



Book Content Rules

How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business (New Rules Social Media Series)

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Wiley, 2010

Recommendation

On the Internet, a brand new start-up, even a one-person shop, can compete directly and quite favorably with the biggest *Fortune* 100 companies – as long it offers superior online content. Today, consumers find the products and services they want by using search engines. Your goal is to create engaging, compelling, and memorable content – blogs, videos, podcasts, and websites – that people like, link to, and pass on to others. This can help your material show up on the first page of search engine results – even ahead of material from huge corporations. Internet content expert Ann Handley and online marketing expert C.C. Chapman use helpful guidelines and detailed case studies to teach you how to plan, create, and publish online content that will engage your prospects. *BooksInShort* recommends this straightforward, informed explanation of what makes online content great, how to produce it and where to publish it in cyberspace.

Take-Aways

- Aggressive advertising and marketing are becoming increasingly passé.
- The new goal is to create quality online content to engage prospects and transform them into loyal customers.
- Do not develop online content to sell directly to people. Develop it to educate and inform them instead.
- Include keywords in your online content to make it highly searchable.
- Worthwhile online publishing platforms include blogs, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.
- Employ friendly, relaxed language online, not stilted corporate jargon.
- Refashion content you prepared for one online medium to suit it for several web uses.
- A little humor and a light-hearted approach work well in online content.
- Make your blog the hub of your online offerings.
- Videos are a powerful way to engage consumers on the Internet.

Summary

Selling Online with Expertise and Humor

As the new director of instruction at Reynolds Golf Academy in Greensboro, Georgia, golf pro Charlie King badly needed to bring in golfing students, but he had a very limited marketing budget. Informed and “inspired” by David Meerman Scott’s *New Rules of Marketing & PR*, King turned to the web to build his clientele by showcasing the Academy with quality online content that would attract golfers who wanted to strengthen their games. He presented useful golfing tips and explained that golf is not as difficult as it may seem. King believed that his expertise and humor would draw golfers to his online activities and thus, eventually, to the school.

“Online content is a powerful envoy for your business.”

In February 2008, King launched his blog, “New Rules of Golf Instruction,” offering free lessons via blog posts and videos. In March 2009, he published an ebook, *New Rules of Golf Instruction*, as a free download from his blog and Reynolds’ website. *Golf* magazine’s website ran an ad-libbed video featuring King teaching a satirical lesson showing angry golfers “The Proper Way to Throw a Club” into the water. The video went viral; at 1.8 million viewers and climbing, it is continuing to

generate hits on the Academy's website, providing great publicity and great fun.

"When people search, you want them to find you."

King does not use Internet promotions to hit prospects with overt sales messages. Instead, he creates and delivers educational, entertaining online content. He wisely uses every possible social media outlet, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, plus he distributes an email newsletter to help golfers connect with him and the academy. Has King's Internet outreach worked? "We had a bigger spring [in 2009] than we'd ever had," he reported. King scores big with Internet prospects because he creates content they want. Your prospects also gather daily at their favoring Internet watering holes – blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms – to contribute or gather information and entertainment, and to share with each other. Use such venues to engage your clientele. Create and publish compelling, "customer-focused" material. Posting quality content benefits you in several ways: It educates prospects and pulls them to your site, reduces or shrinks sales resistance, builds a competitive advantage, generates buzz, establishes credibility, and prompts impulse buying. Consider these recent marketing developments:

- **"Customer behavior and expectations are shifting"** – People now rely on search engines to help them learn about items they want to buy. Create keyword-rich content that attracts online users as they search the Internet for helpful shopping information.
- **Constantly interrupting buyers with ad messages isn't enough anymore** – Relying on such promotion is shortsighted and doesn't do full justice to your brand.
- **Now, "everyone is the media. Everyone is a publisher"** – When you blog, you are, too.

"With any piece of content, you've got a very narrow window – often less than eight seconds, according to some reports – to engage someone before they click away."

