

Can YOU be a

Content Generator?

A guide to content,
what it's for, and how
to use it to attract
your target audience.



Foreword

Are you reading a lot about content but not generating any of your own? If you are, then you may be already aware of how important content is in helping you market yourself online.

However, I'm going to risk repeating this, even if you've heard it all before, because if you're still not generating content, you probably need reminding.

Content works for inbound marketing, and inbound marketing is an extremely effective tool in growing your business through online channels. Don't worry, I'll explain what inbound marketing is in chapter one.

This guide looks the importance of content in inbound marketing and, importantly, suggests ways of generating content for you to use in marketing your business and your brand.

Finding content that works for you can be a challenge, because it's about understanding how to attract your target audience by addressing the issues that matter to them.

In other words, it means taking on a different perspective: content should be about them, not you.

I'm a writer, but not everyone finds writing easy. The aim here is to offer suggestions to everyone, writers and non-writers alike.

This isn't a how-to manual however, nor does it attempt to be a definitive guide. Mainly, it's about getting you to think about content, and how you might generate it and use it.

Thomas Ridge

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1. What is Inbound Marketing?

Inbound marketing is where you work to attract an audience to you by offering them something of value. Essentially, you're trying to **PULL** them towards you, rather than pushing things out at them in the hope they'll want to buy from you.

This pull-marketing is very different from traditional forms of push-marketing, or outbound marketing.

Outbound marketing is the familiar stuff: advertisements, special offers, email shots, the leaflets you get pushed through your door, etc.

Why has inbound marketing developed?

Marketing Irritants

Basically, when it comes to being online, outbound marketing can prove to be something of a turn-off.

Think about those irritating banners and pop-up windows that seem to just get in the way when you're surfing the net, turning the pages you visit into obstacle courses.

So what do you do about it? You install an ad-blocker to prevent those ads getting in the way of your browsing.

That's bad news for marketers and their clients.

Marketers are a resilient bunch however, so they've been busy devising other ways of getting your attention.

Smart online marketers realise the value in allowing the customer to feel they are doing the legwork, because while the internet is extremely convenient, it's also about the power of individual discovery.

What is Inbound Marketing?

How Inbound Marketing Works

The idea is to connect with your target audience by first **ATTRACTING** and then **ENGAGING** with them.

This means gaining their attention, sparking their interest and then drawing them into your orbit.

The hub of this activity is likely to be your website. This is where you can expand on what your business offering is. Therefore, the aim of your inbound marketing activity is to drive people to your site.

By choosing this method, you're hoping that they will choose to come to you, without you giving them the hard sell.

What is the means you're going to use to do this?

The answer is **CONTENT**, of course.

Don't Confuse Your Inbound with Your Outbound

Whereas you shouldn't ignore all the marketing possibilities that may be relevant to your specific needs, you mustn't confuse your different marketing strategies.

For example, if you generate inbound content in the form of articles and blogs that aim to attract your audience to you, then you shouldn't be populating it with outbound sales messages.

On the other hand, if you're putting out outbound sales or marketing material, then it must focus on a clear call to action and work to persuade its intended audience to do this.

What is Inbound Marketing?

SUMMARY

Use **INBOUND MARKETING** to first attract and then engage your target audience.

This method allows your audience to feel they are much more in control, choosing to come to you, rather than you pushing things out at them. It is especially effective online, where people may find online advertising too intrusive.



2. Why is Written Content Important?

I'm a copywriter, and my focus is on **WRITTEN CONTENT** here.

Content does come in other forms, including video, which is continuing to grow exponentially in popularity. However, written content should still be an important part of any content strategy for several reasons.

And when it comes to SEO, or search engine optimisation, written content is vital, providing you optimise it for search engines (more on this later).

Let's look at your **CONTENT STRATEGY** first.

What is a Content Strategy?

A content strategy helps and supports you in using content in your marketing activities.

It involves planning, strategic thinking and a clear understanding of what your **BRAND VALUES** are, and what your brand's tone of voice should be in expressing them.

Your content strategy should be looking at what kind of content you need to reach your target audience, and where you should be posting or placing it to make it as effective as possible.

There are multiple online channels available for this, but it might not be the case that all of them are appropriate to your audience and your brand.

What are the risks if you don't have a content strategy?

Why is Written Content Important?

