The New Guy presents the

HANDBOOK OF CONTENT MARKETING

Including The

Secret Truth about Content Marketing
THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW!

STEPHAN MATHYS

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Blogging

"Everyone knows what blogging is!"

Oh, really, Francesca, do you think EVERYONE gets it? Well, then, why isn't EVERYONE doing it?

What Is It, And Why Should You Do It?

Blogging is the first thing that people think about when they think *content marketing*. Because blogging is, at its most basic, content about your company, your employees, your industry, or even the legal environment. It is, frankly, nothing more than a self-published article. And that separates it from an industry publication, because of the stamp of approval that's missing from an external editor's selection of your content for their space.

Blogging is the regular or irregular production of a "web log" highlighting the fact that you are a professional. Don't quote me on this, but I believe Doogie Howser was blogging back when AOL was still cool. He would be so proud to see the blogosphere today.

You should consider a blog if: your competitors are blogging and you feel left behind; you want more ways to show off your customers; and you want a cost-effective (no printing, maybe minimal research fees with blogging) method to do some more bragging.

What Should I Write About?

Blogs are about lots of different topics. That's the intrinsic value of self-publishing: you can highlight a recent success, or show off the fact that you've just inked a new partnership. Did you get written up in the local paper? Join the Chamber of Commerce? Win an award? Brag about it! Did you present at or even just attend an industry conference? Write up your reactions and share them with your audience.

The value comes in variety. Unlike most other forms of content marketing, which will have a specific purpose, and often even a standard format (like the Case Study and Testimonial), blogs do best when they're not always about the same kind of thing.

How Long Should a Blog Post Be?

Longer than a social media post (which will be covered later) and shorter than an article. You want them to be digestible in only a few minutes. So that means it should probably run about 400 to 800 words.

What Should a Good Blog Post Include?

At a minimum, you want your readers to be engaged. This means you ideally want to provide something they didn't know before. This could be a conclusion you had from that industry conference, or a profile of one of your employees. Information like this is the stuff that you don't want to have static all the time in your marketing materials (such as Brochures) but it's very relevant to your company.

If your blog is a teaser for a longer piece of content (such as a White Paper), then you can include a quick preview. But don't give away everything. You want them to click over to the other article and if you put all your conclusions up front, they won't be intrigued enough to do that.

Include plenty of space and some highlighting for easy scanning. Nobody likes a word wall, because we don't comprehend well when we don't have ample space to take a mental breath every few sentences

and every few paragraphs. When we see that, we mentally shut down because it brings back nightmares of college biology textbooks or Greek philosophy. *Shudder.*

Finally, a good blog should have a couple of links. One or two to other parts of your website will keep you directing the reader's tourney and cultivating their experience for them.

What Should a Blog Post Avoid?

Avoid preaching (unless you're a church). Avoid the hard sell. Avoid negatively bashing your competition (unless they really deserve it).

How Often Should You Blog?

Some people treat blogging like candy and pop out one or two a day. Some are very regular, every Monday and Thursday. Others (*yours truly*) are random and produce when the inspiration hits. Try some different cadences and see what works for you and your audience.

Does Everyone Need To Blog?

No. Not everyone *needs* to blog. But, in order to keep your company fresh in the mind of your clients (or potential clients), it's a good idea. Plus, creating a schedule and executing it can ensure that you're always thinking about how to present yourself and your organization in a new and fresh way.

CONCLUSION

A blog is 400 to 800 words on a single topic that highlights something new for your audience. Keep it fresh, timely, and relevant, and you could see results[1] like higher engagement, greater customer satisfaction, more word of mouth, and potentially reduced employee turnover as success breeds success.

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1   Results not guaranteed

Case Study

Case studies are all the rage these days. And, unfortunately, they're a lot like *you-know-which-holes*: everyone has one, and they (almost) all stink. Who was it that said you can write a good case study in an hour? Certainly not me. Probably nobody, because nobody'd be that foolish to make such a claim.

