

HOW TO
BRAINSTORM
CONTENT
THAT ROCKS
AND
CONVERTS



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It's hard to figure out what your audience wants to hear. It's harder still to offer content they'll connect with and respond to. Effective marketing starts with great content. But you can't be effective when you don't know how to start.

If you get hung up on what to say and how to say it, you're not alone. 36% of marketers say producing engaging content is [their biggest challenge](#). We wrote this guide for them, and for you.

Whether you need a good starting place or you're out of ideas, this guide will help you brainstorm inbound marketing content to convert those prospects into customers.

Customer-Generated Content

When you don't know where to start, it helps to step outside yourself. If you're trying to attract more customers, talk to the ones you already have.

They know what got them to buy in the first place. They know what keeps them buying, and - even better - what would make them buy more. Turn those conversations into content.

Customer-generated content has the added benefit of getting those customers to interact with your brand by providing that feedback, then keeping them excited to see their contributions featured.

Ways To Get It

Solicit feedback in your emails. You can encourage subscribers to contact you with questions, comments, product reviews or whatever else is on their minds.

Start conversations on social networks. Engage fans and followers on Facebook, Twitter and other social sites and draw content from their comments.

Get the ball rolling on your blog. Use readers' comments on your posts and further the discussion in a newsletter article (and a follow-up blog post, too!)

Now, go offline. Chat with customers in your store. Call your most loyal clients for interviews. Set out comment cards to gather feedback.

Talk to family and friends who don't know your industry. Compare their perspective against feedback from your customers.

Repurposed Content

If you have brochures, a blog or a website, you probably have a content goldmine to dig into already. You just need to know how to sort through and leverage it. Repurposing content to use in new ways gives you a bigger return on investment from each piece.

Repurposing content is like borrowing from yourself. It's all in adjusting the angle of your approach.

"Review your greatest hits. Read your most popular blogs. Look for ways to take a slightly different angle and further illuminate the same topic."

- [Copyblogger](#)

Ways To Do It

Deconstruct a blog post. Just because information lived on your blog first, doesn't mean it can't be restructured and presented elsewhere.

Review emails in your campaigns that performed especially well (with high click-through and open rates). High open rates tells you you've got a compelling topic. Lots of clicks through tells you you've presented it well. Revisit those ideas in other channels.

Take content from your print materials, especially ones that target prospects. Which ideas will translate well online? What should be updated?

Use content from your site:

Expand points from your "About" page into a comprehensive company history or our vision for the future.

Revisit your FAQ and pull out some questions to highlight with in-depth answers. You can target content to prospects and customers through email, webinars, blogs and social networks based on the areas where they need the most help.

Have you written articles for other sites? Rework them to use in your own blog or newsletter.

Where To Put It

Most content can be repurposed for almost any medium. You could:

Take a popular blog post and turn it into a podcast.

Address your FAQ in a video series on YouTube.

Host a Q & A session over Facebook chat.

Feature customer tweets (and your responses) in your next email newsletter.

Create a whitepaper with points from a recent webinar.

Compile your best blog posts into a helpful ebook.

Feature reviews on your Facebook profile.

No matter your content's original format, there are plenty of channels to plug into.

An Important Note

Repurposing your content doesn't mean copying word-for-word. Don't plagiarize yourself. Using the same wording across several platforms will disappoint your readers (and seriously damage your SEO).

Getting Unblocked

Repurposed content can only take you so far. Your resources will dry up eventually and then you'll need *brand new* content. But every idea bores you. Or you can't string a sentence together. Your marketing muse is silent.

Welcome to writer's block.

It's a frustrating place that can make you feel caged. And it kills your marketing mojo. The faster you can break out, the sooner you can market effectively again. Creative thinking is the key to unlocking your block.

Try some or all of these exercises to generate fresh ideas.

Approach From a Different Angle

Look at your business from the same old vantage point, and you'll make the same old points with the same old buzzwords in every channel.

Get rid of the tired, old clutter with a fresh perspective. Two simple exercises can help you see your business in a fun and engaging new light:

Mix business with pleasure. Stop talking about your business for a minute and focus on your hobbies. What do you really love? And why? Sketch out some analogies where your passions and your product overlap.

Re-write your elevator pitch to sell your service to a 7-year-old. Change gears and explain your industry to a 70-year-old. Can you pull pieces from either pitch to help new customers or people who encounter your brand for the first time?

Mindmapping

A mind map is a free-flowing visual outline that helps you see connections between ideas related to your business.

Mind mapping is about free association, with new ideas on separate branches originating from your main topic. Exploring your business in a non-linear way can lead to new connections you hadn't considered before.

If you're not into mapping with pen and paper, here are a few resources you can use instead:

[15 Free Online Mind Mapping Tools](#)

[11 More](#)

[6 Resources from Make Use Of](#)

Freewriting

Despite what you learned from *The Sound of Music*, the beginning isn't always a very good place to start, especially when you don't know *how* to start.

Most people get stuck on beginnings. The fundamentals of writing teach to start with a bold introduction, follow up with supporting points and tie it up with a closing that brings it all together.

