



Sensible Copy
and Consulting

The Sensible Business Owner's Blog GUIDE

Building Authority to Get Leads

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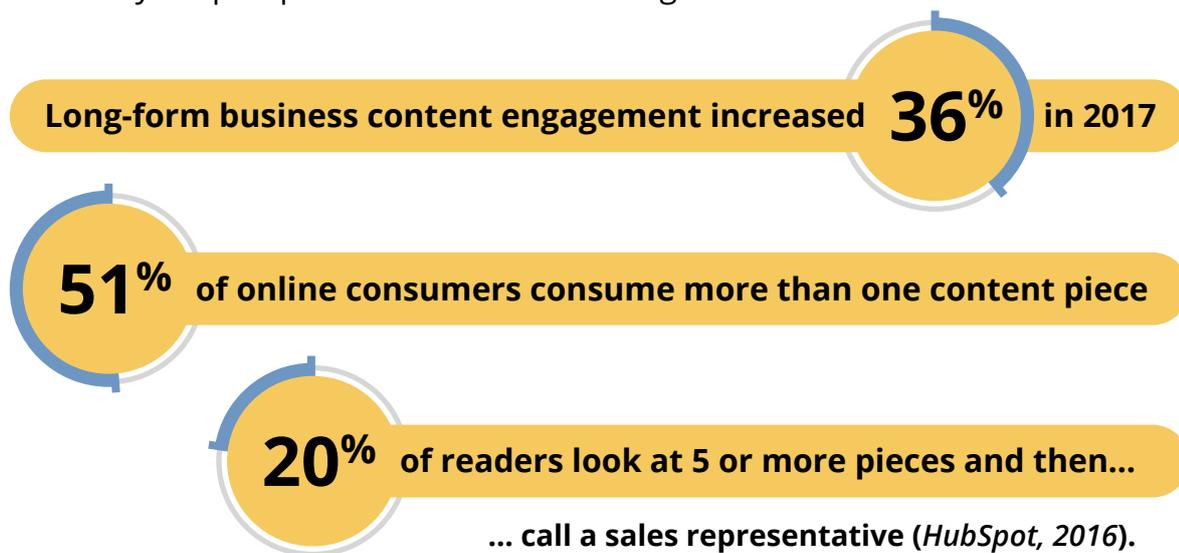
You're running a business. We know that you don't have the time to be sitting developing content, writing thousands of words and spending hours online in social media forums.

But...

Yes, there is always a 'but.'

If you aren't dedicating some of your resources to creating a solid online presence, you are missing a huge opportunity for free and cheap leads that come to you. While other companies continue to pound the pavement, you can streamline your efforts and save the soles of your shoes by pounding the keyboard.

The reason is your prospects are online and doing research:



Are you getting that call?

When companies publish 16 or more content pieces every month, they increase traffic by **3.5 times** compared to competitors posting four or less (HubSpot, 2015).

If you aren't getting the calls you want, and you'd like to, this guide will show you what every major brand and savvy smaller brand is doing to develop that brand authority online.

In four simple steps, we will lay out why you need content, how to identify the content you should be writing and how to better compliment any online advertising with smarter lead capture systems.

Step One: Define Brand Personality

Every person on earth has a unique personality. Every company has its own personality as well. What is yours? Whatever it is, we want to keep it from seeming like it's a split personality. We don't want clients confusing you with their Great Uncle Bob.

Let's take a few moments to understand why content reigns and how to develop your online personality.

Why do you need online content?

Simple answer: because your competitors are doing it already.

More complex answer: just because competitors are doing it, doesn't mean they are doing it well. You can catch up and beat them because most aren't strategically approaching content needs. You are smarter than your competition.

Even more complex answer: You need online content because consumers are going online before they do anything. Your prospects - the people you want to sell to - are searching for solutions, price comparisons and benefits before they talk to a single person about solving their problems.

Take a moment and think about the last major (or minor) thing you were going to buy. Maybe it was a camera or specific software for your company. What did you do?

