

A GUIDE TO

Content Marketing

An introduction to creating and marketing influential content to boost your visibility and credibility

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Overview

The availability of online content has changed the way we read and digest information, and that has forced all of us to think differently about how we create our content. No longer can we write the same way we did for print, radio, or television.

Today, people read quickly, hunting or scanning a web page for key words and sentences. According to Eyetrack III, a study of how people read on the Web, most people simply look at the first couple of words, only reading the entire page if they are engaged.

Tips to Writing SEO Friendly Content

Tips to Writing SEO Friendly Content

Readers want concise, pared down content that gets to the point immediately. Below are 9 tips to help:

1. Catch the reader's attention in the first few words. Use descriptive and meaningful (but not clever) headlines and sub headings. Make sure your headlines are also search-friendly and include keywords that your target would use to search for information.
2. Use the inverted pyramid writing style. Front-load crucial information by creating a broad opening paragraph. This paragraph should address what your article is about in a way that both informs the reader and captures their attention. Be sure to answer "What?" and "Why?" This information is important for your users.
3. Be brief. And get to the point quickly. Users are likely on a specific mission, so try and stick to one idea per paragraph. To limit your word count, use the following guidelines:
 - Headings should be around 8 – 10 words
 - Sentences should be 15 – 20 words
 - Paragraphs are nice at 40 – 70 words
 - Pages should have no more than 500 words

Tips to Writing SEO Friendly Content

4. Meet the user's immediate needs. In general, visitors to your site are in search of a solution to a problem. Explain why you are the solution at every step along the way. Make information specific and geared toward helping the reader complete a task.
5. Include a "Call to Action." After reading a page on your site, the visitor should know how to take action. Include a phone number, a link, a form or an opportunity for them to subscribe to your RSS feed, leave a comment, or follow you on Twitter. The web is about getting excited, making things and sharing with others. Give your readers the chance to do that.
6. Use descriptive links. Avoid using common phrases like "click here" or "download." The descriptive text associated with your link (called "anchor text") should let users know what to expect when they click. For example, use "Download a product manual" instead of "To download a product manual, click here." Write your links as if you are writing a heading. Remember to place links at action points in your text. A link is a call to action.

Tips to Writing SEO Friendly Content

7. Take “I” and “we” out of your vocabulary. Content that works on the Web has one key characteristic: it’s customer-centric. The content that doesn't work on the Web also has one key characteristic: it is organization-centric. According to research, readers prefer to read objective content that’s free from marketing hype or promotional writing.
8. Use parallel construction. Consistent patterns in the way content is written improve readability. For example:
 - To contact a representative, click the state in which you live.
 - To learn more about our products, contact a representative.
 - To view a video demonstration, visit YourSite.com.
9. Make each page scannable. Use subheadings to break up chunks of text and allow people to scan. These headings should be equal parts informative and enticing. You should also use bulleted lists to break information into chunks, highlight keywords or phrases and try to stick to one idea per paragraph.

Tips to Writing SEO Friendly Content

Just remember this simple framework: Readers want content that is concise, scannable and objective. A good headline, broad opening, headings to break up volume and a strong call to action will give them just that.

How Users Read On The Web

Visitors go to a web site for two reasons: Information gathering and reading. When scanning or hunting for information online, studies have shown that users' eyes move from left to right, top to bottom, in an arc. A good web writer will take note of this and position content in the areas that are primary focus spots.

Keep in mind that users will:

- scan pages
- pick out key words and phrases
- read in quick, short bursts
- be action oriented
- be goal oriented

Giving users visual cues such as headings, sub-headings, and bullet points help to communicate ideas quickly.

Writing Effective Blog Posts

Writing Effective Blog Posts

1. Make it easy for others to find you. Choose a blog name that lets others with similar interests find you through search engines. Be sure to use keywords in your posts to boost your rankings in the search engines.
2. Blog what you know. Demonstrate authority in your area of expertise through what you communicate in your blog, and be generous in sharing your knowledge.
3. Focus. Each blog entry should have one main idea, and the content should focus on that specific topic. Simplicity is key.
4. Tell a story. Compelling stories draw people in and make the voice behind your blog “human.” Even setbacks and defeats make you likeable.
5. Use lists. Readers love to scan a page and quickly find valuable information. Frequent use of bulleted lists is a good way to communicate effectively online.
6. Offer useful information. A blog can be an effective platform to communicate with your audience, but you must provide useful information that helps them solve their most pressing problems. If you don’t, they’ll quickly move on to blogs that do.

Writing Effective Blog Posts

7. Show your personality. No one wants to listen to a speaker with a monotone voice. In the same way, no one wants to read a boring blog without personality. A blog is an opportunity to share your “voice” with your audience.
8. Be passionate. Post regularly and on topics you care about. Don’t be afraid to take a stand or position on an issue.
9. Allow comments. A good blog is a two-way conversation. Encourage others to comment – and respond to them when they do.
10. Be accessible. Make it easy for others to contact you through your blog via e-mail or other social media outlets.
11. Use Links. By directing readers to other helpful sites (even competitors), you become a great resource to those in your niche area. This can, in turn, increase your inbound links, which will increase your ranking in search engines. Also, be sure to use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to post links that direct your audience to your newest blog posts.

Writing Effective Blog Posts

12. Step away from the computer. Continue to build relationships via face-to-face meetings with those you communicate with through your blog.
13. Follow others' conversations. Read blogs from others in your area of expertise and comment on their posts. This helps to establish a conversation between you and other peer leaders in your category - and it could help you come up with story ideas in the process.

This information is adapted from William Flavell at everybodysagenius.com and Naked Conversations by Isreal and Scoble.