But this isn't middle school. Forget about crafting your lead for now and just start writing. About anything. Give yourself a time limit, sit down and write. Set a timer for no longer than 5 minutes. The sense of urgency can kick-start your creative juices.

The trick is to *keep* writing, even if your words don't make sense. Use terrible grammar. Write a 3-page sentence. Scribble nonsense. Just get the words flowing.

Review your scrawlings when the timer goes off and harvest the usable ideas. You may even unearth brilliant marketing content.

Getting Unplugged

A focused environment is key to focused writing. When you're ready to sit down and crank out the content, insulate yourself from any distractions until writing is your only option.

If the TV tempts you, get out of the house.

Get out of the office to escape water cooler small talk.

Log off chat.

Sign out of your inbox.

Leave social networks for later.

Hide your smartphone in a drawer.

And when your research is done and you're ready to write, step away from the computer for a change of pace. Go back to pen and paper. Use an old-fashioned typewriter, a Sharpie and notepad, a quill and parchment - whatever gets the words flowing.

"A writer will do anything to avoid the act of writing." - William Zissner, *On Writing Well*

Learn From Others

The best copywriters steal ideas from others. That doesn't mean plagiarizing. It means getting inspired by a snappy headline or a witty editorial, studying the structure and applying it to your own work. Copywriters save these examples in a swipe file.

Learn from the professionals by looking for your own inspiration on magazine racks or in newspapers. What kind of features grab your interest? Try adapting them for your blog or email campaign.

How to Swipe Ideas From a Magazine Rack

Spend some time in a bookstore, coffee shop, supermarket or newsstand browsing the magazine rack.

Pay attention to the titles that compel you to read or buy.

Jot them down, snap a picture or go ahead and buy the issues that catch your attention the most. Study them later. How can you adapt the headlines for your own marketing content?

Using Search Tools

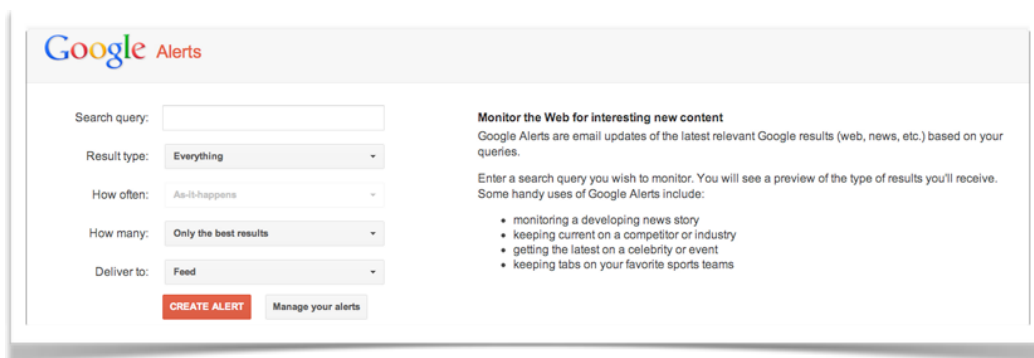
You already keep current with industry news. If you don't, now is a perfect time to start! Reading blogs and conversations started by your competitors gives you a clear picture of topics that matter to your customers. But how do you stay on top of it all

Search tools like Google Alerts, Google AdWords and social bookmarking sites are excellent places to mine for topics that will hook your customers.

Google Alerts

[Google Alerts](#) sends regular email digests of the most recent news and blog articles published on your topic.

Search for keywords related to your business and create alerts for each one. Google lets you select the frequency, content (blogs, news, video, discussions or everything) and email address to send updates to.



The screenshot shows the Google Alerts interface. On the left, there is a form with the following fields: 'Search query:' with a text input box, 'Result type:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Everything', 'How often:' with a dropdown menu set to 'As-it-happens', 'How many:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Only the best results', and 'Deliver to:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Feed'. Below these fields are two buttons: 'CREATE ALERT' (in red) and 'Manage your alerts'. On the right, there is a section titled 'Monitor the Web for interesting new content' which explains that Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results. It also includes a list of 'Some handy uses of Google Alerts include:' with bullet points: 'monitoring a developing news story', 'keeping current on a competitor or industry', 'getting the latest on a celebrity or event', and 'keeping tabs on your favorite sports teams'.

Google Adwords

Google AdWords has a [keyword tool](#) that shows what people are searching for related to your topic. You can rank search terms by popularity to see what information might be important to your customers and prospects.

The screenshot shows the Google AdWords Keyword Tool interface. On the left, there's a sidebar with 'Tools' (Keyword Tool, Traffic Estimator), 'Include terms', 'Exclude terms', 'Match Types' (Broad, Exact, Phrase), and a 'Help' section. The main area is titled 'Find keywords' and shows search results for the keyword 'keywords'. It includes a table with columns for Keyword, Competition, Global Monthly Searches, and Local Monthly Searches. The results show various related keywords like 'keyword tool', 'google keywords', 'keyword', 'google keyword', 'adwords keyword tool', 'keyword search tool', 'google keyword search', and 'free keyword tool'.

