

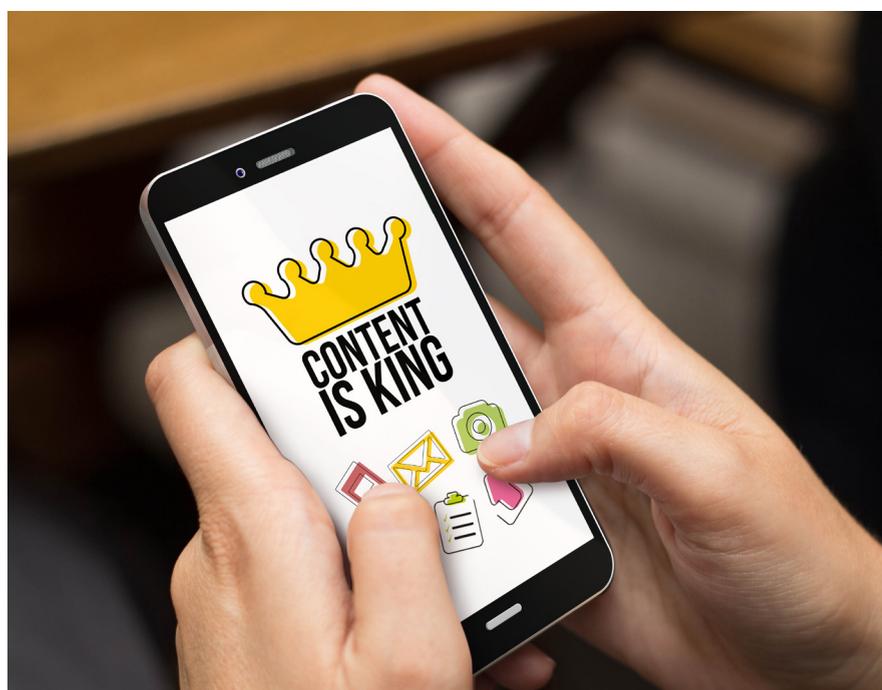
Follow these steps to generate great content that keeps readers coming back

By Jennifer Clark

Have you ever been reading an article, whether in a magazine or online about a competitor's business and thought, "Why didn't I think to write that?" Unfortunately, great content doesn't come easy, or naturally, to most. It's more than just writing a blog for your website or pushing out a Tweet or LinkedIn post. Generating content that people want to read includes resources and time that hinder many people from even trying.

Becoming an expert at content generation doesn't have to stop you before you get started, however. Whether you prefer using an editorial team or a smaller operation including freelancers, it's not impossible to be the thought leaders in your industry. But writing content, and great content at that, is a challenge for most businesses. Whether you're the owner of a small business, or the product manager at a bigger company, it's not easy to continually produce content that your customers, or potential customers, will want to read.

So, if it's not easy to do then how do you do it? Start off by thinking about what you and your business do best. What distinguishes you from your competition? If you offer a service or program that stands out, or have an exclusive product no one else can sell, think of the best ways to advertise that through a subtle sell. All too often people think of content as just a way to tout their own internal products and values, without giving much thought to the message's vehicle and the message itself. Instead, why not set yourself apart as a trusted resource for industry-related information that ultimately points people back to you?



Does your website do a good job of selling your products? If so, you probably don't need accompanying content about the physical products in, say, a newsletter. Instead, create a case study or video that shows how customers use those products in real life. Content isn't limited to something tangible you hold and read. It can also be visual. Consider telling a story of how a product might solve a common problem your customers are facing. Host a web seminar or podcast that walks users through set up or configuration. Showing your products in action, especially with real people in real scenarios, carries more weight than just touting the products' specs.

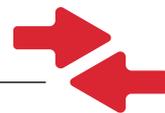
Once you have your ideas and have written the first draft, you'll want to follow this checklist. If you can't answer these questions, then it probably isn't worth publishing.

1. IS IT PROFESSIONAL? Did you have a professional writer (either in-house or a freelancer) write and edit it? There's no quicker way to ruin a reputation than with typos or poor grammar.

2. IS THE CONTENT READABLE? Hopefully after answering yes to number one, number two is a given; however, if you were unable to have something professionally written, remember what you learned in grade school. Try to use the inverted pyramid, bullets, a single font, and short paragraphs. The latter is especially useful if publishing content online, as no one wants to read long paragraphs on the internet.

3. IS THIS CONTENT USEFUL? Would someone want to send the article or email to a friend? Is it worth sharing or linking to? Will your customers learn something from it after reading?

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Although being personal and targeted helps in campaigns, try to think about a broad audience and how they may interact with your content.

4. IS IT ACTIONABLE? While most great content exists to help make you a leader among your competition and should shine a light on your industry, you still want the readers to take action. Does it link to an email or your website? Can users comment directly on the page or reply back to you personally? Think about what your readers will take away from each piece of content you create. Ultimately, your overall call to action should be for them to get in touch with you to make a sale, but it must be done with subtlety.

5. CAN PEOPLE FIND IT? There is no reason in going through the work of writing great content only to have it buried on a website that no one ever reads. If it's on a blog or somewhere

they may not stumble upon easily, make sure you promote your pieces via email pushes, social media links and front pages on your website.

6. ARE YOU USING IT TO ITS GREATEST POTENTIAL? Too often people feel that one piece of great content is just a one-time deal. But did you know you can recycle a long-form e-book into several different pieces of content? A well-written e-book will contain 10+ pages of content that can be reduced to one blog post or expanded upon to a web seminar. Further, a series of social media posts can follow any expert advice and an email that points to some of the e-book's highlights is a great way to reach out to a customer and share the rest of the content. Make sure your content is used to its fullest and you haven't spent a lot of your resources on a one-time use. Further, if you did pay a lot for an e-book to be created, you'll be able to get more for your money by expanding its uses across multiple platforms.

7. ARE YOU TRACKING THE CONTENT PIECE'S PERFORMANCE?

While you may have generated a great blog on how to configure a payment terminal, it might be a hit and you have no idea. Without any measurement or analytics, like Google analytics or social media tracking tools, you have no idea what your readers are engaging with and what they're not. If you see a trend in one topic over another, there's your direction from which to produce additional pieces. If no one is engaging with your content then you'll also have a clear-cut answer as to what NOT to do. Shooting in the dark is no longer acceptable in today's digital world thanks to the myriad tracking tools and vanity metrics that exist.

Following these tips will no doubt help you assemble content that your customers are interested in, keeps them coming back for more, and will position you as a leader in your industry. Now get out there and write! **C**

