

The 3 Pillars of Inbound Marketing

A Beginner's Guide To Online Marketing

An eBook by

Spokal



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Introduction

Did you know that over 3 billion people are on the internet today? It's true! On average, Google processes 40,000 searches per second – that's 3.5 billion searches per day!

Everyone's on it! And, these searches aren't just about browsing for funny memes, cat pictures and games to play when you're bored with 78% of users say that they use Google to research products and services!

That means people are using the internet – and the content that's on the internet – with the intention to eventually buy.

For a business, the internet is probably the most amazing marketing tool at your disposal. Never before have you been able to reach so many targeted potential clients at such scale before. It's unprecedented. It's your Yellow Pages, TV adverts, magazine ads etc. all rolled up into one.

Why?

Because unlike paid ads – you're not constrained by budget. You can earn your potential customer's eyeballs. It lets small businesses with small marketing budgets perform at levels they could only dream of before the internet came on the scene.

And the most effective, most affordable way to market yourself online is via Inbound Marketing.

“Inbound Marketing is defined as a marketing strategy where businesses implement tactics to “get found”, or as we say, “get spotted” by customers.”

Inbound marketing has been proven time and time again as the most cost efficient and effective strategies for marketing on the web.

But don't take me at my word.

- 82% of marketers who blog see positive ROI for their inbound marketing.
- 66% of consumers have made an online purchase as a result of a marketing email.

- 91% of B2B marketers and 86% of B2C marketers use content marketing
- Content marketing generates 3 times as many leads as traditional outbound marketing, but costs 62% less

The data is amazing, right?

Who wouldn't want to get in on this action! All you need to do is...

Wait.

What do you need to do, exactly? Where do you even start? Sure, you've been to Google, but there's just so many results! There's so much information! TOO much information! And a lot of it sounds so complicated. And this website says one thing, another website says another thing.

It's a bit of a mess out there.

We get it. It's frustrating. It's overwhelming.

That's exactly why we wanted to create this eBook.

We wanted to create a source of information on inbound marketing that was easy to understand, easy to put into action and, of course, that was all in one place.

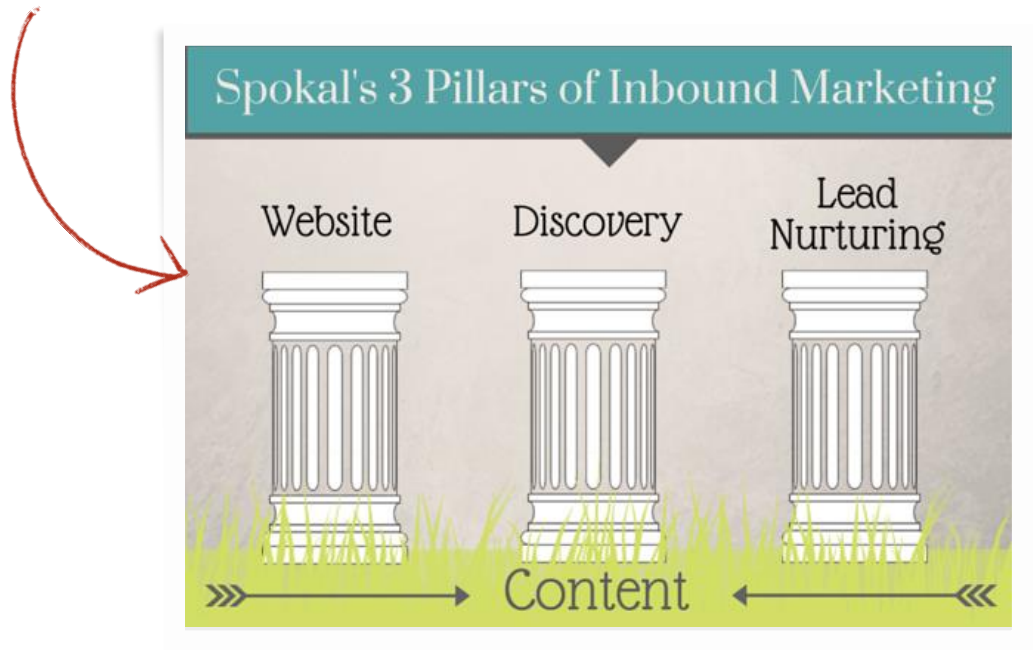
And, here you have it!

1

Introduction to Spokal's 3 Pillars of Inbound Marketing

There's a lot of information on inbound marketing out there, and a lot of it is just empty noise.

To get started you really just need a good grasp on three things: Website, discover and lead nurturing.



And what connects all of these things? Content, of course. Content is the foundation for all of these elements.

Seems simple, right? Well that's because it is.

So it's time to tune out all that other content that's been buzzing around and focus your sights on this ebook to get a really good grasp on inbound marketing so that you can start marketing your business online in no time.

1. Website

So what do we mean when we say “website”? We mean:

- On-Page SEO
- Usability
- Content

So let’s take a closer look...



What is SEO?

SEO stands for “search engine optimization”. SEO is the term used to describe a set of processes that aim in optimizing a website for search engines.

Search is the #1 driver of traffic to content sites, beating social media by more than 300%! And after you get them on your site, you get to look forward to a 14.6% close rate (as opposed to outbound’s 1.7% close rate).

So yeah, it’s important.

What does on-page SEO entail?

Well, it’s often the more technical aspects of digital marketing, such as proper URL structures, optimized internal links, title tags, keeping your website regularly up to date etc.

You know, all the fun stuff! I’m kidding, of course. On-page SEO can be super tough!

Usability

Usability also plays a huge part on your website's success with 47% of consumers expecting a web page to load in 2 seconds or less and 40% of people abandoning a website that takes 3 seconds or longer to load.

But it's not just about loading speeds, it's about an overall good user experience. How easy is it to use your website? Are your navigation buttons easy to find? Is it responsive? Does it look good and is it easy to navigate on a phone? These are important factors to consider when approaching inbound marketing – and we'll be delving right into them!

Content

You'll be hearing a lot about this. It's basically the foundation of inbound marketing, and what we mean by that it play an important role for all three pillars – website, discovery and lead generation.

Content has to be on your website. It's as simple as that. From landing pages, to blogs, to videos, to pricing pages, to “about me” sections... It's all content and it's all important. It's what makes you visible to search engines, it's what you share on social media, it's what others will link to you for, it's what makes customers aware of your business, consider purchasing with you and then – hopefully – actually purchasing with you.

It's a pretty big deal.

Actually, it's the biggest deal. But more of that later...

2. Discovery

Discovery is exactly what it says on the tin – it's about how people discover your business online. Of course, your website is one of them – which we've already discussed, but there are also external factors such as:

- Social media
- Relationship building
- Search
- Paid Advertising



Social Media

Social media is huge nowadays. 74% of all internet users are on at least one social media network – and that figure skyrockets to 89% when we're looking at the 18 – 29 age group.

So again we find ourselves returning to the age-old idea that we should be marketing where our audience is – and they're on social media. And, to make things even better, they want you there too! 95% of millennials said they expected every brand to be at least on Facebook.

But why do people want to follow your business on social media?

- 52% are following you for discounts.
- 36% are following you to stay up to date with your business
- 22.7% are following you for interesting or entertaining content

So yeah... it's important.

Relationship Building

Relationship building? Don't you mean link building? Kind of. Let me explain.

Link building “is the process of exchanging links with other Web sites to increase your own site’s backlinks and quality backlinks”.

But, as with anything that works, link building quickly became used and abused by marketers, which annoyed internet users, who then alerted Google to the problem, who then updated their algorithms so that they could spot unnatural links and penalize inauthentic and spammy link building practices.

All these changes made the internet a better place for us all.

But links are still considered “votes” for popularity and importance, so marketers still had to focus on getting links to their sites! And that’s when we began to differentiate what the difference between spammy “link building” and authentic “relationship building”.

Relationship building works towards gaining all the same benefits of link building (i.e. backlinks) but through an organic practice of creating relationships with popular websites in your industry. Once you get to know each other, the idea is that you can then work together for each other’s mutual benefit, either through collaborations, guest posts, or simply by linking back to your website because you created content that added value to their audience.

Search

93% of all online experiences start with a search engine.

Search engines are powerful sources of information in today’s world. It’s where we go to get answers to our questions, to find out more about a topic we’re interested in, or to research a product that we want and/or need.

It’s the number 1 driver of traffic to websites, and beats traffic from social media by more than 300%. Moreover, leads who have found your business through search

engines have a 14.6% close rate, that's in comparison to outbound leads' 1.7% close rate.

But to be found through search engines, you have to be visible – and that means ranking high in the search engine results pages (SERPs) because 75% of users never scroll past the first page of search results.

But how do you get found through search engines? Content. Content. Content. Of course, there are factors that take place with regards to your content that plays a huge role in how well it will rank, for example user signals (bounce rates, CTRs etc), social signals (likes, +1s etc) and relevant terms.

Paid Advertising

Paid advertising is the more traditional advertising that we've seen before the digital age. It is, of course, rented traffic. Which simply means that once the ads (and money) stop flowing, the audience stops coming.

Still, if you have the funds, paid advertising does work quite effectively with 64.6% of people click on Google Ads when they are looking to buy an item online!

In particular, we'll be discussing:

- Display Ads/Banner Ads, Text Ads
- Google Adwords
- Alternative places to advertise: Facebook, LinkedIn – Bing/Yahoo – StumbleUpon

We'll also take this opportunity to discuss landing pages in relation to paid advertisement, but also in relation to other marketing initiatives.

A Note on Off-Page SEO

Social media signals, search and relationship building are considered “off-page SEO” (as opposed to the on-page SEO which we mentioned in our “website” section).

Off page SEO refers to techniques that can be used to improve the position of a web site in the search engine results page (SERPs). Many people associate off-page SEO with link building but it is not only that. In general, off Page SEO has to do with promotion methods – beyond website design –for the purpose of ranking a website higher in the search results.

Off-page SEO has a huge impact on the success of your website, so we’ll be diving deep into what you can do to get your social media, search and relationship building game on.

Paid advertisement doesn’t affect how you rank in search engine results, so it’s not SEO. However, it can drive traffic by the very nature of advertisement – i.e. to get in front of eyeballs – so it’s considered a part of the discovery process.

3. Lead Nurturing

Creating great content, having a stellar website, building relationships, working on your social media distribution are all factors that work to generate interest or leads in your business. But at what point does this interest become profitable?

Lead nurturing is all about taking your leads, and turning them into paying customers. To put it bluntly: Lead nurturing is where the money comes in.



In this section we'll be discussing:

- Strategies To Get Them From Browsing To Buying
- The Art of Effective Calls-to-Action (CTAs)
- Email Marketing (MSPs, list building, segmentation, email layout)
- From Browsing To Buying

Not everyone that comes to your website is going to be ready to buy. In fact, approximately 96% of visitors that come to your website aren't! But... they are looking for information.

And if they like what they see, they might want some more. And some more. And some more...

The idea is that if you create relevant/entertaining/educational content, your leads will be kept interested in your business, while also growing their knowledge of your product/service/industry so when they are ready to buy, you'll be at the top of their minds.

Of course, this also means that your leads are all at different stages of the buying cycle with some just discovering you now and others having known about you for a while.

There are 3 main stages of the buying cycle: Awareness, consideration and purchase.

Your website and discovery do a lot of work on building awareness and consideration, but it's through your lead nurturing campaigns that you can really help your leads move through the cycles efficiently.

A large part of lead nurturing is creating the right kind content, for the right kind of lead that's targeted at them at just the right time. You don't offer someone a burger directly after they've eaten one, do you? But offering them an ice-cream for dessert makes perfect sense! It's all about timing.

But how do you know if your prospective customer has eaten a burger yet? Have they even looked at the menu? Are they actually really looking for a kebab instead and just stumbled on your restaurant by accident? In other words: how do we know where our leads are in the buying cycle?

Lead scoring

Lead scoring is a strategy where you use your leads information in order to alert you to what stage of the buying cycle that they're in, so that you can send them targeted messages.

In this chapter we'll discuss how you can score your leads, and send them targeted relevant content that will encourage them through the buying cycle.

The Art of Effective Calls-to-Action (CTAs)

CTAs are a battle ground between you and your prospective customer. The right CTA will encourage people to take action, but the wrong one could push them away for good.

We'll run through how you can create effective CTAs using language, colors, formats and placement. We'll then talk about the different types of CTAs, which ones are effective for what, and how to A/B test your CTAs so you're getting the most of your website traffic. We'll then discuss strategies that get your readers to opt-in: Ask, trick or force? We'll run through each of them so you can decide what works best for you!

Email Marketing

There's this ugly rumor going around that email marketing is dead, when the fact is that 74% of consumers prefer to receive marketing messages via email. Email marketing is a pretty big deal, and it's consistently proven to bring in a substantial portion of a business's ROI.

Well, with a mail service provider (MSP) of course. There are plenty of MSPs that will help you nurture your leads by sending them well-crafted and well-timed emails, and we'll run through some of the top providers with you.

We'll also look at list building and different tactics to get your list growing.

And then we'll dive more into how to best segment your email lists so that you're sending targeted messages to your leads as they're working their way through the buying cycle.

And, as always, image is everything. How you layout and design your emails is really important so we'll go through some email layout best practices with you too!

2

Content Marketing: The Lifeline of Your Online Business

You've probably heard the term "content is king" before, right? Well, it might be bit cliché, but I've yet to see anyone adequately disprove it. Sure, you might have people claiming that content is no longer king, and say... quality is. But how, may I ask, can one have quality content without, well... content?

The only way people will ever look at your website, is if there's content on it. The only way people can discover you on social media, search engines, advertisements etc., is through content. The only way you can nurture leads, is through content.

You see what I'm getting at here?

Content is the lifeline of your online business. Without content marketing, there is no inbound marketing. It's an absolutely necessary subset of inbound marketing.

The good news is, the barrier of entry into who can create content is pretty low. As long as you can put pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard – you can create content. But the bad news is, content marketing isn't easy. It takes perseverance, hard work, consistency and innovation (as well as a whole bunch of other things too!)

But I'm not here to tell you it's going to be easy, I'm here to tell you it's going to be worth it.

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action

– Content Marketing Institute

The key here is the words to describe the content that you're creating: Valuable, relevant and consistent. While content can come in a few shapes and sizes, from blogs, to webinars, to video marketing etc. it's consistency, relevancy and value that always stays the same.

An effective content marketing strategy will help a business engage with its customers through their content, leaving them better informed and interested to find out more.

But most importantly: Content marketing is not a direct sales tactic.

Instead, it's useful to think of it as a way of opening up communication between a business and its target audience. Content marketing is a way to grow your target audience's understanding of your industry by educating, entertaining and engaging with them through the creation of awesome content.

Is Content Marketing Effective?

I'm going to let the facts speak for themselves on this one.

- Companies with an active blog generate 67% more leads per month.
- 9/10 marketing officers believe that customer content has a positive effect on audience attitudes, strengthening the bond with customers.
- Using inbound tactics saves an average of 13% in overall cost per lead.

- Brands relying on inbound marketing save over \$14 dollars for every new customer acquired.
- Adopting an inbound strategy doubles average website conversion rates, from 6% to 12%.

Why Does Content Marketing Work?

We've established that content marketing works, but now we need to figure out why it works. Why don't we use more traditional methods, such as outbound marketing, instead?

Well, for one: Traditional marketing just doesn't work that well online. Organic search leads (that's people who find your website from search engines) have a 14.6% close rate. Outbound marketing leads close 1.7% of the time.

And, secondly: People just don't want to be sold to. 80% of users ignore paid ads, focusing instead on the organic results.

These statistics send a pretty loud message: Internet users don't want to be sold to. In fact, 73% of people prefer to get information about an organization through a series of articles rather than in a traditional advertisement.

Moreover, approximately 96% of visitors that come to your website are not ready to buy. They want to take their time, research a product/service, look at the competitors, read your content etc. before they make any purchasing decisions with you.

On the web, the power is in the user's hands.

And that means, what the users want, the users get and it's our jobs as content marketers to give them exactly what they want – relevant, consistent and engaging content!

5 Challenges of Content Marketing

So, let's say you're convinced. You want to start content marketing – you understand that it's hard work, but you get know that it'll be worth the investment. Great!

But is it really that simple?

Nope.

Content marketing is far from simple, and often marketers and business owners are discouraged by their lack of instant success. Content marketing is not a quick fix. It takes time to grow, but once it does, it will keep growing and growing and growing.

Rand Fishkin, the Founder and Wizard of Moz, explained “Why Content Marketing Fails” as being 1 of 5 of following reasons:



1. Content Marketing Is Hard

The biggest – and most misleading – marketing myth out there is that content marketing is easy. That all you have to do is create content, publish it and sit back and wait for the customers to come flooding in.

And while this might happen for the lucky 0.1%, the chances are it won't happen for you.

Content marketing is a much more organic process that grows when nurtured and tended to. It takes time to get the ball rolling, and perseverance to push through the slumps when it doesn't seem that the ball is going anywhere, but once it starts to move – you'll find that the organic reach that you have is incredibly powerful and growth will continue steadily.

But it doesn't come free. You have to consistently be creating relevant content you're your audience genuinely find useful and engaging. And this isn't as simple as it seems.

Today, humans create as much information in 2 days, as we did in the entire time before 2003. We have a ton of information out there, how are you going to stand out from the crowd?

Don't worry – we're not going to leave you hanging like that! In the next chapter we'll be diving deeper into how you can create amazing content that people love.

2. Your Content Marketing Doesn't Have A Community

When you create content, you're creating it for a specific community to engage with. Or, at least, that's what you should be doing.

Your content should be created with the objective to start conversations, to encourage dialogue, to get debates rolling – in other words, to nurture a community of like-minded people!

If you don't create content with your particular community in mind, or too broad a community in mind, you won't garner the same kind of traffic and attention from your

content as you had hoped. You need a community to support your efforts, to engage with your content and to add real value to your industry.

3. You Didn't **AMPLIFY** Your Content

Great content simply isn't enough, you need to make sure that it gets read by the right people. You have to work to promote your content too.

According to Rand, most amplification falls into three categories:

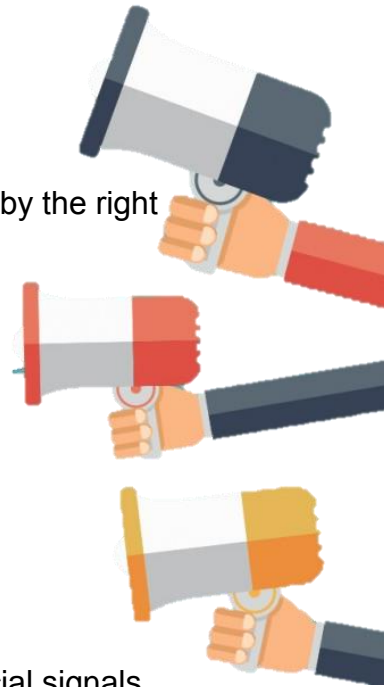
- Broadcast: Social Media, Email, Events, etc.
- 1:1 Outreach: Social, Email, In-person, etc.
- Paid Promotion: Promoted or boosted posts, Advertising, etc.

Social is a powerful thing.

The most recent Searchmetrics' Correlation (2014) study revealed that social signals actually affect your content's visibility in search results. Meaning: Google actually looks at data from social sharing, and considers it to be a signal that a particular piece of content was good, and therefore it will give pieces of content that are popular on social media better rankings.

Similarly, you'll see that the study found that backlinks

Each of these promotion strategies can be employed to some extent by your business in order to help you content marketing be successful, but we'll be diving into more detail in subsequent chapters.



4. SEO Is NOT Dead.

Another dangerous myth is that SEO is dead. It's not. On average, Google processes 40,000 searches per second – that's 3.5 billion searches per day! I don't know about you, but that's a pretty strong indication that search engine optimization is still pretty significant.

SEO can bring strong, relevant traffic to your content and your business. The Searchmetrics' Correlation 2014 study actually showed that user signals such as how long a person stayed on a page, and how frequently they clicked through (CTRs) has a huge impact on how well your content ranks in search engines.

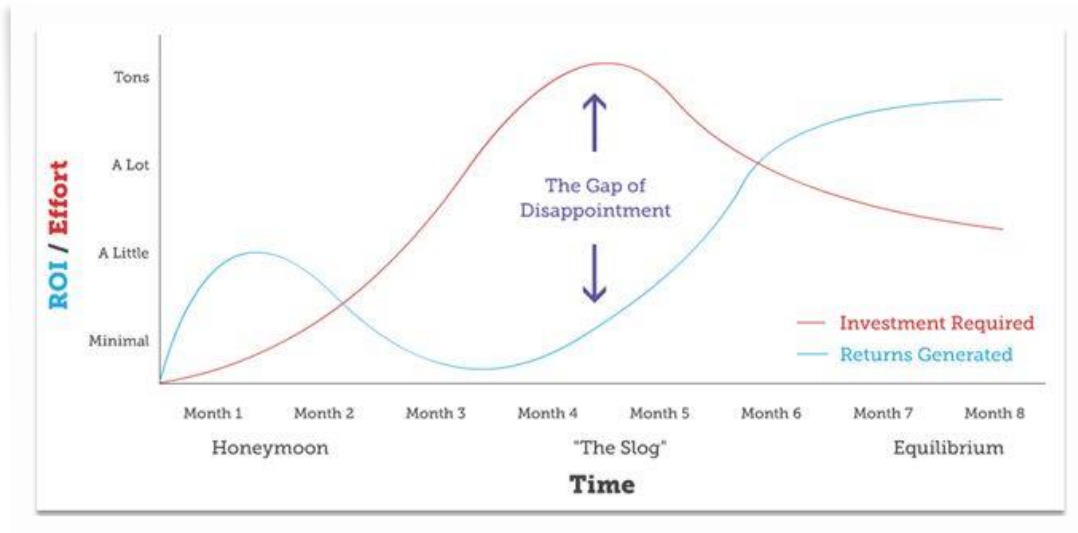
Rand also goes on to talk about why SEO is so important in terms of user intent. When an internet user is searching for something through a Google query, they're much more likely to be more actively looking to take action and "do things". When an internet user is on social media, they're more likely to just be browsing.