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches	Local Monthly Searches
keywords	Low	1,830,000	550,000
keyword tool	Low	1,000,000	301,000
google keywords	Low	301,000	90,500
keyword	Low	2,740,000	1,000,000
google keyword	Low	550,000	201,000
adwords keyword tool	Low	165,000	49,500
keyword search tool	Medium	27,100	14,800
google keyword search	Medium	22,200	9,900
free keyword tool	Medium	18,100	9,900

Quintura

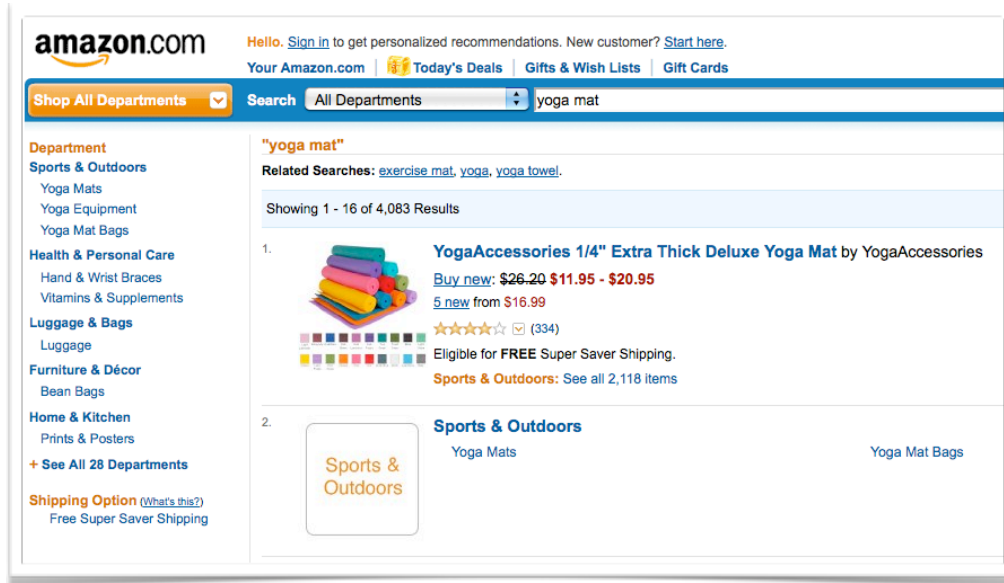
The site [quintura.com](#) helps you see the relationship between searches. Quintura builds a cloud of visual connections between related keywords that you can use to build fresh article ideas.

The screenshot shows the Quintura keyword cloud interface. It features a search bar at the top with the text 'Search for kids'. Below the search bar, a cloud of keywords is displayed, including 'car', 'web technology', 'politics', 'business', 'education', 'game', 'health', 'movie', 'review', 'video', 'music', 'holiday', 'celebrity', 'web 2.0', 'travel', 'cell phones', 'iphone', and 'technology'. The interface also includes a sidebar with 'Web', 'Images', and 'Video' categories, and a footer with '© 2005-2010 Quintura Inc. All Rights Reserved.' and a 'Search for kids' button.

Amazon

In the same way, you can actually use [Amazon's](#) product search to find a fresh content angle.

Search Amazon for products like yours, paying attention to the related products the system recommends. Then browse customer reviews to see how your competition resonates with customers.



Social Bookmarking

Sites like [Digg](#), [Delicious](#), [Reddit](#) and [StumbleUpon](#) let users save their favorite sites and vote for their favorite content bookmarked by others. Bookmarks are categorized by searchable tags.

Search for your industry keywords on social bookmarking sites and order results based on popularity. Articles with the most buzz are excellent content sources to reimagine for your own marketing channels.

How It All Comes Together

Brainstorming is half the content battle. It's a big half, but still only part of the whole content marketing picture. The next step is figuring out where your content pieces fit into your campaign.

Ask yourself a few key questions about your content, your audience, your prospects and your customers to find the best use for your hot-off-the-press ideas.

Questions To Consider

Is this topic best suited to beginner, intermediate or advanced users (or customers)?

Which format or channels are most suitable: blog post, email newsletter, webinar, whitepaper, podcast? Do some of your topics lend themselves to a multichannel campaign?

What action do you want your content to inspire? Downloads, requests for information, sales, social sharing? Do you have clear goals for those results and a way to measure your return on investment?

Content that's clearly focused has more value to everyone who encounters your brand, from prospects to customers to long-time advocates. When your content has a goal, you'll know who to aim it at and where it fits in the grand scheme of conversion.

Now get creating!

About AWeber

What do leading sites such as Social Media Examiner, Copyblogger, Which Test Won, ProBlogger and Harvard Business Review all have in common?

They rely on AWeber for easy-to-use email and social media tools to cultivate relationships with their readers. Since 1998, AWeber has been the email engine powering the growth of organizations around the world.

Today, more than 110,000 small- and midsize-businesses, entrepreneurs, agencies and nonprofits are making the most of AWeber's sophisticated segmentation and analytics capabilities, social media and testing applications, extensive template libraries, and industry-leading deliverability and live support.

For marketing advice, examples and inspiration, please join us here:

