

Content Marketing for Small Businesses in  
The New Age of

# Advertising

People are sick of advertising that feels like advertising. We spend so much of our lives being sold to, anything that feels like a pitch is as likely to provoke annoyance or be tuned out altogether as it is to encourage a sale.

In addition to a growing number of consumers with a lower tolerance for traditional advertising, the Internet has completely changed how people consume and shop. Businesses must adapt their marketing methods to the shifts in consumer behavior.

## Why Content Marketing?



Content marketing is based on a simple idea: tell people what they want to know, rather than what you want them to hear. People are tired of being sold to, but they're not tired of learning new things. Content marketing is focused on adding something valuable to the larger conversation – providing useful knowledge rather than just practicing self-promotion.

Get people to come to you via content that's informative, entertaining or moving, and increased brand recognition and sales will follow.

Though content marketing is far from a new concept, the influence that search engines now have on consumer behavior makes it a greater force in business than ever before. Quality content can build your brand, attract new customers to your business, and strengthen your relationship with current customers. As an additional perk - it's an important function of search engine optimization (SEO).

Small businesses have long valued the importance of a reputation for quality customer service and reliable products to keep business strong. The Internet hasn't made those qualities any less important; it's just changed how building that reputation looks.

## Benefits of Content Marketing

We've already briefly touched on some of the benefits content marketing can offer a small business, but there are enough to go into it deeper.

### 1. It builds brand reputation

To start, it's easy to make the case that offering people something valuable for free will build up their opinion of a business.

Let's say a woman in the midst of the stressful process of working on that yearly tax return hits up against an issue and turns to Google for help. If she finds the answer she's looking for in a blog post from a small business selling accounting software, she's very likely to have a positive association with that business from then on. There's a chance she'll even decide to go ahead and buy that software now to make next year's return an easier process.



The concept's the same if your business sells construction materials and puts out content on how to build different types of furniture, or if you're a florist who puts out information on the best types of flowers to consider for particular occasions. If you can provide information that helps answer a question a potential customer has, they'll be grateful for it and more likely to make use of your services the next time they have a need for them.

## **2. It shows your expertise**

Beyond inspiring gratitude, good content gives you the chance to show consumers that you know what you're doing. You're not just some guy selling wood and tools, you're someone who has built decks and bookcases before and can speak with confidence on the best way to do so. This is a persuasive way to answer the question: why is this business the best for the job?

Let consumers know you're worthy of their trust.

## **3. Increases your visibility -- in particular via SEO**

Obviously a good reputation is crucial, but trust can only go so far if people can't find your business. When people are trying to decide who to turn to for a need they have, most now turn to the Internet -- Google specifically. If you want to grow your business, a strong online presence and a high Google ranking for your site are necessities.



Google's goal is to provide users the most relevant results for their needs. This is generally good news for most reputable businesses providing goods and services of value to consumers -- it helps weed out the spammier, lower-quality businesses and bring those doing good work to the top.

To determine which sites should be ranking higher, Google looks at a variety of complicated factors. Some of the major determinants: the keywords used on your site, the number of other sites linking back to yours, how authoritative those sites linking to you are, and how often the site generates fresh content. This is a vast oversimplification of SEO, but gives a quick explanation of why content marketing plays an important role in search engine rankings.

By producing quality content that's relevant to the products and services you provide, you have more opportunities to highlight keywords related to your business, and to provide information other sites will be inclined to link to.

If you check with businesses offering SEO services, you'll find that almost all of them include content strategy and development as part of the package. It's one of the best ways to get an edge in search engine rankings.