Case studies are an important part of the content universe because they are essentially a brag piece that shows off your skills. Good case studies can be an excellent tool for marketing your organization. Bad case studies give the impression you might only do a partial job, or may leave your potential client unfulfilled. Having no case studies at all leaves your client to draw their own conclusions, and that can be dangerous. We're not Picasso here. (Most people "drawing" their own conclusions isn't likely to be pretty.)

Don't be that kind of company. Write good case studies, and get more business.

What Is It, And Why Should You Do It?

A case study is, in essence, the story of how you helped a client solve a problem. It's the ultimate marketing material. "We're good," it says. "See?" And then you prove it. Having a case study gives you

more credibility, because it helps your customers envision themselves working with you to solve their problem.

What Should I Write About?

You should pick a somewhat common problem that your organization solves. This way clients will know that you can handle the issues they're likely to face.

Alternatively, if you have a niche area of expertise in which you do something that none of your competitors do, highlight this. Showing how you can do something unique gives your customers confidence that their problems will be "no problem" for you.

How Long Should a Case Study Be?

This is going to be shorter than other pieces, because it's probably going to be an interchangeable part of your collateral (stuff you create and market) at various times. It might go into a proposal for a new client. It might end up in your newsletter (slightly rewritten). It might end up as content on your blog.

The point is that it won't be as long as a White Paper, but will probably be longer than a traditional blog post. Around 600–1,000 words should give you enough space to get the problem identified and the solution explained.

What Should a Case Study Include?

Not every Case Study will have all of these elements, and some might expand more than others, but if you're looking to keep it succinct (short and to the point), you'll want to hit all 4 of these points:

The Client

Include a short profile of your client. If you work with universities, maybe 3 to 6 sentences describing the student

population, the location, the educational focus, and some of their goals they're looking to achieve.

The Problem

Explain what it is that the client is trying to do. For our university example, this could be that the admissions office and the alumni giving office are working with two separate software systems and having problems communicating effectively over the lifetime of working with students.

The Solution

Here is where you get to brag on your company. Spend some time highlighting what elements of the problem led the client to seek you out. Do you have a connection from past projects? Were you referred by someone the client knows? Did they see a presentation at a conference and approach you to get help?

Include some details about how you investigated possible solutions, evaluated them, and then implemented. You want to have some kind of unique angle here that sets you apart from the competition. For our university, it might include something like this in the setup:

> *The University saw that QED Solutions had experience from working similar projects over the past five years with over a dozen universities. They knew that our deep knowledge of the industry allowed us to bring insights into potential software solutions that others might not have unless they'd worked specifically in higher ed before.*

The Results

Don't be afraid to brag a little bit. This is where you shine. Did the client see 23% reduction in turnaround time? Mark it up! Was there a 3x increase in the number of leads generated? Great! Did your client suddenly expand their reach from 10

counties to 20? 30? 50? Whatever the benchmark, it should be tied back to the problem identified at the outset. Otherwise, you *will* confuse your readers if you pretend that a 3x increase in the # of leads generated was the desired outcome from simplifying an HR paperwork issue.

What Should a Case Study Avoid?

Avoid giving away trade secrets and don't fill it with jargon. Do tell that you designed and implemented a software solution that increased communication between the departments. Don't say that you built a sixteen-dimension Farkenberger Cube that smoothed the network merge-purge irregularities within cross-departmental forecasts of future lifetime giving based on a binomial regression analysis with validation updated quarterly and factors reset weekly.

That may be the specific *tasks* you performed, but it wasn't the *solution* you created. Not only is that overwhelming and impossible to understand unless you've been deep down in the specific tasks, it's not likely to apply to future clients, and they can get turned off. "Wait, *that's* what I have to do? *Where's my Lotus 1-2-3 again…?*"

How Do You Do It?

Interview a few people involved. Get them to give you their impressions of the before-during-and-after. Write these up following the standard format and you've got a great case study.

