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Content Marketing

How to Build an Audience that
Builds Your Business



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Content Marketing means creating and sharing valuable free content to attract and convert prospects into customers, and customers into repeat buyers. The type of content you share is closely related to what you sell; in other words, you're educating people so that they know, like, and trust you enough to do business with you.

If you're interested in marketing your business online (and who isn't at this point), you can't escape hearing about content marketing. It's everywhere you look, or listen.

- You hear that people don't want advertising when making purchasing decisions; they want valuable information.
- You hear that it's content that people desire and seek out, and it's great content that Google wants to rank well in the search results so those people can find your business.
- You hear that it's content that spreads via social networks, generating powerful word-of-mouth exposure for savvy content marketers.

- You hear that content is the best way to achieve what advertising is supposed to achieve, but doesn't do so well online getting people to know, like, and trust your brand.

You hear all of that, and yet, perhaps you're thinking ...

So what? What does content marketing actually mean for my business?

Let's start with the very basics.

There are many ways to profit with content: blogging, video tutorials, email newsletters, white papers, free reports ... and yet many people are confused about the entire concept. So, we put together this ebook that lays out the basics in plain language. Remember, content drives the Internet, and consumers are looking for information which solves a problem, not an immediate sales pitch. The trust, credibility, and authority that content marketing creates knocks down sales resistance, all while providing a baseline introduction to the benefits of a particular product or service.

The individuals and businesses that are having the most success online tend to take an approach that involves a high ratio of valuable content that seemingly has no sales agenda, mixed with periodic promotional messages.

Let's take a look at how to do just that ...

What's the Difference Between Content Marketing and Copywriting?

by *Sonia Simone*

From a traditional marketing standpoint, the answer to the above question is simple.

Content marketing is the creation of valuable content that has a marketing purpose.

For example, my company creates an awesome special report, and we exchange it for your email address and your permission to educate you further about our stuff.

[Copywriting](#) is designed to get the reader to take a specific action.

Sometimes that's making a purchase, but it can also be confirming an email opt-in, calling for more information, or going into a store to check out the merchandise.

Content marketing is blogs, white papers, and viral video. Copywriting is sales pages, infomercials, and direct mail.

Two different critters, right? Well, not if you're doing it right.

Content without copywriting is a waste of good content.

There are some blogs out there with seriously good content, yet few readers. (Maybe yours is one of them.)

If you're writing great stuff that people would love to read, but you're not finding the traffic you want, the problem probably lies in ineffective copywriting.

Let's briefly discuss the elements of ineffective copywriting.

Bad headlines

It could be that your headlines are boring and they don't give people any reason to click through. Or your headlines might be too cute and clever, showing how smart you are without communicating any reader benefit. Either way, if you're not putting much thought into your content headlines today, hop over to the Copyblogger tutorials on [writing great headlines](#) and fix that before you try anything else.

No benefits

Just like a product has to provide a benefit to the buyer, your content has to be inherently rewarding to readers, or they won't come back. [Here's an article](#) that talks about how to do that.

Lack of trust

You can always get social media attention by being a brat, a pest, or a train wreck, [but attention doesn't translate into subscribers](#) or customers.

No social proof

You need to leverage social proof to show readers that your blog is a cool place to hang out. This is tricky when you don't have lots of readers yet, but we have a [few tips for you](#).

Where is the call to action?

You must have a clear, specific [call to action](#) that lets people know what you want them to do next. That might be to subscribe to your blog, sign up for your email newsletter, or share your content on social sites like Twitter and Facebook.

Remember, copywriting is the art of convincing your reader to take a specific action. (And yes, it's still copywriting if it takes place in a podcast or video ... if you're doing it well).

The thoughtful use of copywriting techniques on your blog will get readers to subscribe to your content, opt in for more from your email newsletter, and share your great stuff with other readers.

That's how you build a large, loyal audience.

Copywriting without content is a waste of good copy.

So is copywriting everything? Will effective use of copywriting technique propel you automatically into the ranks of the world's most popular blogs?

Sadly, no.