5. Content Marketing Takes Time

It takes time for you to create enough awesome content on a topic so that Google knows that you're an expert, so it takes time for you to become relevant in search results when someone is looking for something you do or sell.

Scott Clark from BuzzMaven and Rand Fishkin describe this as "[Surviving The SEO Slog](#)".



There is a 4-6 months period where you might not see much ROI, even though you're putting a lot into your content marketing. That's OK. As long as you persevere (and keep creating amazing content!), your numbers will start to climb again.

Conclusion

Content marketing is a fundamentally important part of inbound marketing, in fact, without it, there can be no inbound marketing strategy.

However, while creating content may sound easy, the reality is that it's not. Content marketing takes time, energy and hard work. But the good news is that the end result is long-term success for your business online!

3

The 8 Key Factors in Creating Great Content

Why Are We Creating Great Content?

One of the biggest challenges that content marketers and small business owners who are committed to inbound marketing face is being *heard*. The internet has become a noisy place full of mediocre (and often downright crappy) content. There are nearly Facebook users share nearly 2.5 million pieces of content a minute, and 500 million Tweets a day.

To stand out from the crowd, business owners and marketers have to create something that is genuinely remarkable. It has to be something that people find useful, relevant, entertaining and unique.

Creating great content helps business owners and marketers to stand out from the crowd and be heard.

What Defines “Great” Content?

It’s easy for us to tell you to create “great” content, but what does that even mean? What’s “great” to one person, is just “mediocre” to another.

So let’s steer away from the subjective terms and get objective.

Very generally, great content is content that your target audiences *genuinely loves*.

Which means that it can vary widely. However, the consistent signs of great content are summed up in 8 factors:

1. Originality
2. Interesting and Informative Headlines
3. Long-tail keywords
4. User-relevant
5. Trustworthy
6. Visual
7. In-depth
8. Entertaining and/or Educational

I know. It sounds like a lot.

But the reality is that you don't have to – and most likely *won't* – start out with “great content”.

You'll start out with good content. You'll start out by providing answers to question people have, by creating content that useful and will work, by entertaining and engaging your readers – and that's as easy as looking at your support emails, blog comments and social media. (Feel free to skip to the end of this chapter for how to come up with blog post ideas!)

Very few people begin their content marketing journey with great content.

It's the good content that will get you on your way to great content.

And then, once you've established yourself as useful (or entertaining... or both!) and you've gotten into the swing of things, you'll start to develop your content and begin to focus on making it great.

And even then, not every piece of content you create will have each and every box ticked. That's a reality. But the idea is that we're always *striving* towards this end goal.

Remember, the true key to creating great content is *perseverance*.

And a little bit of luck, too.

The 8 Key Factors of Great Content: Explained

If you can master these 8 keys to great content, you'll be well on your way to mastering content marketing.

1. Originality

With humans creating as much information in 2 days, as we did in the entire time before 2003, originality has become more important than ever for businesses who want to stand out from the crowd.

Creating original content has 2 main benefits:

1. It will make you a valuable source of information that your readers can't find anywhere else.
2. Search engines love it. Google has made it clear that they do not like and will penalize sites with duplicate content. And to make it even more appealing, Google actually *rewards* original content too.

2. Catchy *But* SEO-Friendly Headlines

Your headline is the first, and often the *only*, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a compelling headline to entice your audience into reading the rest of the content, your accompanying text is pointless – *no matter how good it is*.

But it's not as easy as creating catchy headlines and crappy content – That's called click-bait and people *hate* it.

Instead, there's a very fine balance where we create informative headlines (that contain your keywords), but also ignites curiosity in your readers.

Creating the perfect headline isn't each, and can't be easily covered in a chapter of an ebook. To learn how to create headlines that will get people reading your content, head on over to ["If You Only Read One Post About Headlines, Read This One"](#) to get an in-depth look at how to create amazing headlines that get your posts read.

3. Keywords or “Long-Tail” Keyphrases

I know, I know – you want to write for humans, not for search engines.

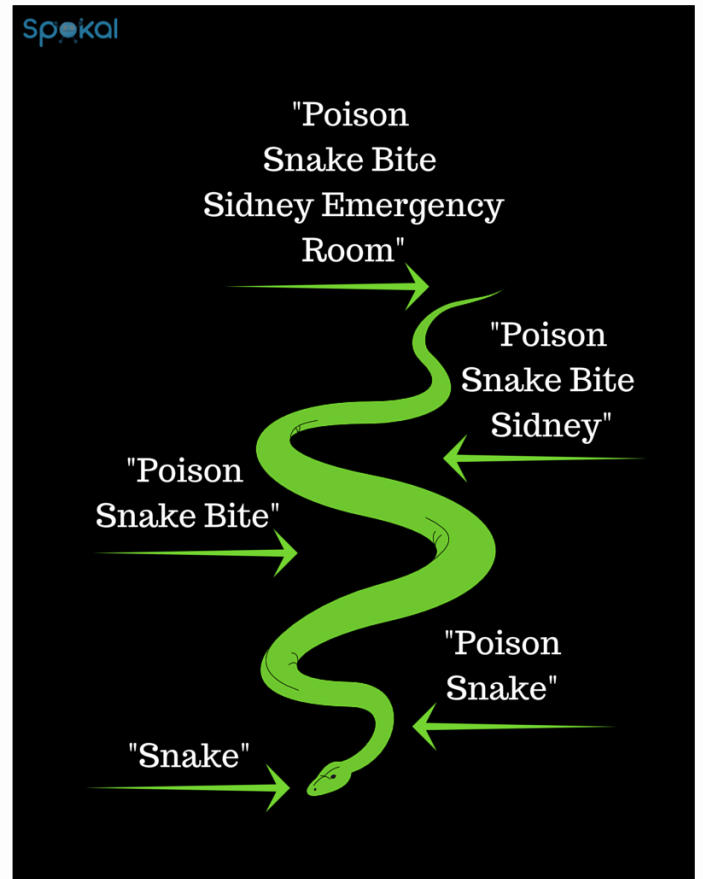
But here's the thing: Keywords, when used intelligently, *are* for humans.

- Keywords allow for humans to *find* relevant content. Search engines simply mediate between your content and internet users to ensure that the end-user is presented with the best content possible. In the end, search engines are only a tool to facilitate humans.
- Keyword research allows for us to understand what terms our target audience are searching for. It allows for us to create more relevant and targeted content that we *know* our audiences want to read.

Obviously, the more general your search term, the more often it's searched for. But the problem with general popular search terms is that they actually only make up less than 30% of all search terms.

The other 70% is called the “long tail” of search. The long tail keyword contains hundreds of millions of *unique* searches that might be conducted only a few times in any given day.

Moreover, research has shown that the more *specific* and long-tail the keyword that someone uses, the more likely they are to actually buy. To better illustrate this, let's look at the explanation that was first explained in Jennifer Grappone's book, “Search Engine Optimization – An Hour a Day”.



In this example, a snake is used to illustrate the difference of psychology with relation to keywords.

- Further down we have the keywords “**poison snake**”
- Then about half way down we have “**poison snake bite**”
- The further down we have “**poison snake bite Sidney**”
- And at the end of the tail we have “**poison snake bite Sidney emergency room**”

Now think about what's going through the mindset of each person who's making each query. The keyword “snake” is general, and could just be someone curious about learning more about snakes. It could even be a kid doing some research! There's going to be tons of information, and they won't have to pay a dime for it.

The same happens for the second keyword “poison snake”, this still could very well be research for a project. But things start to change the further down the analogy we get, and the more specific (and long-tail) with the keywords we use. “Poison snake bite” could be about research, sure – but it’s much more likely that the person is looking for a diagnosis, or for a treatment kit. Here we’ve moved from the general idea of a “snake” to something much more specific that indicates a more urgent need. Finally, at the last keyword “poison snake bite Sidney emergency room,” we know that it’s very likely that someone needs help *right now*. They’re ready to act.

The same can be applied to your keywords. The more specific and long-tail they are, the more likely you are to attract high-quality readers (who want to *act*) to your website.

Moreover, there’s far less competition for these keywords, so you’re more likely to rank highly for them.

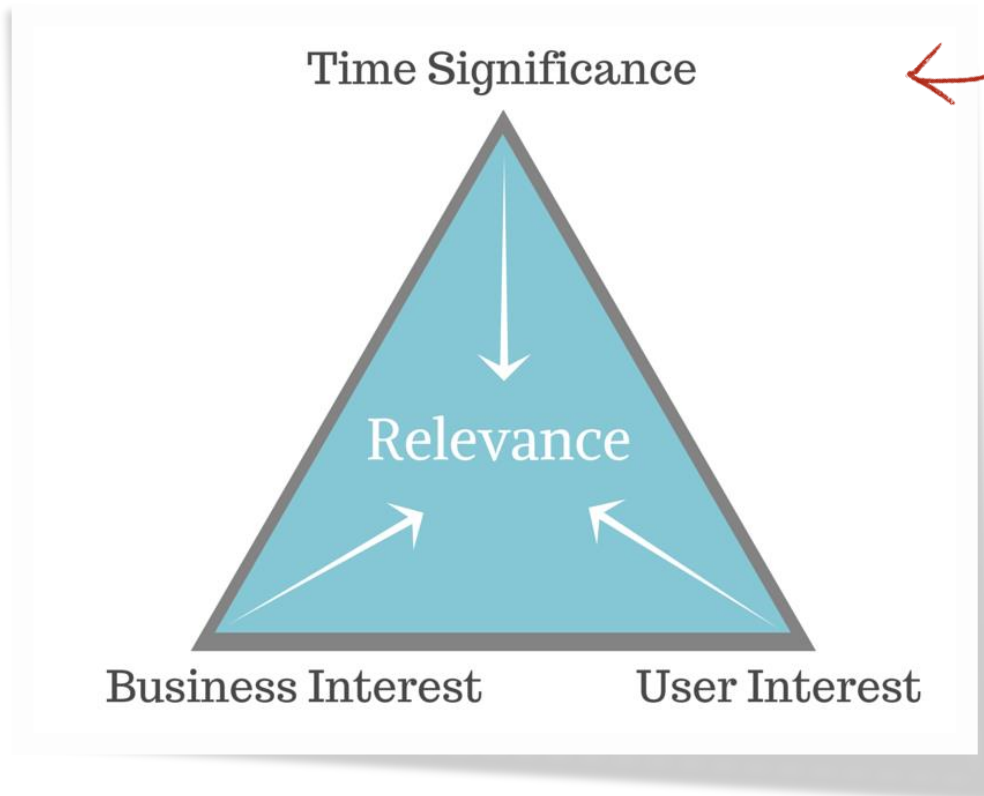
For keyword research, Google’s [Keyword Planner Tool](#) is the most popular starting point. It not only suggests keywords and provides estimated search volume, but also predicts the cost of running paid campaigns for these terms.

Remember: You’re looking for keywords that are commonly searched for, but whose competition is low – which means that people are looking for content on those keywords, but what’s available isn’t great. This is the optimal opportunity for you to create content that will rank highly in search engines.

4. User-Relevant

What do your users really want? What do they like? What do they find interesting? What do they hate?

Not sure what's relevant? Angie Schottmulle discusses the Triangle of Relevance where three factors – business interest, user interest, and time significance – are aligned in order to create content that's highly relevant.



5. Trustworthy

Thanks to journalism, we understand the importance in fact-checking and sourcing your information, and the terrible downfall of Steven Glass has been used as a warning for many against falsifying information and fudging facts.

When you fact-check, and link to reliable sources, you also build a relationship with your audience based on trust – the strongest and most powerful tool that you can have at your disposal.

So don't be afraid to look critically at your sources. Are they from trusted and authoritative sites? Are they accurate? Are they recent?

6. Effective Use of Visuals

Visuals are a fantastic way to catch your audience's attention and encourage engagement. Posts with visuals receive 94% more page visits and engagement than those without.

But they're not just for decoration either.

65% of people are said to be visual learners, so adding visual components to your content actually makes it easier for people to understand.

More Resources on Visuals For Content Marketing:

- [The Ultimate Guide To Sourcing Free Images For Your Blog](#)
- [How To Easily Create Beautiful DIY Visuals That Will Get You Noticed](#)

7. Go Deep, Not Wide

Just like with keywords, general isn't as effective as specific.

Generalizations are everywhere on the net, but that content very rarely produces leads and customers.

Instead of creating content that talks very generally about a subject, try to dig a bit deeper. If you provide your target audience with in-depth and well-research articles, you're providing them with information that they don't see and can't find elsewhere.

For examples of how to go deep, instead of wide, have a look at [Brian Dean from Backlinko](#). His pieces are always well researched and provide extensive information, details and instructions which makes his content invaluable to his readers.

8. Be Entertaining and/or Educational

Last, but definitely not least, is the tone of your content. The reasons people read content can be summed up in 2 words: Education and/or entertainment. Meaning: Your content has to be informational/educational *and/or* entertaining for it to be of any value to your readers.

Actionable Content

Actionable content falls firmly in the “educational” category. Actionable content is most clearly illustrated through how-to posts. These posts are instructional in nature, and usually provide a step-by-step rundown of information.

If you can also be entertaining while creating actionable content, all the better!

Answers To Questions

Are there certain questions that pop up with regarding your industry frequently? Creating content that answers these questions is an excellent way to provide value to your customer’s lives.

Again, if you can be entertaining as well – great!

Engaging and Thought Provoking

Do you have an unusual point of view on a certain topic? Can you weigh in on a relevant debate? Do you have experiences that might be contrary to popular opinion? Or a completely unique idea that hasn’t been considered before?

How To Generate Great Content Ideas

So you know what makes great content, but now you have to generate some great content *ideas* and you might be feeling a little overwhelmed.

Not to worry, we've some tips and tricks to get you kick started.

Brainstorm Challenge

Want to get a lot of ideas *quickly*? Why not try our [100 Blog Post Ideas in 30 Minutes Challenge](#). It's effective, it's quick, it's... well, kind of terrifying. We've had a few readers come back to us after trying it out confessing that they were sweating and shaking all the way through!

But...

No one's ever been dissatisfied with the results.

Are you up for it?

Look At What Posts Perform Best

If you already have a blog, look back at what posts perform the best. These are the posts that your audience loves from you, so ask yourself: Is there anything else you can add to the topic? Are you a definitive source of informative regarding this topic? Are there any updates you can add to it?

Kevy creates content that caters around keywords that people already use to find them. By doing this, they're making sure that they dominate search engines with regards these keywords, making them the ultimate experts.

Look At What Questions That Your Customers Always Ask

If you're receiving repeat questions about a certain topic, then the chances are it can do with some content that can utilize a resource for your audience. Remember, if 1 person asks a question, there are probably 100 more out there with the same question.

Have a look through your live chat, emails and phone calls etc. to look at frequently asked questions that are raised by your customers / leads.

According to Brooke Beach of [Kevy](#), using live chat has been an amazing source of inspiration for their content strategy:

“Having live chat on our site has been an unexpected but pivotal part of our content strategy. We can look at each interaction and see if a particular page is causing a lot of people to speak up. If they are, very often it's because the content on that page isn't clear.”

Conclusion

Creating great content is a challenging endeavor, and you won't always produce it. However, if you manage to create consistent content, all the while keeping these 8 key factors in creating great content in mind, you will create something amazing.

Stay tuned for next Tuesday where we'll be talking about Website Usability & On-Page SEO!

4

A Guide to Website Usability and On-Page SEO

At first glance, you might think that usability and on-page SEO (Search Engine Optimization) seem like 2 completely different topics.

- SEO is about discovery – getting people to your website to begin with by making sure it shows up in search engines.
- Usability is about people's behavior and how people are able to interact with your site once they're on it.

And while the two are separate and distinct topics indeed, they also see a lot of overlap.

So how do they 2 topics relate to each other?

Search engines, despite their best efforts, can't understand the value (or sometimes the lack thereof) of text the same way that humans can, watch videos or view images, so they are forced to use other signals in order to gage a site's worthiness and rank them accordingly. These signals come in the form of meta information (no, not necessarily meta tags) about how people relate to sites and pages. This information can then be used by search engines as an insight over the quality of the pages.

For example, if you're searching for "dinosaur bones" and come across a site that's slow to load, doesn't have any real data or information on dinosaurs, or dinosaur bones, and is hard to navigate – then you'll probably quickly leave and move on to another site. It's not valuable to you, and search engines pick up on that information.

Of course, it's not quite this simple, but the general principle stands.

Search engines strive towards improving their performance by providing the best results possible for its users. To do this, they look for information on what kind of pages and sites most satisfy their searchers needs. This information includes:

- Pages and sites that are easy to navigate, use and understand
- Content that provides direct, actionable information relevant to the query
- Content that's high quality, relevant and credible

Having great SEO but lousy usability means that you'll get lots of traffic, but the visitors won't turn into customers. Conversely, a site with great usability but lousy SEO simply won't get many visitors, so it doesn't really matter how good it is.

So it's suffice to say that usability and on-page SEO often intertwine, overlap and affect each other in many ways.

Create Content That Can Be Indexed

Like we said, search engine bots still can't read text, images or movies – so you need to provide them with the same information (or close to) in the form of HTML text formats. There are more advanced methods, but HTML text formats are the easiest ways.

Alt Text For Images

When using images in gif, png or jpg format, you can add “alt attributes” that can be used as a description of the visual content for search engines. This is actually more important for usability than it is for SEO – try surfing the web with a browser for the blind – they're dependent on things like alt tags.

Provide Transcripts for Video & Audio Content

If the video and audio content is relevant to your website, then providing a transcript of the content will mean that the search engines can index it.

If you want to see what your site looks like to search engine bots, simply type the following link into your navigation bar (replace the `http://example.com/` with whatever site you actually want to look at):

`http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://example.com/`

Providing alt text and transcripts for visual content also has the added benefit of being inclusive for those who are visually impaired and rely heavily on textual narrators.

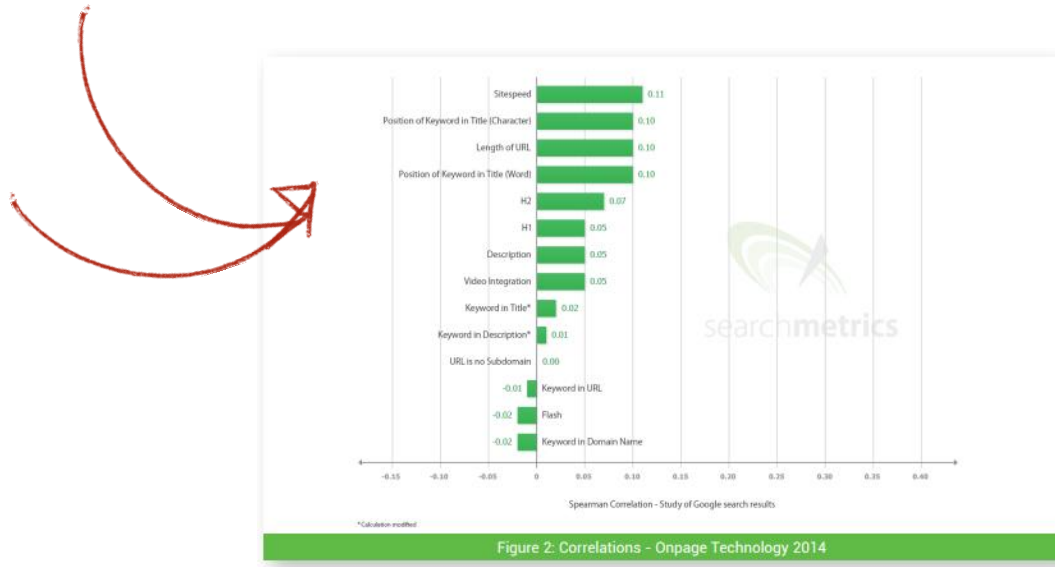
Header Tags

After you've ensured that your content can be indexed, it's then important to ensure that you're utilizing header tags so both search engines and humans can easily understand what your content mainly concerns.

Header tags are made up 6 groups: `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>`, `<h4>`, `<h5>` and `<h6>` tags. The numbers equate their importance, with the first tags such as `<h1>` being the most and the last, such as `<h6>` being the least important. The 2014 Searchmetrics Correlation Study has shown that search engines put a greater importance on words that appear between the higher tags, such as `<h1>` and `<h2 >` tags than they do on words between `<h3>` tags and lower.

Keywords in Header Tags

Whether or not you put keywords in your header tag or URL isn't as important as it used to be. However, Searchmetrics states that "the presence of keywords in the Title, the Description and in H1 and H2 tags is still best-practice, but should not be over-optimized".



Meta Description

Your meta description should also contain your keywords.

The meta description tag is as a short description of a page's content. While search engines don't actually use keywords in these descriptions to help with ranking, they are the primary source the snippet of text that is displayed beneath a listing in the results.



The meta description works as a kind of advertising copy that draws readers into your site from the results. It is an extremely important part of search marketing and shouldn't be underestimated. When creating a compelling description for your website, don't forget to use important keywords – which you'll notice Google highlights in bold. A good meta description can have an impact on how many searchers end up clicking through to your website.

Another thing to note is that meta descriptions can be any length, but search engines generally will cut snippets longer than 160 characters, so it's generally wise to stay within in these limits.

If there aren't any meta descriptions available, search engines use other elements of the page to create a snippet. (They may do this anyways, even if the description exists)

Proper URL Structures

Another important aspect that concerns both on-page SEO and usability is proper URL structures.

There are 2 types of URL structures: Dynamic and static.

Static URL:

www.example.com/blog/dog-walking

Dynamic URL:

www.example.com/?p=578544

As you can see, dynamic URLs lack any kind of keywords or semblance of meaning for humans (and search bots too). Search engines prefer static URLs, and they're typically ranked faster than dynamic ones.

Best Practices For URL Structures

Semantics

Proper URL structures should make sense when the human eye looks on it. For example, “www.example.com/blog/dog-walking” is an example of a URL structure that makes sense to the human eye – we know that the URL should bring us to a blog that has content on dog walking available. However, “www.example.com/?p=578544” tells us nothing.

Having a clear URL is helpful to both humans and search engines.

Hyphens

Use hyphens to separate words instead of underscores. Search engines read dashes as a way to separate words, but underscores to be the same word, so `dog_walking` will read as `dogwalking` to a search engine.