Quality content can be anything you create online: "words, images" and all the other data on your website. Top content is a terrific marketing tool because it "attracts people to you and creates trust, credibility, and authority...and that ultimately converts visitors and browsers into buyers." Once they own your product, build up their loyalty with high-quality online content to transform purchasers into referral agents, even evangelists. The more valuable your content is, the more people will view you as an expert. Marcus Sheridan, co-owner of River Pools in Virginia, uses blogging, web videos, and other content to earn the trust of his customers and prospects. "I used to see my company as a pool company," he says. "Today, I see my business as a content marketing company...my entire goal is to give more valuable, helpful and remarkable content to consumers than anyone else in my field, which will in turn lead to more sales." That worked for River Pools in 2009 when it sold more fiberglass pools than any other US firm.

"Tell a good story that allows your organization to embrace the role of the cape-wearing superhero."

Creating quality online content is not difficult, but it requires knowing exactly who you are, who you want to target, what you want to communicate, and why it matters. Plus, you must know "when and how" you will develop your content and where online you want to place it. To measure your success, set specific online goals (such as "generating at least 100 new mentions" for your product). Always optimize your content so search engines will find it quickly.

The "Content Rules"

Follow 11 rules of online content to create and publish engaging online material:

1. **"Embrace being a publisher"** – Put your quality content online: blogs, videos, podcasts, email newsletters, ebooks, white papers, tweets, webinars, photos and images. Publishing includes new material you post on your Facebook page or LinkedIn profile.
2. **"Insight inspires originality"** – Gain the essential knowledge you need to develop compelling content that targets the right audience, such as what makes your customers tick or what makes your offering special.
3. **"Build momentum"** – Set a clear goal. Make sure your content includes triggers that compel users to take actions that will eventually result in buying your products and services. Content itself does not sell; it sets up the sale by giving useful information.
4. **"Speak human"** – Adopt a natural voice online. Don't put on airs. Avoid jargon, such as "impactful," "synergy," "proactive," "end-to-end," "win-win" and "leverage" used as a verb. "Write the way you talk."
5. **"Reimagine; don't recycle"** – As you create your online content, consider how to use it in different formats for various online platforms – blogs, email newsletters, ebooks, websites, and so on. Take your "big idea" and use it to develop your Internet ecosystem. Develop a schedule to draw attention consistently. For example, tweet daily, blog weekly, send an email newsletter out monthly and publish an ebook every quarter.
6. **"Share or solve; don't shill"** – Your content's purpose is not to sell but to educate and inform. This engages people who will then react favorably to your firm. To illustrate, the Pampers division of Procter & Gamble produces online "Welcome to Parenthood" videos. The videos don't sell diapers; they inform new parents about babies, covering such topics as "potty training," naps, and so on. The Wisconsin Cheese Board developed the "Cheese and Burger Society" for cheese and hamburger enthusiasts.
7. **"Show; don't just tell"** – The hard sell doesn't work on the Internet. Instead, use case studies and narratives from your customers to demonstrate how your products help make their lives better. This soft sell draws readers in, rather than pushing them away.
8. **"Do something unexpected"** – Customers love it when you or your firm do things differently. To gain attention, surprise your online visitors. This works well for B2B firms that want to stand out from their competition.
9. **"Stoke the campfire"** – Think of your Internet efforts as a campfire. Build it, at first, with combustible tinder, which you create by seeding online comments about other people's blog posts and videos. Then, use another type of flammable material to illuminate a single engaging topic to solicit public comments. After ignition, regularly feed your campfire new material. Handle it right, and soon folks will metaphorically sing around your online campfire as you build, promote, and maintain online conversations.
10. **"Create wings and roots"** – Cultivate your content from deep within your corporate culture, which provides your roots. Your wings (like buttons people can click on to share) let your content soar across the web from one user to another. If your Internet presence is an airplane, your content is the fuel that powers it across the online skies. Use this fuel wisely. Create profiles on the important social networks. Test your content to ensure that it works across all platforms and browsers. Make your content as sharable as possible.
11. **"Play to your strengths"** – You don't have to produce the web's most entertaining videos, podcasts, or blogs, but you must publish some type of quality

material online.

