Overcoming Your Content Marketing Challenges

How to create great content your readers will share.
Engage your readers with great content

Coming up with content for your email communications is one of the biggest marketing challenges facing small businesses and nonprofits today.

But what most people don’t realize is that there are great sources of content all around you.

With the right plan and a little bit of help you could soon be on your way to creating content that will engage your audience and help bring new customers, members, or volunteers to your business or organization.

This guide is jam packed with helpful resources and advice to help you overcome your content challenges and take your email marketing to the next level.

Contents

5 Ways to Create More Engaging Email Content ...2
Overcoming Your Content Challenges ...4
Content Marketing Cheat Sheet: Sources ...8
Content Marketing Cheat Sheet: Curation ...9
Conclusion ...10
5 Ways to Create More Engaging Email Content

When it comes to email marketing, the idea is simple: create content that inspires people to do something.

In practice, coming up with that content can be hard.

Just ask Jaye Myrick, Co-Owner of Take 5 Massage. She dramatically improved her open and click-through rates with strategic content, but she still doesn’t think it’s easy.

“I’d be lying if I said that,” she admits. “But there are ways that small business owners can make creating content a lot easier.”

Here are Jaye’s secrets to making email content so engaging that it drives opens, clicks, and, ultimately, sales:

1. The template

Above all, Jaye says her content template has been the key to her success. Each month, the team will scribble down any potential idea on this template to see how it will look in the email.

“It helps us stay organized,” Jaye says. “We’ll come up with different themes for each newsletter, but if we come up with a good idea that doesn’t fit a theme, we can put it in the template for another month and put it back in my desk.”

2. Finding sources of inspiration

One of the biggest problems for small business owners is just coming up with those ideas in the first place. Here are Jaye’s top sources for content inspiration:

- Email newsletters from other businesses
- A notebook for ideas
- A mind map that helps capture business values
- Other businesses on Facebook
- Newspapers and magazines

The key for Jaye is to just “dip in” to different topics that can be applied to massage. During the Olympics, for example, she used a picture of an athlete getting a massage and used it as a jumping point for an article.

“Photos can make a huge difference,” she says.
3. Having a theme

Each of Take 5 Massage’s newsletters have timely themes to remind clients why the service is important. In August, the email was all about children going back to school, and how starting school can be a stressful experience.

Having a theme as a cornerstone to your content can make it easier to come up with ideas and gives email subscribers helpful information that promotes your business.

4. The coupon

Jaye has found that you don’t need to offer a big reward with an email, either. In the above newsletter, she offered a $2 coupon, which can be redeemed either by printing it out and giving it to the massage therapist or opening the email on a smartphone and displaying the coupon on the screen.

Take 5 Massage keeps track of every coupon redeemed and the massage therapists see over 300 redemptions each month.

5. A checklist for voice

Jaye has a checklist that she goes through every time she’s about to send an email. That way, she makes sure she doesn’t miss anything—whether it’s making sure the email is scheduled or an article is tagged correctly on the Take 5 blog.

The quirky part of this checklist is probably the most important: “We make sure we check for voice before we send anything out,” she explains.

That means making sure emails from Take 5 Massage clearly show the personality of the business.

“'I’ll go through the text and punch it up if it seems a little boring,” Jaye says. “And the last thing I do is make sure that every ‘I’ in the email is turned to ‘we.’”
Breaking the bubble

Since she started applying content marketing strategies to her email newsletters, Jaye has seen an uptick in practically every metric.

What Jaye shows us is that content marketing is all about breaking the initial bubble that surrounds the product or service of any business.

Take 5 Massage’s email newsletters work because the content puts massage within the context of larger issues: from health, to stress, to work, to school.

At the core, content marketing is thinking about the other things your audience likely cares about, and then connecting those issues with your business.

Once you start planning appropriately, you may even find you have a different problem than before.

“I don’t ever run out of ideas anymore,” Jaye says. “I just run out of time.”
Overcoming Your Content Challenges

It seems that whenever there’s a hot topic in the marketing world, there are also plenty of misconceptions that come along with it.

This’s certainly the case when it comes to content marketing.

Whether it’s coming up with ideas, writing newsletter articles, creating and maintaining a blog, or just thinking of stuff to share on Facebook or Twitter—content marketing comes with certain challenges.

As a result, you may be wondering whether creating content is a worthwhile investment. Well, it is!

Content is currency on the Internet.

It’s what people consume and share,… and it’s what can get your small business found online.

So before you throw in the towel and give up on the idea of content marketing completely, here’s how to overcome common content challenges.

1. I can’t create great content, I’m a horrible writer!

“I can’t create content…” isn’t a sentiment any business owner needs to accept, especially if the reason has something to do with your proficiency as a writer.

Great content is all about answering the questions of your audience. It’s why someone visits your website or checks out your content in the first place: to learn more about your business and see what you can do to help them.

So whether you’re writing about products, services, events and promotions, or just sharing your expertise about your industry—you already have those answers. Now all you need is a strategy for turning those answers into great content.

2. I don’t know what I’ll be doing a year from now, it’s impossible to plan my content!

The first step to changing the way you think about content is changing the way you plan it.

For most small businesses, content creation is a last minute process. It’s something they know they need to do each month, but may be reluctant to pay much attention to until they’re getting ready to publish, post, or send it.

Don’t wait until the last minute to come up with content ideas. Instead, develop an editorial calendar that makes sense for your business.
3. I have a business to run, I can’t spend time creating content!

Small business owners have never had more access to easy-to-use tools for content creation.

Take your smartphone, for example. That’s essentially the modern day Swiss Army knife of content creation.

Whether you’re snapping pictures, shooting videos, recording audio or taking notes, business owners have never had access to a more valuable resource.

And with the convenience of a mobile device, you can create engaging content without disrupting your schedule or taking away from your business.

4. I’m only one person, I can’t come up with enough content ideas!

One of the biggest misconceptions about creating content is that you’re responsible for writing every single thing.

While it’s important to share your own expertise, it’s valuable to open your content to outside resources. After this section, we’ve outlined 16 of the best places you can turn to for great content ideas. These are places you’re probably visiting on a daily basis and just haven’t thought to tap for inspiration.

5. I’m just a small business, I can’t compete with the big guys!

Believe it or not, you can create content as well (and in many cases better) than your biggest competitors.

Don’t believe me? Join the email list of your biggest competitor and see how well their emails connect with you as a consumer.

Chances are you’ll receive plenty of content, but not much that connects with you personally.

That’s because big businesses can’t come close to providing the type of personalized content that customers actually want. On the contrary, you’re writing to a customer base you see on a daily basis, people whose questions you’ve answered and whose orders you’ve likely processed yourself.

It’s something even your biggest competitors wish they could match. And because irrelevant content is one of the biggest factors why someone leaves your network, it’s you who actually has the advantage when it comes to creating content.
6. Content is only valuable to me if it gets people to buy!

Not all the stuff you create is going to lead people to buy. Writing with a sales mentality is a sure-fire way to undermine your content marketing. The real value of content is that it gives your audience the opportunity to get to know, like, and trust you over time.

People enjoy receiving content that speaks to their interests and enables them to overcome a challenge, achieve a goal, or learn something they may not have already known.

That doesn’t mean you can’t talk about yourself or your products. Just keep in mind that people are much more interested in what your product will do for them than what selling it will do for you.

Finding the time for content

The beauty of content is that it’s flexible. If it’s something that informs and engages your audience on your website, it could serve the same purpose in an email or on Facebook.

And while you don’t want to just be sharing the same stuff each and every week, you can take steps to make your content work across all your marketing channels.

