

HubSpot Research

How HubSpot's Sales Blog Team Broke a 1.5 Year Traffic Plateau

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Last year I became the editor of HubSpot's [Sales Blog](#). I was super excited -- until the end of the month, when we missed our blog traffic goal. And the end of the next month, when we missed again. And the next month, and the next, and the next.

Our monthly traffic number used to spell success or failure. If the Sales Blog hit its target, I'd succeeded. If it was under, I'd failed. (Kind of like a salesperson!)

But just like scrambling to hit quota can lead you to the wrong tactics (such as discounting heavily), trying to hit that monthly number encouraged less-than-ideal strategies.

If we were falling behind, I'd publish "quick win" posts -- digestible and clicky content that was **guaranteed to give us a traffic boost** (e.g. [7 Seemingly Harmless \(But Secretly Deadly\) Sales Phrases](#)).

I'd also temporarily stop publishing "unsexy" content, which was basically anything technical and higher-level directed at executives and managers instead of front-line reps. These posts never performed well in their first several weeks.

On the surface, it seemed like these techniques were helping me salvage bad months. **But every sexy post had an opportunity cost. Publishing something clicky might have earned us a few extra thousand views that month... but it meant I didn't publish a search-friendly post that would become a reliable traffic-earner down the line.**

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Introduction

To illustrate, here’s our editorial calendar for the week of June 12, 2017. I’ve noted the search-friendly posts in orange (“search-friendly” = has an organic angle).

Sun 11	Mon 12	Tue 13	Wed 14	Thu 15	Fri 16	Sat 17
					CRM (Padraig) -- SCHEDI 6:30 – 7:30am	
	Startup Sales Mistak 7:30 – 8:30 WEEKLY LIV	Persuasion Principles (up 7:30 – 8:30am	Lose Trust w/Qual Quest 7:30 – 8:30am	Linkedin Secrets (update 7:30 – 8:30am	Sales Tips for Introverts 7:30 – 8:30am	
Best Sales Emails -- SCH 8:30 – 9:30am	Emails Sound Insecure -- 8:30 – 9:30am	How to Start Sales Call S 8:30 – 9:30am	Sales VM (repromote) 8:30 – 9:30am	Doubled Sales in 1 Year 8:30 – 9:30am	Motivating Salespeople 8:30 – 9:30am	Amateurish Behaviors -- 8:30 – 9:30am

The four orange posts have cumulatively racked up 97,084 views. The other seven have gotten 39,955 in total.

That’s 24,271 average views per post versus 5,708. (And the gap will only grow wider over time as those four posts continue to get organic traffic -- which will boost their page authority and help them gain more backlinks and social shares, leading to higher rankings in a self-fulfilling cycle.)

The old content playbook had made the Sales Blog one of (if not the biggest) publications in the sales world and earned it hundreds of thousands of readers every month.

But it was time to tweak the playbook.

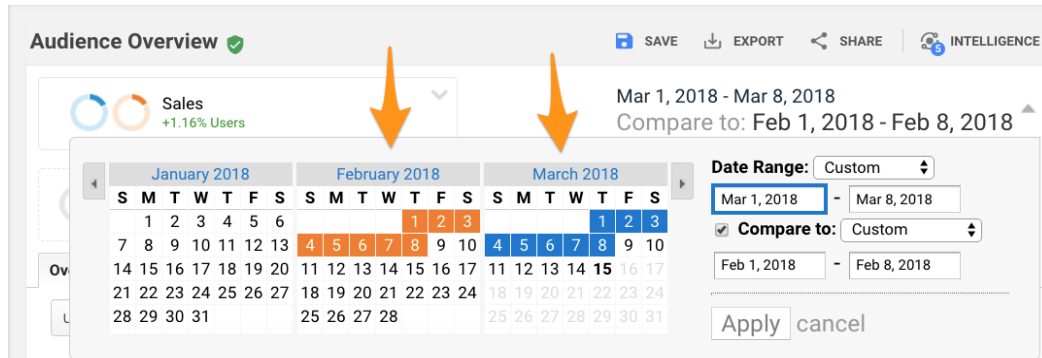
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The 3 Steps We Took to Increase Traffic

1. Abandoning the month-to-month mentality

I realized focusing on the monthly number was jeopardizing our long-term results. So, I stopped treating it as the main measure of success.