- You could be spending time, effort and money creating content that doesn't match your objectives, or that won't resonate with your target audience.
- You also might end up sending out mixed messages, confusing your inbound and outbound marketing (as I referred to earlier).

You should be **SYSTEMATIC** in your planning, understanding how your written content might fit in with your brand identity, with video and with key design and visual elements.

What having a content strategy should mean is that you are putting content at the heart of your marketing and communication activities.

People Still Like Reading Stuff

Yes, I know everyone is watching videos on their smartphones on the commute to work, or at work, or whenever, but that doesn't mean people don't want to read certain types of **INFORMATION**.

In fact, a written article or blog post can inform people very quickly and concisely, providing it's written in such a way that they can skim through it easily and digest the essential information it contains.

Also, you can choose to produce **LONG-FORM CONTENT** (like this guide) that sets things out in detail, clearly and under various subheadings, for people to read and digest at whatever pace they choose.

In other words, some content you produce should carry a certain amount of heft, to help boost your credibility. It's not all about soundbites and quick hits.

To bring prospects further along your sales funnel, you might require written content to add persuasive detail to your arguments and propositions.

Why is Written Content Important?

Reading, in certain key situations, be more appropriate than watching, especially if there's a soundtrack, which might distract or irritate others.

The other thing is, video and text are not mutually exclusive. In fact, written content can help videos rank higher on search engines, capturing their content in concise, clear written summaries.

Another issue is one of expense. Commissioning a professional looking video can be costly when compared to a professionally-written blog or article.

Yes, you could simply film it yourself on your mobile phone, but have you seen some of these videos lately? Talking at camera solidly for five to ten minutes may seem spontaneous, but it can quickly appear tedious

Work to a script. Achieving a watchable, off-the-cuff video is not easy. It's often far better to work up a written script first, which will help structure and deliver your message.

SUMMARY

Before you become a content generator, you must devise a **CONTENT STRATEGY**, so that the content becomes part of your overall marketing and business objectives.

WRITTEN CONTENT has a vital role to play in content marketing, because it resonates with audiences who like to read as well as watch, and it allows you to convey a certain depth of information.



Written content helps with SEO, and it also works well with video, complementing it and adding value.

3. Know Your Audience

This is the crux of the matter. When it comes to content, you've got to know who you're **AIMING** it at.

Remember, when it comes to content marketing, you're working to attract your audience, to intrigue, inform, reassure, educate and even entertain them.

This brings me to a very important point when it comes to crafting written content.

It's Not About You

That's right. Yes, it's your content, but it shouldn't be all about you. This is an elementary mistake many people make when writing content: it becomes an exercise in ego-inflation.

Put yourself in your audience's shoes. They are looking for answers to something that they need or want to know, or have an issue that needs addressing.

You telling them that you're the number one business in your field, or that you've won some award, or that your CEO has met the Queen, isn't going to help them.

In marketing, the rule is, generally, to talk about the **BENEFITS** of a product or service, not its features.

Similarly, with content, don't get hung up on who you are, or what you do, but focus on what your audience wants.

Be **EMPATHIC**. See things from their perspective and tailor your content to fit.

Know Your Audience

We All Like Stories

How long do you have to engage with your online audience? You've probably got 15 seconds maximum, but often it's much less.

People browse the web with a vastly reduced attention span, therefore your content has got to work hard to get their attention in the first place, and then keep it.

How can your content do this?

By telling stories, that's how.

Storytelling is one of our oldest established human traits. It's hardwired into us. We like doing it, and we respond to it.

Well that's fine, you might say, but how can content marketing harness the power of storytelling?

The solution is not to get too hung up on the details, but focus instead on the **EMOTIONAL IMPACT**.

This is how it works:

- You need a powerful **HEADLINE** to draw people in.
- You address your audience's **PAIN POINTS**. This is the theme of your story, something that impacts on them.
- You demonstrate your in-depth **KNOWLEDGE** of the subject, but not loftily, like a distant expert, but by getting under your audience's skin.
- You point them towards a **RESOLUTION**, but be sure to leave them intrigued enough to want to know more.
- Finally, and crucially, you include a **CALL TO ACTION**. You want your audience to do something following on from what they've read.

Know Your Audience

Think of the power of the story with a cliff-hanger ending. The content itself has kept you glued to it, but at the end, something will make you want to find out **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**.

SUMMARY

You must define your audience so that you can shape your content to appeal to them. Remember to focus on their needs and issues, rather than simply banging on about yourself.

Use **STORYTELLING** to structure your content. This can work as a powerful means of attracting your audience's interest, and retaining it.



4. How to Generate Content

If you stopped to think about the amount of content that people are posting online right this minute, would it prevent you publishing your own?

The statistics tell us that the volume of content published online is enormous, as is its potential readership.

What will make your content valuable enough for someone to want to read it?

This is about how you find the right sources for your content, and then deliver it effectively.

First, let's be clear about what your content should **NOT** be:

- It shouldn't be direct sales material.
- It shouldn't be about how great you are, or how fantastic your business is.
- It shouldn't be a detailed account of how you do what you do.
- It shouldn't be full of business or industry-specific jargon.
- Above all, it shouldn't be **BORING**.

Where does this leave you? How do you find **INSPIRATION** for things to write about?

I've written earlier about addressing your audience and their needs. That's the perspective to take.

However, it will only get you so far. Your content needs to be useful, but it also must be distinctive. You can help it become this by taking a novel approach to generating it.

How to Generate Content

Here are some ideas to help you **GENERATE CONTENT**:

- **INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH** – don't ask the same old questions of your search engine, but go to other sources such as businesses you work with, clients you have, peer groups you network with. Ask them questions you cannot find be asked, or answered, online. This can help you gain fresh ideas and viewpoints to then create content from.
- **MESSAGE BOARDS AND ONLINE FORUMS** – here's where debates get lively and issues come alive. They can be an excellent source for different debating issues and viewpoints.
- **WHITEPAPERS, EBOOKS AND REPORTS** – what are your competitors offering and discussing, and what sort of reference material can it provide you with?
- **NEWS MEDIA** – look beyond the headlines for issues that will have staying power, but don't try and crowbar current affairs into your content. Even when you're watching news or current affairs on TV, look out for things that might spark ideas for relevant content.
- **EXPERT OPINION** – who can you contact who will provide insight you can use and attribute to them? Can you interview them and use this as the basis for your content? You might even get several pieces of content from one interview, providing you ask the right questions.

Creation or Curation?

Take the right approach to content curation and you needn't worry about always having to write your own original material.

it is a valid and useful way of keeping your content fresh.

What does curating involve?

Well, it isn't just about trawling the internet and reposting links to other people's content, or liking it, or just plagiarising it.

How to Generate Content

It must be much more **THOUGHTFUL** and **STRATEGIC** than that.

It requires diligent research, finding content that is relevant both to your audience and your own brand.

Then, when you do post it, comment on it, or quote from it, give credit where credit is due, and be clear why you're drawing on it.

Effective content curation means broadening your audience's experience but also demonstrating your own **DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE**.

SUMMARY

Generating your own content requires careful consideration, because you want your approach to feel **FRESH**.

Think about less obvious ways of **GETTING IDEAS** for content, beyond simply trawling through Google search results.

CURATE AS WELL AS CREATE your content.

This can help you demonstrate your own depth of knowledge while taking away the pressure of always having to come up with your own fresh material.



4. Conclusion

Without content you cannot compete effectively online for a greater audience share.

The challenge, therefore, is to come up with content that will attract and resonate with your target audience.

There are several **KEY STEPS** you must take to generate your own content:

- Develop your **CONTENT STRATEGY**
- Make sure your content addresses your **AUDIENCE**
- Try to tell a **STORY** with your content
- Look for **ORIGINAL SOURCES** to inspire you
- **CURATE** as well as **CREATE** your content.

About the Author

I'm a copywriter and content specialist and I work with many different businesses, including marketing agencies and web developers.

I don't, however, claim to be an expert in all aspects of marketing.

I'm a writer, first and foremost. Within this discipline I work with a wide variety of clients, covering a broad range of topics.

My speciality is diversity: I'm not tied to any one industry or sector.

I don't claim to offer full service digital marketing, but I believe I have the writing skills to support your marketing and communication objectives.

Regardless of the development of online visual media, the written word is still at the core of how we communicate, and of what gives a business credibility and authority.

I've written this guide to encourage you to get involved in content creation. It's freely available. I don't want your contact details or any kind of subscription or commitment in return.

But, if it's been useful, or at least diverting, then I hope that if, in the future, you need support with writing content, you'll think of me.

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