

# ROI OR RIP

THE **LEAN CONTENT** MARKETING  
HANDBOOK FOR SMBs



## Foreword

Some people say content marketing is only for companies with deep pockets, and that short of creating Star Wars, you'll struggle to make an impact. We disagree.

Over the past three years, we've seen many SMBs find success with content marketing, and that's why this handbook exists: to be a guide to success for those who are looking to find ROI by making their content marketing lean.

But the important point is: **we're not alone in that belief**. To write this guide, we asked some of the world's top experts on content marketing what would be their #1 piece of advice to SMBs. We'd like to thank them for their awesome contributions:



Andrew Coate, Kapost



Barry Feldman, Feldman Creative



Brian Fanzo, Broadsuite



Dennis Shiao, DNN



Erika Heald, Anaplan



Heidi Cohen, Actionable Marketing



Ian Cleary, RazorSocial



Jason Miller, LinkedIn



Julia McCoy, Express Writers



Lee Odden, TopRank



Mark Schaefer, Business Grow



Paul Chaney, Chaney Marketing



Rebecca Lieb, Altimeter Group



Robert Rose, Content Marketing Institute



Stephanie Clegg, Convert with Content



Ted Karczewski, Skyword

A lot of the lean content marketing best practices that we describe in this guide were first debated during the #leancontent meetups [we hosted first at our San Francisco offices](#) and [then in New York City](#). So we'd also like to thank all the attendees and the awesome speakers who enriched the discussion.

Finally, because we practice what we preach, the Lean Content Marketing Handbook for SMB is a mix of original content, curated content and repurposed content from the [Scoop.it blog](#) - itself a collaborative work with dozens of various contributors from our community. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all as well.

[The Scoop.it team](#)

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# **Lean Content: why 2015 will be the year SMBs embrace content marketing.**

## The roller coaster of SMB marketers. And why 2015 is the best time ever.

Before the Internet, the powerful traditional media (TV, newspaper, radio) were beyond the reach of most small and mid-sized businesses: their marketing had to stay small or niche.

The Internet opened the game: now, the movers & shakers with agility and decent skills can compete against larger companies in the war for audience and attention.

Once this knowledge became mainstream, though, winning attention once again became extremely challenging for SMBs: the web 2.0 created an ocean of noise where only the most powerful could stand out, both by becoming online media and by dominating online advertising, and subsequently pushing up again the barrier to entry.

A new trend is arising however and 2015 is the time for SMBs to reap its benefits. This is Lean Content, or the practice of developing an online presence with positive ROI by means of clever publishing.

This guide presents, in explicit, actionable steps, how SMBs can effectively deploy an affordable Lean Content marketing strategy that yields measurable benefits – today.

## Why do SMBs need to become media?

We believe it's now obvious to all, but let's spell it out again: becoming a media is a must; that's the only response to the challenges of online presence today.

What are the two overarching objectives of online marketing? **Brand Awareness** and **Revenue**. Simple. And what are the means to these ends? A collection of tactics that recognize the fact that your customer journey is no longer linear (from an identified need straight to your shop) but is a long and complex mix of personal research, social influence and serendipitous discovery. In order to win your customers, you need to accompany them along this journey:

- You need to be “searchable” (this is SEO, or organic traffic from search engines)
- You need to demonstrate thought leadership on values that matter to your audience
- You need to feed the conversation with your community and its influencers (engagement)
- You need to nurture your leads throughout each of their many steps through the buying cycle

All of these require you to regularly publish relevant, high quality content. You need to become a media. Content is the fuel of your online marketing strategy.

## How is 2015 the right time for SMB online marketing? Lean Content

Becoming a media might sound frightening, overwhelming for an SMB. But on the contrary, it has never been easier. How is that? Three main reasons:

- An effective online media is a niche media that addresses very specific personas on very specific subjects; the audience has never been so fragmented. So if you know exactly who to target and if you deploy a smart organization and a very specific editorial line, you will not be overshadowed by more powerful players that are, by essence, more generalist.
- Then, technology helps you. A rich spectrum of SaaS based software solutions exists that help businesses with all steps of online marketing. These solutions are more affordable than ever and can help you effectively save time and increase your impact (warning: be pragmatic and do not over arm; complexity can kill you; use SMB dedicated tools).
- Finally, you can leverage the abundance of content out there to your benefit. You can scale up your content with curated content: existing Internet content that you select, enrich and add to your editorial line. When done with care and ethic, content curation is a legitimate and super efficient element of a content strategy; it measurably contributes to the ROI of your online marketing, [as confirmed by many SMBs](#).

Smart SMBs are becoming media now; their clever publishing strategies are yielding business benefits: increased brand awareness and leads.

Wanna play? It's time!

Please follow the guide.

# Strategize

## Aligning your company's business objectives with your content marketing goals

Late last year, we published a [report](#) on how SMBs measured the ROI of their content marketing strategy. While **audience engagement** is the most commonly measured KPI, SMBs define their objectives in terms of **brand awareness development**, then **thought leadership development** and **lead generation**.

When defining your content marketing strategy, it's important to differentiate final objectives (the outcome making your company better off) from other intermediary indicators.

Let's take engagement for instance. What does it really bring to your company?

"Content and social media marketers are keen to drive engagement but it [may not necessarily be a viable strategy](#). In fact, it comes at a cost." - Mark Schaefer

[Mark Schaefer](#) has a great point: we often confuse the means with the end. In a blog post that I wrote last year, I explained why I thought [social media publishing was dead](#) as we know it. One of these points was that the impact our content has is the combination of volume, quality and engagement. As Mark explains, engagement is only one variable in that equation.

So how can you convert your social media activity to make it count towards your goals? More generally speaking, have you defined the objectives of your content marketing and what can they be?

Now that we're thinking in more of a content-focused mindset, consider this: over the next three months, what does your business want to accomplish? Think of this goal as the overall mindset of your company, not just your marketing team. Do you want to be mentioned in 20% more blogs this quarter? Or do you need to grow sales next year by 15%? All actions you take should ultimately lead to something that will help accomplish this goal.

To really have an impact, you should go beyond engagement and define objectives that matter to your business. We'll cover how to measure ROI and success in reaching these objectives in the "Measure ROI" section of this guide.

## Defining your editorial line and content types

So now that we've clarified the difference between the means (engagement, traffic...) and the end (develop the brand, grow sales), should you prioritize one of these possible objectives?

Our answer to this question is no, you shouldn't. Because ultimately, you will address them all even though it might be a matter of learning to walk before you can learn to run.

To explain this, it's critical to consider (i) who you will be publishing content for (ii) what stages of the buying process they're in and (iii) what is your overarching message that sets you apart to these people you target.

Who are the people you'll be talking to? What do you know that they don't? Where are they in the sales cycle? What types of content will these buyer personas respond to?

Let's say, for example, your audience is your current customers and you want to educate them on how to make the most of your product. What are the most commonly asked questions about your product? These are the things your content should address. To provide another example, say you're a service provider who wants to reach potential clients. What types of questions are people asking themselves when looking for a new [insert your service here] provider? Be the resource they are looking for.

Finally, make sure your content is not just about you: what is your message and what are your values? Defining them will give you a specific angle when publishing content: your editorial line. In the example above, what do you want people looking for a new provider to pay attention to when doing research.



"I think the number one thing a company can do to get more results out of content is to start thinking first about what the customer needs or wants, and then how the company can deliver it. In other words – it's content as a product not as marketing. Great content marketing creates value that is separate and distinct from the product or service being marketed. It aligns with the company's brand, and creates an enhanced experience for the customer, so that they look at the company (and its products and services) as differentiated from competitors."

***-Robert Rose, Chief Strategy Officer at  
Content Marketing Institute***

The following table gives an interesting way to map your buyer personas with the various stages they're in and plan the content you need:

- list as many personas you'd like to target in the columns (but be realistic: don't list too many);
- then think about what content can help them move from one buyer stage to the next.

Buying stage	Persona 1	Persona 2	...	Persona N
	For each of these buyer personas, define the content that will help them move from one stage to the next:			
<b>Strangers</b> (unaware of your company)				
<b>Visitors</b> (came to your site)				
<b>Contacts</b> (gave you their email address)				
<b>Leads</b> (expressed interest to buy your product)				
<b>Customers</b> (bought your product)				
<b>Ambassadors</b> (love your product)				

For example, say you've identified your target buyer as a female between the ages of 30 and 50 who lives at home with pets and children, and you're using content marketing to promote your line of household cleaners. When this female is in the unaware stage of your company or product, keep your content broad. Write about concepts like "The Dirtiest Kid Activities" or "How to Remove Red Wine Stains from Carpet;" general things that she might be searching for in situations when your product would be helpful.

In the visitor and contact stage, or the beginning of the awareness phase, it's time to get a little more specific. They're aware you exist, but still might not be convinced. This would be the time to talk about the great things your product can do, like "5 Things You Didn't Know You Could Do with [product]."

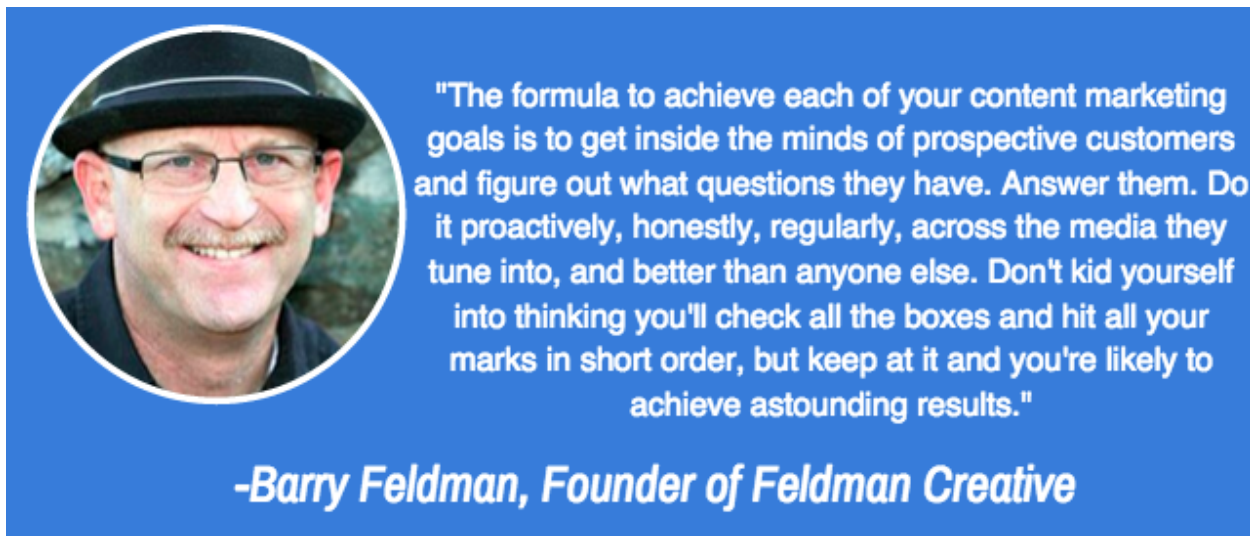
Finally, in the customer and ambassador stages, the time has come for you to involve your community in your content creation. On one hand, you've got happy customers who may be willing to write their experiences or opinions. On the other hand, you've got the responsibility of making

sure these people stick around, so provide them with content talking about new features or deals, or tips if applicable.

Listing all your content ideas in the above table will give you a great start to defining your content that you can now develop and plan ahead in your content calendar.

Note that while the result might look overwhelming, it's useful to consider whether the required content will be more useful if created or curated. Remember that third-party content is [4x to 7x more credible than vendor-originated content](#) so curating some of the content in the above table will not only be less stressful and faster but it might be the best thing you can do to convince your prospects.

Going back to our original question on the objectives of your content strategy, you can see that while brand awareness will be the main objective at the top of the funnel, you will also want to include lead generation as you progress to create and curate content for the bottom of your funnel.



In the following section, we'll cover how you can actually build solid foundations for your content strategy that are compatible with all the objectives you will eventually have, including brand awareness, thought leadership and lead generation.

## Planning your resources

Content Marketing is a winning strategy for SMBs because it can be done in lean way but that doesn't mean free. You should budget some time and prepare some resource allocation that are compatible with your company's capabilities and goals.

A good way to think about this is to consider the following 3 buckets:

- **Cost of producing content:**
  - time spent by you or your team members creating content and if you're outsourcing some of your content:
  - time spent creating briefs and managing external resources
  - costs of outsourcing content to these external resources.
- **Time spent curating content:** as we'll see content curation is essential to your content marketing mix so you should plan to budget some time from you or your team members to source, curate and publish third-party content.
- **Software and tools:** license cost of your content marketing software solution.

with an optional 4th bucket if you choose to have this strategy:

- **Content distribution and advertising costs:** should you engage in paid content distribution.

So what are the things to consider when planning your resources?

If your concern is ROI, you can perform quick estimates on your content creation costs using the typical metrics below that we've observed across our clients and agency partners<sup>1</sup>:

Type of content	Cost to produce	Time to produce
Blog	2-4 man hours or \$80-200	1-3 days
Infographic	\$2,000-\$10,000	3-6 weeks
Video	\$5,000-\$150,000	4-12 weeks
White paper	5-20 man days	3-8 weeks

A quick conclusion is that content is expensive to create...

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<sup>1</sup> Scripted blog post costs are \$99 to \$199 depending on length and required expertise. Visual.ly infographics are quoted \$1,995 to \$4,995 depending on how much efforts you put in the brief creation.

As we'll see below there are several tactics that this guide will provide to help you reduce the costs of your content production and here are the two main strategies that you should consider at the planning stage:

1. **Using curated content as part of your content mix:** among other benefits like credibility, thought leadership and influencer engagement, content curation also is very efficient from an ROI standpoint. While writing a good blog post takes 2 to 4 hours or \$80-\$200 (excluding briefing/editing time) to outsource, curating a piece of content and turning it into a curated post can take as little as 15 minutes for you or one of your team members.



"Find a balance between creating your own content and curating the content of thought leaders in your space. Doing so will not only alleviate the pressure of having to devote valuable time to creating original content, but it will also help add credibility and third party validation to your efforts. It's also a great way to get the attention of the influencers in your space and start building relationships with them."

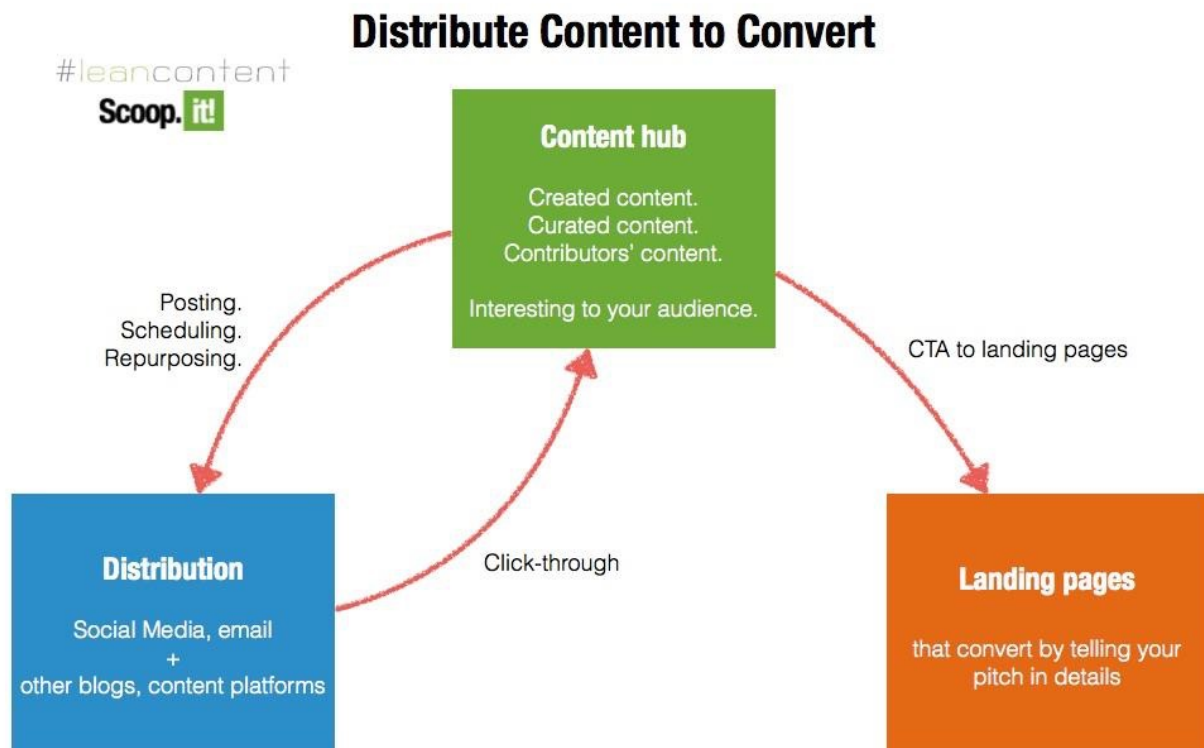
**-Jason Miller, Sr. Content Marketing Manager at LinkedIn**  
*Author of Welcome to the Funnel*

2. **Using software and tools to optimize the productivity of your team:** it's easy to waste a lot of time when it comes to producing or curating content. If you work as a team, add to that time spent coordinating your team. Software and tools can help you not just streamline your process but also save time planning, sourcing, publishing and distributing content.

# **Build the foundations of your content strategy**

Before you rush to produce all the content you've just planned, it's important to think about how this content will be published for your readers and how it will be articulated with your business' online presence. Content Marketing is more than blogging and sharing links on social media. In this section, we'll take a look at the basic content infrastructure every company needs to maximize results.