However, you should also not overuse hyphens as URLs with excessive hyphens often seen as spammy.

Length

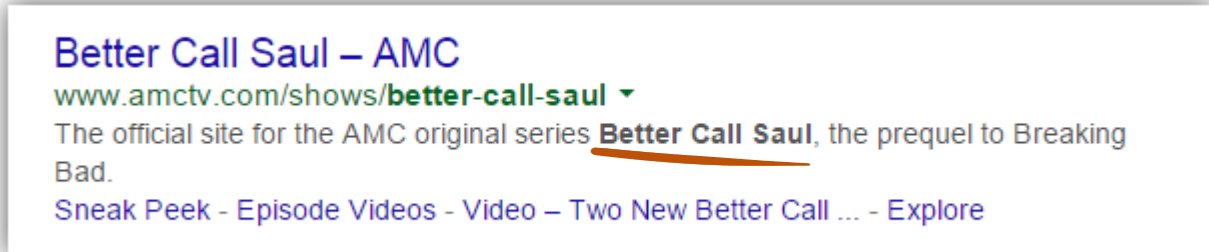
According to Searchmetrics most recent correlation study, the top 10 average URL length is only 36 long, signifying that simplicity is key.

Relevant URLs

The other benefit of having a semantically correct URL, is that webmasters are more likely to get search engine-referred traffic due to the keywords in the URL. These, like title tags, are used for determining relevancy and computing rankings.

Keywords in URLs

Google doesn't put much (if any) weight on keywords in URLs, however they do serve as a purpose with relation to usability and searcher interaction. As you can see from the example below, keywords in URLs are highlighted in bold which may encourage higher click-through-rates, which then also improves search engine rankings.



Optimized internal links

Optimizing internal links is a commonly overlooked SEO (and usability) factor. While internal links are often considered as less important than external links (depending on who you ask), they are still a very important part of search engine algorithms and user experience.

As the Searchmetrics 2014 Correlation study states:

The pages in the top search positions have comparatively more internal links than pages further down the rankings

Links, and the effects they have on search rankings, are easiest to understand when you consider links as a kind of "vote". For example, if Page X links to Page Y, then Page

X is “voting” that Page Y is relevant to the words are used in the link text that connects the 2 pages.

However, not all votes are equal.

The strength of a link or “vote” is determined by a variety of factors, which includes – but is not limited to – how trustworthy the website that’s linking is, and how relevant Page X is to Page Y.

Just like with any voting system, the more votes a page gets, the better chances it has to rank for keywords that’s relevant to it. Which means, the more internal links you have on your website that point to any given page, the better opportunity that page will have to rank highly for its targeted keywords.

You’re not only creating votes for your own content through internal links, optimized internal links also improve your reader’s experience as they’re provided with more relevant information.

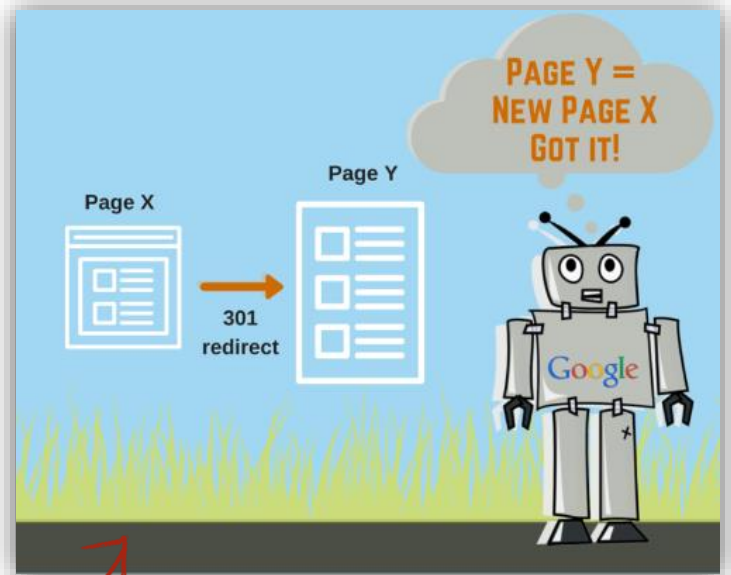
According to Searchmetrics, the ideal number of internal links tend to fall between 120 to 140 internal links per URL, but this is very much dependent on individual websites.

301 redirect

So what happens if you need to move your content from one URL to another?

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect which is considered to be the best approach for implanting redirects in most cases. A 301 redirect passes between 90-99% of link juice (or ranking power) to the redirected page, so there's not much lost in translation.

A 301 indicates to search engine bots and browsers that the page has moved permanently. Search engines then understand that the content (or an updated version of it) can also be found at the new URL and will carry any link weighting from the original page, to the new URL.



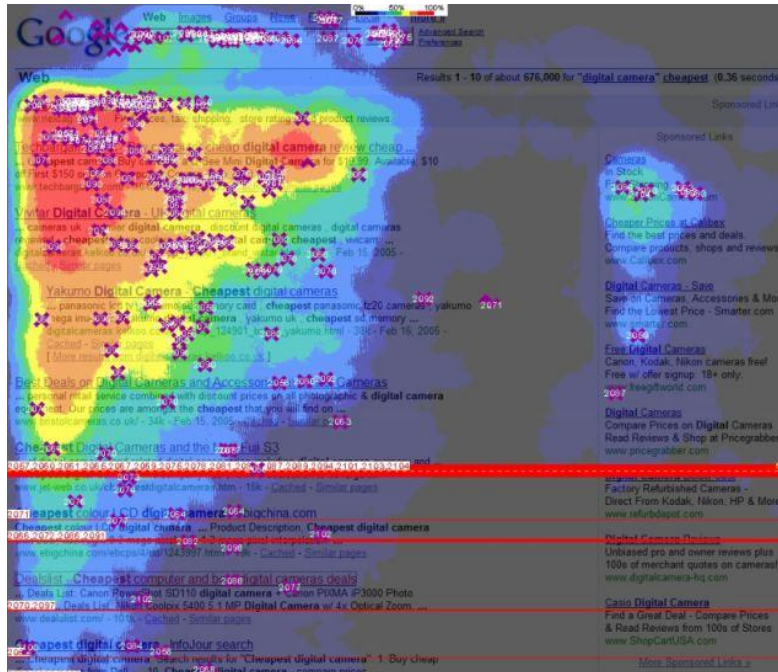
Site design For Usability

Creating a site design with usability and utility in mind, rather than the visual appeal, has become a standard approach for successful and profit-oriented web design. Design and functionality have become second to usability because the simple fact of the matter is that if your visitor don't understand how to go from point A to point B, they won't use your site.

How Users Interact With Your Site

When a visitor lands on your page, it's important to note that how they interact with it.

Visitors rarely read an entire page, instead the scan it.



By noting the red or “hot” areas where the visitor focuses most of their attention as they scan for relevant keywords, information or links, you can ensure that users are quickly able to navigate and use your site.

For optimal usability, your site should have the following features:

- a clear, self-explanatory navigation
- precise text-presentation
- search functionality
- Visible and thought-out site structure.

Pop-Ups

In 2004, Nielsen released survey results that suggested that 95% of users hate pop-ups, 69% use pop-up blockers. Over 10 years later, the argument for and against pop ups still lingers.

When it comes to user experience and usability, people generally detest pop-ups. People are also much more likely to leave your site faster (thus increasing your bounce rate) and with a bad taste in their mouth. Pop-ups also reduce how effective your website is on mobile, and with the increased demand for mobile optimization (which we'll discuss later), this plays a huge part.

On the other side of the story, data has proven time and time again that pop-ups do work to increase opt-in rates.

So, in the end you have to make a decision – What's more important to you, customer experience or email subscribers?

If your aim is to create a brilliant customer experience, then concentrate on converting site visitors into leads with relevant content and compelling CTAs, instead of intrusive gimmicks.

Flash

The obvious problem with Flash is that search engines can't read it. And if search engines can't read it, it doesn't get indexed. And if it doesn't get indexed, no one's going to find it.

But it also has a negative impact on user experience. Visitors now expect pages to load faster than ever, and Flash tends to take longer to load.

It also limits the amount of usability that the visitor has. Take [Pharrell Williams' 24 Hours of Happy](#) site for example, and try to do the following tasks:

- **Zoom.** Try clicking Ctrl and '+'. As you can see, the center clock becomes distorted and large and the Flash remains the same size.

- **Copy Paste Content.** If you wanted to c & p any information on the website, you can't.
- **Find Clickable Links.** I don't know about you, but I'm not sure where I can click.
- **Back Button.** Nope!
- **Touchscreen Desktop Users.** Flash relies on mouse roll over actions, but there are many screens (like mine, for instance) that support touch functionality.
- **Mobile.** Nope. Which is a huge issue – we'll get more into that later.

For this particular site, Flash may be useful. The site isn't selling anything, and is there simply for entertainment purposes – but as you can see, the limited features are not something that you want to emulate on your own site.

Mobile Optimization

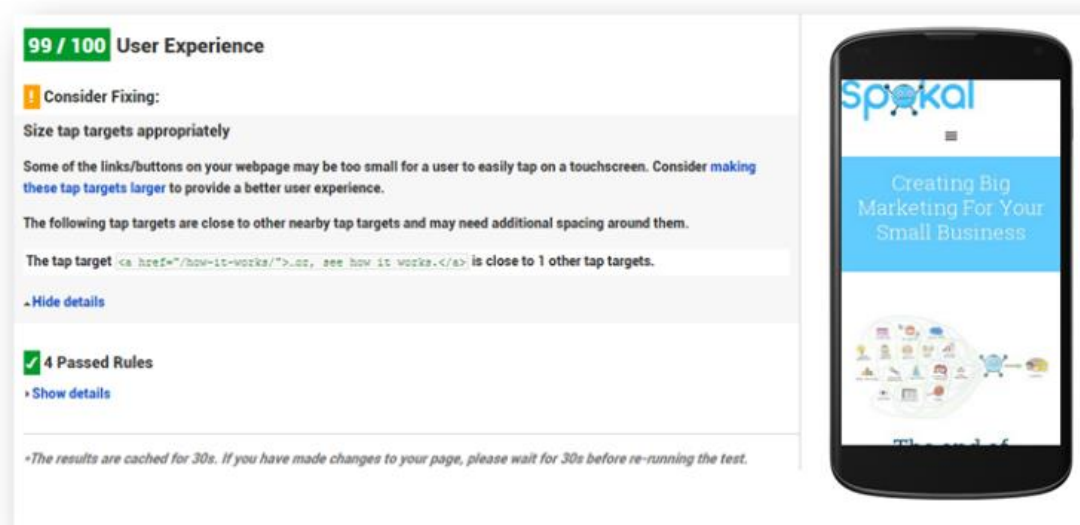
Each year we see more and more people using mobile devices and tablets in order to access the internet and in 2014, mobile finally out did desktop for devices that were used to access the internet. In fact, as of May 2014, 25% of global web traffic was mobile and when you consider that mobile traffic only constituted 0.7% of global web traffic in 2009 – that's a 3,473% increase in 5 years.

Moreover, it seems that many people only use mobile when beginning the search process with [Telmetrics' Mobile Path-to-Purchase study](#) finding that 50% consumers use their mobile devices to start the search process and 46% use mobile exclusively when performing research online.

Yet even with these clear indicators that internet users are now relying more and more on their mobile devices to access online content, there are still many websites that aren't mobile ready.

However, as more and more users turn to mobile, search engines are beginning to put pressure on websites to optimize for these changing times. As of April 21st 2015, Google is using mobile-optimization as a ranking signal throughout mobile search results, and Google says it will have a “significant” impact.

But not to worry – Google has created an awesome [PageSpeed Insights](#) tool that you can use to analyze how well your website is optimized for mobile. The tool doesn’t just tell you what’s wrong with your site, but also how you can fix it.



So what do you have to know about mobile optimization in order to be ready?

Responsive Web Design

There are 3 main kinds of website configurations: responsive, dynamic and separate site configuration. While each has its advantages and disadvantages, Google prefers responsive design (although it supports all 3 options as long as you have set them up properly).

Responsive web design is the most ideal design with regards mobile optimization because it provides optimal viewing experience for its users across a wide range of devices.

Page speed

The average speed of the top 10 sites of the Searchmetrics Correlation Study was 0.99 seconds and while surveys show that most mobile internet users expect page's to load slower – or at least slightly slower – on their mobiles, their patience is usually only limited to 6 -10 seconds. Due to connectivity issues and the difference in devices, ensuring that your website is fast to load is even more important for mobile users than desktop users.

To improve page speed, you need to optimize images, minify code, leverage browser caching, and reduce redirects.

Again, Google's PageSpeed Insights tool can help you figure out exactly what you need to do to get your speed pages optimized for mobile.

Keeping Your Website Updated

Why is it so important to keep your site updated?

1. Fresh Content. People don't read the same material over and over and over again. They come back for something new.
2. Keeping Up With New Technologies. The internet is a rapidly developing space that evolve to meet their audience's expectations – it's not advisable to be left behind.
3. Ensuring That Your Site Remains Indexed. The success of your website is often dependent on whether people can find you or not, and with search engines constantly

updating how they rank and index pages, you have to be sure that you can keep up with their changes.

4. Making Sure That The Site Is Running Smoothly. Nothing runs smoothly on its own, there's always something that could go wrong. From you host server, to file structures and broken links – you should always regularly review and evaluate your site to ensure that it remains fighting fit.

Conclusion

Usability and on-page SEO play a key role in making your website run smoothly and be found by your target audience. While the 2 topics seem at odd with one another, we can see that such elements as Flash, pop-ups, responsive design and URL structures all play a part in both areas. By being mindful that many on-page SEO elements also have an impact on usability, you can be sure to create an user experience that is seamless, stress-free and therefore, effective for producing positive results for your business.

5

A Guide To Off-Page SEO

What is Off-page SEO?

Off-page optimization concerns factors that have an effect on your website or webpage listing in natural search results that aren't controlled directly by you or the coding on your page, for example: links from other sites.

Why is Off-Page SEO important?

Search engines are always trying to figure out ways that they can provide the best results for their users' queries, and off-page SEO has become an important factor in how they rate the usefulness of a page or website.

For search engines, off-page SEO factors indicate how others see a website. A useful website with valuable content will usually also have 1 (or 2, or all!) of the following 3 traits:

- **External links** from other sites that are trustworthy
- Lots of engagement on **social media**
- **User signals** that point towards interest and engagement

Each of these traits are signals that a website is good, and therefore search engines use this information in their ranking metrics.

Of course, you'll have noticed that these factors all happen outside of your website, and therefore out of your direct control. So the question is, is there anything you can do to influence them?

Relationship-Based Link Building & Off-Page SEO

With the introduction of the [Google Penguin update in 2012](#), the term “link building” has become somewhat outdated because it was associated with black-hat (spammy) SEO. Instead, marketers shifted their terminology to “relationship building” or “relationship-based link building” which focuses more on building relationships with people connected with related authority sites, in the hopes that eventually they'll provide you with a backlink in a non-transactional and organic way.

How Do External Links Help My Off-Page SEO?

Like we discussed in the previous post, [Usability and ON-Page SEO](#), links (and the effects they have on search rankings) are easier to understand when they're thought of as a kind of “vote”.

For example, if Website X links to Website Y, then Website X is “voting” for Website Y. The more votes, the more popular a website is.

But not all votes are created equal.

The strength of a link or “vote” is determined by a variety of factors, which includes – but is not limited to – how popular and trustworthy the website that's linking is and how relevant Website X is to Website Y.

Marketers often (but not always) view external links as more powerful than internal links. This is because search engines try and “read” human behavior so they’re naturally going to listen to what others are saying about you, rather than what you’re saying about yourself.

Just imagine you’re running for class president. Of course you’re going to vote for yourself (internal links) but it’s who else votes for you (external links) that is seen as a deciding factor.

Of course, Google can spot unnatural links a mile away so the practice of simply asking or trading backlinks is no longer considered an effective marketing strategy. However, there are ways that you can nurture relationships with targeted industry-related websites that you’d like to get backlinks from.

Identify Influencers

Obviously, the first thing you need to do is figure out who you’d like to get links from in an ideal world. These people should have influence over websites that are popular, related to your industry and trustworthy.

[FollowerWonk](#), [Buzzsumo](#), [Topsy](#) all offer tools and features that help you identify key influencers in your industry.

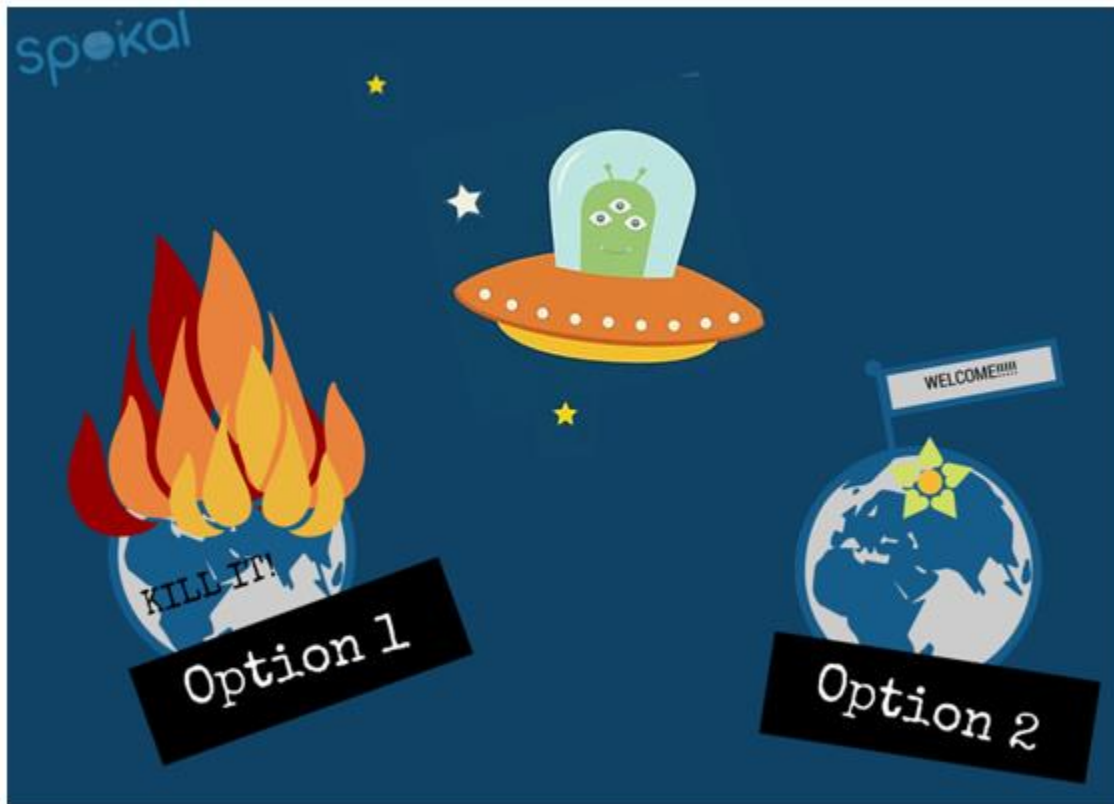
Making First Contact

Imagine for a moment that you’re an alien trying to make first contact with the human race. Your planet is low on water, and you need some help. What would you do?

Option 1: Plop your space ship down right into the center of the biggest city and run around screaming “I NEED HELP, I NEED HELP!” in a language that no one understands until everyone is so frightened that they either try to capture you, or kill you.

Or...

Option 2: Discreetly send hints that you’re out there. At first maybe you send a few messages, then you land once or twice, get to know a few people, get the message out there that you’re not going to kill them or hurt them and then eventually you can ask for help without seeming too intimidating or needy. Or, you know... downright weird.



So, which one do you choose?

Option 2 is my bet.

Making first contact with an influencer is a lot like making first contact with an alien lifeform. You've got to ease your way in there, get to know them and make sure they're familiar with you so that they don't run away screaming when you need their help.

OK... so maybe the analogy is a bit off, but you get where I'm going with this.

To get onto your influencers radar, reach out subtly by connecting with them through commenting on their blog posts, sharing their content on social media, or even emailing them with a thank you or with praise for their work (who doesn't love those emails?).

The idea is that you make a lasting impression on the influencer, without looking for anything in return.

Offer Value

So you know who ~~the aliens~~ your influencers are, and now they know who you are too. It's time to offer some value.

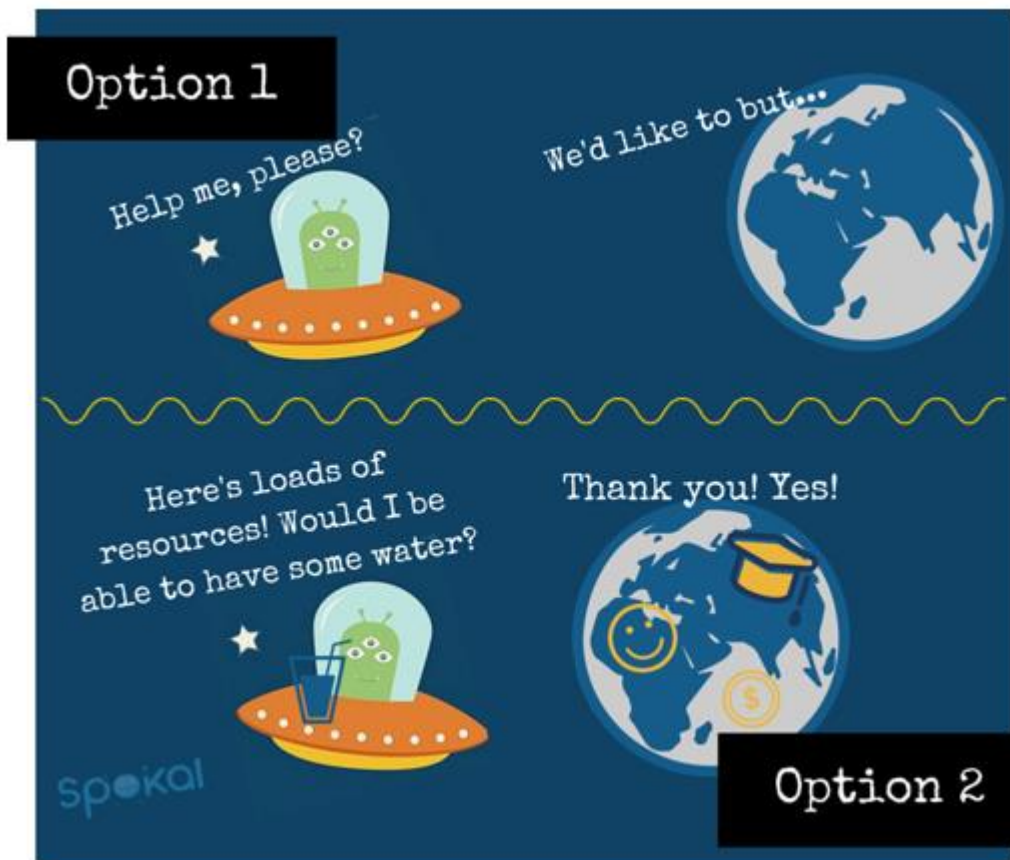
Let's go back to the alien analogy for a moment.