If you do a brilliant job packaging and marketing crap, all you do is efficiently get the word out about how bad your crap is. Not the result you're looking for.

Smart marketers still need to keep some cornerstones of great content marketing in mind.

Generosity is sexy.

When your free content is so valuable that it makes you a little uncomfortable, you know you've [got the mix right](#).

Only ad men like advertising.

If your content looks like an ad, it will be overlooked or thrown away. Make your “advertising” too valuable to throw away by wrapping it in wonderfully beneficial, readable content.

Write for people first.

Content marketing makes for great SEO, but don't make the mistake of writing for the search engines. Always write for people first, then go back and make your content search-engine friendly so new readers can find you.

And of course, always remember the [first rule of Copyblogger](#).

Really good content is unsurpassed at building rapport, delivering a sales message without feeling “salesy,” and getting the potential customer to stick around.

That's why the sharpest copywriting minds are trending more toward a “[content net](#)” approach. They combine strategic copywriting with great content to get the best of both worlds.

Which is exactly what Copyblogger has been teaching readers since 2006: how to create breakthrough content marketing ...

The Three Essentials of Breakthrough Content Marketing

It takes more than “content is king” to work in this tricky environment.

You need to focus your attention on these three key elements to make content marketing work for you.

1. Give your readers a cookie.

What’s the smartest way to train a puppy to sit on command? Give him a cookie and a nice pat on the head every time he does what you want.

Enough cookies and enough pats on the head and he starts to think that sitting on command was his idea.

He likes you, he trusts you, and he sits when you say sit because it’s in his best interest to do that.

Your content needs to work the same way.

High-quality content trains your readers and listeners to keep opening your stuff. It rewards them for doing what you want them to do.

That means every piece of content you write has to either [solve a problem your audience cares about](#) or it has to [entertain them](#).

Preferably both. Everything they receive from you should make them feel good. Each piece of content is a cookie that rewards your audience for consuming it.

When you do this consistently, your content becomes an appealing habit for your readers. When they see your name in their inbox or in a retweet, they know there will be something they like on the other side. And they'll click through.

Fortunately for us, most people who try content marketing get this wrong. They train their readers to look away, by producing content that doesn't benefit readers, by putting out too much irrelevant fluff, or by overselling.

2. Position yourself for success.

Remember your mom telling you that you had to be a good friend to get lots of friends? Well if you want to find more customers, you need to be someone worth doing business with.

Yes, it's about authority, but not about being a pontificating guru who can never admit any weakness.

Some personas work much better than others for content marketing. Your audience wants a smart, cool friend who understands how stuff works.

They want someone to share experiences and lead by example. They want a [trustworthy](#) person whose word means something.

When in doubt, remember Paul Newman's axiom:

"Always take your work seriously; never take yourself seriously."

You definitely want to show that you know your stuff, but that doesn't mean your readers want a college lecture.

3. Sell smart.

Remember, you're not trying to land a sale in a single shot, like some desperate used-car dealer who wants to put you into a 1994 Pontiac Bonneville TODAY.

Instead, you're building a content net that supports this sale and many sales after this one.

Use your content to address underlying objections that might keep someone from buying. Use it to tell interesting stories about how others have benefited from your offering. Use proven persuasion techniques to show your reader just how much he or she needs your product or service.

Successful salespeople will tell you that your customer needs to know, like, and trust you before he or she will buy. That's exactly why content marketing is so effective. Great content buys you the time to build that trusting relationship, so use that time wisely.

Yes, you still want to ask for the order with a strong [call to action](#). But keep the balance right. Use your content to build desire for your product and to create an unshakeable relationship with your audience...then ask for the sale.

The point when you begin striking this balance consistently is when you can begin actually generating revenue, even profit, via content marketing.

And here's a smorgasbord of ways to do just that...

47 Creative Ways You Can Profit From Content Marketing

Maybe you think "content marketing" means having a blog that makes money. Or that it's about producing content for sites like EzineArticles and Squidoo. Or having an email autoresponder.

Content marketing is much bigger than that.

