

THE CRAZY BUSY MARKETER'S GUIDE TO CONTENT CREATION IN THE REAL WORLD

Written by John Jantsch



The Crazy Busy Marketer's Guide to Content Creation in the Real World

Written by John Jantsch

Marketing a business can feel like a “change a minute” exercise in futility at times. Particularly with all the new tools, tactics and buzzwords that come along at an ever increasing pace.

Lots of marketing folks are talking about content as a foundational element of marketing and they're right, but what does that really mean and, perhaps more importantly, how are you going to get all this content created.

What content is from a marketing standpoint is pretty simple really. We're talking about articles, blog posts, videos, workshops, images, and words of all kind online and off that help your market better understand what you do.

Our prospects and clients have grown to expect that they can turn to a search engine at any moment and discover everything they need to know about products, services, people, companies and problems and challenges they seek solutions to.

So, in that sense, content is how you get found, its how you educate, build trust, answer questions, stand out, and sell in the world we live in today. It's online, offline, shared, curated, excerpted, repurposed and packaged in every way imaginable.

In this guide we've attempted to help make sense of the foundational need for more and more content in the most practical manner possible.

We'll show you where to find it, how to create it, where to share it and how to get the most bang for your content buck.

Let's get started, shall we?



- John Jantsch
Duct Tape Marketing



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Content Creation Strategy | 4 |
| The Essential Types of Content | 8 |
| Stages of the Content Hourglass | 20 |
| Getting an Education Through Content Creation | 26 |
| How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool | 29 |
| My Content Amplification System | 32 |



Content Creation Strategy

“Like all good systems and processes, your content lead system must start with strategy.” - John Jantsch

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Everyone’s talking about content these days and, like it or not, you’ve got to get in the publishing game.

Of course this doesn’t mean get in the game just to play. The idea behind all of this content creation is to use it to build your business in the long term—to get more leads and sales.

The following systematic approach to content creation will help guide you in the most effective use of your limited time on the way to creating a momentum-building content-based lead generation system.

Content Creation Strategy

Like all good systems and processes, your content lead system must start with strategy. With that in mind there are three very important concepts to consider:

- **The total body of work.** Think big picture when you think content. Outline a book (real or imaginary) about your entire subject of expertise. Now, as you think about content work through the outline and remember that you are creating a body of work that may take months and years to finish.
- **Purpose and repurpose.** As you create content, always think about the purpose you have in mind (drive traffic, get links, draw reaction) and the repurpose opportunities (blend several posts into an article, use it as seminar, create an ebook from a category of blog posts).
- **Medium diversity.** One great way to get more bang for your buck is to republish your content in various forms. Record and archive seminars, transcribe audio and video and offer multiple forms of the same content.

Tools: Moleskine notebooks to capture ideas, Dragon Dictation or Casting Words to transcribe audio and video to text, Audio and Video capture tools such as iPhone or Flip Camera



Content Creation Strategy

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System



Content Inspiration

Even with a big picture body of work approach you can get blocked when it comes to creating fresh and frequent content. It's a good idea to have ready-made sources of inspiration to turn to and help keep you up to speed on all the real time happenings in your world.



Questions. Make a note of all the questions that prospects and customers ask and get in the habit of posting answers to these inquiries.



Delicious. Use a bookmarking tool like delicious so you can mark things you've found for later reading, and so you can see what other people are bookmarking for categories you need to keep up on.



Google Reader. Subscribe to and browse 50 or so related blogs—you can do this on your phone while you stand in line at the coffee shop.



Alltop. This is a convenient way to see lots of blog posts sorted by countless topics.



StumbleUpon. Find off the beaten path stuff about topics you choose using this unique service.



Google Keywords. Sometimes you just need to write about what people are searching for, and using a keyword tools helps you know the best way to say it.

SmartBrief

SmartBriefs. Read daily digests of some of the best of the web on a variety of topics.

Content Creation Strategy

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Content Automation

Few people are still as geeky about RSS as I am, but I still love what you can do with it.

My favorite use is to create content automatically or on the fly by installing a bit of RSS magic. Using this approach you can create fresh content for your own site or even design custom filtered feeds just for your best customers.

Here's a quick tip: Bookmark mentions of your company in delicious using the company name tag, grab the RSS feed from the tag on delicious, then take it to Feedburner and use the Buzz Boost feature to create HTML code to publish this info to your "In the news page." The page updates automatically every time you bookmark a news mention.

