

Inbound and Content Marketing Made Easy

Marcus Sheridan

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Introduction: What this eBook can do for YOU...

****Read this First!!** An Introduction to Inbound Marketing Made Easy

Have you ever experienced something so great and profound that you just had to share it with others?

Well if you have, then you'll understand well what motivated this work, which in many ways, is a labor of love.

Quick Background

As you will come to see as you read the words herein, **The Sales Lion** was started in November of 2009, mainly as a result of the growth and prosperity my swimming pool company received after we embraced **HubSpot** and the principles of **inbound marketing**. Because the application of these principles truly snatched our company from sure bankruptcy, I've now spent the last 5 years trying to help folks just like you catch the vision of what is inbound and content marketing— In a way that's **easy to understand** and applicable to any business.

Why this eBook is Different

What makes this work unique is the fact that everything you'll read here is **real**. It's all personal experience. No “great ideas” without application (something that drives me nuts). So if you read it here, you can rest assured it has already been tried and tested.

Upon reading this book, you'll learn clear and concise strategies by which you can embrace everything about content and inbound marketing, especially when it comes to blogging for business.

How to Read this Book

Because this book consists of many blog posts I've written over the past couple of years, **not all may apply to your situation**. This is absolutely fine, which is why everything is arranged easily so you can find the chapters and subjects of most worth to you, as some will help and others will not. This being said, the more you read these pages and inspiring stories, the more you'll catch a vision of marketing previously unimagined by you and/or your employees.

I'm Here to Help

One last thing before you get started. As you've probably noticed from reading The Sales Lion, I'm the type of guy that appreciates community, relationships, and helping others. This is why I love it when readers contact me with their questions, comments, etc. Feel free to email me any time at: **Marcus1@thesaleslion.com**

Good luck to you in this process and may the teachings of this book help you and your family experience great financial peace and success in the years ahead.

Marcus Sheridan

The Sales Lion

Chapter 1: The Vision that is Inbound Marketing

Just How Much Can 800 Days of Inbound Marketing Change Your Life??

Jan 2005: Our swimming pool business is in shambles. My two business partners and I have just found out that we've suffered a major embezzlement of about \$200,000. Not only that, but [the IRS is after](#) us and has put liens on our homes. I've never worked so hard to experience so much stress and hardship. Frankly, it's depressing, and I wish it would just all go away.

Nov 2008: For three years we have fought tooth and nail to bring our business out of this hole. And just when we see the light, the economy has tanked. Banks are failing everywhere. Consumer confidence, especially for luxury items like swimming pools, is in shambles. I can't believe this is happening again. Many swimming pool companies are already closing shop. We've worked too hard and come too close to fail now.

March 2009: I just stumbled across a company called HubSpot and learned about **inbound marketing**. This makes complete sense to me. Finally, I can take control of our website despite my tech deficiencies and also do what I do best—**teach**. But now I'm going to do this thing they call "blogging." Dumb name, but hey, the concept makes sense.

If I just answer consumer questions Google will reward me with more visits, which should ultimately turn to leads and then sales. Despite the "recession" our country is in, I believe this is our answer, and I'm going to make it work. Even better, for the first time in years, I'm excited to be a business owner again.

Nov. 2009: Wow, I'm shocked at these last seven months. This "inbound marketing" stuff is amazing. We have somehow survived this year, even though so many of our competitors have gone out of business with the economy. Everyone keeps telling me there is no one buying, but I'm glad they're not looking at my website analytics, because they indicate otherwise.

Also, I've decided to start another blog because I sense an insatiable desire to help other businesses experience the success I'm finding through inbound marketing. The site will be called **The Sales Lion**, and something tells me it just may change my life.

Sept. 2010: What a year it has been. The economy is still in peril, but my swimming pool

company continues to thrive. All of the blogging we've done over the past 18 months has put us literally on top of the industry. Leads and sales are strong and we've never spent less in advertising and marketing. This thing is like a snowball rolling down a mountain, and it's just amazing to sit back and watch it grow. I think we're going to actually turn a nice profit this year.....simply unbelievable.

As for The Sales Lion, things have grown slowly. It has been a struggle at times, as I honestly thought growth would come quicker. Notwithstanding, my resilience is undeterred, as I'm committed to this for the long haul, and I know a tipping point will eventually come.

March 2011: Wow, my pool company is going great and The Sales Lion is doing even better. About four months ago I seriously committed to building my online network and community (as before I'd just been writing) and the results have been profound. The number of active readers has taken off. People are talking and now I'm getting more and more companies asking me for help with inbound marketing. Life is going very fast now; it's almost hard to keep up, but it appears that the tipping point has finally arrived.

August 2011: Where should I start? It's only August and my swimming pool company has pools to install practically until the **end of the year**, something we've never come close to experiencing this early before. We've gotten more leads this year than in the previous two combined. My business partners and I just sit back and watch the pings on our Blackberries come in with one lead after another looking for someone to come out and sell them a swimming pool.....very exciting to say it in the least.

In all honesty though, we deserve it. We committed to being the premier teachers in our industry and that's exactly what we are. When I put my site on HubSpot's platform in March of 2009 it only had 20 total pages. Today it has about 600 or so.

Each and every day we get calls from around the country from folks asking us if we'd be willing to travel out to them and install their swimming pool. Sadly, we have to turn many down, as we're limited to VA and MD, but the lesson remains the same—**consumers trust those persons that are willing to openly and honestly give as much helpful information as possible.**

Financially, the company has never been better. At this point and time, we have almost no debt. The embezzlement and IRS are a distant memory. And it feels very, very good.

Time to Run Free

But that's not the only thing that is changing. For quite some time I have felt like a stallion, caged-up by my pool business commitments, yet wanting so badly to run free so as to pursue my other interests. Up until this point, I have been unable to break free, but the impacts of inbound

marketing are now allowing me to do just that.

This week (Aug 8-12) will be my last full time week at [River Pools and Spas](#). It's almost surreal to say it, but it's happening. No more will I drive five to eight hours daily to go on sales appointments. My only duties will be the company's inbound marketing, which will take 10-15 hours per week, and the rest will be taken care of by commissioned sales persons.

Now that I'm able to run wild, I can't even start to express my excitement, as **The Sales Lion** has now entered a new phase as well. Businesses are contacting me on a weekly basis seeking for someone to give them a vision of inbound and content marketing. What's crazy is that I haven't even pushed my services hard up to this point. But that's how inbound marketing works. You gain trust through great information, not silly sales pitches, which is why clients and companies come to you, versus the other way around.

As an example, next month I'll be speaking at a variety of businesses and events around the country.

All Because of One Decision

My point in saying these things is not to brag, but to simply give readers a **clear vision** as to how this has all happened. When it comes down to it folks, the decision to embrace inbound marketing has changed my life. **It has changed the lives of all my employees.** It has brought me to a point of being able to experience financial peace and prosperity while doing what I love most—teaching other individuals and businesses how to reach their potential, through speaking and writing. And even better, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

So for those of you that have been dabbling with inbound marketing, I say **what's the hold up?** What's preventing you and your business from reaching the potential that awaits? Enough already, giddy-up cowboy, it's time for the ride of your life.

Update to Post: Even today, in 2014, this article is as relevant as the day I wrote it. The information and principles taught in this eBook can be life and business changing.

Internet Marketing, Small Business Owners, and How a Big Dummy Like Me Learned Web Design

I've talked quite a bit in the past regarding the importance of powerful, information-filled websites to satiate consumer needs for any business in the 21st century. So considering we all agree about such a statement, I want to address a subject that many small business owners (and professional sales persons) are doing their best to ignore and sidestep:

Web Site Design.....Done by YOU

Before we talk about the reasons why 21st century business owners must take control of their websites, I want to give you a brief feel for my previous knowledge of computers and what helped me come to my current opinions on this critically important subject matter.

I'm no computer nerd

I did not grow up in a “tech” environment. We didn’t use computers. And electronics in general were not a major component of our home. Even in high school, I did not take computer classes. And believe it or not, I didn’t even learn to type until I was in college.

Simply stated, computers have never been my “thing.” I’ve never been savvy with Information Technology and I thought I’d never get my arms around it.....that was, until, the following took place:

Small Businesses and Web Design

About nine years ago I went into business for myself with two other partners. To make a long story short, it was our goal to become the premier inground swimming pool company in the United States.

For the first two years of our business, in 2001 and 2002, we didn’t even have a website. At this time, Internet marketing for businesses was just starting to take off and neither I nor my business partners had a clue as to anything to do with computers other than how to type a Word document.

Our marketing efforts at this time were very old school: radio, print, cable TV, etc. Needless to say, it was one sad marketing campaign at River Pools and Spas.

Around 2004, I started dabbling with a company web site. Obviously, I had to outsource everything and the results of our company webpage during this time were less than stellar.

Essentially, the few pages of the site looked like a glorified business card and we appeared to receive few leads from this new medium. Notwithstanding, we did notice two major trends: Normal advertising, especially print and radio, was starting to get outrageously expensive. More and more people were starting to see the Internet as their go-to source for information, especially when shopping for a product.

Embracing Information Technology

Feeling the need to eventually be the best, I started getting online and trying to learn basic web design. I also studied general Search Engine Optimization (SEO) concepts. Because everything I was learning was self-taught, the progress was appalling.

Around 2006, we started working with a really good web designer. Because I was now starting to see just how **information** was a critical component of a great website, I was constantly emailing or calling our web guy for him to make updates, changes, additions, etc.

As this went on for a little over two years, I realized two more important trends: Outsourcing all of your business' web design, including simple changes, can get pretty expensive. Outsourcing also causes delays and limits in a business owner's (or marketer's) ability to be creative with whatever new ideas come to mind.

Time to Learn

With these realizations, I went to my web designer and had him teach me basic web design principles using Dreamweaver. Frankly, I was sick and tired of being a web dummy and was committed to make a change. Although much of it was over my head, I could at least now go into my website and make simple text changes, announcements, etc. on the fly.

With this newfound ability, my creative juices really started flowing and I wanted to learn more. In fact, my ultimate goal was to have the complete ability to design my own website, inside and out.

It was also during this time that the Internet's value to businesses across the world really started to catch fire. Ours was no different and with the help of Adwords, we soon were getting more and more traffic on our website. Although Adwords usage was expensive, it was bringing us much needed marketing results.

We were also getting a lot of comments regarding the amount of information found on the site from customers. By the end of 2008, it was easy to see that consumers were serious about their research, and it was my job as a business owner to give it to them. But I knew I had to do more.

HubSpot and CMS.....WOW!

Weighing heavily on my mind the need to reach another level of web design and consumer education, I was blessed to find the company HubSpot at the beginning of 2009. HubSpot (and no, I'm not an affiliate) is an SEO company that helps businesses understand proper web marketing. They have a mountain of free information on their website, including their famous [Webgrader page](#) (it will grade your website, very cool), video seminars, forums, articles, etc.

I devoured much of the information on their site and learned about their CMS (CMS stands for Content Management System, which is a web design tool that allows even the biggest Tech-Dummies like me to produce awesome websites after just a small amount of time and

practice.) I realized that I could actually design my own site front to back (at least the majority) without knowing ANY CODE/HTML.

Despite the fact that I'm light years from being a computer programmer, I've been able to accomplish this in the last 11 months of working with a CMS from HubSpot. I have the most well-known blog in the swimming pool industry (on my website) My website gets views from an average of 10 countries a day. We spend very little with Google Adwords now because we have such tremendous organic (free) search success. Our site is chock-full of photos, videos, articles, lead capture forms, etc. Frankly, customers **RAVE** about it.

Simply put, HubSpot has transformed my business completely and it has helped me realize that even a computer dufus like me now has the tools available to be a web designer. HubSpot is one of many CMS systems that are popping up all over the Internet and if you are a business owner considering taking this leap of faith in yourself and your own abilities, and I can assure you such a leap will change your life in an incredibly positive way.

The Future

No longer can small business owners shy away from Information Technology. No longer can they leave the heartbeat of their business in the hands of some guy or gal behind a desk that really knows very little about the essence of their business.

In my opinion, it starts with this simple belief:

"No one knows more about my business than I do. No one can teach and talk about my service and products as I can. I know I can design my own website and the days of me having the self-identity of not being tech-savvy are over. I am now embracing the future."

3 Amazing Ways Content Marketing Can Change You, Your Company, and Your Life

There is a movement afoot in businesses around the globe folks. And frankly, this is a movement that excites me more than anything I've seen in a long, long time—and it's going to change the world of business as we know it.

Looking Within for Change

More and more, younger employees of companies all over the world are **taking it upon themselves** to introduce the power of content and inbound marketing to their CEOs and

managers. Because the idea of social media, blogging, etc. is so much more prevalent with the “younger generation” (not always though), these 20 and 30 some things are doing their best to convince their bosses that there is a better way of marketing than the methods that have been used over and over again for the past 50 years.

It is because of this movement that the #1 question I get from readers, other than how to build a blogging community, comes from those persons looking for the proper manner in which to introduce this new way of marketing to their boss.

Such was the case about eight months ago when I talked to a young man named Jason. (For the sake of privacy, I’m going to leave off his last name and company info.) After talking with him about this issue many months ago, I received the following letter (word for word) from him this past week. Please read it, as its simple lessons are as profound as anything I’ve ever written on my blog.

Hey Marcus.

I’m super busy today, but I was thinking about you. First off.....THANK YOU!!! We spoke in the fall about HubSpot. Your case study was really important to us signing up for HubSpot. It sold my boss in 15 minutes. We also spoke on the phone for 15 minutes or so and you convinced me that smart people in a blue collar industry can dominate online with the help of HubSpot and a lot of hard work.

HubSpot has been amazing for us. We signed up in October 2010

We had 300 visitors in November. We had 14,000 in April. Our business has basically changed overnight. My boss is AMAZED. We’ve had to hire new people, buy new truck and machines, etc. It’s been a crazy season. I also got promoted to Vice President.

I just looked at your pool website with my SEOMOZ tools. It was showing like 1100 root domain links, which is amazing!!!! I want help with HubSpot. I trust you.

I am starting a new website for our sister company, <name hidden> Nursery.

Reach out when you can..... Thanks!

Jason

As you might imagine, emails like this get me fired up. What’s even better, is that I’m starting to get them *a lot*. The simple fact is inbound marketing—*done right*—works. Content can change a business forever. And those businesses willing to embrace change will likely dominate their niche because of the antiquated methodologies of their competitors.

But beyond the benefits of content/inbound marketing itself, I was reminded of 3 powerful lessons with this experience:

1. Content Can Change Companies Forever: Just by getting on HubSpot and embracing

inbound marketing, this company's website went from 0 to 60 in a matter of no time (or "overnight" as Jason said it). Seriously, going from 300 visits a month to 14k is astonishing, but such is the power of blogging (content) for small business when done right.

2. Content Only Needs One Believer: Granted, it's not always easy to convince one's boss of the merits of social media and content marketing. But nothing happens without the first initial effort. Simply because one man in this company had the guts to put it out there and approach "the boss," every other employee in that company will now be able to feed their families easier and much needed jobs will be given to those persons who have likely been unemployed and struggling to get by for months. If that's not motivating, I don't know what is.

3. Content Leads to Promotions: How do you go from 'fresh out of college' to "Company Vice President?" As Seth Godin would say, you become a heretic. You push the envelope. You challenge the status quo. This is exactly what Jason did in his industry and now his entire life has changed.

The Huge Problem of Getting Buy In

For those of you reading this who have a boss with his or her head in the sand, that won't embrace content marketing and social media, do them a favor and have them read this. Then, if they're still not convinced, put them on the phone with me. (No, I'm not kidding.) It's time your business was ushered into the information age—before it's too late.

So as we go about our week my fellow readers, what say ye that we follow the example of Jason? Let's push the status quo. Let's challenge our bosses (or ourselves) to reach new heights of excellence within our company. And more than anything, let's all be a part of what might be the most important business movement in the history of the world.

The Age of Digital Branding and the Power of Perception

I pulled into the gravel parking lot of my swimming pool company this morning and an unexpected thought came to mind— "**Geez this place is pretty ugly.**"

I know, sounds rather rough, doesn't it? But it's true. It's such a plain metal building. No glitz. No pomp. And if you were to drive by it, you probably would not even give it a glance. And you certainly wouldn't know it was the home of the most popular swimming pool website in the world.....

Good-Bye Pretty Buildings, Hello Smart Marketing

As many of you know, a few years ago I completely changed my shift and focus as a business owner. Instead of solely relying on antiquated marketing principles to generate business, I did a 180 and embraced content and inbound marketing. This was easily one of the smartest decisions I've ever made, but it also coincided perfectly with another major shift in my thinking as well.

You see, I used to equate the success of my business with the image people saw on the outside. This image was derived, at least in my mind, from retail stores. There was a time when I honestly thought that if I had really nice stores, this would naturally lead to more profitability and sales. This is also what I was taught when I entered the industry in 2001, which explains why just a few years ago I had one of the nicest retail stores in all of Virginia for swimming pools, offering a full line of game room equipment, pool tables, tanning beds, hot tubs, and much more.

From the outside, the place made quite the impression, but from the inside, it practically crippled the company. Not only did it require a huge amount of time, employees, and management to operate such a facility, but it also was, at best, a break-even financially.

Accepting Reality

After having been in this location from 2006-2009, my business partners and I realized a couple of important realities.

1. Our website, not our stores, created the consumer perception of our company's brand.
2. Old-school retail, in many industries including ours, was a dying business model.

With this realization, we "sold the mills" and got rid of all retail. We also took all of the energies we had been spending on the frivolous minutia of running the store to producing a website that would generate leads and sales through content— and lots of it.

And boy did the strategy pay off in spades.

Customers Don't Care About Your 'Stuff'

My pool company has gotten more leads in the past month than at any other time in our history. These leads have translated into sales— LOTS of sales. And do you know how many people have commented or asked about our buildings/offices/retail stores?

If you answered ZERO, you were right.

At the same time though, guess how many of these clients have talked about our company's website— and the feeling, or “perception,” they got from all of the information they found therein?

If you answered ALL of them, you're right again.

Switching gears for a second, most of you know that I do a lot of web coaching, speaking, traveling, and consulting these days for other businesses, some of which are multi-million dollar companies. I don't mention this to brag, as it's nothing special, but I just want to stress this critical point again:

How many clients have asked me about where I run my business from or what my office looks like?

Again, you already know the answer. **None of them.**

They don't care that I work out of my home. They don't care that when I'm talking to them on the phone, I'm likely wearing a t-shirt with my bare feet propped up on the desk.

Nope, all they care about is what they see on that dang screen.....

Perception Based on the Digital Realm

We live in a time folks where the perception others will have of us has nothing to do with ‘stuff.’ It's has nothing really to do with what they see in the real world, but everything they *perceive* from the digital realm.

So if you, as a business owner and entrepreneur, truly want to taste success, start thinking day and night about your digital brand and perception. How do you come across to others online? Are you viewed as a thought leader? Do you have a community that further validates your “expert” claims? Are you producing the content that's required to be a mover and a shaker in your industry or niche?

These questions and many others just like them need to be clearly understood if you want to be successful. And it's not a one-time thing either. It's a subject of utmost importance until the day your business and brand no longer exist.

Let-It-Go

My point? If there is anything distracting you and your business from online greatness, drop it. Just let it go. I've been asked many times why I let go of my swimming pool stores. Many people thought it was a dumb idea and would hurt my image. But what they don't understand is I know who I am, and I know how my customers make their judgments about me, and it sure as heck isn't based upon those yellow metal walls. Nope, it's all about the little digits on the screen,

and when it comes to that screen, I'm going to make sure the impression is a lasting one.

Are Some Industries Just Too “Boring” for Blogging and Content Marketing?

In a recent video interview with my friend **Srini** from [Skool of Life](#) and BlogcastFM, I was reminded of a question that I've been asked again and again over the past 2 years but has honestly never made much sense to me. It goes a little like this:

Marcus, how did you do so well blogging about an industry (swimming pools) that is, let's face it, kind of boring, and really not at all sexy?

Ahh yes, the “sexy” myth we hear so much of when it comes to blogging and content marketing. But I understand the question, as it was a good one by Srini, because so many people are thinking the same thing when it comes to their niche, industry, or product. In fact, I'd venture to say I've heard a derivative of the following statement at least 50 times:

“I'm in a boring field Marcus, this blogging stuff isn't going to work.”

Alas, how very misguided you are my friend.