Use the channels of communication you have available to get your content in front of your target audience and don’t think you always need to start from scratch. Don’t be afraid to reuse, repurpose, or recycle content you’ve already created.
Content Marketing Cheat Sheet: Sources

The content you need is closer than you think. Here are 16 places you can look to get the creative juices flowing:

1. **Internet research**
   What topics might interest your customers? They don’t have to have anything to do with your industry, you can just share some helpful facts, too.

2. **Marketing materials**
   Sift through flyers, brochures, sales sheets, or newsletters for bite-sized pieces of information. Curate some of this content and put it to work.

3. **New product literature**
   In the days leading up to a new product release, create content about the problem the product will help customers solve.

4. **Press releases**
   What “big news” has your company released recently? Spread the word. Don’t just copy and paste, be sure to make the news conversational, as if you’re talking to your customer directly.

5. **Industry news**
   Are there things going on in your industry that affect your business? Let your customers know your point of view.

6. **Competitor news**
   You should always keep tabs on your competitor. See what type of things they’re offering and let your customers know how you’re doing it better, faster, or smarter.

7. **Community happenings**
   Help sponsor an event or offer a product or service that can help organizers. Talking about the experience can help connect you to customers.

8. **National news**
   It’s a big world out there. What’s happening and how does it impact your business? Customers can appreciate your take on what’s current.

9. **Trade publications**
   Your customers might not have access to all of the trade publications you read. So if you find something interesting—share it.

10. **Tradeshows**
    Let your customers know what you’ve learned at tradeshows, so they can use it to make more informed decisions.

11. **Survey results**
    Ask customers what information they want to receive. Then you can create customized content for that need.

12. **Employee profiles**
    Introduce your employees to your customers by profiling them. Your customers will feel like they know the team, which goes a long way in creating positive relationships.

12. **Customer testimonials**
    Case studies or letters from customers patting you on the back for your great product or service should be shared. Word-of-mouth is still one of the best forms of advertising and sharing these testimonials is like virtual word-of-mouth.

14. **Google Alerts & website reviews**
    People are talking about you. You just may not know it. Set up a Google Alert for your business, look around on Yelp and other review sites to see what people are saying. Pick out the positive things and share them with your customers.

15. **Social media comments**
    If you’re on social media, look at what people are saying about you there. You can even start a conversation by asking a question.

16. **Funny stuff**
    If you can find a funny picture, video, or story that will make your customers smile—why not? They’ll appreciate the break from all the other salesy emails in their inbox and will hopefully remember that joke or funny cat picture you sent them the next time they visit your store.
Content Marketing Cheat Sheet: Curation

Ever wonder how you can curate content? Here’s a way to do it in 30 seconds or less:

1. Go to www.google.com and click “News.”

2. Type in the name of your industry or something related to your industry in the search bar and start curating.

3. Use the links for inspiration or link to the stories you find. Bottom line: put your own spin on them!

That’s all there is to curating any content. Really. Using trendy news articles as springboards for your own content, or just linking to them with your opinion, can help engage your customers on any network. Better yet, you’ll start making your Facebook Page or emails a resource for industry news, so all of your fans and subscribers are more likely to come back, too.
Content marketing is just helping your customers

Content marketing really isn’t any different from what you’ve already been doing for your customers: helping them and building relationships.

Thanks to online marketing tools, that help can travel a long way. That’s why compelling content can organically build an audience and spread awareness about your brand much further than before.

The truth is, at the end of the day, you’re trying to show that you know what you’re talking about.

When people are looking for what you offer and they already depend on you for help on that same topic, they’re more likely to buy from you in the future.

The breakdown

- **Content marketing** is just a new way of helping your customers and building relationships.

- **Making content** doesn’t have to mean writing a long piece about your products or spending hours on a presentation. Just sharing a quick image can keep people engaged.

- **Planning ahead** can save you a lot of time: make a template for email content or try creating a calendar for other kinds of content to keep things organized.