The whole idea behind content marketing is that you can use your creativity and know-how to make something cool, then take that cool thing and use it to market a product. It's often associated with Seth Godin's notion of permission marketing, but content marketing can be a part of any promotion or selling you might do.

To jog your creativity, here are 47 content marketing tactics you can start using right away. Some of these are ideas about making any form of content more interesting, some are attention-getting strategies, and some will be useful for lead generation or prospect conversion.

1. “Content” isn’t just about being online.

I had a conversation with Bill Glazer (he’s Dan Kennedy’s business partner), and he believes passionately that every business needs to send a paper newsletter to existing customers, to build loyalty and better repeat business. I don’t know about “every,” but I think he’s on to something for many businesses.

Incidentally, businesses usually find that customer newsletters work better when they don’t get too fancy in their format or printing. Four-color printing on glossy paper looks like an ad. A simple photocopy on plain paper looks like valuable inside information.

2. Utilize direct mail.

You'd be surprised at some of the well-known Internet marketing gurus who are experimenting with direct mail, especially as pay-per-click gets more and more expensive. The same techniques that make your online content marketing work will do beautifully offline.

3. Write a white paper.

Write a special report or white paper that addresses a thorny problem in an interesting way.

4. Create a free course delivered by email autoresponder.

This is a great way to build trust and rapport.

5. Publish a blog post series.

Write an educational series of blog posts designed to attract traffic for a competitive keyword phrase. (Like this one on the [fundamentals of copywriting](#), for example.)

6. Offer a free webinar.

This is a great way to build interest in your business. You can do all the talking yourself, or work with a partner in an interview format. And remember to record the class—the recording will also be valuable content that you can use in future marketing.

7. Offer a paid webinar.

Offer another teleclass that takes your content further and provides additional value. Again, the call can be recorded and sold as a product for as long as the content remains relevant.

8. Build a membership web site.

A membership site can be a profitable business in and of itself.

9. Build a Facebook page.

This is a page separate from your personal profile, and it gives you another platform for interaction with your customers.

10. Compile your best 100 blog posts into a physical book.

It worked for Godin, and it can work for you.

11. Contribute in forums.

When you contribute to an online forum in your topic, remember that your answers are content. Make sure this content reflects well on you.

12. Make your most popular blog post a video.

Take your most popular blog post, add some really good images, and translate it into PowerPoint. Then record it for a YouTube video.

13. Create mini niche sites.

Use WordPress to efficiently create these. Since you're a student of quality content, your sites will tower above the usual fare. Then, use these niche sites to sell products from affiliate marketplaces like Commission Junction, which offers "real world" products as well

as digital ones so that if you want to sell coffee, movie posters, or collectible figurines on your niche site, you can.

14. Optimize your Twitter strategy.

Most of us know that Twitter is an exceptional tool for building relationships with prospects and customers. To use Twitter most effectively, make your tweets entertaining, funny, and/or personal. The right balance on Twitter is generally 95% relationship building, 5% selling.

15. Be real.

Use any content vehicle to talk about how you've overcome a difficult problem related to your topic.

Don't try to be an infallible guru. Instead, be a smart, real person who has solved problems that your readers will find relevant.

16. Write a yellow pages ad that looks like a blog post.

Make it interesting, informative, funny, and compelling. For bonus points, in addition to the usual contact information, provide

information in your yellow pages ad about how to sign up for your email autoresponder or get your free white paper.

17. Make your podcasts an ebook.

Take your 10-15 best podcasts, get them transcribed and edited, and sell them as an ebook.

18. Host a virtual conference.

Bring 5 or 6 of the strongest people in your topic together and create a virtual conference, with each presenter giving an audio or video workshop. This is a relatively simple way to create a very

marketable product. Again, the recordings can be sold as long as the content remains relevant.

19. Hold a Tweetathon for your favorite charity.

Consider creating a piece of valuable content (a special report, etc.) as a reward for donations over some specified amount.

20. Create a treasure hunt with some blogging friends.

Each person hides a clue somewhere in the content on their blog, and readers are invited to find all the clues and put them together for a prize. (The prize, of course, is another piece of valuable content.)