Fact is, every, and I really do mean EVERY, industry can be sexy.

How is it possible? Let' me cut to the chase: Not making a huge mistake when buying a product is sexy. Purchasing an item or service without stress is sexy. Saving \$10,000 is sexy. Saving \$1.00 is sexy.

Catch my drift?

People search all day online to save \$5 on a book they could have bought from Amazon in 60 seconds.

And when they do it, they go and brag to their friends and family.

Don't ask me why this is the way that it is, because I can't explain the logic, it's just the truth. So don't fall into the trap of thinking your industry, product, or niche is boring; as there are plenty of people just waiting to be fed great information and be taught from someone who

actually cares about their well-being and wallet.

10 Ways to Convince Your CEO and Management Team to Embrace Content Marketing and Social Media

We have a serious problem my friends raging in businesses, small and large, across the world—**Social Media Buy-In from management.**

Never was this so apparent than when I spoke in Toronto this past week at the MeshMarketing conference and among the many emails I received, these two really struck a chord:

Hi Marcus,

It was great meeting you at Mesh Marketing yesterday. My biggest struggle with content marketing is getting buy in from my senior management. I've been pitching this idea at them religiously for a year now but they keep countering that we don't have the time, the resources, enough subject material, etc. I am seriously looking forward to hitting them with all the new stuff I'll be learning from you.

Stay awesome!

Dorothy

Or this one from Alice:

..... I work for a very small company led by a CEO that refuses to see the light when it comes to ANY marketing strategy. I am about to pull my hair out. I came on board about 4 months ago, thinking they were open to new ideas. Nope. Not a one. Doesn't believe in social media – claims Twitter is a “lie” and that there's no one really listening. Doesn't let any content hit the website unless it's been sanitized to look like a college brochure. Doesn't force the sales guy (yes, only one) to get on board with me.....in short, this is a place I'm looking to get out of as soon as I can.

..... This (marketing) is a brave new world that I came back to and I want to be a part of it. So if THIS place is destined for the slag-heap, I don't intent to go down with it. The saddest thing of all? I'm a great writer, if I do say so myself. I've written everything from plays and short stories to IBM training classes and technical case studies. Ah well. What was that you said about leading a horse to water? They will probably never get it.

Alice

So there you have it. We have a management buy-in problem with respect to social media and inbound marketing, and it's happening everywhere. It might even be happening in your office. Alas, what is the solution to dealing with antiquated business leaders who simply 'don't get it'? Great question. Hopefully the following suggestions will be exactly what you're looking for:

10 Ways You Can Convince Your CEO and Management Team to Embrace Content Marketing and Social Media

1. Show them competitor keyword phrases

Here is the key to 'motivating' CEOs, especially when they're a hard-headed and prideful male—Take advantage of their competitive nature. Personally, I've never known a CEO/owner of a company that wasn't a little bit competitive. With this being the case, it's time to allow the competition to do the convincing for you.

For example, a great idea is to find a competitor who has done well with ranking for certain keyword phrases in your niche. Once you've identified 5 such phrases that your competitor ranks high for, and your company doesn't, simply walk into your boss' office and ask him/her if he has a minute to look at what your prospects are finding when they research online.

Next, ask him to type in each phrase, and allow him to see that the competition is showing up while he is not. Go through all 5 phrases slowly, and make him search each one closely.

I can assure you by the 5th phrase and search, your boss will likely be ready to punch his desk, and might just be willing to give you what you're looking for.

2. Show them competitors/peers who have been involved in case studies

Every industry has case studies of people who have crushed it online. Heck, my pool company has been featured in at least 10 different online publications. If you want to see an example of many different niches, see [HubSpot's case studies](#), where you'll find an incredible range of business types.

Again, management and CEOs are competitive by nature. Allow this to work in your favor by showing how your company is an online 'slacker' compared to these others that are getting so much Internet attention.

3. Show them general competitive stats

I love this one. HubSpot is especially good at it, as it allows me to compare my website with the website of many others. In fact, check out this awesome screenshot:

Website	Website Grade	mozRank	Traffic Rank	Indexed Pages	Linking Domains	Blog Grade	Facebook Fans	Twitter Followers
www.riverpoolsandspas.com	97	5.4	258,240	848	909	59	N/A	1,089
www.waterworldpools.com	72	5.0	2,114,380	182	22	Not Graded	214	N/A
www.vikingpools.net	90	5.1	891,760	251	213	49	908	N/A
www.trilogypools.com	94	5.0	1,133,980	194	87	53	0	1,919
www.sanjuanpools.com	92	5.4	1,511,107	475	389	Not Graded	0	N/A
www.leisurepoolsusa.com	93	5.2	1,134,509	441	1,677	59	N/A	N/A
www.sunpools.com	87	4.7	3,486,599	307	42	Not Graded	N/A	N/A
www.alohafiberglasspools.com	84	4.6	2,481,473	14	64	59	N/A	N/A

With certain analytic tools like this one from HubSpot, you can easily compare your company website with that of another.

By seeing the various ways your company stacks up against others, there is a very good chance you'll stir some serious emotions within the management team.

4. Analyze with marketing the amount of money that has been spent on other advertising and marketing tactics.

This one takes a little work but is incredibly effective. It's actually pretty shocking the fact that many CEOs have little to no idea just how much they spend on advertising each year. And when you compare that steep amount with what they *could* be spending (or not spending) on social media, it suddenly appears more enticing.

As an example of such stats, in 2007 my swimming pool company spent about \$250,000 in advertising to achieve a gross sales total of about \$4,000,000. This year, in 2011, we'll spend \$18,000 and reach a gross sales of roughly \$5,000,000. (Heck, you can just show your boss that number and then have him call me if you'd like)

5. Analyze where sales have come from specifically with all other advertising. Is it quantifiable?

This one is very similar to #4 but the fact is, old-school marketing stinks in terms of its ability to be measured and quantified. Unlike social media, blogging, and inbound marketing that can track specific numbers of leads and sales, most outbound marketing methods have a very, very cloudy Return-On-Investment (ROI).

If a CEO realizes that he can finally start to track real numbers, he may just get excited enough to give you a green light.

7. Show real-time conversations happening online about your product.

Just as Alice's boss in the opening thought Twitter was "a lie," it's possible to show real-time mentions of products and services happening all over the world, as well as businesses interacting with those real-time mentions.

8. Survey existing customers/previous leads

Have you ever surveyed your existing customer base and asked them if they would appreciate an educational/how-to blog explaining your products and/or services? Or even better, what would happen if you surveyed your leads that didn't convert into customers and asked them if your lack of a powerful web presence had any effect on their decision not to choose your company? If but one person says they chose one of your competitors because of their website/social media interaction, I can guarantee you'll then be in business.

9. HubSpot's Webgrader

HubSpot's [website grader tool](#) was what really started it all for me in March of 2009 when I scored a whopping 17 out of 100 for my company's website. So mad was I at this low score that I just had to see it rise.

So do yourself a favor and take a moment to try this tool out and if the score isn't a 'passing' grade, print that baby out and neatly set it on your boss' desk.

10. Utilize the Power of Video

Remember, **over 60% of all people are visual learners**, and your CEO or management team might fall into this category. If your competitors are making great videos, make sure your boss sees them. Also, take advantage of educational videos that teach proper marketing concepts. As an example, just last week I had a client tell me her boss gave her the green light to use my services when he was forced to watch my "[Vision of Inbound Marketing](#)" Video. (Sweet!)

So there you have it folks, 10 ways you can attempt to bring your CEO and management team into the 21st century and embrace the social media marketing principles that you already know to

be true.

It is my hope that if you're struggling like Dorothy and Alice you'll take a moment to see if some of these actions work. And if all else fails, just tell them to call The Sales Lion, and he'll get 'em straight.

How to Change the Entire Content Marketing and Social Media Culture of a Company in Less than 48 Hours

I've written quite a few posts espousing the value of social media and inbound marketing , but I honestly feel this one today may be one of my most important, and you'll understand why if you read until the end.

Going About It All Wrong

When it comes to the social media cultures of most companies, almost every business I've ever seen is doing it completely and totally wrong. And because businesses are going about this thing called social media/content creation the wrong way, **they fail**. Yep, with a big, fat "F."

Here are a few reasons why:

1. There isn't **complete buy-in** from ALL employees (top to bottom).
2. Employees don't share similar understandings nor visions of what great content can do for the company and individuals as a whole.
3. Employees don't understand how to use their own skills to produce valuable content.
4. Everyone expects "the marketing director" to be the blog, the voice, the everything.

Change is Needed

I could seriously list possibly 100 more reasons why most companies fail when it comes to social media, but I'll just stop there. You get the point. Everyone has seen this. **Stuff has got to**

change.

But I'm happy to say "change" is what this article is all about. Personally, I'm tired of hearing "gurus" tell me how content creation and social media are for "*experts*" with "*certain skills*" and they must have "*xyz talents*" and blah, blah, blah.

It's total bull. All of it.

Here's what qualifies an employee to help a company's social media efforts:

If any employee of a company has ever answered a customer question, then they're qualified.

Don't believe me? Just keep reading.....

How to Change an Entire Culture in 48 Hours or Less

Two weeks ago I flew to Michigan to help a company of 60 employees catch the vision of content/inbound marketing. I knew it was going to be a daunting task, mainly because we had a lot to cover in a short amount of time, yet we needed results immediately. Like many business in this economy, Company X (we'll call them that for privacy reasons) has had a rough go at it lately. They sell a product, quite high-end I might add, all over the world. But the sales just haven't been sufficient. They need results, BIG results. And they need them soon.

So their head of marketing and I got together and planned a two day event that would literally (we hoped) ignite a fire and vision within the entire organization and enable them to quickly dominate their industry through the power of inbound marketing. Here's how the schedule went, and whatever you do, make sure you read the final results of our efforts, shown at the bottom:

Day 1

8am

The CEO welcomed his entire staff and implored them to give their best over the next 48 hours. He explained how he had "bought in" to content marketing and in order for this to work, everyone else would need to step up as well.

8:20am-11:30am

For the next 130 minutes, I gave the group a complete introduction to inbound and content marketing, in a way that anyone and everyone could fully “get it.” I also showed its impact on my swimming pool company’s bottom line, how it had saved our business, and exactly the how each and every one of them could utilize their own skills and talents, within their area of expertise, to produce content as well.

12:30pm-2:30pm

Time for phase two. This section was all about giving the group, especially the sales department; the vision of how content is literally the greatest sales tool on earth. As in the previous segment, there was much Q and A, and the conversation was in constant flow.

3:30pm-5:00pm

Final education session of the day. I discussed “personalization” with the employees, and talked about the need for each to share more of themselves on the company website so as to form stronger relationships with their clients and customers (personal branding). We also dove into video and the power of You Tube in this class. I showed some of my most successful videos of all time and once again, the Q and A was excellent.

Day 2

(Note: I just stayed for the first day and the marketing director lead the effort on day 2)

Morning

A full review of the previous day with more questions and answers. Afterwards, the employees were divided up into teams to see who could come up with the most blog article ideas, using the [same technique](#) we had discussed for “content ideas” the day before.

Afternoon

Video time. Employee teams now produced their own videos (again, using teachings from

previous day). Some were more humor based, others more serious, but everyone joined in, and it was huge hit.

Evening

Employees reviewed the day's activities and watched everyone's videos. Laughs were shared, stronger bonds were formed, and the social media retreat had come to an end.

The Results

The following week, I received this letter from the head of marketing. Please understand that I'm not sharing this note to brag about myself and say, "Look at me, I'm awesome." Rather, I want companies to realize just how much their social media culture can change in less than 48 hours.

Here's the letter, word for word:

Hi Marcus,

Well, mission accomplished my new dear friend! I am so proud of you and all that you did to rock the entire organization into a new reality. They definitely "got it" after hearing you speak. It was better than I dared imagine. Thank you so much for helping them all understand inbound/content marketing in a new and awesome way. And the coolest part is, not only do they get it..... they are EXCITED!

I have been getting text messages, email notes and IMs ever since the retreat from the most unlikely people thanking me. Even the biggest skeptics have made a point to reach out and tell me how much they enjoyed you as a speaker and that they have all these ideas now. It is going to be so very powerful having this many people unified with the same vision and equipped to make it happen.

The full report on Day 2.....

Before we could even start on the workshops I was really surprised at all of questions from the audience. I took it as a good sign that people had been ruminating on your content all night and were chomping at the bit for application. So that was cool.

Then the blog title brainstorm contest was the perfect activity to follow-up. All combined, the teams came up with more than **700 blog titles!!** (I'm not sure how many duplicates are in there but who cares..... over 7-stinking-hundred!!) Ha!

As for the rest of the day, people were wayyyy more into the personal branding exercise than I expected and the videos that people made were hi-larious! Some of them are actually worth keeping and sharing on our website. Matter of fact, Jason C's was how to fix <insert equipment piece here> simply by changing out the batteries and he had his 6-yr-old daughter demonstrate (much like your video of [your son demonstrating how to clean a pool](#)). Now he's going to work on a related blog post so that we can embed the video.

I'm going to follow-up with Josh N. again about the pictures tomorrow. I hope to get you something right away!

-K

P.S. I forgot to tell you that the real lasting proof of a successful retreat was the fact that **I had 8 blog posts in my inbox by lunch today and many more on the way.**

Your Challenge

So there you have it folks. Yes, it can be done. But the key here was the fact that the company, instead of segmenting blogging and social media into a small section of employees, decided to start everyone off on the same page, sharing the same vision (see Steve Jobs), and making sure they all understood their importance to such a campaign.

As a poker player would say, they're **All In.**

Chapter 2: No Excuses

Husband, Father, Blogger, Business Owner: A Sales Lion Close-Up



Larsen, Dad, and 'Pink'

Monday February 21st 2011

7:30am—As I feel a tiny set of fingers tickling the bottom of my feet this morning, my eyes begin to open and a smile immediately comes to my face. Larsen, my 4-year-old daughter, has taken it upon herself to wake up “Daddy” this morning, just as she always does about this time. I’m feeling really good today though. Yesterday, like most Sundays, I caught a nap, and today I arise invigorated, just knowing that everything on this day is going to fall into place. For some reason, I can’t help but to smile.

8:15am—I skipped breakfast this morning. I’ve got writing on the brain instead. A post is due and I can see it already written in my head. I’m going to write today about an experience I had on a sales appointment Friday. This article will be fun.

8:40am—Article is done. Wow, that was fast. Yeah, it really is going to be a good day. A few more minutes to get this puppy up on WordPress and we’ll see if she’s got legs. Blog day is always fun. Never quite sure of the reaction, but I feel good about this one.

9:15am—“Publish” button has been hit.....Need to tackle a few emails for my swimming pool company before writing my next article this morning.

9:40am—Wow I'm feeling stoked to write an article that has been building up within me for quite some time. Despite the fact that I run the most popular swimming pool educational blog in the world right now, none of the manufacturers/vendors in the industry want to offer content for guest posts. I've offered and almost all have said no. I want to give them a free platform to spread the word yet their minds and marketing methodologies are so antiquated that I've been stonewalled. Well enough is enough. Time to call 'em out. The article will be called, "[There is Something Very, Very Wrong with the Swimming Pool Industry](#)." I think it's going to cause a stir, but that's OK, it needs to be said, and it won't be the first time the status quo and I will buttheads.

10:05am—850 words later and she's done.....and I really like this article. It just feels right. I'm going to throw it up on my blog, which is a HubSpot platform, and see if she's got legs.....TSL article is already getting comments. Patricia is the first to jump in. What a great lady she is. I like her a lot. Joe and Robert quickly throw in their thoughts as well. Looks like this article might do well. I'm excited.....and still smiling.

11:15am—Back upstairs to grab a bite. My kids and I chat and play a little. I eat fast, but that's me. I hate wasting time on food, especially on a day like this when I'm so excited as to the possibilities.

11:45am—Time to head to the office building of my swimming pool company. As I'm walking to my car, I look out and see Larsen on her swing. Alone. I better take a minute and give a few pushes before I leave. She needs to know I care.

12:30pm—At the office. I've got some new employees to meet today as pool season is about to explode yet again. I don't come here much anymore. My business partner Jim handles the day-to-day for our company. At this point I'm either selling or producing content. It allows me to work at home quite a bit. The office is a cage for me at this point in my life. Soon, I will hire a full-time sales person and my duties will almost be completely filled, thus allowing me to further focus on other areas of my life. Although River Pools has been great to me, this stallion is ready to run.....

6:00pm—Still sitting here. Everyone has left the office and it's about time I started to head home as well. I'm hungry. For some weird reason I want McDonald's French fries. Hmm, that's weird, I don't know when was the last time I actually had the urge to eat *anything* from McDonald's.

6:30pm—Sitting in McD's eating French fries and their new oatmeal. Don't ask me why. I'm still trying to figure it out myself.

7:30pm—Home with the fam. Time to read some books and wrestle with the kids, depending on who's climbing up my back. I enjoy this part of the night, and their smiles indicate likewise.

8:00pm—Notice an email on my blackberry. It's Jk from Hustler's Notebook. Despite also leaving a comment on today's post, he has taken a moment to privately tell me he thinks I should write a book about the ideas I'm teaching on TSL. I can't believe how kind and thoughtful the guy is. Unbelievable.

8:30pm—Kids are now in bed. My wife Nikki and I are on the couch talking while the baby, "Pink" as we call her, rests on Mommy's lap while eating. This is our special time together each night. No distractions. Just light conversation and simple observations of our newest child while whispering on the couch. The lights are now off in the house. Peace resides.

9:30pm—I've just started my workout downstairs after saying goodnight to my dear wife. Just like every night at this time, I'll be on the elliptical for the next hour. This is also my time to watch TV while working out. Thank goodness for TiVo.

10:40pm—Elliptical done, now I'm in the sauna. 180 degrees in here with Bach playing in the background. This is my spiritual and meditative time of the day. It's great.

11:15pm—Feeling refreshed again. Ready to catch my second wind. I'm debating over whether to write blog articles for my real estate business, write a guest post for another popular blog, or answer an interview request from another blogger.

12:00am—Chose the interview first. I'd been putting the guy off. It took a little time to answer his questions but it was fun. Now time for the guest post.

1:00am—Guest post written. That's a relief. My eyes are now hurting. Real Estate articles will have to wait till tomorrow.

1:30am—Slowly tip-toe in bed. While I lay here I take a deep breath. One in. One out. I'll be asleep in 30seconds. It was a good day. And I'm still smiling.

10 Lame Excuses NOT to have a Business Blog Now

Warning, this is a vent blog directed towards business owners and entrepreneurs, so if you're not up for a little venting, you may want to continue on with your day.....But if you're like me and frustrated to see the awesome benefits of content marketing and blogging that is available to every business owner in the world only to have a very, very small percentage take advantage of the beautiful medium, then keep reading.

I've recently started doing more and more consulting with small businesses. I love helping people succeed, so such a business is only a natural result of these circumstances. But I'm finding the more I discuss the power of blogging and content marketing with other businesses, the more I'm blown away with lame and down-right silly excuses as to why these men and women are not jumping on the train of Web 2.0 and giving their customers what they are truly looking for.

So in this little post, I decided to take a break from trying to convince small business owners across the globe to begin to embrace information marketing. Instead, I'm going to talk about some of the bogus excuses I'm hearing more and more these days from small biz owners and entrepreneurs everywhere.

“My company’s website does not currently have a blog because……”

I’m just not good at writing.

You're not good at writing, huh? Well tell me, **are you good at talking?** In other words, are you able to talk to customers about your services and products? I'd be willing to bet you are which is why I'd be willing to bet you could also blog if you only believed in yourself. Remember though, you do not have to blog alone. Do you have a spouse or a friend that could help and edit? How about a co-worker?

Frankly, I'm just tired of people blaming their writing skills for their lack of content marketing. It's lame and just like any other skill, we get better at it the more we do it. But it starts with an “I can” versus an “I can't,” that much I'm sure of.

I don't have the time.

Out of time are you? You mean to tell me that you don't have 2-3 hours a week to produce 1-2 articles about a subject in your field?? C'mon, that's crapola and we both know it. Have you watched a TV show this week? If your answer is “yes” then you're lying and do have the time.

We've all heard it before—***Everyone has enough time to do the things they want to do.*** We all prioritize the events and activities of our lives that are most important. Instead of saying “I just don't have the time” you may as well just be honest with yourself and say “I just don't really care.”