You know earth, earth knows you – great! But now you need help. You need to bring back water to your planet, but why should earth help you? What can you offer them in return for their help?

Again, you have 2 options.

Option 1: Don't offer anything of value, but ask for help anyways.

Option 2: Offer something of value, so that they're more than happy to return the favor.



There are, of course, plenty of ways to offer value to an influencer in the hopes of gaining backlinks. 2 of the more popular tactics are

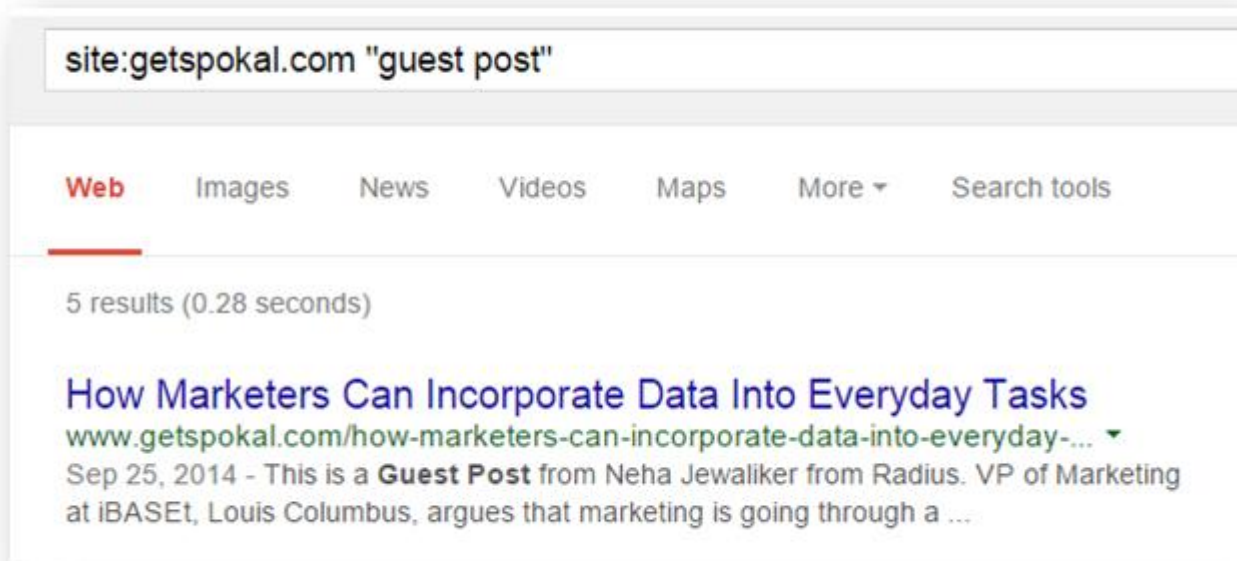
1. Guest posting
2. Creating great content

Guest posting is a match made in heaven for bloggers and influencers. Influencers are always looking for great high-quality content, and you need backlinks – it's a situation that works really well for both parties.

But before you run off and email them offering to guest post on their site, it's advisable to first research and see if them. Ideally, they will have it clearly stated on their website that they do or that they don't, and other times you'll have to look through their blog posts to see if they've ever taken guest posters before.

Alternatively, you can search these terms that can help you discover if a blog has accepted guest posts in the past:

- *site:targetblog.com "guest post"*
- *site:targetblog.com "post written by"*
- *site:targetblog.com "guest author"*



Obviously this is no guarantee that they always accept guest posts – this could be a one-off occurrence or their policy has changed, but it’s usually a good indicator that your outreach won’t be a complete waste of time.

Creating great content that’s relevant to your audience and offers value to their lives should always be a top priority, whether you’re guest posting or not.

And while we don’t always create content with influencers in mind, it doesn’t do any harm to consider them in your content strategy. If the content you’re creating adds value to the influencer’s own content (and therefore to their readers), they may link back to your website.

For example, if you’re reading a blog post and you come to the end of it and think to yourself: “wow, that was great! I really wish they had a checklist I could download based

off of this post though” then that’s a huge opportunity for you to create that checklist. Once you do, you can share the link to the checklist with the influencer and they may very well provide others with a link to your content.

More generally, any content that provides really great value may be picked up by influencers at any time. The reason influencers are so, well, influential is because they want their content to be the best it can be – so if your content can offer even more value to their readers, the chances are that these influencers will be more than happy to provide you with a backlink for your efforts.

Social Media & Off-Page SEO

According to Pew research, as of January 2014, 74% of online adults use social networking sites. Because most internet users are on at least one social media platform, and because this is where content often gets shared and liked, search engines take social signals as an important metric for ranking web pages.

This is even truer today than it was a year ago, as can be seen by Searchmetrics 2014 correlation study that shows that social signals have become quite a bit more influential as a ranking factor since last year.

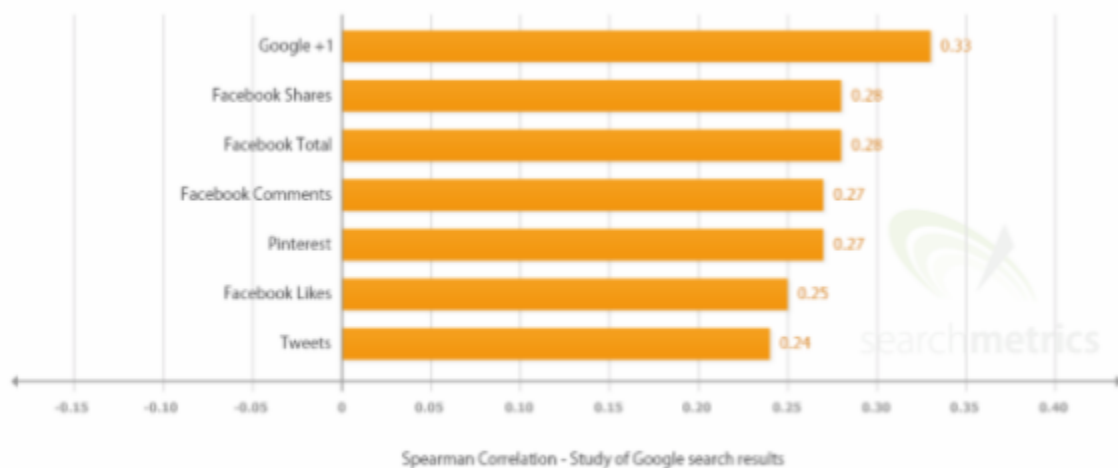


Figure 61: Correlations - Social signals 2014

How To Improve Your Social Signals

Step 1: Make sure you have pages set up (and fully filled in) on the top three social media sites: Facebook, Google+ and Twitter. I'd suggest starting with one of them, getting into the flow of social sharing, and then setting up more as you get more comfortable with using social media for business. Also, you can do some additional research to see [which social media platforms are best suited to your business](#).

Step 2: Post relevant content that your audience loves on a consistent basis.

Step 2.5: Head on over to [A Guide To Creating A Social Media Automation Strategy That Works](#) to get a really comprehensive look at how to get your social media game on point.

Step 3: Ask questions, add images, test what times you get the most engagement, and talk with people on social media. Encourage people to share your content, and share content (as long as it's good!) from other people too. Be active and, well, social.

User signals and Off-Page SEO

Searchmetrics correlation study also revealed that user signals have become a more influential ranking factor as well:

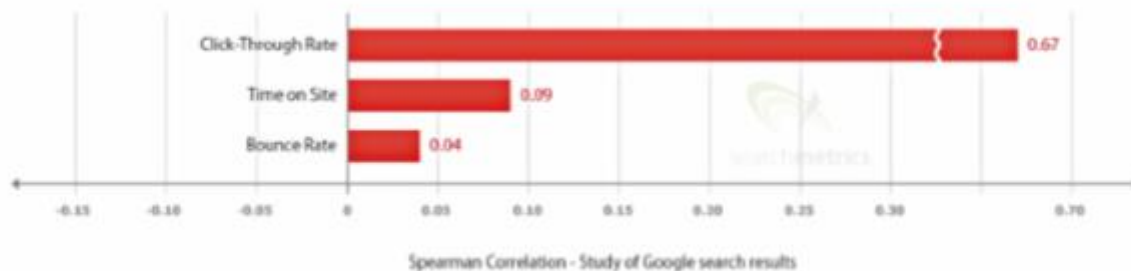
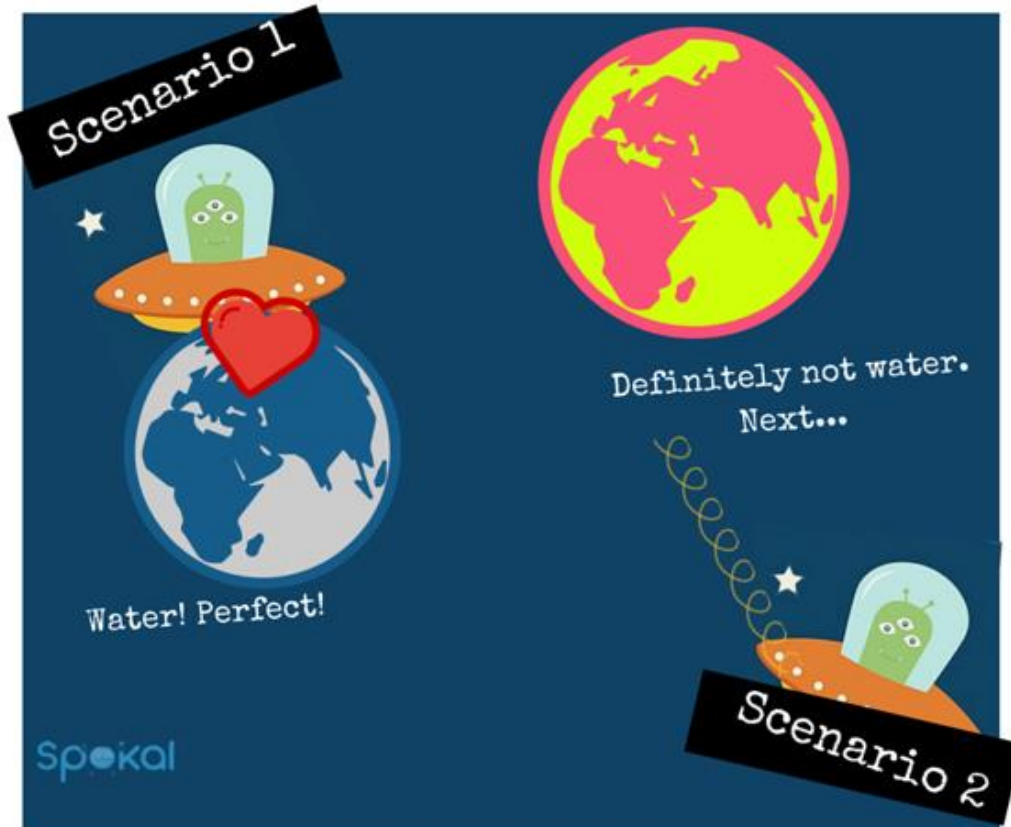


Figure 82: Correlations - User-signals 2014

How long people stay on your page, and how often they click through to another page and your page's bounce rate are all now important ranking factors.

User signals inform search engines how relevant and good a webpage or website is.

If we return to the alien analogy (this is the last time, I promise), and imagine ourselves as aliens looking for a planet with water on it. When we find a planet like earth, that's blue and covered in water, we know straight away that it's the one for us. Because it's just what we're looking for, we stay around for a while in order to get what we need. But when we see a planet that's all radioactive looking, we're going to leave pretty quickly, right?



That's exactly how people react to search engine results.

When you go into a webpage and the content is not what you were looking for, you'll either click the back button and hightail it out of there, or you spend only a few seconds

looking at the page before leaving. Search engines will naturally see this as a sign that the content doesn't match the search query and rank it lower.

On the other hand, when you do find content that gives you the right information and is amazing – and not only that, it also gives you some other awesome resources in the form of links (which you then click on!) – well that tells the search engines that your site is awesome.

Obviously, content, which we discussed in chapter 2 and 3 plays a huge part in user signals.

But usability, which we discussed in detail in chapter 4, can also have a huge impact on it too.

Conclusion

While off-page SEO isn't technically under your direct control, that doesn't mean that you can't do certain things that can influence it. That includes building relationships with influencers in your industry, creating great content that people want to share, like and comment on, and creating a site (with said content) that people enjoy spending time on.

6

Introduction to Spokal's 3 Pillars of Inbound Marketing

What Is Social Media Marketing?

Social media marketing (SMM) is a form of internet marketing that uses social networking sites as a marketing tool. Social media marketing usually involves businesses producing content that users will engage with and share with their friends, with the aim of driving traffic to that business' website, increasing brand exposure and extending customer reach.

How Does Social Media Work In Inbound Marketing?

Content is key to inbound marketing, but you need to make sure that people can actually find that content. Like we've discussed in parts 4 and 5 of this content marketing series, SEO plays a huge part in this, but so does social media. In fact, "interesting content" is one of the top three reasons people follow brands on social media.

With 2/3 people in the U.S. on at least one social media network, social media has allowed for businesses to maximize their opportunities to be found by their target audience. It's on these networking sites that your customers are interacting with their friends, colleagues and other businesses in search of entertainment, information and recommendations, so if you're not around to answer their call, you can bet your competitors are.

Are Search & Social Media Marketing Related?

The short and sweet answer is: Yes, search and social media marketing are related. And they're becoming increasingly so as the internet develops.

The world is now producing a lot of content:

- The average American consumes 34 gigabytes of content and 100,000 words of information in a single day
- Every 2 Days We Create As Much Information As We Did Up To 2003
- Facebook users share nearly 2.5 million pieces of content a minute
- 500 million Tweets are sent out in a day

And as we produce more and more content, search engines need to become more intelligent and sophisticated with how they rank content so that their users get the best possible result for their queries. Because most internet users are on at least one social media site, and it's on these sites that people show their interest in content through liking and sharing it, search engines have started to use social signals as an important metric for ranking web pages.

This reliance on social signals as a ranking factor is become stronger by the year, as is depicted by Searchmetrics 2014 correlation study:

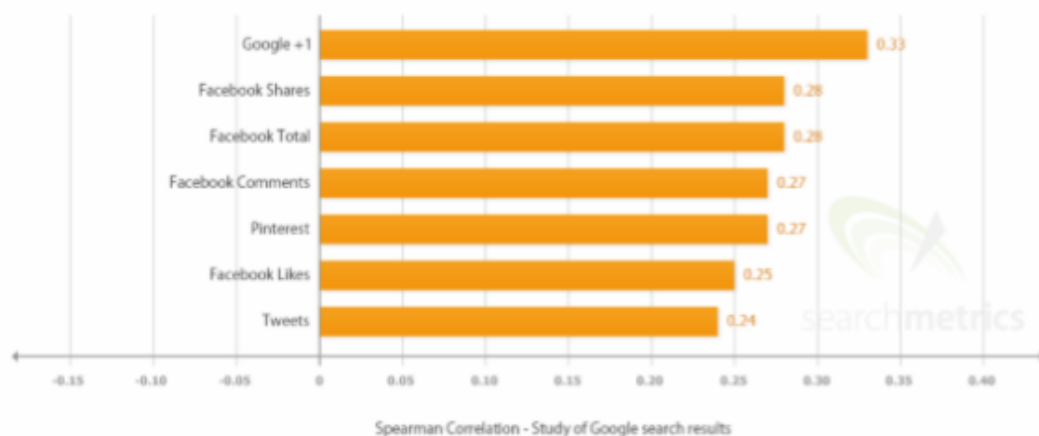


Figure 61: Correlations - Social signals 2014

So while social media and SEO might seem like 2 different topics, the fact is that they're more related than ever before.

Which Social Media Platform Is Right For You?

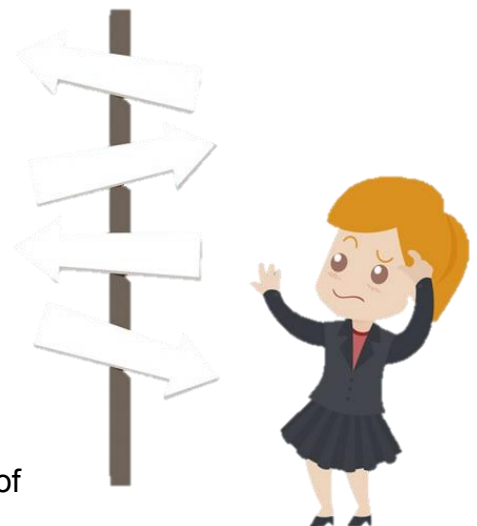
“Social media” has become a catch-all term for sites that may provide completely different services. For example, Reddit works more like a forum than it does your typical social media site, Twitter is like “texting for the internet” and Facebook is a full-blown social networking site where you can share practically any type of content.

Because of the huge differences between the social media platforms, they're not all equal with regards how effective they will be in reaching your business goals. This means that it's advisable to do some research into the various social media platforms in order to get a better idea of what they'll require from you to run successfully, and what ones are most suited to your industry.

In order to choose which social media platform will be best for your business, start by asking yourself these 3 questions:

1. *What do you want to gain from being on social media?*
2. *What social media websites tend to work well for similar businesses in your industry?*
3. *Who are my target customers, and what social media platforms are they most likely to occupy?*

Once you've answered these questions, it'll be a simple task of doing your research and figuring out which platforms offer the best solution.



Check out our Slideshare for a rundown of 8 of the most popular social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Foursquare/Yelp, Youtube and Google+.

Alternatively, you can check out the blog post that the Slideshare was inspired by [here](#).

Of course there are plenty of other social media platforms out there that we haven't mentioned, for example Reddit, Snapchat, Tumblr and Tsu. Oftentimes these alternative options can actually work better for a business than the more popular sites.

What Makes People Share Content On Social Media?

The New York Times Customer Insight Group shed some light on the psychology of sharing recently, revealing that there are 5 main reasons that people share content.

1. 49% people say they share to bring valuable and entertaining content to others.
2. 68% people say they share to define themselves to others.
3. 78% people say they share to grow and nourish our relationships.
4. 69% people say they share because it makes them feel more involved in the world (self-fulfillment).
5. 84% of people share to support causes or issues that they care about.



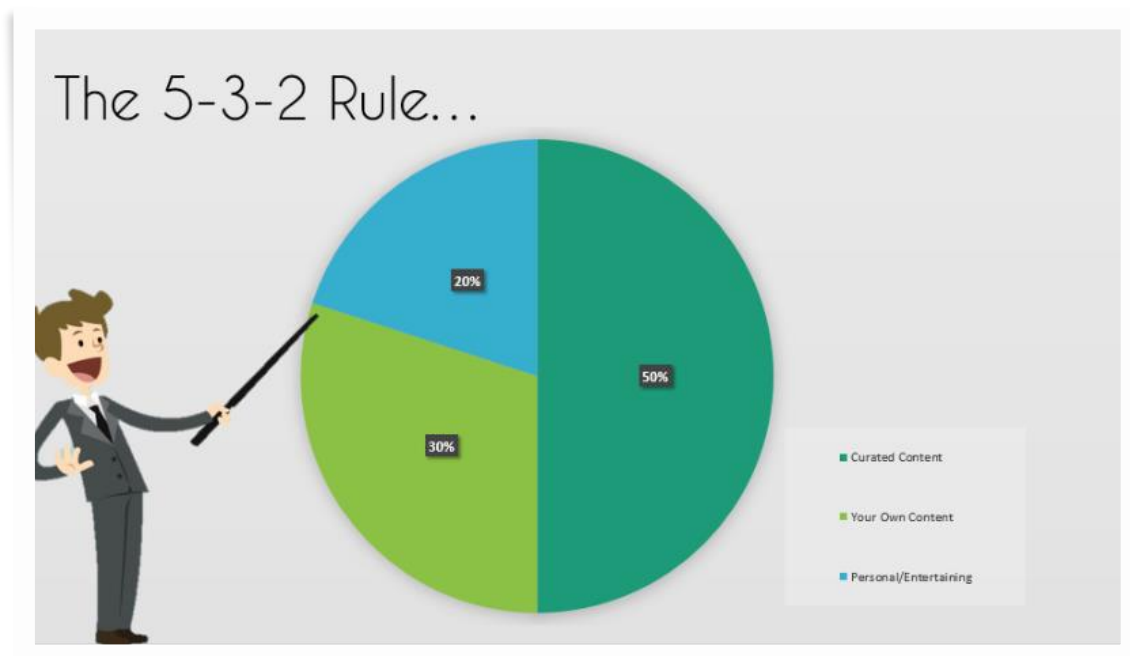
Following this logic, we should always aim to produce content that is in line with how our customer wants to be perceived (by themselves, and by others) and content that is entertaining or informative.

What To Share On Social Media: The 5-3-2 Rule

There isn't a clear set of rules that you have to follow when it comes to what to share on social media. Certain businesses find that sharing only their content works for them, while others say that the best practice is to only share content created by others.

But it's not very helpful of me to tell you to just go figure it out for yourself, is it?

So as a starting point, there is a popular ratio called the 5-3-2 rule that's often considered to be a good example of social sharing etiquette. The rule means that for every 10 pieces of content you share, 5 should be curated content from others, 3 should be your own content and 2 should be entertaining/personal content.



Remember, this is just a template and not a foolproof rule. You'll have to play around with it, test it and see what ratios work best for you.

50% Curated Content

Curated content is content that you find from another source in your industry.

Why share content from others?

Imagine you're at a dinner party and you're making polite conversation. What do you talk about? Just yourself?

No, of course you don't! That's rude, and it's boring to the other person. Instead, you try to hit on topics that you're both interested in and have a conversation about a variety of different subjects. That's called being a good conversationalist.

Social media is a type of conversation, so it only makes sense that the same logic would apply. People get very tired of a business that keeps promoting themselves and doing nothing else.

Where to find amazing content?

- Newsletters
- Social Media
- Scoopit/StumbleUpon
- Feedly
- Medium
- Monthly Roundups (some blogs compile lists of the best content from the month/week before that can give you some amazing things to share)
- Communities/Forums (Google+ have some amazing communities that regularly share really great content)

When you first start curating content, you might find that it's taking up quite a bit of your time (or, at least, that's what I found). I've gotten a few strategies together to

make content curation much easier that you can check out in this blog post: [How to Speed Up Your Content Curation Process Without Sacrificing Quality](#)

30% Your Own Content

When sharing your own content, you want to ensure that you're not being too pushy or salesy. Your content should really sell itself.

Try to personalize your social sharing to seem more human.

20% Other Content

And finally, 20% of your content should be personal/entertaining. It's an often overlooked aspect of social media for businesses, but it's crucial in humanizing your brand.

For this kind of content, you can share something that you've found online, or you can create something new.

- [Ecards](#) are really popular because they're funny, and when the message hits a nerve, people tend to share them easily.
- People love to share memes. [MemeGenerator](#) is a great tool for creating your own industry-specific memes that you think will entertain your audience.
- Inspirational quotes are also quite popular, often accompanied with an image of sorts. [LiveLuvCreate](#) have background images that you can easily add text to and share with your followers.

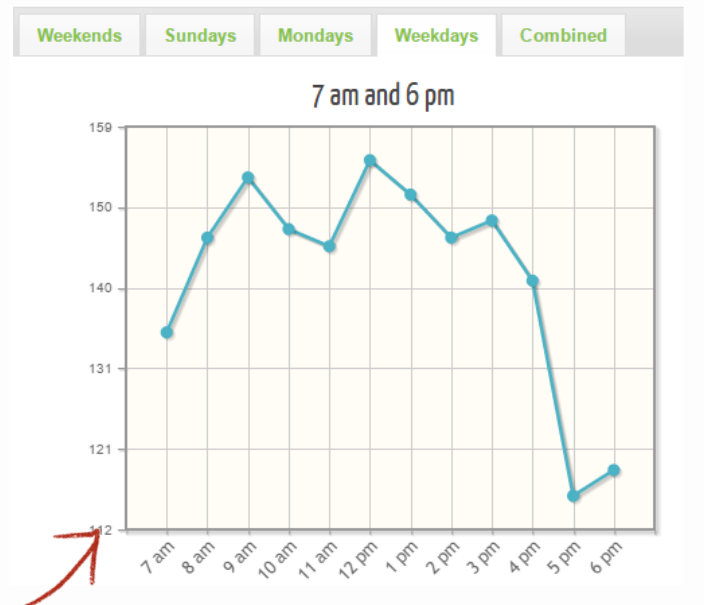
Remember, this is all a template. Spokal doesn't necessarily follow this rule all the time, but we've tried something similar and changed it up to suit what our audience likes best.

When To Share On Social Media

Now that you have a good feeling for what type of content to share on social media, what's the best day and time to share to each social network?

Tweriod and Followertwork take all the guess work out of your social sharing. These amazing tools analyze your social media accounts to tell you what the optimal time that you should be sharing your content on social media is.

Here's an example of Spokal's graph for our engagement. As you can see, we get most of our traffic between 7am and 6pm, with spikes at 9am and 12pm.



How Often To Share On Social Media

How much you choose to share on social media varies from business to business, but there has been several studies done that have helped create some general guiding principles.

Social media management tools

Feeling overwhelmed? Don't know how you're going to be active on social media without spending hours every day tending to it?

Not a problem.

There are plenty of tools out there that help businesses manage their social media marketing, without having to sacrifice the quality of their engagement.

Spokal, for example, allows for you to create a social sharing schedule in batches so you only have to check in at certain points during the day. Buffer and Hootsuite are other tools that also manage your social sharing without any of the other inbound marketing features that Spokal has.

There are also social media platform-specific solutions, such as [Post Planner for Facebook](#) and [BundlePost for Twitter](#).

Remember, social media automation is a tool that can help you manage your social media marketing, but don't abuse it. The "set it and forget it" attitude has backfired on more than one business in the past, so check out [A Guide To Creating A Social Media Automation Strategy That Works](#) to get a sense of how to use social media automation.

Conclusion

Social media marketing is an important part of inbound marketing, and it's increasingly becoming a central part of many business owners marketing strategies. However, there are no rules to social media, only guides so be careful not to rely too heavily on these guides and instead test different things out on your social media platforms.

Next week, we're going to be discussing paid (or rented) advertising.



Content Marketing: The Lifeline of Your Online Business

You've probably come across the term "online advertising" before in some form or another. It's sometimes referred to as Search Engine Marketing (SEM), paid channel marketing, or pay-per-click (PPC) marketing. The terms are often used interchangeably to describe what is essentially the same concept – purchased or "rented" traffic through online ads.

Online advertisement is a billion dollar industry, with digital ad spending worldwide hitting \$137.53 billion in 2014 and accounting for one-quarter of total media spending.

I know, it's crazy money, right? But the question is, is it effective?

- In 2013 the top three video ads generated a total of more than 12 million shares
- Twitter delivered 400% the revenue per visit in 2013 than it did in 2011: 44 cents versus 11 cents.
- The average click-through-rate for Facebook Ads has jumped 275% since 2012.

(Source for statistics: [Wishpond](#))

Clearly, paid advertising can be effective.

But we also have to keep in mind that it is only *rented advertisement*. Once you run out of money to put the ads up, the traffic will stop coming in. Moreover, if you're not smart about your online advertising, there is a high-risk that you might actually lose money on your investment.

However, online advertisement is also very attractive because it's measurable, and highly sophisticated with regards targeting. This means that it's actually possible to calculate both a long-term and short-term value for how much revenue resulted from each and every incoming website visit. And it's also possible to target a very specific part of your demographic for more effective marketing.

So what kinds of online advertising options are out there? The 2 most popular are CPM and PPC types.

Paid Channel Pricing Models

CPM

CPMs are billed at a flat rate per 1,000 "impressions". An impression is a measure of the number of times an ad is displayed or has left an *impression* on a user, regardless if it was actually clicked on or not. You're not charged additionally for any clicks that the ad receives.

CPMs are *usually* display ads (meaning that they are visual), but not always.

Strengths:

- CPM rates are usually pretty inexpensive.
- It's easy to apply a budget that makes sense for you since you're paying only for a certain amount of views, which gives you more control over how much you spend.
- CPMs guarantee that your ad will be shown the number of times that you want it to be seen.

Weaknesses:


- If people don't click on your ads and convert to customers, you risk overspending.
- It's difficult quantify the return of your traffic buy until the end of the campaign.

- Rush of resulting web traffic is uncommon. Actually, it's so uncommon that you are more likely to complete NAVY SEAL training than click a banner ad.

Pay per click (PPC)

PPC (also known cost per click or "CPC") do exactly what they say on the tin: They're ads that are paid for only when someone actually clicks on them. This means that you don't pay if nobody sees your ads, and even when they do see your ad, you don't pay unless they actually *click* on it. These ads are usually shown in text form, possibly with a smaller image.

The price that you pay per click is determined by the marketplace value of the keyword or expression you're interested in. This is calculated by your ads quality score and the competition for said keyword you want to target.


$$\frac{\text{Competitor Adrank}}{\text{Your Quality Score}} + 0.01 = \text{Actual PPC}$$

Strengths

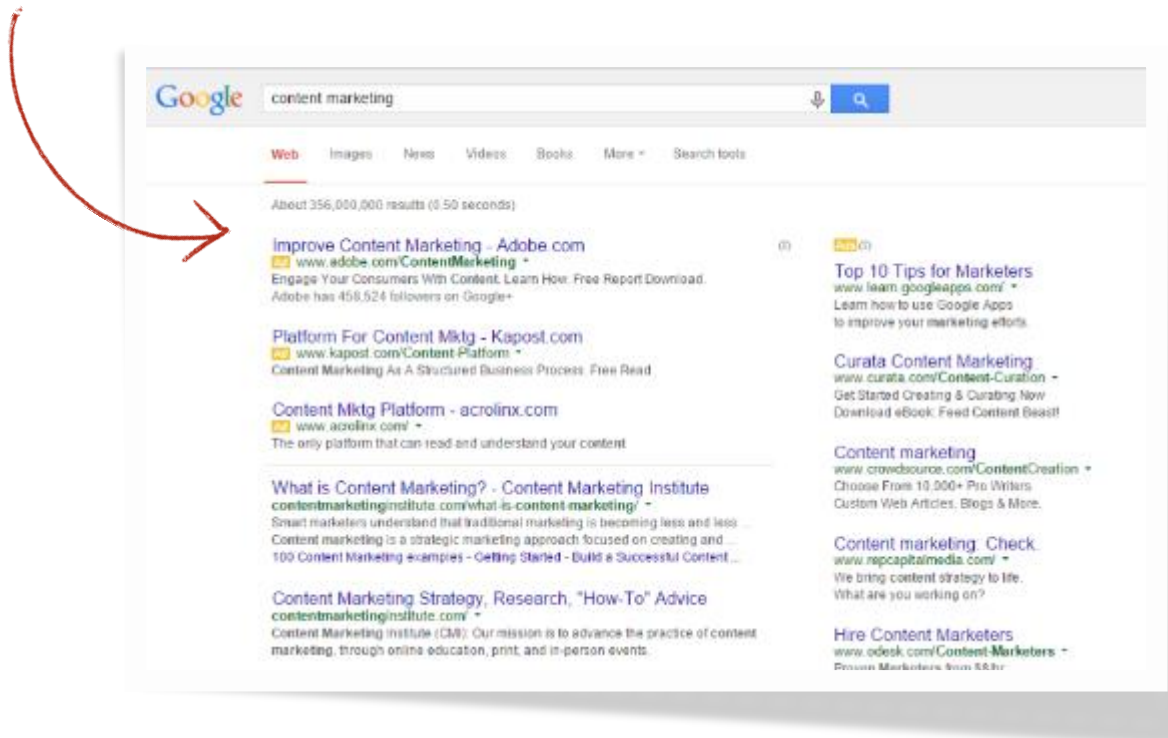
- Unlike impressions, clicks are extremely straightforward to track. Someone either did *or didn't* click on your ad.
- You only pay for the clicks you need.
- There's less of a risk for overspending on ads that aren't converting, because you're only paying for traffic that's actually directed to your site.
- You're able to place budget caps on traffic coming in through large networks (again, so you don't overspend).
- CPCs and budgets are modifiable in real time.

- Well-optimized PPC campaigns can bring in significant traffic.
- For marketers who track ROI, PPC advertising can be a much more cost-effective way to get traffic than CPM.

Weaknesses

- Because you're competing with other advertisers for traffic, this can sometimes cause PPCs to become expensive and unaffordable.
- *But*, if you're not bidding with a competitive PPC, it's possible that you won't get any traffic.
- Just because a click didn't convert to a paying customer straight away, doesn't mean that they might not become one later on. Attribution models must be able to handle this accurately.
- It can be complicated, and you really need to know what you're doing to see an ROI.
- You might lose money at the start, before you optimize over time.
- Just because someone clicks on your ads, doesn't mean that they have any interest in your offer. 50% of clicks on static mobile banner ads are accidental.

Examples of PPC ads on Google:



Examples of PPC ads on Facebook:



CPA and Revshare

Less common forms of online advertising include CPA and Revshare models. CPA (cost per acquisition) is a model of online advertising where advertisers only pay *per lead* is generated. Revshare, where you receive a portion of the profits from the client you're referring.

Retargeting

Retargeting (also known as remarketing) can also be a very effective marketing strategy, but your site has to have a decent amount of traffic (at least 5k visitors a month) in order for it to be effective.

Retargeting works off of cookie-based technology that uses simple a Javascript code to anonymously 'follow' your audience all over the Web. The code (or "cookie"), which is unnoticeable to your site visitors and won't affect your site's performance, is dropped on

each new visitor that comes to your site. Later, when your cookie'd visitor is browsing the web, the cookie let's your retargeting provider (Retargeter & Adroll are the popular choices) know when to serve ads. This ensures that your ads are served only to those who have already visited your site, and are therefore more likely to be interested in your offer.

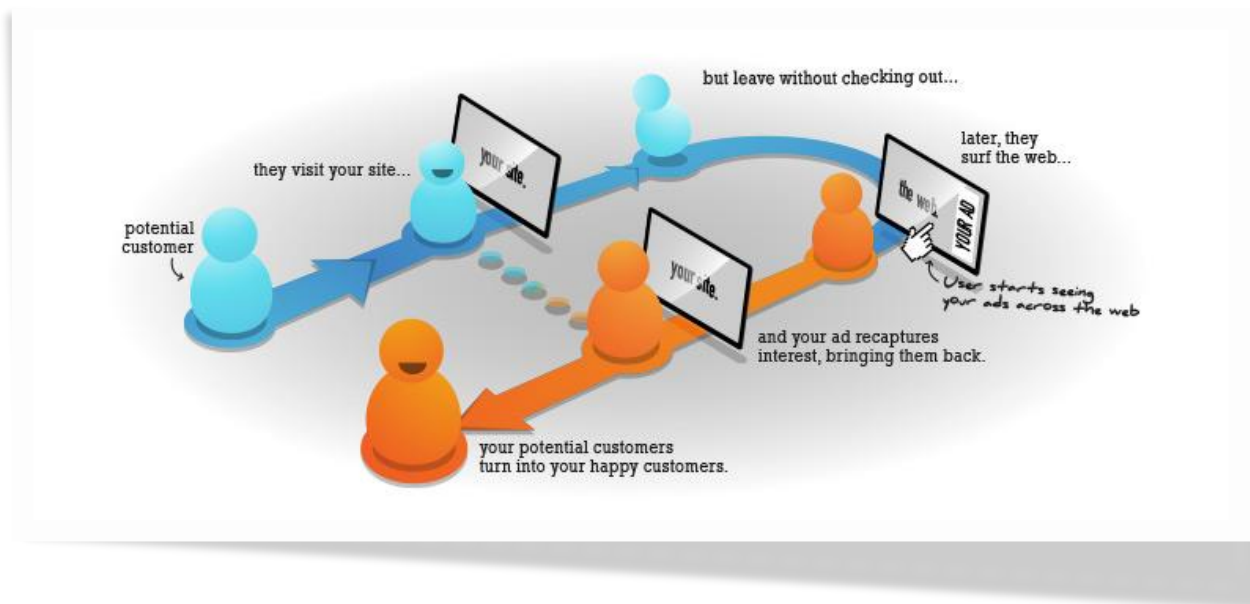


Photo courtesy of Retargeter

Retargeting can be even more effective than PPC, so it's definitely an option to consider if you're website gets plenty of traffic.

How To Choose The Right Ad Network

Choosing the right ad network is tough, and what works for one business, might not work for another. In order to figure out which network will work best for you, answer the following 3 questions:

1. What Are The Available Targeting Options That You Need?

The first step to figuring out which ad network is right for you, is clarifying what are the targeting options that matter most to you.

- What is most important to you, **demographic targeting or interest-based targeting?** (or both?)
- Will this ad network help you reach your target audience with the right marketing message at the right time?
- Are you marketing towards B2B or consumers?

2. How Does The Ad Network Align With User Experience?

How do you want to be introduced to your target audience? Different user experiences of your ads will result in different amounts of success. So, for example:

- Search advertising through Google AdWords and Bing is more targeted, and can help you reach consumers based on **keywords they're researching online.**
- Facebook ads allows marketers to show ads that drive **awareness about new businesses, services, or products.**
- LinkedIn ads **target professionals by interest or job title as they're browsing through feeds, job listings, or groups.**

3. Is The Ad Format Appealing To You?

- Are the ad formats likely to inspire user engagement?
- Do available ad formats give your marketing team the ability to tell its story in a clear and compelling way?
- Do available ad formats align with your brand's needs?

- Unattractive ads will generate a negative user experience, costing you time and money. Don't jump into an ad network because you feel like "everyone's doing it." Choose ad products and features that create the best user experience possible.

A Note On Ad Network Reputation:

We all know that the internet is filled with all types of shady and dark corners intent on "playing the system" rather than partaking in it, and it's best to avoid these when it comes to ad networks too.

If an ad network looks too good to be true, it probably is. 'Cheap web traffic' usually has a catch, or won't give you any decent traffic that actually converts, so make sure that you're always working with a reputable web traffic partner.

Ad Networks

Here's a quick summary of 5 ad networks to give you an idea of what ones will work best for you:

- **LinkedIn:** For B2B marketing mostly.
- **Facebook:** Ads work like display ads, and are best for top-of-funnel marketing.
- **StumbleUpon:** Seriously *amazing* content that grabs the user immediately.
- **Google Adwords:** Offers CPC ads and can be highly targeted.
- **Bing:** Similar to Google Adwords, but with less competition.

These are but a few of the ad networks out there that are considered effective, but there are plenty of [trustworthy alternative ad network sites](#) too.

Important Paid Advertising Concepts You Should Know

When you're going into paid advertising, it's important that you go in with a strategy and a goal in mind. Understanding a few of the key concepts of online advertising is key to creating a strategy that will suit your business.

Behavioral Targeting

Behavioral targeting is when advertisements are targeted at users based on their past purchase activity. For example, you might target a user with ads about invitations for an event after they purchased some save the dates from you (yes, that is *exactly* what just happened to me!).

CPC/CTR

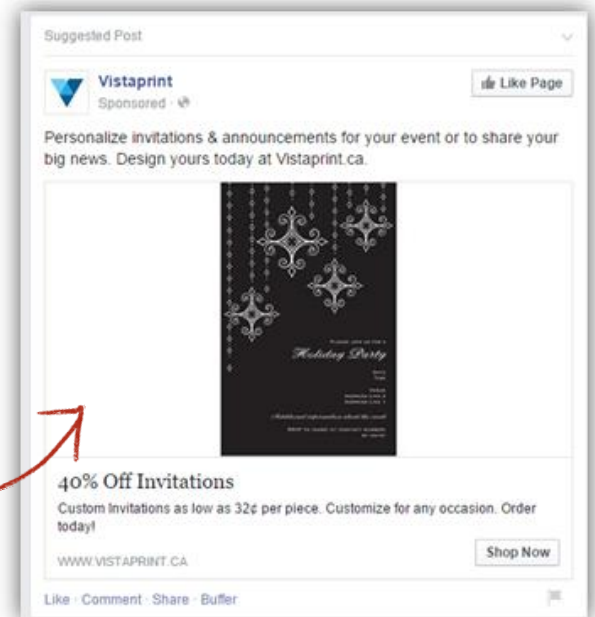
The cost you pay per click (CPCs) often decreases the higher an ads CTR (click through rates) is. When it comes to auctioning for keywords or expressions in online auctions, the highest CPC isn't always the winner.

Day Parting

Day parting is a feature that is sometimes available that allows you to specify what time of the day an ad is to be shown.

Geotargeting

Geotargeting is often used for businesses that are more geographically relevant. Geotargeting allows you to target your advertisements to audiences in a particular country, state, city, or metropolitan area.



Interest-based targeting

This is the ability to advertise to customers with a specific interest or hobby.

Match Types

Keyword match types control which searches or terms will commence your ad.

Broad match will show your ad to a wide audience, phrase match will ensure that your ad is part of a searched expression, and exact match will only show your ad to people who search your exactly keyword.

Quality Scores

Quality Scores are rating on how well your advertisements align with your marketing message/landing page/offer. Quality scores are particularly important to Google, and they reward higher quality scores with lower CPCs (i.e. cheaper web traffic). This incentivizes advertisers to show high quality ads.

Creating Landing Pages That Convert

Regardless of which ad network you choose, to make any online advertising campaign work to the best of its abilities, you need to create some high-converting landing pages.

You don't want to just have people visit your page, you want them to take some kind of *action* once they're there. To do this, you need to create a landing page that's engaging and compelling enough to convince them to take the step that you want them to!

To do this you need to follow Kissmetrics' C.O.N.V.E.R.T.S. formula:

- C** = Clear Call to Action
- O** = Offer
- N** = Narrow Focus
- V** = VIA: Very Important Attributes
- E** = Effective Headline
- R** = Resolution-Savvy Layout
- T** = Tidy Visuals
- S** = Social Proof

Clear CTA

Your CTA (call-to-action) is the button whose job it is to drive the user to take action, so it's vitally important to how successful your landing page performs.

What makes a great CTA? Value + Relevance. A CTA should make it clear what *value* you're offering your prospective customer, and it should also be *relevant* to your website/landing page (i.e. not generic).

For example, Pet Amber Alert's CTA is "Find Your Lost Pet Now!" The value = finding your lost pet. The relevance = the idea behind visiting the site is to find a lost pet, and the CTA reiterates that.



Offer

An offer is anything you give your visitors in exchange for getting them to take the action that you want. This is usually a discount/coupon, a free trial, a free downloadable whitepaper etc.

Kingsley Judd offers a “FREE brochure” for those who fill in their contact form (and a bonus entrance into a competition just for ticking a box!) The offer is compelling, and makes the payment (contact details) seem like a good deal.



Narrow Focus

The more choices you offer people, the more time they'll take to make a decision. Make their decision for them by having a narrow focus.

Keep your landing pages simple, and only focus on 1 thing at a time.

This TakeLessons landing page, for example, focuses on one thing and one thing only: Private English Lessons. There is only one choice in the landing page: To request a call from them or not.



Very Important Attributes

You need to convince visitors that there's a very good reason for them to do what you want, and to do this you have to highlight the best features of your product. It's important to prioritize that these really are the *very important attributes* of what you have to offer because you don't want to add too much information to the landing page – just enough to convince them to want *more* information.

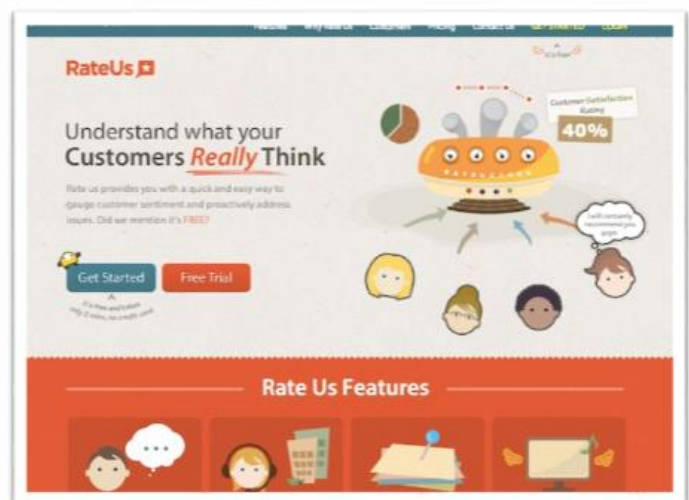


Right Signature do a fantastic job of this with their “send”, “sign” and “archive” information. These are the very important attributes of the product, and while there *may* be other attributes, they're not as vital to the product as these 3.

Effective Headline

Create clear and informative headlines that clearly articulate what your business is actually all about. No one wants to land on a landing page that can't tell them even the most basic details.

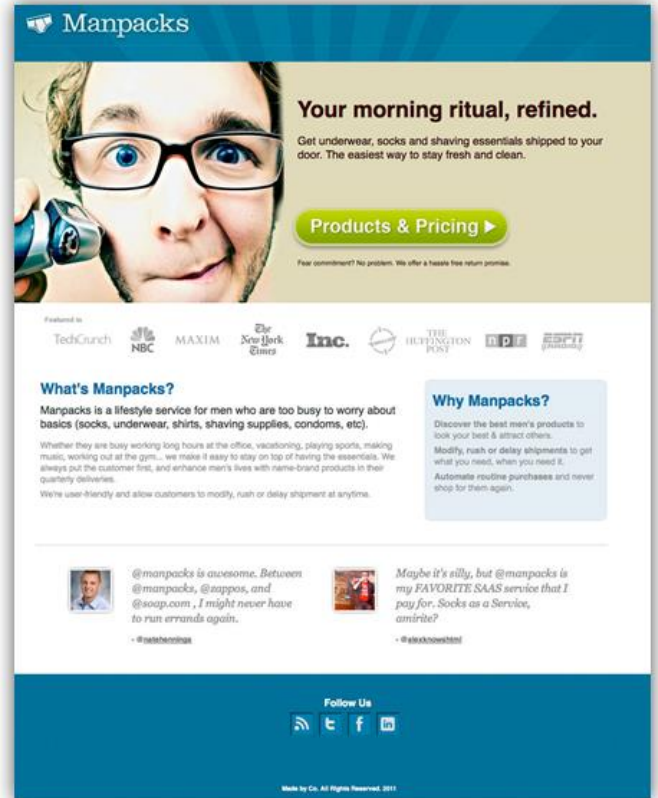
At first glance at this landing page, we know *exactly* what Rate Us does: They help you understand what your customer really think!



Resolution-Savvy Layout

People surf the web on all types of different devices nowadays, so make sure that your layout allows for the wide variety of different user experiences by keeping the most essential parts of your message (i.e. the logo, headline, call to action and the supporting visual) in the center top of the screen. This means that even if your landing page is cut off my small screen resolutions, the important information will still be above the fold.

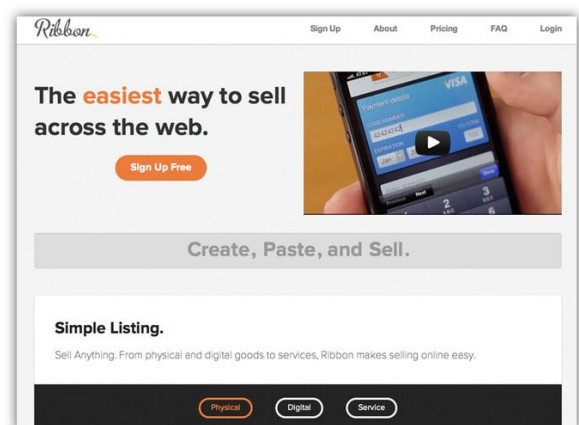
As you can see, Manpacks does a great job of this. All primary information is at the top, and secondary info is pushed to the bottom.



Tidy Visuals

As with your headlines, you want to make sure that you have one simple visual that your user will see. Unappealing, low-quality, or too many visuals will distract from your message.

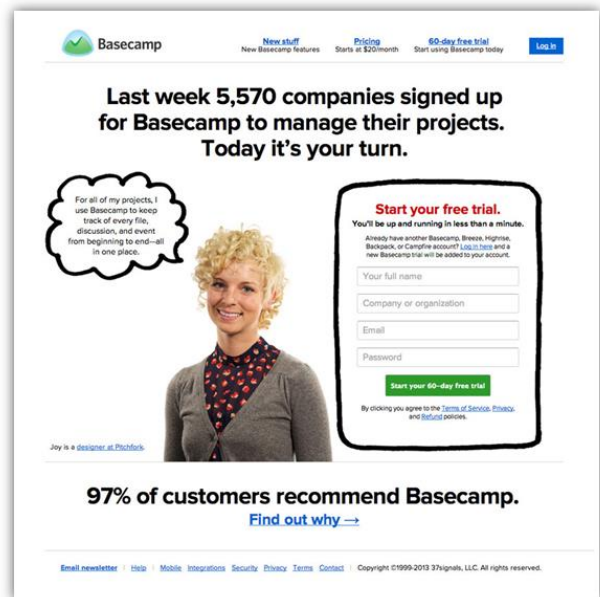
Ribbon keep it nice and simple with just one visual to the right of their CTA and headline.



Social Proof

Humans are social creatures, and we tend to listen to our neighbors, friends and strangers more than we do a business. This is why testimonials, reviews and user-numbers are all super effective in convincing others to hop on board!

See how Basecamp combines both a testimonial *and* user numbers as social proof that their service is awesome:



The image shows a screenshot of the Basecamp website's landing page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Basecamp logo, links for 'New stuff', 'Pricing', and '60-day free trial', and a 'Log in' button. The main headline reads: 'Last week 5,570 companies signed up for Basecamp to manage their projects. Today it's your turn.' Below this, there is a testimonial from Joy In, a designer at Pivotal, with a photo of her and a quote: 'For all of my projects, I use Basecamp to keep track of every file, discussion, and event from beginning to end—all in one place.' To the right of the testimonial is a sign-up form titled 'Start your free trial.' The form includes fields for 'Your full name', 'Company or organization', 'Email', and 'Password', and a 'Start your 60-day free trial' button. Below the form, it says 'By clicking you agree to the Terms of Service, Privacy, and Refund policies.' At the bottom of the page, there is a statistic: '97% of customers recommend Basecamp.' with a link 'Find out why ->'. The footer contains links for 'Email newsletter', 'Help', 'Mobile', 'Integrations', 'Security', 'Privacy', 'Terms', 'Contact', and a copyright notice: 'Copyright ©1999-2013 37signals, LLC. All rights reserved.'

Conclusion

Paid traffic acquisition is an extremely viable marketing channel, but it comes at a price (literally). Online advertisement can be highly effective in driving short-term traffic, but you should always remember to start small and test out what works for you. Don't put all your eggs into one basket.

Instead, think of paid advertisement as a short-term way to boost your website traffic, but not as a central strategy. Instead, focus on marketing strategies that will work for you in the long-term, such as consistently providing valuable content, keeping your website updated and easy to use, offering a great product or service, and ensuring that people can find your content through SEO.

8

The 8 Key Factors in Creating Great Content

Creating great content, having a stellar website, building relationships and working on your social media game are all factors that work to generate interest or leads in your business.

But at what point does this interest become profitable?

Lead nurturing is the process of bridging the gap between non-sales ready leads, and sales-ready leads, through providing highly relevant educational content that helps build brand and product preference long before the prospect is ready to buy.

There are 3 main goals that any lead nurturing should keep in mind:

1. **Maintain Permission To Stay In Contact With Your Prospect.** If lead nurturing is about nurturing relationships with your leads, then maintaining permission to stay in contact with your prospects is the most important goal of lead nurturing. A bad lead nurturing campaign allows prospects to lose interest in your marketing messages, in which case they'll either begin to ignore your marketing messages, unsubscribe or – worse case scenario – mark your messages as spam.
2. **Establish Key Ideas That Are In Line With What Your Product/Service Offers.** Lead nurturing is partly about preparing your prospect to purchase your service/product. In order to do this effectively, you can educate them and guide their thinking so that they understand the market better, so that your business is in the optimal solution when they're finally ready to make a purchase.
3. **Watch For Signs Of Progress Through The Buying Cycle.** You don't give a watch to a baby, nor should you push a sales pitch onto a prospect that's not ready to buy. It's about

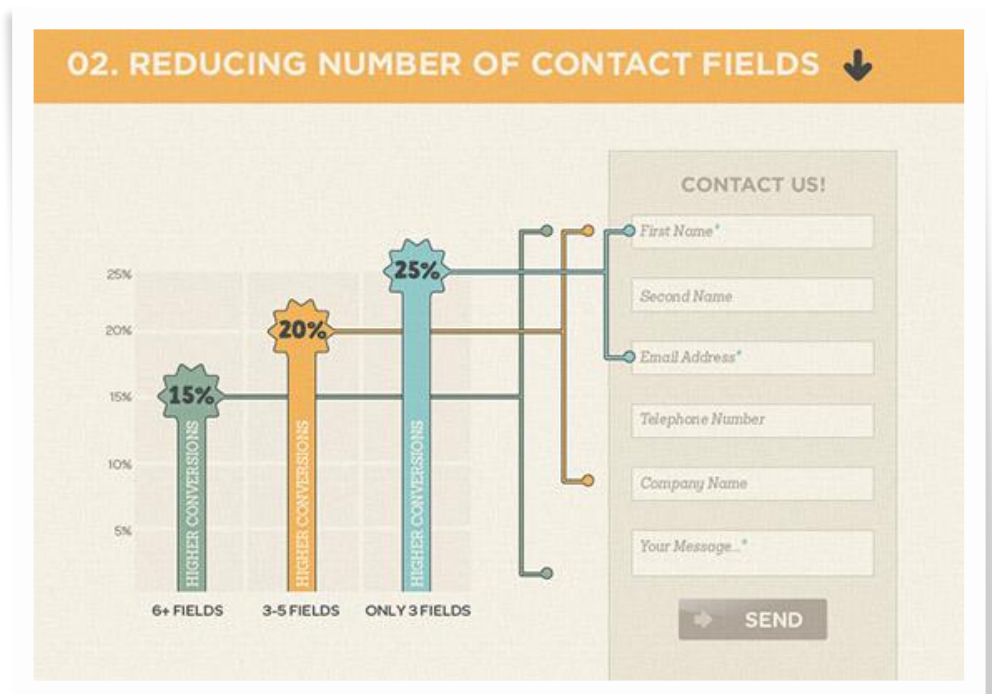
giving the right content to the prospect at the right time, and you can only do this by watching for signs that they're progressing through the buying cycle. This is done through lead scoring, but we'll get back to that a little bit later.

Now that you have those 3 goals in mind, let's get into the process of lead nurturing.

Opting-In

The lead nurturing process starts with a Top of the Funnel (TOFU) opt-in by your visitor. This is usually done by creating a CTA (call to action) that entices the visitor with an offer. The offer can be for a whitepaper, a PDF download, a newsletter, a guide, free templates etc. The idea is that you're offering them something that they want to have because it's useful, educational and valuable. And all they have to do to get it? Fill in a few contact details.

How many form fields you ask your prospect to fill out all depends on your priorities.



Less fields will gain you more leads, but more fields will gain you more qualified leads.

For example, the form to the right from WeddingDates.ie only has 2 form fields, “name” and “email”. This encourages more subscribers because the barrier to entry is pretty low, i.e. not many people feel any hesitation giving out their email address. But it also means that their initial marketing messages won’t be super targeted.



Kissmetrics asks for more information in the below form, including your company’s name and a phone number.

While the longer form will reduce the amount of prospects signing up, it will increase the amount of qualified leads that they have (and even sales-ready leads since they have a “would you like a demo” field). It will help also help them send more targeted messages to each prospect.

It’s also important to note that if you are looking for more information from your prospects, the offer has to be really good (Kissmetrics have a variety of guides that contain a lot of valuable information) and you also have to prove that you’re trustworthy. Kissmetrics is a popular name, with a history of being trustworthy, so people will have confidence that their information is safe with them.



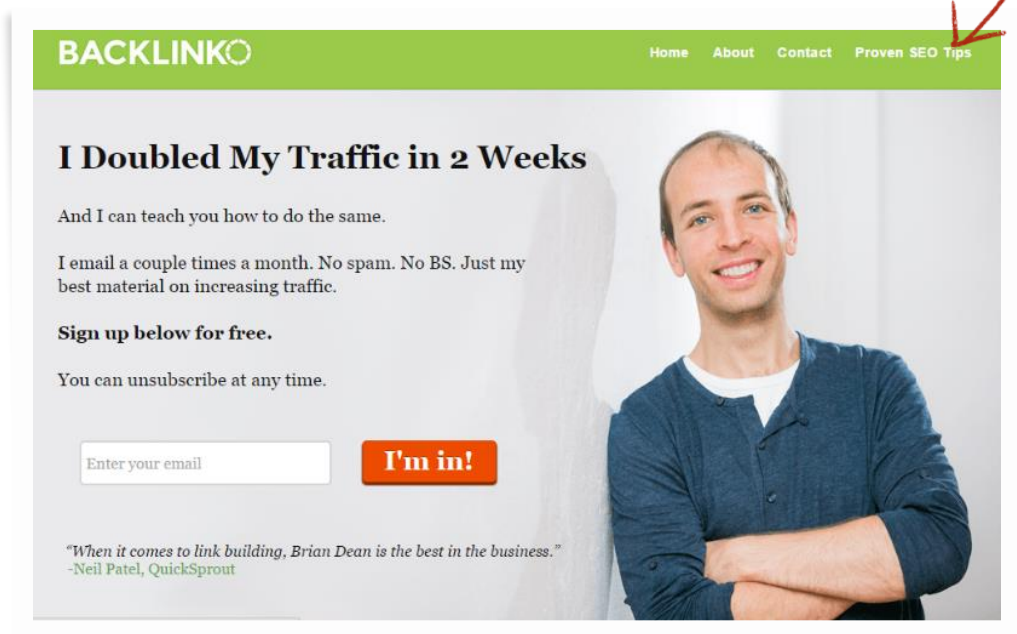
Once you've grabbed your prospect's information from your opt-in form, it's time to start nurturing them.

Nurturing Your Leads Through Email

Once your prospect has given you permission to stay in contact with them by filling out the opt-in form, it's then time to fulfill your promises by sending them the content you promised, at the times that you promised them.

In the example below, Brian from Backlinko has promised several things.

1. Educational content on how to double a website's traffic
2. Emails only a couple times a month.
3. Relevant content (no spam, no BS)



Brian now has to honor these promises in his emails in order to keep his prospects happy and tuned in to his marketing communications. But will all his messages make sense for say... an entry level marketing student? Probably not.

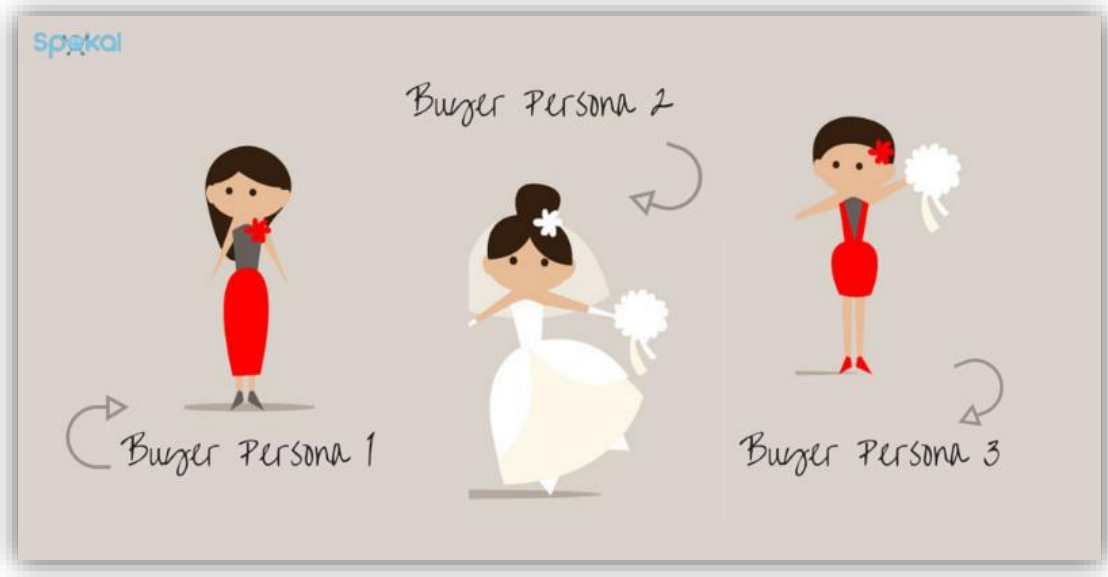
In order for marketing messages to be effective, they have to be targeted at the right kind of people. In order to do this, you have to create a variety of “buyer personas” that you can categorize your prospects in.

The Buyer Persona

It’s important to have a few buyer personas that you can categorize your leads into. Each buyer type has its own needs and wants that you should be addressing in your emails. Marketing to everyone will mean that you’re not marketing to anyone in particular, so your communications won’t be as effective.

It goes without saying that each buyer persona should be on a particular email list. It’s also worth noting that, depending on how you collect information, some buyer personas may be on multiple lists.

For example, if you have an online wedding dress business, you might create a bride, mother of the bride, and bridesmaid buyer personas. Each of these buyers are looking for completely different outfits. It wouldn’t make any sense to send the mother of the bride emails about your new bridesmaid dress collection, would it? Instead, the “mother of the bride” buyer persona should be put on a separate list that receives information regarding clothes that would suit her role.



By creating buyer personas and adding them to certain email lists, you're nurturing your lead in a more specific and targeted way. Your communications are directed specifically at them, and their wants and needs, so they're much more likely to be interested in what you have to say.

So now that you have your prospects in appropriate email lists, how do you know when they're browsing, what they're on the market for, and when they're ready to buy?

Lead scoring!

Lead Scoring For Even More Targeted Messages

Lead scoring is a method that both the marketing and sales team use to rank leads in order to determine their sales-readiness. The score of each lead is based on the interest they show in your business, their current place in the buying cycle and their fit with regards your business.

Companies can score leads by assigning them a certain amount of points based off of the leads' fit, interest or behavior.

1. Lead Fit

Figuring out whether your lead is the right fit for your business is determined by observable or directly shared information. This demographical information is often derived from your original opt-in form or registration process, and typical demographics that might determine a lead's fit include:

- Gender
- Age
- Job
- Location

Depending on your business, the information that you require to determine lead fit may be more or less extensive. For example, if you're a SaaS aimed at Enterprise industries, you may need to know a lead's role in their job in order to ascertain whether or not they have the authority to make any buying decisions at their company. However, if you're a florist, location might be more important to determine lead fit.

Once a lead's fit is determined, they can be segregated in your email list so that your campaigns make the most sense to them.

For example, a Canadian florist might not send leads who are in the U.S. a "free shipping" discount, but they will send it to their Canadian leads.

2. Lead Interest Scoring

Lead interest is when you score your leads, well, interest. This is done by tracking your prospect's online behaviors in order to measure their level of interest.

Let's take the wedding dress shop again as an example. If a lead signs up to your bridal newsletter, you might give them 10 points. If they click into a link from your email, because this action shows interest then you might then assign that lead 20 points. If they stay on your website for over 30 minutes, this action shows a lot of interest, so you might assign them 30 points. And if they visit a pricing page, well, then they're practically already making a purchase with you so you might score them something like 50 points.

As you can see, certain actions express more interest in making a purchase than other actions, and some less. As your lead interacts with your business, their score accumulates. These scores can be used in a variety of ways.

For example, you might use these scores to set off a triggered email that sends leads a particular kind of message. For example, you might send leads who score 80 out of 100 a case study of how your product/service has helped others, or maybe a free trial of your product so they can test it out before they make any commitments.

3. Buying Stage and Timing

The buying stage and timing of a lead is also something to take into account in your lead scoring campaigns. The buying cycle is usually broken up into three different stages, that of awareness, consideration and purchase.



What stage your lead is in will determine what marketing communications will work most effectively for them.

During the awareness stage, it's about introducing the lead to your market, and what problems there are, and how your product/service solves those problems.

The consideration stage is when the lead can be given more detailed information of your solution, social proof of the effectiveness of your product (testimonials and reviews) and as they progress through the consideration cycle you can then also offer them free trials.

Once they opt-in for the free trial, then the next step is just for them either to decide that your product works for them or not!



Marketers can use this information to adapt their messages according to the leads' stage in the buying cycle.

But how can one person do all of this? Well, they can't. This is where marketing automation comes in.

Lead Nurturing Software

Most marketing automation platforms have lead nurturing capabilities, but there are also some that specialize in lead nurturing. To determine what kind of marketing automation software that you need, head on over to our comprehensive guide and answer just a few questions: [Not All Marketing Automation Platforms Are Born Equal. Don't Choose The Wrong One.](#)

Conclusion

With the right marketing automation software, and with the right goals and strategies in place, your business can easily encourage your prospects through the buying cycle by giving them the right content at the right time through lead nurturing.

We've given you a lot of information to start off with, but the best advice we can give you is start out simple and work your way up to a more targeted and strategic strategy as you become more familiar with the practice of lead nurturing and the software that allows you to accomplish it effectively.

And, as always, test and tweak your lead nurturing campaigns. Nothing is ever as simple as "set it and forget it" when it comes to the success of your business.