You probably went online, put the product name in the search engine. Maybe you weren't sure of a product solution so you typed in the description such as HD video camera or small business accounting software. Then you probably looked at websites offering comparisons or solutions.

If the website looked like your Great Uncle Bob made it while taking a break from Pickle Ball, you most likely will leave the site. When you found a site that explained what you needed and what the cost-effective solutions were in an authoritative fashion (meaning an industry expert giving you advice), you continued reading until you were satisfied that you discovered the product to solve your need.

This is no different than what your prospects are doing.

They are responding to company websites they perceive as the authority in what they need. Your job online is to become that authority so they want YOU to help them. Part of establishing that authority is establishing the company culture you want to share online.

What is your company culture?

While every company has its own culture and personality, this is a concept that isn't all that easy to define. What it boils down to is how your company does things and what makes it different.

Company culture starts with the mission of your company and where you plan on taking it. Every person on staff should be able to clearly define what you do as a company and explain why you are the best. A shared vision is contagious and is absorbed by your consumers.

Think about the corporate culture of Google. It's a hip cutting-edge technology company. It has put libraries and the term "card catalog" out of business. But its culture is more than just being a behemoth search engine. It's workforce is treated with the same cutting-edge innovations to job structure as the technology they create. The company offers flexibility in schedules, lifestyle inclusions such as bringing your pup to work and encourages new ideas.

Some companies need to be more conservative than others. Plumbing isn't sexy, but a sexy

plumbing company is unique and different. A personal injury attorney who rides in on his Harley is different than every other lawyer out there. Think about what you do, why you do it and how you want your customers to see and remember you.

Your company culture is the attitude your company conveys to its prospects and truly lives among its workforce. Your target audience may define part of your company culture.

Understanding your audience.

This is imperative. Translation: We CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH.

Without fully understanding your target audience, you are likely marketing to the wrong people. In today's marketing world, your ideal buyer is known as an avatar or a customer profile.

Not only do you need to define your client, you need to know where they are in the buying process. Do they truly understand what they need? If so, do they have an idea of what the best solution is?

Those who know what there is a problem and are seeking a specific solution are a small percentage of prospects. But if you are the top rank, that small percentage will find you first. Strategic content is created to help those who know they need some type of solution but aren't quite sure what that solution is. Your content leads down the path to happiness.

Your Prospect's Journey

For example, imagine the person who is having trouble sleeping. They might not be sure why. They get online trying to understand possible scenarios such as stress, mattress or back pain. They may even look at supplements a potential solution to their sleep issues.

Now imagine you, the local mattress store, that creates content based on all the reasons people have trouble sleeping. Let's assume that the person is having trouble sleeping because of a herniated disc in his neck and the real solution is surgery. You aren't a surgeon and can't solve his problem but that doesn't mean you can't create content that talks about the various things that lead to back pain, potential solutions and long-term strategies for recovery including your mattresses.

Your prospect might not need you right now, but perhaps his surgeon or physical therapist will talk about how his mattress affects his long-term back health. Enter you, the expert.

Your Ideal Customer

Spending time to talk to your customers and prospects helps to identify the ideal customer. If you haven't been in business long, you need to start with what you imagine to be your ideal customer, collect data and start to survey results.

Sometimes your target client isn't obvious. For example, a company that provides home care services for senior citizens might start out thinking the ideal client is a person over the age of 70 who wants to remain in her home. But after doing additional research and surveying new clients, it becomes apparent that the target audience is the adult children helping aging parents with decisions about staying home or moving into a care home.

By understanding who your decision maker is you are better able to target content, hit the right emotional triggers and build the right relationship with that audience through content.

That ideal client is spending time researching various solutions online. In the case of the senior home care company, adult children are often doing most of the research and then presenting it to parents. When you know your target, you can laser focus your efforts and building your brand.

Make a choice about style and tone.

This goes back to your company culture and audience understanding. But it also comes across in how you present yourself online. You can write your online content, your blog in a first person view, second person, or the third person point of view.