No one in my industry reads blogs.

No one? Really? So are you telling me that not a single person in your industry that's looking for your service or product doesn't have questions before they buy? Are you inferring that every consumer in your industry is a natural expert and is born knowing everything about your business? Sure.....gotcha.

I don't have anything to blog about.

Well I guess you don't have a product then either, do you? Heck, you don't even have a business, so why don't you just close the doors and move on to your next successful endeavor considering you picked the only industry in the world that is void of any and all information?

In other words, start thinking like a consumer; stop thinking like a business owner.

Blogging costs too much money.

You're right. I mean, considering starting a blog takes about \$20 and a few hours of time a week, yeah, sounds incredibly expensive to me. I guess that's why you're still spending \$800 a month to have a big ad that no one reads in the Yellow Pages, right?

Blogging Doesn't Work.

Yeah, and neither does the sun. Good grief, the idea that blogging doesn't work, in 2010, is a sign of delirium. My blog at River Pools saved me over \$6,000 last month in free searches that I would have normally paid for had I been completely Pay Per Click/Adwords dependent. I don't know about you, but to me that's a lot of money.

Blogging isn't for smaller, local businesses.

Again, utter near sightedness and lunacy. Blogging is definitively the best tool (other than Google local business/search) to optimize one's website for local search phrases. Considering that every business provides services in at least one town or city, local blog optimization is crucial.

We've been doing it this way for years.

Yeah, that's exactly what Henry Ford said.....and JC Penny's.....and K-Mart.....and every other business that was at one time extremely successful but has now gone the way of the dinosaur.

Newsflash: **Just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today.**

I'm just not web-savvy.

Well then get web-savvy—at least enough to be able to whip up a document in Word and paste it on a blogging platform. These days, not being web savvy is no longer a thing to brag about for a business owner. In fact, it's embarrassing.

I can say this because it wasn't too long ago that I was clueless when it came to the web and computers. That is until I got mad at myself enough to do something about it. Any person, no matter what the age or background, can become comfortable and knowledgeable with computers, websites, and blogging within only a few months' time if they'll only dedicate a few hours a week to learning and experimenting with technology.

I don't know where to begin.

I'm biased, but this blog is a darn good place to start. Then I'd go over to HubSpot and check out their incredible educational tools. Those guys are awesome and they really get the “big” picture.

Once you're ready to start your blog, write down the 20 top questions you get from consumers. These questions will be the titles of your first 20 blog articles. Now start writing.

How to Turn Your Company Into a Content Creation Machine

I was planning on writing a different post this evening but I was so moved by a telephone conversation I had today with a business owner that I just had to address this incredibly important subject, which is a growing problem for more and more businesses around the globe. Here is the conversation (For the sake of ease, we'll call the business owner “John”):

Me: OK John, so you're getting on board with this whole idea of inbound marketing. Great. That's exciting. Tell me, do you already have a blog?

John: No, but that is something we're looking in to.

Me: Once you start blogging, who do you see as the people that are going to be producing content?

John: What do you mean by producing content?

Me: I mean any person that produces any text, video, photos, etc. that says anything about your product or services.

John: Well, I guess that would be my head of marketing.....and myself.....and maybe another person. That being said, we are a little worried about blogging because we only have about 5 hours a week to dedicate to this.

Me: Exactly how many employees do you have working for you John?

John: About 400

Me:(doing a double flinch on my end) 400??

John: Yes, 400, spread around the globe.

Me: (short pause as I slap my forehead in disbelief) John, you're going about this all the wrong.

John: What do you mean Marcus?

Me: Well, tell me this, how many people work in your sales department?

John: About 16 or so.

Me: OK, and let me ask you one other question, and this is the important one—How many people in your company have ever answered any question at all about your product or services?

John: (thinking for a second) Well, I guess all 400 have.

Me: John, don't you see where I'm going with this? What would happen if you asked every employee in your company to write just one blog article a year?

John: Wow, I never looked at it like that.....

Creating a Culture of Education

Here's the thing folks—John is a very, very smart guy. Just talking with him on the phone I could tell that I'd never want to compete against him in Jeopardy. Notwithstanding, John has yet to grasp the concept of creating a culture of education within a company.

One of the biggest problems businesses have is that they are way too reliant on a very, very small percentage of their employees to actually produce content. This, my friends, is bonkers. It makes no sense.

A guy like John, who is already equipped with 400 employees (a small army), was worried that he simply *didn't have enough time* to produce content. Are you kidding me?! In reality, the biggest problem John should have is managing the river of content that flows into him (or his marketing dept.) from the mountain of employees who are all excited to be a part of the company's content marketing revolution.

Big or Small, the Same Rules Apply

I hope you're catching the vision with me here. Let me give you another example on a smaller scale. My swimming pool company has about 15 employees. This year, we've given every person that works in the field a digital camera so that they can take pics of the various stages of every pool install we do. I also have my service guys equipped with flip cameras so they can record simple "how to" videos on basic pool maintenance. Yes, I'm still producing content as I've always done but now that I've got so many others on my "team" the idea of new "stuff" has gotten much, much easier.

Also, another huge benefit of involving as many employees as possible is the fact the employees get excited and take more of an "ownership" approach to their job because they are making a difference by teaching others (literally around the world) about what it is they do. Simply put, most employees throughout the world are just dying to share their talents and knowledge with others, and there is no better means to support and facilitate this than by allowing them to produce content—in any form that may provide value to consumers.

So that's my challenge to you folks. If you own a business, the time has come to start leveraging the power and skills of your employees. Embrace a culture of education from top to bottom. **Let every member of the team carry the ball.** By so doing, I can assure you that not only will your workload go down while employee moral goes up, but your company will also turn into a content producing machine, putting yourself in position to dominate your niche for many years to come.

The Real Reason You Don't Have the Time for Blogging and Content Marketing

Business Owner: Hey Marcus, how are you?

Me: Great, just sitting here finishing up a blog article I just wrote.

Business Owner: Dang man, I wish I had the time you had to blog. I'd love to blog. I've got tons of ideas and things to say, but I just don't have the time.

Me: (Debating on whether to be honest or just roll with it.....) Yeah, I know what you mean.

This was a brief conversation I had just a few days ago with someone that had called me for some general advice. I mention it here because I've had almost this exact same conversation at least 100 times (no exaggeration) this year alone with other business owners. Yep, when it comes down to it, there is a problem in the world, and I believe the moment has arrived that we all accept this truism and move on from it:

There Just Isn't Enough Time For Anyone To Blog. No Time For Content Marketing. No Time For Video Marketing. No Time. No Time. No Time.

Seriously, I'm blown away how often I hear this talk about *time* and how it relates to proper marketing for a small business. One of these days someone is going to tell me how they "*don't have the time*" and all of the sudden I'm going to lose my mind and say something to the effect of:

It's not that you don't have the time. You don't care. And you don't care because you don't get it. And you don't get it because you don't see the big picture. You have the time to hire employees to work for you. You have the time to hire a book keeper. You have the time to blow money on antiquated advertising mediums that don't work any longer. Yet you don't have the time for blogging. You don't have the time to embrace change and usher your business into the "educational age." No, when it comes down to it, you don't have time to for greatness.....You're too stuck on staying average with the rest of the masses.

OK, so there it was. Now I feel better. Glad I got that off my chest.

Look, I know blogging, especially as a business owner, can be tough when you're getting pulled in 50 different directions. But the concept of proper content creation for a business is so important in this information and consumer education age that businesses can't ignore it, which is why you need to accept this reality.

Either you take care of your content marketing, or you hire someone to do it for you.

As I mentioned above, treat it like doing the books for your business. At this point, all businesses realize that they have to take care of their books. There is no way around their accounting. This means that business owners either do it themselves or they hire someone who can. But by no means do they not take care of their company's accounting, otherwise they'll be shut down and go to jail.....which makes the pain of actually getting the books done worth the end result.

Although I would like to think that the fear of failure and future pain isn't the root of all content marketing and blogging for a business, if it's the only thing that motivates a business owner to get started on the right path, then so be it.

But for the love of Pete, please stop telling yourself you don't have the time. Not to sound conceited here, but if someone were to actually follow me around for a week and see how I'm usually writing my next article when the rest of the world is asleep, or when I'm sitting in my car in a parking lot and slapping away at the keys because I have 30 minutes in between appointments, then all the sudden they'll start to realize what it means to be truly dedicated to blogging, or as I prefer to put it—creating a culture of education within your business.

Now go make the time. Do the right thing. Plow forward and don't look back. Just have the faith that the work will pay off.....and I can assure you it eventually will.

The Uncomfortable Road to Success: A Story About You and Me

As I pulled into my driveway around 11:30pm on Thursday night of last week, exhaustion had officially set in. Having driven about 23 hours over the previous 3 days, I was physically spent. But just like many other nights before this one, I still had one major item left on my to-do list—the elliptical.

Although some of my oldest readers have heard me talk about my beloved elliptical before, many of you may not know that each night, somewhere between 9 and 11:30pm, I get on this machine for exactly 60 minutes, without fail. But on this particular night, the physical and mental toll of the previous 3 days were such that I frankly was unsure as to whether or not the workout would even happen.

Decision Time

So as I always do, I walked into my quiet house and slowly drudged into my bedroom, very quietly, so as to not wake up my wife and retrieved my workout clothes out of the dresser. But,

as I grabbed its handle to get the clothes, fatigue again became my only thought. Literally, my head seemed to be spinning. And I knew that if I could just lie down in my bed I'd be out in 30 seconds.

So I stood there. Not sure how long really. But I debated, and debated, and debated. If anyone had seen me there, standing in the dark and looking blankly at a dresser-drawer, they may have thought I was crazy.

Somehow, I eventually summoned the strength and soon walked out of the room with workout clothes in hand.

As I walked by my kitchen table, just before heading to the basement, I stopped again. This time, one thought kept coming to my head:

“Just go to bed man. Just go to bed.”

And so once more, all I could do was stand there. Again and again I rationalized how missing one workout wouldn't matter. It was quite the civil war, to say it in the least.

But just as I was on the cusp of giving in, I found myself saying the same thing I've said many, many times late in the night—“Just give it a go Marcus, even if it's but for a few minutes. Give it a go.”

And so I did. 5 minutes into my workout I was still feeling dizzy from the day. 20 minutes in I was very ready to quit. 30 minutes in I was convincing myself to hang in there a little longer. And 45 minutes in I thought, “You've come this far, just keep going.”

Finally, 60 minutes came. I was done. Ahh yes, the satisfaction of knowing I'd won a little battle, again.

It wasn't comfortable. It wasn't easy. But it was worth it.....as it always is.

Some of you may be wondering why I relate this story. And although it may be a silly one in nature, it's just one example of many in my life that show a true reflection of what the road to success is all about.

Because when it comes down to it folks, **this road that I'm speaking of is not comfortable.**

There's some utopic myth out there that all we need to do is choose our passion and then success will come naturally and easily. To this, I say bull. Success is great, yes, but it's not easy. In fact, the most successful people I know are often times the most uncomfortable.

Our Challenge

I would go so far to say that if we're not a little uncomfortable, we're simply not pushing ourselves hard enough.

To close, I'd ask you to consider if you're pushing yourself as you should be. Are you challenging the status quo when necessary, even though it's not comfortable? Are you taking care of your mind, body, and soul.....even when it hurts? And are you reaching the God-given potential you've been blessed with, even though the bumps in the road would dictate otherwise?

If the answer is 'no', then it's time we pushed a little harder folks.

The Law of Compound Information in Marketing: Timing is Everything

I was speaking to a client a couple of days ago who, up to this point as a business owner, has basically done squat as a content marketer. In other words, he has no blog, he has done no video, and just isn't currently thinking like a consumer.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings though, this guy has already placed himself in front of many in his niche just by merely recognizing he has marketing and branding "issues." After talking for a while regarding his next steps, he asked me the following question:

So let's just say I keep things like they are this year and then when I have a little more time, I get going with all this inbound marketing stuff??

My response was simple:

You don't understand the Law of Compound Information.

Timing is Everything

Most of us have heard about **Compound Interest** in the past. For anyone looking to garner a financial nest egg and live a financially sound retirement, this action is usually a must. Here is what Wikipedia says regarding the subject:

Compound interest arises when interest is added to the principal, so that from that moment on, the interest that has been added also itself earns interest. This addition of interest to the principal is called compounding. A bank account, for example, may have its interest compounded every year: in this case, an account with \$1000 initial principal and 20% interest per year would have a balance of \$1200 at the end of the first year, \$1440 at the end of the second year, and so on.....

Without having a deep economic discussion here, compound interest equates to your money's ability to grow over time. And what will impact this growth curve the most? When it comes down to it, there are 3 main factors. Wiki states further:

The effect of compounding depends on the frequency with which interest is compounded and the periodic interest rate which is applied. Therefore, in order to define accurately the amount to be paid under a legal contract with interest, the frequency of compounding (yearly, half-yearly, quarterly, monthly, daily, etc.) and the interest rate must be specified.

What does this mean for your business?

We've all heard that inbound/content marketing is an investment. But just like any investment, your return on said investment (ROI) will be greatly impacted by the following economic principles:

Frequency

This is huge. How often are you blogging? How often are you adding video to your site? Are you constantly looking for ways to add new pages to your site or has it been stuck on the same number for the last 6 months?

Hopefully you see what I'm saying here. Your two biggest customers, Search Engines (like Google) and consumers (anyone that might buy something from you) need to be fed great information often so as to give you respect and love. This may sound too simplistic but it's incredibly true.

Understand that each and every article you write gives Google more opportunity to look at your site, notice your value to the consumer, and then show you on the first page for more and more key phrases in your niche. By simply compounding your articles and the information therein, your organic search results will only continue to go up.

Furthermore, when consumers constantly see you giving more and more useful information to anyone who cares to listen, respect is garnered and your brand awareness naturally climbs. I've seen this process again and again and frankly it's a beautiful thing.

The Value of the Interest (Information) Rate

I equate this one to the value of the information you're actually giving consumers. To give you an example, let's say your company blog is a glorified calendar and sales pitch. Because all you ever talk about in your blog posts is how great your company's products and services are, as well all of your "amazing accomplishments," the value to the consumer will be low. In fact, they'll quickly cover their eyes and ears because you're not actually helping *them*.

But if your blog is all about the consumer—if it teaches them everything there is to know about your product/service—then you're going to get major love. People will read you often. Links will come your way from other websites. And because of this, Google will again look upon your site with a smile and rank you higher and higher in organic search results.

Time

What's the first thing anyone talks about when saving to build wealth? That's right, TIME. Timing, in many ways, is everything. For example, if you invest \$100 a month into some type of savings plan at the age of 20 and don't touch your money until you're 50, you'll have way more money than the 50 year-old guy that started investing \$200 a month when he was 30. The simple reason for this is timing.

This is why it's a terrible idea to just wait to embrace content and inbound marketing. The company that started writing 2 great blog articles a week 5 years ago is **CRUSHING** the company that started writing 4 great articles a week 2 years ago. Although this may not sound fair to some, it's the facts. Just look around the web and you'll start to see exactly how the principal of compound information really works and is critical for any business.

So please consider this reality as you consider content/inbound marketing for your business. The idea of "waiting for a better time" makes no sense. Start compounding your information *today*. Start getting noticed by Google and consumers *today*. I can assure you that if you do decide to

wait, your business will be sadly left behind by those businesses that were actually willing to see the big picture and embrace the mind of the 21st century consumer

Chapter 3: Content Marketing to Make Millions

Why Content is the Greatest Sales Tool in the World Today

Blogging and content marketing work, right? Yeah, sure they can. If done properly, they can create for your business one of the most dominant SEO campaigns on the web, thus driving tons of traffic to your site that will hopefully end up in leads and ultimately sales.

But let's assume for just a few minutes here that blogging did nothing for SEO. Let's say it never garnered your company's website any new traffic whatsoever. *Would it still be worth it??* In short, here's the answer: **You're dang right it would be worth it.**

I hear companies talking about how blogging and content marketing can impact their bottom line, but rarely do I speak with someone who understands the true vision and impact that a continuous flow of content can have on an existing customer base, especially those that are already in your sales funnel (existing leads).

For example, the other night I went on a sales appointment (for my swimming pool company) to see a lady that I'd met with two years ago but at the time decided not to purchase a pool. Knowing this would be my second visit with her, I was determined not to let another opportunity to slip through the cracks.

For about 45 minutes, I discussed with the lady what she was looking for and found out that she had subscribed to my company blog during the time of our last meeting and thus had been diligently researching swimming pools for over two years. In fact, because she was so loyal to our blog she was as knowledgeable about pools as a first time buyer can possibly be. Thinking everything was looking great, I gave the lady the total price asked for a deposit, and this is the conversation that then ensued:

Lady: Well, I like your quote and your company but I just can't make a decision tonight.

Me: Why? (When it comes to sales, I prefer direct questions)

Lady: To be honest, I have another appointment with another company next week.

Me: Why?

Lady: Because I've been told you're supposed to get 2 or 3 quotes whenever you make a purchase like this.

Me: Hmm, that's interesting. Who are you planning on meeting with?

Lady:<company X> (names are hidden to protect the innocent)

Me: Company X? Really? Well let me ask you this. Over the past two years, how many articles of "Company X" have you read that taught you something about pools?

Lady: Uhhmm, well, none.

Me: And over the past two years, how many times has "Company X" bothered sending you any information that showed they really and truly cared about your swimming pool experience, regardless of whether you went with their company or not?

Lady: That would be none also.

Me: And over the past two years, who has sent you two emails every week so as to assure you're continually learning and staying informed as to the happenings of the pool industry?

Lady: You have Marcus.

Me: Ma'am, where have you essentially learned everything you know about swimming pools?

Lady: (with a shameful smile at this point) Your blog Marcus.

Me: Then why in the world would you be getting another quote when you already know we're the right company for you?

Lady: I guess it's silly, isn't it?

Me: Yep, sure is, crazy in fact, so go ahead and cancel that appointment and the deposit tonight will be \$250,000 (actually, it wasn't close to that but I figured 250k would sound much cooler).....

Lady: (with a big smile) Sounds great.

When all was said and done and the kind lady had written me a check, she said she was thrilled and relieved to finally be done with the process and have made a decision. But in my mind, there was one reason why we were able to have the above conversation and subsequent agreement:

Great content leads to even greater trust.

So think about this the next time you're debating on whether or not your company should be blogging. Remember, whether you get huge SEO benefits or not, you should be producing great content for those persons in your sales funnel that are still "in the game" but have yet to actually pull the trigger and make that all-important buying decision. If you do this, I can assure you that you'll discover blogging and content to be the best sales tool in the world in this new information age we are all a part of.

5 Small Business Blogging Benefits Nobody is Talking About

OK, so we've all heard it by now: If you own a business, and if you want to truly have any web marketing presence at all, you need to be blogging. With benefits like SEO, subscribers, and inbound links; content marketing for small businesses can pay some serious dividends.

But today I want to focus on a few blogging benefits that very few, if any, are talking about on the Internet. Let's take a look:

1. Page Views Equal Sales:

When I first started blogging for my swimming pool company two years ago, I had no idea of the following benefit. Basically, after studying my analytics for a few months, I realized a very fascinating statistic:

30 prospect pages views=80% closing ratio in sales appointments

In other words, if I could ensure that every prospect read at least 30 pages of my website before a sales appointment, 4 out of every 5 appointments would end up as a sale. Think about that for a second.....Considering the average closing rate is around 15% in the swimming pool industry, the fact that my company closes about 80% of those persons that read more than 30 pages of our site is a profound statistic. But in reality, it makes plenty of sense. Why? Because great content leads to trust which in turn leads to sales. This is also why our closing rates for prospects that read *less* than 30 pages of the website hovers around 40%, roughly half of that of the "content hungry" customers.

But what would happen if my website was like most in the swimming pool industry and less than 20 total pages with very few great articles to teach and educate consumers? How would the trust

be garnered then? That's right, our closing rates would be average just like everyone else's.

So consider this stat with your company's blog. How many pages do your customers need to read before they reach a "tipping point" and closing rates skyrocket? Just by knowing this little bit of information your entire marketing and sales approach will be drastically improved.