**Social Media, on its own, is out. Content hubs are in.**



Faced with decreasing organic reach on many social networks, some could be tempted to solve the equation through a high-volume/low-quality solution but what, as [this Facebook's post](#) explains, you can't compromise on its quality otherwise your content will be buried in 1,500 stories and never make the cut.

In short, publishing more crap will yield no results.

This leaves us with 2 choices (or the combination of both):

- 1 - increase volume and quality at the same time;
- 2 - increase engagement.

As [our recent study on its impact for professionals](#) shows and as detailed in the following section of this guide on publishing content at scale, content curation is a great way of achieving #1. By leveraging what you already do (read great content; have expertise), by combining it with content curation technology that helps you identify more rapidly and by making it easy to publish it to all the social networks you want to maintain, platforms like Scoop.it allow you to create and feed a content strategy efficiently. As the study showed, 88% of professionals surveyed said that content curation helped them to find the time to publish content while 65% said it improved their SEO rankings.

But let's also look at #2.

When Facebook (or Twitter) define engagement, they always look at the engagement on Facebook (or Twitter). They define it by the number of likes, re-shares, retweets, favorites, clicks, etc... This is good but could be too restrictive.

Social Media engagement does not only happen on the social network itself. Resharing a link you found on Facebook to Twitter is engagement. But commenting a blog post you found through Twitter is also engagement. Subscribing to a blog is again engagement. Generating leads of all forms is engagement and - as more and more content experts like [Barry Feldman](#) point out - one of the best ways to [measure the impact of your content](#).

Ask yourself the question: what's better for you? That someone likes one of your pictures on Facebook or that she subscribes to your blog's newsletter?

So while optimizing engagement on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ should definitely remain an imperative for anyone who publishes on social media and wants to get results, thinking of engagement only in the context of these platforms is doomed. In short, sharing is not enough: **you need a content hub.**

Here's what we mean by that:

## Sharing is not enough: you need a content hub.



- ✓ Social content = short-lived
- ✓ 140 characters (– title – url) to add context.
- ✓ Drive audience away; not to your own site.
- ✓ No opportunity to convert.
- ✓ No opportunity to show related content.
- ✓ No traffic from search.

@gdecugis

Scoop. it!

**I don't care how much you tweet, if you're just tweeting links, you're missing out.**

Why? Because if you're just sharing:

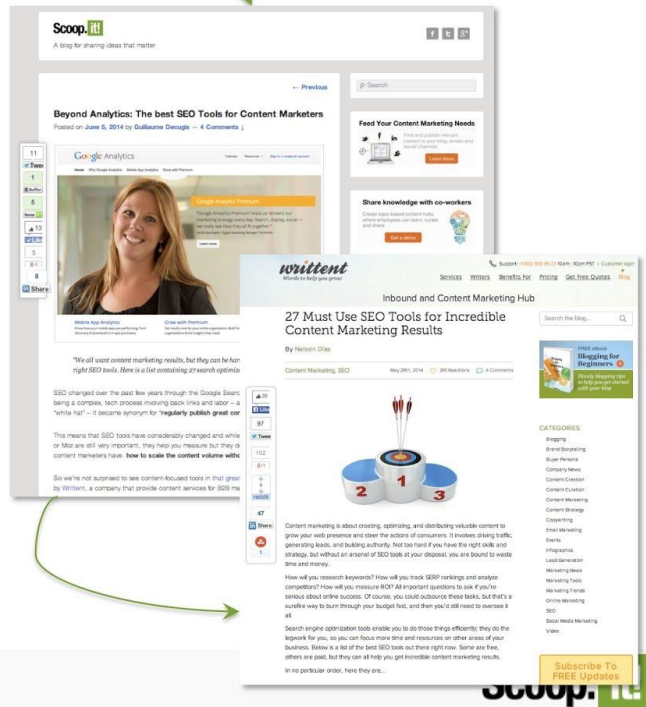
- Your content investment is short-lived: the [lifetime of a tweet is in minutes; a few hours at best](#).
- You have no or limited opportunity to provide context.
- You drive your audience away from you; not to your own site.
- No opportunity to convert.
- No opportunity to show related content.
- No traffic from search.

# Sharing is not enough: you need a content hub.

Guillaume Decugis @gdecugis · 10h  
Beyond Analytics: The best SEO Tools for Content Marketers  
[blog.scoop.it/2014/06/05/bey...](http://blog.scoop.it/2014/06/05/bey...)

- ✓ My curated content is now archived and will be discovered and reshared in the future.
- ✓ It receives targeted traffic from search.
- ✓ My own context is displayed (eg: what it means for my audience)
- ✓ I can add conversion & engagement CTA's.

@gdecugis



By having a content hub, now things are totally different:

- Your content is now archived somewhere and can be discovered and re-shared in the future (I regularly see people tweet my Scoop.it-hosted content months after I published it; [this](#) for instance links back to [this scoop](#) – published 2 months earlier).
- Extra perk if you're a business: having individuals re-share your content on Facebook has a lot of value since the Facebook News Feed algorithm prioritizes people over pages.
- Your curated content receives targeted traffic from search (on average [40% on Scoop.it topics](#)).
- Even through a simple aggregation, if you add specific commentary to your content, you will show more and better context making your content more engaging for the audience you target.
- You can add conversion & engagement CTA's (subscribe, contact me, request a demo, book services, etc...).

So while you might have different resources to manage social media, newsletters, blogs... (for instance if you have a community manager and a content strategist working with you), it's time to break the silos and unify your content strategy around a content hub.



"One of the biggest issues in marketing is the creation of content in silos. At Kapost, we call that 'random acts of content.'"

*-Andrew Coate, Senior Content and Community Manager*

## Building and integrating your content hub to your website

With this information in mind, it's time to develop the first part of your brand new SMB content marketing strategy: your content hub; your home to centralize not just the content you create but also third-party content that you'll need to curate to make your content more credible.

Over the past year or so, content marketers have been trying to learn how to create quality content, share quality content, get their content distributed to as large of an audience as possible, integrate SEO without being too spammy, collaborate with their teams, and so much more. So, where are content marketing tools headed in 2015? Towards the content marketing hub.

In the coming months, we'll see content marketers leaning towards organizational as well as functional tools in order to ensure that their content marketing is powerful and impacting as it can possibly be. The content marketing hub is a place where you can find, share, create, upload, distribute, measure, and collaborate on content.

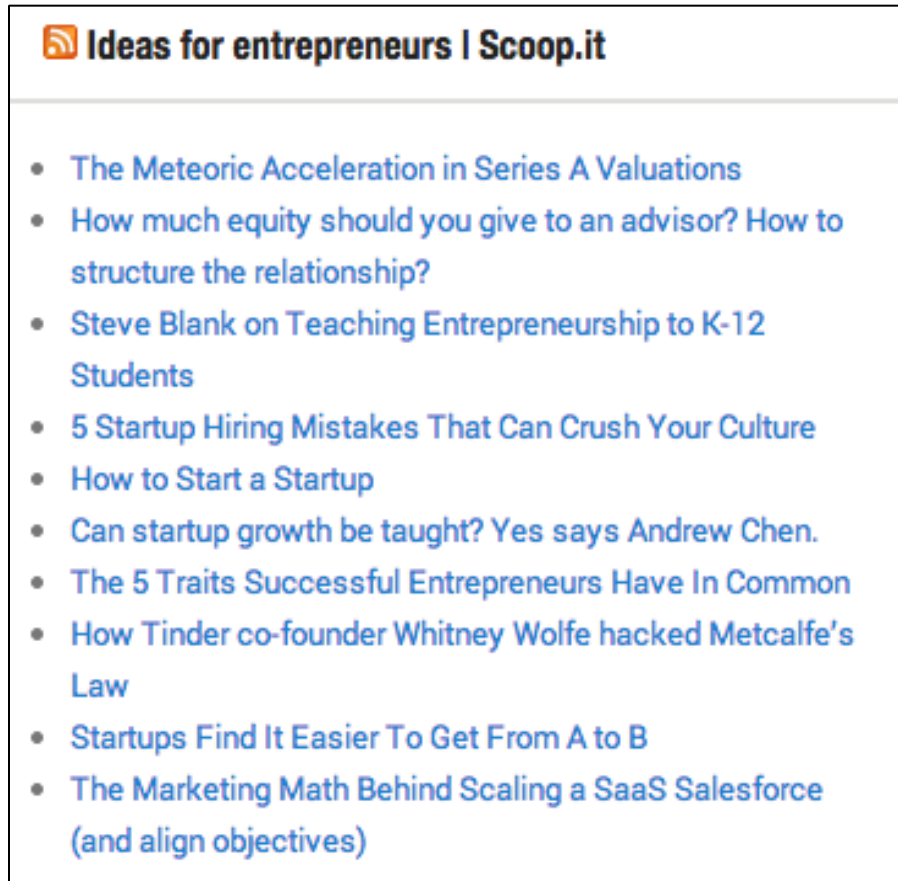
One of the main ways to leverage a content hub as a business is to add curated content to your website or blog. By selecting the most interesting content for your target audience and adding some context to it, you will naturally show your expertise to your visitors – a good objective in itself. But, if you do it right, you should also enjoy the following benefits:

- Audience engagement as readers can now discover more interesting content than just your own stories or product news: loyal visitors will stay longer, hopping between related curated pieces, and have reasons for coming back or even subscribe to receive [your email newsletters](#).
- SEO as your Website now contains more quality content on your niche topic which can be indexed by Google. Not only will that content be well targeted and relevant but it will also be organized and contextualized which is what Google is looking for (more on seo benefits of content curation [here](#)).
- Social Traffic as your readers can share content they like while directing traffic to your site (more on why you should use a content hub for your social media publishing [here](#)).
- Conversions as readers of your curated content are not just clicking on links in your tweets or Facebook posts to end up on third-party websites, but are instead being directed to your own website that now acts as a content hub. You can incorporate call-to-actions in your hub to either contact you, subscribe to your newsletter or request a demo of your product (more on how to use content curation for inbound marketing and lead generation [here](#)).

Here are the pros and cons of key integration options that you should be aware of:

## Embed a sidebar widget

A quick and easy way to add curated content to your website is to add an RSS-widget to the sidebar. Simply adding the [RSS feed of your curated stream](#) will do the trick:



Of course a basic RSS widget is very minimal in terms of design and lacks a visual experience. If you're using Scoop.it for your content curation, you can make things look much more dynamic by using the Scoop.it widget.

But regardless of the design and while this type of integration is really quick, it has the following limitations:

- No content is displayed beyond a title and a visual: your insights are not showing which is a lost opportunity to engage your audience and this makes your content less attractive from an SEO standpoint.
- No new web pages are created as a result: from an SEO standpoint, this will impact your existing pages (with the restriction above) but will not help having more pages indexed by Google.

- Readers can not share any of the content from your site.

### Embed curated content pages

Another layout you might consider is to have one page of all of your curated content (or one page per topic if you've curated several topics). If you're using Scoop.it, the embed code will let you do that with a simple cut and paste.

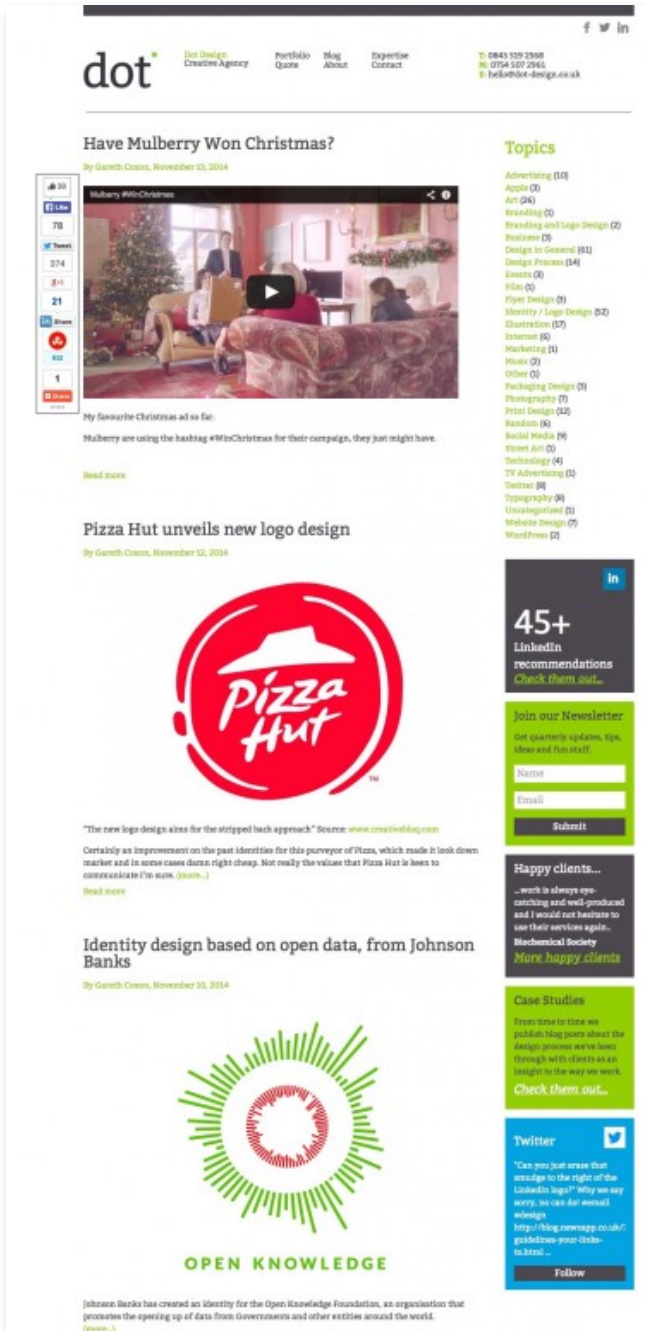
[Here's an example](#) of how it can look:

Compared to the previous solution, this implementation lets you achieve a lot more: it incorporates visuals, your insights are now clearly showing and this page can have conversion hooks as well as the full navigation of your site to let your readers go back and forth. But again, with the above-listed objectives in mind, it has the following limitations:

- You're adding only 1 page (or 1 page per topic) to your site, which is better than none but doesn't optimize your content curation efforts.
- Readers can still not share any of the content from your site because even though you could have sharing buttons on these posts, there are no URLs on your website for this content. You could create tweets and Facebook posts redirecting to the original content but you would then lose the [benefits of having a content hub for your social media publishing](#).



### Enable a CMS integration to turn your curated content into curated blog posts



If you already have a CMS (Content Management System) for your website and blog, for instance Wordpress, you should consider an integration of your curated content directly at the CMS level such as the one that [advanced curation platforms like Scoop.it provide](#).

This solution solves the above limitation as each piece of content you curate is now turned into a post in your CMS and therefore a page of your website, with its own permalink URL that can be indexed by search engines as well as re-shared by your readers individually.

The problem that could arise now is how to differentiate your curated content from your created content?

This might not be a problem if you don't create much original content or if you consider both to be equally important and interesting to your readers. There is no right or wrong answer to this: on the [Scoop.it blog](#) for instance, we mix them both because our curated pieces always including a fair amount of original content from us as a Scoop.it "insight." Plus the Scoop.it integration we use makes it clear it's curated by prominently displaying the source of the original content and links back to it.

However, you might feel they should be separated for editorial reasons, or you may

want to simply organize your content in a certain way if you have multiple topics.

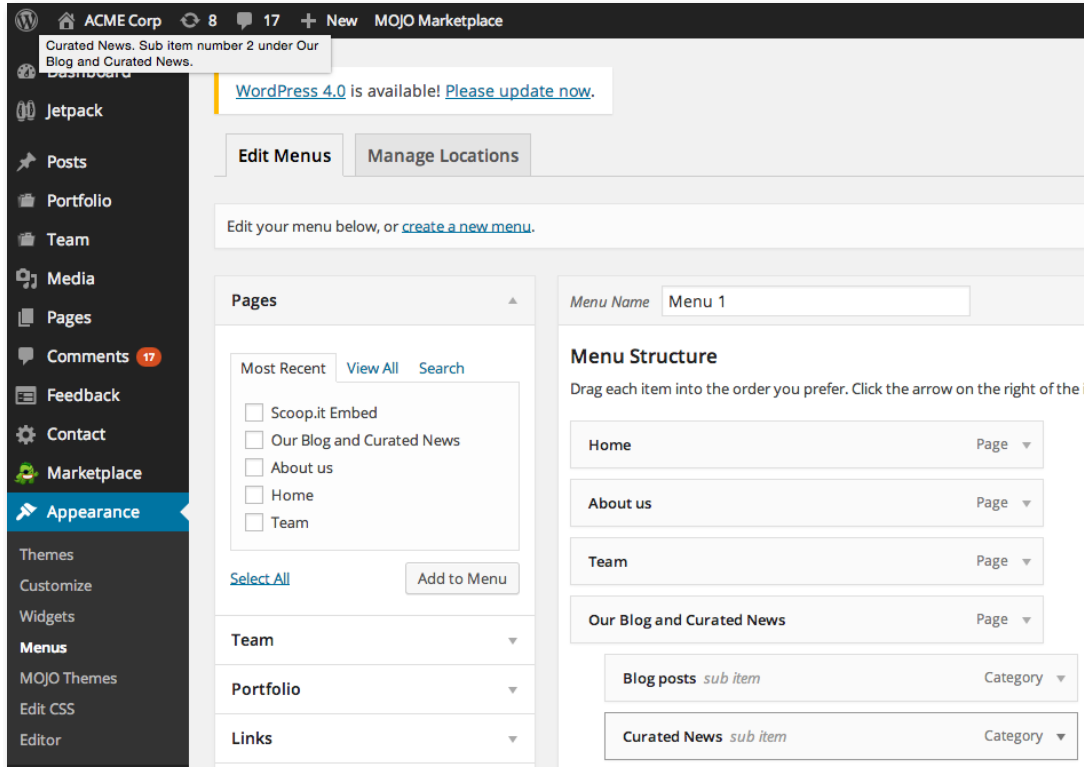
Here's how you can address that in the case of Wordpress (but the same would apply to any other CMS provided your content curation platform integrates with it):

- Mapping posts by WordPress category:

One way to do this is by mapping your curated topics within Wordpress categories. If you have only one topic, you can assign all of your curated posts to a category called "Curated content" for

instance. If you have say 3 topics, you could have 1 topic in the “Industry News” category, another one in “Market trends” and a third one in “Best practices”.