9

A Guide to Website Usability and On-Page SEO

When marketers want to make a big impact on their marketing, they often focus on going after a big project. You know the kind: a big email campaign, or a huge website redesigns or a big social media project!

But while big projects can have big payoffs (as long as they're executed smartly), it's undeniable that they can also be very time consuming. And we all know that you're already struggling enough keeping up with these 3 minute meetings, scarfing lunches down while listening to podcast proofs, before rushing off to your next meeting.

But not to worry – there are ways to make a big impact without having to run a big project. Instead, small tweaks can often make a world of difference. Especially when they're on your call-to-actions (CTAs).

The 6 Most Common Types Of CTA

There are 6 types of CTAs that you'll see most frequently, and they are: Sidebar, in-line CTA, scroll box, exit overlay, smartbar and popup.

Let's take a look at the various CTAs that you can employ on your website.

1. Sidebar

Some CTAs are great for blog posts, some for certain offers, and others for broader concerns. The sidebar CTA is a great choice for CTAs that are focused on broader, business-wide goals because they aren't super connected to a particular blog post.

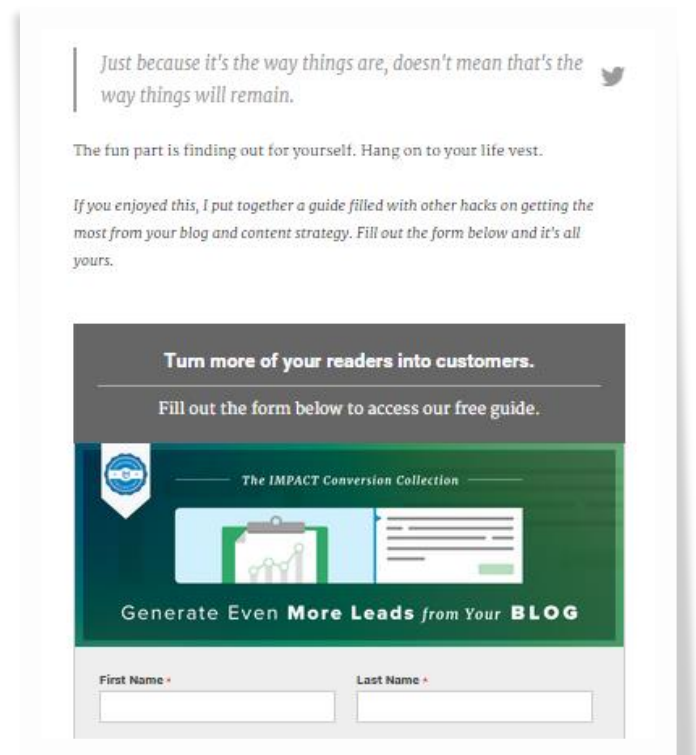
They're usually positioned on, well, the sidebar of your website.

2. In-line CTAs

Not all CTAs stand out and apart from your content. The in-line CTA can be placed within your content.

In-line CTAs don't necessarily follow the same "button-style" CTA that other CTAs do. For example, you could [read this blog post to find out more information on the power of effective in-line CTAs](#). (See what I did there?? That's an example of an in-line CTA that isn't a button).

But, if you're a button fan, that's fine too! Here's an example on how [Impactbnd](#) does it:



3. Exit overlay

An exit overlay, unlike a traditional pop-up, is a modal or lightbox overlay that is activated in the same window the user was already browsing in. This marketing tool is designed to convert website visitors into leads as they're leaving a website.

Generally, exit overlays grey out the rest of the site in order to focus the user's attention on the overlay's offer.

Here's an example of an exit overlay via QuickSprout:

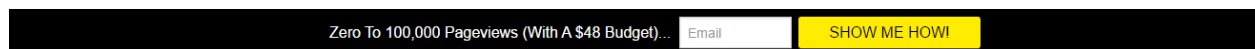


Photo courtesy of [QuickSprout](#)

4. Smartbar

A smartbar is a bar that appears at the top of a website with your chosen CTA. Smartbars generally scroll with the screen so they always remain at the top of the user's window, but there are options that allow for the user to exit out of the smartbar.

Here's an example of a smart bar via [RobbieRichards.com](#):



5. Pop Ups

While pop-ups get a pretty raw deal when it comes to users, the simple fact is that they're still effective. And, when they're used properly and sparingly, they don't have to be so annoying for your users.

A few things to note when using pop-ups:

- A pop-up should have one single clear intent.
- Pop-ups should be easy to exit.
- Pop-ups should be timed accordingly. Bombarding people with pop-ups as soon as they step on to your site is just rude.
- Look at your analytics to discover how long people stay on a specific web page for, and then schedule your pop-up to show a few minutes into that time period. This means that people will read your content and start to trust you before you ask them for something.

6. Scroll box

As you scroll down on many sites, you may notice that a CTA slides into the bottom of the screen.

This is a non-intrusive way that encourages your blog readers to convert on your blog posts. Scroll boxes can be extremely effective – since we introduced the scrollbox to Spokal we've captured 358% more leads across all accounts than we have with the sidebar widget.

The 4 Elements Of A Great CTA

1. Copy
2. Colors
3. Format
4. Test



1. Writing Copy That Converts

Use actionable language.

For effective copy on CTAs, use action-oriented, second-person verbs. This empowers your readers, and encourages them to click your CTA. Language such as “learn, download, discover, find, unearth” are all much more effective than “be smarter, get this paper”. This also has the additional advantage of creating more concise copy.

Align CTA copy with landing page copy.

Always ensure that the language you use on your CTA reflects the language you use on the landing page that the CTA will take your user to. This means that if you call your ebook a “downloadable business pack” on your landing page, then your CTA should also be called this.

Include a clear value proposition.

Why should your reader download your ebook, or whitepaper, or guide? You need to be clear about what value your CTA has. People generally won't part with their email unless they can get something in return.

This means that you should describe what your product actually is, and how it will help them.

Play up its time-sensitivity.

People are busy online, so they might think that they'll sign up later, or that they just want to get in, get the information, and then get out again as quickly as possible. Typing in their email address may seem too time-consuming and not something that they necessarily have to do now.

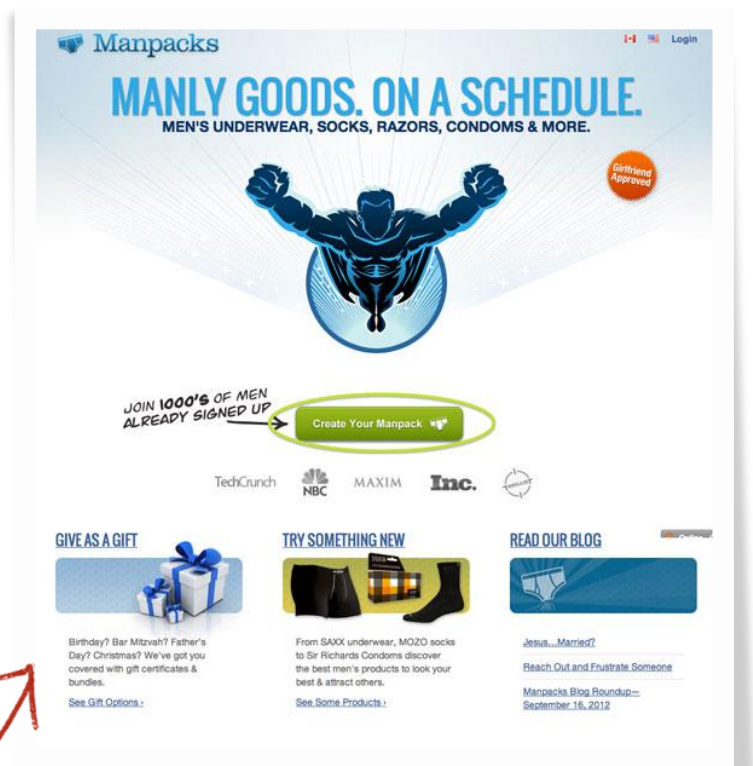
One way to encourage your readers to sign up is to create a sense of urgency, and one way to do this is to add words like "today" and "now" to your CTA buttons.

2. Designing Your CTA

Use Colors To Entice

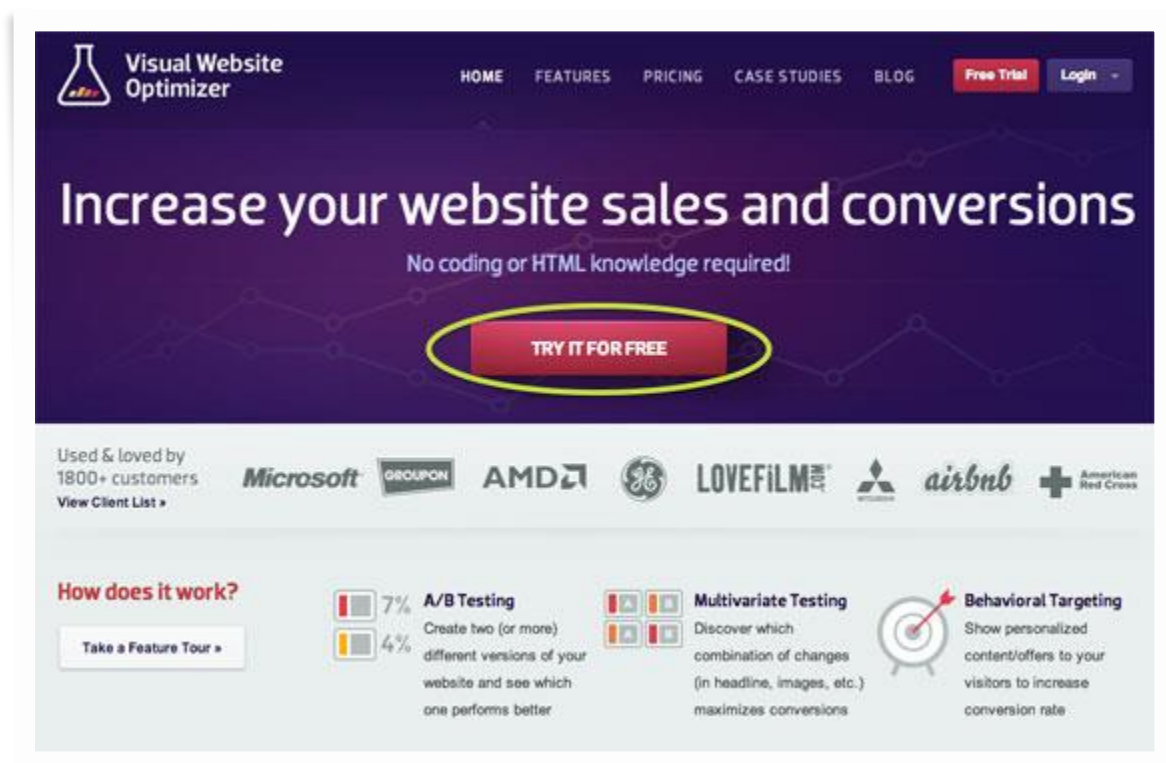
Design is a huge factor in how effective your CTA will be. A CTA that doesn't stand out from the rest of your website will get very little attention, so while it's advisable to stay with the same style of your website (similar fonts, colors in your style guide etc.), it's also important that readers actually notice it.

For example, look how Manpacks green CTA stands out from the rest of their colors:



Make the button look clickable.

You'll have noticed that most things online that can be clicked, look like they can be clicked. This is because shading or contouring makes the button look like, well, a real-life button. So if you want your CTAs to be clicked, it makes sense to make it look like something that people know to be clickable, right?



3. Format Your CTA

Place your CTA prominently on your website.

Once you've designed your CTA and written its copy, it's time to start putting it to work on your website. Placing your CTA above the fold will gain more click and conversions,

while placing it below the fold will gain you higher quality leads, so it all depends on what your goals are with your CTA.

Wherever you choose to place your CTA, ensure that it's in a prominent position on your website – don't hide it away.

Personalize CTAs for different segments of your audience.

Of course, you should A/B test your CTAs (we'll get into that a bit more later) but you can also tailor your CTAs so that they only show up to a select part of your audience. For example, you might want to show one CTA to your leads and another to visitors

Add alt text.

The web is becoming a very visual place, but there are browsers that may not support your images, or visually impaired users that rely on textual content in order for them to use the web. In order to ensure that all your users get the same great experience, it's important to add alt tags to your CTAs (as you should with all your visual content).

4. Testing Your CTAs

A/B Test Various CTAs To Find The Best Performer.

Sure, following these rules will optimize your CTAs, but A/B testing them is the only way that you can know for sure that your CTA is performing at its best.

How To Create Compelling CTAs With Canva

Creating CTAs is all about creating visuals, so you need to find the right graphic design platform for you.

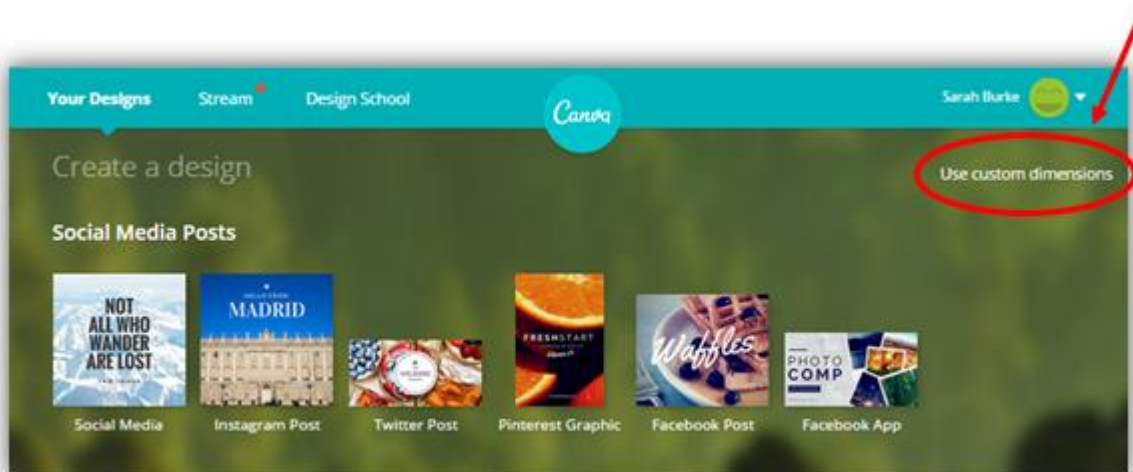
If you're a photoshop pro, then lucky you! Go ahead and skip this part, you already have the skills to create great CTAs.

For those of us who don't know what "blending" even really means, there are other tools that are extremely effective in creating CTAs. My absolute favorite? Canva.

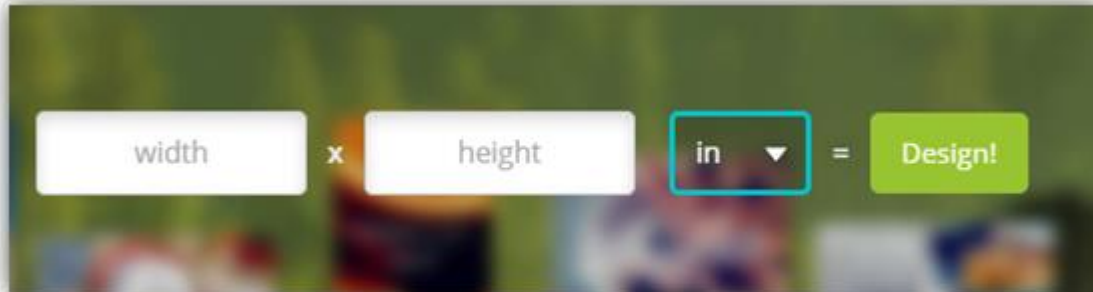
Canva is easy to use, provides templates to help you create designs, allows for a huge variety of projects, has a large database of free (and paid) images, and with their design school, anyone can learn how to pass for a graphic designer with a little practice.

Step 1: Choose Your Size

The dimensions of your CTA will all depend on what kind of CTA you've decided will work best for you. While Canva has a bunch of ready-made dimensions, there is also a "use custom dimensions" tool:



This allows for you to create graphics in any dimension of your choosing, based on inches, millimeters or pixels.



Step 2: Get Inspired

What kinds of CTAs have convinced you to take their intended action? Look through your inbox at what newsletter you've signed up for, and then go to that website to see what the CTA looks like.

Step 3: Copy The Layout Of Your Inspiration

Great, you've found a CTA that impresses you. Now, copy it.

No, I'm not saying make a direct replica of it. Instead, just use the layout of an existing CTA as the basis of your CTA's layout.

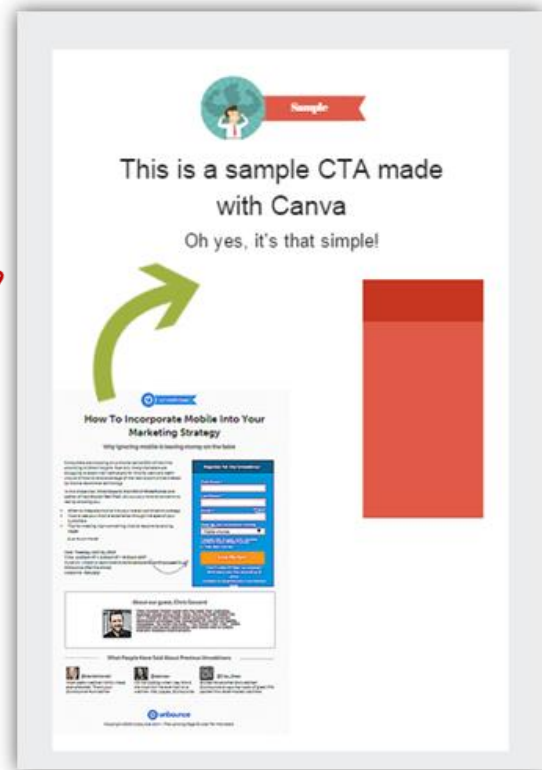
Here's the thing: You're not a graphic designer, but the chances are many of these CTAs have been created by actual graphic designers (or at least people with more experience with graphic design than you), so mimicking them/being inspired by them will help you create something that looks good, and performs well!

I like to print screen the CTAs that catch my eye and save them as a picture.

I then upload that picture to Canva and insert them into the graphic I'm creating. This helps me match up the layout as I go, as you can see in the image to the right:



The original CTA picture can be moved, deleted and re-added at any point in your design creation.

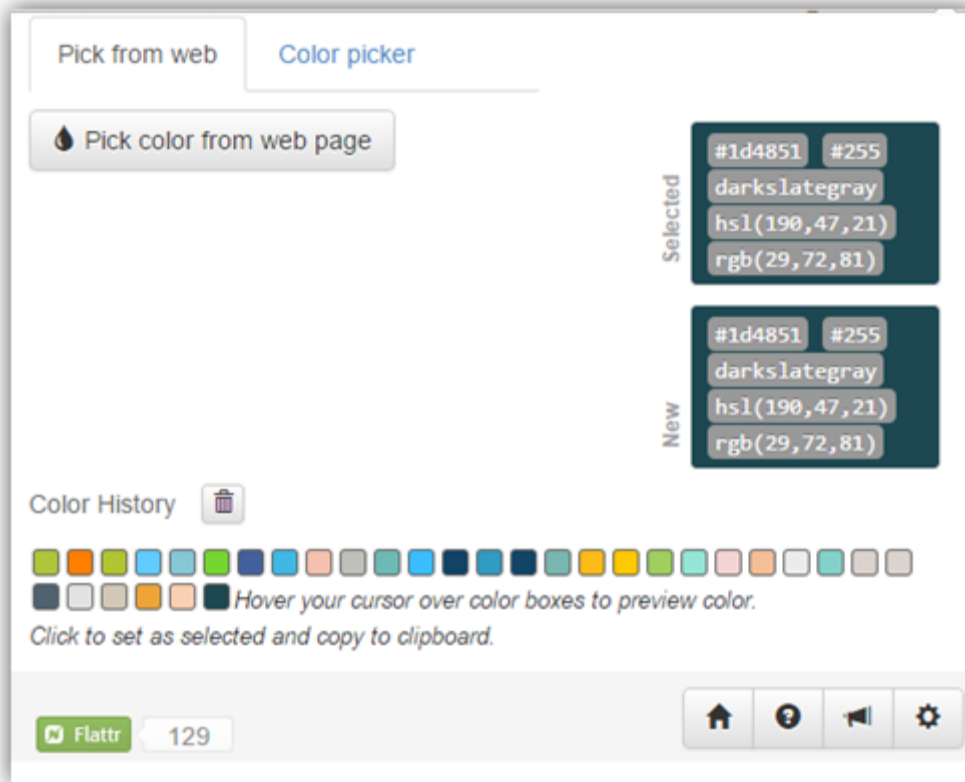


Step 4: Choose A Color Scheme

Usually, your website will be what decides your color scheme for you. Like we said, you want your CTA to stand out, but also work with the flow of the rest of your website's aesthetic.

I know, it sounds hard. But trust me, you just need the right tools.

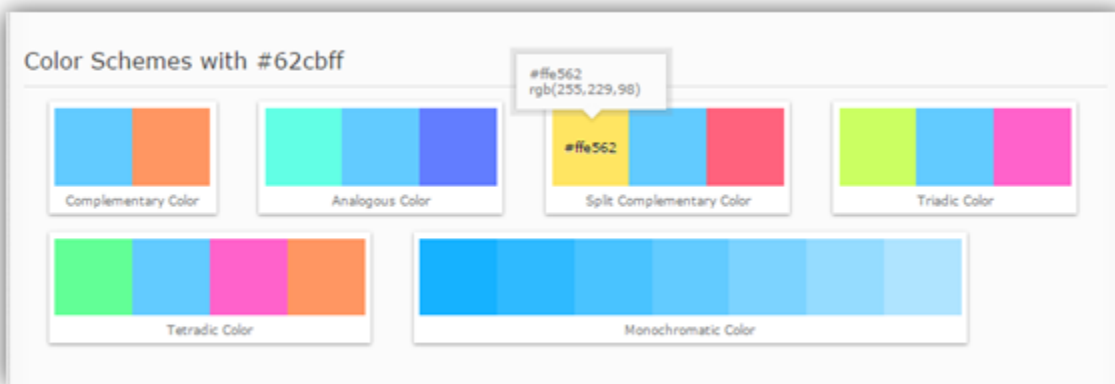
First, download an eyedropper tool, like [Instant Eyedropper](#) or, my new favorite, [EyeDropper](#).