21. Comment with purpose.

Your comments on other people's blogs are content. Treat them that way. Be original, relevant and interesting.

22. Use your own content to sing the praises of others in your topic.

Partnerships, both formal and informal, can exponentially multiply your success in the content world.

23. Create a buyer's guide.

Use it to frame purchasing questions on your terms. Let buyers know what to look for and what to watch out for. Tell them what questions they should be asking. But don't make this too self-serving.

If you make it real (and let other vendors win some of the business, especially for customers who aren't truly suited to you), it will get used.

24. Write an editorial for a dead-tree newspaper or magazine.

Yes, lots and lots of people still read these.

25. And if the newspaper/magazine doesn't print your editorial, buy ad space and run it as an advertorial instead.

Yes, lots and lots of people read these too.

26. Collect weird stories from sources your readers don't usually see.

If your audience is made of particle physicists, gets stories from The Enquirer. Sift through and find the metaphors and analogies in these stories that will relate back to your topic.

Quirky, oddball stories make any content more compelling. And you can't get results from content that doesn't get read.

27. Write an industry report on a hot topic.

You'll be surprised at how many high-profile folks will agree to a recorded Skype/phone interview for an industry report.

28. Be true to yourself, but show your different facets too.

If you've got a piece of content that is too weird, rude, vanilla, sentimental, R-rated, G-rated, etc., for your own site, run it as a guest post on someone else's site.

29. Use a label that resonates with your readers.

You don't have to call it a blog just because you created it in WordPress. Maybe it's an Online Coffee Shop, a Web-Based Self-Coaching Site, a Virtual Concierge, a Tutorial, an E-School, a Directory, a Dictionary, or any other compelling phrase relevant to your niche.

30. Build holiday-themed Squidoo lenses

Build a collection of Squidoo lenses that are optimized to sell goods around a particular holiday, like Halloween costumes or Christmas lights. There are a good number of these now, so find an underserved niche within those broader subjects.

31. Write a manifesto!

Have a good ranting voice and something interesting to say? Get it out in a manifesto, and then send readers to your blog or email list if they want to know more. These tend to work better if you don't require an email opt-in to receive them—the idea is to spread your ideas (and name) far and wide.

32. Review everything.

Books, blogs, newsletters, tools, physical products, information products.

33. Make an unwieldy topic manageable.

Take a topic that's subject to information overload (maybe it's "the coolest apps for your iPhone") and make it manageable. Create a

"10 Best" post that's simple, user-friendly, and gets the reader out of information fog.

34. Leverage pop culture.

Compare your product or service to the weirdest celebrity story that people are currently talking about. Look hard enough and you'll find 7 things your business has in common with Lindsey Lohan's addiction to World of Warcraft.

35. Hijack a story.

If you're stuck for content ideas, find a story on the Reddit front page that has absolutely nothing to do with you. Then rewrite the story so it does. (You might keep nothing other than the headline. That's fine. In fact, it's probably ideal.)

36. Hijack a headline.

Use headlines [swiped from popular magazines](#). Cosmo is especially effective, but anything will work if it's designed to jump off the newsstands. Like the previous tip, this works best when the magazine has nothing to do with your topic. Sonia Simone wrote one of her most [enduringly popular posts](#) using this technique.

37. Address objections.

Use your content to address every objection you've ever faced when trying to sell your product. Write interesting articles that show your product or service getting around these objections.

38. Offer a “test drive.”

Record a session with a client (with their permission, of course) and offer it as a “test drive” to people who are thinking about working with you.

39. Create a useful tool and give it away.

Create a checklist, spreadsheet-based calculator, cheat sheet, planning worksheet, etc., that can be distributed to your blog subscribers or email list. These make great “thank yous” for subscribing to your site or autoresponder.

40. Create special “gratitude content” for subscribers.

Send special subscriber-only content on days like Valentine’s Day or Thanksgiving to thank your readers for their attention and business. Try to take it beyond a simple message of thanks, and make the content itself a small gift for my readers.

41. Create a sideways sales letter.

Use a blog post series or an email autoresponder to create a [sideways sales letter](#).