To understand how we were doing, I'd compare equivalent weeks:



When looking at performance, I'd also factor in seasonal trends and holidays.

Most importantly, **I decided we'd prioritize search-friendly content**, even though it wouldn't have a significant impact on our traffic for months.

It made me nervous, but I tried to think of it like working out, going to the dentist, or saving the other half of my burrito for dinner instead of eating it all at lunch -- down the line, I'd be glad I made the sacrifice.

I needed an objective way to measure this new strategy, so I started closely monitoring our percentage of organic traffic. The more search-friendly content we published, the higher this percentage should grow -- even if overall traffic flatlined or dipped.

Sales				15.35% ▲	15.36% ▲	13.80% ▲	29.9%
1.	(not provided) ★ 📅	0	\$0.00	0			
	Mar 1, 2018 - Mar 8, 2018						
	Jan 4, 2018 - Jan 11, 2018						
	% Change			15.71%	15.65%	14.00%	-2

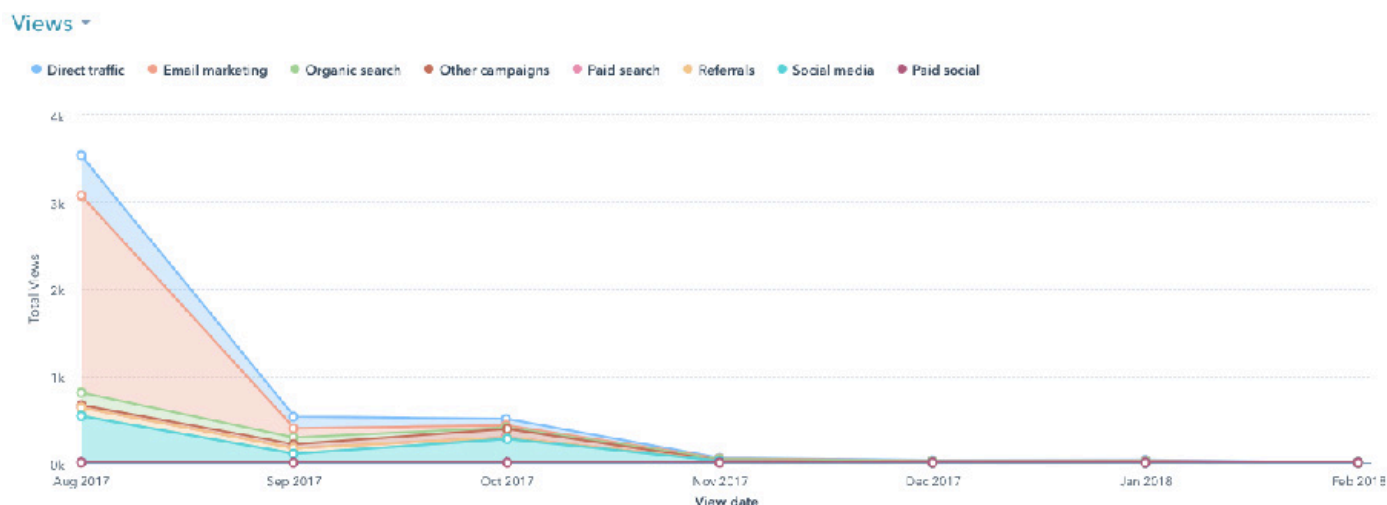
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The 3 Steps We Took to Increase Traffic

2. We focused relentlessly on organic

The Sales Blog used to publish many different “flavors” of posts. Each flavor had a different purpose: the aforementioned “quick wins,” which tended to be about email/voicemails/phrases and generated instant traffic; thought leadership, which presented different views and helped us build the HubSpot brand; placeholders, which were easy to write up (think infographics and SlideShares) and let us fill slots in a pinch; and more.³

Our posts all have the same purpose now -- capture search traffic. If an update or new post doesn't have an organic angle, we tweak the angle so it does or look for a different topic altogether. It's not easy to keep this going, but once you see far too many posts do this:



... you realize every piece of content needs to have legs. In other words, it must bring in significant organic traffic every month -- every half year or so, we might update it, but for the most part it's like passive income. Big results, low effort.