2. Blog Articles Mean Better Emails

This one goes hand-in-hand with #1 but the majority of small businesses have terrible email marketing campaigns with their customer-lead base. Sadly, most are boring, monotonous, and stink when it comes to creativity. This is why I tell business owners and marketers that every email should contain at least one, if not many, links to previous blog articles your company has written. As customers are shown intriguing links to articles on your site, they'll be more inclined to click said links and start the process of education, pages views, and trust building.

3. Forced Cognition

Ask anyone in sales who has a blog if their writing has increased their effectiveness and closing rates and they'll tell you "yes" every time. The reason for this is simple. Blogging forces us to constantly study, analyze, question, ponder, and test our products and services. This constant activity leads to a depth and breadth of knowledge that empowers sales professionals to be tremendous communicators.

4. Blogging can have a Tribal Effect on Staff

As human beings, we love to work on a team and strive for a common goal. Such is also true with content marketing. When a company has two or more people that contribute blog posts, a "team" feeling can be created amongst the group as everyone participates in the company's web marketing and sales success. In turn, this teamwork leads to camaraderie, higher morale, and better working relationships in general as everyone contributes.

5. Blogging will Lead to Other Income Opportunities

Here is the deal—Blogging, when done properly, will make you and your company very attractive. Not only will it garner you many more visitors to your website, but it will also leverage your company as a major player/force in your industry. As this happens, you will start to receive outside offers from other businesses, vendors, etc. that will want to share in your success.

To give you an example, because my swimming pool blog is so successful, in the past 2 years I've been approached with franchise opportunities, speaking/consulting gigs, companies have offered to "buy us out," etc. Similar events are now happening on The Sales Lion as well.

When it comes down to it, people are attracted to winners. If your company has a great, information-driven blog that influences your niche, you will clearly be seen as such—a **"winner."** Once this happens, just watch the opportunities role in.

That Ain't My Shtick...The Power of Knowing Who You Are in Business

A few weeks ago, my business partners and I had the interesting experience of having 3 cameramen follow us around for a day as part of a documentary they were doing that would end up being used as an education piece in college business schools across the country. The group had read about us online and knew of our unique story, so they wanted to catch footage of all aspects of the business—from installing pools to taking lead calls in the office.

During one of these lead calls in my office, as the cameraman stood over me and recorded, I had a very interesting conversation with a prospect. Basically, the prospect had two major needs: He wanted a pool large/deep enough for a diving board, but he also wanted a very large play area with the pool (section of water less than 4' deep). After discussing these needs with him for about 5 minutes and realizing they were a critical aspect of his buying decision, I told the prospect the following:

Me: Well sir, to be completely honest, I don't think we have a swimming pool that's going to fit your needs based on what you've told us.

Prospect: Really, why is that?

Me: Fiberglass pools do not get any larger than 16'x40'. What this means is that if you have a diving pool, the first 1/3 of the pool, or about 13' is going to be play area. The next 1/3 of the pool is going to be a hard slope, which serves very little purpose. And the final 1/3 is going to be a diving well (8' deep). Because you'll only have 13' as a play area, I don't think that will be enough to make you happy.

Prospect: No, 13' is not enough, what's our solution?

Me: Well, I think you're going to need a concrete pool in this case. They don't have size/shape

limitations, and it sounds like what you're really going to need is an L-shaped pool—two unique bodies of water, one being shallow and one being deep.

Prospect: But you all don't sell concrete pools, do you?

Me: No, we don't. But if you're really serious about your two major needs of play area and diving area, that's the only solution I can offer you. **Honestly, I just don't think we're the company for you.**

Prospect: Well thanks for your honesty, I do appreciate it.

After I got off of the call, one of the cameramen looked at me mystified, and this was the conversation that followed:

Cameraman: Are you telling me you turned down that guy's business? I would never do that!

Me: Our product doesn't fit his needs, and I'm not going to lie to the guy. He wants a large play area and a large diving area in his pool. We simply can't offer that, and I'm not going to pretend we can.

Cameraman: Yeah, but selling is selling and you should still try to convince him that he should go with your company.

Me: First of all, I am not dying for his business. We do inbound marketing, and because we're so dang good at it I get tons of leads every day. I'm looking for *great* leads, not ones I have to convince about our product. If I had met with this fellow at his home, two other concrete pool guys would have come out and convinced him of what I just told him—our product isn't the right fit, period.

Cameraman: Well I've never turned down a job.

Me: That's because of two reasons: **Your marketing has never been that good and you really don't know who you are.** My product fits 80% of the marketplace. I don't worry about the other 20%. The fact is, **I sell more because I'm worried about less.**

Cameraman: I think that's crazy.

Me: (laughing) Yeah, I may have thought the same until I really learned who I was and stopped trying to please everyone else. The moment I did that, everything changed. You should try it sometime.

I'm not sure if that phone call is going to be on the documentary, but if I was calling the shots, it would be the first thing college students saw, as it's that important. After being an entrepreneur for over 10 years now, I've come to this conclusion: **Most people in business have no idea who they really are.**

For example, as I've mentioned here before, when I started my pool company I offered vinyl liner inground pools, fiberglass pools, above ground pools, retail, and many other items. Today, 10 years later, I do ONE thing—fiberglass pools. And because of that, our company is nationally branded as *the* fiberglass pool company. I'm not saying this to brag, that's just how it is.

Blogging Identities and Shticks

I see many bloggers suffering from this same problem when it comes to branding and identity. They try to make money in a handful of ways but they never become **truly** known in the blogosphere for anything, and that's why they eventually give up.

For example, folks in the blogosphere know me as a guy with an incredible community that passionately talks about inbound marketing and HubSpot. I don't spend a bunch of time trying to act like I know all things web, social media, affiliate marketing, etc. Although I may be interested in those things, they aren't my shtick. But when it comes to inbound marketing and blogging—oh yeah, that's me.

For example, last week I had two large companies contact me about what I would charge to come out and speak to their organizations. Both requests were practically identical—they wanted me to get their employees fired up about inbound marketing. These types of contacts are starting to become very common, but they're just a natural result of consistent branding, hard work, and a sense of self.

So that's the challenge folks. Who are you? What's your shtick? And do other people see you or your business the same way you do? If you know these things, your ability to experience huge success on and offline will be increased dramatically.

5 Reasons You Should ALWAYS Talk about Product Pricing and Costs on Your Company Website

I don't get it. Seriously, what is the deal with small business websites and their fear of talking about the one thing that makes every transaction a reality? Yes, you guessed it, that "one thing"

is **MONEY**.

Yep, the last I looked, if consumers and customers don't have money, they have a tough time buying things (well, not including the housing market from 2001-2008). So, being that money is so vital to the purchase of a product or service, why is everyone afraid of it?

I'm guessing the answer is that they are afraid they'll end up turning-off a consumer, or possibly scare them away. Personally, I think such a fear is crazy, bonkers, (fill in your own adjective here). In fact, the first question a serious consumer will ask when they are considering the purchase of a product is:

How much does it cost?

Notwithstanding this all-important inquiry, hundreds of thousands of companies don't even begin to mention pricing on their websites.Hmmmmm, ***Houston, we have a problem.***

Over the years I've learned that being open and honest regarding pricing is fundamental to success in sales and marketing. In fact, here are 5 reasons why you should always discuss product costs on your website:

1. People want to know: Wow, now that's deep. But seriously, just like I mentioned above, serious consumers know the Internet will give them the answers there are looking for if they search long enough. And if they can't find them on your site, guess what happens? Yep, they go check out your competitor's site and look for the answers there. Remember, any question a consumer asks about your product should be answered on your company blog/website.

2. Search Engines will give you LOVE: That's right—big time love. Do yourself a favor and go to Google and type in the phrase *Fiberglass Pool Cost* or *How much does a fiberglass pool cost*. If you simply type these phrases in, or any similar phrase for that matter, my [pool company's website](#) will come up 1 or 2 on search results every time.

This page has been #1 on Google for about 2 years now and it's all because I spoke extensively on my website about fiberglass pool pricing before *any* other company in the world did. Crazy.....but true. As mentioned in the video below, this phrase has garnered me thousands and thousands of dollars in sales.

3. Consumers will appreciate your honesty: Despite this nutty myth that consumers don't like to talk about pricing, you will find that most potential clients greatly appreciate the fact that they

were finally able to get great answers from you and your company. This gratitude leads to respect which in-turn leads to trust.....and ultimately leads to sales.

4. You will not waste time with unqualified customers: Because financing has become so difficult these days, the idea of “*If they have a heartbeat we can get ‘emcredit*” is deader than a doornail. I don’t know about you, but as a sales and marketing professional, I’m not interested in spending tons of time trying to sell a product to someone who can’t even afford to buy said product. Remember, our time is very valuable, and the quicker we can focus our relationships and efforts on qualified candidates, the more successful we’ll be.....and the less rejection we’ll receive.

5. No Surprises: Have you ever talked with a client and after having given them your price/quote/proposal they give you that, “Oh my goodness, I’m going to pass out” look? If this has ever happened, you and your website did a pretty poor job preparing them for what was expected. This is also why I always send out at least one well-written “pricing/cost” article to any lead that comes into my data base.

So please take this information to heart. If it’s not there already, get busy talking about pricing on your website. Give the consumers what they’re looking for. Answer their questions. By so doing I can assure you that you and your brand will take another step toward niche domination and your bottom-line will benefit greatly.

How to Come Up with 100 Blog Articles for Your Business in 10 Minutes or Less

Content Creation—Studies have shown it’s the most difficult part of starting, and maintaining, a successful blog for any business. Having written about 250 blog posts and articles over the past year, I’m stoked to share a system with you that has made the process of article creation simple, fun, and extremely effective.

Although I could go into great detail as to the essential keys to unlimited blog ideas and articles for your business, I’m just going to give here 2 easy-to-follow and succinct strategies.

1. Write down on a sheet of paper EVERY question a prospect/customer has ever asked you.

I know, you may think this sounds odd, but it’s an incredible strategy for helping marketers to start to think like consumers and develop a long-tail keyword strategy at the same time. When

you do this exercise, don't take the time to edit—just write, and write as fast as you can. If you can have someone or a group of people brainstorm consumer questions with you, then even better.

Once you've written down as many questions as possible (25 minimum or you're just either being lazy or your brain is not working), you now have the actual blog titles for all of your articles. For example, if you come up with 30 consumer questions, and you post 2 blogs every week, that means you have roughly 3 months worth of excellent blog articles.

Sound pretty simple? Well it is, it's just that many people make out the process of content creation much more difficult than it needs to be.

2. Focus on Negative Phrases consumers will ask when considering the product

Not sure what negative phrases are? If not, it's time to learn, because they are an essential key to long-tail domination and will work wonders for your blog's organic search results.

Let's assume you sell concrete swimming pools. A few examples of "negative" articles would be: Top 5 Consumer Complaints Regarding Concrete Swimming Pools; Top 5 Problems and Solutions of Concrete Swimming Pools; What are the Pros and Cons of Concrete Swimming Pools? Are Concrete Swimming Pools Bad? Read 5 Very Interesting Customer Reviews Regarding Concrete Swimming Pools

Hopefully you're seeing my point here and how the pattern works. When I explain this pattern to business owners, rarely do they understand it at first. In their minds, why would it do any good to even mention the negatives of a product? Although I do see why this would initially be a concern, you must remember these two keys: Consumers are going to search for these phrases whether you like it or not. That's what they do. By addressing a product's supposed drawbacks, problems, etc., you can actually beat your competitors to the punch and explain fully the good, bad, and ugly of a product—thus lending you massive credibility and thwarting the efforts of those that might talk down your product.

Hopefully you understand these two simple steps and will now apply them to your company's content marketing campaign.

I can assure you as you follow these steps, you will be amazed at just how many new ideas and articles come rushing to your mind. Not only will this prevent writer's block and frustration, but it will also lay the pattern to huge traffic results and respect from consumers and search engines alike.

7 Content Marketing Ideas that Will Blow Up Your Brand and Business in 12 Months or Less -- Guaranteed

OK, we've heard all the phrases—**Content is king, Content Rules, Content is Everything**.... Yes, yes, yes, it's true, no doubt. But the real question is no longer about just producing content—it's about writing stuff that truly teaches, inspires, and answers consumer questions. And not only that, it's about producing content that stands out—that's opinionated—and makes the world (your industry) take notice.

So the obvious question is how? How can your business come up with article ideas that will skyrocket your brand, garner web traffic, and also rock and roll when it comes to SEO (search engine optimization)?

That's what this article is all about. Having coached in the last year businesses from all walks around the globe on this very subject, I'm stoked to discuss today simple yet extremely unique strategies that will not only give you stacks upon stacks of consumer and SEO friendly content, but will also leave you thinking in no time (once you look at your website's analytics)—“Wow, how did this all happen??”

7 Content Ideas that Will Forever Change Your Business

1. Pricing Articles

I'm always amazed at how often I'll go to a company's website and they are afraid to discuss pricing. I'm telling you, this is just about the dumbest thing ever. For whatever reason, many companies want to have customers meet with a sales person before that evil thing we call “pricing” is ever brought up.

But think about it for a second—When you're interested in a product, what's the first thing you look for when you're on someone's site? Yep, that's right, you want to know how much the dang thing costs. And if you can't find any pricing info? That's right, you move on to the next site.

So if you're a business owner and you're not talking about product pricing on your website, then get with the program, because you're not only losing business but it also appears as if you're embarrassed about your own pricing. (Keep in mind here that you don't have to always give

specific pricing per se. Ranges are fine, especially if your product or service varies in its cost.)

Just to give you an example of what I'm talking about, type in "fiberglass pool pricing" in your little Google box. In the first couple of places you'll see [this article](#) that I wrote about 1 year ago. And how many views has it gotten during this 12 month period? Well, to be exact, a decent 31,279 reads. Not too bad, eh?

2. Cost Articles

I know what you're thinking—"Marcus, you just talked about this." Yes, I did, but in the eyes of Google and their algorithm, I clearly did not. You see, when it comes to product pricing, there is a large group of people that will type/search (let's assume your company sells widgets) "Widget Pricing" or "Prices on Widgets" and then there is another group that will type in "Widget Costs" or "Costs of Widgets."

Are you seeing what I'm saying here? When it comes to awesome content that gets major love from the search engines you need to write articles that address ***exact phrases and words***, not just general ideas. This is very, very critical to understand if you want to be successful.

Just to shed further light on this, the most successful page on my pool website is far and away the [fiberglass pool cost page](#), which, in the last year alone has been read exactly 54,305 times. (And no, I'm not kidding).

So to reiterate what I'm saying, the 2 most popular pages on my entire website **both talk about the exact same subject**, but address two very, very different words—cost and price.

3. Vs. Articles

Whenever I meet with a new client, one of the first things I talk with them about is their competing products and manufacturers. For example, let's assume that your company sells John Deere lawnmowers. This being said, you are competing with handfuls of other lawn mower manufacturers, which also means your potential customer base has to choose between said manufacturers.

Let's assume someone came to your store and got a quote on John Deer X model. Then, after going down the street or looking on the Internet, they get a quote on a Husqvarna Y model. Being confused as to which is better, they go to Google for advice and type in *John Deer X vs. Husqvarna Y: Which is Better?* If you've written an article on such a topic, and it's good, there

is a very good chance you could show up on the first page of Google for said results.

A perfect example of one I've written is [“Fiberglass vs Concrete Pools: Which is Better?”](#). This article alone has garnered 56 inbound links and has been read 8,652 times in the last 15 months.

4. Problems Articles

Whenever a person is looking to spend money on a product, one of the first things they do is seek out the negatives or drawbacks to said product. For example, in the inground swimming pool industry, there are 3 types of pools—concrete, vinyl, and fiberglass. And considering that many builders like to blab all day long about the “problems” of the other products (types of pools), consumers are constantly typing in Google “problem” oriented phrases.

To give a powerful example of this, my business partner Jason Hughes once wrote a landmark article called [Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions](#). Because no one in our industry had ever had the guts/marketing sense to write about such a topic, it immediately shot to the first page of Google. And how has it done since? Well, in just over one year it has garnered 137 comments, 168 inbound links, and 25,589 views as of today's date.

Seriously folks, this is an amazing content strategy and you need to do it **today**.

5. Review Articles

I love review articles. So do consumers. But for whatever reason, companies are afraid to write them. My question is this—We market and sell our products and services all day long, during which time we are comparing said products/services with other companies, so why are we so afraid to take these same thoughts and put them to pen?? Frankly, it makes no sense to me at all.

If you really want to see further what I'm talking about here, just type in Google any phrase that has to do with “fiberglass pool reviews” and you'll see one of my articles show up on the first page—every time.

6. Awards

Ahh yes, award articles. Man these work great! Here are a few I've written over the past couple of years with their corresponding stats:

[4 Fiberglass Pool Manufacturers to Watch Out For in 2011](#): This article has garnered 118

inbound links and 1544 views

[Large Fiberglass Pool Design Awards For 2010](#): 1749 views to date

[Small Inground Fiberglass Pool Design Awards For 2010](#): 54 inbound links and 6,886 views to date

You may be asking yourself the question, “What gives me the right to give out awards to vendors/manufacturers in my industry?” The answer is simple—You have an opinion. And you’re an expert in your field. So share it.

As you can see, the traffic and SEO juice is exceptional.

7. Gimmicks

Every industry has its gimmicks. I see it every day in the Internet marketing world, the swimming pool industry, and the many other fields in which I’ve assisted clients. It doesn’t matter the niche, they’re all the same, and there are going to be gimmicks, frauds, hacks, whatever.

But the main question is this: **What are you going to do about it?** Are you going to just let it be or are you going to nail your 95 Thesis to the church door and call them out? Yes, the latter will garner positive and negative attention from those in your field, but in terms of marketing and branding, there’s no question the results will be well worth it.

Here’s an example of a “gimmick” article I’ve written before:

[The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I’ve Ever Seen](#)

So there you have it folks, 7 content ideas that should get your creative juices flowing and if followed through with, will have a huge impact on your company’s brand, web traffic, and bottom line. Yes, I know much of what you read above is a new way of thinking, but trust me, it will work, and if you have further questions as to how, email me at marcus1@thesaleslion.com and we’ll make it happen together.

How Brutally Honest Blogging(Teaching) will Skyrocket Your Business to the Top of Your Industry

As I've been stressing quite a bit lately, the giving of great content, especially by means of that wonderful tool we call blogging, is the future key to the marketing success of any business or niche. By moving from the industrial age to the information age, the minds and shopping patterns of today's consumers are quite different than they were just a few short years ago. This is why content marketing—i.e. blogging, is taking the world by storm.

But what's most interesting as I analyze businesses around the globe is that although most now understand that they must teach and give great content to their consumer base, they really don't know how to achieve such a task effectively. Yes, many companies are able to accurately portray what makes their products wonderful and how consumers will benefit from said products, but the truth is this method is only half of the equation. And what's the equation?

He who gives consumers the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of a product will always be the content king.

And for the sake of this article, I really want you to focus on the “bad” and “ugly,” as we all pretty much understand how to talk and teach consumers about the ‘good’ regarding our products and services. Allow me to explain.

As an entrepreneur, my main business is in the swimming pool industry. Specifically, my company specializes in installing fiberglass swimming pools. Each year, thousands and thousands of consumers all over the United States and Canada go through the process of buying an inground swimming pool. And for many of these people, the process is not an easy one. Essentially, pool shoppers have to answer the following main questions: What type of pool should I choose? (Concrete, Vinyl Liner, or Fiberglass) If I'm going with fiberglass, which manufacturer will best suite my needs? Which builder will I feel most comfortable with? Etc., etc., etc.

Such questions are applicable to any industry. When a consumer is in the buying process, they will naturally ask many questions. These questions will lead to research, which is where the whole paradigm of blogging and content marketing, showing the good, the bad, and the ugly, comes into play. Turning back to swimming pools, let me explain how this is key.

Up Front Information

Often times I have customers that are debating between a fiberglass and concrete pool. These same shoppers will typically get a quote from a fiberglass pool builder (like my company) and

then they'll also go to a concrete pool builder. During this process, you can imagine a lot of misinformation and product-bashing gets thrown around.

As we know all too well with sales, some supposed "sales professionals" will do or say anything to sway a consumer to their way of thinking. In my case, concrete pool companies will often point out to shoppers the possible problems, issues, and draw backs to owning a fiberglass swimming pool. Some of their points are legitimate, and others are total bologna, but notwithstanding it causes a consumer to be left trying to choose between the words of one sales person versus another.

This is where proper blogging and content marketing comes into serious play.

Recognizing that consumers are going to hear all types of "problems" and "myths" regarding fiberglass pools, my business partners and I set out over a year ago to beat our competitors to the punch. In other words, unlike most pool companies that sit there and praise their type of swimming pool "hook or crook," we've elected to go the informative, non-biased route and teach our customers all of the good, the bad, and the ugly that come with fiberglass swimming pools.

Literally, as far as I'm aware, this is a paradigm that is not currently shared by a single company in the swimming pool industry. (That is until everyone reads this blog tomorrow.)

But the flaw is not specific to the swimming pool industry; it's prevalent in just about every industry you can possibly imagine. Everyone is one-sided. Everyone is biased. And consumers, frankly speaking, see right through the crapola.

Be Different

This is why the company in any industry that is not afraid to stand up and blog about the good, the bad, and the ugly of their products will eventually gain the respect, admiration, and loyalty of the consumer base.

For example, out of all the blogs my company has ever produced, (over 125 the past 12 months) do you know what the two most popular articles are?

#1: [Fiberglass Pool Prices: How Much is My Pool Really Going to Cost](#)

#2: [Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions](#)

Both have had thousands of views and with a little bit of analysis, it's no wonder why these two articles have done so very well for us. I attribute their success to 3 main reasons:

1. Most pool companies are scared to talk in-depth about pricing on their website. This strategy

is the antithesis of true content marketing and is, for lack of a better term, dumb. This is especially true for the “problems” article. Obviously, because businesses are so scared to even mention the possibility their product might have some inherent flaws, they elect to only paint pretty pictures, all-the-while doubting the consumer’s ability to see right through their biased tendencies.

2. The first question a serious fiberglass pool shopper is going to ask is: How much does a fiberglass pool cost?

3. The reason why the “problems” article is so prolific is because after a shopper talks to a concrete pool sales person and hears about all the supposed issues with fiberglass pools, the first thing they are going to do is attempt to verify the fact with Google.

This is why if you go on Google right now and type in “fiberglass pool cost” or “fiberglass pool problems,” my company’s site is going to show up number one. You see, when it comes down to it, Google ain’t stupid. Their search engines, although sometimes slow, will eventually find the best and most relevant search content. Such is their job and they are doing it better and better with each passing day.

A Broken Paradigm

Recently I got into a debate with someone in my industry regarding my belief in giving consumers the good and bad points to any product. Because this person is such an advocate for fiberglass swimming pools, he thought it was a bad idea to even mention any of their flaws. Sadly, his paradigm is shared by roughly 99% of small businesses out there. But this is why he is wrong:

Consumers are getting better and better at searching online. So whether we (as biz owners and marketers) want to accept it or not, they are going to find and learn about all the good and bad of any product.

Because consumers will eventually find and learn about all sides, addressing a product’s issues upfront versus acting like such problems don’t exist is incredibly proactive and effective. Doing it any other way just doesn’t make any sense.

This is why he who paints the entire picture, instead of just part of it, will gain dominance in his niche and/or industry. Just go to my [blog](#) on fiberglass pool problems and see how many comments are under the article. Literally, there isn’t a single blog article in the entire pool industry that comes close to so many comments.

The Challenge

So to those persons that think that such a strategy of utter honesty is a bad method for content marketing and blogging, I seriously beg to differ and would ask you to reconsider your antiquated methodology of thought.

To close, I just want to challenge all business owners to start seeing the world through **their customer's eyes**. Start writing for *them*. Their thoughts, concerns, questions, etc should be the core of any business' website and blog platform. Blog with brutal honesty. Be real. Be different. Have some guts and give consumers answers to *all* the questions they want to hear. I can promise you the results will be unbelievable.

6 Ways to Be a Blogging Rebel and Turn Your Industry Upside Down

There is one rule I'm 100% certain of when it comes to blogging, be it business or personal:
We all want to be noticed, seen, and respected.

Some folks act like they don't care about these three words but I honestly feel it's a bunch of bull. Why?

Because if we didn't *really* want to be seen we wouldn't have an **online** blog in the first place for the entire world to see.

I freely admit that like everyone reading this, **I want to be viewed as a thought-leader in my field.** (Why are we embarrassed to admit this btw??) Whether it's swimming pools, inbound marketing, blogging, etc—I want readers.

I want growth.

I want to spark discussion.

I want to force myself and everyone around me to take a stand.

(***Notice here I didn't say I want everyone to *like* me, but that's another point for another day.)
But again, I'm by no means alone, we're all in this boat together.

Despite our overall uniform desires of recognition (of some kind), well over 90% of us fail in this endeavor. When it comes down to the brass tacks, our blogs lack the "it" factor. Notwithstanding all our hard work and efforts, **we miss the mark**. We're left out of the crème

that rises to the top.

As I look around the world of business blogging today, and the saturation that is occurring at a faster and faster rate within each industry, I wanted to offer my thoughts on how any of you reading this can stand out from the crowd. How can you, despite the competition, stake your blog's claim as one of the best in your business?

Let's talk about it....

1. Compare Like Mad

Some of you have read before how I've discussed the power of "vs." and "comparison" when it comes to blogging. Without a doubt, this is still the most underutilized and untapped content tool in the world of blogging today.

For example, when I started in the fiberglass pool industry, consumers kept asking me which manufacturers were the best, and which ones I suggested they stay away from. (Similar to someone saying, "Which is better, Ford or Chevy?")

Upon hearing these same questions over and over again, I knew it was my duty as a content marketer (and thought-leader) to put my opinions to pen. So I started writing. Just a few of the articles were:

Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews/Ratings: Which is Better? (Results: 125 inbound links and 13,195 page views)

San Juan vs. Viking Pools Ratings/Reviews: Which is Better? (Results: 22 inbound links and 6050 page views)

Fiberglass Pools vs. Vinyl Liner Pools vs. Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison (Results: 201 inbound links and 21,577 page views)

With each one of these articles (plus the many, many more I've written), they all rank #1 on Google for their respective key word phrases, and the reason for this SEO domination is very simple: **I was the only one writing them in the industry, and Google appreciates rebels that aren't afraid to write about what others aren't willing to.**

2. Don't Be Bullied by Dinosaurs

I was about 30 years old when I started voicing my opinions online with respect to swimming pools. Most of the leaders in my field were in the +45 crowd. This being said, I was attacked, verbally, a lot. I was also [sent letters](#) from lawyers, a lot.

Before long, I realized an important truth: Many industry leaders and their lawyers are like the big bully on the playground—**If you stand up to them and even punch them in the face, they'll likely run away and their true colors will come out.**

Once I stopped caring about false threats and started realizing I was always within my rights (due to the fact I was stating the truth), everything changed, and the amount of attention we received as thought-leaders skyrocketed.

3. Question the Way It Has Always Been Done

Don't like the way things are done in your industry?

If so, then **stop complaining and do something about it.** Use the power of words or video to change the status quo. Stand tall and tell everyone why you believe what you believe.

As an example of this, the warranties in the fiberglass swimming pool industry are ridiculous. Full of tricky semantics, some are very, very misleading to consumers.

Seeing this problem, I posted an article entitled: [The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I've Ever Seen](#), and to say this article got much attention and page views would be a mild understatement.

Remember, this applies to every single niche, field, industry, etc., so don't feel you're the exception to the rule.

4. Be 'The Drudge Report' of Your Industry

Whether you're a republican or democrat, you have to respect what **The Drudge Report** has done in terms of building its brand by breaking news and events.

So often on the web, "timing" is everything, which is why your blog should report on the latest

events, as they happen, in your industry. If a major manufacturer makes an acquisition, talk about it. If someone files bankruptcy, talk about it. If there is a significant innovation, talk about it.

But remember, the timing to this is critical, so as you see things start to unfold, **get to your computer.**

5. State the Best and Worst

Everyone loves “Best of” and “Worst of” Lists. Surprisingly, most industries don’t have them. Most folks refuse to write about them. Why? Because they’ll get attacked, judged, criticized, etc. Just ask **Jade Craven** who writes ProBlogger’s “[Bloggers to Watch](#)” List every year. Heck, Jade doesn’t even call them the “best bloggers,” she just calls them “worth watching,” yet the article is still anticipated by thousands every year, discussed all around the Internet, and at the same time criticized by many.

Again, this goes back to having an opinion about your industry and putting it out there. Write your opinions down. Tell us why you’ve reached those opinions. And then stand by your claims.

6. Question Authority if You Feel They’re Wrong

What’s the deal with people being afraid to question authority in their fields? I see this everywhere and wonder sometimes if 99% of us have become the sheep that aimlessly follow the shepherd without any rhyme or reason.

Here is a good rule of thumb my friends: **If someone in your industry, especially a leader, says something you don’t agree with, then write about it.**

Got me?

But there is a second part to this: **Don’t be a jerk. Don’t call someone names. Don’t question motives. Just state your opposite opinion with class.**

Long Tail Keywords: The Greatest Key to SEO and Business Blogging Success

Most small business blogs stink. I'm sorry if that offends you. Fact is, it's true. There are many reasons for it, but none more important than what I want to briefly talk about and then show you (via video) today.

A few months ago, I wrote a blog about [long-tail keywords and what they are](#). Although I don't want to go into too much depth here regarding this "low hanging fruit" of the World Wide Web, suffices to say that long tail keywords consist of longer phrases (usually at least 3 words or more) that Internet searches are entering in order to find more specific data regarding a particular niche. Here is an example: Short Tail: Chicken; Medium Tail: Rotisserie Chicken; Long Tail: How to Prepare Rotisserie Chicken

Because Internet users are becoming more and more adroit at searching and finding information online, the floodgates are wide open for any businesses that is able to aggressively go after these "longer phrases" and beat others to the punch.

This process of developing a killer small business blog and dominating your niche via the long-tail is not as hard as it might sound, and in my opinion really only requires 3 essential qualities:

1. **Think Like a Homeowner.**
2. **Write Homeowner Friendly Blog Titles and Articles**
3. **Consistency in Post Frequency**

Business owners and employees have a big problem when it comes to content marketing: they often think like business owners and employees. You may snicker at this but it's absolutely true. The curse of knowledge can kill anyone's ability to speak at the level of their audience.

In order to overcome this problem, the most important exercise a business owner or content marketer can do for his or her blog is to sit down and write the 20 most prominent questions consumers ask regarding his or her product. These questions formulate perfect titles for blog articles and combined with solid content and regularity (post at least twice a week), a blog's traffic will quickly skyrocket because of its consumer-centric appeal. If you haven't ever done this exercise, stop putting it off. **It works.**

Remember: Any question, and I really mean ANY, that a consumer asks regarding a

product or service is worth writing about. And it's the businesses that are most aware of these questions that end up producing the best content for search engines and eventually garnering the most viewers.

I can say this because my swimming pool blog is easily the most popular in its industry. Also, our traffic is in the 99th percentile for swimming pool companies. So by simply going after longer phrases with our blog articles (thinking like consumers), we've been able to bypass other companies that are multi-million dollar operations. In fact, our traffic is so prolific throughout the United States and Canada that I'm now partnering up with consumer-lead services because we get a mountain of leads outside of our consumer area and I just hate throwing them all away.

Low Hanging Fruit, Long Tail Keywords, and How to Dominate the Big Boys

Almost one year ago to the day, I, like most small businesses trying to break into the world of Search Engine Optimization, felt like a man at the bottom of Mount Everest, looking up into the clouds and wondering how I could possibly get to the top. And when I say top, I mean website traffic, and lots of it.

I wanted to be the site other companies in my industry looked up to when they set their traffic goals. I wanted to be the industry standard, the example, the hub of consumer information.....But the task was going to be difficult, and even worse, I was attempting to climb a mountain – for the first time.

As all my readers are well aware, I own (along w/ two partners) a fiberglass swimming pool installation company. In terms of web traffic within this industry, fiberglass pool manufacturers dominate. Why? Mainly because their Google page rank is so high with two simple phrases: “fiberglass pools” and “fiberglass pool.” Those two words garner over 20,000 searches a month on Google and therefore catapult the manufacturers to the top, with most builders like me lagging way behind.

Why Small Biz Web Traffic Stinks

In fact, the majority of pool builders get very, very little web traffic. And when I say very little, I mean between 10-20 unique visitors a day.....if that. The reasons for this are many but the main cause of the problem reverts back to poor SEO practices—As I've mentioned ad nauseam on this blog, most builders have awful websites. They don't offer the consumer remarkable content. They don't teach. They don't inform. Essentially, the sites are glorified business cards.

But this problem within the swimming pool industry is no different than 90% of other small

businesses around the world. Carpenters, plumbers, builders, electricians, home improvement companies—they are all the same. When it comes to web traffic and web lead generation, they stink. In fact, many of these companies depend on their suppliers and manufacturers to give them all their leads. And if they ain't getting leads from their manufacturers, they immediately turn to Google Adwords and start throwing money their way. Needless to say, it's a nasty cycle.

Less Dependency

Luckily, when I started this process about a year ago, I understood this cycle for what it was, and I didn't want any part of it. In fact, if there is one thing I learned a long time ago in business it's the more a small business is dependent on "others" for lead creation and generation, the more they're in trouble. I didn't want to ever sit at my desk and wait for my pool manufacturer to send me a lead. In fact, I wanted to beat *them* to the leads. Frankly, I wanted to beat all the manufacturers to the leads. This is what my SEO quest has been all about.

As I've mentioned before, this quest started with blogging. My initial blogging goals were simple: I wanted to get on the first page with the words "fiberglass pools" and "fiberglass pool."

After the first few articles though, I realized my positioning with those two words weren't really moving. In fact, the blog seemed to be a failure. I was bummed.

Common Sense Blogging

My experience was nothing unique though. Many bloggers, especially small biz bloggers, deal with a sense of hopelessness at the beginning of blogging escapades. We live in a society of *results*. And we want *fast* results at that. Unfortunately, blogs don't typically work that way. But with lots of persistence mixed in with common sense, blogs can take any business' SEO results to new heights.

And what do I mean by common sense? I mean that you need to start blogging to *answer questions of consumers*. Stop thinking like a business owner or marketer and start thinking just as a consumer would. This is why you should make a list today of the top 20 questions a consumer asks when they are considering the purchase of your product. These questions will form the foundation of your Long-Tail Keyword strategy, or as I like to put it, your business' *Low-Hanging Fruit*.

Low Hanging (SEO) Fruit

The website Wisegeek gives a nice explanation of low-hanging fruit:

We have Mother Nature to thank for the expression *low-hanging fruit*. A fruit-bearing

tree often contains some branches low enough for animals and humans to reach without much effort. The fruit contained on these lower branches may be not be as ripe or attractive as the fruit on higher limbs, but it is usually more abundant and easier to harvest. From this we get the popular expression “low hanging fruit,” which generally means selecting the easiest targets with the least amount of effort.

This concept of low-hanging fruit is the whole reason my company’s blog eventually exploded. Instead of worrying about more difficult keywords such as “fiberglass pools,” I started focusing on questions/topics regarding fiberglass pools that consumers would be asking themselves and therefore turning to Google for answers. In the world of SEO, these phrases are what’s known as “Long Tail Keywords.” There are also short and mid-tail keywords. An example of this would be: “Pools”—Short Tail “Fiberglass Pools”—Mid Tail “What are some sizes of fiberglass pools?” – Long Tail

Do you see the difference? Obviously, long-tail keywords are much more targeted and specific, which is what makes them so wonderful. Just look at it this way, which customer/lead would you rather have, the person that found your website (Let’s assume you sell and install cabinets) by typing in “Cabinets” or the person that typed in the phrase “How much do mahogany cabinets cost installed?” I’m sure you’d choose the second, as such a phrase would indicate the high level of seriousness of the shopper.

The beauty of blogging is that you could easily write an article entitled, “How Much do Mahogany Cabinets Cost Installed?” and I can practically guarantee it would quickly move to the front page of Google for that keyword phrase, simply because the competition for such a word is so low.

It Only Takes One Great Article

Let me give you an example from my business. My partner Jason once wrote an article entitled, “Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions.” Immediately, this article captured the first spot on Google for many long-tail keyword phrases such as: “*Fiberglass Pool Problems*,” “*Problems with Fiberglass Pools*,” and many others (Type a few in your search engine and see what I’m talking about).

And although such phrases might not register that high for monthly searches on Google, the blog article has now been read over 5,000 times this past year. Think about that for a second.....The average pool builder gets about 5,000 visits a year on their website and this ONE article garnered our website over 5,000 views alone! Now that’s what I call some low-hanging fruit.

The “Fiberglass Pool Problems” article is just one example of many long-tail keyword phrases we’ve written about since we started thinking like a consumer. This is also why, even though we STILL are not on the first page of Google for “Fiberglass Pools,” our site traffic has now moved well past every fiberglass pool manufacturer in our industry. While they’ve been fighting over

the attractive fruit that is higher in the tree, we've snatched as much of the low-hanging fruit off of every branch we could find, and we now stand at the top of the traffic mountain that, just under one year ago, seemed insurmountable.

Your Turn

Hopefully you can see just how simple a strategy this is. It doesn't require you to be an SEO genius. And it doesn't require a bunch of money. In fact, it only requires 3 things: A business blog

- **Write at least 2 articles a week**
- **Start thinking and acting like a customer**

That's it. That's all it takes. And I can promise you that if you do these things your site's traffic, along with your company's leads and sales, will reach heights you never imagined possible.

The Most Common Business Blogging and SEO Mistake in the World

Over the past week, because of my guest post on [Social Media Examiner](#) and due to the increased traffic here on **The Sales Lion**, I've had the opportunity to look at 28 business blogs that are doing their best to embrace this thing we call **Content Marketing**.

Yet out of these 28, I'd say 26 are making the same mistake again and again and again. In fact, because I keep writing the same diagnosis to business owners I figured I should start using my brain and simply write a post on the subject.

It All Comes Down to Goals

But let me just cut to the chase by making this critical statement, one I earnestly hope you will take to heart for your business' blog from today forward:

If you don't have a keyword phrase goal for *every* blog post you ever write, you're missing the boat.

In other words, if I looked at your company's last 10 blog posts, from the title of the post alone could I clearly tell what your target keyword goal was for that post??

Yep, that's the magical question, the one that 26 out of 28 blogs this past week clearly cannot answer.

People constantly send me emails wondering why they are getting little traffic with their blog posts. Usually, within seconds of looking at their writings, the problems jump off the page.

The Problem with Terrible Post Titles

Although there are some core SEO problems that most folks suffer from, terrible post titles takes the cake again and again and again.

There is a little debate as to whether or not blog titles should be more "witty" (written to attract readers) or more "SEO oriented" (written to attract the search engines).

I submit that it's usually possible to achieve both, but for over 99% of all blogs in this world that have very few subscribers, **SEO in the title should be the first priority**. The reason for this is simple—**SEO is the gift that keeps on giving**. When you rank on the first page of Google for a particular keyword phrase, the new business and customers that can come from that one post can literally last for years to come. (I've experienced this many, many times.)

This is why most folks need to **quit with the witty titles that make no SEO sense and start enriching said titles with a keyword phrase**, preferably one of the long-tail.

For example, here is a really dumb blog title:

"The Big Secret Your Pool Guy is Not Telling You"

(As you might imagine, no one is typing in Google the keyword phrase "big secrets from pool guys.")

Now take the same blog post, and change the title to:

"The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I've Ever Seen"

The second title is not only keyword rich (fiberglass pool warranty), but it's very attractive to readers as well. (It also ranks on the first page of Google for the phrase, as it's an article on my swimming pool site.)

Real Life Examples: Can You Guess the Keyword Goals?

Let me show you some real life examples of what I'm talking about here. Although I don't always write titles for SEO here on **The Sales Lion**, many do have a keyword goal. With my swimming pool company, EVERY article has a keyword goal. (Remember** Because I have so many subscribers here on TSL and it's more of a "social" niche, I can have more of a mix. With swimming pools not being a "social" niche, it's all about the SEO). I'm going to show you a blog post, and see if you can guess what the targeted keyword phrases were with each (before I tell you the answer below each image).



The Most Important Customer Review of Hubspot You'll Ever Read
by MARCUS SHERIDAN

We live in interesting times. For small businesses throughout the world, it's a time when many are realizing the need to make a change. The old stuff no longer works. Whether it's radio, TV, print, direct mail, etc.—the times have changed. These forms of outbound marketing are, more or less, dead in most industries. Inbound marketing (attracting people to your site) is the new wave, the future of the way all small businesses will think and act. But for a HUGE majority of these businesses that are the heart of the world's economy, there's a major problem—

99 21
Tweet Share

Keyword Goals: "HubSpot Reviews" (#3 on Google Currently), "HubSpot Customer Reviews" (#5 Google Currently)

The 13 Best and Most Powerful Blog Header Designs on the Internet

by MARCUS SHERIDAN



Over the past few days, I've looked at hundreds of websites and blog headers. I

started with **Brankica Underwood's** incredible list of 199 blogs you should be reading and worked my way from there. And as I looked around, the more I realized this sad reality—**Most blog headers fail to induce any emotion and connection with the blog, and it's a shame.**

97

Tweet

46

Share

Keyword Goals: “Blog Headers” (#3 on Google Currently) “Best Blog Headers” (#3 Google)
“Blog Headers Designs” (#2 Google)

The Most Important Small Business Video Marketing Tip You'll Ever Receive

by MARCUS SHERIDAN



While speaking at the Hubspot User Group conference last month, a kind lady in the crowd asked me the following question:

“Marcus, what are your thoughts on video? I read all of this stuff that I ‘have to do’ and I feel overwhelmed just getting started.”

300

Tweet

30

Share

Keyword Goals: “Small Business Video Marketing Tips” (Currently #1 on Google)

Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions

Posted by Jason Hughes

Like1

Tweet1

+11

in Share

By Jason Hughes

If you're considering the purchase of an inground fiberglass pool and done any research on the web, you've probably come in contact with some discussion of the problems associated with fiberglass pools. The purpose of this article is to address, with full disclosure, five of the most common problems associated with

Keyword Goals: “Fiberglass Swimming Pool Problems” (#1 Google), “Fiberglass Pool Problems” (#1 Google)

How Much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan

Like2

Tweet0

+11

in Share

How much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

By Marcus Sheridan



One of the first questions a pool shopper asks themselves when they begin the process of buying a swimming pool is: How much does a pool cost, and what are the expected prices for the different types of

Keyword Goals: “Inbound Pool Cost” (#3 Google), “Above Ground Pool Cost” (#3 Google), “How much do Inground Pools Cost?” (#1 Google), “How much do above ground pools cost?” (#1 Google)

State Your Keyword Goals and Watch the Results Follow

Hopefully, as you looked at each one of these blog titles, the keyword goal(s) of each became immediately obvious. This is exactly how it should be for your company blog. Remember, the key is that you always have a clear goal. Once you establish this one little habit, you'll notice

your organic search visit traffic will start to go up and you'll rank for more and more keywords with each post.

5 Small Business Blogging Myths Most “Experts” Don’t Understand

We’ve all heard them—the do’s and don’ts of blogging. The “secrets” that will take your personal or company blog to new heights of greatness or, if done poorly, valleys of “traffic despair.” And although much of what is taught as general rule in the public forum is good, small businesses must come to understand certain *myths* that surround this sometimes rewarding and other times frustrating animal we call content marketing and blogging.

So let’s just get right to it. I wanted to take the time today to discuss what 2 years of blogging for various businesses has taught me and hopefully it will inspire some of you to possibly take your blog and company website to new heights in 2011. Here goes:

Top 5 Small Business Blogging Myths

1. Guest Posting is the Key to Success and a Larger Audience

Ahh yes, the lovely concept of “guest posting.” Let me just say here I’m a huge fan of guest posting. In certain applications, it’s awesome. But frankly, there are simply some industries where it’s not worth a rip.

As an example, in two weeks I’ll be guest posting on the extremely popular blog “[Men with Pens](#).” Because the blog has a huge following of people that are passionate about writing and blogging, it’s the perfect fit, and will surely garner my site hundreds of visitors and many subscribers that otherwise would not have ever taken a trip over here to The Sales Lion.

But let’s switch gears for a second. Another blog I write teaches people the ins and outs of inground swimming pools. When I started blogging in the swimming pool industry 2 years ago, guess how many companies actually understood what true blogging/content marketing was? If you guess ZERO, you’re about right. Yeah, sure there were some decent websites out there, but none were based on Web 2.0 principles. In other words, I couldn’t have done a guest post if I wanted to, and if I had, it wouldn’t have been read by anyone nor garnered me any additional traffic.

So it really comes down to your niche. Chances are though, if it's a blue collar niche you're in there are likely very few successful content marketers (which is good).

2. SEO is Difficult to Achieve

Again, this depends on the niche. Most people want to simply blanket search engine optimization as a difficult strategy only accomplished through the strategic use of keywords and a mountain of anchor text links coming back to one's site.

The reality is that most industries are still up for the taking when it comes to garnering web traffic through the search engines. Why? Because there just aren't many smart content marketers out there that are speaking "consumer: speak versus "nerd speak."

Going back to my swimming pool blog, over the past 2 years I haven't spent one second on guest posting, link building, or anything of that nature. What I have done though is write articles that answer specific consumer questions, exactly as the consumer would understand and read them. The strategy has paid some major dividends and is why it's the #1 swimming pool blog in the world today.

3. Commenting on Other Blogs Is/Is Not Important

Notice how I said here "Is/Is not" important. That's because depending on who you talk to, commenting on other blogs is either a great traffic building strategy or a waste of time. Well ladies and gentlemen, again this one comes down to your niche and industry (notice a common theme?). For example, the self-improvement/blogging/SEO industry is full of people that read various blogs. And because they are such avid blog readers, the more a writer can be seen in the public as "participating in the conversation" the more chance they have of gaining fans and followers. In fact, the biggest mistake I made on this blog in its first 6 months was the fact that I did not understand this critical concept and rarely commented on other blogs.

But the reality is that I only did this based on what I'd learned in the swimming pool industry. When I started The Sales Lion I figured I'd garner enough traffic by giving readers great content that was keyword (SEO) related. But within a few months I realized that some industries are really dang competitive, whereas others are not. Although I could gain a huge following on my pool blog by simply producing great content, I had to learn Twitter, networking, commenting, etc in order to make The Sales Lion a success.

4. RSS is Used by Everyone

I'm shocked at how many bloggers in the web/bloggging/SEO industry do not have “**Subscribe by Email**” buttons on their site. The reason for this is simple—Bloggers are suffering from the *curse of knowledge* and assuming that everyone knows what an RSS feeder is, which is nuts.

To give a better example of this, on my swimming pool blog 90% of the subscribers are through email, and only 10% are with RSS. Compare that to The Sales Lion where the exact opposite is true—80% RSS and about 20% email.

My point here is that consumers make an industry and niche what it is. With many older, non-technical folks in their 50s, the swimming pool industry will be mainly email subscription based for at least another 5-10 years until RSS crosses over to more “non-technical” households.

5. Blogging is a Waste of Time for Location-Based Businesses

This one really gets me going. You see, there are some people that feel content marketing/bloggging is a waste for a small business that has a finite area of coverage. To be completely frank, whoever makes such a statement is a total idiot and has no idea what they're talking about.

My swimming [pool company](#) only builds pools in Virginia and Maryland, yet we write a blog that teaches the entire world about our product and industry. Because of this, many people have asked me in the past why I focus on getting all that traffic even though a large portion of the visitors are not in my area. There are many answers for this question, but the main 2 are this:

Blogs aren't just about producing search engine traffic. They teach, build trust, and ultimately earn sales with existing customers and persons in your sales funnel. Out of 500 visitors that come to my site, if only 30 are in my area but came to the site because of a search engine query stemming from my blog, it was more than worth it, as those 30 visitors never would have found me otherwise.

Although I could go on and on about this subject I'm sure you've picked up on the theme of this article. **Every industry, and therefore every blog, is different.** And because they are different, there isn't a “one size fits all” approach to generating traffic and sales. The key is constant action, experimentation, and the ability to adjust as the times dictate.

10,862 Comments Later, I Realize Blog Comments are NOT a Business Model

I had a very interesting conversation with my friend and John Falchetto last week that centered around blog comments. In our discussion, John posed to me a very simple question:

“Marcus, of all the comments on your blog, how many of the people turned out to be actual customers?”

“Hmmm,” I thought “I really don’t think anyone that has commented on TSL has *ever* turned into a paying customer. Some customers have turned into commenters *after* being a client, but not the other way around.”

“Exactly,” said John, “Me neither.”

Think about that for a second: **Over 10,000 comments and not a single customer.**

A Clear Understanding of Goals

You see, what started this conversation with John was my inquiry into his blogging schedule, and the fact that he is now writing a post just about every day, more than double his previous posting schedule. In a nutshell, here are the results:

- 1. Less comments per post (about half of what he used to get, sometimes less)**
- 2. More traffic**
- 3. More paying clients**

In fact, John came right out and said what I’ve been feeling for the past few months:

“I really don’t care about the number of comments on my posts anymore. I’m trying to reach my goals. That’s my focus. And comments don’t fall under my goals. If they come, then great, if not, that’s OK.”

Powerful stuff, wouldn't you agree?

Living and Dying By the Comments of Others

When I first started writing here on TSL in November of 2009, **I lived and died by comments**. I almost passed out with the first one I ever got. Then, the first time I got 10 on a post I almost cried. Next, when I reached 50 comments for the first time I thought my life was complete. When I passed 100 comments on a post the first time I felt a sense of joy that was unbelievable. And finally, when I passed 400 comments on a post, I thought I had died and gone to blogger's heaven. (I know, sounds pretty shallow, but that's where I was at the time, and I think many other people, if they're being honest with themselves, would relate.)

But then something happened. Time went by. The weeks rolled on. The comments just kept on mounting with each and every post.

And oddly, as the comments grew, my sense of joy that came with each declined.

Blogging "Maturity"

Now don't get me wrong here friends. This isn't one of those, "Please stop commenting on my blog" posts. To this day, **I invite comments on every post. I appreciate every one I get from readers. I take them seriously and know the relationships formed through them can clearly lead to tremendous opportunities. I also find them inspiring, enjoyable, and well worth the hours and hours I have spent in responding to each.**

But I've also reached a point in my "blogging maturity" (I guess that's what we'll call it) where I don't feel **validated** anymore purely based on comment numbers. In fact, this is now how I judge the success of a blog post:

1. How many **personal emails** do I get after someone has read the article?
2. What were others moved to do (actions taken) from reading the article?
3. How many **speaking/consulting inquiries** do I get from an article?

Do you see the difference?

Take last [Thursday's post](#) for example. It wasn't about "blogging," or even so much about business, but more about "personal development," a topic I love but don't discuss a ton here on TSL.

Looking at that article, you'll see that it only got around 60 or so comments, a low number based on TSL averages. But at the same time, within 30 minutes after that post had went out to email subscribers, I'd received **5 personal emails** from readers saying how much they appreciated the post. And of these 5 people, all rarely if ever comment on the blog here.

In other words, that post induced enough emotion for the "lurkers" (those that don't typically comment on a blog but actually make up about 95% or more of the audience) to **take action** and send an email. For me, that defines success in a major way, because I want my writings to induce not just thought, but **action**.

Is Your Need for Comments Hindering Your Business Growth?

I wonder how many folks out there are actually hurting their bottom line because they are too focused on blog comments and not focused enough on effective business principles. Or look at it in this way: Are you writing for the 1% that leave comments or the 99% that are silent in the background?

For example, it would have been easy for John Falchetto, if he were so wrapped up in number of comments per post, to shy away from increasing frequency, as he knew comment averages would obviously go down.

But because he now has a clearer vision of what we wants, and the best way to get there, he was able to not allow such a questionable metric to affect him.

I've heard many "A-list" bloggers state a similar point: Posting every day, although it may not lead to more comments, leads to more subscribers, profits, etc.

Am I saying with this that you should post every day?

No, of course not. Personally, I can't imagine myself posting every day, it honestly, at least at this point, doesn't interest me at all.

Looking Elsewhere for Validation

But what I am saying is that our need for “comment validation” and our search for “big numbers” should never get in the way of our ability to meet the other goals we’ve set as bloggers.

For some of you, those goals may be many, with financial gain being a center component.

For others, commenting and discussion may be your only goals. **That’s great too.**

But know thy self. Know thy goals.

And then do whatever it takes to make those goals and dreams a reality.

How Long Does It Truly Take For A Business Blog To Grow and Content Marketing to work?

Over the past year I’ve talked to hundreds of business owners and bloggers about success in this field, and inevitably everyone asks the exact same derivative of this question within the first 10minutes of conversation:

“OK, assuming we do all of this stuff, how long with it take for our blog to grow, produce results, and make sales?”

Ahhh yes, a dang good question indeed.

Despite what any “SEO hack” might tell you, the only answer to this question is, “It all depends.”

And possibly more than anything, it depends on a very important indicator that I like to call “CSI,” or otherwise stated, and industry’s **Content Saturation Index**.

To make CSI easy to understand, it works like this—**The more content an industry/niche has**

written about it, the harder it is for a blog to make headway and find success in that field.

And when an industry has very little online content available to the masses, it can often be gobbled up within almost no time at all.

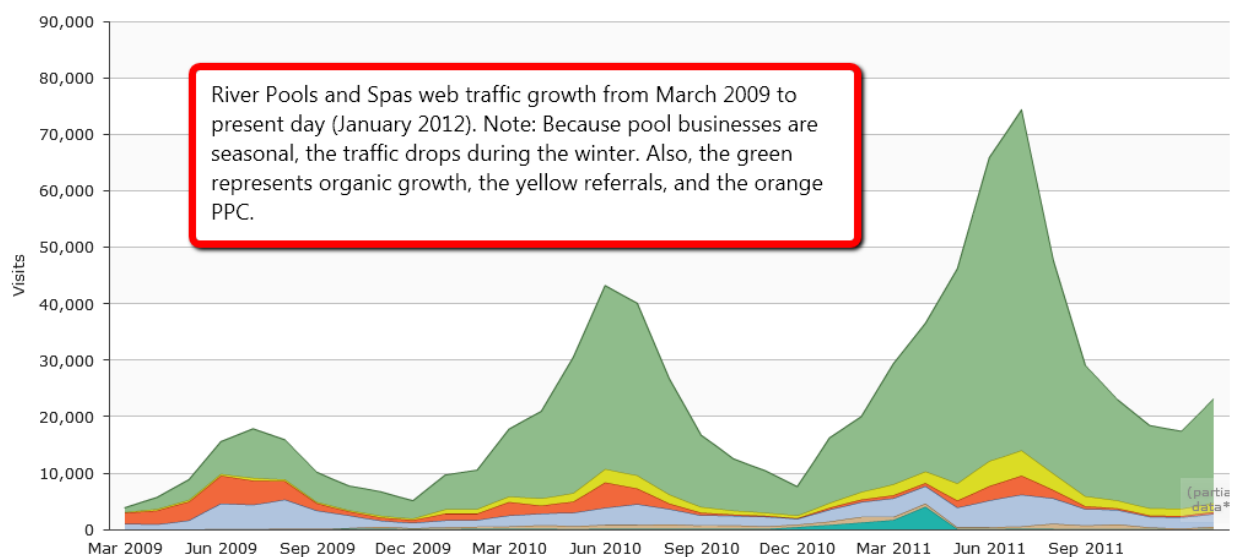
Let me give you an example of both extremes.

River Pools and Spas: Skyrocketing to Success Through Content

In March of 2009, I started blogging for my swimming pool company. At the time, less than 20% of our website traffic was “organic” (free through search). The rest came from PPC (Pay Per Click) and “direct.” Within 6 months, and after blogging 2-3 times a week, there was a significant shift in our numbers and the organic traffic started to grow dramatically. It was also during this time we started to experience more leads and sales because of this new found traffic.

Within 18 months, the blog had elevated the website to an elite status in the swimming pool industry. By now, the [long-tail keyword campaigns](#) were paying huge dividends. Within hours of writing an article with specific keyword goals, we were showing up on the first page of Google. This success also enabled us to cut all of our old-school advertising and go 100% “all-in” with blogging/content marketing.

But keep in mind, all of this would not have been possible had the CSI of the swimming pool industry not been so low. In other words, because so many “pool guys” had zero interest in producing great content on their websites to teach the masses, it left a field wide open for someone like me to come in and have a complete harvest. (Note** I still had to be strategic and smart in terms of topics, SEO, etc.)



And believe it or not, to this day there are many, many industries (especially blue-collar fields) that greatly lack content on the web, and are just waiting for someone (like YOU) to come along and take the bull by the horns and quickly rise to the top.

The Sales Lion: A Slow Rise to Success

On the reverse side of the coin, let's take a look at **The Sales Lion**.

In a field focused on blogging, marketing, and business tips, you can imagine just how much content is currently out there. The amount of folks writing about this stuff is growing by the day, which is one reason why so many bloggers and businesses struggle to stand out in the fields of marketing, self-improvement, sales, etc.

I started The Sales Lion in November of 2009. At the time, I naturally figured I'd just walk right in, just as I'd done in the swimming pool industry, and dominate.

Boy was I wrong.

For the first year, this blog grew *very* little. In fact, it really wasn't until I woke up and started working much harder on my [networking](#) that things finally picked up around the beginning of 2011. Luckily for me, I wasn't dependent on The Sales Lion to pay my bills during this time period, otherwise I would have gone broke.

But by midway 2011, two very important things started happening:

1. Companies started contacting me for inbound/content marketing help.
2. Conferences started contacting me to speak at their events.

Finally, **after almost 20 months of diligently blogging 2-3 times per week**, the Law of Momentum had started to work its magic. The relationships built were paying off. Organic search was actually growing. And a business was starting to form and take shape.



But explaining why things took so much longer to happen for The Sales Lion is again because of the content saturation index being so very, very high in this industry.

And whenever this occurs, solid content is usually not enough to get a blog going. In fact, as I've stated on other occasions, beyond networking I'd strongly suggest bloggers embrace these two core skill-sets:

1. Learning [how to write articles for SEO](#), especially when it comes to proper blog titles.
2. Learn to be a [blogging rebel](#) in your industry. Talk about stuff no one else is willing to talk about.

No matter what an industry's CSI is, if these two needs are not met as well, a blog will likely experience little success.

Yes, But How Long Will it Take??

Before I close this little post, I know some of you still are wondering what the average amount of time is needed for a business blog to show an increase in web traffic, leads, and sales. And although there are countless factors that go into this question, I would say the average for most companies, who intelligently blog at least 2-3 times per week, **is 6-12 months**.

Again, that's an average, but it seems to be the most common number after tracking the success of my clients and other companies over the past 2 years.

Despite this average though, short term results are absolutely possible as well. For example, you could write a blog post today (your first one even) that ranks well for a particular keyword phrase tomorrow, which then leads to a web visitor that same day, who then fills out a form on your website, who then becomes a customer a few days later.

Not only have I seen this scenario many times with both my companies, but every business I've worked with that has **truly** embraced a culture of consistent content marketing has experienced

the same as well.

The Bottom Line

All this being said, really the most important aspect to the question of “How long will it take?” comes down to actually [getting started and doing something](#). Unless you start producing content and pushing it out there to the masses, you’ll never know about time, be it short or long term.

But this much is for certain—**You need to start**. And if you do, *and do it well*, the rest will fall into place.

Why “Community” is NOT the Holy Grail of Blogging and Online Success

Many of you read an article I wrote entitled [10,862 Comments Later, I Realize Blog Comments Are NOT a Business Model](#). At the time, the article certainly got a lot of comments and interaction.

Some understood it.

Others completely missed the mark.

But today’s post is a harder and deeper look at a subject that affects each and every one of us—the **misunderstood concept that is “Online Community.”**

Yep, Let’s Talk Money

As you can tell from the title of this post, today we’re going to talk about money.

The reason for this is simple: **Businesses don’t exist without money.**

I think this statement is one of the most forgotten truths when discussing the subject of online business success.

Again, nothing happens in business without money.

If your business makes enough of it, you smile and turn a profit.

If your business doesn't have enough to pay your bills, and the creditors are after you, and you can't make payroll.....well then **life stinks**.

I should know— [been there, done that](#).

Blogger's Denial

Let me give you an example and then to my point.

A few months ago , while I was attending BlogWorld and grabbing a bite to eat, I happened to see a lady sitting alone at a small table and being that I was looking to meet someone new, plus the fact that all the tables were taken, I asked her if I could join her and she happily obliged.

We proceeded to have a very pleasant conversation about her blog, her large community, the high level of engagement, etc.

Upon hearing all this, I told her that I thought community was great, but blog comments, in and of themselves, were not a business model nor a strong success indicator.

The lady disagreed with me but as we continued our discussion, it came out that her blog was clearly not making enough money .

In other words, she couldn't pay her bills and was very, very concerned.

Although her blog *appeared* successful, there was a reality check happening beyond what was showing in "the community."

In many ways, this very kind lady was wrapped up in a belief that is killing the success of many, many bloggers and businesses today—**that "community" means "profits."**

Nope.

Not even close.

Make the Choice

Now for those of you who legitimately don't care for one second if your blog ever makes a dime, please understand this doesn't apply to you.

But for the large majority that are doing their best through blogging, content marketing, and inbound marketing to make a living, I'd ask you to consider this question:

Would you rather have a thriving online community or a thriving bank account?

And no, you're not allowed to say "both."

Yes, of course the ideal answer is "both," but in this case, let's just pretend you've got to make a choice.

What's the answer going to be?

I submit that too many bloggers are worried more about "offending" their community than actually leveraging said community to turn a profit.

Again, we can love our communities to death and have the greatest intentions in the world, but if we can't pay the bills, it's all for naught.

Focusing on What Matters

Someone recently told me they didn't like my opt-in box on the homepage of my site because it was too "pushy," and that others in the community probably didn't like it either. But considering the incredible amount of eBook downloads that form generates every day, plus the fact so many of those same readers turn into actual consulting and HubSpot customers of mine, **I really don't care if a few people are offended with the box.**

Again, it's about priorities, and paying customers are #1. Because you can't always please every reader you have with every decision you make, sometimes you've simply got to choose the one that leads to the greater good.

You see, I don't think many folks online would ever make such statements, as "community" is viewed by most as the "Holy Grail" of the blogosphere.

And although community is very, very important, it is *not* the Holy Grail.

What is? Happy Customers +Profits = Business success

Now *that* is the Holy Grail.

And if it happens by way of an amazing blogging community, then great.....wonderful. In fact, when a blog/business finds a way to better monetize their community and give great value in the process, then believe it or not the community itself grows stronger. (As noted by the 100+ emails I got last week alone from people that read my newsletter yet don't actively comment on my blog.)

But if a blogger or business owner loses track of this extreme priority, then we have a serious problem.

This Ain't the Field of Dreams

Blogging for business is not like the movie "Field of Dreams." Sure, "*If you build it, they will come*" is a start, but there needs to be a few more words attached to the end of this statement to make it applicable to our industry: **"And once they come, know how to make enough of them happy and paying customers."**

So before your business starts focusing too much on the number of Facebook likes, tweets, silly Alexa rankings, massive amounts of blog comments, or even frivolous Klout scores.....please remember the one thing that we all must have first and foremost on our minds—**Financial Peace.**

The Ultimate 11-Step Plan to Launching a Successful Business Blog in 6 Months or Less

As I sit in a plane and return home from what was another amazing [Content Marketing Workshop](#) experience I had with a Salt Lake City company yesterday, I wanted to discuss a subject that seems to vex so many businesses when it comes to establishing a blog and content marketing plan that not only work, but work **fast** in terms of building a company's brand, increasing leads, and elevating sales.

The following system is one that I've been using over the last year with tremendous results and has been further refined with each client, including 3 that I've launched over the last 30 days. Although the system is best set up for companies with 5 or more employees (I've done this with companies from 5-200 employees thus far), the principles herein absolutely apply to solopreneurs and small partnerships as well. Here goes...

The 11 Step Plan to Creating a Prolific Blog and Culture of Content Marketing

1. Management Buy-In

I know, this can be a toughy. So much so, it's the #1 complaint I've been getting from marketing renegades and it's also something I've written quite a bit about in the past.

But when it comes down to it, unless management is REALLY onboard with creating consistently great content and "gets it," your blog and social media efforts will likely fail. I say this out of much experience because with my individual clients, there is an extremely high correlation between management buy in/involvement and the rate of content marketing success.

2. The "Why" Workshop

You've seen me write about this in the past but more than ever I feel incredibly strong about what I call the **"Why" Workshop**. Centered upon **Simon Sinek's** principle of using the [Golden Circle](#) to establish a deep-rooted culture within organizations, a "Why" Workshop for Content Marketing addresses 3 major questions when it comes to Content Marketing/Social Media:

1. **What** is it?
2. **How's** it done in a way that gets results?
3. **Why** are we really doing this? (From an individual and company perspective)

I'm going to be writing more and more about how Chief Marketing Officers can do these in-house workshops themselves, but I can tell you that if done properly the results are profound and lasting, and about 1000x more effective than a CMO or management member sending out an email to all employees saying: "Blogging and social media will help our company, which is why we are asking everyone to write blog articles going forward."

If you're looking to doom your company's content marketing before it ever even gets going, just send out one of these letters and wait for the flurry of articles to hit your inbox the next day. ;-)

Oh, and one other thing about the "Why" Workshop-- When management tells everyone to stop what they're doing and then takes the time to bring as many employees together as possible in a setting to learn the what, how, and why of content marketing--employees sense what is getting ready to occur is **more than "just another program."**

3. Everyone participates in content brainstorm

I love this activity and it's one that I've seen work incredibly well many, many times. Without going into too much detail, this is what I suggest:

1. Divide employees into groups. Depending on the number of participants, groups of 5-10 employees tend to work best.
2. Assign 1 or 2 members of each group to be scribes/recorders.
3. Tell groups their task is to come up with as many consumer/client questions as possible in 10 minutes. Whoever has the most questions written down at the end, wins.

*(Note*** When I say "consumer question," I mean any question a consumer would type into a search engine assuming they had a problem/need and were looking for an answer.)*

Although this activity may sound a little silly to those that have never watched it in action, I can assure you it's amazing. By the end, employees are starting to catch the vision of how consumers think, how easy it is to come up with content ideas, and the power of synergy when all employees are "content producers" of one shape or form.

And to give you a feel for what to expect, most small groups will typically render a minimum of 20 questions for every 5 minutes of brainstorming. Going forward, **these questions will now be the titles of all your future blog posts.**

4. Individuals Brainstorm

After the initial "Why" Workshop, when content ideas are fresh on everyone's mind, I suggest that each employee in the group is given the task of coming up with 20 additional consumer/client questions on their own. This can be done during the workshop itself or as an assignment for that day, but to give you an idea of how effective it is, my client from earlier this week had about a dozen or so employees do further brainstorming the day of our workshop and they were able to come up with about 300 unique questions-- **well over a year's worth of blog posts and easily enough content to skyrocket their brand and business once it's written and posted.**

5. CCO selection, Management Editor assigned, No Bottlenecks Allowed

This is one step that can't be missed. Depending on the size of your organization, someone is going to need to fill the role as CCO, or **Chief Content Officer**. The scope of this position (and name for that matter) is incredibly flexible based on need, but the key point to remember is that someone

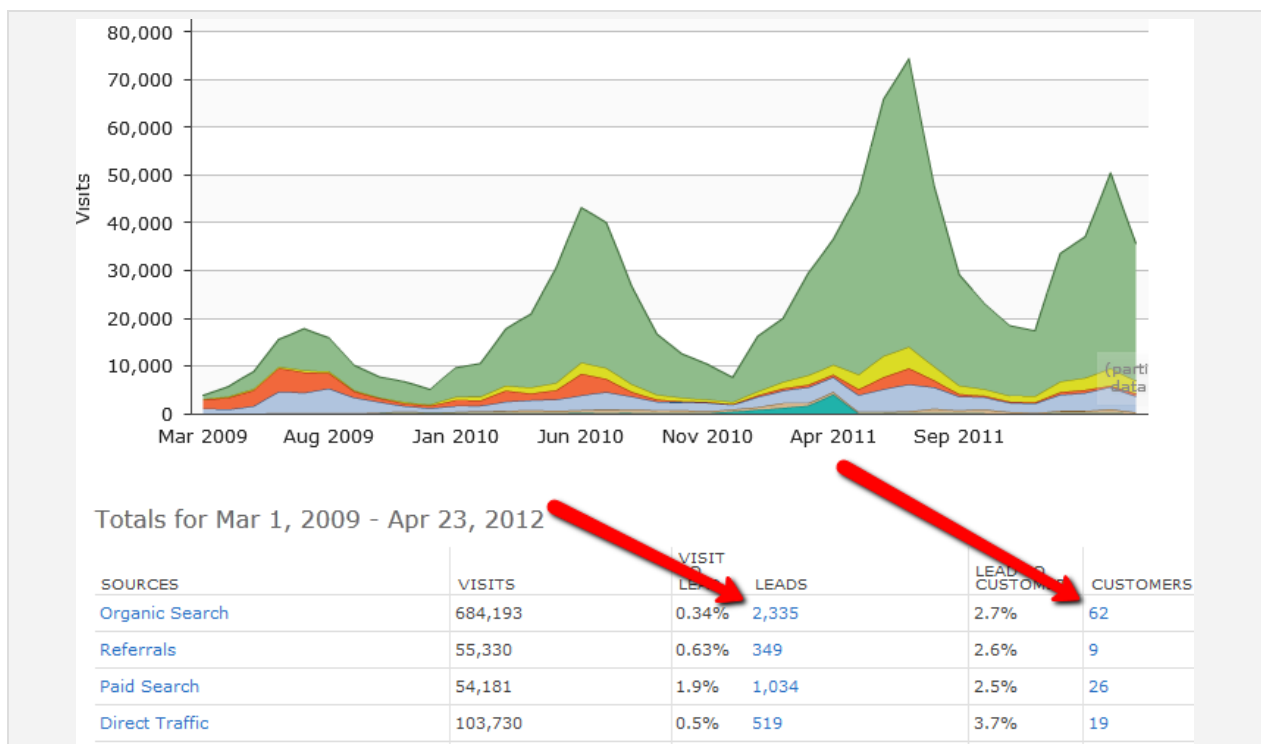
needs to be in place to **plan, assign, edit, and upload all content** to the company blog. If these duties are too far spread out, then failure is almost always inevitable. Ultimately, one person **MUST** be responsible.

Along these same lines, there is usually one person within management that does a review of every article before they are posted onto the blog. Again, this might be the CCO or it may be someone else, but the essential element here is that the person is **NOT a bottleneck** and is able to read and approve/edit the articles very quickly.

6. Editorial Calendar Written, Names and Dates Assigned

Once the consumer questions/content ideas are listed, the next step is to assign a name and date to each one of the articles. Be careful not to get too caught up in this step (over-analyzing who would be the best writer for what), which I've seen happen a few times. Generally speaking, if an employee came up with an article idea, there is a good chance they're the perfect candidate to write the content for said post.

7. Better Analytics



As I've talked about many times, HubSpot takes analytics and ROI to a whole new level.

As I've talked about in [this article](#), tracking the ROI (**Return on Investment**) of our content marketing and blogging efforts is of HUGE importance. Furthermore, **Google Analytics is not enough**, as it doesn't track names of people (folks that have filled out lead forms on your site), how they arrived on the site, what pages they went to, etc. And if you're truly going to be great with any

type of blog, better analytics are a part of the deal, whether people want to accept this or not. It is for this reason that I require all my clients to use **HubSpot** as it's the best overall software I've personally seen on the market for inbound and content marketing.

8.The Initial Content Burst

After you have brainstormed all your consumer questions and assigned your dates and authors, it's a great idea, when possible, to launch a strong foundation of content at the beginning of your blog. In some cases, because of the lack of manpower, you may only be able to post one single article at first, which is fine. But if you have multiple contributors, I'd recommend **5-15 initial posts out of the gate**. Notwithstanding, do not delay the launch of your company's blog just to stockpile large amounts of content for the launch. Get it out there!

9. Email and Assignment Selling Implementation

I'm not going to dive into [Assignment Selling](#) here because I've done it in other articles, but it's critical that as soon as a blog launches the employees, especially those in sales, start integrating the blog content, be it articles or videos, into the sales process. This is also why I feel every email a sales person sends out to a prospect or client should include at least some content within it so as to help that individual move along in the sales process.

10. Bi-monthly Newsletter

If a company is going to form a great blogging/content marketing culture, there needs to be something that keeps everyone aware and informed of the happenings, victories, etc. When done right, a company's content marketing newsletter should include:

- Articles written and authors of each
- Articles that ranked for keywords
- Positive comments from readers about content
- Leads generated from content
- Sales generated from content
- Success stories of sales department using the blog articles/content to get better results

11. Management Praise

Did you notice what this 11-point plan started and stopped with? Yep, that's right, **management**. As you already likely know, their importance in all of this working cannot be overstated. And when employees are putting their thoughts out there and helping with the company blog, a few words of direct praise from management can go a long way in making the blog and content marketing campaign a huge success.

Why the Greatest Content Marketing Companies Start and Stop with CEO and Management Involvement

Whether or not you feel trickle-down economics work well in national government, there is no question of their incredible importance when it comes to content marketing success for businesses large and small. In fact, I'll just toss this one out there for a second:

*If your company CEO and/or management team do not **fully embrace content marketing**, your efforts to find massive success online and have a cultural transformation will very likely fail.*

Yeah, sure there are outliers in every realm. And yes, there will be renegades that do amazing things despite the lack of buy-in from leadership.

But the more I seek to help companies **go big or go home** with building their digital brand and business through content marketing, the more I realize nothing great happens without full buy-in from the top dogs.

Why?

Because success in this business doesn't happen overnight.

Content marketing isn't a chia-pet—water today, a vine jungle tomorrow.

Rather, it follows the principle of the **Law of the Harvest**.

- The field must be prepared.
- The seed must be planted.
- The beginnings of life must be continually watered and nourished.
- The crop must be protected.
- And the harvest eventually comes.

For some businesses, like my pool company, this success can happen quickly.

For others, like those in deeply competitive industries, success may be slower to appear.

But done right, it comes—without fail.

Doing It Right

I think about my clients a lot.

Some are doing very well. I'm not just talking about small gains either. I'm talking about millions of dollars in sales and impact.

I've got other clients that struggle. For whatever reason, roadblock after roadblock seem to appear with their content marketing efforts.

- There is never enough time.
- The employees are too busy.
- The website isn't right.
- On and on and on.

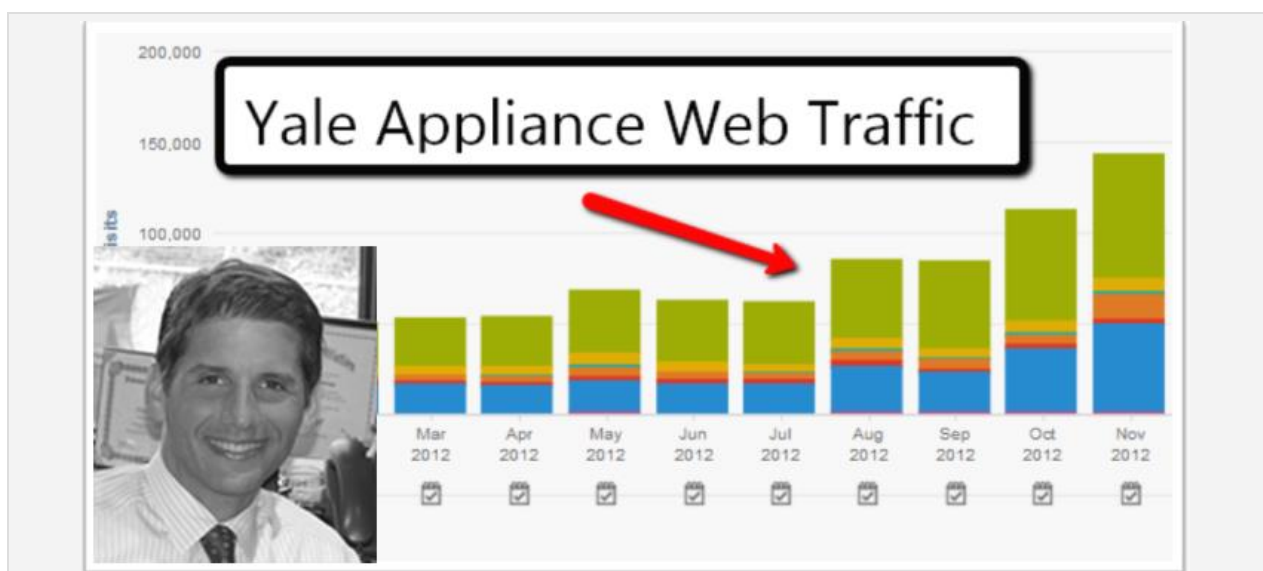
But the funny thing about this is the fact that companies who have top buy-in never seem to be stifled with these same obstacles.

And when I say "buy-in" I'm not just talking about a CEO who is *generally* aware of what's going on.

Rather, I'm referring to someone who is actively engaged in the process and walks the walk with everyone else.

Real Examples of Trickle Down Content Marketing Success

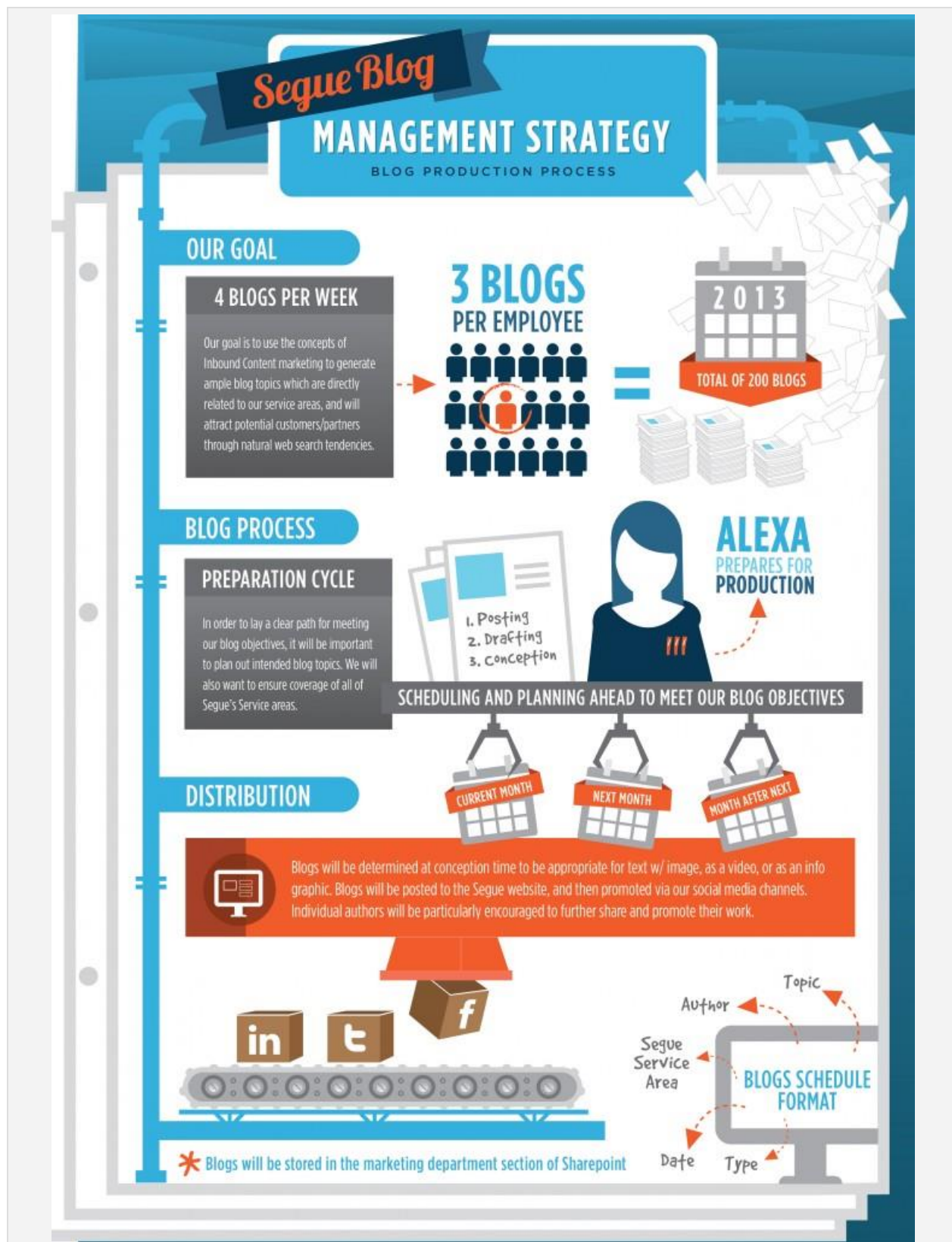
Last year, [Yale Appliance's website](#) and business exploded. A +50 million dollar company, their CEO, **Steve Sheinkopf**, acts as their head content producer. He spends hours each week producing content, studying analytics, and focusing on ways to improve their content marketing efforts. Although he could easily afford to have someone else do what he does, he realizes the greatest ROI he can have **right now** with his business is found by leading a company, and an industry, with a new way of thinking and doing business.