42. Find a “guest author.”

Write a series or a regular column “authored” by your two-year-old, your dog, your cat, your parrot, or your guinea pig. Think it’s too cutesy to work with your audience? Try it and see.

43. Make an absurd comparison.

The farther you have to reach, the better it will work. “101 Ways LOLCats Can Improve Your Arc Welding” is just about guaranteed to capture some attention. Among arc welders, anyway.

44. Create a monthly paid newsletter.

Deliver it electronically or by physical mail, in addition to your free content. Include more detailed how-to and reference information than you would on your free site. You don’t have to sell all that many subscriptions, and they don’t have to be very pricey, to add up to significant income.

45. Make a monthly recording, either audio or using your phone camera for video.

Keep it casual, like a standing date with a friend to grab coffee together. Each month, discuss a single pressing issue facing your audience, and give three or four techniques that will let your audience thrive in whatever the current environment might be. This makes a nice add-on to a paid newsletter.

46. Produce CDs and DVDs.

If your customers aren't particularly web savvy (or sometimes even if they are), think about producing your content on CDs and DVDs. There are many businesses that can handle this for you inexpensively, and the perceived value is much higher than purely online content.

47. To come up with your own ideas, combine your most generous self with your most creative self.

Think about how to create content that makes your customers' lives better, and dream up exciting new ways to get that content in front of them.

But producing content -- no matter how creative it may be -- is only one part of the equation.

Your content must then be properly leveraged to help you acquire customers...

How to Use Content to Find Customers

So can you actually get any customers with your content? Absolutely, but not if we take the usual blogger's approach.

Money doesn't drop out of the sky just because we produce high-quality material. We need to put some time, thought, and planning into the marketing side of the content marketing equation.

And that means we need to think strategically about how different types of content contribute to the larger persuasion cycle.

Get their attention.

Earlier, we talked about the fact that every bit of content needs to be a tasty cookie that rewards your audience for consuming it.

So how can you attract a new audience to come find you? You need something bigger and more exciting than a cookie.

You need a birthday cake.

In other words, a piece of content that's exciting, that feels special and that tastes good. It doesn't hurt if it also has a [great headline](#).

Not only that, it has to show your potential audience that you know your stuff and that you solve a worthwhile problem. Otherwise they might enjoy scarfing down your content, but they won't bother coming back for more.

White papers, special reports, extended tutorials, manifestos, and viral videos all make excellent birthday cakes.

Contrary to popular belief, you do want marketing messages in your birthday cake content. But they have to be palatable, subtle messages. You're not closing sales here...the birthday cake is just the beginning of the conversation.

Raise questions. Poke around at pain points that you can address in later content. Tell stories which resolve objections, but be subtle about it. The purpose of this content is to get your audience into a receptive state of mind before they start hearing any overt sales messages from you.

Create interest and desire for what you have to offer, but don't talk too much (if at all) about how you're going to solve all your audience's problems and make their lives wonderful.

If your birthday cake is compelling enough, your audience will stick around to find those answers.

And how does your birthday cake get in front of a new audience? By being remarkable enough to share.

If it's not good enough to link to, bookmark, retweet, and email friends about, it's not good enough. Keep working on it, or partner with a content expert who can create something exceptional for you.

Convert attention to customers.

Good bloggers are fantastic at capturing attention, but sometimes we have a tough time knowing what to do with it.

The answer is to keep delivering compelling messages to our new audience, either using a blog, [an email autoresponder](#), or both.

Here's where you use content marketing fundamentals to start creating a commercial relationship.

Obviously, you still deliver terrific quality. You teach and entertain more than you sell. You use metaphor, rhythm, and vivid language to make your writing sing.

But you also use the techniques we teach at Copyblogger to create an audience of buyers, not just fans. You begin to call on your copywriting bag of tricks, adding more [persuasive](#) elements to your writing.

You're still keeping the selling under the radar at this point, especially if you're using a blog to deliver your content. At this phase, you're building your case, establishing trust, and increasing the intensity of your audience's desire.