“Meet Emma, the email marketing and communications service...We think it should be easy to use (goodbye, cluttered interface). It should be made for you (farewell, generic templates). And it should even be fun (see ya around, support phone queue). It’s all about email marketing in style...we’d love to help you.” (online marketing message from Emma, a Tennessee company)

Quality content is always:

- **“True”** – Never deal in false messages. As author Annie Lamott teaches, “Good writing is about telling the truth.”
- **“Relevant”** – Your message must be purposeful and must matter to your audience.
- **“Human”** – Don’t write about your product; write about how people use it.
- **“Passionate”** – People will not care about your products unless they see that you do. Use the strength of your feelings to engage them.
- **“Original”** – An unusual story or a “fresh perspective” captures readers’ interest.
- **“Surprising”** – Being a bit unexpected is interesting; being shocking is a way to go viral.

Become a Publisher

Popular forms of Internet publishing include:

- **Blogs** – Online publishing starts with blogs (a “blend of the terms ‘web’ and ‘log’), the basic hub of your online content. Blogging platforms include “WordPress, Squarespace, Movable Type, TypePad and Blogger.” Include photos and other artwork. Permit comments but moderate them.
- **Twitter** – Use Twitter to communicate, gain notice and develop web followers with short messages or “tweets.” Since your maximum message is 140 characters, make each word count. Be simple and direct. To encourage people to forward your tweets to others, use “85 to 100 characters.” Use the bit.ly service to condense any URLs in your tweets. Be aware that a sentence of abbreviations is too hard to read. To provide context, employ “hashtags,” which are “a kind of Twitter shorthand that clusters related tweets” under one word plus a hash symbol, for example, #followfriday.
- **Webinars** – Handled correctly, these web-based seminars can attract many prospects. A recent Business.com study found that 67% of “business leaders” seek webinars (and podcasts) to obtain useful information. To demonstrate your work, include “case studies, client stories or colorful anecdotes.” Let your prospects see your products in action.
- **White papers and ebooks** – White papers, with their straightforward presentations, are normally 10 to 12 pages. Ebooks can be the same length, but their presentation style is more informal and their layouts are normally more engaging. The “solve; don’t shill” rule particularly applies to white papers and ebooks. Whichever format you use, hire a design professional to achieve the most compelling graphic look.
- **Case studies** – These examples offer “really good customer success” stories. Vitality, the firm that makes the GlowCap, a web-enabled, dose-monitoring top for pill bottles, has an online case study so compelling that *The Colbert Report* poked fun at it in March 2010.
- **Videos** – Web videos capture the attention of prospects and customers, which is why people upload masses of videos to the web. YouTube alone gets 24 hours of new video every minute. Produce a video that targets a discrete segment of the public: people who care about the specific type of product or service you sell. Make your video an engaging story about your firm or its products. Let authentic, down-to-earth people tell it. Include customers for credibility. Tag your videos for searchability.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** – This web page does yeoman work for your firm, building trust by detailing the customer service information your shoppers want. The main composition rule for FAQs: “Write answers, not descriptions.”
- **Podcasting** – Your company can have its “own radio show” in the form of a podcast. You don’t need a lot of special equipment since your laptop’s built-in microphone will work fine. Before you produce a podcast, go online and listen to the way other companies handle theirs. You can publish your podcast on your blog.
- **Photographs** – Pictures always tell stories well. Follow the lead of online shoe retailer Zappos, which creates an annual “Culture Book” showing images of every aspect of the company. Use believable pictures of your products “in real-world situations” that demonstrate their use. Tag your photos so people can find them online.

Create a “Listening Dashboard”

To discern which topics people find most compelling, don’t just publish for them, first listen to them via heeding their online communications. Set up a listening dashboard including Google Reader (an RSS – “Really Simple Syndication” service) and Google Alerts, which sends you emails about new web content that fits your search terms. Follow the blogs in your subject area and use Search.Twitter.com to find relevant postings.

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