

HOW TO WRITE AN EBOOK

From Content and Concept to Design and Promotion



Table Of Contents

3	Introduction
4	<i>Chapter One:</i> Organizing the Team
6	<i>Chapter Two:</i> Picking a Topic
9	<i>Chapter Three:</i> Research
12	<i>Chapter Four:</i> Writing
15	<i>Chapter Five:</i> Design
21	<i>Chapter Six:</i> Promoting and Tracking Your Ebook

Introduction



For inbound marketers, “offers” are the golden ticket for lead generation. Not only do they feed your list of new contacts, but they’re also a critical tool for nurturing existing leads into a position that makes them more sales-ready.

But, gosh. Isn’t the word “offer” so utterly vague and abstract? What the heck is a marketing offer and how do you create one?

Among the many types of content that can live behind a gate -- or a form -- you have the choice of templates, kits, workbooks, and even interactive websites. The most common, however, is the ebook -- simple in definition, but often complex to create.

Aside from writing the content, you need to design and format it into a professional-looking document that people will want to download and read. Then there’s the social media posts, landing page, and all of the other moving pieces of promotion. Yet, with lead generation as a common goal for content marketing, ebooks are an essential part of any successful inbound marketing program.

To create a successful ebook, you’ll have to be a hybrid marketer: part journalist, part designer, an expert project manager, and an all-around content strategist. Thankfully, there’s no need to do it alone.

In this ebook, we’re here to take away the mystery behind creating an awesome ebook (very meta, I know). Read on to learn how to pick an engaging topic your sales team will love, write and design content that keeps your reader engaged, and promote your ebook for measurable results.

Chapter One: Organizing the Team

So, you're ready to add ebook offers to your content strategy. Considering the resulting lead generation opportunities, you've made a great decision for the overall health of your marketing funnel.

Before you begin writing, there's a bit of organization that needs to be done. First and foremost, who on your team will create offers? For every marketing team, this will look different. Here at HubSpot, we have a team dedicated to the creation of all types of offers. However, many other people from throughout the larger marketing team also craft ebooks and templates as a supplemental part of their typical duties. Either option could be the case for your business.

In addition to the writing and design of the ebook, you'll also have to determine who's in charge of ebook promotion, including social media, kickback emails, landing pages, and corresponding blog posts.

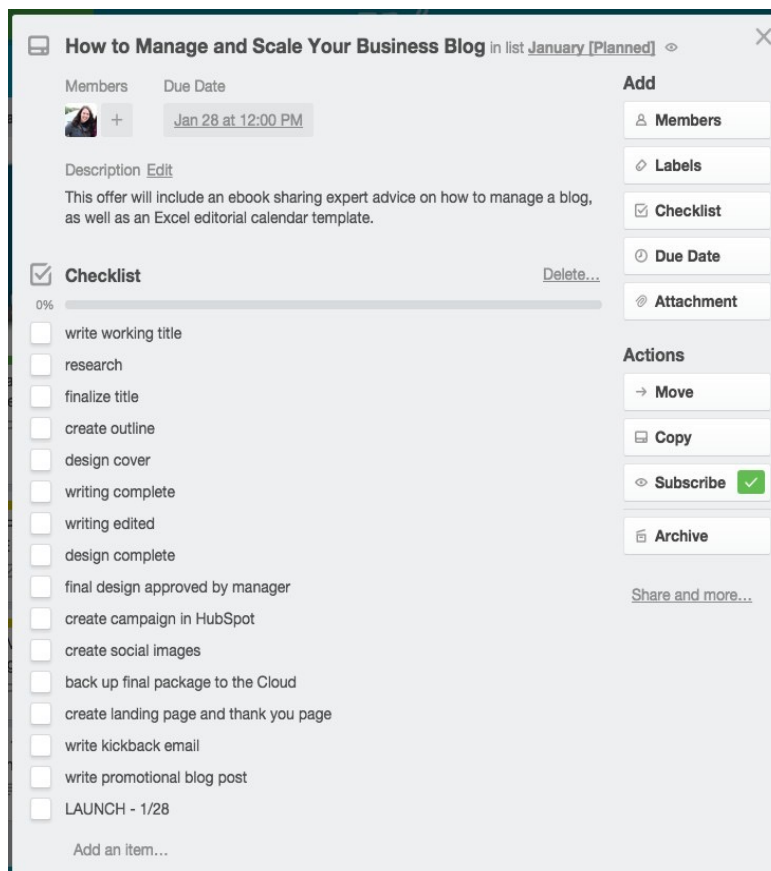
As you begin to form your own offer creation procedure, evaluate each stakeholder's bandwidth and expertise to determine who will own each asset. Ultimately, ebook creation is a team sport. Utilize your diverse and talented team to create spectacular pieces of long-form content.