Tools: Google News, Feedburner, Delicious, Yahoo Pipes



Advertising Content

If you want your advertising to be more effective and your content to generate leads, don't sell your stuff—advertise your content. Use your Facebook and other PPC advertising to point to your valuable free ebook or upcoming online seminar and past seminar archive. Turn your advertising into a trust-building platform rather than an expensive turnoff.

Content Creation Strategy

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

On Demand Content

One of the most dramatic advances in the communication of sales messages has come in the form of presentation platforms.

With today's low cost and easy to use video tools you can create full featured, highly engaging sales presentations and host them online to effectively generate and nurture leads night and day.

Using a tool like SlideRocket allows you to easily embed forms in your interactive presentations and receive alerts when people view the show and complete the form.

Content Partnerships

And now for the big payoff for all your content creation.

Once you create a blog, ebook, white paper, podcast, videocast, or online and offline educational seminars, you can take these proven and practiced bits of content and start offering them to your strategic partners.

Let them cobrand your ebook and offer it to their clients. Invite them write guest blog content and interview them for your podcast. Offer to provide your awesome seminar free of charge to their customers.

While content creation may seem like a lot of work, using even a fraction of the ideas contained here you can make the ROI of content creation crush just about any other form of lead generation today.



“Strategically, the word content must mean more than a blog post or a blank sheet of paper each day.” - John Jantsch

The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

The Essential Types of Content

The creation and distribution of content has become such a significant aspect of effective marketing that it requires a high place in the strategy conversation in most every business.

Some might go as far as to suggest content marketing has become the most effective way to build a business.

The word content is confusing enough as it’s bantered around these days, but it’s also difficult for many small business owners to come up with a big picture view of the role content plays in the acquisition of clients.

Strategically, the word content must mean more than a blog post or a blank sheet of paper each day. You must begin to think of your content as a total body of work that is being built to serve your business over time.

You must understand and create content for the most important keyword phrases for your industry, the essential themes of education in your business, and your company’s core points of differentiation.

You must also think of your content as a tool that moves prospects from awareness to conversion, and in this effort there are at least five types of content that you must address. Each type must be considered as part of your overall content strategy.



- BUILDS TRUST
- EDUCATES
- CUSTOMER GENERATED
- OTHERS GENERATED
- CONVERTS

The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

I've listed each below and I also discuss them in the audio track that accompanies this post.

✓ **Content that builds trust.** One of the first jobs of your content is to bridge the gap between awareness and trust building. Your SEO efforts actually marry with this type of content to make sure you are both found and found in abundance.

- **How To content** – specific advice or tips and tricks
- **Reviews** – customer reviews on sites like Yelp and Google Places
- **Testimonials** – endorsements from happy customers
- **Articles** – articles you've written or that mention your firm in outside publications

✓ **Content that educates.** Once you create awareness and trust, a prospect will be hungry to find out much more about your unique approach, your solution, your story and your organization.

- **White papers** – not boring, dry, technical stuff—your best writing tying a bigger topic together
- **Newsletters** – weekly or monthly education that nurtures their interest
- **Seminars** – in person or online, these allow prospects to learn as well as engage
- **FAQs** – some folks just need the answers to their questions and this format serves that need well
- **Survey data** – results from surveys can be very compelling as a way to let prospects know you understand them



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

☑ **Customer generated content.** Getting your customers involved in the production of content builds loyalty and community, creates proof of results and gives you another avenue for content creation.

- **Automatic referrals and reviews** – create ways to move happy customers to a referral and review process
- **Testimonials** – automate this process by providing online audio and video tools
- **Video success stories** – create events that bring customers together to network and tell their story

☑ **Other people's content.** One of the primary jobs of marketers these days is to provide some insight to the stream of information that our customers face. Filtering and aggregating content produced by others is not only a great service, it's a great differentiator.

- **Custom RSS feeds** – create customer- or industry-specific feeds to share
- **Republish, Share, RT** – point to and share great content that is being produced
- **Curate** – use tools like Storify to collect and republish customer newsletters

☑ **Content that converts.** This last category is one that gets overlooked in the “write for writing's sake” view of content. Ultimately, great content has the ability to call and convert prospects to the action of buying.

- **In person events** – live events are the absolute best way to use content to close
- **Case studies** – deep studies into the success of another client act as tangible proof in the buying decision
- **ROI calculators** – use content to help prospects understand the specific value of making a change
- **Results** – provide documented proof of results in simple and easy to understand forms that address the common needs of most prospects



The Essential Types of Content

[Content Creation Strategy](#)

[The Essential Types of Content](#)

[Stages of the Content Hourglass](#)

[Getting an Education Through Content Creation](#)

[How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool](#)

[My Content Amplification System](#)

5 Ways to Use Other People's Content

You need lots of content, you know that, but you also know that content creation is one of the more time intensive marketing activities you have to tackle.