When you're ready to take an order, send your loyal fan to a well-crafted [landing page](#). That page does the most explicit selling, with a [killer offer](#) and a clear, direct [call to action](#).

There's definitely an art to writing an effective landing page, but if you've primed your audience with a smart content strategy, the landing page doesn't have nearly as much work to do.

How to be in the “third tribe”

If you don't see yourself using the hard-sell, high-squeeze tactics of the traditional Internet marketing crowd, but you also don't want to eat Ramen noodles for the rest of your life as a “cool but broke” blogger, ignore those two tribes and join what we call the third tribe.

People in the third tribe take the best elements from hardcore Internet marketing but deliver them with the passion, personal voice, and credibility that the best bloggers have to offer.

Content marketing is the third tribe's most important tool. In fact, it's the tool that defines this tribe.

Master it, and the game is yours.

And for anyone in the third tribe, part of mastering content marketing is embracing the power of social media.

Why Content and Social Media are a Powerful Match

Creating stellar content for your marketing is great. But great content doesn't (quite) distribute itself. It needs vehicles for people to pass it along, discuss its merits, argue over its controversies, blog it, mash it, tweet it, and even scrape it.

Which is, of course, where social media comes in.

[Social media](#) didn't create content marketing, but it's an unsurpassed tool for getting it distributed. On the flip side, great content gives social media life by giving people something more interesting to talk about than what they're ordering right now at Starbucks.

Social media is the third tribe's sacred hearth.

The new breed of smart, savvy online entrepreneurs are creatures of the social web. Gathering places like forums, Twitter, and Facebook are the campfires that pull the tribe together.

Some of us have been convening around digital campfires for a long time, perhaps even before the invention of the World Wide Web.

Social media has grown so explosively because connection is probably the deepest drive we have. The campfire gives us a place to share information about the day's hunt, a forum to air out the tribe's differences, even a place for us to consider new and better ways to build campfires.

No, it's not a utopian picture. Our campfires are places for bickering and malice as much as for inspiration and community. But without a connecting place, without a central spot to bring us together for conversation, there is no tribe.

Our gathering places are never perfect. They're human. That's what makes them so extraordinary.

Great content is the third tribe's saga and story.

It doesn't matter if you're talking about the Yanomamo in the Amazon rainforest or friends at a barbecue in Teaneck, New Jersey. Anywhere people gather around fires, they're going to tell stories.

It's in the nature of the human animal to play with language to create fables and songs and nonsense to entertain ourselves with. And it's in our nature to make beautiful objects and embellish anything that will stand still long enough.

These instincts are alive today in the great writing and imagery being shared all over the Web. The impulses that make us retweet a blog post or a fantastic Flickr image are the same ones that bring a superb Navajo weaver renown across four states.

Wonderful words and beautiful images capture our attention, no matter who we are or what technology we might have at our disposal. Our impulse to create and our desire to remark on skillful creations haven't changed much since we started walking upright.

The third tribe is on the move

In addition to our passion for connection, the other remarkable human trait is adaptability.

No other animal can adapt to as many different ecosystems and environments as we can. We've built dwellings in Antarctica and in space. We've survived the Ice Age and world wars, tsunamis and earthquakes, and even Joan Rivers winning *Celebrity Apprentice*.

When the environment is stable, we get complacent. We settle into calm, selfsatisfied habits for thousands of years at a time.

But when the earth starts to shake, we wake up again: the same smart, watchful, inventive, and dangerous monkey we've always been at heart. The recent economic meltdown has been described as "economic climate change." We don't know where it's going to get unbearably hot and where the temperature will plunge to permafrost. The system is too complex to predict, except we know it's going to change and it's likely to change fast.

But some things won't change.

If we can sing a remarkable song, others will gather to hear it. And now, digital campfires connect us from Kuala Lumpur to Iceland to Dallas.

If we create content that's worthy of attention, the world will show up and talk about it. We don't know how they'll show up in 5 years (or 5 months), but we know they will.

Our jobs are to make something amazing, then use the global network of digital campfires intelligently to find the people who will love and appreciate it.

So let's go over the ten most important elements of creating an amazing content marketing strategy ...

The 10-Step Content Marketing Checklist

Everyone knows that content marketing is the "new" marketing approach that all the cool kids are supposed to be doing.

[Coca-Cola is doing it](#), IKEA is doing it, Copyblogger has been doing and talking about it for years now, so it's a no-brainer, right?

Except, uhhhh, *what is it exactly, again?*

Boiled down to its simplest form, content marketing is communicating with potential customers in a way which:

- An audience actually enjoys paying attention to, and that
- Demonstrates to that audience that you would be a good person to do business with.

Combining those two "simple" factors can be a little tricky to execute, though.

So here is a checklist to make sure you're building your content marketing on the right foundation.

Just like nutrition, parenting, and the designated hitter rule, there are passionate schools of thought that differ on some of these.

Consider this the "essential" list for you to build the foundation of a solid content marketing program on. Check these off, and you'll have the right framework to create a successful program.

1. Don't build on rented land.

Before you create a single piece of content, think about where that content will live and how audiences will get to it.

Effective content marketing takes work. You'll need energy, thought, and time to create good content — whether you create it yourself or use a capable [professional writer](#).

This means that nearly all of the content you create needs to live on a domain you control, using a platform you can do with as you please.

That will ensure that you're not producing the bulk of your creative content for Facebook, Twitter, or Google+. And you're not publishing on a "website in 20 minutes" solution that forces you to use someone else's domain.

If your domain isn't `www.YourWebsiteName.com`, you don't own your platform.

If you can't publish what you please, with the wording, sales messages, and images you please, you don't own your platform.

About 99 times out of 100, self-hosted WordPress is the right solution here.

We don't just say this just because we sell [fantastic-looking premium themes](#) or provide the best managed WordPress hosting available (although we do both). We say it because WordPress is flexible, it's robust, it's easy to find excellent developers for, and it makes life very easy for you as a content publisher.

You can absolutely use social sites like Facebook and Twitter to nurture customer relationships and get the word out about the content that you create. In fact, they can work beautifully for both purposes.

But don't build your entire business there — it's a [dangerous mistake](#) that can end up costing you hours (or years) of lost work.

2. Craft your cornerstone.

In order to create a content marketing platform (as opposed to just writing about a bunch of stuff you find interesting), you need to understand your cornerstone.

The cornerstone of your platform comes from what interests and engages your audience. If you're just starting out, you can start with what interests and engages you, then observe and adapt from there.

If your site is brand-new, start with about 10 posts that really encapsulate your fundamental beliefs and values about your topic. Think about what you would want every single reader of your site to know about.

If you've been writing for a while but your site lacks focus, look through your most popular material and pull your best stuff into a series of well- focused [content landing pages](#).

These useful pages are a great place to focus your [SEO copywriting](#) efforts, because readers love them and they naturally tend to attract links and social sharing.

3. Make your content worth reading.

This one is tricky.

We've seen marketers claim that their content is "high quality" because it contains a certain number of words, because they didn't use article-spinning software to write it, or even because they actually know something about their topic.

There's a lot of lousy, unreadable content that conforms to those three standards.

If you don't get likes and shares, if Google suddenly hates you, or if your traffic tends to bounce like a superball, you have to take a hard look at the possibility that your content just isn't as good as it needs to be.

How can you tell if your content is worth reading?

Content is worth reading if people read it. You don't decide. **Readers decide.**

That means you watch what gets the most traffic, the most links, the most social shares, and yes, the most comments.

Content worth reading usually:

- Appears under a [headline that attracts](#) and pulls in the audience, and
- Is genuinely useful, focusing on problems readers actually care about, and
- Is [formatted to engage](#) and hold attention, and
- Is at least moderately entertaining.

Leave any one of those out and you'll find that content marketing is depressingly, horrifyingly hard.

If, after a hard look, you realize that your [content sucks](#), all is not lost. Partner (now) with a writer who's great at creating terrific content, but who struggles with some element of business that you're really good at.

There is no way around this step.

