

# The Four Types of Content by Topic and Timeliness

There are four types of content that can be used effectively in your content marketing program: evergreen information, time-sensitive information, branding, and product advances and applications, including case studies. Your ratio should probably lean in favor of the first two types.

1. *Evergreen* means content that doesn't get dated, at least for many years. In the health niche, for instance, examples include the benefits of daily exercise, proper diet, and regular checkups with your doctor. These can be effective as long as they subtly help sell your concept and product, usually but not always early in the buying cycle. For a diabetes product, for example, early evergreen content might talk about the dangers of eating too many carbs because they convert to blood sugar in your body.

Evergreen content might need updating every now and then, but should stay useful for a long period of time. Some content providers deliver huge amounts of evergreen materials, such as bridal magazines (how many different ways can you write about selecting a wedding cake?).

- 2. *Time-sensitive* means the content ties into current news, preferably the breaking news of the day. In email marketing, we find a tie-in with major news stories almost always increases open and click-through rates.
- 3. *Branding* contains messages, some subtle and some more explicit, that educate readers why your approach to the problem your product solves is the right one. For example, diabetics should eat one piece of fruit a day rather than drink fruit juice, since one glass of juice contains the sugar content of five to seven pieces of fruit.
- 4. *Product advances and applications* are more explicit about how your product or the method of making it specifically reduces or even eliminates the problem. This should be a mix of content and sales copy so it doesn't come across as too much of a hard sell.

# How to Work with Experts

Often content writers gather information by interviewing engineers, scientists, doctors, and other technical SMEs. If you are not a techie yourself, this can be a challenging process.

I know of three ways to make technical interviews easier and more successful. First, gather background material, study it thoroughly, and make a list of questions about anything you don't understand.

Second, when techies talk tech, they often speak rapidly, so back up your written notes by recording the conversation. Handheld digital recorders work for face-to-face interviews. For phone interviews, use a conference service such as FreeConferenceCall.com, which offers the option of recording the call. Then hire a transcriptionist to convert the audio file to a written document.

Third, if the SME is distant and travel is either impractical or avoidable, you can conduct the interview with incremental emails, in which

you ask one question per email, and the SME replies with an email answering your question. Because the SME took the time to write, the information is usually clearer, more complete, and easier to extract than in an interview. I cut and paste each email answer into the Word document in which I have recorded and compiled my notes.

If you have a technical background, tell the SME this when you introduce yourself. I have found that knowing they are talking to a fellow techie puts the SME more at ease and produces more complete answers. When they give an answer you do not understand, ask for more explanation.

# A Collaboration Trick for Working with Senior Management

In addition to interviewing SMEs, also ask brand managers, product managers, marketing managers, and even C-suite executives for a few minutes of their time. Many are too busy to work on content, but others are eager to communicate their plans, visions, and ideas.

When you interview executives and senior managers, your content will reflect

TIP

The SMEs can give you technical knowledge, but the C-level executives give you the "big picture" view. How does this content help the company achieve its strategic goals in response, branding, positioning, and sales? What key points does management want to communicate? These may be points the SMEs are unaware of. By talking to technical SMEs, sales, marketing, and top management, you get a more well-rounded briefing. You master both the facts and the strategy so your content better supports the marketing objectives of the campaign.

their views and objectives. This, and the fact that you asked for their opinions, makes them happier with your content and more likely to approve it quickly and with a minimum of edits. They get what they want, and you shorten the rewrite process considerably. You also form a stronger relationship with senior executives so they see you more as a valuable resource than as a low-level scribe.

# Implied Content

Remember the Duncan Hines ad I told you about? The headline was: "The secret to moister, richer chocolate cake." It hinted you would gain useful knowledge just by reading the ad: a chocolate cake recipe. When you did read the ad, you discovered the secret was to use Duncan Hines cake mix. Why was that headline so effective? Because it *implied* you would learn something useful just by reading the ad, regardless of whether you bought the product.

Are people put off by implied content? In my experience, no. The editorial nature of the headline prepares them to learn something, and whether the ad is content or copy, they usually do—in this case, how to save time and effort, and how to make a better cake by using a prepared mix.