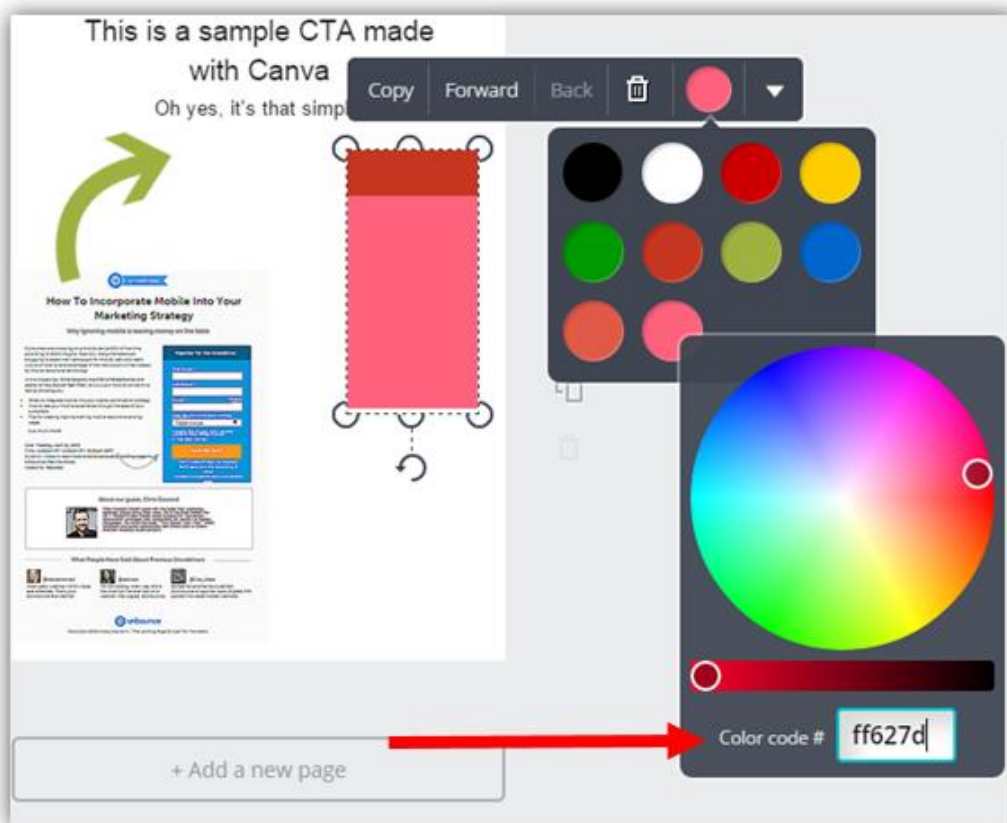
Use your eyedropper tool to select the shade on your website you want your CTA to match, and then copy it into [ColorHexa](#).



ColorHexa analyses the color code and gives you complimentary and contrasting colors (among other things).



Copy the codes of the contrasting/complementary/tetradic etc. colors of your choosing, and simply paste it in Canva.



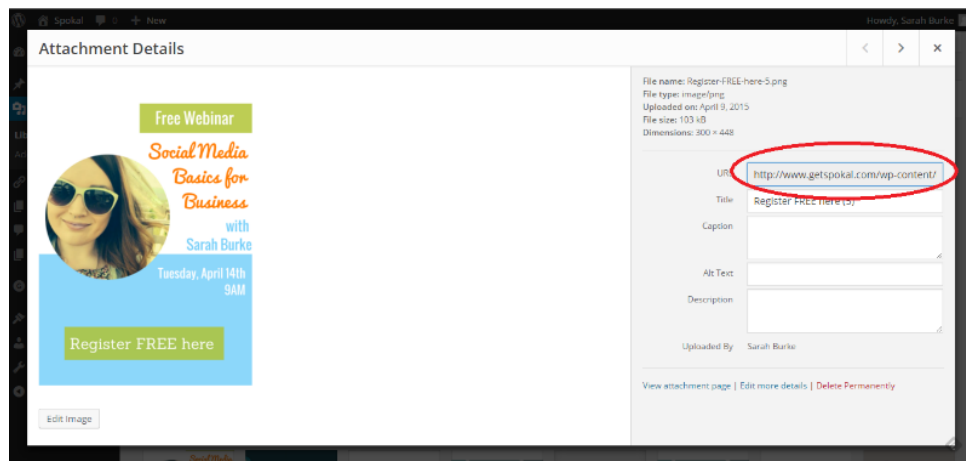
Step 5: Write The Copy

Once the color scheme and layout is all set, then it's up to you to create compelling, actionable copy. Remember: Use action words, keep it short and sweet, highlight only your best features and call attention to how you can help people.

Then you'll probably spend some time tweaking fonts, position of images etc. Be picky, make yourself look at the smallest details, and spend some time getting it just right.

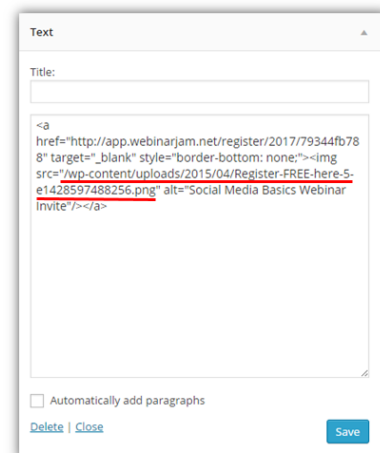
Step 6: Add Your CTA To Your Website!

If you're on WordPress, you simply add your graphic to your media library, and then copy the URL for the graphic to your chosen CTA destination.



This particular CTA is on our sidebar, so I simply go to Appearance >> Widget >> Primary Sidebar >> Your Chosen Placement and add the URL into my embedded code.

And you're all set to go!



Strategies For Getting Readers To Opt-In

There are 3 main tactics that you can use to get your visitors to opt-in to your CTAs: Ask, trick and force.



Ask

The politest of the bunch, asking people to sign up is always a favorite amongst website visitors. By offering updates, news, discounts, promos and freebies for an email, customers don't feel resentful or annoyed because the decision has been placed solely in their hands. This is how you create a relationship with your readers that is based on trust and mutual respect.

Trick

If you trick customers into giving over their information, you run the risk of ruffling a few feathers. People like to feel like the business that they're dealing with is transparent and honest.

Visitors can be tricked into opting-in through comments section, polls, quizzes etc. When the content is good enough, users usually don't mind – or even notice – that they've been tricked, but if the content is sub-par then you'll notice very few people will turn into loyal customers.

Force

Content that expires, or is for members only, is the most forcible way you can get customers to opt-in. This tactic is only effective if you've already proven to your visitors that you are trustworthy and offer a lot of value.

Likewise, contests that force users to enter their information in order to gain opt-ins can be effective if the prize is deemed worthy enough of the effort.

Conclusion

If you don't have much time, but you want to make a difference with regards conversions on your website, your CTA is a prime opportunity for you to do so. So use actionable words, make your CTA pop with some color, create buttons that are just too clickable to resist, and above all: run A/B tests so you know what your best performers are.

10 A Guide To Off-Page SEO

How many of you can say “You’ve got mail” without putting on the AOL computer voice? I know – what memories! Sitting there, impatiently waiting for your dial up to connect, and then tada! Mail!

It was unbelievably exciting.

But, if you were anything like me, most of your mail was spam. Actually, my first decade of email experience was tainted by spam. I even had to create a special email address just to send all the spam to! And I know I wasn’t the only one. In fact, I didn’t start to take email seriously until I was in my first year of college which was in... 2007!

But, this was a problem, and as technology grows, it’s a problem that we’ve – for the most part – solved. Now, our inboxes are smart enough to fish out spam and send it straight to our junk mail, without us ever having to lay our busy little eyes on it!

And when we do get mail that we don’t like, it’s just a matter of clicks before we never have to see it again!

While in these days it’s much less common to get notifications for every email we receive, and instead social media that reigns supreme in that department, that doesn’t mean that email has become any less important. In fact, our email inboxes have become somewhat of a place for solitude for us. Unlike social media – where the content that pops up on your feeds can be sporadic and oftentimes, overwhelming – email is where we receive messages that we’ve carefully chosen to receive.

That’s why, if you’ve been in the marketing world for any length of time, you’ll have heard the amazing value that email can provide businesses and marketers with when it

comes to communicating with their customers. But, while email marketing is an amazing vessel for business' marketing messages, it's one of those tricky tools that not every knows how use.

So, in an attempt to right that wrong, let's get started...

Step 1: Get Permission To Stay In Contact

Firstly, in order to effectively market through email, you have to get permission to do so. No one's going to look at your unsolicited (read: spam) emails. There are a few ways to get permission to send your audience emails, and each strategy tends to fall into 1 of 3 categories: Ask, Trick and Force.



To review these strategies, check out chapter 9.

Remember, to get permission to send people emails, you need to tell them why they should or would want to get those emails. "Gimme ur email address, plz" just won't do.

Firstly, you're not a 14 year old girl. Secondly, you don't give any incentives as to why they should give you their email.

Elaborate, make people think that they need your content in their inbox.

A good exercise is to look at your own reasons for giving out your email. Personally, I tend to give my email for the top 3 reasons:

1. I want to keep up to date with a blog (i.e. I really like their content!)
2. A free download – usually an ebook or a whitepaper
3. To keep updated with products/services/new releases etc.

Have a look at your inbox and try to remember the reasons you signed up for the newsletters and marketing messages that you receive. What works for you, will often work for others!

Step 2: The Follow-Up Email & Managing Expectations

So you've got their email addresses, now what?

Well, it's time to manage your subscribers' expectations. Email marketing is all about expectations, and it's up to you to set them. This means creating an email marketing plan that you can follow-through with, and communicating this with your audience.

To manage expectations, it's a good idea to send your subscribers a quick follow-up email immediately after they've subscribed. This is an optimal opportunity for you to, not only thank them for subscribing, but to also to introduce yourself, send them material that you think they'll be interested in as new subscribers and remind them how often to expect your messages. Almost all email service providers give you the option to create an autoresponder workflows (something we'll talk about a little bit later), so use it!

Just remember: If you promise to send 1 email per week but instead send them one daily, then you're setting yourself up for some angry subscribers. On the other side of the story, if you promise to send one post daily, and only deliver once a month... you can bet people won't be happy either.

Step 3: Sending Out A Great Newsletter

Of course, there are plenty different kinds of emails that you can send to your subscribers, but a consistent newsletter is a great place to start. Quality content is, as always, the most important element of, well, anything. But, more specifically, quality content is the most important element of a great newsletter.

So, in saying that, it's important to note that sales pitches is not the only content that you should be sending your readers. You might think that your product or service is quality, but everyone else may not necessarily agree with you. If you're asking people for something all the time, they're likely to start ignoring your emails.

Remember: Humans are selfish creatures, and they don't open emails in order to give something, they open emails to get something. Whether that's a free download, content that they think is useful, or a whitepaper – you need to give to receive.

Bottom line? Cut the sales pitches.

Make it readable!

Is readable even a word? Who knows!

Anyways, you want people to actually be able to read your email – no matter what device they're on, or how much time they have. That means:

- Mobile optimizing your emails
- Using bullet points, subheadings and plenty of short paragraphs (avoid the text-wall of doom!)
- Using simple HTML or text posts (don't get too flashy, these photos/videos often don't display properly in emails and could be marked as spam)

What's the pointing in creating those amazing marketing campaigns if no one can read them?

Proof and edit

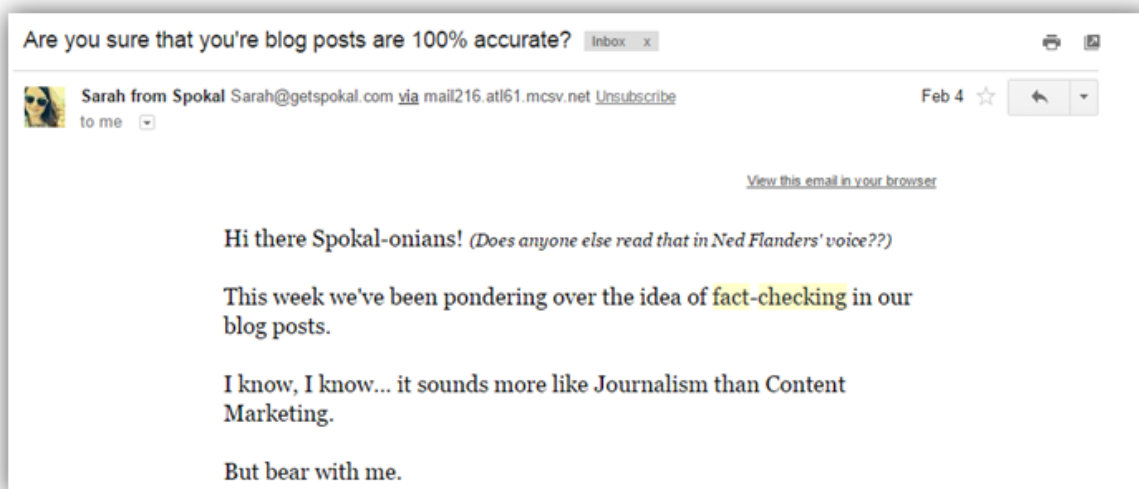
Read over your email a million times? Yup.

Confident that there are no mistakes? Yup.

Sent yourself a test email? Yup.

Ready to click send? Yu...Hold on!

I said "yes" to all of the above questions too. That was before I went ahead and sent this doozy:



Can you spot the mistake?

Try looking at the subject line.

Yup, I wrote “you’re” instead of “your”. For shame. You can start boo-ing me off the internet now.

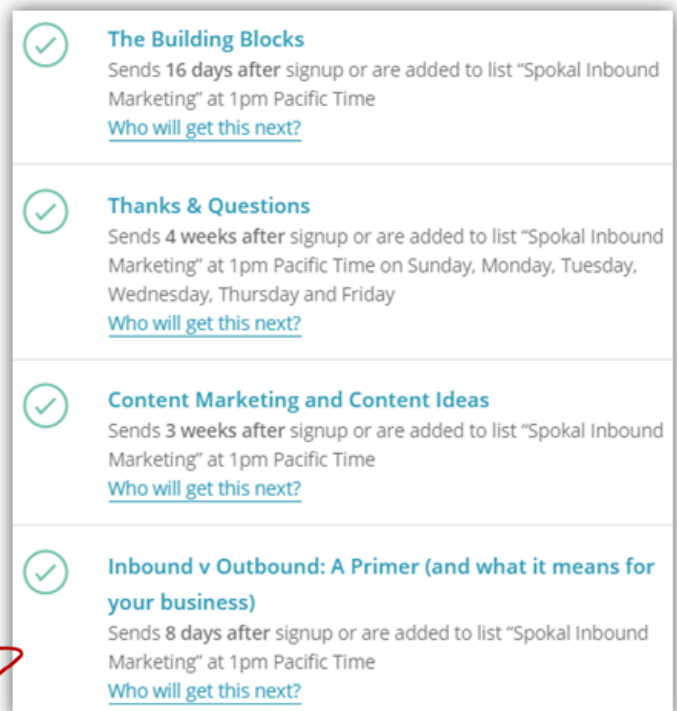
Self-editing is hard, and I learnt the hard way that my own eyes just won’t do. We tend to look over our own work with rose-tinted glasses, reading it how we intend for it to be read, rather than how it’s actually written.

If you can, have a co-worker read over your messages before you hit the send button to avoid typos, broken links or anything other errors that are sure to rub subscribers the wrong way.

Step 4: Creating An Automation Workflow

Like I said, most ESP (email service providers) have the capability of creating automated email workflows. So, instead of getting an email subscriber and initially sending them one or two emails, before getting distracted and forgetting all about them, you can be sure that you have emails sent to them over the course of a few days, weeks, months etc. with email automation.

Here’s a sample of some of the emails that we have set up with Mailchimp:



✓	The Building Blocks Sends 16 days after signup or are added to list "Spokal Inbound Marketing" at 1pm Pacific Time Who will get this next?
✓	Thanks & Questions Sends 4 weeks after signup or are added to list "Spokal Inbound Marketing" at 1pm Pacific Time on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday Who will get this next?
✓	Content Marketing and Content Ideas Sends 3 weeks after signup or are added to list "Spokal Inbound Marketing" at 1pm Pacific Time Who will get this next?
✓	Inbound v Outbound: A Primer (and what it means for your business) Sends 8 days after signup or are added to list "Spokal Inbound Marketing" at 1pm Pacific Time Who will get this next?

As you can see, these emails are scheduled to be sent to our subscribers after a certain amount of days of them being subscribed to us. We've more emails that are sent during this period too, and it means that once someone subscribes to our newsletter, they'll receive consistent messages from us (but not excessively, or too little) from the very beginning.

Step 5: Segmentation

After you've set up your email automation workflow, you might want to start targeting your audience in more specific ways. For example, you may want to send those who have clicked through to read your "social media automation for dummies" blog post a follow-up email with more information on social media automation and how your product can offer a solution.

Segmenting your subscribers based on the different information you have of them is a great way to ensure that the messages you're sending them are more targeted, and therefore, more interesting to that individual.

Like I said, you can do this based off of your subscribers behavior towards your emails, but there are tons of ways that you can segment your email lists, such as:

- Gender
- Age
- Geography
- Persona
- Organization Type
- Industry
- Job Role
- Seniority Level

Just like a tailored suit is a much more comfortable choice over a one-size-fits all one, as is segmented emails to a more targeted group much more comfortable (and therefore, more appealing) than more general emails to everyone.

Step 6: Analytics

As we all know by now, analytics are an important way for us to analyze whether or not our marketing efforts are working. Most ESPs offer some form of analytics that you can look at.

For email marketing, there are plenty of analytics that you should be looking at, but 3 of the most important ones to watch out for are: open rate, click through rate (CTR), and unsubscribes.

Your open rate will tell you how well you've built your relationship. Depending on your industry, the average open rate varies – check out [Mailchimp's averages for your industry](#). In general, a good open rate is about 20ish% for a marketing campaign.

A low open rate means that people have started to either ignore your messages, or delete them as soon as they receive them. (Or, what I do, is mark them as “read” and just leave them there – probably never to be actually read!) If your open rates are low, you need to work on your email marketing game. Take a look at the previous emails you've sent them, or at your subject lines. Something about those emails has deterred your subscriber from opening them up, so tweak and test until you get higher open rates.

If your click through rate (CTR) is low, it could mean a few things. Either, your messages aren't targeted enough, i.e. you need to step up your segmentation game, or you're simply not being clear with your audience what you want them to do, i.e. you need to improve your copy.

If your un-subscription rate is high in comparison to your opt-in rate, then you've got some serious work to do. If this is a problem that you have, then go back and look at when people are choosing to unsubscribe from you.

If they're leaving after a certain autoresponder email, then re-work it. If they're leaving after marketing messages, then re-work the way you present offers. If they're leaving early on in your funnel, then you need to fix your original call to action so that it's in harmony with what you're sending.

Email analytics are critical in that if you're paying attention, they'll give you very specific clues as to what you're doing wrong. Of course the key variable here is "paying attention."

The Top Email Marketing Providers

There are tons of email marketing providers for you to choose from, but just to help you out, here's a rundown of 3 of the more popular providers:

Mailchimp

Mailchimp is probably one of the most popular email marketing companies out there. They offer a lot of great services, and provide a lot of templates for you to choose while creating emails. It's also super simple to set up autoresponders, and there are tons of integration and segmentation tools.

You can start out with a Forever Free plan, which lets you send email to up to 2000 subscribers for up to 12000 emails per month. Once you go above this plan, you can start a month-by-month payment plan.

Aweber

Aweber offers a lot of the same functions as a lot Mailchimp. They have a 30 day free trial, and then then the pricing starts at \$19 for the first 500 contacts.

They do seem to have a more designer-friendly signup form builder to integrate into your site, making your signup form more attractive.

Constant Contact

Constant Contact offers a 60-day free trial, giving you even more time to try their service before you buy. After the trial, their pricing plans are pretty reasonable, scaling up the more subscribers you have.

Constant contact also provides you with marketing plans, show you how to market events, has social integration capabilities and will help you to build out an online survey.

Email Layout Best Practices

Most ESPs provide you with templates and designs in order for you to get your emails looking great with as little hassle as possible, but just to give you some guiding principles, here are 5 rules that you should abide by when creating your email layout:

1. Design With Mobile In Mind

53% of emails are opened on mobile, so I think it goes without saying that making sure that people can actually read your email on their other mobile devices is pretty important.

2. Make Links Look Like Links

We're all conditioned to know what a link looks like, and we won't do any detective work to find them. Make links look like links so people can click through to your content easier.

3. Design For 600 Width Of Pixels

Emails are viewed on a variety of different platforms, so you need to be aware that you only have so much screen width to play with. A safe bet is to keep it at 600 pixels or below.

4. Minimize the Use of Images

While the web is becoming an increasingly visual place, there are still some devices that don't display images correctly. Reduce the chances that your subscribers won't be able to see your email at all by not relying too heavily on images to get your message across.

5. Be CAN-SPAM Compliant

Well, because you legally have to. To be CAN-SPAM compliant you'll need to ensure that your physical mailing address is in the email and that users can unsubscribe from your email by replying to it, or through a single click.

5.1 Make it Easy to Unsubscribe

But it's not only about being CAN-SPAM compliant, allowing your subscribers to unsubscribe from you easily is also better for you than being marked as "spam," and a hard to find unsubscribe button is the easiest way to be marked as so.

Don't forget: It is better if your users unsubscribe from your list than if they mark you as spam. If you're marked as spam, there's no going back. Plus, being marked as spam lowers your delivery rates as your emails are automatically marked as spam more and more.

But if you're unsubscribed to, well, then there's some hope that you can win them over again.

Conclusion

Email marketing is still a very effective way to market your business, so if you're not sending out emails, then get started now. Simply choose a mail provider, get collecting those emails, and then get an email automation workflow going that your subscribers love!

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