You either create content worth reading (or watching, or listening to, if you're doing multimedia) or you don't. Anyone who tells you otherwise is slowing you down and will lead you to failure.

4. Give your content a secure environment.

Having your site hacked is just no fun, and it happens too often. But there is a lot you can do to protect yourself.

Make sure your web host takes security seriously. Keep your site software (WordPress or whatever other tool you might be using, including your theme and all plugins) up to date.

We have been consistently impressed with a service called [Sucuri](#) which monitors your site 24/7 and alerts you instantly if they find any malware.

They can even clean it up for you if it does happen. We use them to do "security sweeps" of existing sites before we bring them onto our hosting platform, because they do such an excellent job. (These daily sweeps plus cleanup are included in all Synthesis hosting packages.)

5. Don't give your great content an ugly place to live.

Your words might be brilliant enough to make unicorns weep, but if you put them into an ugly, amateurish, or cluttered design, your readers won't come back.

The right [premium WordPress theme](#) can give you a beautiful, professional-looking design at a very attractive price. It will provide other benefits as well, including improved security and code that doesn't get in the way of your SEO rankings.

6. Create content that attracts a wider audience.

Your "cornerstone" content will help you start to build strong relationships with the people who can eventually become your customers. Now you've got to find readers for that content ... which means you'll create content that is specifically designed to attract and widen your audience.

This is where you put all your headline-writing skills into practice. Content that attracts attention also tends to have a strong, well defined point of view.

A little controversy can be good for attracting new readers, as long as you don't fall into the [trap of seeking attention](#) for its own sake.

You'll still rely on the factors that make your content worth reading: make it useful, make it interesting, make it readable, and put a killer headline on it.

[A numbered list](#) or two wouldn't kill you either.

7. Build an email list sooner rather than later.

Content on a public website (like a blog) is fantastic for snagging attention — but to deepen the relationship, [nothing works like email](#).

The [email autoresponder](#) is a proven way to use your very best content to build prospect relationships and create an environment of trust.

Email hits readers in a more intimate way, and it tends to engage their attention more fully. When you want readers to take a specific action, send them an email.

8. Create content on a larger stage.

If you feel good about items 1-7, you're ready to start looking for a larger stage to play on.

This is where [guest posting](#) comes in.

If you have the chops to write content worth reading, and you have solid cornerstone content on your own site, you're ready for prime time.

Guest posting puts you in front of a larger audience (or sometimes, just a new audience). You can also do interviews, teleseminars, webinars, Q&A calls, or any other activity that puts you in front of more people.

Just remember to always send your new readers back to that high-quality content built on a site you control — whether that's your blog or your email list.

The smartest guest bloggers build landing pages just for these new audiences, to give fresh readers a great first experience with the site.

9. Don't go too long without making an offer.

If you're content marketing, you can't forget the marketing part.

If your content is supporting a business, make sure your audiences know exactly what that business is.

[Well-crafted landing pages](#) will explain your product or service to your audience in a way that makes it easy to buy. These landing pages will focus your prospect's attention so he or she doesn't skip around your site checking out all the goodies. And they keep the "selling" in its own designated zone, away from your primary content.

You shouldn't [be afraid to sell](#), but you don't need to be a used car salesman either.

Whatever your offer may be, make sure it's [something your audience actually wants](#) (not just what you think would be cool) and that you've delivered a clear, simple [call to action](#).

10. Go to social media ... once you've got something to talk about

Do you notice how much “how to sell something on the Internet” advice starts with getting a zillion Twitter followers or Facebook likes? That’s the kind of false shortcut that will kill your progress.

Social media audiences will start spreading the gospel about you as soon as you give them something worthwhile to talk about.

Don’t try to rush to Step 10 of the checklist when Step 3 is still giving you trouble. Just like building the foundation of a beautiful house, if you do the steps in order, you’ll have something solid that will serve you for many, many years to come.

Ultimately, that should be your objective when you set out develop and execute a content marketing strategy.

Content marketing is not a short-term game plan for immediate gains. It is a proven, long-term strategy for building an audience that builds and sustains your business.