In a B2B ad selling filters for processing plants, this headline had an editorial and educational feel: "How to Keep Your Products Pure." The ad then explained the best way to maintain purity was to use the company's filters and described the superior design that made them more effective than their competitors'. Yes, it was actually a sales ad, not a content piece. But again, not only did it sell the filter, but it also explained the new design and showed how it could increase yield and ensure product purity in the plant.

# Storytelling

Storytelling has been used in marketing for many decades, in part because stories get attention: People love to read and hear stories. "Charts, facts, and figures make good proof, but they don't motivate people," says internet marketing coach Terry Dean. "You can show them charts until their eyes glaze over, but they won't take action on them. Facts simply won't give them momentum to get moving. You have to use true, authentic stories if you want to cut through all the clutter, through the noise, and speak directly to people's hearts."

Public speaking coach Dr. Jim Anderson writes, "The way to convince the skeptic is not through logic. They'll always come up with a way to not believe what you are telling them. Instead, you need to find a way to win their hearts first."

And Stefanie Flaxman, editor in chief of Copyblogger, says that stories are the way to readers' hearts: "Information is simultaneously too much and not enough. Information is impotent to reach the hearts and minds of those who want to run with your idea, product, or service. Story, on the other hand, is virile, rare, unforgettable. And when well-crafted, more true than the mere statement of plain facts."

In a 2019 article in *Target Marketing* magazine, marketing expert Chris Foster identified three types of stories that help build brand awareness: functional, emotional, and moral:

- 1. *Functional stories* relate how the product or service makes things better, easier, quicker, and faster for a customer. For example, TV commercials for AAA often show a frustrated person stranded by the side of the road with a flat tire or dead battery. But as an AAA member, she makes one phone call that summons immediate assistance and gets the problem fixed so she can continue on her way.
- 2. *Emotional stories* in marketing are all around us. For instance, the nonprofit humanitarian group Children's International (CI), in its fundraising direct mail, tells the detailed personal story of one impoverished child and how your small donation can dramatically improve their life. In fact, the story is made more real through the marketing: When you donate, you can sponsor a real child, who sends you letters about her life and how your generosity gave her family better shelter, healthy food, clean water, and, for her, an education.
- 3. *Moral stories* help brands empower you to do good, help others, and make a difference. 4Ocean sells bracelets made from recycled glass and plastic, and for every bracelet you buy, they help fight pollution and protect marine life by removing a pound of plastic from the oceans.

Internet marketing coach Terry Dean shared some thoughts on this topic with me and offered three suggestions to make your stories more compelling and effective:

- 1. *Is there a story you can share that illustrates your message?* It could be a personal case study or a case study from one of your clients. Or it could be a story about a lesson you learned when you were growing up. Keep your eyes and ears open for the stories that happen all around you: at the restaurant, at the beach, wherever you go. Whenever an idea strikes you, record a voice memo or make a note on your phone. Or you could even go old school and write it in a notebook. When it comes time to write, you'll have a list of ideas and stories to choose from. We live in a culture that is enamored with celebrity. Tell your story. You can be a celebrity no one has ever heard of outside your industry. Get the benefits of fame without the paparazzi.
- 2. What contrarian advice can you share? What mistakes, myths, and misconceptions are common in your market? What are the gurus lying about? What makes you so upset about your industry that you just can't keep quiet about it anymore? In some cases, you may be the only one talking about this. And that's fine. Is there an underlying frustration in your market you can tap into? What truths can you expose to the light? You'll draw an audience when they see you as an individual voice instead of just another echo.
- 3. What value can you bring to people's lives? Filling your head with a bunch of knowledge (i.e., content) doesn't do a lot of good on its own. Sometimes it can even be a problem. If you're stuck in analysis paralysis because there are so many options of shareable information in front of you, adding even more content to the mix isn't going to fix it. Maybe you just need to start with one simple, straightforward piece of content and figure out the rest as you go.

Do these stories have to be true? I cannot give legal advice, but I can say that they must be factually correct. If you say customer X reduced their energy costs by 25 percent using your system, you had better have the documentation to back up that claim, or at least a signed written approval of the content from someone employed by customer X in a professional or management position.

As Terry said, think about how you're bringing value to people's lives. Value is more than content—it's also about inspiration and motivation. Help your audience act in their own best interest.

## **Curated Content**

*Curated content* is existing content created either by someone else or by you in the past for other marketing communications or for reference works which you would like to use as your own content.