As for the physical format, well, that will probably go on your company marketing sheets, so someone else will be designing that. (Okay, I admit, if you're a small business, it's probably you.) Probably want to make it look nice with a logo and some appropriate formatting. The big thing you want to avoid is walls and walls of text. Columns and paragraph breaks are good.

Graphics, like some trend lines or appropriate bar charts, maybe some before-and-after photos, work well to illustrate the point. Don't forget about the visual learners.

CONCLUSION

An effective case study will highlight your company's expertise and brag about your unique solutions to potential clients' problems. You'll use the format over and over and over again as you leverage one case study to win another client, and then use the case study you write for that client to win more. How can you go wrong?

Measure Everything

Stop me if you've heard these before:

> "What gets measured gets managed."

> "If it's not measured, it's not worth it."

> "I lost 6 pounds last week!"

> "That's great, Janice, how much have you lost this year?"

> "Negative 3 pounds!"

Purpose: DEFINED
Schedule: CREATED
Content: PRODUCED
Marketing: COMPLETE
Next step: *MEASURE EVERYTHING*

Everything?

Everything that matters. Because if you don't measure it, how will you know you're improving? How will you know you're getting better at whatever it is you're doing?

And remember, all of this measurement and management is not for the sake of the numbers. It's to hold yourself accountable, to be able to evaluate and refine and change your strategies, your plans, and your execution if you're not getting what you need.

Ultimately, there will be ONE big bottom-line number. Everything else may feed into that, but when it comes down to it, each decision-maker will have that one metric they can't avoid.

And, usually, that's not on the balance sheet. "I'm not happy," we'll hear. Or, "I'm so stressed out." These are metrics, too, measurements of satisfaction with job, with coworkers, with campaigns, with the industry. Keeping track of some of these softer measurements can provide a welcome balance to the over-valued hard numbers like Return on Investment, Average Customer Lifetime Value, or Clickthrough Rate.

So this lesson will be a little different. You might expect me to say I want you to measure clicks, and spending amounts, and conversions, and all that. And I do. Those are marketing basics. Those are content basics. But in this essay, I'm going to promote considering a different perspective. Consider your emotional feelings, and let those also drive the intellectual process.

We're Learning Just How Much We Don't Know

Much of the research recently about brain functionality and decision-making has shown us that something like 95% of our decision-making each day is automatic. Subconscious. We drive home without even paying attention. We go to the grocery store and we *assume* we're making a rational choice about milk brands based on reputation, price, amount of time left until the "best before" date, etc. But, in reality, most of these things we assume are decisions really aren't. They're just automatic shortcuts our brains have learned to help us conserve as much energy as possible.

That 95% could be 90% or 99%. We're not sure, and everyone is different. The point is, though, that most of what we do, most of what we *think* we're doing, is actually wrong. We think we're making

rational decisions about buying a car, or trusting a business partner. We think it's because they've proven their value with voluminous calculations showing growth going up and to the right forever.

What they're actually doing, though, is to allow us to *validate* the emotional decisions we've already made, unconsciously, without us thinking about them and without us actually even knowing that it's happening.

We're doing this because our brains are incredibly complex, incredibly wasteful machines, and they are also trying as much as possible to reduce the amount of energy they're wasting. Because of this, they make decisions at a subconscious level *waaay* quicker than we realize, thus eliminating the need to use those energy resources by considering the pros and cons of a proposal. We may see those facts, and give lip service to "evaluating all sides of the situation", but what we will *actually* do is selectively choose facts that validate our decisions already made at the subconscious level. This simplifies the process of decision-making.

Because that decision-making is hard. Let's admit it. It can be difficult and time-consuming to realistically weigh pros and cons of a situation. How many pros exist? How much weight for each? How many cons? How different is this from a prior experience? What might the outcome be? What are all the potential alternatives? Are you sure? Can't you think of another? Or another? Or another?

This could go on forever. Instead of allowing that to play out, then, we do as Thoreau suggested, and "Simplify, simplify." We make intellectual shortcuts, because we've evolved to do so. It's going to take a while to get away from that.

What? What Are You Talking About?

It may seem like I'm off-topic. But I'm really encouraging you to simplify your metrics and measurement, too. Yes, track the number of exposures, the number of click-throughs, the buy rate, the average purchase amount, inventory, forecasts, general environmental look-forwards, projects upcoming, and the like. But don't forget that

we are all just people. We need to recognize the fact that we are not robots, we are not machines, we are still *mostly* emotional shortcuts.

And so when emotion, or feeling, is tracked (not necessarily with hard statistics, like with surveys or focus groups), keep an eye on what you're feeling. Maybe keep a journal. Maybe just talk with someone once or twice a month, to check in on things. Your numbers may be up, but you may feel terrible about it. Does that mean your content marketing is working? Or that you're fooling yourself about your purpose that you defined months ago?

Understand Minimal Effectiveness

Okay, I'll go back to some traditional topics. You want to understand what is minimally effective. That is, when you're tracking your engagement, your click-throughs, your Facebook Likes and Shares and reTweets, you want to have a feel for which elements work, and at what level. It would be ridiculous to expect that every customer you meet through every channel is the same. Keeping track of how you relate to the various constituencies will help you to target messages to them, and make sure you keep them engaged in the right ways.

This sounds like simplicity defined. And it is. Isn't that what everyone does, though? "We simplify our goals, simplify our plans, and then execute.

Do's And Don'ts

Do: Pick a few key measures, understand where you were, and how you expect changes in those metrics will affect your business.

Don't: Call everything "wildly important". You lose the effectiveness and focus when you represent ancillary or supporting measures as just as important as the top three.

Do: Track over time. Develop an understanding of usual variation per day, week, month, quarter, or year, so you know what's "normal" and what's "abnormal". Plus, when you have more measurement, you can

also see trends. Be discerning on when something is the beginning of a trend and when it's just an anomaly.

Don't: Freak out if you don't immediately see the change you're expecting. Things take time. Rome wasn't built in a day, the Titanic wasn't built overnight, and nobody's going to win the U.S. Presidency by announcing a campaign in July. You need time for your changes to work; in fact, you might see measures going the wrong way sometimes. If you know the improvements you're making are going to be causing a major shift in your customer base, you might have a lot of purging that has to happen first before the regeneration comes. You'll see this happening, but if you planned for it, you'll be ready when you see the numbers going down and you won't freak out about it.

Do: Separate between environmental measures (things you can't control) and internal measures (the things you can). Environmental would be things like population growth, or $ of industry advertising in your region. Internal would be things like number of clicks per post, or number of questions fielded by your sales team in the months since you've released your new white paper.

Don't: Just expect everyone to know why those measures are important. Ignorance is the enemy of progress. Be sure to explain, or have readily accessible, why you're choosing the measures you do, and how you define success of those measures.

Finally,

Do: Celebrate success! You're going to get there. When you do, make a damn big deal of what you've accomplished. There will be time later for an after-action review, and it should happen. But in the moment, right in the time when you get your 1000th view of your white paper, or when you've finally had your 100th customer sign up for your e-mail list, promote that! Use that as a one more opportunity to brag, to create additional customer engagement, to give you one more piece of content to market in the future.

Diversify Your Portfolio

While I encourage only considering a few measures as the most important, remember that those few measures are actually the accumulation of many smaller parts underneath. Nothing exists in a vacuum: profit doesn't exist without gross revenue and expenses, expenses don't exist without headcount, headcount doesn't exist without "work to do", work to do doesn't exist without customers calling, customers don't call without a need, customer needs don't develop unless prospects have an emotional need to be filled, prospects don't recognize that emotional need until there is some pain in their life.

And while I don't think it's necessary to measure your effectiveness at *every* point in the supply chain, it would be good to think of some various measures along the whole spectrum of interaction, not just at the beginning or end.

CONCLUSION

Effective metrics are more than just the number of Facebook likes or LinkedIn comments. Emotions may be harder to quantify, but keeping at least some kind of track on the broader elements of work and life will enable a more holistic view to the effectiveness of your content marketing efforts.