You can come in as a very professional authority. Or you can be a friend talking to a friend helping them understand how to find a solution for a problem. How you choose your style and your tongue should be reflective of your audience and your company culture. If you have done your homework about the company culture and your target audience then determining the style and tone of your blog content should be easy. It naturally flows from the work you've put in.

Step Two: Understanding the Competition

This section can seem simply: who else is fighting for your prospect's attention? You probably have a pretty good idea of who is a competitor in your area. You might even sit next to them on occasion at the local chamber of commerce lunch. But you need to realize that there many other voices whispering and screaming in your prospect's ear.

Discover the key players doing exactly what you do. Also look at the key players who help your prospects with a similar problem or with a different type of solution. Just like the sleep example we talked about earlier, you need to know that prospects can be influenced to try other solutions.

The person seeking weight loss might try a fad diet, join a gym, hire a trainer, use weight loss supplements or try a weight loss or detox program. Every single one of those niches is vying

for the same prospect. Take a close look at what they are all doing, what emotional cues they hit with prospects and what their client reviews look like.

This will affect how you craft content and use keywords to compete. It's not about screaming louder, its about clarity for prospects. Knowing the competition gives you the clarity that translates online.

Keywords Continue to Dominate

Even the least savvy person on the web has probably heard that keywords are important. Bloggers are tagging content and listing words that are popular. Everyone is using keywords.

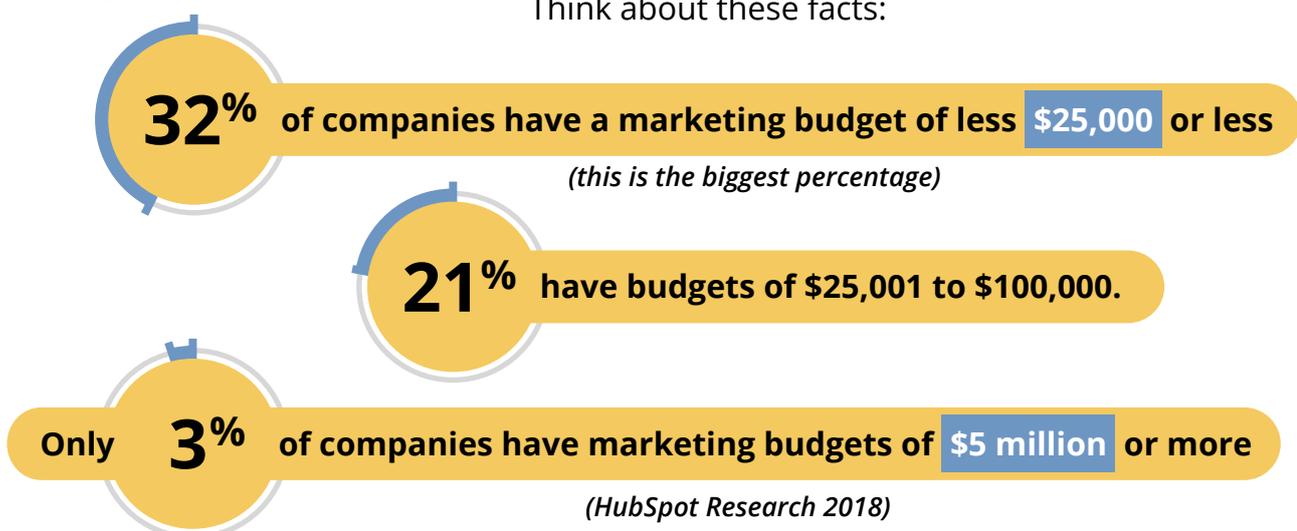
So if everyone is using keywords, why bother?

Because search engines are smarter than your average blogger and know the difference between well-crafted content that contains the right keywords and content created with the sole intention of stuffing as many keywords into the mix as possible. The result is Google penalties, which mean the search results for that site drop.

That's good for you, the smart blogger who will use keywords in smart content. Your keyword foundation is the words and phrases that your prospects ask. If they are asking, they are searching. However, most major keywords and phrases are the same for a business regardless of whether they are large or small. The audience nor the search engine differentiate content based on a company size. It does however consider content library size, which we'll cover a bit later.

The problem is big national brands have bought the market on most keywords through ads and big budget SEO campaigns. If you are trying to compete with the big national brands on the most traditional keywords, you'll lose. But don't despair; you can still win the SEO game by playing smart.

Think about these facts:



Lets accept that the big boys are going to spend money and own a percentage of the market. But you still need to know what they are doing because not only are they targeting your prospects, they are trying to buy you out of the market with their big budgets screaming louder by buying all the keywords via ads and building huge content libraries.

The Big Business Edge

The goal of all this content to generate inbound leads – that's are when prospects email or call you. Getting that edge requires focusing your SEO with a little more purpose than everyone else. This isn't hard even though a lot of your competitors aren't doing it.

When we say everyone, we mean everyone. The majority of companies use inbound marketing as their primary marketing approach to the total of 79% in North America, slightly higher than the global rate, 74% (HubSpot Research 2018).

But marketing and marketing effectively are two different things.

Large corporations already have brand recognition. Still most flood the market with content and ads because they can afford it and it's the strategy to maintain top brand authority over competitors big and small. Every possible topic is approached to maintain the top spot in keywords. They also pay for sponsored posts to be the first thing consumers see in search results. Essentially they buy they market in the most keywords.

David Beats Goliath

If big companies with huge marketing budgets are buying the market, where does the little guy with a budget of \$25,000 or less find success?

Using long-tail keywords.

Long-tail keywords are three to five word phrases that customers use specifically find what they are looking for. 50% of all search queries by consumers are 4 words or more (WordStream, 2016).

The average consumer reads 3 to 5 pieces of content before engaging a company to work with (Demand Gen Report, 2016) . That content is usually found by entering a long-tail keyword phrase. Part of the reason is the increase of using voice assistance in searching.

These phrases often include a zip code or city such as, "best gyms in Burbank."

Local searches produce results with 50% of searches resulting in a store visit within 24 hours and 78% resulting in offline purchases (Search Engine Land, 2014).

Finding what long-tail keywords increases your chances of Use the right data to determine which keywords are most important. If you think about how you speak about things you want, then you are on course to find the right long-tail keywords.

This is the foundation to the recipe for content success. Then add to the recipe; include a mix of similar phrases all used in the same blog. It's this mix that becomes the sweet part of the recipe that the search engines love.

The Secret to Multiple Keywords

Every topic has other phrases that are commonly associated with the content. These might involve synonyms or industry related jargon. Using the gym example above, there are many ways to create a mix.

Best gyms in Burbank
Workout centers in Burbank
Weight loss with boot camps
Fitness centers near studios
Fitness classes and gym equipment

These are examples of how you start to expand on your key long-tail keyword phrase. This is part art and part science. But even if you aren't an expert, you can still increase your rankings by using a variety of phrases.

Develop Smart Content

Smart content is engaging content. It's what you want to present to the broad public. The solutions you provide people are often the step before they actually need you.

Remember there is a hierarchy to consumer awareness and need. It starts with the person who doesn't even know they have a problem and works its way up the hierarchy to the person who knows there is a problem, has looked at all sorts of solutions and has decided on one particular solution.

The prospect at the top of the hierarchy is easiest to sell to because they know they have a problem and need you. However, if they don't know who you are by the time they need you, a competitor wins.

Look at this example:

You have a landscaping company. Your prospect is thinking about replanting an adolescent fruit tree. This prospect may be pretty handy and have many resources available to him so he thinks he can research it and do it himself but wants to research exactly what is required to keep the fruit tree healthy during and after the event. He comes across your blog about this topic. Obviously your expertise shines through with case studies and examples of when things go well and when they don't.

You provide the prospect useful insights about what to expect after transplanting, the signs of poor tree health and what to do. You have a simple call-to-action to get a free step-by-step guide to tree health. He signs up for your email list. A month later his fruit tree is not doing well. He happens to receive your newsletter offering a free consultation. He calls.

What you have done is provided an Internet researcher a solution. He then becomes a prospect who is in your system. By consistently sending valuable content, he believes you to be an authority and calls you when he is ready.

All this was because of quality smart content. Finding buyers before they realize they are buyers.

Step Three: Develop Baseline Content

If you haven't already started an online blog or developed online content, having one or two posts is not going to make a difference. You need to establish what we call a starter library. The starter library needs to be a set of articles that meet the most comprehensive set of consistent prospect needs in your industry.

Some of the content will be longer, developing the authoritative side of your business. Other parts of the library consist of shorter content to grab a reader's attention and hold it long enough for them to engage with a question, comment or share. Longer content is usually 1,500 words or longer while shorter content can be a quick list of tips maybe capped at 300-500 words.

Keep in mind that search engines favor long form content. Top search results on Google have an average word length of 1890 words (Backlinko, 2016). Long form content consists of 1,200 words or more, often averaging around 1,500. Some longer pieces can serve as pillars to your entire content library, which also helps. There is still value in short form content because the consumer's attention span is often short.

Use both. They build on each other with favorable search results and quality consumer engagement. Make sure to format long form content because 43% of readers confess to skimming content for desired information (HubSpot, 2016).

Be a Solution Provider

Content shouldn't be bogged down in methods; it should proclaim solutions. The single mom whose car broke down on the highway doesn't care about how the radiator works. She wants to know that you can get it fixed in time for her rush her kids to soccer practice.

Good content is always solution-oriented. By focusing on the solution, not the methodology behind the solution, the content is considered a valuable resource. Everyone else is just trying to sell something or sound smart. That's a marketing trap and we aren't going to let you fall into it. Valuable resources are rewarded in search engines because consumers appreciate it.

English Teachers Aren't Grading Blogs

Write like you speak – or like your consumers speak.

Most people are afraid to write thinking that its all about grammar and creative thinking. Some of the most popular blogs out there have grammar and spelling errors. While we don't recommend being lazy about editing and proofreading your content, it is important to understand that engaged readers are engaged because you're speaking to them, reading their minds.

You speak to people regularly, right? Congratulations, you can blog.

Start with Your FAQs

A lot of business owners struggle with content topics. It's the primary reason blogs die. The blog isn't mature enough to get engagement or provide results and the blogger runs out of ideas. We recommend starting with your own FAQ section.

Design blogs that use case studies or anecdotes. Build content around what your customers are frequently searching for online, which is probably addressed in your FAQs but blogs are more personal and fun. Useful and fun is the foundation of your starter library.

Once you have a starter library, keep a pulse of your audience. Look for trends or common problems that prospects have. For example, IT companies can have the core content library and then provide up-to-date content on regulation changes or common problems with tech risks.

Setting Expectations for Results

One of the major reasons business owners stop blogging is because they have unrealistic expectations about getting results. They think it should get business right away and after a few weeks of blogging they tire of the process because results haven't flown in yet.

You aren't that impatient. Understanding that this is a long-term strategy is critical for success. It takes time to develop what the search engine "spiders" find. It takes time to build engagement. But it is worth it. If it weren't, 79% of companies wouldn't be trying to play in this arena.

There's no simple way to say how much content is needed before you see results. There are a lot of factors that go into search engine success. Part of that is what is the competition doing. Another is examining how competitive the market really is. Are there big national brands that are buying out these keywords through advertising and other methods?

The idea is to create content that builds the library intelligently so the search engines and their "spiders" find you faster. Spiders are the bots that scour the internet for useful things based on consumer needs. It then indexes the internet and those businesses with active and solid blogs get indexed 424% more than those that don't.

Develop a Content Strategy

Right now, long form content is the key to getting the most search engine traction. We say right now because search engines are constantly changing based on consumer demands and we need to be flexible to change along with it.

With that in mind, your content strategy must include at least some long-form content. These have at least 1200 words. Some content can even exceed 2,000 words. Aside from being what the spiders like, this content helps you establish yourself as a qualified and true professional in your field.

Once you have a foundation of three to five long-form titles, look to create some small pieces. Of course you are going to ask why do this if the spiders like long-form? Because it helps engage consumers who scan content and don't have the best attention spans. Plus, shorter articles are easier for readers to digest and engage with which is critical for your success.

Because consumers scan things, make sure to break up longer articles with easy to scan headings so readers are able to find desired information faster. You don't just want readers to stop by your website, you want them to stay for a while. Search engines can tell when people "bounce" from a site quickly. So keeping them on your site for a few minutes is important. This starts to build SEO momentum.

Step Four: Be Consistent

Once you got the momentum started you need to be consistent with publishing new content. This lets the search engines know that you are still in business and you're still an authority.

Repurposed Content is High Value Content

We call this compounding content; it's where you use older content and update it and re-publish it. Only 10% of content on the market is compounded content yet this 10% generates more than 32% of traffic (HubSpot 2016). Why?

The search engines recognize it and it lends credibility to the writer.

Old content is as valuable, if not more valuable than new content. Search engines see how long content has been online. Engines give you more love the longer content has been up. Repurposing old content helps invigorate search engine recognition with new viewers to older content. This should all be part of your long-term content strategy.

Building Links

You may have heard about link building strategies and understand that they are important. If you haven't, here's the overview.

Creating anchor text that is hyperlinked to another website or webpage helps spiders index pages more effectively. Quality outside links help build authority to your information while internal links help move traffic to other content you have written. It's like using an index in a book instead of a table of contents. If you want to find one specific term, the index will send you to specific pages rather than guessing from chapter headings where your desired information is.

As part of your strategy, you will begin to link back to your own content and find resources where you can link out to. As you become a bigger online authority, your goal is to have other authority websites link to your content in what is called white hat link building – like the hero cowboy, white hat link building is the positive way to get results.

Social Media Goals

A big mistake many business owners do with social media advertising is to put an ad up for services or products. Instead of trying to sell someone something immediately, the goal should be to captivate them.

The primary goal with any social media advertising should be capturing people who want to learn something you are an expert at. The problem with traditional ads is it will only capture that 1-2% of people who need you right now, who are ready to buy immediately. What about everyone else who doesn't realize they'll need you in a month?

Social media advertising is great because it allows you to target customers very specifically and limit ad campaign budgets. When creating your campaign, your goal is to build your audience. That is the win, getting subscribers. This is the front-end acquisition strategy. Once you have your audience, you can offer more content, promotions and rate quotes. That is the back-end win – acquiring a new paying client.

Content strategies provide valuable content and build a relationship with an interested prospect who sees you as the expert when the time comes that they need your services. This is why capturing information is essential and creating a non-salesy drip of content that interesting, engaging and shareable.

It doesn't matter if you are a life coach, a divorce attorney or a plumber, building a community of followers is the key to becoming the leading authority in your area and building that pipeline of business. You'll know you're succeeding as you build a commentary base – those followers who ask questions, add insights and praise your content.

Engage With Comments

Engagement is critical for a blog and social media content. But it can't be a one-way street. Once you have them engaged, open communications with them. Don't just thank people for comments. Acknowledge and expand on their statements.

This is another area the search algorithms are tracking. To get search engine love, make sure have people reading your content, staying on your site and then engaging in comments. Most business owners think the search engine changes are just some money making scheme from Google and the other big search engines. That isn't what is happening.

The Next Steps

As you build bigger online authority, your next step is to solidify the top standings. This is done with more content, eBooks, whitepapers and even video series. Combine this with smart ads and funnels to capture and lead consumers to the sales path.

Make sure content has a call to action and don't be afraid to ask for the business. After all, you are offering something for nothing except the possibility of a sale. As long as the content is useful and valuable, prospects will happily give you the business when the time is right.

If you would like to look at ways to build your unique online presence, feel free to [reach out](#) to us here.