I rarely use already-published content "as is" as the basis for my curated content. Instead, I add more information, more recent statistics and facts, and more detail to clarify the concept and its value and use.

For instance, I published an ebook version of Claude Hopkins' classic book *Scientific Advertising*, originally released in 1923, which is now in the public domain. Others have made copies of *Scientific Advertising* available for free download. But unlike them, I expanded mine with updated content. These included copies of ads illustrating his principles, sidebars giving more how-to instructions for implementing his advice, and other

TIP Your safest course of action is to write to the copyright holder and get written permission to use it in a work you specify in your permission request. Signed permission from the copyright holder is usually but not always sufficient protection to guard you against charges of plagiarism and copyright violation. When you have written permission, you may use the curated content, but only in the manner specified in the signed permission letter.

documents by Hopkins that have rarely been seen. I called the book *Scientific Advertising: Annotated and Illustrated*; while the core is curated, it has been expanded to add value to the original. And you can only get this edition from me.

I cannot give legal advice on the use of copyrighted material, which may include fiction and nonfiction writing, poetry, music, videos, graphics, and artwork; however the topic is addressed in Appendix A.

Some content managers using curated content reprint the text and graphics in their entirety in white papers, on websites, and in other media. More often, though, curated content is only a small part of a longer document where the content is original to you. You can enhance curated content by adding explanations, examples, illustrations, graphs, photos, and commentary that illuminate the curated material and make it more meaningful or clearer to your readers.

# **Content Syndication**

*Content syndication* refers to posting or linking to your downloadable content (such as white papers, ebooks, webinars, videos, case studies, and articles) on third-party sites and ad networks. The metrics by which content syndication success is measured are cost per lead, lead quality, and the rate at which leads are generated.

The syndicated content is most often placed on a "gated" download page,

meaning the user has to enter some personal information—at minimum, name and email address—to download your content.

The advantage of syndication is your content is seen by fresh traffic—the visitors to the third-party site—most of whom would otherwise never encounter it. And by putting it behind a gated page, you capture new names and email addresses and grow your list with a fresh crop of new subscribers.

Some third-party site owners may accept a content swap: They display your white paper on their site, and in exchange you offer their content on yours. In cases where the other party has no interest in swapping, they will most likely charge you Do not ask for too much information about the prospect on your registration form. Rather, the sales copy on the download page can to a degree qualify leads for you. If the headline is a free white paper on how to make product prototypes on 3D printers, only people working in design or manufacturing would be likely to download it.

TIP

a performance-based fee: You pay a small fee per click or per lead your content gets from their site.

Syndication partners rarely ask for an exclusive deal to post your content on their site, and if they don't ask, don't offer. You want to get your content offer on as many relevant sites as possible. For white papers, one of the bigger syndication sites is Bitpipe (https://www.bitpipe.com).

# Setting Expectations for Your Content Team

In the 21st century, many vendors and employees are under increasing pressure to deliver a product or service of top quality, fast, and for the lowest possible price. Content writers are no exception, as shown in Figure 2–3 below.

The problem is that in most cases it is not feasible for vendors to deliver on all three promises. If you work cheap and fast, your product is

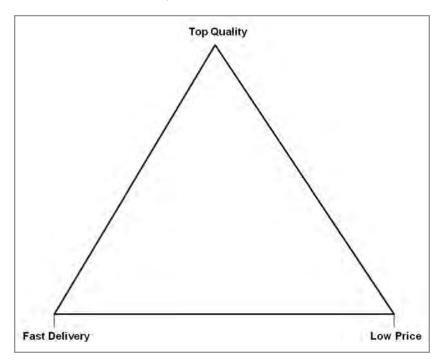


FIGURE 2-3. The Triad of Requirements for Content Writers

unlikely to be the best quality. And if you deliver premium products and services while meeting extremely tight delivery schedules, you will want to (and should) charge a premium price. If you deliver a product with perfection and care, your price is likely to be higher and you cannot do it quickly, because it takes more time to make.

In the 1970s, many workplaces displayed posters showing the triangle seen in Figure 2–3. The caption simply said "Pick any two."

But because so many executives and professionals view writing as a commodity instead of a valuable skill or profession, they expect their content writers to deliver all three points on the content triangle: high quality, fast turnaround, and cheap prices. This is seldom possible in any activity, and if you attempt it, the work will be subpar, the deadline blown, and the budget exceeded.

Why do content writers, in the words of Rodney Dangerfield, get no respect? Unfortunately, writers are often low on the totem pole in the corporate world, and content writers are near the bottom of that pole, kept there by the false notion that "anyone can write."

True, the vast majority of people can write. But only a few can write *well*, which is one reason we need professional writers and editors. The other reason is that for many corporate employees and entrepreneurs, writing is not the highest and best use of their time. Calling on staff writers or freelancers to do the writing for them allows them to focus on their core business competencies.

If your primary job function is something other than writing, these are the expectations you should be prepared to meet:

- Be able to write your own content when needed.
- Sevaluate the skills, experience, and work of content writers.
- Review content submitted to you by others with a more objective and educated eye.

On the other hand, if you are a professional writer, the expectation is that you are capable of creating content that is clear, engaging, and fresh, and that supports important aspects of your marketing campaigns, including SEO, customer education, brand awareness, and increasing click rates, conversions, and other important metrics.

# More Tips for Making Your Content Easy to Read

This section offers some more juicy tips on making your copy readerfriendly.

## Avoid Big Words

Technical writers sometimes prefer to use big, important-sounding words instead of short, simple words. This is a mistake; fancy language just frustrates the reader. Write in plain, ordinary English, and your readers will love you for it.

Here are a few big words that appear frequently in content; the column on the right presents simpler options:

Big Word	Substitution
terminate	end
utilize	use
incombustible	fireproof
substantiate	prove

#### **Use Shorter Sentences**

Shorter sentences are easier and more inviting to read than long sentences. How do you know whether a sentence is too long? Use the "breath test."

*How it works:* Without taking in extra breath, read the sentence aloud at a normal conversational volume and speed. If you run out of breath before you get to the end of the sentence, the sentence is too long.

*Solution:* Read the sentence again. As soon as you come to a place where a new idea is introduced, break the sentence into two or more shorter sentences. For example:

#### Lengthy sentence:

Systems shall be established and maintained that provide control of all functions affecting the quality of raw materials, supplies, services, and products to assure conformance to order, code, and specification requirements.

Broken into two shorter sentences:

Systems shall be established and maintained that provide control of all functions affecting the quality of raw materials, supplies, services, and products. Their purpose is to assure conformance to order, code, and specification requirements.

#### Prefer the Specific to the General

B2B readers are interested in detailed technical information—facts, figures, conclusions, recommendations. Do not simply say something is good, bad, fast, or slow when you can say *how* good, *how* bad, *how* fast, or *how* slow. Be specific whenever possible.

General	Specific
a tall spray dryer	a 40-foot-tall spray dryer
plant	oil refinery
unit	evaporator
unfavorable weather conditions	rain
structural degradation	a leaky roof
high performance	95% efficiency

#### Break the Writing Up into Short Sections and Paragraphs

Long, unbroken blocks of text intimidate and bore readers. Breaking up your writing into short sections and paragraphs makes it easier to read.

In the same way, short sentences are easier to grasp than long ones. As noted, a good guide for keeping sentence length under control is to write sentences that can be spoken aloud without losing your breath (do *not* take a deep breath before doing this test).

#### Find an Organizational Scheme that Fits the Material

Poor organization stems from poor planning. Computer programmers would never think of writing a complex program without first drawing a flowchart, but they'd probably knock out a draft of a user manual without making notes or an outline. In the same way, a builder who requires detailed blueprints before he lays the first brick will write a letter without really considering his message, audience, or purpose.

Your outline need not be formal. A simple list, doodles, or rough notes will do. Use whatever form suits you. If the format isn't strictly defined by the type



of document, publication, or editor you are writing for, select the organizational scheme that best fits the material. Some common formats include:

- Order of location. An article on the planets of the solar system might begin with Mercury (the planet nearest the sun) and end with Neptune (the planet farthest out).
- Order of increasing difficulty. Instruction manuals often start with the easiest material and, as the user masters basic principles, move on to more complex operations.
- Alphabetical order. A to Z is a logical way to arrange a booklet on vitamins (vitamin A, B, B1, and so on) or a directory of company employees.
- Ochronological order. This presents the facts in the order in which they happened. History books are generally written this way. So are many case histories, feature stories, and corporate biographies.
- Problem/solution. This is another format appropriate for case histories and many other types of reports. The problem/solution format begins with "Here's what the problem was" and ends with "Here's how we solved it."
- Inverted pyramid. The inverted pyramid style of news reporting has the lead paragraph summarize the most important points of the story, and the following paragraphs present the facts in order of decreasing importance. You can use this format in journal articles, letters, memos, and reports.
- Deductive order. Start with a generalization, then support it with particulars. Scientists use this format in research papers that begin with the findings and then state the supporting evidence.

- Inductive order. Begin with specific instances, and then lead the reader to the idea or principles the instances suggest. This is an excellent way to approach trade journal feature stories.
- List. A list article might be titled "Six Tips for Designing Wet Scrubbers" or "Seven Ways to Reduce Your Plant's Electric Bill."

### Use the Active Voice

In the active voice, action is expressed directly: "John performed the experiment." In the passive voice, the action is indirect: "The experiment was performed by John."

When possible, use the active voice. Your writing will be more direct and vigorous; your sentences, more concise. As you can see in the samples below, the passive voice seems puny and stiff by comparison:

Passive Voice	Active Voice
Control of the bearing-oil supply is provided by the shutoff valves.	Shutoff valves control the bearing-oil supply.
Leaking of the seals is prevented by the use of O-rings.	O-rings keep the seals from leaking.
Fuel-cost savings were realized through the installation of thermal insulation.	The installation of thermal insulation cut fuel costs.

# **Copywriting 101 for Content Writers**

Virtually all multichannel campaigns today combine content marketing with copywriting, so a content marketer or writer should learn at least the fundamentals of copywriting. Below are a few tips to get you started.

### Write a Killer Headline

The headline is the first thing your reader sees and the most important part of the promotion. The headline's main job is to get the prospect's attention in a way that makes them want to know more about what you are selling. The more specific your headline, the stronger it will be. In his classic book *Scientific Advertising*, Claude Hopkins wrote, "Platitudes and generalities roll off the human understanding like water from a duck." Ford had little success with its "Quality Is Job One" campaign because *quality* is about as general as you can get. By comparison, David Ogilvy's classic ad for Rolls-Royce, created in the late 1950s, worked because it was specific; many consider it one of the greatest car ads ever written. The headline: "At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock." (When an engineer at Rolls-Royce saw the ad, he commented, "It's about time we did something about that damn clock!")

#### Put the Prospect First

Don't start with the product—its features, quality, craftsmanship, and design. Start with the *prospect*—their needs, desires, fears, concerns, problems, headaches, and dreams. People care much more about themselves than about you, your company, or your product. They are only interested in what your product can do for them.

#### Stress the Benefits

A *feature* is something the product is or has; a *benefit* is what that feature does to help the user. For instance, a watering can has a spout; that is a feature. The spout allows you to direct water to the houseplant so you don't spill it all over the windowsill or table—that is a benefit. Buyers need to know both features and benefits, but benefits are usually more important. Copywriters are told that every consumer listens to a radio station in their head with the call letters WIIFM, which stands for "What's in it for me?" Car manufacturers used to advertise "rackand-pinion steering" in automobile brochures, but no one understood what it was or what it did—so it had no impact on sales. By comparison, Michelin tire TV spots showed a cute baby sitting inside a Michelin tire. The message was clear: The technology in our tires can keep your family safe when you drive.

#### Find the Product's USP

Even if your product offers great benefits, so do your competitors' products. You need to tell consumers why your product is different and better than the competition. This is called the *unique selling proposition*, or USP. For instance, holding a piece of chocolate for any length of time will cause it to melt. M&M's solved this problem by placing a hard candy coating around the chocolate. Its USP is now famous: "M&M's melt in your mouth, not in your hand."

Most people know that when you get to the bottom of a pot of coffee, the dregs are bitter, and you should make a fresh pot. Maxwell House claimed it had developed a coffee that stayed fresh-tasting from the first cup in the pot to the last. Its USP: "Good to the last drop."