(This is [21 Salespeople Reveal the Worst Sales Advice They Ever Got](#), which I wrote because I thought it would be attention-grabbing and interesting. The problem is, no one is searching for “worst sales advice,” so this post gets barely any traffic on its own.)

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The 3 Steps We Took to Increase Traffic

That doesn't mean we've stopped publishing thought leadership, or awesome infographics, or posts about sales emails. We still do. The difference is, they're intended to rank.

And if you're wondering how we found new topics to target -- great question.

3. We found untapped search potential

You know how finishing a jar of peanut butter is a real struggle? To get those last spoonfuls, you have to dig.



That's how I felt about scooping up the last bits of search potential for the Sales Blog.

If there was a general sales-related term with any search volume behind it -- we're talking as little as 50 searches per month -- the HubSpot Sales Blog was almost always already ranking for it.

The 3 Steps We Took to Increase Traffic

That's great from a mind-share perspective. But from a "grow the blog" perspective? It's not so great. Short of getting people to search for sales advice more frequently (I wish I had that power), we couldn't influence our organic traffic. So, my team and I got creative. We delved into topics that weren't familiar to us.

Topics like:

- Real estate sales
- Client gifts
- Car sales
- Becoming a medical device rep

While these stray from our usual topics, they do boast significant search volume. And we found ways to put the HubSpot spin on all sorts of subjects. **No matter the topic, a post only went on the blog if it was:**

- Well-researched and comprehensive
- Aligned with HubSpot values
- Backed up with statistics and research where appropriate
- Tailored to our existing audience (for example, our subscriber survey showed realtors are already reading HubSpot)



2

The 3 Steps We Took to Increase Traffic

Here's the total traffic from this post (published in Nov. 2017):



Not bad at all! This post will continually bring in thousands of visits per month for us. (For context, the average post gets less than 100 views per month after its first 30 days.)

To make sure we didn't lose our regular audience, I'd always balance these posts with more traditional fare, like [The Ultimate Guide to Creating and Using a Sales Playbook](#).

The Sales Blog typically publishes two posts per day: one at 7:30 am and another at 8:30 am. If a post was super niche -- like "How to Get Your Real Estate License" -- I'd schedule it for 6:30 as a third post. The other post(s) going live that day would always target our main audience.

			Niche	
			How to Get a Real Estate License -- 6:30am, https://app.hubs	E-sig tech (GetAccept) -- 6:30am, https://app.hubs
How to Build Sales Process -- 7:30am, https://blog.hubs	Hire VP of Sales -- SCHE -- 7:30am, https://app.hubs	How to Make Sales Training -- 7:30am, https://app.hubs	Organize With Multiple In -- 7:30am, https://blog.hubs	Direct Mail (Aja) -- SCHE -- 7:30am, https://app.hubs
8 Ways Not to -- 8:30am, https://blog.hubs	Motivational Quotes -- 8:30am, https://app.hubs	Business Sales Plan -- 8:30am, https://app.hubs	Using BANT in 2018 -- 8:30am, https://app.hubs	Best Chrome Extensions -- 8:30am, https://app.hubs
Weekly	Daily Email	Daily Email	Daily Email	Daily Email
Update Editor's Picks -- 9:30 - 10:30am	Pick updates for next week -- 9:30 - 10:30am			
		Emma/Aja 1:1, 11am	Blog Audit for AF, 11am	
			Thursday Thunder: marketing -- 12pm, NYE - Roxbury 3rd	

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The Results

This January, we finally broke through an 18-month traffic plateau, setting a new record for sessions (a 14.7% increase from our previous highest month in May 2017).

If you publish a blog post in the forest and no one reads it, did you truly publish it all?

These days, simply producing great content is table stakes. To meet your performance goals, you have to make sure you're covering the right topics (i.e. what your readers are looking for) in the right way (so they can find it on Google).

You might be thinking, "Do we want more visitors if they're not going to convert right away?"

Because the blog is as top of the funnel as it gets, yes, we do want more visitors even if they don't convert right away. And chances are, they will -- **people who are familiar with a brand are 2X more likely to click on its ads and convert.** This concept doesn't just hold true for ads. Increasing your content reach gets your company's name out to a greater number of buyers ... and down the line, when they need to make a purchase, they'll think of you.

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