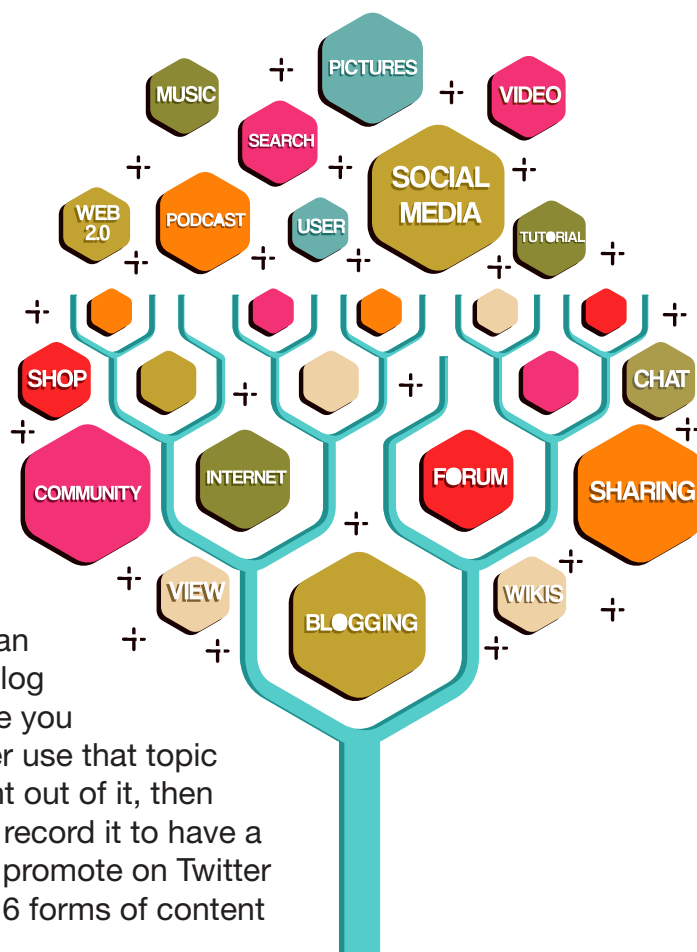
## **What is Content Marketing?**

Content marketing comes in many, many forms. White papers like this one are a form of content marketing. Blogs are an increasingly common form -- and make an especially good tool for deploying content marketing for SEO purposes. Videos, whether they're entertaining, informative, or both, are content marketing. To give a sense of the breadth of formats that can be employed in content marketing, here's a starter list, in no particular order:

<b>Blogs</b>	<b>Newsletters/Email</b>
<b>Webinars</b>	<b>Marketing</b>
<b>Press Releases</b>	<b>Social Media</b>
<b>White papers</b>	<b>Power Point Presentations</b>
<b>Articles</b>	<b>Case Studies</b>
<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>Surveys</b>
<b>Podcasts</b>	<b>Ebooks</b>
<b>Videos</b>	<b>Classes</b>

Don't view this as a list of requirements, but rather a list of ideas that your business can use as a starting point to tailor a content marketing strategy that works best for your company.

One of the nice features of this list (and anything you think to use that's been left off it) is that there can be a lot of overlap in how you use it. If you write a blog post about "The 10 Most Important Tax Tips to Save you Money This Year" - that doesn't mean you can never use that topic again for anything else. You can make a Power Point out of it, then turn that into a Webinar open to your email list, and record it to have a video to post on your site after, which you can then promote on Twitter and LinkedIn. Right there with one idea we've used 6 forms of content marketing. Pretty good, huh?



## How Can a Small Business Get Started?

At this point, you have a choice to make. Do you have the time and energy to develop and deploy a content strategy on your own, or do you want to bring in a *consultant* to help with it?

Chances are, if you're running a business with a small staff, content marketing will be a lot to take on without hiring someone new to focus on it, or bringing in some qualified outside help.

Once you've answered the question of "Who," it's time to tackle the larger question of "How."

First determine what exactly you want to accomplish with content marketing. Is your top priority improved search rankings? Website traffic? Increased sales? Brand recognition? Customer retention? You'll probably want to accomplish some combination of all of the above, but you can determine where to best focus your efforts based on which goals make the top of the list.

Now, you can work out your plan. Create a list of ideas for topics to address, determine the best forms of content to employ for each, and create a schedule to get the work done.