#### Give Proof

When you make a claim in advertising, the more proof you back up that claim with, the more believable and effective your advertising will be. For instance, years ago, Krazy Glue claimed its glue was far stronger than other glues. To prove it, a man wearing a hard hat put a drop of glue on top of the hat and pressed it against a T-shaped platform above him. The glue held the hat firm while the man dangled in midair below. Another example of proof can be seen in commercials for various cleaning products, such as sponge mops, stain removers, and cleaning fluids. Two dirty surfaces are treated side by side, with the product being advertised and a competitor. The surface treated with the advertised product comes out clean and shiny, while the competitor's surface is still somewhat dingy. With paper towels, the advertised towel absorbs more fluid, while the competing product can't handle the spill and falls apart.

#### Remember Your Primary Objective

For your copy to truly succeed, it must persuade consumers to part with their hard-earned money and buy your client's product or service. Selling should be your number-one priority at all times.

#### Establish Value

Even if you convince consumers that a product delivers benefits they desire, is superior to other brands, and does what you say it will do, one

problem remains: persuading them they need the product badly enough to part with their hard-earned cash. In essence, you need to demonstrate that the price you are charging is a pittance compared to the incredible value the product delivers. Here's an example: Your client sells a thermostat that can cut energy bills by 10 percent. Your prospect's monthly gas and electric bill is \$300, so a 10 percent reduction is a \$30 savings. If the device costs \$30, it will pay back its own cost within a month, and give them an ROI of more than 10-to-1 within a year.

### Ask for Action

After reading the copy, what do we want the prospect to do next? The next step may be to request a free estimate, visit the dealer's showroom, or apply for a mortgage over the phone. Identify the next step, and, in your copy, tell the prospect to take it. If you don't tell people what to do next, they'll do nothing.

#### Give a Gift

*Free* is the most powerful word in the English language. People love free stuff. Giving a gift with an order is a proven response booster. For example, if you are selling subscriptions to a magazine on personal finance, you can get more orders by offering a bonus gift such as a free special report about the best mutual funds to buy now.

### Create a Sense of Urgency

Successful salespeople know it is important to close the sale now, not later. Why? Because a decision deferred is a decision not made. It seems sensible, even kind, to let the prospect walk out of your showroom, go shop around, and come back later. But if you do that, your competitors will say anything to get the sale. So you must give the prospect a reason to act now. There are many ways to create a sense of urgency in your copy, but the easiest is to add a deadline to your offer. If you are having a sale on patio furniture, say in your ad that the sale ends Saturday at midnight. And when midnight arrives, remove the sale tags and lock the showroom door.

## Urgency + Credibility = Better Response

The usual techniques for adding that sense of urgency that will get the prospect to act now are OK as far as they go—typically a deadline or limitedtime offer. However, these methods are much stronger when you give the reader a legitimate reason why these deadlines are real, not just pulled out of thin air. Credibility plus urgency equals a better response. The following are just a few of the credible-urgency techniques you can use:

- A walk through the warehouse. We just inspected our warehouse, and inventory levels are low. And we won't be getting a new supply for weeks. So you had better act now while we still have some in stock. Otherwise you may miss out.
- *Rising cost of raw materials.* The cost of the raw materials used to make our product are increasing. That means we will soon have to raise prices. But act now, and you can still pay the lower rate.
- Limited supply. Only a few units are left, and after they're gone, it's too late. No more will be made. (I use this with hardcover books, which I have usually bought at low remainder prices. When they are gone, no more will be printed.)
- Limited production capacity. Because our production process is slow and exacting, our capacity is small and we can only take 100 new customers or orders. So this offer is limited to the first 100 people to respond.
- Ingredient availability. You can use this one for nutritional supplements, for example: The growing season for the main ingredient is almost over, and for the rest of the year, that botanical is extremely difficult to get.
- Legal status. We don't know how much longer the government will continue to approve the selling of this product. And once they ban sales, it's too late.
- Scarcity. A hurricane, flood, freezing weather, or other conditions have destroyed the bulk of this year's crop. So our supply is dwindling fast, and when it's gone, it can't be rapidly replaced, if at all.
- Popularity. Customers love our product so much that it is flying off the shelves, and demand is only increasing, risking short supply.

- Expertise. Our experts who do the manufacturing and testing are a small staff, and therefore we do not have enough people to keep up with the orders. Because their skills are specialized, additional qualified staff is difficult to find.
- Limited resources. So many customers have joined our auto-ship program that you should join now before we are filled to capacity and can accept no more new members.