While you do need to create your own content as the foundation for your total content and teaching strategy, you can—and should—supplement your content with that from other people.

One of the best services marketers can provide these days is to act as a filter for all that's being produced out there and aggregate the best of the best on behalf of our communities.

Finding and sharing consistently high quality, relevant content and adding insight to this information is not only a great way to increase the volume of your content, it's a great way to build trust in the value of your content.

Here are five ways to add other people's content to your routine.

① Cobrand a winner

Lots of people produce great content in the form of downloadable white papers and eBooks. In some cases they do this to attract newsletter subscribers and links, but quite often they do it because they know something about a topic and want to document it.

With just a little bit of searching you can probably turn up a great eBook that your network would love to get their hands on. Now, some people might simply link to this content, but I'd like to suggest another way.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

What if you approached the eBook author and asked if you could send it out to your networks, with full credit to the author, but with the ability to add one simple information page about you or your company at the back?

With this approach you could potentially build a library of content overnight with the right topics and content.

Here's how to get started.

Use the Google filetype operator to find lots of potential candidates on just about any topic you can imagine. Here's how it works: If you want to find PDF documents and eBooks about content curation, for example, you would type: content curation filetype:pdf into a Google search box.

This tells Google you are looking for content related to content curation, but you only want results that are PDF files. This way you'll probably turn up any number of candidates for cobranding projects.

② Email newsletter snacks

Publishing a weekly email newsletter is a proven way to stay top of mind with your community. Of course, offering a great free eBook as mentioned above is a great way to build that weekly newsletter list.

As you compete for inbox space you must keep in mind that your newsletter content must be consistently useful, relevant and convenient.

One of the best ways to meet these qualifications is to produce high quality content filtered from other sources and delivered in snack-sized bites. Think in terms of an email newsletter that might contain 5-6 great articles presented with abstracts that lay out in about 100 words why someone might want to click through and read the rest.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Using tools like AllTop, GoogleReader, NewsVine or PopULRs you can easily locate and aggregate content related to topics of interest to your readers. You may also be able to locate local bloggers that could be great candidates for guest content and strategic relationships.

③ Create a Magazine

The idea of curating content is very hot right now, but in order to really make it pay, you've also got to be ready to add insight. So many people look at curation as something more closely aligned with republishing.

Republishing content you find does have value, but narrowly targeting a very specific topic and becoming known as a trusted source of insight on the vast array of information being published on any topic is how you take content curation to a new level.

Below are some of my favorite tools for creating your curated online content magazines.

- **MySyndicaat.** <http://mysyndicaat.com/home>
- **Scoop.it.** <http://www.scoop.it/>
- **Storify.** <http://storify.com/>
- **Curation Station.** <http://curationstation.com/>

You can also use tools like Delicious, Evernote, Pinterest or Pearltrees to simply clip, bookmark and organize content you find for republication.

If you really want to know how to get great at this, follow Robin Good. Here's a great place to start: [What Makes A Great Curator Great?](#)



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

④ RSS to HTML

This technique is perhaps a bit more technical, but it also allows you the greatest control.

Just about all online content these days comes powered by RSS, making it easy to convert whatever you find into a feed that can be converted to HTML code and displayed on any page you like.

For example, if you wanted to publish positive mentions of your firm on a new page on your site, you simply set up Google Alerts so you receive notice that your firm was mentioned. Click through to the page and, assuming it's something you want to publish to your site, bookmark the content using PinBoard and a tag like "ournews."

PinBoard creates tag-based RSS feeds so anything you tag with ournews can be displayed in a specific RSS feed. This gives you total control over what you want to appear in the feed.

Once you create the feed, you can take it to FeedBurner or RSSInclude to convert the feed to HTML code that you can embed on a page or widget to easily display the content from the feed wherever you choose.

Then any time you bookmark a new item it will publish to the page.

⑤ Ask little things

One of the best ways to get lots of people to create content for you around a specific topic is to ask lots of people to answer one very short question.

This can be a great way to collect lots of suggestions, opinions and insights to support or start a topic of interest to your readers.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

The other powerful thing about his approach is that you can often get higher profile contributors to participate if all you are asking them to do is answer one question or finish one statement.

Once you receive all your answers, you simply collect them and add context and analysis.