## Tips for Effective Content Marketing

### 1. Keep your audience top of mind

Sure, the end goal is to convince people you're awesome and they should buy things from you, but don't make it all about you. Put your audience first. Make giving them something they need or want your priority. You'll win more points with generosity than self-promotion.

Depending on your business, you may be able to narrow your demographic and deploy a more targeted approach. If most of the people likely to buy your product fall within a certain age group or industry - make sure you're making content for them.

## 2. Identify a need

Is there a question you hear a lot from customers? Is there a mistake you notice people in your industry making again and again? Anything you've noticed that a lot of people don't know, but they'd all be better off if they did -- that makes a good topic to cover in your content.

## 3. Include a call to action

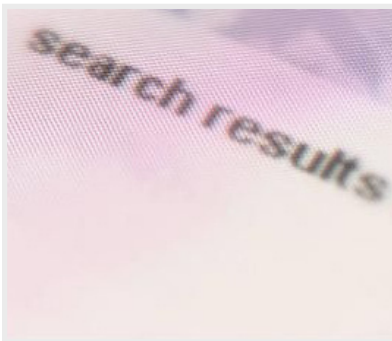
Once somebody has consumed your content, you've accomplished step 1. Now what? Not everyone who comes across your content will make the next move, but in order to get as many people as possible to take that next desired step- tell them exactly what that is.

*"Like that article? Click here to learn more."*

*"Now that you've learned some of the best seasonal flower options for Mother's Day - check out our great deals!"*

*"These are some of the most important tips to remember when doing your taxes. If it all seems a bit overwhelming, let us take care of it for you. Call today."*

## 4. Do keyword research



Google offers a free [keyword research tool](#), so it's easy to keep up with what terms people are searching for. This can help you pinpoint the best topics to produce content about. Are a lot of people searching for tax tips for freelancers? If so, are they more likely to search for "freelancers" or "self-employed"?

If you know the terms people are using, you can make sure to use them in your content. If you use popular keywords effectively, more people are likely to find your content when they're looking for the answers you provide. Everyone wins!

## 5. Show your expertise

Every one of us knows more about the industry we work in than the majority of the population. When you spend hours a day mired in something, you become an expert. Use that knowledge and apply it to the content you provide. It's a good way to show people that you know what you're doing and they shouldn't hesitate to feel confident that your product or service is worth paying for.

## 6. Pay attention to industry trends

Follow what publications and other experts in your industry are talking about. By becoming a part of the larger conversation, you'll make new contacts and position yourself as a player in your field.

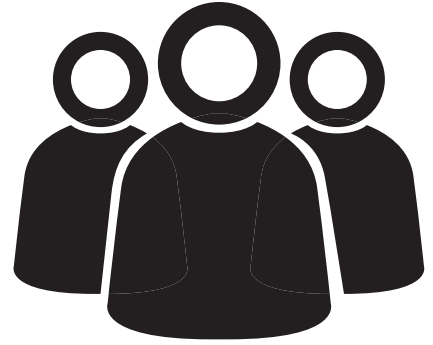
This is also a handy way to keep content ideas flowing. You can respond to, build on, or comment on content that others are producing.





## 7. Network

The more contacts you have that trust you as a good source of information, the more people are likely to share your content and recommend you to others. There are any number of ways to network effectively: local organizations and events, conferences, social media, partnerships with related businesses, sponsorships--positive business relationships are good for everyone involved, so there's no shortage of people looking for ways to form new ones.



### About Austin Copywriter

Kristen Hicks is an Austin-based *freelance copywriter* with a focus on content marketing for small businesses. With over 5 years of professional writing experience, a penchant for learning new things and an enthusiasm for language, I'm well equipped to develop quality content for a wide array of businesses. Learn more at [www.austin-copywriter.com](http://www.austin-copywriter.com), or get in touch at [kristen@austin-copywriter.com](mailto:kristen@austin-copywriter.com)