Then by using Menus from the Appearance settings of your WordPress dashboard, you can organize how you want to display content from your various categories:



An example of how this can be seen at <http://acme-insurance.com/> where the Blog main menu shows both curated and created content mixed, but the corresponding submenus are showing only original posts (<http://acme-insurance.com/category/news/>) or only curated posts (<http://acme-insurance.com/category/curated-content/>).

- Create a dynamic home template:

If you're using your own WordPress template or are able to modify your existing one, you can even go further and make your home page a lot more dynamic by showing the latest posts by category. WordPress is a very powerful platform and lets you do pretty much what you want so the possibilities are limitless.

You may think of your website as primarily your home page and then, further down, some content pages that visitors can navigate to. It's not. In today's reality where social media and SEO drives the most traffic, most of your readers will come from content pages first to THEN discover your website's home page.

### Key Points On Content Hubs:

1. To make your content marketing strategy efficient, **you will need both created and curated or shared content integrated together** into a content hub you control.
2. While it can be important to give access to your content on your home page for audience engagement, **it will not drive more traffic if you simply do that.**
3. To optimize your content's impact and its benefits in terms of SEO, social traffic, branding, etc... you should **consider a full integration with your Website** as shown in the table below.

### Building and integrating your content hub with your website: how to do it right

Compared benefits of various solutions

Integration with your Website/blog CMS (eg: Wordpress)		
Embed a sidebar widget	SEO traffic: stories can be indexed individually	Embed a curated content page
	Social traffic: stories can be shared individually	
	Matches template & CSS	
	Displays added insights	Displays added insights
	Good looking	Good looking
Simple	Simple	Simple

## Social media, as a part of a strategy, is still in.



"When it comes to your social footprint, a mixture of fabulous curated content and high quality unique content will give you the right stepping stones to influence, build relationships online, reach your customers and convert leads into sales. Be consistent and be relevant."

*-Stephanie Frasco Clegg, VP at Convert with Content*

As we said social media engagement is not a strategy and how sharing without a content hub wasn't enough, you might wonder whether you need social media at all. Of course! We are not saying social media is not essential but simply that it's not enough. So let's detail why it is still important for your company to be on social media.

### **People expect your business to be there.**

We have come to the stage in history where people expect your business to be on social media by default. It is a little like how twenty years ago people automatically expected your business to be in the phone book. People are going to search out the things that they like on social media, and if your target audience likes you then they are going to search you out. If you are not on there, then they are going to be disappointed, and you risk them becoming disillusioned.

### **You can gain free traffic for your website, blog or business.**

Social media is going to take up your time, and your time is valuable. Even if you are a blogger your time is valuable, because whilst you are typing things into social media you are not working on your blog. However, if you think about it, you will see that every other form of marketing is also going to take up your valuable time. Whether you are working on your SEO, proof-editing or making adverts for your affiliate adverts, you are going to be using your time.

The big difference between working on your marketing and working on your social media marketing is that it is free to host your adverts and promotional material. If you were to create an advert and host it on a website, then it is going to cost you money. But, if you were to create an advert and then post it on social media—it is free! In that sense, you are far more likely to see a bigger return on your investment when you consider how little you had to invest in the first place.

### **Social media has a few good SEO benefits too.**

The online programmers have made social media integration something that is simple and effective at boosting your website's traffic and SEO (Search Engine Optimization). They have created widgets that you can install on your website or blog so that people only need to click them in order to talk about you on social media.

They have made widgets so that your audience can click a "Like" button to show their appreciation for that element (text, image, video elements, etc). Not only do these widgets help to improve your SEO, but they also allow the people on social media to display the things that they like to their friends.

There are even comment sections that are powered by social media sites. Instead of making a comment on a website or blog about an article/post, people can make a comment powered by a social media site. The comment will appear on the website/blog with their profile picture next to it, and it will also appear on their social media profile (if they want it to). This will help to improve your traffic numbers and your SEO.

### **Which Social Networks Should You Focus On?**

A lot of people will tell you to think really hard about where your audience is.

We say: don't be shy, don't over think and experiment.

Why?

Because there are now tools that will help you automate content publishing to social media while leaving you in control and giving you enough flexibility to adapt your message to each channel. So the marginal cost of experimenting with say Google+ is lower than spending hours in meetings, analysis or arguments on whether it's a ghost town or not or whether your target audience really likes it.

Just give it a try, measure the results and after a few weeks you will know for sure what channels are good for you.

## Landing pages & Inbound Marketing

Your content marketing strategy can be purely focused on brand and thought leadership development but you can add ROI to the equation by [integrating it with your inbound marketing strategy](#). By designing and creating landing pages where your visitors can sign up for demos or sales calls, you can drive demand and generate leads by having prospects come to you instead of you reaching out to them: this is the basic definition of inbound marketing which has proven a lot more successful and efficient than traditional outbound, intrusive marketing over the past few years.

So how do you connect content marketing to inbound marketing and create landing pages that convert?

You must have done your pitch a million times already, right? You start by describing a target persona then you talk about how miserable they are with problem X and finally you explain how your solution solves problem X in such an elegant way that we all want to cry out of relief for your soon-to-be-not-miserable-anymore persona.

It's a great story and you know how to handle objections, questions and feedback from your audience. Based on who they are and how much thinking they've done on problem X, their questions are different. And you're also not doing the same pitch if you have 1 minute, if you have 5 minutes or if you're meeting for 30'.

The problem with website visitors is that you don't get to be in front of them; you have to hand the job over to your website. While you can't overload your home page with answers to each and every objection or question, here's what you can do: break down your pitch into as many landing pages as you need. Use tools like [Unbounce](#) or [Leadpages](#) to create them without even having to code. Make them as long as needed to really hand hold your visitors through the entire articulated and convincing argument.

Then connect your content hub to your landing pages through clear call-to-actions so that your visitors ready to move to the consideration stage can easily request a demo or get in touch in a seamless way. Your content will now not only convince but also convert.

We'll describe best practices for landing pages, conversion hooks and lead nurturing in a following section of this guide.

## Email Marketing & Marketing Automation

According to research performed earlier in 2014 by Gigaom and [reported by eMarketer](#), email marketing is still the most commonly used method of digital marketing, with a whopping 86% of respondents claiming to use it. If that's not enough, though, over half (59%) of B2B marketers [surveyed by HubSpot say](#) that email marketing is the most effective channel for generating revenue.

Why are email marketing and content marketing such a great match?

1. Because email marketing ends up being spammy if it's entirely self-promotional. Nobody likes to read about your 15% end-of-month discount endlessly. Content that answers your audience's question - aka content marketing - is not spam nor advertising: it becomes something your audience will be eager to find in their inbox.
2. Content requires distribution before it can generate some. Your email subscribers are your most loyal readers and the more likely to share your content to their own social networks.

In short, email needs content and content needs email.

In the section dedicated to email distribution, we'll go in details on how email marketing can produce great results through content and data on how content email newsletters perform way better from an open and click rate standpoint than promotional content.

So for now, let's focus on what to put in place.

### **The minimum you should put in place for email content marketing:**

- **An email platform** to manage your mailing list and distribute your email content newsletters: if you don't have any, [MailChimp](#) is your best bet (we like Constant Contact too but MailChimp is [free up to 2,000 subscribers](#) which is hard to beat).
- **Subscription forms:** make it easy for people to sign up for content updates from your company. On your blog, landing pages, gated content, etc... (again, MailChimp's got you covered with [embeddable code](#) that's easy to configure)
- **A CMS-Newsletter integration:** that's the important part that will save you time and which is critical to understand. Creating newsletters from scratch every week is too much a pain: use software like [Scoop.it](#) to automatically generate templated newsletters from your created or curated content. Cut down the process to a simple review, minor edits and send!

Beyond this simple set-up, you should consider Marketing Automation to provide a personalized nurturing experience for your contacts aiming at converting them from simple readers to leads. As you define workflow to trigger emails based on events and subscriber data as part of your Marketing Automation strategy, you'll realize something quickly: you need content to make it better and more impacting.

Sure, you can send an email offering a sales call or a demo to that contact who became a hot lead as he downloaded a white paper and made 3 visits to your site in the last 10 days. But if offering sales call or demos is all you have, he might be not as responding than if you can send him a great piece of content, a survey results or a guide that will help him move through the buyer's journey.

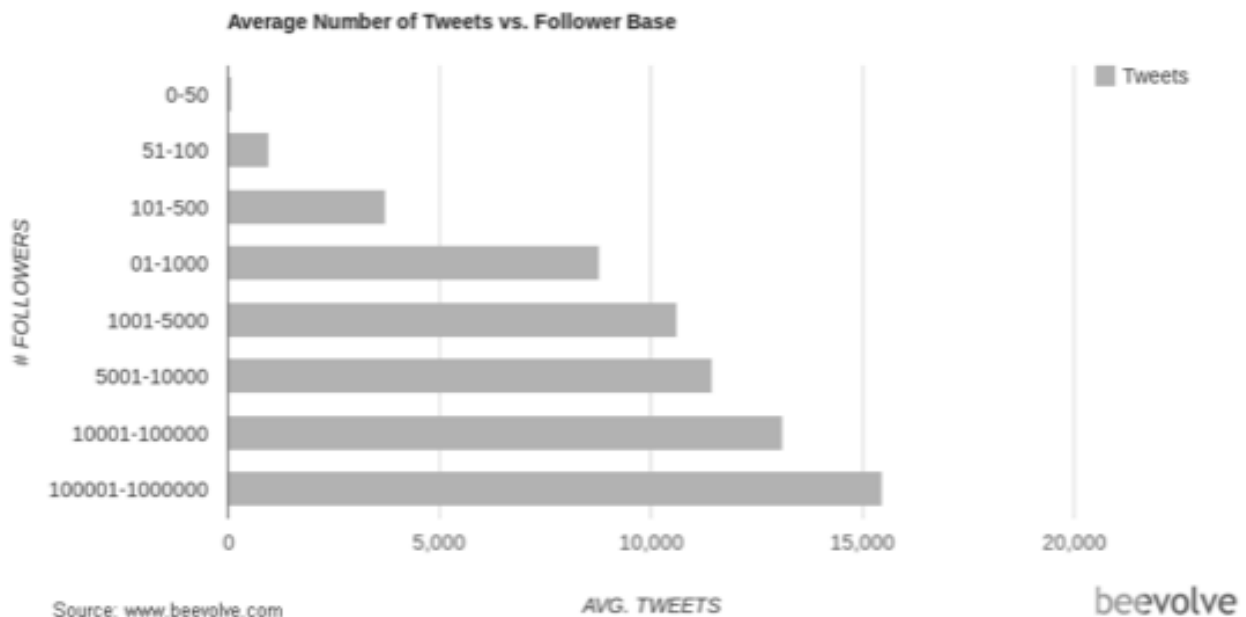
Marketing Automation, like Inbound Marketing, requires some fuel: content.

# **Lean Content: publish content at scale with limited resources**

Now that you've built the foundations of your content strategy, let's look at running your content operation. The key to getting any results with your content strategy is to publish regularly and consistently quality content. The time where you could rely on an occasional epic piece of content such as a quarterly white paper or a yearly survey report are gone.

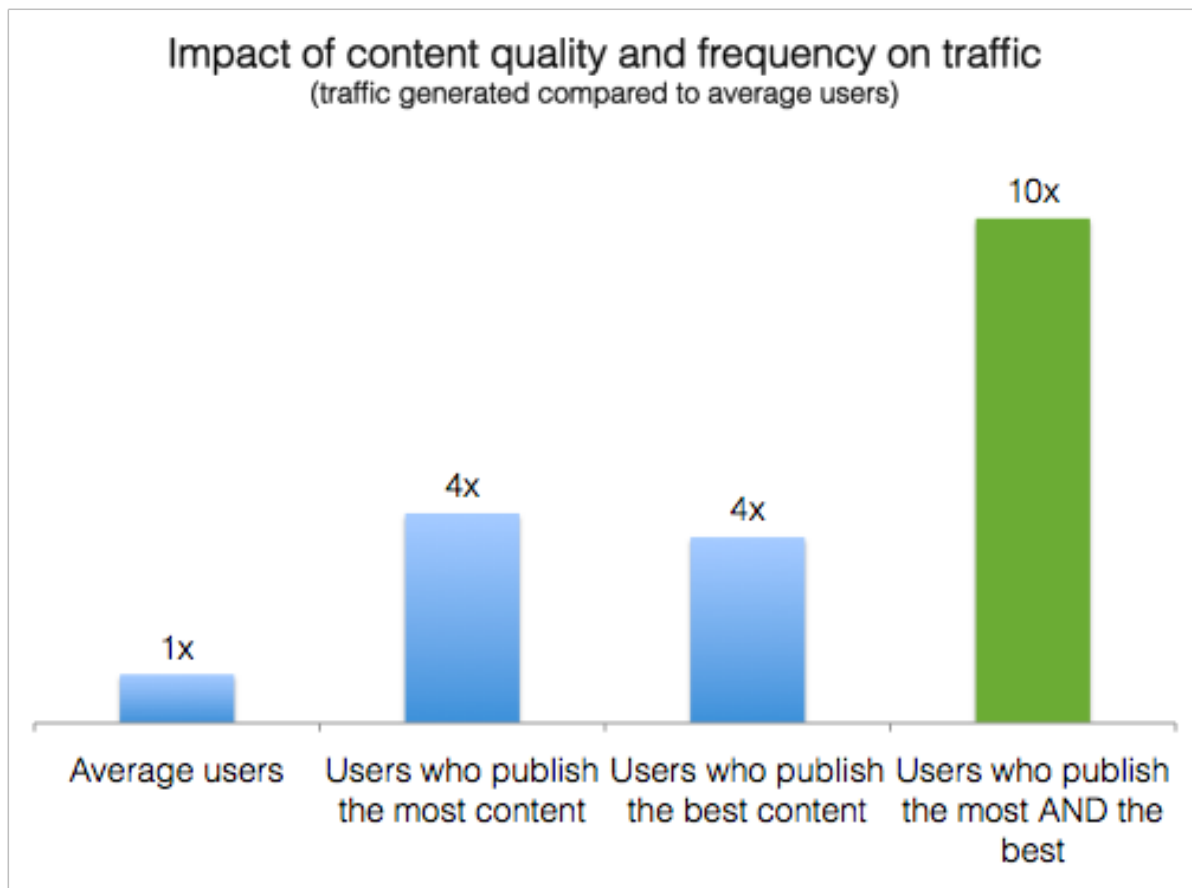
Here are several data points on this:

- Numerous studies on social media - including the one below by Beevolve - have found a strong correlation between social audience size and the volume of posts. Of course, having many followers is not enough to have a successful content marketing strategy, but building your audience is a necessary prerequisite to reaching your business goals.



Source: <http://www.beevolve.com/twitter-statistics/>

- By analyzing data from the Scoop.it user base (1.5M+ users), we were able to quantify the impact of content quality and publishing frequency on traffic. The details of our methodology [are on our blog](#) but the bottom line is that Scoop.it users who publish the best and the most content generate ~10x the traffic than the average users as shown in the graph below:



So a clear question to all content marketers is: how do I scale my published content while maintaining or increasing its quality? And how do I do that with limited resources?

We'll explore the various options to do that in the following sections.

## How to create good content

If 2014 wasn't the year of quality content, 2015 will be. Search engines as well as readers are consistently looking to surface the best of the best; content that will make their lives better by adding value and teaching them something that they're looking to learn.



"Content creation requires a mix of listening, storytelling and engagement that ultimately helps and solves problems for the reader. Focus less on creating content for content sake and more on creating great content and upcycling it into different types of media. When you focus on creating great content you'll have time curate others content giving you a well balanced message to your audience. "

*-Brian Fanzo, Chief Digital Strategist at Broadsuite*

There's one catch to the Internet allowing everyone to become a publisher, though: some of us weren't born writers, or just aren't sure how to become them.

Expert blogger Jayson DeMers has a few [tips](#) that can help you get on the track to writing the perfect business blogpost, including one of the most important practices of blogging for marketing purposes: defining a clear strategy for each piece of content you create. Being "intentional" about planning out each piece of content you create, along with the goals of that piece of content and its distribution strategy, will take a lot of the pain out of creating original content for marketing purposes.

Here's a table summarizing some of his key advice:

#### 4 steps to creating the perfect blog post according to Jayson DeMers

1. **Inventing a captivating introduction:** put yourself in the shoes of your target audience and discern what you believe they will want to learn from this post so that you can tell them up-front that they've come to the right place.
2. **Including a captivating image:** Images take significantly shorter amounts of time for the brain to process, so winning the attention of your audience with a great one is the way to go and is likely to keep readers on your page for a longer period of time.
3. **Citing outside data or information:** Readers are 3x more likely to trust information coming from a third party.
4. **Presenting content in an easy-to-read format:** You may be starting to sense a theme here. Making content easy for your audience to consume is infinitely important.

Source: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2014/06/01/how-to-write-the-perfect-business-blog-post/>

## Outsourcing

There are many ways to outsource original content creation by leveraging existing services and marketplaces to help speed along the process.

As PR and digital marketing evolve, so did many agencies which more and more offer content services in addition to strategic recommendations and other digital practices.

You can of course recruit freelancers or writers directly but content marketplaces such as [Scripted](#), [Odesk](#), [ExpressWriters](#) or [Visual.ly](#) help reduce the recruitment time of independent content talents by standardizing the process and performing the matchmaking process. One such example of this is a tool like Scripted, where you can post a brief of the piece of content you'd like written or created, and someone from their network of writers and designers will claim the task and create the content for you within a specified period of time.

One thing to keep in mind when outsourcing content though is that you will still have some work to do: for a freelancer or an agency to reflect your brand, your tone or even simply your expertise, it takes some effort which [Rebecca Lieb gives a great check-list for in this blog post](#). Having a great writer or designer for your blog or your infographic is just the beginning of the process and outsourcing still takes work: creating a brief, editing, sending feedback and iterating content is not to be neglected.

So even if your favorite agency can deliver content services or even if you leverage the matchmaking capabilities and services of the new content marketplaces, outsourcing will always require some budget **and** some time.

## Content Curation

Content curation is a key lean content strategy that will bring you many benefits. Here is how in detail.


### How to leverage your hidden content gold mine

You're sitting on a content gold mine that you're probably not leveraging properly; in fact, you're might not even be conscious of it! You might be able to increase your firepower, both in quality and quantity, with just a minor change in your procedures. You might be one step away from increasing your content ROI – measurably.

How could such a content gold mine hide in your business in full oblivion?

As far as content goes, you are first and foremost a reader: under all likelihood, you read more than you publish. You spend valuable time discovering, digesting and filtering tons of content throughout your working day – sometime purposely, sometime serendipitously. Which measurable benefits do you draw from this investment? You acquire knowledge; you become a better person and a better professional: there is ROI in knowledge. But how does this translate into your content strategy?

Curation is the process of discovering, enriching and publishing existing content. Your unique perspective and context on the content you curate yield added value to your readers.



"How do you make content curation work? Add value! Don't just repost/retweet an article or headline, but play it forward. Curation is an opportunity to add the value, insights, or perspective that positions you (or your firm) as a thought leader. What does that new law mean for your industry? How does that new movie tie into the problem your business solves? Curation is an exercise in insight and creativity - not an excuse to be a parrot."

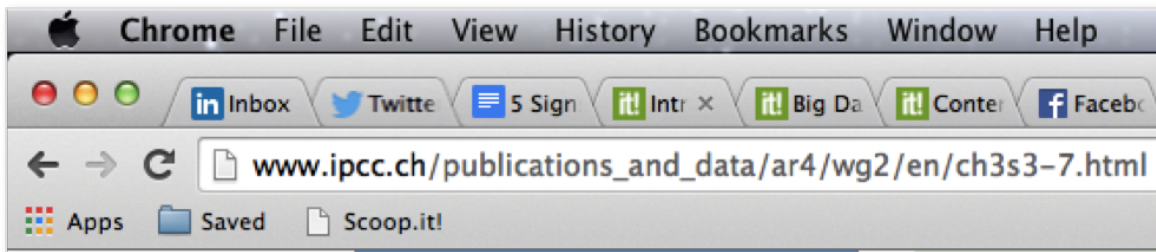
**-Rebecca Lieb, Analyst at Altimeter Group**

So curation is a proven, effective contributor to any content strategy as it brings credibility, [firepower and ROI](#).

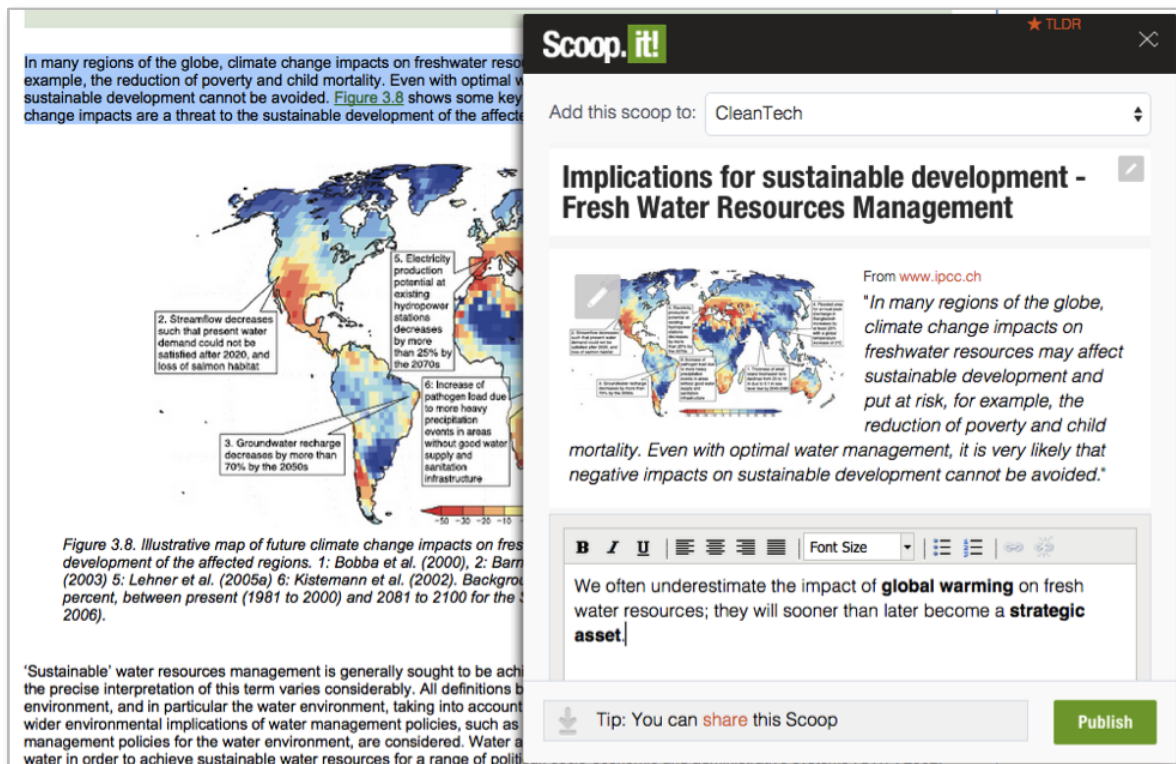
Clever publishing consists in streamlining your content consumption into content curation.

When engaged in a content strategy, curators invest time to hunt for content when they need to publish. You can complement this attitude with an opportunistic approach: capture relevant content when you find it! Don't wait until you need it! Add this simple process to your reader routine.

How can you do this efficiently? This can be achieved with the proper tool (the purpose of which being simply to save you time) such as the Scoop.it [bookmarklet](#):



Then, whenever you meet content relevant to your editorial line, capture it by a simple click on this bookmarklet:



By adding this curation reflex to your reading routine, you've cleverly – and substantially – increased your publishing firepower. You can go one step further: leverage your team. You are a

reader and so are your colleagues, partners, collaborators and associates. They can all be part of your clever publishing process.

### Amplifying your curation through content discovery tools

Capturing and re-purposing what you discover and read is clever. This is the beginning of your content curation strategy – making use of what you’re already doing. But as powerful as serendipity is, it’s not sufficient: an effective editorial line needs density, regularity, rhythm – you need relevant and rich content to feed your presence on many media (social media, sites, blogs, newsletters) throughout the day.

Bottom line: **you need predictability in your content sourcing in order to generate ROI.**

To do that, you should highly consider content discovery tools that will automate content discovery for you, provide a consistent stream of fresh, relevant content and save you time over other serendipitous content discovery approaches.

The screenshot displays the Scoop.it web interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'Planner', 'Content' (which is active), and 'Analytics'. Below the tabs, a search bar shows 'Suggestions for topic: Webdesign' with a dropdown arrow and a red badge indicating '353 more suggestions'. On the left sidebar, there's a 'Keywords' section with a search box and several tags: 'webdesign', 'responsive design', 'design', 'interfaces mockup', and 'responsive email'. Below this is an 'Advanced configuration' button with a '6' badge. The 'Sort by:' section has two options: 'Relevance' (selected) and 'Freshness'. The 'Show:' section has checkboxes for 'All Suggestions', 'Bookmarked (0)', 'Articles', 'Documents', 'Pictures', 'Videos', 'Social Networks', and 'User Suggestions'. At the bottom of the sidebar are 'Check All' and 'Uncheck All' links. The main content area shows a list of four curated items, each with a Scoop.it logo, a title, a brief description, a thumbnail image, and social media share counts. The items are: 1. '15 websites that use white space the right way' by Jurij Burchenya (26 shares), 2. '10 Web design trends you can expect to see in 2015' by Jurij Burchenya (231 shares), 3. '5 Responsive Email Design Best Practices to Start Off Your Day' by Maria Mincey (8 shares), and 4. 'Huge Set of Responsive Design Interface Mockups' by thenextweb.com (10k shares).

One such example of these tools is our Scoop.it Smart Suggestion Engine that we built with precisely that need in mind: it browses the web for you, listens and watches for what is published

and exchanged within your topics of choice, and suggests what's relevant for you to curate. You draw two immediate benefits from it:

- First, you learn and find inspiration (more on this also in the following subsection).
- Second, and most importantly, it helps you defeat the white page syndrome: at any given point in time, it offers you unlimited content for you to feed your editorial line, as and when you need it.

More details on how it works can be found [here](#).



"Think of it this way: content is fine art and you're the curator of the world's most prominent art museum. Understand your target audience first, then spend a lot of time thinking about them while curating. Ask yourself, 'Would my audience find this piece of content useful?'"

*-Dennis Shiao, Content Marketer at DNN*

## Curation as a way to inform creation

Content curation is not just a placeholder for the lack of inspiration or time to create great content. While it certainly can help publish relevant good content in the lack of a brilliant original content idea, it's also [a great way to generate some](#).



"I strongly believe that content curation will be a key part of a successful content strategy for all online marketers in 2015, along with creating original content. A simple reason is the vast amount of content on the web. Curating from what already exists will help you discover awesome content that can inspire your readers and not only that, but help you stay inspired in your own original content creation. That and doing frequent content audits, to analyze and ensure your existing (and past) content stays up to par."

*-Julia McCoy, CEO of ExpressWriters*

On top of using curation as a way to publish content, Content Marketer Tommy Landry [argues](#) that content curation is also a way to generate content ideas that will fill the gaps and be more original and impactful: by constantly monitoring what is published on your topics of interest to find content to curate, you will also understand with precision what content hasn't been produced yet and needs to be. In short, content curation informs content creation [as others also noted](#).

### 3 Tips To Use Content Curation To Inform Your Original Content Creation

Look back at your own curation work and pause on a weekly basis to reflect on:

- 1 - what are the developing trends that people have been publishing on? Can you elaborate on them?
- 2 - can you do roundup posts with top 5/10 pieces of content you've curated this week?
- 3 - what are the things your customers or prospects are asking and that the content you've been curating does not cover: why not write a post on exactly that?

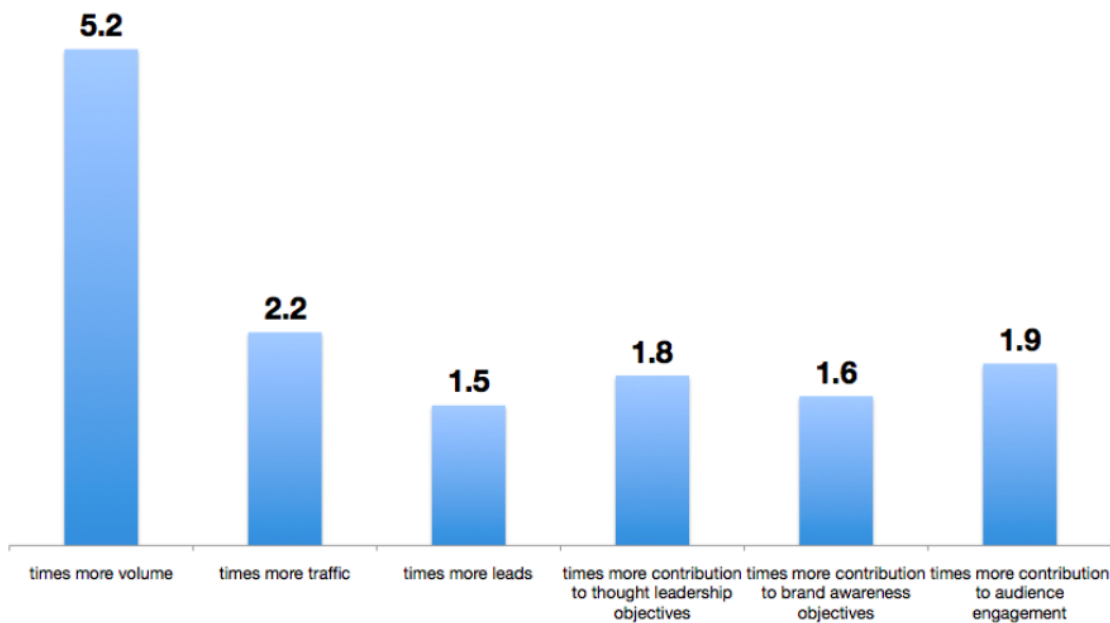
## How effective is content curation?

With over 1.5 million freemium users on the Scoop.it platform, we decided to add data to the discussion and ask our SMB clients how curation has impacted their content marketing strategies and goals.

The first finding of this [study](#) let us know that content curation helps SMBs increase their content volume. The average SMB has a mix of about 76% curation and 24% original content creation. Along the same lines, about 40% of SMB marketing budgets goes towards content curation, yet still manages to account for 76% of the total content volume.

Furthermore, as demonstrated in the chart below, one dollar's worth of content curation has been reported to bring 5.2x the volume of content, 2.2x the traffic, and 1.5x the leads as that same one dollar spent content creation<sup>2</sup>.

**What does 1 dollar of content curation bring SMBs  
vs 1 dollar of content creation?**



<sup>2</sup> Source: Scoop.it's 2014 report on the ROI of content curation <http://business.scoop.it/content-curation-roi/>

#### 4 Key Findings On The ROI Of Content Curation For SMB Marketing

1. Adding **content curation** to the marketing mix allows SMBs to **increase the volume of their content without a significant increase in cost**
2. Scaling content marketing by adding **content curation yields more than it costs** when it comes to meeting business objectives
3. SMBs spend six less hours curating content than they do creating it, with content **curation yielding about 3x the volume.**
4. **57% of website traffic for SMBs comes from content curation.**

## Contribution

### Employees

Content Marketing needs to grow beyond the marketing team as I once wrote about in [that post](#) and as other authors such as [John Jantsch](#) also [noted](#). But while everybody seems to agree, let's be real: it's not easy. I regularly talk to hundreds of business owners, entrepreneurs and even VP Marketing at larger companies which all tell me how incredibly hard it is to get non-marketers to create content.



Content marketing can pose as a huge financial obstacle for SMBs--the cost of technology and freelancer help can quickly add up. To reduce costs while still publishing quality work at a consistent rate, SMB marketers should look internally for help telling stories that their readers and customers care about.

Content marketing is much bigger than just pushing, "publish." SMBs have to look at the whole picture and better understand where they can cut costs to round-out their programs.

**-Ted Karczewski, Marketing Content Specialist**

But don't fool yourself: you won't get everybody to create content.

So yes, as Jantsch writes, this is also about creating a content culture favorable to content marketing. And he recommends a number of useful steps to foster it which don't involve creating content specifically but there's a key one that he overlooks: collaborative content curation.

While it's extremely hard to constantly remind people they have a blog post to finish, it's much easier to have them curate the content they read and they feel is valuable to the content strategy. Your co-workers have expertise; and they read content which is valuable. Empower them to easily curate it and share it so you can make your content marketing strategy stronger.

From a practical point of view, think about the following concrete ideas:

### 3 Ways To Make Content Everybody's Job

- 1 – create a [weekly newsletter](#) from the best posts that your team read this week;
- 2 – create [private content hubs](#) where everybody can share content without too much over thinking and then curate this pre-curation to your blog;
- 3 – identify champions who naturally share content (tip: they're the ones already sending links by email to the rest of the company) and give them ownership: make these company thought leaders responsible to create a weekly roundup post of curated links.

There are many other ways to involve more people in your content marketing strategy – a premise I can not agree more. But any of the above will be more efficient than waiting forever for one of your engineers to write that epic slideshare or for your super busy sales rockstar to come out with the perfect blog post.

## Community



Whether you are or have a community manager or not, involving the community surrounding your business in your content strategy is an excellent and highly recommended way to save time and money on content creation as well as distribution.

Numerous community professionals have worked with their marketing teams to include community in content marketing strategies. There are a few ways to do this and numerous benefits to doing so.

The first thing to consider is that your community is an excellent sample of your overall audience. They are the ones that you've already won over; the ones that want to be a part of what you're building and providing to the world. In order to reach more people like them through content, an

excellent practice is to hold feedback sessions with willing members of your community. This can be an extremely effective way of coming up with new content marketing topics or expanding on the ones that you're already focused on.

Next, and most importantly, SMBs can leverage their existing communities to co-create content. [According to content strategist Ted Karczewski](#), "If a customer or social follower asked a profound question, brought up an interesting trend he or she was noticing, or said something favorable about the brand, a writer or videographer should look to connect with that person to extend the conversation. Co-creating content further supports community development, earns trust, and guarantees amplification."

Asking your community members to write about their favorite things about your business or product, how they are making it a part of their life, or their expertise and how it relates to your brand is a great way to generate content as well as amplify distribution as your guest writer is guaranteed to share the content that they wrote on your site with their networks.

There are lots of community professionals using content as a part of their strategy and vice versa - learn more [here](#).

## Influencers

Content Marketing and Influencer Strategy must work together for either to be successful. 90% of the world's data has been generated in the past 2 years; and while content marketing is approaching mass adoption, getting a message in front of the right people at the right time is as formidable as it is essential. To rise above the noise, convey a message and mobilize buyers, content marketers are turning to influencers.

"Investing in a content and influencer marketing strategy can be one of the most impactful actions a business can make." – Lee Odden, TopRank Marketing



The above framework gives a complete framework by [Traackr](#), the leading influencer marketing platform, for designing and executing an influencer marketing strategy tightly coupled to your content plan. For more on this, we encourage you to check their [Ultimate Guide To Content Marketing Influencer Strategy](#). But as a way to bootstrap this, here's how to bootstrap this and get started.

## How To Get Started with Influencer Marketing

### To Amplify Your Content Strategy

A good practical way to get started with influencer marketing [as noted by the Traackr team](#) is to **curate influencers' content** as it's a way to:

- **Get in their radar:** as you share a curated piece from them and clearly mention them as the author, they'll likely to take notice;
- **Bring them to your site** and have them discover what you're all about, especially if you're using a [content hub](#) to create engagement and conversions from your social media publishing;
- **Have them amplify your reach** by re-sharing to their own audience;
- **Generate conversations** with them that will eventually lead to co-creating content.

As a recent example of the above, I [curated a post](#) by influencer [Rachel Miller](#) who took notice and discovered my Scoop.it page on that topic and [tweeted](#) it. The conversation went on and she invited me to join in her next #SSHour tweet chat that she hosts with [Brian Fanzo](#) - another prominent influencer in our space. This again amplified our content but also resulted in us [co-creating content](#) that generated further traffic, engagement and results.

It's good to remember that content is not created in vacuum. It's first and foremost a way to communicate from people to people. Involving influential people in your content strategy is a great way to keep it real and connected to your audience while extending its reach.

## Repurposing content

We've all played Lego as kids. Are you thinking of your content as modular lego-type building blocks?



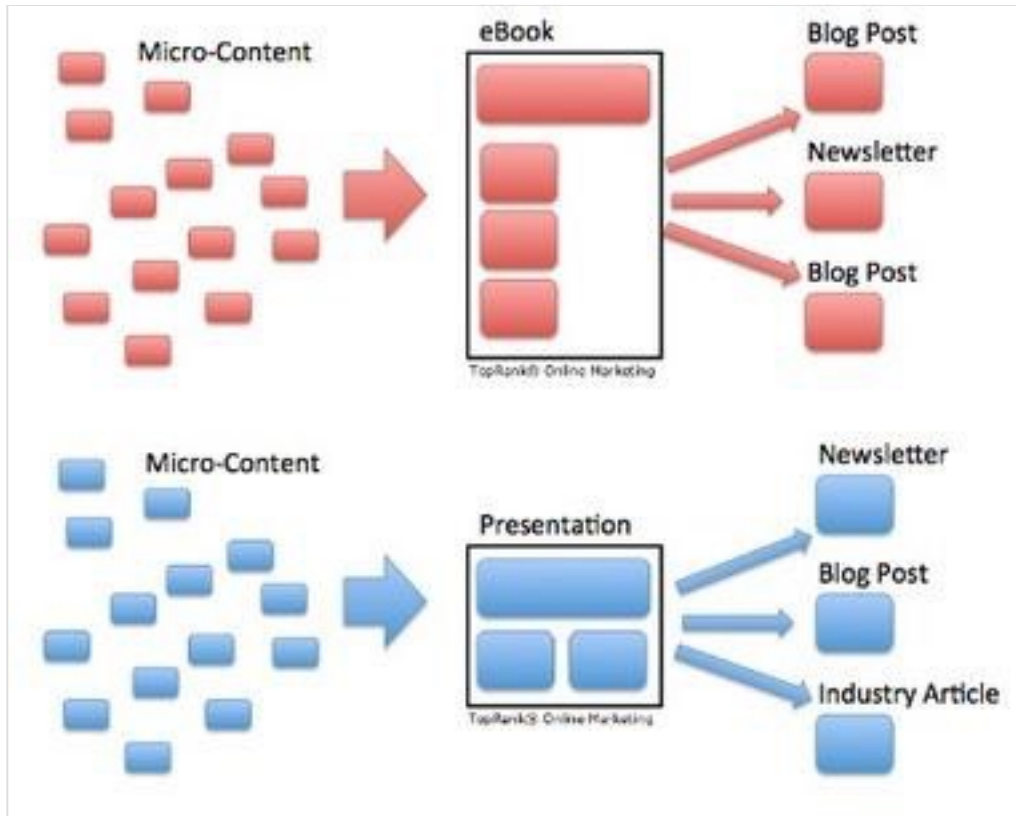
"In my small business, I have many old blog posts that still have valuable ideas. I can "re-use" this basic content a number of ways, including:

- Assembling several posts into an eBook or white paper
- Designing a Slideshare presentation based on the content
- Narrating - slides, recording it, and posting it as a YouTube video
- After a year or so, re-writing the original ideas into a new post
- Using the posts as chapter in a book or customer guide."

***-Mark Schaefer, Social Media Author & Consultant***

Lee Odden explains [in this post](#) why you should because you'll then be able to turn micro-content into eBooks and then blog posts, newsletters, etc... And vice versa.

A [lean content](#) practice that will help you scale your content marketing as shown in the following graph.



(Source: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2014/05/modular-content-repurposing/>)

[Rebecca Lieb](#) of the Altimeter group is also a big advocate of this technique and she came out with the [turkey leftover](#) analogy for repurposing content: she explains how you could turn epic content such as an ebook or a [white paper](#) into many other pieces of content with only marginal additional work. Just like the Thanksgiving turkey leftovers can last you many more meals... and should given the hard work you've put into cooking it in the first place.

Break big content into smaller pieces or do the opposite and plan your micro-content so that it can fit into something bigger like an ebook. Both are equally effective.

As Lee Odden points out, content curation plays an important role if you want to pursue this strategy: "Curation of micro-content is easy, provides useful information to your target audience and can fit within a social content workflow designed to roll up to a larger content project."

Here are several interesting ways you can leverage the curation of micro-content:

- create roundup posts with a given period's top 5/10 pieces of curated content (here's a great example: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2014/10/10-content-marketing-posts-2015/>),
- create the same as a weekly email newsletter (see [this guide's section on email marketing](#) for examples and data on this),

- publishing a mini content site with the top resources on a topic (here's our own example on content curation: <http://www.scoop.it/t/content-curation-insights-resources>).

By assembling your Lego content blocks together, you will not only save time but you might soon realize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And by breaking down your larger constructions into content atoms, you will extend their lifetime and their impact.



# Distribute



"Create detailed content that is better than your competitors and then promote this content. There is so much content available you will not succeed unless you can get your content to stand out amongst competitors. By creating better content than your competitor you have a chance of it being successful. But you also need to allocate time to promote it because great content just sits on the shelf without the relevant promotion."

*-Ian Cleary, Founder of RazorSocial*

## Synchronize your channels

"Write it and they will come" never actually happens. Yes, search engines will eventually bring audience to your content but before that can happen you need to bootstrap your distribution yourself. And to maximize the impact of your content, synchronizing your distribution channels is essential.

### Social media

A natural way to get distribution is of course to promote your content on your own social channels. While you may initially only have a limited number of followers, don't neglect the impact they can have: these people have chosen to follow you so they're likely to be interested in your content. In addition, think of this in a dynamic way: publishing consistently and regularly will mechanically ensure your followers grow in number and become a key distribution channel for your content.

#### 4 Must-dos To Get More Distribution From Your Social Channels:

1. **Schedule your social posts** at the moments where your audience is present,
2. **Post multiple times**: not all of your audience will be there when you post so don't be afraid to repeat it at various times,
3. **Use hashtags** to attract new followers who are looking for your keywords on Twitter, Google+ or Facebook search engines,
4. **Mention people** who are likely to retweet or reshare.

### Email newsletters

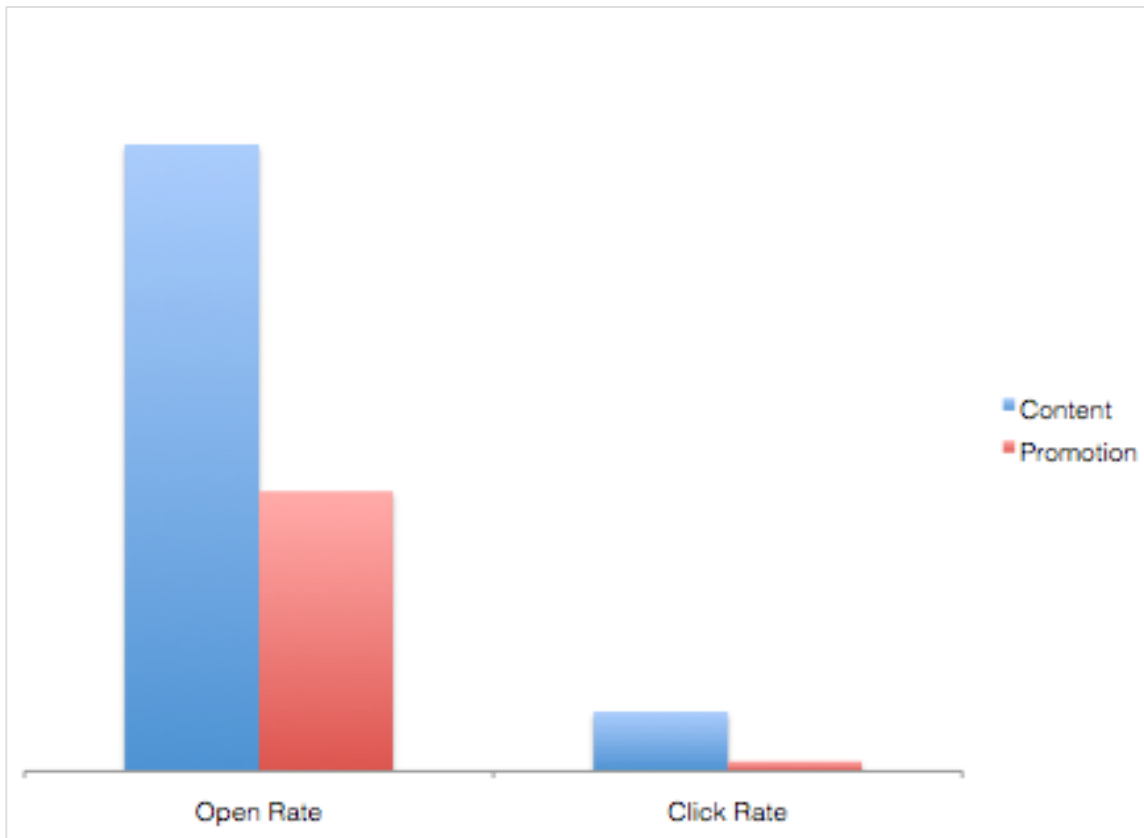
As mentioned in the previous section, though social media has been all the rage these past few years, you shouldn't underestimate how important email remains. But even better, you can make social media and email work hand in hand in a synchronized way:

- add sharing options to your newsletters so that your recipients can directly share your content from their email inbox,
- make your newsletters carefully curated with your best content - the one that received the most traffic and shares since your last email newsletter - to amplify the success of your most promising content.

So beyond that, what can you do to get optimized results from your email marketing?

Because email is such an important channel, we've done extensive research on it and here's what we've learned over two years of using email newsletters as a part of our content marketing strategy:

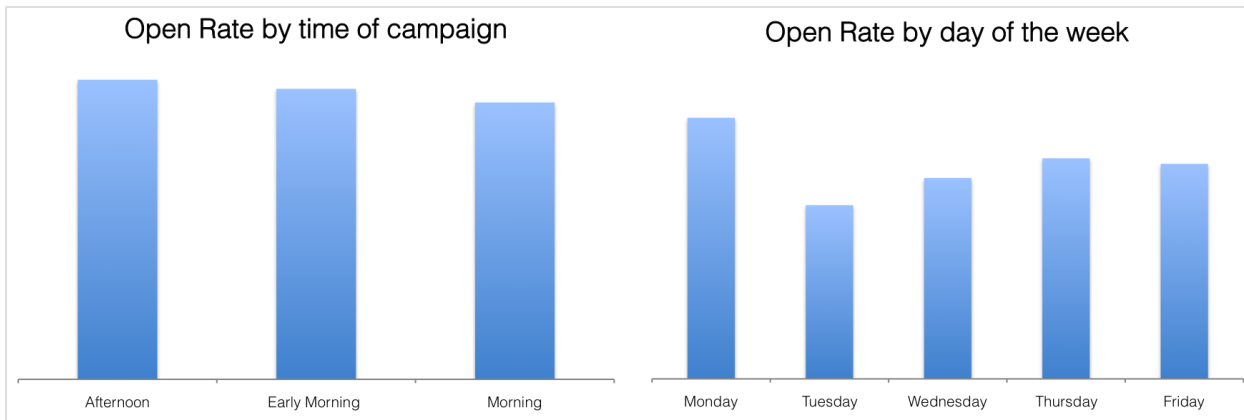
## 1. Content performs much better than promotion



This might be expected but while promoting our premium products through discount or special offers certainly helped our revenue grow, they weren't as engaging to our audience as inspiring content created or curated by Ally or the rest of the Scoop.it team.

On average, content beat promotion by a 2.2x on open rate and a 6.0x on click rate.

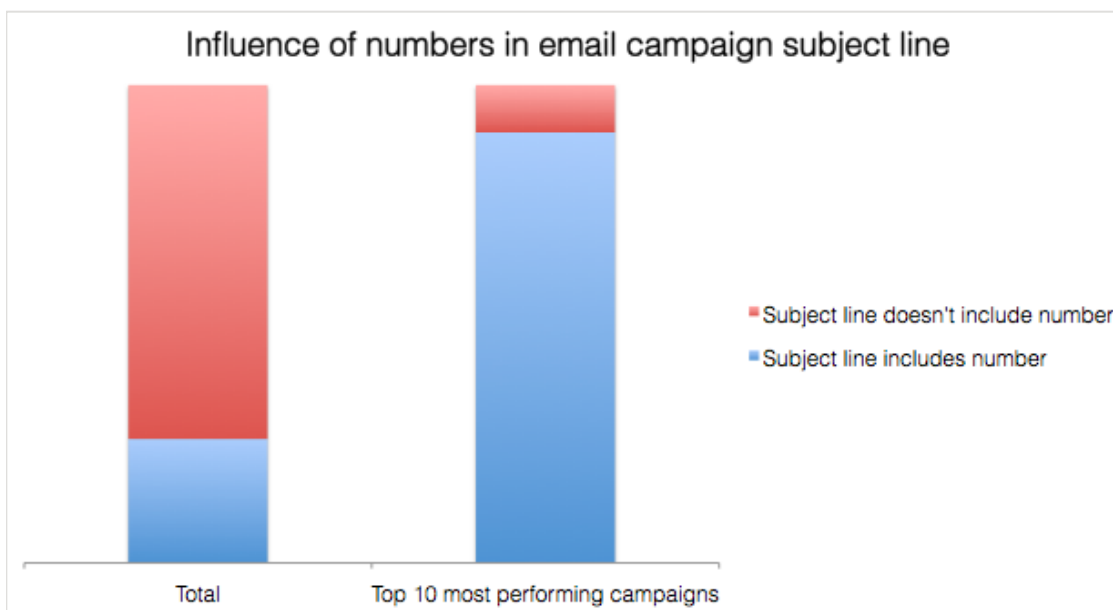
## 2. Timing of campaigns is not entirely critical



As on social media where we stopped counting the number of “best times to tweet” infographics long ago, there are a lot of studies online about the best time to send an email campaign. While we saw some slightly higher performance of campaigns sent on Monday afternoons, the differences don’t seem to be very statistically significant. Note that because we have a user base which is quite international (65%+ of our users are now outside of the US), this might explain the lack of impact of this criteria.

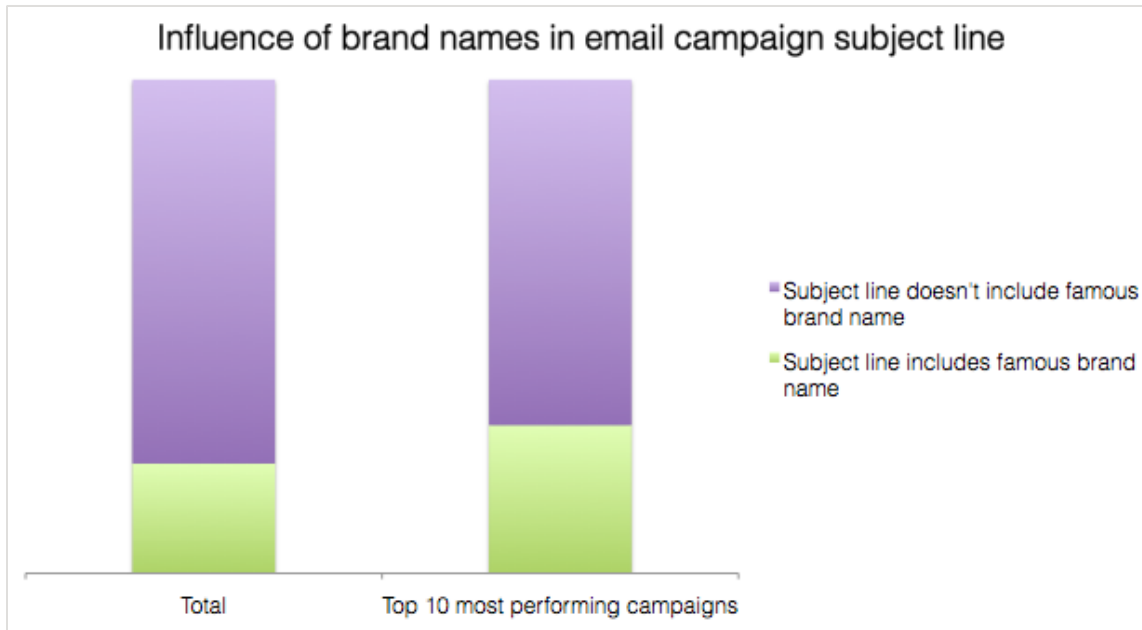
## 3. Having numbers in the subject lines helps the open rate

Is our user base super rational and number-driven? Not sure, but what we are sure of is that 9 out of our top 10 best performing email newsletters had numbers in their subject lines, the winner being “5 tips for hacking social media, optimizing for Twitter, and promoting at the right time” (and no, this latter was not one of these “best time to tweet” studies...) with an astounding 45% open rate.



#### 4. Piggybacking on famous brand names doesn't really work

Since 3 of our top 10 campaigns happened to include famous brand in the subject line (e.g.: "Content we love: 5 tips for lean thought leadership, Facebook "Home," and Operation: Integrate all the things!"), we looked at whether it helped – the rationale being that quoting Facebook or Twitter or other 800-pound gorillas that everyone in our space wants to watch closely might yield higher engagement. Frankly, we didn't find strong evidence of an impact, as we found the number of subject lines with famous brand names to those without them to be essentially the same.



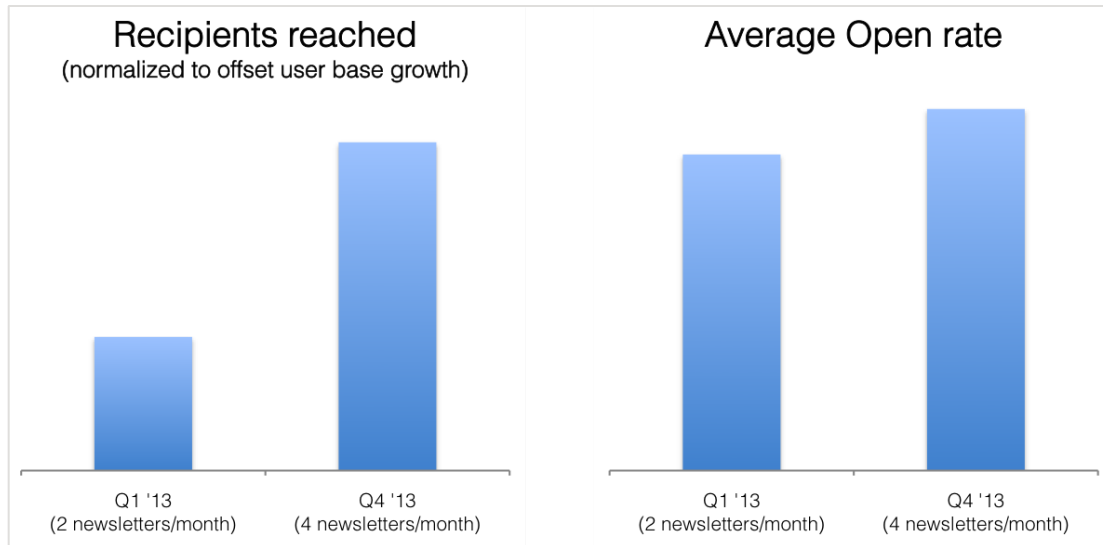
#### 5. Not having enough relevant content to send is by far the #1 hurdle

Overall, while there certainly is an art – and possibly even a science – of crafting impactful email newsletters, when taking a step back, we found that the #1 criteria for impact was by far the frequency of our campaigns.

It is worth noting that our #1 campaign outperformed the average by a huge amount; it is a clear outlier. And, don't get me wrong: our top 10 performing email campaigns – even excluding this one – clearly outperformed the average by a factor of 1.7x. This is a lot, but in reality it's very little, compared to the impact we could have lost by not sending any newsletters at all.

One thing to confess here: while this is our trade – helping people find great content to easily publish to all their channels to develop and engage their audience – I have to admit that we've been historically much more focused on social media and SEO than on email. For that reason, we were slow to adopt to email what we've been preaching to blogs, social media and search: content curation. Yes, I know, it seems a little funny. But, the lesson was learned and we worked on it not only by integrating much more content curation in our own email campaigns but also by [making it a feature](#) on the Scoop.it platform.

And, when we compare our recent results vs the historical ones, we found the biggest take-away of all: as we started including curated content more systematically into our mix, we were able to send content newsletters on a weekly basis without degrading the quality: our open rate went up a bit but much more importantly, our increased frequency drove the number of recipients we reached through the roof by a factor of 2.5x (when normalized to offset the fact our opt-in user base grew rapidly in the meantime).



In other words, **our best months were not the ones where we had just 1 or 2 exceptional campaigns but were months where we were able to send newsletters every week.**

### Email Newsletters As Part Of A Content Strategy: Key Take-aways

1. **Content outperforms promotion:** better open rate and click rate.
2. **Content enables marketers to send more emails without being spammy.**
3. **Email frequency is by far the #1 criteria to optimize reach** of email campaigns.
4. Yes, **subject lines and timing can have some influence** but again, you're better off optimizing frequency than spend too much time over-experimenting on these.

## Influencers

As explained above, co-creating content with influencers is a great way to involve them in your success, particularly get them to help distribute it. But while co-creating content is important, it's unlikely you'll be able to co-create massive amount of content on a daily basis.

Another way to get influencers to help is to place your content in the context of their interests:

- curate your target audience's influencer content,
- adding your own thoughts to it and publish it on your content hub (blog, website)
- share the resulting curated post on social channels while mentioning

Here's an example of a blog post I curated from Rachel Miller and shared with a clear mention that this is adding to the conversation she started:



**64 Guillaume Decugis** @gdecugis · Oct 3

Keep It Real: 3 Things To Remember About Content Curation [sco.it/9GoCsz](https://sco.it/9GoCsz)  
starting a conversation with [@RachellouMiller](#)

The tweet got her attention and she reshared my content:



**Rachel Miller** @rachelloumiller · Oct 4

Keep It Real: 3 Things To Remember About #Content Curation [sco.it/9GoCsz](https://sco.it/9GoCsz) via  
[@scoopit](#) [@gdecugis](#)

And she even took the time to share our curated stream on that topic:



**Rachel Miller** @rachelloumiller · Oct 4

A great collection of articles (including one of mine) discussing the power of  
#content from [@gdecugis](#) [ow.ly/Chj8O](https://ow.ly/Chj8O) #b2bmarketing

While you should definitely have co-creation in mind as mentioned in the previous section, curating influencer content with added context and clear mentions to add to the conversation is a great way to get some amplification on a daily basis.

## Your community

All of your followers are not the same. As you develop your community management, you will likely identify fans in your follower base. To get them to help you distribute your content, you can use private groups on Facebook, LinkedIn or Google+ to address them specifically and ask them to share your content - particularly content that helps them with regards to their own audience.

## SEO

Though you don't control SEO distribution per se, there are a number of indirect SEO benefits you can expect from doing the above: the more people will like your content, the more they're likely to link back to it. Link building can be a direct consequence of your success at doing all the above. Of course, there are link building techniques that you can explore but by focusing on publishing great content and on maximizing distribution, you'll get the basic for SEO in place [as this post also details](#). An interesting data that underlines this point is that, just by publishing good curated content and integrating this with social distribution, Scoop.it pages receive on average 40% of their traffic from search engines.

## Leverage existing channels

What if you don't have many followers or an email subscriber list? How do you bootstrap distribution when getting started? As mentioned before, the main answer to this question is to publish regularly and consistently great content. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't leverage other channels to bootstrap your audience or accelerate its growth.

### Existing content platforms

One of the Lean Content best practices we've seen several speakers at our meetups recommend is to leverage existing audiences on top of your own to increase the reach and the impact of your content. While your blog may or may not yet have a strong audience, there's always more people to reach. By placing your content on publishing platforms which offer interesting discovery mechanisms or having blogs that are read in your industry re-publish it, you could in theory multiply your own reach by not doing much more.

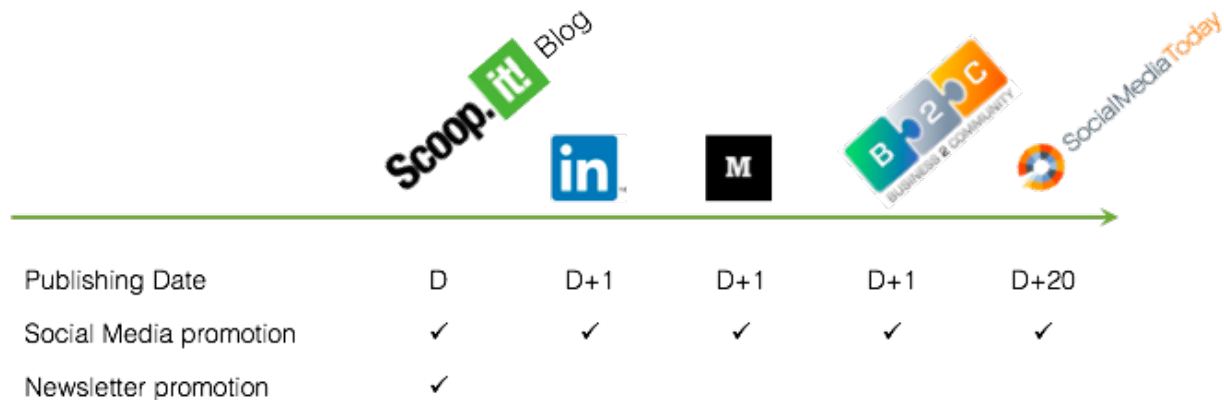
Though the idea makes perfect sense, it also comes with questions:

1. Re-publishing on other platforms can be more or less complex: some like LinkedIn publishing platform or Medium are public or in the process of being public; some industry blogs (for example, in our space, [Social Media Today](#) or [Business 2 Community](#)) recruit contributors based on their own selection criteria.
2. Re-publishing content is creating potentially duplicate content which could hurt SEO and defeat the purpose.
3. Re-publishing content means it's read on a platform from where we can't convert our audience: to subscribe to our blog, to sign up for a demo of Scoop.it, etc. As part of our own Content Marketing efforts, [conversion is an important metric](#).

At Scoop.it, we like to put ideas to the test so we did an experiment a few weeks ago to come out with data that would support or reject this. While most of our original content is on our blog, we've occasionally contributed to various other media such as Business 2 Community, Fast Company, Business Insider or Social Media Today. In addition, Ally and I have also been publishing on Medium and LinkedIn which now have interesting blogging platforms. But while until now we hadn't been really consistent at tracking performance on these various platforms, this time we've been measuring impact the best we could.

Here's what we did:

- On June 18, I published a piece called "[Social Media Publishing is dead \(as we know it\)](#)" on our blog.
- From there it had the usual social media promotion we do for all of our content: we share it to our social channels including the Scoop.it channels; we also promote it specifically to Scoop.it users through the message that shows on their dashboards.
- The following day, on June 19, I published it under various names to:
  1. LinkedIn: "[Is Social Media Publishing dead?](#)"
  2. Medium: "[R.I.P. Social Media Publishing](#)"
  3. Business 2 Community: "[The Death of Social Media Publishing \(As We Know It\)](#)"
- We also submitted the post to Social Media Today but their review process is typically longer and they ended up publishing it on July 9th: "[Is Social Media Publishing Dead?](#)"
- We also did social media promotion on these links as for the original piece on our blog.
- On June 23, the blog post was included as part of our email content newsletter [that we send out on a weekly basis](#).



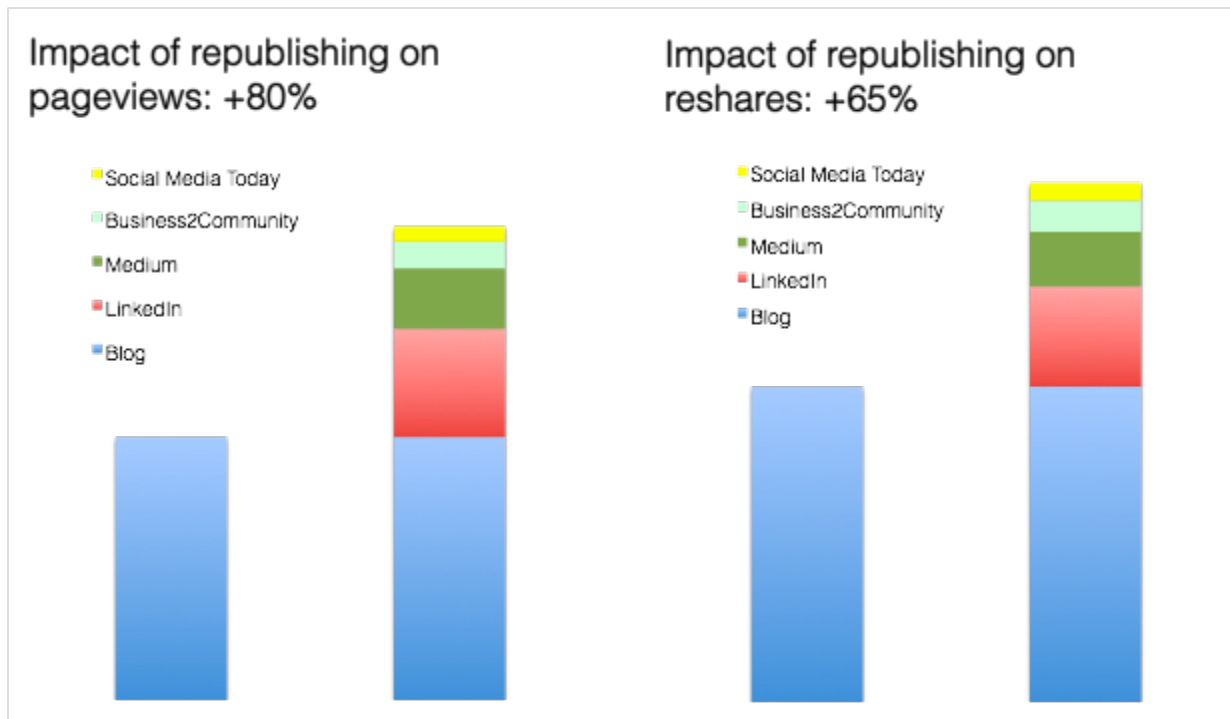
We measured results in 3 ways:

- First, we looked at KPI's per platform such as pageviews, shares (to social media) and comments.
- Second, we looked at SEO impact: did we win some keywords? Which article did?
- Third, we looked at lead generation: though the third-party platforms could not generate leads for us, was there any non-attributed leads that could maybe be correlated to the added traffic?

Note that the post was successful which helped make the data interesting. Apparently the title resonated with many who struggle with getting engagement on social networks and the content generated comments and re-shares. This post ended up being in our Top 10% for Q2.

Unsurprisingly, the blog link performed better: not only was it there that we published it first (24 hours earlier) but it had more social media promotion as well as promotion to the Scoop.it user base through the site and via our weekly email newsletter.

### What's the impact of republishing content on traffic and engagement?



The first learning is about amplification: as the above graphs demonstrate by comparing pageviews and shares with and without it, re-publishing meant our content was seen and re-shared by close to 2x more people.

In detail:

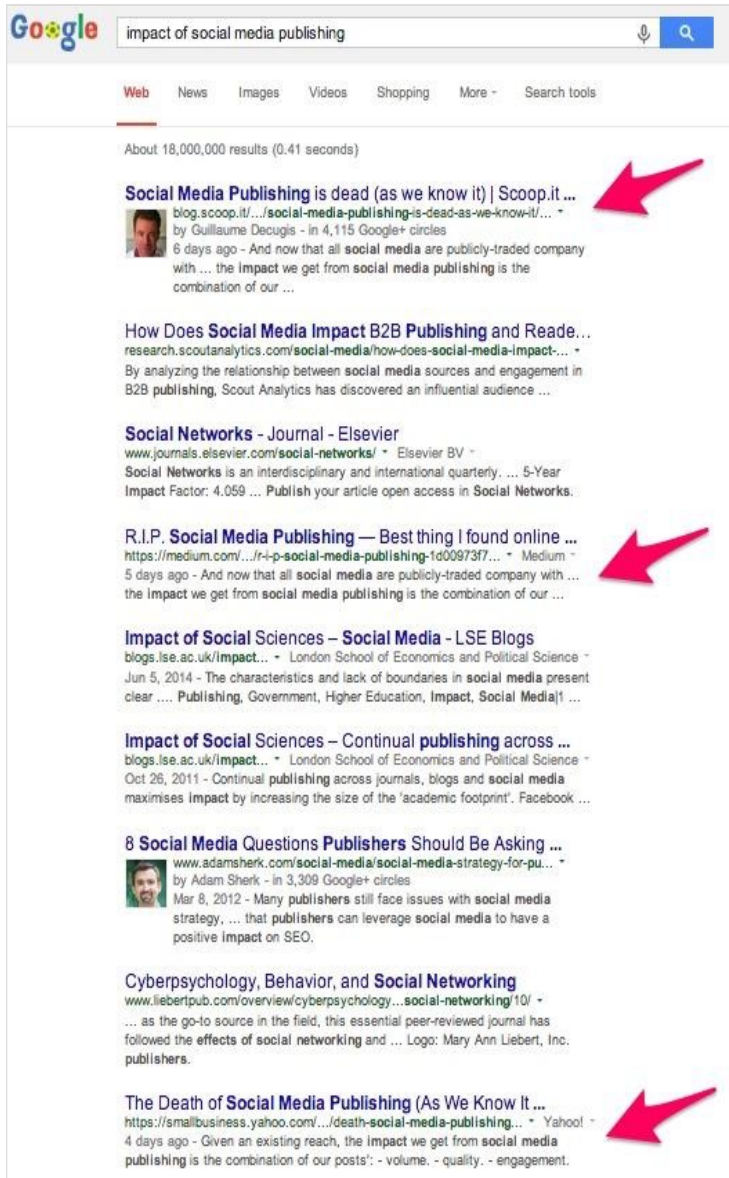
- LinkedIn came out close to the blog for Views and Shares and did amazingly better on comments.
- Medium added close to a quarter of the blog's traffic and shares.

Note that we didn't retain likes on LinkedIn and recommendations on Medium as KPI's because we're not too sure what they bring besides augmenting the performance of the content on their respective platforms but there was a very significant number of likes on LinkedIn and recommendations on Medium.

- Business 2 Community was less impacting but given the target audience of the site is very relevant for us, it's still significant. It's also itself automatically syndicated back to Yahoo.

- Social Media Today came late to the party (close to 3 weeks after the other ones) so I'm not sure we can really measure the impact on the same basis.

### What's the impact of republishing content on SEO?



It's always hard to judge results from an SEO perspective but the post was able to score some wins with keywords such as "impact of social media publishing" where it gained position #1 with the blog version and #4 with Medium version.

Surprisingly, the duplicated post on Yahoo! did better than the original Business2Community version... It was also #1 on Google News through the Business2Community version for the same keywords or for "facebook organic reach decline".

But the conclusion is that republishing didn't hurt the SEO performance of the original post using the timeframe we described above.

### **What's the impact of republishing content on lead generation?**

Finally, we saw overall great performance from a lead generation point of view but none that can really be attributed to the re-publishing activity: as mentioned before, the blog post performed really well and this reflected on the leads we generated from the blog but we didn't see a spike in non-attributed leads that could be originating from our re-publishing activity.

While re-publishing will help you leverage existing audiences, the big limitation is of course that you won't have conversion capabilities through that strategy. When you write on your own blog or when you curate third-party content to your own content hub, you have to build your audience but you can convert it (see our own post on [how to generate leads through curated content](#) for instance).

In a way, re-publishing is the opposite of content curation: while it definitely brings leverage, it doesn't help convert like [your own content curation hub](#) does.

### **So is re-publishing content worth it?**

Yes, but it depends on your content strategy's objectives.

Overall we achieved a near 2x amplification that helped us reach new audiences for a minimal effort (beyond writing the blog post itself) and we didn't see any SEO downside – quite the opposite.

However, if lead generation is the only goal of your content strategy, it's probably not the best tactic for the reasons explained above.

## Best Practices When Republishing Content To Other Blogs And Publishing Platforms?

If you're interested in applying re-publishing, you might want to consider the following good practices:

1. **Identify the blogs or platforms that will match your target audience.**
2. **Understand their rules of engagement:** some platforms will want exclusive content, some are happy with re-publishing or syndication.
3. **Analyze what drives content performance on these blogs/platforms** you're targeting: for blogs, it might be understanding precisely the editorial line and building relationships with the blogger or editorial team; for LinkedIn and Medium, it's a mix of social following (your existing network or the one you can build) and featuring opportunities (eg: being featured as part of a Medium collection that has a large audience; [Len Kendall](#) was for instance kind enough to feature my story in [the awesome](#) collection he created and curates and that is followed by an impressive 11,000 people).
4. **Vary the headlines and/or add some specific context as an intro:** not only for SEO purposes but also to adapt the post to the blog/publishing platform specific audience.
5. **Promote the re-published content:** don't be selfish and expect all the benefits to go one way. Share the re-published content and not just your own original blog post: there are multiple opportunities to spread your sharing across several days anyway so you should be able to do both.
6. **Be realistic with your objectives:** as explained above, re-publishing won't help much to generate leads like your own blog or your own content curation hub can. So it's best to use it specifically for new ideas, opinions or thought leadership pieces.

To follow up on that topic, you can read [our experience on what we learned using SlideShare as a visual blog](#) - the visual content platform being one with massive traffic for professionals that you might consider for implementing that tactic.

## Guest blogging

Guest blogging has been at the heart of a controversy last year as Google's Matt Cutts said: "Okay, I'm calling it: if you're using guest blogging as a way to gain links in 2014, you should probably stop. Why? Because over time it's become a more and more spammy practice, and if you're doing a lot of guest blogging then you're hanging out with really bad company."

But his words are important: having people contribute to your blog in an authentic way is by no means a bad idea. What is targeted here is the spammy proposals that any blog with some traffic will sooner or later receive: I blog for you if you blog for me and we exchange links. These proposals of low quality content from people who have no idea what your audience cares about and what your brand stands for are to be avoided at all costs. But building a carefully selected community of guest bloggers - as mentioned above - is a great way to scale your content. The reciprocal approach is also worth considering to bootstrap your audience and the best practices are the same as in the above section on leveraging existing platforms: after all, contributing to some other blog is leveraging their audience as a platform.

But in addition to these principles, you can also build relationships with blogs you contribute to and over time make the exchange more interesting by negotiating to:

- include back links to your site (which in this case are totally white hat SEO),
- include links to your own landing pages,
- include links to your other content.

## Online communities (tweetchats, G+ Hangouts...)

In the same spirit of building groups with your most engaged community members, consider existing communities. Search for and join some existing groups on your topics of interests. Publish your content to these groups and even ask members to reshare it if they like it. Don't be spammy but remember one important thing: if you publish valuable content to these groups (unique awesome pieces or carefully curated ones from third-parties), they will enjoy reading it and resharing it.

## Paid Content Distribution

While most of lean content marketing initiatives involve non-advertising-based inbound marketing tactics, paid content distribution (or paid media) is yet another important channel in which to further generate awareness and leads. As Gary Vaynerchuk said, “content may be king, but distribution is queen and runs the household.”

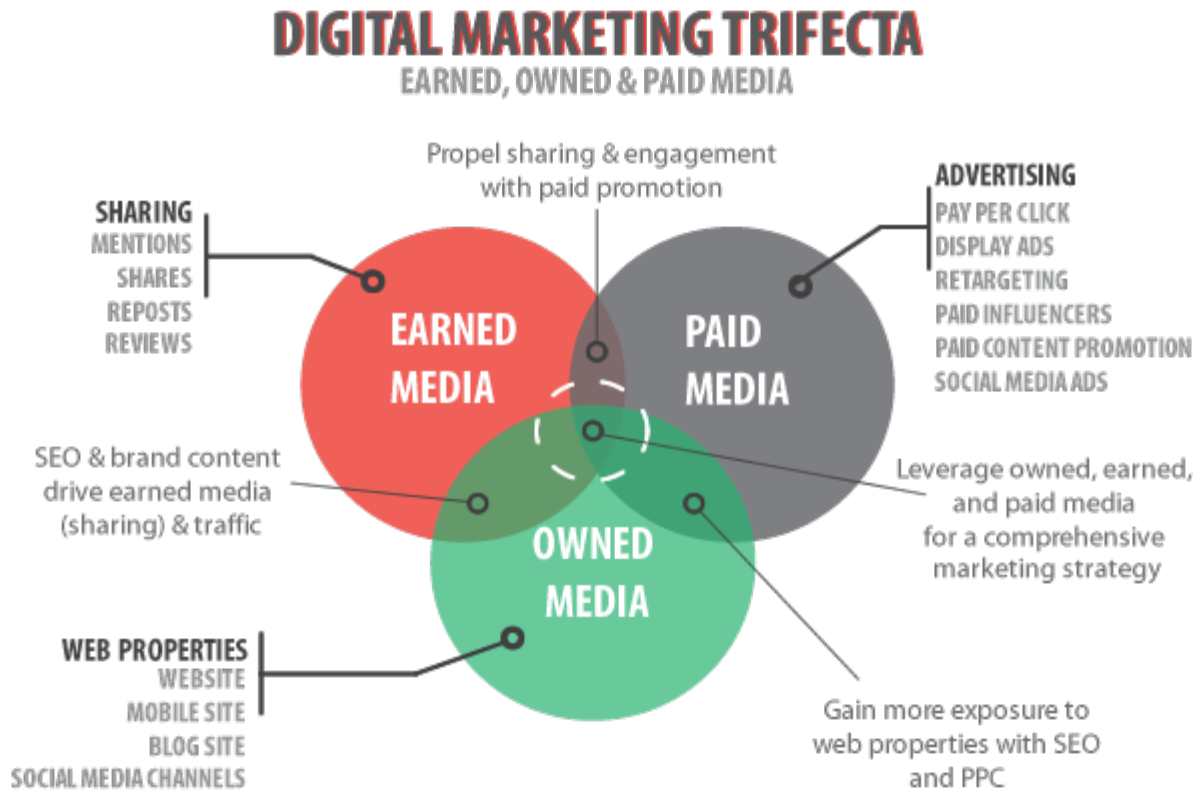
Outbrain, Taboola, Disqus, Yahoo Stream Ads and NRelate are probably the most well-known paid distribution networks. They promote your content as recommendations on the web’s largest content publishers including Yahoo, Conde Nast, CNN.com, and ESPN. Due to a variety of audience targeting capabilities, certain networks may take some time to optimize for success. Average PPC rates range from \$.20-\$.30 (based on anecdotal media reports), and some are as high as \$.75 for “premium sites.”

One network that stands out is Nativio, which differentiates on strategic / native placement within a website versus just displaying links that push out to a publisher. These placements include homepage and article pages so the experience is far superior, although it’s a CPM usually north of \$10, so a different model as well.

Facebook Sponsored Posts, Twitter Promoted Tweets and LinkedIn Sponsored Updates are also forms of paid distribution that can generate varying degrees of awareness and leads. Facebook and Twitter are the more economical route at between \$.50-\$.75 CPCs, however CTR on Facebook is usually around .10% versus Twitter at north of 1% (note: these are anecdotal rates reported in mainstream media so actual results may vary). Twitter of course has a much smaller base than Facebook and tends toward media and entertainment content.

LinkedIn’s Sponsored Update prices tend to be in the \$4 CPC range, due to hyper-targeting capabilities, however the value of the network versus price is still an open question. Experiences with InMails and Sponsored Updates indicate mixed results when it comes to CTRs or responses, so it’s a good idea with this and all networks to start with a test budget and optimize from there when you see success.

As various networks work to integrate content into publishers in a meaningful way, price, targeting, nativity and relevance will continue to play factors in success. It’s worth noting that Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest also have paid programs, which depending on how active you are, can prove valuable. If you believe Marissa Mayer there’s opportunity: “The average post on Tumblr gets reblogged about 14 times. The average sponsored post on Tumblr gets reblogged 10,000 times.”



Source: <https://www.titan-seo.com/newsarticles/trifecta.html>

There is definitely an opportunity to “pay for play” in content marketing. Whether this offers a real leverage for SMBs remains to be seen as history shows us that whenever it becomes a money game, companies with deep pockets win. If you have some budget to allocate for paid distribution, it’s probably a good idea to get some experience and give it a try. One thing though: make sure to measure returns by tracking your campaigns as we describe in the Measuring ROI section of this guide.

# Convert through content



"It stands to reason that if I'm relying on you for information and advice based on your curation efforts, I may choose to do business with you, as well. The trust barrier is overcome; I know what's important to you and what you consider a priority. If you're writing about these topics in blog posts or feature articles, then I benefit from your insight and understanding. In that case, why wouldn't I want to do business with you?"

*-Paul Chaney, Internet Marketing Consultant*

## Turning readers into contacts

Just because you've started a business blog, doesn't mean you're a content marketer. Being able to convert through your blog is the ultimate golden ticket to content marketing.

### Subscription forms

If people are reading a post on your blog, it's likely that they'll be interested in your future posts. Make it as easy for your audience as possible to read everything you post on your blog by creating a form to collect contact information and send your new posts out by email.

**Subscribe for hand-delivered premium content.**

Email Address

## The Lean Content Marketing Handbook for SMBs

There are many ways to add subscription forms to your blog. If you're using WordPress, there's a simple [widget](#) for that. If you want to take it a step further, try out tools like [MailChimp](#). You can create a form in the MailChimp backend and paste the code for it onto your blog's sidebar. Then, all the email addresses collected will be automatically added to a mailing list and all you have to do is create a newsletter and send it out!

### Staying fresh

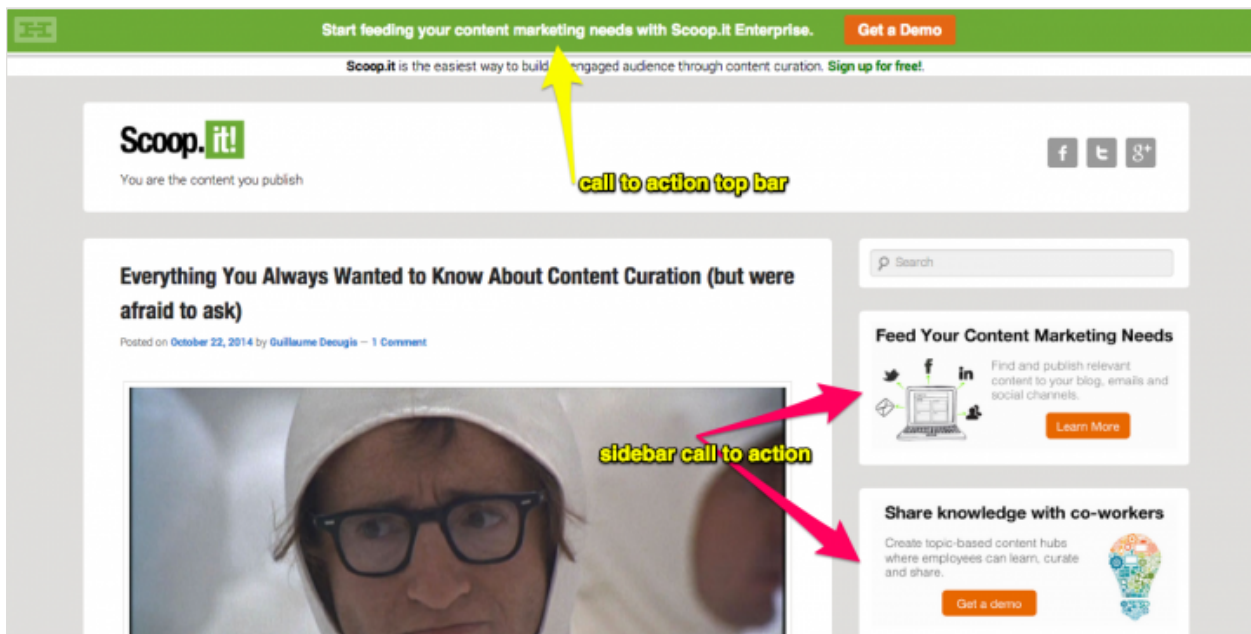
You might be a marketer, or an executive, or a community manager, or even a social media intern. If you're anything other than a full-time blogger, you probably have lots of other things going on every day that take away from your precious writing time. Every week that goes by without a post, though, is equal to potential lost readers.

Curate content that's been created by others. In this age of information overload, there is plenty of content out there that's already been written and is relevant to your messaging. Read a few pieces at the beginning of your day and share them with your added insight to provide value to your readers while saving more time for your other work and original posts.

### Calls to Action

There's a reason it's called 'content marketing' instead of blogging. When you're creating a blog for your small business, it's important to remember to connect it back to actual sales in order to see results. If your blog is a separate website with no connection to your website where readers can make an actual purpose, you're missing out on a huge opportunity.