It's time to make other people's content one of your content foundation planks.

5 Ways to Get Your Customer to Create Content

You've heard enough about the need to produce content that I'm guessing you're probably blogging away and curating, aggregating and filtering all manner of content. But there's one type of content that you may not be focused on, and I happen to think it's some of the most potent to be had—customer generated content.

Your customers, the ones that already know, like and trust you, are more equipped to tell the real story of your business than an army of writers in any marketing department, so why not engage them to do just that.

Imagine taking your best, most loyal, most vocal, customer with you on your next sales call and asking them to simply explain the real benefits they've realized because of the work you've done for them. That's the power of customer generated content when done right, and that's why you need to routinely find ways to acquire it.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Below are five ideas to help you get your customers telling their stories.

① One question testimonial

Create a survey that asks every customer one question: On a scale of 1-10, how likely is it that you would refer us? Now, set the survey up so that if the answer is 1-4 the survey taker is redirected to a page that apologizes and sets the expectation that they will hear from someone immediately to find out what went wrong.

If it's a 5-7, send the customer to a page that says, you're not happy until they are happier than that and ask them to suggest how you could have done better.

For the 8-10 answers, redirect them to a form that allows them to submit a testimonial and ask them to check a box if they would agree to be interviewed for a case study.

This is a great way to automate testimonial generation and keep a real time pulse on how you're doing. I use Wufoo forms to run this process, but I've heard good things about Formstack as well.

② Video appreciation party

I've written about this before, but it's such a great way to get lots of great video content that I thought I would share it again.

Once a year or so hold a client appreciation event to say thanks and create a networking event for your clients and prospects. Hire a video crew for the event and, after a few bottles of wine have been emptied, ask some of your clients to talk about their experience with your firm on camera. Then also let them record a five-minute commercial for their own use too.

This is a great way to get lots of testimonials and case studies in one day and your clients will get very engaged in swapping stories and selling each other on the benefits of working with you.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

3 Tell us your story

Getting your customers to share their experience is a very powerful form of content. You can sit across the desk and interview your customers in order to extract this kind of content or you can employ a handful of tools that make it very easy to capture these stories.

For audio-only content, a testimonial recording line from AudioAcrobat is a great way to go. You simply provide your customer with a phone number that they can call and record their story. The service then produces an mp3 and code to embed on your site for people to play the recordings.

You can also use a tool like MailVu that allows you to send a link with a video capture tool so your clients with a web cam can record a video testimonial or story and submit it with little work on your part.

4 Community knowledge base

What if you could find a way to get your best customers to willingly shoulder creating answers to questions and best practices? Tools like ZenDesk and GetSatisfaction make it easy for you to enable community members to provide help and archived advice to other customers and prospects.

Robin Robins, founder of Marketing Technology Toolkit in Nashville, TN involves her customer community in an incredible way. She has created a membership program that allows her mostly IT business customers to receive ongoing business building support through coaching, training and tools she provides.

She has created what she calls “accountability groups” in the membership program, and customers head up these groups and do a great deal of work keeping participants engaged and on track. Heading up these groups is not a paid position; loyal and committed customers that want to play a bigger role in the community do it.



The Essential Types of Content

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

5 Help your peers

Using a tool like Google+ Hangouts, Skype Video Conference or GoToMeeting Video Conference you can easily host and facilitate a group video conference where your customers and their peers can discuss important industry and business challenges and trends. You can record and archive the event and create some very useful and engaging content.

This is not a sales event, but by virtue of the fact that you have included customers in the conversation, there will be the inevitable discussions about what you've done to help them address a challenge.

Creating opportunities to capture the stories your clients have to tell is an important piece in any fully developed content strategy.

So, what have you done to get your customers talking?



CONTENT GRID v2

The "buying" process begins long before a sales person contacts a prospect. The fuel that drives a prospect from latent interest to active demand is created, curated or procured by a brand, distributed over social channels and measured against business objectives. The Content Grid v2 is a framework for the process of Content Marketing.

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

- TWITTER ■
- FACEBOOK ■
- QUORA / FOCUS / LINKEDIN ■
- BLOGS / WEBSITES ■
- YOUTUBE / VIMEO ■

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

PROSPECT GOALS

| | AWARENESS | CONSIDERATION | CLOSE |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| BORED AT WORK | VIRAL VIDEOS | INFOGRAPHICS | EBOOKS, PLAYBOOKS & GUIDES |
| VAGUE NOTION OF POSSIBLE SOLUTION | ARTICLES | CURATED LISTS | |
| INTERESTED IN A SOLUTION | | QUIZZES & WIDGETS | TREND REPORTS |
| RESEARCHING VENDORS | | E-NEWSLETTERS | PRESS RELEASES |
| EVALUATING PRODUCTS | | WEBINARS | IN-PERSON EVENTS |
| NARROWING FIELD | | DEMO VIDEOS | |
| SOCIAL VETTING | | INTERACTIVE DEMOS | CASE STUDIES |
| NEGOTIATION | | WHITEPAPERS | REFERENCE CHECKLISTS |
| PURCHASE | | ANALYST REPORTS | |
| | | DATA SHEETS | |
| | | | ROI CALCULATORS |
| | | | PRICING GUIDES |

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

TRAFFIC / PAGE VIEWS / TIME ONSITE
 CONTENT DOWNLOADS
 INBOUND LINKS / PAGE RANK
 FANS / FOLLOWERS
 MENTIONS / COMMENTS / SHARES

OPEN / CLICK-THROUGHS
 INQUIRIES / DATABASE GROWTH
 FORM SUBMISSION RATE
 FUNNEL CONVERSION (STAGE CHANGE)

QUALIFIED / ACCEPTED LEADS
 MEETING WITH SALES OPPORTUNITIES
 ACTIVE PIPELINE / PIPELINE VALUE
 CLOSED DEALS

“One of the best ways to employ content in a strategic manner is to match different kinds of content with the stages of the hourglass and customer life cycle.” - John Jantsch

Stages of Content Hourglass

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Stages of the Content Hourglass

The need to produce content in marketing has grown so foundational that you can't really get through a day without hearing about it, reading about it and perhaps stressing out about it.

Marketers are beginning to think and act more like publishers and are producing, curating and repurposing content like never before. Really smart marketers are snapping up journalists as key members of their marketing teams.

But if marketing content is to become the essential element that it must become in your business, you need to view its production from a strategic point of view.

You may indeed need more content, but you certainly need content that addresses every one of your base business objectives and you need to view the editorial calendar in this strategic light.

In other words, you need content for every aspect of the customer life-cycle and you need to stage that content in something I call the Marketing Hourglass™.

The hourglass acknowledges the fact that your job as a marketer is to get someone with a need to know, like and trust you and that you then need to plan to turn that know, like and trust into try, buy, repeat and refer—and that each of these stages must address a prospect's evolving relationship with your organization.

In other words, you need to plan to walk with a new prospect all the way down the path to where they become a fan and volunteer member of your sales team.



Stages of Content Hourglass

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

One of the best tools in the hourglass arsenal is content.

One of the best ways to employ content in a strategic manner is to match different kinds of content with the stages of the hourglass and customer life cycle.

So, your content hourglass might look something like this:

Know

The key element here is blog content created on a narrowly defined set of keyword phrases and topics. One of the best ways to become known is through organic search. This phase would also include advertising that draws awareness to other, more advanced forms of content such as eBooks and seminars.

In many businesses a referral introduction is the first exposure that someone gains to an organization. This calls for content that is geared towards this type of exposure and specifically acknowledges your referral process.

Like

An eNewsletter can be a tremendous content tool for nurturing during the like and trust-building phases as it allows you to demonstrate expertise, knowledge, resources, and experience over time.

A series of blog posts around a specific topic turned into an eBook or email series is another great content play that helps tell your story.



Stages of Content Hourglass

[Content Creation Strategy](#)

[The Essential Types of Content](#)

[Stages of the Content Hourglass](#)

[Getting an Education Through Content Creation](#)

[How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool](#)

[My Content Amplification System](#)

Trust

Once you've gained attention you must move towards that all-important next step. We will buy products we simply like, but we'll rarely commit to organizations unless we trust them.

Your customer-generated videos, case studies and stories make great content here. Your SEO efforts (others trusting and linking to your content) and Social Media participation comes into play in the trust phase.

Getting your customers involved in the content creation game is an essential element and one that many are happy to be involved in.

The ability to tell why your organization does what it does in stories that illustrate purpose in action is perhaps the key trust-building content piece of the puzzle.

Try

Try is a phase that many people skip, but I think it's the easiest way to move people to buy, particularly in highly competitive and highly priced situations.

Here the content needs to represent a sample of the end result. This is where eBooks, online and offline seminars and evaluation type processes in the form of content shine.

Many people miss this point but this is an audition and it's where you need to deliver more than anyone could possibly consider doing for a free or low cost version of what you sell. This is one of the first places where you plant the seed for a referral as well as a sale.



Stages of Content Hourglass

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

By producing content in the try phase that clearly demonstrates how much better your paid product or service is than most, you can differentiate your business and create evangelists out of those that don't ever buy.

How To content in the form of videos, workbooks, examples, cheat sheets and checklists—the kind of stuff your competitors are charging real money for—is the stuff that the try phase is built on.

Buy

Content that converts consists of proof. You must be able to show real results and customer stories, and help your buyer clearly envision receiving the promised results in the future.

Many people miss the idea of content during just after the buy phase because the thinking is that the person has already made a decision and the product or service will speak for itself.

The total customer experience is measured by the end result, not the build up to the sale. In order to deliver a remarkable customer experience you've got to continue to educate with content.

Creating content that acts as a new customer kit or orientation to your business or product is the first step.

Most businesses should also consider quick start guides, in-depth user manuals and customer support communities. You can easily build this kind of content with your customers using services such as Get Satisfaction or Zendesk.



Stages of Content Hourglass

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Repeat

Don't wait for your customer to call you when the need something. Stay top of mind through content that educates a higher level.

Use email and print to start sharing how others have gotten more advanced results with your products or services. Create customer events that have a content sharing component.

Create a results review process where you help your client measure the results they are actually getting by working with your firm and use this process to capture content in the form of success stories.

Refer

Start this phase by documenting your referral process. Create tools that make it easy for you to teach your rabid customers and strategic partners how to refer you.

Create eBooks, videos and teaching events and offer them to your strategic partners to cobrand and present to their clients.

Work with a team of best-of-class providers (the folks that can help your clients get everything they need) and create a team blog. Create and acquire content that makes it easy for you to introduce your partners and gives them plenty of incentive to do likewise.

You don't have to do all of your content creation from scratch either—there are many ways to effectively use other people's content as part of the overall picture.

Content creation is the hardest job of a marketer these days, but when you plan your content with your hourglass in mind it may well be the highest payoff work you can do.



KNOW

LIKE

TRUST



THE MARKETING HOURGLASS™

This diagram explains the logical path a lead should follow to participate in your fully developed Marketing Hourglass™.

Questions to get you started:

Ponder these questions in order to start thinking about the hourglass concept.

- What is your free or trial offering?
- What is your starter offering?
- What is your "make it easy to switch" offering?
- What is your core offering?
- What are your add-ons to increase value?
- What is your members only offering?
- What are your strategic partner pairings?

TRY

BUY

REPEAT

REFER

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

“What if you looked at content production as a way to get yourself educated?” - John Jantsch

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

Without looking too hard you can see that many successful organizations lean very heavily on their content to generate and convert leads. In fact, the wildly successful online marketing service Hubspot appears to do little more than produce, aggregate, syndicate and promote useful content as a way to expose potential customers to their way of doing business. (Granted they do a lot of it.)

With content production comes work, however, and that’s the part that even marketers who realize how important good content is struggle with.

I’ve written many posts about tools that make content production easier and even where I find inspiration for things to write about, but there’s one bit of leverage that I’ve not shared that may help kick your content production into high gear.

What if you looked at content production as a way to get yourself educated?

See, I’ve found that one of the surest ways to get something done is to increase the payoff for doing it. (It’s sort of why after months of not being able to get our taxes organized we magically get it all done one day in early April—the payoff, or perhaps threat of fines, makes it a high priority.)

So what if instead of always writing about the things you know, you chose to include writing about the things you need to or should know.

For example, as a business owner I need to know more about cash flow, balance sheets, profit and labor productivity. Not so much so that I would advise others on these things, but certainly enough so I can understand them, teach them to my staff, use this data to run my business and, in some cases, teach my CPA how to actually be an adviser.



Getting an Education Through Content Creation

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

So what do I do? I ask around and find what some are calling the best book on these matters. (Here's the one I landed on: Simple Numbers, Straight Talk, Big Profits!: 4 Keys to Unlock Your Business Potential.) I read the book. (That part most people do.) Then I find the author, interview him, create a podcast, and write about the very subjects I needed to know more about—an act that deepens my learning.

This is such a powerful way to learn what I need to learn, get advice from leading experts, and produce high quality content all at the same time.

You likely couldn't make this your only content strategy, but you can certainly create a list of 8-10 topics that you need to know more about and go to work on finding someone that would be happy to teach you while you create content.

My Top 10 Sources of Content Inspiration

I'm often talking about producing high quality, education-based content as way to draw leads to know, like and trust you. So, for example, I always advise small business owners to create and populate a blog because I happen to think it's one of the easiest and most effective ways to both create and optimize content.

Some of the questions I still receive frequently, however, are ones like: How do I know what to write about? Where do I get all those good ideas? How do I uncover trends, tools and tips that might appeal to my audience?

I thought I would share the tools I use to get my brain thinking about what to write about. My favorite strategy is to mine these tools and sites for seemingly unrelated ideas. I can't tell you how often I've uncovered the seed of an idea from something totally unrelated to marketing that I could twist to apply it in a totally new and relevant way.



Getting an Education Through Content Creation

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

- **Customer feedback.** I love to turn customer and prospect questions into blog posts and more. You should be keeping track of those FAQs and answer every single one—as well as some that don't get asked—as content.
- **delicious.** This old school bookmarking site is still my favorite place to go to see what other folks are finding and saving.
- **Bing/xRank.** I have to admit this is a new one as Bing, the relaunched Microsoft search engine, is new, but for now, xRanks seems to be turning up trends faster than Google Trends.
- **Blogs I subscribe to.** I use Google Reader RSS feed and anytime I can I check in with some of the 100 blogs I subscribe to.
- **OneRiot.** This is another fairly new real time search engine that I use to find the links that people on twitter are discovering and retweeting.
- **Keyword Phrases.** Google's free keyword search tools can give you phrases that people are actually using to find your products and services, and offer some tips for what to call your blog posts.
- **SmartBriefs.** Subscribe to a daily briefing on a variety of topics and see what some pretty smart editors are turning up.
- **Business Week's BX.** Business Week's social network allows anyone to submit content to a large group of subjects.
- **Twitter follows.** I follow some folks who are always finding and tweeting good stuff. By setting a select group up in TweetDeck I can always stay on top of these important tweets.
- **Magazine pile.** I subscribe to Wired, Inc, Entrepreneur, Business Week, and Fast Company, and while I sometimes get behind on the pile, I love to go there for inspiration.



How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

“One of the best ways to get a referral relationship moving is through content opportunities.” - John Jantsch

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

I’ve seen and heard this scenario countless times. Two perfectly suited strategic partners determine they should start doing some things together in an effort to create referral opportunities for each other.

They shake hands and agree that it’s a fabulous idea, but then nothing happens. Mostly nothing happens because there’s no catalyst to get the ball rolling in a way that makes sense.

I mean, sure, they could both send out a mass mailing to their clients professing how great the other is, but would that really offer much value to the recipients?

One of the best ways to get a referral relationship moving is through content opportunities. It’s just such a logical way to extend what is already a proven marketing practice.

If you would like to build a killer local referral generator, you should look no further than hosting a multi-author WordPress blog. (It doesn’t have to be WordPress, it’s just the best tool.)

Let’s say you’re an attorney who works with small business owners. In your work you’ve seen that small business owners need accounting advice, hiring advice, management advice, marketing advice, real estate advice, outsourcing advice, selling advice, leadership advice, and the list goes on and on.

What if you built a team of best-of-class advice providers for many of the items listed above, and you created and hosted a blog that featured contributions from each of these providers.

With any commitment at all your team could produce a local, keyword rich, content asset that would turn into a valuable resource for your clients and prospects, and a logical referral generator for every member of the contributing team.



How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Of course, this could just be the start of your formal partnership team as you could easily turn this into group-sponsored workshops and online seminars as well. Are you starting to see the power behind being the one that formalizes the network?

I hope it goes without saying that the content must be educational and valuable. This effort will offer little if it's just an ad for all parties. Give great advice openly, use local keywords and phrases and create a consistent flow of new content, and this tool will allow you to dominate local search results.

Creating a multi-author WordPress blog isn't any more difficult than creating a single author blog, but there are a few considerations when it comes to promoting, managing and securing your platform that can be handled with the addition of the following plugins.

Promoting your contributors

- **WP Biographia.** This is great plugin because it adds all kinds of extra fields like social links to the user profile screen and creates a bio for each author. This way when your authors post content their bio automatically shows at the end of each of their posts and features links to their social profiles making it easy for people to connect.

WordPress does not by default allow users to upload photos, so add the User Photo plugin, too, and then Biographia will add your contributor's photo.



How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

Managing the Content Flow

- **User Role Editor.** WordPress defines what set roles like subscriber or contributor can do (See a list) but sometimes you may want to edit these a bit. For example, an author can't by default upload images. If you have a trusted group of authors creating content and you want them to add images to their posts, which is usually a good thing, then use the editor to grant that permission.

- **Editorial Calendar.** This tool simply creates a monthly calendar and allows you to drag drafts to dates for automatic publishing. This is a great way to take lots of content and spread it out for consistent publishing. For managing bigger groups and creating deadlines you might also look at DivvyHQ.

Keeping Things Secure

- **Adminimize.** This is a pretty cool tool as it lets you strip away everything you want from the admin dashboard. You might want to hide a bunch of stuff you as the admin don't really use, but you certainly want to take away most of what your contributors see as well. Some things are naturally hidden based on WordPress default roles, but you can really make a clean posting screen for your contributors by taking away everything you know they don't need access to.

Every business knows they need to produce great content. By facilitating the creation of this content in a way that can benefit your clients, prospects and referral partners, you can create a platform that will start to attract more of all of the above.



My Content Amplification System

“Of course writing good content is only part of the business challenge.” - John Jantsch

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

My Content Amplification System

Of course writing good content is only part of the business challenge. You’ve also got to get it read. Some would say, and to a large part this is true, that simply writing something that people want to read is the first step in drawing links and shares, but you’ve also got to put your content out there in places where people do their reading these days.

The following is a sampling of my content amplification routine. I do this with each blog post in an effort to get that particular piece of content the greatest amount of exposure. Is this the perfect, all-inclusive list? Probably not, but it’s a routine that I can do in about five minutes and still give my content a chance to be seen by lots of potential clients, journalists and strategic partners.

After I hit publish I:

- Tweet the headline and link with some context to draw the most interest using StumbleUpon link shortener su.pr—this syndicates the content to StumbleUpon and Twitter and starts the traffic exposure in both places.
- Publish the post to my Facebook Page.
- Publish the post to my Google+ Stream—public, circles and extended circles.
- Publish the post to my LinkedIn profile—also share with several large groups.
- Bookmark the post in appropriate tags to Delicious.
- If a post has drawn a large number of retweets I may post to Twitter a second time during the day—I generally make this decision and schedule the Tweet for a specific time using TweetDeck’s scheduling function.



My Content Amplification System

Content Creation Strategy

The Essential Types of Content

Stages of the Content Hourglass

Getting an Education Through Content Creation

How to Use a Content Platform as Referral Tool

My Content Amplification System

A couple things worth noting:

- I don't use a service or tool to cross post this to all avenues as I think each service has its own personality and following, and I take a minute to point out something different about the post in each network.
- I participate in many other ways, unrelated to my own content promotion, in each of these networks.
- I check back several times a day, depending on my schedule, to participate in any conversations happening around the content, including comments on the original blog post.
- I have +1, LinkedIn, and Facebook buttons above every blog post.
- I have links to share the content with popular bookmarking sites on the blog posts (sociable plugin) and in the RSS feed (Feedburner feed flare option).
- I often highlight a particularly well-read blog post or two from the week in my weekly email newsletter.





About The Author

John Jantsch is a marketing consultant, speaker and best selling author of Duct Tape Marketing, Duct Tape Selling, The Commitment Engine and The Referral Engine.

He is the creator of the [Duct Tape Marketing System](#) and [Duct Tape Marketing Consulting Network](#) that trains and licenses small business marketing consultants around the world.

His blog was chosen as a Forbes favorite for marketing and small business and his podcast, a top ten marketing show on iTunes, was called a “must listen” by Fast Company magazine.

Huffington Post calls him one of the [top 100 “Must Follow”](#) on Twitter and Forbes named Duct Tape Marketing on of the [100 Best Websites for Entrepreneurs](#).

To find out more about John and Duct Tape Marketing visit <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/>.



FIND OUT IF YOUR MARKETING IS CURRENTLY ON TRACK

Have you ever wondered if the marketing you are doing currently is effective? Would you like someone to evaluate those activities – and make recommendations to tweak and make those activities more effective?

We've created a “Marketing Checkup” to give you the opportunity to tell us about your business and your marketing.

Our consultants will review the information you provide – research it – compare it to your competitors – and share their findings with you. Our consultants are trained to help you:

- *Gain control of your marketing to generate more leads and close more sales*
- *Get the strategy right so that you can implement targeted marketing tactics that get real results.*
- *Integrate a total online presence into your overall marketing plan above and beyond activating social media.*

This process is completely free – it gives both parties the opportunity to work together and determine if we are a good fit to work together on a larger project.

Start your marketing check up today:

<https://ducttapemarketing.wufoo.com/forms/duct-tape-marketing-checkup/>