What to Include in a Press Release

What to Include in a Press Release

Anything newsworthy for your business or industry makes for a warranted press release. Topics may range from:

- recent company hires
- new business locations
- product releases
- research results
- latest industry happenings.

If it's important to your business or industry, it's important to report!

What to Include in a Press Release

We suggest using resources such as PRWeb.com to distribute your press releases. When posting, remember to include links in your press release that point back to pages from your website. That could be your home page, products or services pages, blogs, etc. You should also include a relevant image with alternative text that accurately describes it.. Remember to add a short section about your business.

Include contact information for your business, such as:

- Business name
- Address
- Phone number
- Email address
- Website
- Social media links or handles

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

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Email marketing is still an important tactic in your overall marketing mix. Although email marketing is significantly more common and slightly less effective, it's still an important touch point with customers and prospects. It gives you an opportunity to stay top-of-mind and can help drive traffic back to your site and boost overall SEO/traffic efforts.

Here are the main advantages to email marketing:

- **Inexpensive:** Unlike traditional mailers, there is no cost for postage. Plus, once you have a template in place, there is very little cost for sending out an email; email services that help clients send to large lists are fairly inexpensive.
- **Universal:** Almost everyone has email and is comfortable communicating with this medium now. Not everyone has Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, etc. or feels comfortable searching on Google.
- **Connects the dots:** It gives an opportunity to make announcements, provide relevant valuable information and connects the gaps between your digital footprints.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

The key to successful email marketing is to provide relevant content to your customers/prospects. Be sure your content is well thought through, free of grammatical mistakes/typos and stands apart from the pack. Don't forget: your customers/prospects **MUST** opt-in to receiving your communication; otherwise you are simply "spamming" them.

How to build an email list

Building a quality list of interested recipients is the first step to successful email marketing. Although you can purchase a list of potential customers, we recommend avoiding this tactic as it can cause you to get on the "spam" list along with frustrating or turning off potential customers. We recommend building your own list of users who have visited your website and either requested information or found it helpful enough to request consistent communications.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

Building an email list can take time. Here are eight tips to help you get started with building your list:

1. Include a sign up form on your website to gather email addresses.
2. Make the task compelling: Rather than saying “Sign up for our newsletter,” ask, “Would you like more helpful information about [your service]?”
3. Provide an insightful article or document that visitors can download if they provide their email address.
4. If you do a lot of direct mail, include a specific landing page on that mail piece and hold a contest encouraging those recipients to provide their email address.
5. Include several forms on your website, besides “contact us” and “request a quote.” How about: “Have a question?” “Just ask” or an “Ask the expert” area.
6. Encourage recipients to “forward to a friend” via your email communications. It’s no secret that like-minded people are connected. Certainly if you send helpful information to someone, they’ll have a friend who can benefit from it as well.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

7. Different list options. Giving people a choice in what type of communications or topics they want to receive may encourage them to sign up. i.e. general news, specific department or certain application versus just one general email list.
8. Networking and word of mouth. As you and your employees are talking with others who fit the audience, ask if you can include them in your email communications. This does not mean that having someone's business card is approval to add them to your email list.

Note: BE SURE to give the option to "Opt In." On forms that are not simple email sign up forms, be sure to include an area for them to accept (or decline) that they want to receive email messages from you.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

Types of Email Messaging

There are a variety of communication topics you can use for email marketing.

- Newsletters: weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly communications about news, events, industry trends, etc.
- Customer service
- PR/announcements
- Sales/promotions

The frequency in which you communicate with your customers depends on your messaging strategy. You may want to do one newsletter a month and communicate announcements quarterly. Or, if you have more time sensitive information, you may send out a promotional message more frequently. Determine what will work best for your business and how receptive customers are to your communications.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

Average email open rates can vary by industry and communication type, but the general rule is to expect around a 16% open rate. If you are experiencing lower email open rates than you'd like, try adjusting your subject titles and sending from a known email address.

Trial and error is important for determining the best time of day to send your message. The common industry time is around 10 a.m. on Tuesday morning. By this time, people will have cleaned their inbox from the weekend and be receptive to opening new emails. Monitor your open rate and compare for time of day. If you find that sending first thing in the morning increases open rates, continue to send at this time.

Ins & Outs of Email Marketing

Third Party Email Providers

Unless you have an extremely small list of contacts, you'll likely want to use a third party provider for sending mass email communications. These providers give you a variety of options that are not available in normal email platforms such as open rates, click through rates, bounce rate, etc. Plus, you will have the ability to design a custom email template for official company communications and more flexibility in designing your message. Successful delivery is typically guaranteed in all major email providers, so you do not need to worry about formatting your message for Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo, etc.

There are a variety of third party providers to choose from. Some commonly used platforms include:

- iContact (MINDSCAPE recommended)
- Mail Chimp
- Constant Contact
- Exact Target

Pricing structure is typically based on the number of email addresses you have on your list and how many emails you plan to send monthly. Please check the provider's website for the most current pricing information.

CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts

Content is a huge part of the foundation for a great marketing plan. The copy you create on your website and media to draw people to your website should be relevant, useful, and interesting. While important to so the right people are finding you on search engines, it is also important to create content that describes what you can do for potential clients.

To be recognized as an influential thought leader in your industry, it is vital to showcase your expertise through on-site content, blogs, press releases, and social media posts.

About Mindscape

Founded in 2001, we are a complete web-success company focused on creating user-friendly websites and Web-based applications that help companies save time and money by streamlining processes, generating leads and making sales. We provide ongoing marketing services that help companies understand buyers, and reach them via the Web at the exact moment those customers are looking to buy.

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