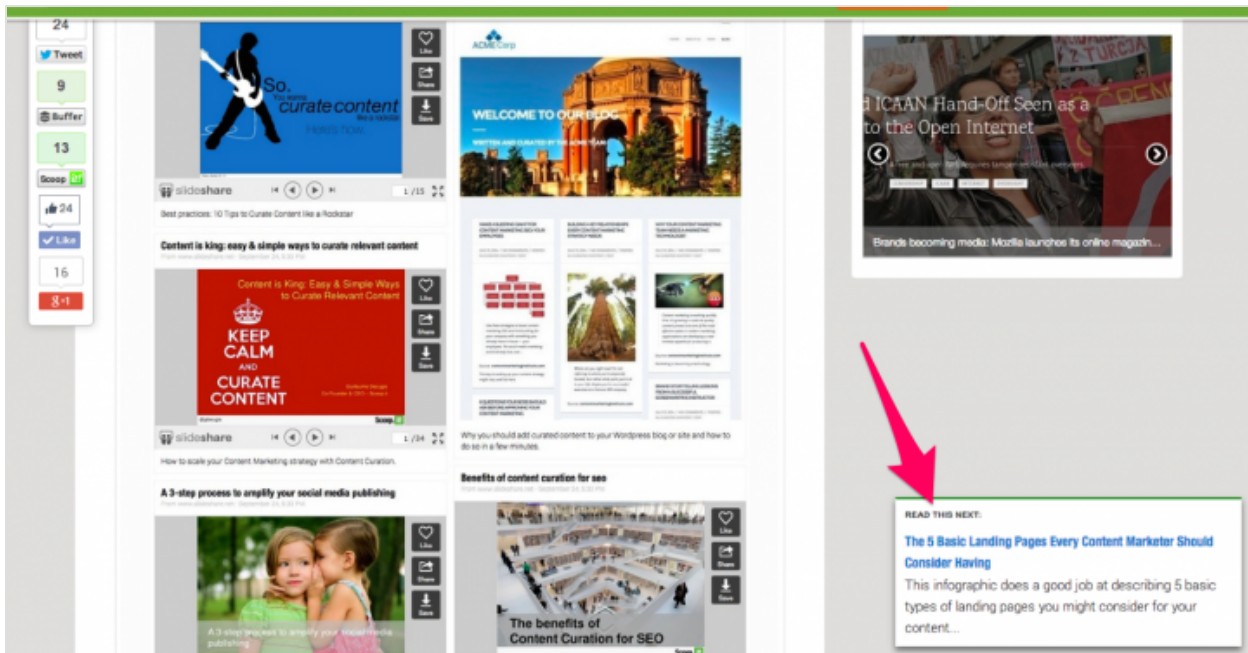
What action do you want your readers to take that will turn them into customers? Is it to sign up for a demo? Or to purchase a product online? Whatever it may be, you can easily create a widget on the sidebar of your blog using HTML and linking to the website you want your readers to visit. Tools like [HelloBar](#) will help in the process of creating CTA's.



## Guide readers through your site











Whether your website visitors are coming from social media, search, or other referrals, the more time they spend on your website, the better. [According to Chartbeat CEO Tony Haile](#), 55% of readers spend less than 15 seconds on a webpage. That barely gives them enough time to read your blog posts, nevermind sign up for your newsletter or visit your business landing page. The odds of readers visiting other pages on your website – if they even stay on for longer than 15 seconds, that is – are slim to none. With some encouragement, you might be able to grab a few more moments of your visitors' precious time.

Make it easier to visit another blogpost on your site than to leave your blog altogether. There are numerous [plugins](#) that you can install to display related content at the end of every post, or even [create a popup window](#) when your reader scrolls to a certain point in the page.



## Leverage the behaviors of your audience

Do you know which pages are visited most by your audience? Do you know where they normally give up and close the window? You should. Knowing where your readers go on your website is an extremely helpful way to provide more value to them and achieve your own goals at the same time. With [Google Analytics](#), you can track the first and last pages of each reader's website visit as well as the average number of pages visited and which pages lose the most readers.

Behavior	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. /	
Overview	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. /2014/07/23/introducing-templates-embedded-topics-and-website-integration-through-scoop-it/	
Behavior Flow	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. /2014/07/14/social-media-engagement-is-not-a-strategy/	
Site Content	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. /2014/07/17/knowledge-sharing-enterprise-report/	
All Pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. /2014/08/07/10-inspiring-quotes-from-the-best-b2b-content-marketers/	
Content Drilldown	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. /2014/09/08/how-you-can-prepare-for-twitters-potential-upcoming-changes/	
Landing Pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. /2014/07/11/a-basic-guide-to-seo/	
Exit Pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. /2014/06/18/social-media-publishing-is-dead-as-we-know-it/	
Site Speed	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. /2014/07/28/12-one-liners-that-will-drastically-impact-your-marketing-blogging-edition/	
Site Search	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. /2014/07/30/scoop-its-next-template-designer-could-be-you/	
Events	<input type="checkbox"/>		

When you've learned the behaviors of your readers, you can optimize your website to make the most out of said behaviors. There are also tools like [bounceexchange](#) and [optinmonster](#) that monitor where your readers go both within your site and on the pages that they visit and serve a popup before they leave in order to collect an email address, lead to another page, or encourage a purchase.

## Encourage social sharing

This might sound like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised. If you're not explicitly telling your readers to share your posts, they're probably not going to.

Sidebars like [ShareThis](#) and [AddThis](#) are extremely easy to install on your blog and make sharing exponentially more convenient for your readers by providing simple buttons to click that lead to precomposed social media posts. If you want to take it a step further, pick out a few tweetable tidbits from within your blog posts and include a [Click To Tweet](#) link.

Make these six changes to your business blog today and you will, without question, see an increase in the ROI of your content marketing efforts.

## Content for lead generation & landing pages

You've created convincing landing pages as we've seen before so now you have 2 questions:

1. How can I bring more people to see them?
2. How can I get more people who see them to convert.

Content marketing is a great way to address #1 and as we've said before, you should think of content as the fuel to your inbound strategy. The landing pages won't get you any leads if nobody sees them but if you've implemented the above, you must now have built a solid content engine that not only generates traffic but also brings some of that traffic to your landing pages through the various conversion hooks described in the previous section.

Beyond your first results, you can probably optimize the traffic you bring from your content by doing a couple of things:

- First, you can test (or even better A/B test) the conversion hooks you place on your blog or on your various content properties. A great tool to do this is [HelloBar](#) which not only will help you create this conversion hooks easily but also has a built it A/B test engine that is very easy to use and understand.
- Second, you should think of how to better align your content and your landing pages. If you started with one unique landing pages, chances are this one-size-fits-all approach won't work for all the buyer personas / buyer stage matrix we've described in the [Strategize](#) section. Even though starting with one landing page is ok, to optimize your traffic and therefore your leads, think about creating a number using this persona / buyer matrix and pair content with the corresponding landing page accordingly. [This infographic](#) will give you some ideas of the various types of landing pages you can consider. Another idea to generate landing pages is to turn some of your evergreen content into a landing page. This [Slideshare](#) that we wrote on the benefits of content curation for SEO is now also a [landing page](#) that was created in a very short time using Unbounce as we [repurposed](#) existing content and didn't have to create it from scratch.

Over time, you'll generate not just more traffic to your content but more traffic from your content to your landing pages.

In parallel to that comes the work to optimize your landing pages conversions: how many of the landing page visitors end up as leads. Again, A/B testing is a must here as there are many results that will prove counter-intuitive: if you're not convinced, make the test on these [12 case studies explained on their blog by Unbounce](#).

And if you're looking for ideas on what to test for, here's a [great example](#) that generated \$1 million for Moz as well as detailed explanations on how they did it.



"SMB content marketing must be laser focused to attract and convert sales. The five actionable content marketing steps I recommend are:

- Define your market
- Know your your customer
- Create the 5 essential forms of content: product information, answers to prospect questions, how to use your products, how to style your products, and customer ratings and reviews
- Incorporate a call to action
- Track your results back to your business goals"

***-Heidi Cohen, Actionable Marketer***

## Content for lead nurturing and social selling

Leads are not clients yet. Depending on your industry and product, the sales cycle might be long or short but it's rarely instantaneous, hence the need to nurture leads by helping them mature their purchase decision faster.

Content can and should help in that process too.

Without content, your sales team are likely to be repeating themselves constantly: "when do you have time for a quick chat?", "did you make a decision yet?", "how can I help you make a decision?", "could we have a quick chat?", etc...

It's frustrating for them or for your prospects. Not only that but it puts your sales team in an uncomfortable bargaining position: they're now begging constantly for a meeting, a call, a decision...

Enter content.

By providing your sales team with great resources or timely fresh content, you will enable to turn this begging process into something completely different: a discussion. Now they can provide value to their prospects: "As you asked the question last time during our call, I thought you'd be interested in that article that the Forbes just published precisely on that topic" or "Since you're also doing business with the insurance industry, you might be interested in this case study we just published on our blog".

If your sales team is practicing social selling, these conversations will naturally extend to Twitter, LinkedIn, etc... "@prospectname Here is a great study that answers your question" provides added-value and is a great way to initiate a conversation that will lead to a potential demo or sales.

Finally, if you're using Marketing Automation services to run lead nurturing campaigns, a diverse portfolio of created and curated content is an important success factor to optimize engagement.

# Measure ROI

How do we measure ROI and know our content isn't just fueling some vanity metric but is actually helping our business?

If content marketing is the new advertising, then we should try to assess this question with the same criteria. Which means first, we should acknowledge that while advertising is a practice that has been undisputed for decades, measuring its ROI can greatly vary. After all, a lot of marketers would still agree with [John Wanamaker](#) who said more than a century ago: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."

When it comes to digital advertising though, this question is easier to solve because we have metrics: we know how many views a YouTube Ad received, we have impressions of ad banners, clicks on Adwords ads, CTR's, etc. As a result, while we can't always have a precise answer to the ROI questions, here are ways to better measure it and – more importantly – to improve it.

## Measure the output: content volume and quality

To produce return you first need to have output. We've mentioned before how critical it is to publish not only good content but also to publish it frequently.

You should use an editorial calendar to set goals and keep track of your content volume:




- number of created or curated blog posts published every week
- number of resulting social media posts
- number of newsletters sent

How about quality?

Quality is of course subjective but a good proxy we like to use is the number of shares you're getting per post from your audience across all social networks. Not that quality is enough to generate share but as we've seen before, you should heavily promote your content anyway. As you push it to them, if it resonates with your community, influencers and subscribers, their propensity to share it will be higher. Keep track of that metric and analyze whether it's progressing in line with your overall traffic growth (which means quality is constant) or faster (which means quality is increasing).

## Use content analytics to understand the performance of your content

The first thing you need to understand is the performance of each individual piece of content. Though Google Analytics will help you get some of that data, you'll be better off using some specific content analytics such as the ones Scoop.it brings as they'll give you a complete, 360 view on your content including social engagement and not just traffic:

SCOOPS		DATE	VIEW	ENGAGEMENT	
	How to take advantage of the brain's preference of visual content & stories	11-03-2014	1.6K	209	▼
	The Science behind viral stories on the Web	01-03-2014	1.5K	250	▼
	3 SEO Techniques You Probably Haven't Heard About	26-08-2014	1.1K	43	▼

While this is not ROI yet, views and engagement are good proxy for your content's popularity and quality. Understanding quickly what piece of content worked better and which ones did not well - directly from within your content platform - will help you and your team make progress faster.

## Use [Google Analytics](#) to measure progress on brand awareness

Measuring brand awareness is of course difficult and integrating it in a precise ROI calculation is harder still. But there are at least a couple of metrics you should be able to get easily:

- how much direct traffic do you get?
- how much search traffic to your Web site does your brand name generate?

Both of these metrics can be easily obtained from [Google Analytics](#). Whether this traffic is coming from people visiting your web site directly or through a bit of help from Google, one thing is for sure: they are all people who've remembered your brand to some extent. If your content marketing is helping your brand awareness, you should see these metrics go up.

## Measuring thought leadership through pingbacks and social mentions

In addition to the above, you can keep track of how many times your content is linked back to through pingbacks. That's easy if you use Wordpress for your blog for instance. Pingbacks reflect your authority: your content is now becoming the reference to other people.

On social networks, the equivalent of pingbacks are mentions: you can use tools like [Mention](#) to track them and measure if people are referring to you in their conversations on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc...

## Track conversions through Google Analytics

There are many ways to track conversions but here's a basic way to do so using Google Analytics:

- Add Google Analytics event tracking for your conversions: here's a [detailed guide](#) on how to do it.
- Use [Google's URL builder](#) to track referral traffic from your content to your conversion pages using UTM tracking.

Combining both of these will result in Google Analytics showing you not only how many conversions you had per type of conversion but which content source delivered it. As you understand which content channel delivers the highest conversions, you'll be able to invest more in it.

If lead generation is a key objective of your content strategy, I would however recommend that you define your various opportunities to generate leads as goals in Google Analytics. Goals can be configured by going to Admin and then selecting a property and a view:

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics Admin interface for the property 'Scoop.it / Blog & LP's / All data'. The 'Goals' section is selected in the left sidebar. The main area displays a table of configured goals. There are two goals listed: 'Form Successfully submitted' and 'Get a Demo'. Both goals are currently turned on. The table also shows the goal ID and the number of conversions in the past 7 days.

Goal	Id	Past 7 day conversions	Recording
<input type="checkbox"/> Form Successfully submitted	Goal ID 2 / Goal Set 1	128	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Get a Demo	Goal ID 1 / Goal Set 1	233	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A goal can be for instance:

- collecting the email address of a visitor,
- generating a click on a "live chat" button,
- generating requests to be called back for a demo,
- etc...

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If you've configured your goals and are using UTM tracking through Google URL builder, you will be able to analyze your lead generation by traffic source:

Goals	Source / Medium	Form Successfully submitted (Goal 2 Completions)	% Form Successfully submitted (Goal 2 Completions)
Goal Completion Location			
Source / Medium			
	1. (direct) / (none)	35	27.34%
	2. blog / post	33	25.78%
	3. google / cpc	18	14.06%
	4. newsletter / email	16	12.50%

or even by piece of content:

	Landing Page ?	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions Goal 2: Form Successfully submitted		
		Sessions ?	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages / Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?	Form Successfully submitted (Goal 2 Conversion Rate) ?	Form Successfully submitted (Goal 2 Completions) ?	Form Successfully submitted (Goal 2 Value) ?
		13,020 % of Total: 100.00% (13,020)	80.76% Avg for View: 80.76% (0.00%)	10,515 % of Total: 100.00% (10,515)	74.60% Avg for View: 74.60% (0.00%)	1.47 Avg for View: 1.47 (0.00%)	00:00:56 Avg for View: 00:00:56 (0.00%)	0.98% Avg for View: 0.98% (0.00%)	128 % of Total: 100.00% (128)	\$12,800.00 % of Total: 100.00% (\$12,800.00)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. <a href="http://blog.scoop.it/2015/01/22/measuring-curation-scoopit-analytics/">blog.scoop.it/2015/01/22/measuring-curation-scoopit-analytics/</a>	925 (7.10%)	67.03%	620 (5.90%)	75.03%	1.41	00:00:55	0.65%	6 (4.69%)	\$600.00 (4.69%)

Goals are very powerful in Google Analytics which has many advanced features to better understand your funnel and optimize your conversions.

## Create a benchmark with a Google Adwords campaign

A way of measuring the impact of content marketing is to consider it as media you didn't have to buy. How much would you have had to spend to generate 1,000 clicks to your site if you had to pay for it? How much to generate 100 conversions?

If you don't know, you can answer this question by running an Adword campaign: while this isn't entirely free, you could run a \$10/day budget for 2 weeks and get an initial idea of how much you should bid on keywords that relate to your business. For \$150, you'll have an answer: say you received 300 visits and 15 leads from that campaign:

- your cost of getting 1,000 clicks is \$500 ( $1,000 / 300 \times \$150$ );
- your CPC (Cost per Click) is \$.50 ( $\$150 / 300$ );
- your CPL (Cost per Lead) is  $\$150 / 15 = \$10$ .

Now you can compare that with the impact of that \$5,000 infographic you did last year: did it bring 500 leads or more? If it did, then you could say you'd been better off than buying AdWords which is a good benchmark to beat considering AdWords visitors are explicitly searching for something.

## Track your SEO progress through tools like [Moz](#) or [SEMRush](#)

Ranking high on specific keywords (or keyword combinations) is not only a great way of generating traffic to your content and your site but it's likely to generate brand awareness and conversions. Measuring progress on this can be done using a manual list of keywords and monitoring your progress against it on a weekly basis but it's likely that the process will become cumbersome rapidly so you can use [Moz](#) to automate the process and also get interesting insights and analytics.

For a full list of SEO tools including analytics, [this article by Writtent is a great help](#).

# Conclusion

SMB marketers are at a turning point. The Internet has redefined their job and they need to adapt to keep meeting their business objectives. Their new playing field is more open, connected, real-time and therefore more competitive than ever.

On the other hand, this open and connected world is an opportunity! The audience has never been so fragmented, and therefore accessible to niche and focused SMBs, and marketing can now be lean: affordable to clever players who adopt the rules, technologies and tactics.

To win the attention war and grow, SMBs need to learn how to accompany their future customers in a long and convoluted journey throughout the web. From brand awareness, thought leadership, and SEO to community engagement, lead generation, and lead nurturing (possibly through marketing automation), every element of the SMB arsenal is fueled by one core resource: **content**. SMB marketers therefore need to develop a content strategy; to become a media that feeds their targeted audience, wherever it is, on a regular basis with relevant content.

Such content strategy should keep both sides of **ROI** in check:

- The **Return**: what are the key performance indicators and how to measure them? Lead generation should be the ultimate KPI, although other intermediate metrics matter too.
- The **Investment**: deploying a content strategy costs money and time (often the SMB's scarcest resource). Adopting lean content strategy is both possible and necessary

The good news, and the number one takeaway of this guide, is that deploying a **lean content marketing strategy that works for SMBs is possible: It requires focus, organization and technology**.

- **Focus**: focus on your unique message, your target audience, your overarching KPI.
- **Organization**: define an editorial line and calendar that leverage existing content; amplify it on all channels; leverage your community and your internal resources.
- **Technology**: save time and increase your impact by using SMB-dedicated solutions to help you source, organize, schedule, distribute and monitor your content.

The web is an open playing field; in 2015, clever SMBs can win the game. Go Lean Content now!