Project Management

Because ebook creation can (and should) involve multiple people, efficient project management is crucial. There are multiple free tools available to collaborate, brainstorm, share creative assets, and keep track of to-do list items.

[Trello](#), for example, is an online project management tool that allows you to create a “card” for each project (in this case, your ebook), set deadlines, and delegate assignments. This is how our team assigns duties to specific members of the team and ensures the workload is balanced on the calendar.



You can also use a combination of [Google Apps](#) -- including Drive, Docs, Sheets, and Calendar -- to integrate your project management with your corporate email account.

Chapter Two: Picking a Topic

Good ebook topics should be found at the intersection of your expertise and your audience's core needs and interests. Remember to keep the end goal in mind: generating leads for sales. Therefore, it's wise to pick a topic that would yield a natural conversation between a prospect and a member of your sales team.

To get your gears turning, consider what ideas come to mind for each of these general frameworks:



Still Looking for the Right Idea?

Here are a few techniques we've picked up over the years for finding the right topics for your audience so you can publish the kind of content people will love to read.

Sales/Support

Your customer service and sales staff -- or anyone interacting with leads and customers on a daily basis -- often have the closest view into the challenges your customers face and the questions your prospects have. Create a forum for them to send content ideas to you based on feedback from their customer interactions. Better yet, sit in on a few sales or support calls yourself. It will help close the gap between your marketing and the customer.

Internet Forums

In addition to your own sales and support teams, take a look at external forums and sites for some relevant topic ideas. [Quora](#) is one of the best sites to check out, particularly for B2B marketers, because it positions itself as a place where anyone can ask anything.

Blog

Expanding a previous blog post or repurposing a series of posts can be a great way to generate ebook content quickly. And with the added benefits of historical data, you can determine which topics perform best with your audience.

Experiments

No matter how many books or resources we read, there is nothing quite like learning from experience. That said, ebooks are a great platform to share what you're learning at your job with your audience. On our content team, many of our offers stem from experiments we ourselves have tested and learned from.

Blog Topic Generator

[Try out this HubSpot tool](#) to refresh your brainstorming. While the tool was technically created for blog post ideas, some of the best ebooks come from blogs. Enter a few relevant terms and the tool will suggest topics that could be a decent starting point for a more comprehensive offer.

Write a Working Title

Found the perfect topic? Great! Now it's time to craft a working title. Think of this as a rough draft of your final title -- no need to make it perfect yet.

What exactly is a working title? A lot of people confuse working titles with topics. Topics are very general and could yield several different blog posts that each go in very, very different directions. A working title, on the other hand, is very specific and guides the creation of the ebook. Think of this as the difference between "data visualization" and "how to use data to tell your product story".



Chapter Three: Research

With your brilliant topic and working title picked out, there are a few steps you must take before you put pen to paper. Chances are, you're already a pretty knowledgeable in your chosen topic. However, don't be tempted to skip the research step.

Now is your time to channel your inner journalist. Find data to back up your claims. Seek out varying viewpoints. See if other brands -- especially your competitors -- have already written at length on the subject. It's okay if they have. But it's good to know how you can expand upon the topic and create an even more useful resource for your reader.

Future Proofing

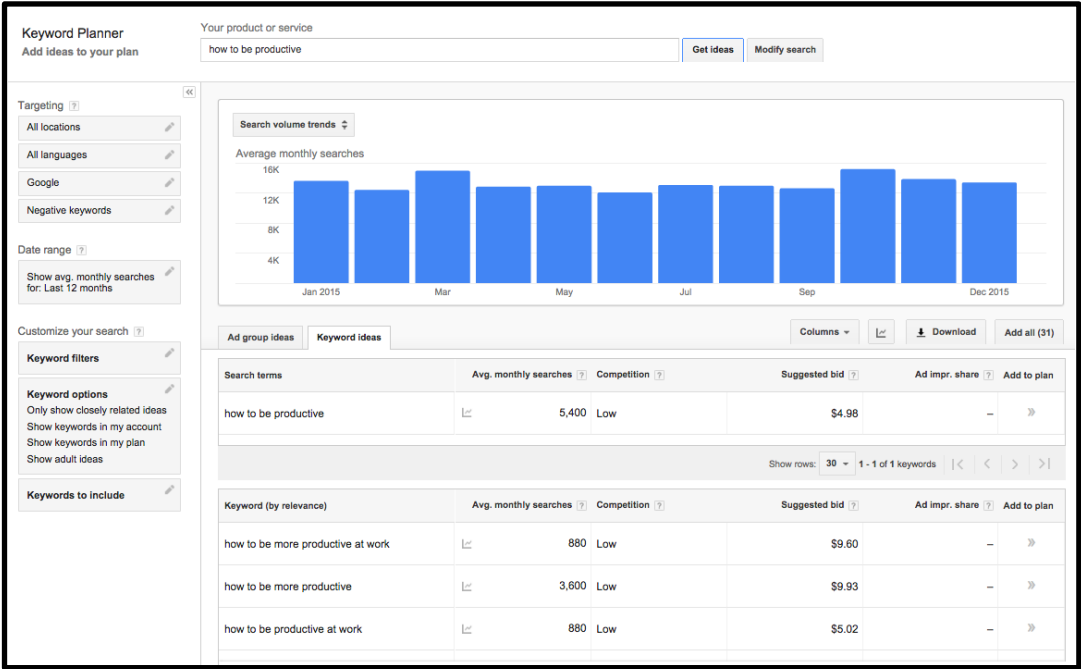
While Google keeps us on our toes with all the algorithm updates, one thing has stayed pretty consistent for inbound marketers looking to optimize their content for search: keyword research. For ebook creators, this step is particularly important for what we like to call "future- proofing." This refers to the ability for a piece of content to bring in leads after the initial promotion and increasingly over time as it ranks higher for SEO.

To kick off this process, think about the some keywords that fall into the overall bucket of your topic. For instance, if your ebook topic were to be about office productivity, I'd start with a list something like this:

- office productivity
- productivity tools
- how to be more productive
- how to be productive at work
- workplace distractions

The point of this step isn't to come up with your final list of keyword phrases. You just want a brain dump of phrases that you think your target audience might use to search for content related to your particular topic. Strive for long-tail keywords: longer, more specific phrases containing three or more words.

Now that you've got the right mix of keywords, it's time to narrow down your list with some quantitative data. There's a lot of ways to do this, including the HubSpot [Keywords tool](#). For the purposes of this guide, we'll dive briefly into the [Google AdWords Keyword Planner](#).



Before you are able to use the tool, you'll have to set up an AdWords account, but that doesn't mean you have to create a paid ad. In the dashboard, navigate to the Keyword Planner. Choose "Find new keywords and get search volume data" and enter some of the long-tail keywords you're considering. Pay extra attention to the trends over time. You don't want to pick a keyword with decreasing search rates. Once you've identified your best option, it's time to ...

Finalize Your Title

For a good starting point, combine the thinking behind your working title with the keyword research you've conducted. Don't be afraid to spice it up a bit. Have fun with alliteration or strong language. Above all, make the value of the content clear. The most important rule of titles is to respect the reader's experience. Don't set an expectation that differs from the content you're offering.

For more advice on writing incredible titles, check out this [simple formula](#).

Decide on a Format

The last step in your preparations is nailing down a format. You, of course, are reading a guide to creating ebooks. Nonetheless, ebooks are not the only format option for your gated offers. Consider creating a template, kit, or visual resource instead of an ebook or as a supplement to increase lead gen. For example, we've created [Budget Templates](#), [Blog Editorial Calendar Templates](#), and a [Kickoff Kit for Marketing Leaders](#).

As your team becomes more experienced at creating gated offers, experiment with alternative formats to find out what resonates with your audience best and diversify your content library.

Chapter Four: Writing

When I tell my friends and family that I create ebooks for a living, I generally receive one of two responses.

1. “You write books! Can I buy them on Amazon?”
2. “Oh, so like instruction manuals?”

Well, not exactly. Effective ebook copy mixes the helpful voice of a blog post and the concise, deep research of journalism. And of course, ebooks should never read as mundane as an instruction manual.

Don’t be intimidated by the length of ebooks. If a person has filled out a form to download your ebook, they’re genuinely interested in the topic, not simply in a rush to put together their next piece of IKEA furniture. Use your expertise in the field to provide a helpful and possibly entertaining resource for your reader.

Outline

Back in college, I spend much of my coursework taking videography and media classes. Early in my major, one of my favorite professors gave me a piece of advice that has forever changed how I approach any creative work: shoot for edit.

In the realm of documentary, this means approaching every potential scene with your mind already in the post-production room. Consider how every angle provides seamless continuity, end each clip with a few seconds of white noise to fix any sound issues that arise, and always be sniffing for narrative themes.

Same goes for drafting an ebook. As you outline, don’t just think of the ideas you want to cover in your writing. Note potential design elements in your outline. This is the key difference between outlining for blog posts and outlining for ebooks. For example, you can see a section of my early outline for this ebook below. You’ll notice a lot of the ideas shifted and reshaped as I began the actual writing and design process. However, the outline still serves as my outlet for unabandoned brainstorming.

Outline

How to Write an Ebook

INTRODUCTION

- Why make ebooks? Generate qualified visitors and leads
- Who creates and who promotes?
- GRAPHIC IDEA: illustrate members of the team

CHAPTER ONE: Gather the Team

- Gathering the team
- Project management tips
 - Trello + other options (include descriptions and links)
 - Setting deadlines
 - GRAPHIC IDEA: display options in a sidebar

CHAPTER TWO: Pick a Topic

- Pick a topic that can easily yield a conversation with your sales team
- Still need ideas? [GRAPHIC IDEA: highlight bullet points in different style]
 - Listen in on sales call to learn about common obstacles for your audience
 - Expand on a current blog post or combine blog posts
 - Tell the readers about an experiment you did (give personal anecdote)
 - Link to HubSpot's Blog Topic Generator

Visual representation is what makes a long ebook easy to digest. When you write with design in mind, you'll save yourself time and energy.

As you begin the outlining and writing process, we suggest working out of a Google Document so you can easily share it with others without version issues. Even if you end up using InDesign or another design software to lay out your ebook, draft the copy separately first. This will make unfortunate typos much easier to spot.

Finally, be kind to your reader. Include chapters, headings, and subheads in your outline to make the copy easier to skim for specific information.

“The usefulness of your ebook is based largely on its structure and readability.”

Write

Now that you've completed your research and outline, there's nothing left to do but sit down and crank out your copy. Start your ebook with a table of contents and introduction. This should set the stage for the content of the ebook.

As you write the body, be as simple and clear as possible. Include practical steps the reader can take and relatable examples. Write whatever is needed to effectively educate your audience about the selected subject, whether that's five pages or 30 pages.

Remember to mark places where you can highlight a quote or statistic within the design. I generally do this with bolded, red text or the comment feature to be absolutely sure I don't unknowingly copy my personal reminder into the design file later on. Just be sure that the quote or statistic you use genuinely adds value to the content and isn't just there for design's sake.

Chapter Five: Design




For many marketers, designing is the most daunting step in creating an ebook. Don't let your fear of not knowing enough about art or intricate software keep you from giving ebooks a try. With a bit of practice, designing can become the most rewarding -- and honestly, most fun -- step in the process. Continue reading to find the software that's right for you and learn some of our favorite hacks to speed up the layout process.



Your Option of Tools

Now that you're finished with the writing of your ebook, you'll have to make a few decisions before you can bring your copy to life. Between Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign, it can be difficult to know what software you should or should not use. Good news here: There's no wrong answer. Choose the software that allows you to thrive, not feel lost or underqualified.

Check out the benefits of each (on the next page) to find the option that's right for you.

-  Indesign
-  Illustrator
-  Photoshop
-  Powerpoint
-  Canva



InDesign

InDesign is what the HubSpot team uses to lay out our ebooks. Frequenting by newspaper and magazine designers, the software allows you to create spreads quickly without having elements shift unintentionally as with a word processor. Copy and paste your content from your Google Doc into text boxes and use the basic graphic tools to add flavor to your spreads. InDesign has an intuitive layout that's easy to pick up with a bit of practice. To access, you'll need a [Creative Cloud license](#).



Illustrator

Illustrator is a software used by graphic designers and visual artists to create vector artwork. In short, vectors allow you to scale graphic elements without them becoming distorted from pixelation. Illustrator is perfect for the more experienced designer to create high quality covers, infographics, and other visual elements for their ebook. To access, you'll need a [Creative Cloud license](#).



Photoshop

While Photoshop should not be used to lay out your ebook, it is a very useful tool for touching up and cropping the photos you might use inside an offer. This software is also an excellent option to create social media promotional images. To access, you'll need a [Creative Cloud license](#).



PowerPoint

For the content creator unfamiliar with Adobe's software, PowerPoint is a great alternative to design your ebook. Follow what you already know about the program to create ebook pages out of the slides. When it's complete, export as a PDF and use

We have a special bonus for those who use Powerpoint: Check out our free [13 Customizable Ebook Templates](#) to create slick offers without the cost of extra design knowledge. To access the software, you'll need one of the multiple subscriptions available via [Microsoft Office](#).



Canva

[Canva](#) is an online platform that allows you to create both your ebook and social images quickly with drag-and-drop functionality. The platform includes stock photos, fonts, icons, and filters to help you to create diverse designs. With the basic version, you can create as many designs as you like, all for free.

Start With the Cover

Before we jump into designing your ebook, know that there is no single order to follow. You can start by designing the table of contents page or playing with extra graphics. Liberating, right? For me, I always start with the cover -- often even before I write a sentence of the ebook.

Designing the cover is, first and foremost, incredibly fun. Use this opportunity to test design ideas and brainstorm motifs you can continue throughout the rest of the ebook.

Know in advance what is expected of the design in terms of following brand guidelines. Most likely, your company has a set of font families and colors for you to use. Don't expand beyond those guidelines unless you've gotten the okay. If your company has a dedicated designer, discuss if it's better to create something clean and professional, or unique and experimental.

Ultimately, remember that the cover is generally the only part of the ebook your audience will see before they decide to fill out the form and download. Even with the help of landing page copy and social promotion, your audience will inevitably judge your ebook by its cover.



Layout

With your document settings customized, it's time to begin designing. Draw text boxes and copy and paste the content from your Google Doc section by section. If you're using InDesign, watch out for a red plus sign on the bottom right of your text box. This means that your copy is longer than what can fit in the text box. Click the red plus sign and click on another part of the page to create another text box that your copy flows into seamlessly.

It's impossible for all of the design best practices to be summed up in an entire ebook, let alone a single chapter of an ebook. Nonetheless, there are a few easy-to-follow principles you can apply to your very first design. Follow the CRAP principles on the next page to make your design look instantly more professional.



Contrast

Your headings and subheads are an ideal place to apply contrast to your design. Try fonts that differ in shape, color, or size.



Repetition

While repetition in writing is bad, repetition in design is not only good, but encouraged. Keep your fonts consistent between each level of headers. Repeat graphical elements such as sidebars, logos, or rules.



Alignment

When you see a design that's pleasing to the eye, it's often because it's cohesive and balanced. Challenge yourself to make every element of the page align with another. This applies to the edges of text boxes and visual elements like bullet points.



Proximity

When you find yourself similar to another person, you often become friends and stay close. Same with design. Content that is related should not only be next to each other, but near each other.

Don't be afraid of a little white space. Give your copy some room to breathe. Play with larger margins to make the design more interesting and increase readability.

Choosing a Final CTA

A call-to-action is a link or visual object that entices the visitor to click and arrive on a page that will get them further engaged with your company. Since your ebook readers have probably already converted into leads by downloading this ebook, consider including a CTA at the conclusion of the book that propels them further down the marketing funnel.

To help you launch your ebook quicker, we've designed 50 customizable calls-to-action in PowerPoint you can [download here](#) and insert into your design.

Once you've chosen the landing page you'd like to guide the reader to, don't add the link quite yet. Use a tracking URL to help keep track of what source leads a reader to a specific landing page. This way, you'll be able to break down the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns.

A tracking URL is simply a normal URL with a "token" attached to the end of it.

- **Normal URL:** <http://www.hubspot.com/inbound-marketing-assessment-product/>
- **Tracking URL (token is highlighted):**
[http://www.hubspot.com/inbound-marketing- **assessment-product/?utm_campaign=examples-assessment**](http://www.hubspot.com/inbound-marketing-assessment-product/?utm_campaign=examples-assessment)

If you're a HubSpot user, you can create a tracking URL by navigating to the Reports tool and Reports Home. Scroll down to Tracking URL Builder. In this tool, you'll add the URL of the landing page, the campaign name, and the source. There is no one way to specify your source, but whatever you choose, keep it consistent. We suggest choosing "other campaigns" for the source, entering "ebook CTA," and including the name of your ebook in the medium



Final Steps

Is your design looking clean and polished? The last step in the design process is to export and save your files. If you're using PowerPoint or Canva, save your project files and export your document as a PDF.

If you created your offer in InDesign, it's better to package your offer as opposed to simply exporting it. This will save all of the necessary assets -- design file, fonts, and linked graphics -- in a single folder so you can share the project file for collaboration without missing content. Find this command under the File menu.

If you haven't already, back up the entire package in your choice of Cloud storage. Create a dedicated folder in Dropbox or Google Drive to store all of your ebook files now and in the future.

For those using the HubSpot software, the last step is to add your final PDF to the [File Manager](#). After you upload the file, copy the file URL and save it somewhere safe, or just keep the tab open in your browser. You'll use it when you build out your thank you page

Chapter Six: Promoting and Tracking



Now that you've written and designed your ebook, are you done? Well, not exactly. Next comes one of the most crucial parts of the offer creation process: promotion.

In this section, we'll provide links to HubSpot's software and [Academy](#) to help you launch your ebook and track your metrics. Each additional asset is optional, but encouraged for the overall success of your content.

Create Social Images

For starters, it's smart for the offer creator to also help with the social media promotion images. Since you already have the design assets, you'll be able to easily copy and paste the assets into your social image project files.

As with the design of your ebook, you have choices for what software you use to create the social images. More often than not, I use Illustrator to create my social images. Since that's the software I use to create my ebook covers, I simply open up a new Illustrator document and copy the original layers. This allows me to move and resize vectors without losing any of the quality due to pixilation.

Photoshop, PowerPoint, or [Canva](#) work just as well to create your social images. Reuse the assets from your cover to speed up the process.

No matter how you choose to create your social images, have your images follow the same theme. Create a mix using the cover of your ebook or specific graphics from inside of it. Keep any text away from the edges and make sure everything is clearly legible, especially for mobile users. For more design tips, check our guide to [creating graphics that convert](#).

Each social media platform has their own size specifications for image uploads. On the next page we've included our (printable) recommendations. Remember to bookmark [this link](#) for easy access in the future.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Facebook

- Cover photo: 851 x 315
- Timeline image: 1200 x 630
(Note: less than 20% of the image is text)

Instagram

- 1080 x 1080

LinkedIn

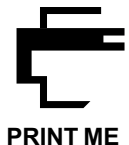
- 543 x 304

Pinterest

- 735 x 1102

Twitter

- Cover photo: 1500 x 500
- Timeline image: 1024 x 512



Create a Campaign

When you create a marketing campaign, there are a lot of moving pieces: blog posts, landing pages, keywords, emails, and much more. Campaigns in HubSpot allow you to set goals and track the combined success of all these pieces.

Marketing campaigns often begin with the creation of a gated offer, such as the ebook you're creating now. Then, you'll be able to link all of those extra promotional assets to the offer.

To get started, navigate to the [Campaigns tool](#). Create a new campaign and give it a unique name that's consistent with your content offer. Remember, the campaign name is the one thing you cannot change. Take a moment to consider implementing naming conventions for all of your future offers. Keep it simple. We suggest sticking with the full name of the offer.

Create a Landing Page and Thank You Page

Your ebook will be available to the world through a landing page on your site. Simply put, a landing page is a dedicated web page that describes your offer and provides a form that a visitor can fill out in order to access the ebook. This form is what allows you to convert your visitors into business leads that your sales team can ultimately follow up with.

This landing page will then link to a thank you page, which provides the audience with a download of your final ebook. For in-depth instructions on how to create your landing page and thank you page in the HubSpot software, explore the [Landing Page User](#) in the Academy.

In addition to your landing page, you also have the choice market your new content with corresponding blog posts and promotional emails. You can find additional tips for these promotional materials on the [Content Offer](#) portion of the Academy.

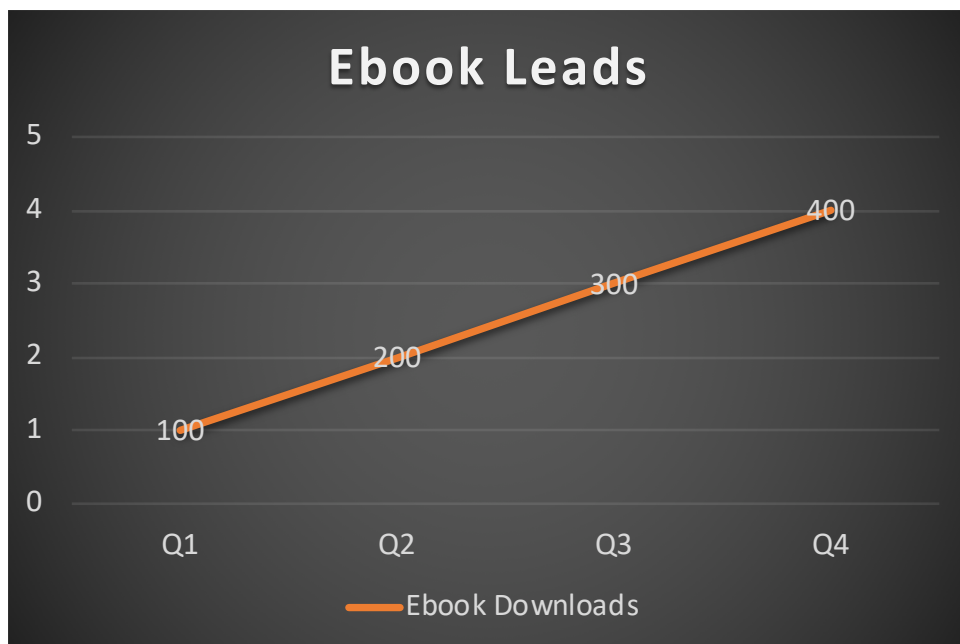
Watch the Right Analytics

Congratulations! Your beautiful, informative ebook has finally been released for the world to see. However, your work is not quite finished yet.

One of the greatest benefits of using ebooks as a part of your content strategy is the long-term results they bring. Thanks to the keyword research you performed during your preparations, you'll be able to see compounded traffic to your offer through what we like to call "leads as you sleep."

To keep track of these long-term wins, you'll need to have marketing analytics in place that measure how your offer performed with your audience. Specifically, you'll want to look at how many people downloaded your ebook and converted into leads. You can then use HubSpot's closed loop analytics that show how many of those people ultimately converted into opportunities and customers for your business.

You can also monitor how many new contacts you generate from you ebook. To learn more, check out the Academy's content on how to analyze your [landing page performance](#).



About MMG

MMG specializes in serving manufacturing companies by helping them increase leads, increase brand awareness and gain credibility in a specific market space. MMG specializes in high engagement and awareness generating marketing by using educational content. We have proven over and over that manufacturer's customers like and need educational content over straight product promotion. This is the heart of the MMG strategy and it works

