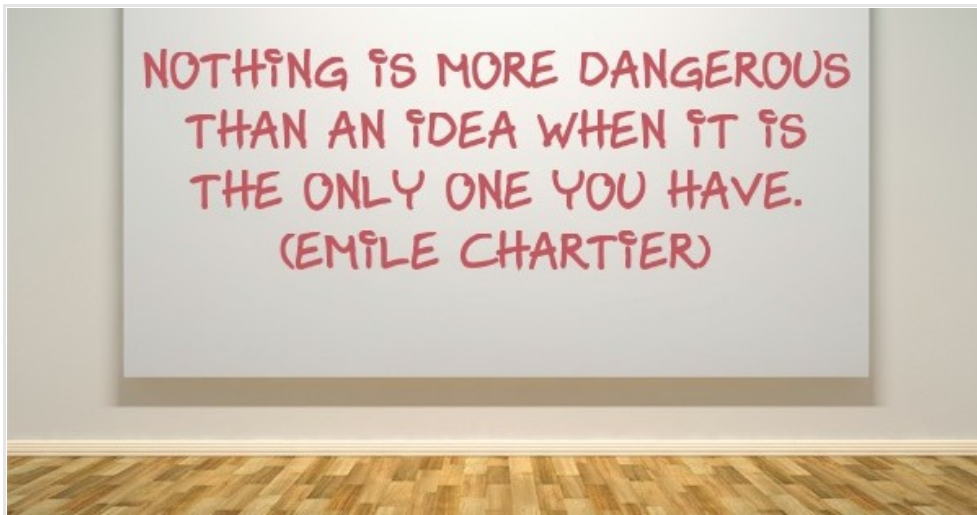


The brain dump of a Manchester Digital Marketing type.

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108 IDEAS IN 30 MINUTES – THE 6-3-5 METHOD OF BRAINWRITING

March 25, 2014 · by Stacey · in Content Marketing

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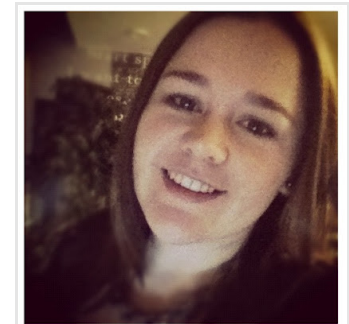
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Ideas generation. That's one of the toughest challenges we face in content marketing. If you have a ton of different clients in a host of different niches, you are effectively in need of a seemingly endless stream of creative ideas and inspiration for content marketing projects.

Once you know your objectives and your audience inside out, the problem faced then is having enough creative ideas to narrow down to handful for potential development. I'm a fan of group brainstorming sessions in many cases. They can, under the right circumstances (and with the right level of moderation) prove effective. In many cases, where I work, we can end up with a list of 20 – 30 ideas after an hour or so with a few people in front of a whiteboard. But the issues come when there's a distraction or the mood just isn't right. It's easy to end up going off on a tangent. Maybe this is more noticeable working agency side – it's not unheard of for brainstorming sessions to end up

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Yet.

I generally blog and Tweet about SEO, Manchester, working in digital, content marketing and stuff that winds me up.

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with us talking about other clients. It's all productive, of course, but it means we're not necessarily completing the goals we set out to achieve with that particular session.

Brainwriting – 6-3-5 Method

Cue the 6-3-5 method of brainwriting, a technique dating back to the 1960s. It is credited to Bernd Rohrbach, who was a German marketing professional. He devised the method and published it in a German sales industry magazine, *Absatzwirtschaft* (volume 12, 1969). The method is [explained in full here](#).

The idea is that this method should help find solutions to problems in a more organised fashion. And we can definitely apply this to content marketing. Here's the way we do it and the typical output.

Before you start

Make sure everyone around the table knows your target audience. Whether you have developed this knowledge through client feedback, through persona development, market research.... however you have acquired the knowledge, make sure it is shared. If there's a single person around the table who doesn't understand who the audience for the content is, then you could end up with some unusable ideas.

Identify the 'problem'

The statement to which you work or upon which your ideas are based is referred to as the "problem statement." Really, in the case of content marketing it doesn't need to be positioned as a problem. It could be a very concise, loose brief. But if there are any time constraints or resource constraints, you may choose to include them here. The tighter you make this statement, of course, the more you limit the people coming up with the ideas. But by the same token, it could increase the relevance of the output.

How the 6-3-5 method works



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The most important thing here is that you have 6 people. This doesn't have to be 6 marketers! It just needs to be 6 people who know who the target audience is, understand what the goals of the session and of the wider content marketing plan are and want to take part! Forcing people reluctantly doesn't end well.

Ideally, you want these 6 people round a table in a single room together. And then it works like this.

1. Each person has a worksheet of some sort. Here's an idea as to **how that might look** but you might choose to include names, for example, or a slightly bigger/smaller ideas space.
2. Round 1 begins. Each person fills in 3 ideas on their worksheet. They have 5 minutes to do so.
3. At the end of the first round, the sheets are passed to the left. There's no discussion, but each person reads the ideas already on the worksheet they now have in front of them and uses these as inspiration for 3 others (completed on the second row of the worksheet)
4. This continues until there have been 6 rounds and each of the 6 people involved have added 3 ideas to each of the 6 sheets in circulation

The end result is that you have 6 worksheets each with 18 ideas on. Some might be similar to one another, but don't worry about that. This is a quantity exercise.

The good

The main advantages of the 6-3-5 method are:

- Efficiency. 6 people, 30 minutes each, 108 ideas. In other words, for 3 chargeable hours of time (agency folk) you could have hundreds of potential content marketing ideas
- The non-verbal nature of it means that the process is more balanced and you don't end up with a ton of ideas dominated just by those who shouted loudest. That can be an issue in verbal brainstorming sessions
- The ideas are all documented. They're all written on paper without someone having to take shorthand notes during a verbal session

The bad

- With verbal brainstorming, you get a lot of ideas born of several people piping in with suggestions. Ideas tend to develop further during the process. Without verbal communication during the process, you may lose a bit of this
- This is a process that takes some getting used to. Being asked for 3 ideas every 5 minutes for half an hour is no mean feat. Some people struggle with this initially
- You can end up with some ideas that are very similar to others. That's the nature of asking people to take inspiration from 3 other ideas, I guess!

How does it stack up to more common forms of brainstorming?

Personally, I much prefer this method. It helps to keep focus without the need for a moderator, it takes care of ideas documentation and it's really efficient. From 30 minutes and 108 ideas, you might only get a handful you want to pursue with development. But when so much of the effectiveness in content marketing is determined by the idea, I think a few good ideas is a great return from 6 people in 30 minutes.

Let me know if you already use this method or if you go off and give it a go! I'm really keen to find out how this works for other people specifically in relation to content marketing ideation.

A Tool to Carry it out Digitally and Remotely

At Tecmark, we were spending a lot of time writing ideas up after using this method, so we could then process them digitally. Add to that the fact that we wanted to get our clients and other people who might not be in the office involved and we needed a means of doing this remotely. So we built a tool! And it's available for free use [over here](#). Go check it out.

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