Despite being the CEO of the company, Steve Sheinkopf has lead his company's tremendous web and business growth by taking such an active role in their content marketing efforts.

Josh Block of [Block Imaging](#) is like any business owner in that he has multiple “issues” that come his way each and every day from all branches of his company. Notwithstanding, he makes the time to write blogs and produce content. He awards employees that are active with the content marketing efforts. He attends marketing conferences just to get an edge. Simply put, he gets it and because he buys in, Block Imaging has experienced massive success through content marketing.

And just last week I did a content marketing workshops for a IT company near Washington DC—[Segue Technologies](#). And how important is content marketing to their Executive Vice President **Ron Novak**? Here are just a few things Novak has done to ensure these marketing efforts are a huge success for his company:



Ever considered doing an in-house infographic to give employees the vision of content marketing? Here is how Segue Technologies handled it.

1. He brought in over **40 of his employees** to participate in a half-day [content marketing workshop](#) so they could understand the “How,” “What,” and “Why” of the new marketing approach.
2. He had his team produce an **in-house infographic**(above) showing the company culture and approach to content marketing, just so the vision would be very clear to all employees.
3. He made it known to employees that content marketing wasn’t simply a “fad” or “option.” Rather, it was a part of the company culture and makeup, and they were “all-in.”
4. He allowed his team to set up an **on-site video “booth”** where they could produce not just textual content, but [video content](#) as well.

With over 100 blog articles already being lined up and delved out to produce, my gut tells me Segue is about to do some pretty amazing things in their industry.

But again, **it trickles down from the top.** That’s where it starts. That’s where the magic lies.

Get Your Hands Dirty

I’d love to go on about more clients I’m seeing do amazing things with content marketing, but you get my point.

Am I saying here that the CEO of Apple (or any massive company for that matter) should be blogging? **No, I’m not.** But at a minimum, the guy needs to understand how consumers think, shop, and research these days—and the role that social media and content marketing play in that process.

And when he knows this, he needs to do something about it, and get his hands dirty in the process.

Speaking of getting your hands dirty, 4 years ago, when my swimming pool company was about to go out of business, I barely even knew what the word “blog” meant.

I certainly didn’t have a clue as to how marketing worked online.

My business partner Jason, equaling my ignorance, had never picked up a camera to record videos in his life.

Today, about 800,000 words later, some people think I’m pretty good at blogging and content marketing.

And Jason, beyond the 1,000,000+ views we've had on our YouTube videos, is now creating pieces that make me smack my forehead, something that further distances us from our competitors:

<http://youtu.be/ohnHLGSzl14>

My point with this article is a simple one. **Content marketing is not a passive approach to business.** It's all-in and all hands on deck.

And it starts with the top.

Disarmament: Content Marketing's Hidden Key to Persuasion, Trust, and Sales Success

As more and more businesses embrace content marketing, the majority are failing to understand one of the most important principles of communication and persuasion that has been around since the beginning of time.

But before I talk about this essential key of great communication—be it in a blog, video, sales presentation, etc.—I want to talk about the Catch 22 so many businesses now find themselves in.

In order to be great at content marketing, assuming you're a business, you have to be willing to address two areas that every consumer wants to know:

1. **Your own products and services**
2. **Your competition's products and services**

Unfortunately, when most companies address #1, they end up either sounding like a used car salesman or at best a very biased "pitch machine."

Regarding #2, [talking about the competition](#), most companies are either afraid to do it at all (not aggressive enough) or end up attacking the competition and come across as very unprofessional (too aggressive).

Like everything else in life, if you're going to persuade consumers and customers to buy your products and services through content marketing, you absolutely must find a balance. This balance, when done right, comes down to the **Law of Disarmament**.

The Law of Disarmament

The Law of Disarmament, a phrase that I came up with to describe much of the content marketing tips I've been teaching these past couple of years, is incredibly simple and works like this:

If you're answering a question about *your* products and services, always start with the "negative."

If you're answering a question about your competition, always start with the "positive."

Let me give you a few examples of what I'm trying to explain here so that the phrases "negative" and "positive" are not misconstrued.





As most of you reading this know, I own a swimming pool company that sells inground fiberglass pools. Because of this, our potential customers are always asking us questions like:

- What is the difference between concrete and fiberglass pools?
- Which is better, vinyl liner or fiberglass pools?
- How does your brand of pools compare to your competitor's brand?

We literally get hundreds of these types of questions a year, and because we follow the golden rule of content marketing (**They Ask, You Answer**), we've addressed every single one on our blog.

Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

[Posted by Jason Hughes](#)

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Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

Is there an unbiased comparison of inground fiberglass pools, vinyl liner pools, and concrete pools on the internet? A client who recently purchased my swimming pool ebook "6 Steps to Pool and Patio Success" doesn't think so. He stated in an email:

"As you're no doubt well aware, it's a desert wasteland when trying to find information on pools.... Sorting through the internet for useable information is difficult in the extreme. Of the few forums I've found, most devolve into trolls arguing gunite vs. fiberglass vs. vinyl liner - over and over and over and over. "

"What would help a great deal is to find some kind of unbiased information that explains each pool in detail and then backs off - letting me (or the customer) make the final decision."

Well, Michael, this article is my effort to provide an objective source of information about the three types of inground swimming pools. The approach is simple. I list the advantages and disadvantages of inground fiberglass pools, vinyl liner pools, and concrete pools.....then "back off" so you can form your own opinion.

Here you go:

An article that has been read over 100k times on our swimming pool site, this article by my business partner Jason Hughes is a textbook example of how to write copy that is professional, unbiased, and leads to sales success.

For example, let's say we are explaining the difference between vinyl and fiberglass pools. By starting with the negative, the article would go something like this:

1. Every pool shopper has different needs (empathy)
2. In some cases, vinyl pools may be a better fit than fiberglass, and here is why... (negative)
3. In some cases, fiberglass pools may be the better fit than vinyl, and here is why... (positive)

Keep in mind, the amount of negative or positive points you make is up to you, but the right order is critical here. By doing it in this manner, as soon as you've mentioned that your product **might not be a good fit for the customer**; they immediately trust you more and are more willing to let their guard down. This, in essence, is how the Law of Disarmament works.

What Are The Best 18 Inch Dishwashers? (Reviews/Ratings)

Posted by Steve Sheinkopf on Mon, Jan 30, 2012

The **18 inch dishwasher** is almost exclusively an urban phenomenon. Typically, smaller apartments have smaller spaces with smaller kitchens producing the need for smaller appliances. 18" dishwashers are more popular than other smaller appliances like stoves and refrigerators where more space is more often needed.

When I started in this industry, 18 inch dishwashers were manufactured by one company, D and M Industries. Frigidaire and others labeled this dishwasher. Then two significant events occurred; D and M went out of business and the European manufacturers started importing into the US. The Europeans use 18 inch dishwashers almost exclusively.

Now there is more choice than ever. Let's look at the four best:

Best 18 Inch Dishwashers



A master of openly discussing products and the competition, Yale Appliance gets well over 100k visitors to their site and blog a month by using the Law of Disarmament.

The process of disarmament is the same in any form of communication, be it text or face to face conversation.

For example, I've had the following conversation many, many times:

Question: Marcus, do you think HubSpot would be a good fit for my business?

My Answer: Well that depends. **I can tell you that HubSpot is *not* a good fit for everyone.** In fact, let me tell you who it's not for and then I'll tell you who it is for...

Do you see how the order of operations is the same? Start with the "negative," finish with the positive.

Oh, and by the way, whenever you tell someone, in a very open and upfront manner, that your product (or service) may not be a good fit for them **they are naturally more inclined to want to make it a fit.** (I call this the **Law of Inclusion**. In other words, we all want to be included.)

One final example about how to handle discussing your competitors: As I mentioned above, the order changes when we talk about the competition. Generally speaking, you want to start with the positive and move to the negative. Keep in mind when I say "negative" **I'm not at all referring to bashing your competition**, but rather showing their factual drawbacks. Here is an example:

Consumer Question: Marcus, I hear concrete pools are better than fiberglass, is that true?

Answer: In some cases, depending on what the customer is looking for, yes, that might be true. Concrete pools have certain benefits that some pool shoppers find very appealing, such as (benefits listed here)...At the same time, concrete pools have certain drawbacks and thus aren't a good fit for everyone. (drawbacks listed here)

Hopefully you're seeing how this properly unfolds in all applications. If you do this right, you'll be viewed as a trusted source and advisor to your customers and readers. If you do it wrong, as many companies currently are, you'll appear to them to be no better than a used car salesman with extremely biased motives.

This is exactly why understanding the **Law of Disarmament** is critical to a culture of content marketing success for any organization moving forward in the information age.

Why Your Business Blog Should Target Keywords that Make Money, Not Traffic

Have you ever taken a moment to look at the keywords people are typing in to land on your website? If so—and this is where the rubber meets the road—**what percentages of those**

keywords being typed in are the kind of word(s) that would denote the individual is looking for a product or service your business offers?

If you haven't done this, please stop reading and go to your **Google Analytics** for a second. Once there, look at the top 50 that are driving traffic to your site and ask yourself how many of these keywords would be typed in by your "ideal prospect."

Here is the thing—**We all love traffic. Me. You. Everybody.** It's the ultimate Golden Calf of the internet, an idol we often worship despite the fact that we generally know better.

"Money Keywords"

This is exactly why many have come to understand **web traffic does not pay the bills**. And if you're a business, once the initial euphoria of blogging and traffic growth has subsided, you're often left wondering how much of all that "traffic" equates to actual sales.

Truth be told, this is a very difficult question to answer. When it comes to keywords and content, there are those that help prospects into the sales funnel, and then others that push them down (or out) of the funnel.

This being said, often times businesses produce content that has very little impact on either of these two goals. To give you a real example of what I'm talking about, let's look at the main keyword traffic for The Sales Lion this past month. If you look at the following photo, the red arrows indicate what I refer to as "money keywords"—keywords that fit my ideal paying client. You'll also notice black arrows in the photo, which show the correlation between the less ideal keywords and the average time on site of each visitor, something I refer to as "false traffic."

Keyword	Visits	↓	Pages / Visit	Avg. Visit Duration
1. (not provided)	14,867		2.93	00:02:53
2. the sales lion	557	←	4.46	00:04:01
3. sales lion	417	←	5.43	00:04:28
4. marcus sheridan	242	←	4.27	00:05:00
5. mcdonalds vs burger king	144		2.06	00:00:42
6. saleslion	143	←	4.33	00:04:16
7. hubspot reviews	141	←	3.10	00:02:28
8. burger king vs mcdonalds	136		2.04	00:00:32
9. twitter feed on website			2.06	00:00:19
10. road to success			2.00	00:00:37
11. yellow pages advertising			2.04	00:00:42
12. time			2.38	00:00:35
13. hubspot review	81	←	2.83	00:02:38
14. thesaleslion	74	←	5.23	00:04:27
15. how much does hubspot cost	67	←	3.39	00:02:23
16. sales role play	57		2.07	00:00:14
17. benefits of blogging for business	48	←	2.23	00:00:47
18. changing habits	45		2.42	00:01:00
19. advertising mediums	44		2.00	00:00:07

Red arrows denote "money keywords"
Black arrows denote "false traffic"

By taking a hard look at your website and blog traffic, you can get a much better feel for what words are and are not helping your business grow.

As you can see from the black arrows, those persons typing in phrases that don't fit my business model at TSL (inbound and content marketing consulting/speaking) generally don't hang around the site very long-- hence the "false" description. But for the money keywords, the average time on site for the visitor can be quite substantial. (Note** Although it varies by industry and business, any keyword that leads to an average visit time of 2 minutes or more is a very good sign.)

You may be asking yourself why I'm ranking for so many keywords that don't quite fit my ideal client, and here are a few answers to that question:

1. Like any business, **this blog has changed and developed over time**. In fact, when TSL started, it wasn't a business at all.

2. **Google has a funny way of optimizing content**. For example, I once wrote an article on why [McDonalds kept kicking Burger King's butt](#) year after year after year. The article did well from an SEO standpoint (McDs vs BK) and has generated thousands of visitors, but the keywords it's optimized for have nothing to do with the services I offer at TSL, thus bringing in **zero direct revenue** to the company. I'm not saying this is necessarily bad, it just is what it is.

3. **I like talking about diverse subjects here at TSL**. Because I write about diverse things, I end up attracting many visitors that couldn't care less about blogging, content marketing, etc., which is fine. That being said, if I were in a financial crunch with my business and had a need for immediate

leads and sales, I would spend all my focus on targeting those “money keywords” that might bring in immediate leads and sales.

Targeted Keyword Strategies

Speaking of a clearer focus, let’s take a look at my swimming pool blog for a second. Here are its top 20 keywords for 2012. The difference from this list, as you can see, is that almost every single one of these phrases would be typed in by an ideal client:

Keyword	Visits	↓	Pages / Visit	Avg. Visit Duration
1. (not provided)	57,218		2.23	00:02:36
2. fiberglass pool prices	5,635	←	2.08	00:02:05
3. fiberglass pools	5,471	←	2.70	00:02:55
4. river pools and spas	4,679	←	4.55	00:05:55
5. cost of fiberglass pools	3,018	←	2.01	00:02:11
6. fiberglass pools prices	2,659	←	2.14	00:02:10
7. pool	2,489	→	1.89	00:00:37
8. fiberglass pools problems	2,296	←	2.20	00:03:20
9. how much does an above ground pool cost	1,879	←	1.33	00:00:46
10. small inground pools	1,725	←	2.23	00:01:31
11. fiberglass pool cost	1,591	←	1.92	00:01:48
12. how much does a fiberglass pool cost	1,500	←	1.97	00:01:51
13. fiberglass pools cost	1,424	←	2.05	00:02:09
14. small pool designs	1,325	←	2.18	00:01:53
15. fiberglass swimming pool prices	1,273	←	2.55	00:02:52
16. fiberglass pool problems	1,144	←	2.01	00:02:48
17. pool financing rates	1,089	←	1.60	00:01:21
18. river pools	1,005	←	4.57	00:05:11
19. how much do fiberglass pools cost	779	←	1.97	00:02:05
20. pools	779		2.31	00:01:13

Because of a targeted blogging and content marketing strategy from early on, almost all organic search visitors to my swimming pool site would make for an ideal client.

The key behind a targeted keyword strategy is that **it doesn't happen by accident**, as the content needs to be strategic. And if you're looking to be more strategic and targeted, here's what I would suggest:

1. It always comes back to consumer questions: You've heard me beat this horse again and again, but if we're solely focused on producing content that answers the questions we get every day from prospects and customers, we're going to be outrageously successful. To make this even more plain, ask yourself what are the questions you receive in the **first 10 minutes** of a meeting with a prospect. Because prospects tend to ask the questions on the forefront of their mind at the beginning (showing their biggest concerns, issues, problems) this group of questions is loaded with "money keywords" you should be producing content around.

2. Focus on the Big Five: I call it the "Big Five" because it represents the five subject areas that people search for aggressively online, no matter what the product or service is. Those five subjects are:

- Cost/Price
- Problems/Issues
- Vs./Compare
- Best of
- Reviews

Just by focusing your company content around these keywords, you should come up with dozens if not hundreds of targeted content pieces that aggressively go after your best type of client and customer.

3. Use Tools: Although listening to customers will always be your best solution to consistent content that gets results, sometimes keyword tools to help generate blog article ideas are a tremendous help. I've studied the area of keyword tools quite a bit and am a very strong proponent of Long Tail Pro-- a tool that I use weekly with my clients in helping them identify great keyword opportunities with their content.

I'm not saying with this post that every blog article you write from this day forward should be solely targeted on the "ideal customer." Frankly, it's your job to assess that question. Notwithstanding, if you're a business, and you want to build your brand while increasing traffic, leads, and **sales**-- then a clear keyword strategy is ideal. And the more focused and strategic it is, the more "real" your traffic will be.

8 Renegade Methods of Using Content Marketing to Dominate Your Industry

This article will not be “logical.” It will not fit in that little box that’s so requisite to get anything “approved” in most organizations. Nor will it be for conservative-minded marketers and business owners that would rather imagine 1000 ways “it might go wrong” instead of dreaming of the unlimited reasons “it might go right.”

In other words, what I’m about to tell you takes guts, imagination, and the magic of thinking big.

So if you fall in the latter, please continue to read on.

Oh, and it’s long too, as well it needs to be, so you’ve now been warned.

12 Months to Do Magical Things

Whether you've been embracing content marketing for some time now or are just starting to jump on the train that has already left the station, over the next year you have the ability to do unbelievable things in the digital world to help your business. In 2012, I worked literally with dozens of companies on their content marketing efforts. Some took the advice they received, made it their own, and then shot off like a rocket within their industry. Others threw up barricades, looked for excuses, and stumbled badly out of the gate.

Based on these experiences, as well as the constant set of content marketing "experiments" I'm running at "**The Sales Lion Center for Advanced Content Marketing Studies**" (wink), I've come up with 8 innovative and outside-the-box steps your business can take to build your brand and achieve outrageously successful results.

1. Show it like it has never been shown before:

A while back I was working with a manufacturing company and one day, when I was touring their manufacturing facility, I decided to start recording a video of what I was seeing. Within seconds of realizing what I was doing, the management team became extremely nervous, and told me that I would not be able to record inside their facility because they didn't want their competitors to see their processes, equipment, and methodologies.

In other words, instead of worrying about the consumer, they were worried about the competition—**which truly is the death of great marketing in the digital age.**

Luckily for this business though, after spending some time helping them understand their "secret sauce" was no secret, they embraced a transparent marketing approach that helped brand them as one of the top in their field within a year's time. And speaking of "secret sauce," have you ever wondered why McDonalds food looks so much better on camera than in person? Instead of ignoring the question, McD's shows how this is made possible in this incredibly transparent video.

[youtube]<http://youtu.be/oSd0keSj2W8>[/youtube]

Lesson: If you do it, show it. Video is a magical medium. Just pull out your phone and record the dang thing. Make it accessible to the masses. Invite the world in to see how you do what you do. And if you need the ultimate example, just see what [McDonalds](#) is doing to take transparency and trust to the next level, which is just another reason why every fast food company will always be second place in that industry.

2. Reward Your Competitors

I've spoken about this subject more and more over the last 6 months—much to the chagrin of many traditionalist marketers that can't seem to grasp the principle of transparency and influence in the digital realm. But considering I've personally applied what I'm getting ready to tell you, hopefully that will help influence your decision and thought process here.

Small Inground Fiberglass Pool Design Awards for 2010

Posted by [Marcus Sheridan](#)



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Share



One of my favorite parts of maintaining a blog about the fiberglass pool industry is the chance I have to look at the unique designs that manufacturers are coming up with as the industry progresses. Last year, we posted another very successful article regarding the [top fiberglass pool designs of 2009](#) but this year I wanted to break things down even further and take this opportunity to solely focus on the 'little guys' of the industry and

One of my first content marketing experiments on giving credit to those in my industry, even the competition. This article opened my eyes to the power of such a transparent approach.

I first started experimenting with this in 2010 with my swimming pool company when I gave out awards to manufacturers in the industry, many of which were competitors of mine. Not only was that article a major anomaly to the industry at that time, but it also generated tremendous discussion, confusion, and curiosity—from industry peers as well as potential customers. Today, that article has hundreds of inbound links, ranks for a multiplicity of major keywords, and has generated dozens upon dozens of leads that have turned into customers.

In 2011 and 2012, I further experimented with this by writing “best of” posts with respect to my local competitors in the Virginia and Maryland areas. These posts struck a chord with real people and search engines alike, and again, like the previous “competitor” articles, generated trust, traffic, and sales.

Local Swimming Pool Information for Virginia and Maryland

[Current Articles](#) | [RSS Feed](#)

Who Are The Best Pool Builders in Richmond Virginia?(Reviews/Ratings)

Posted by [Marcus Sheridan](#) on Mon, Jan 16, 2012 @ 03:29 PM



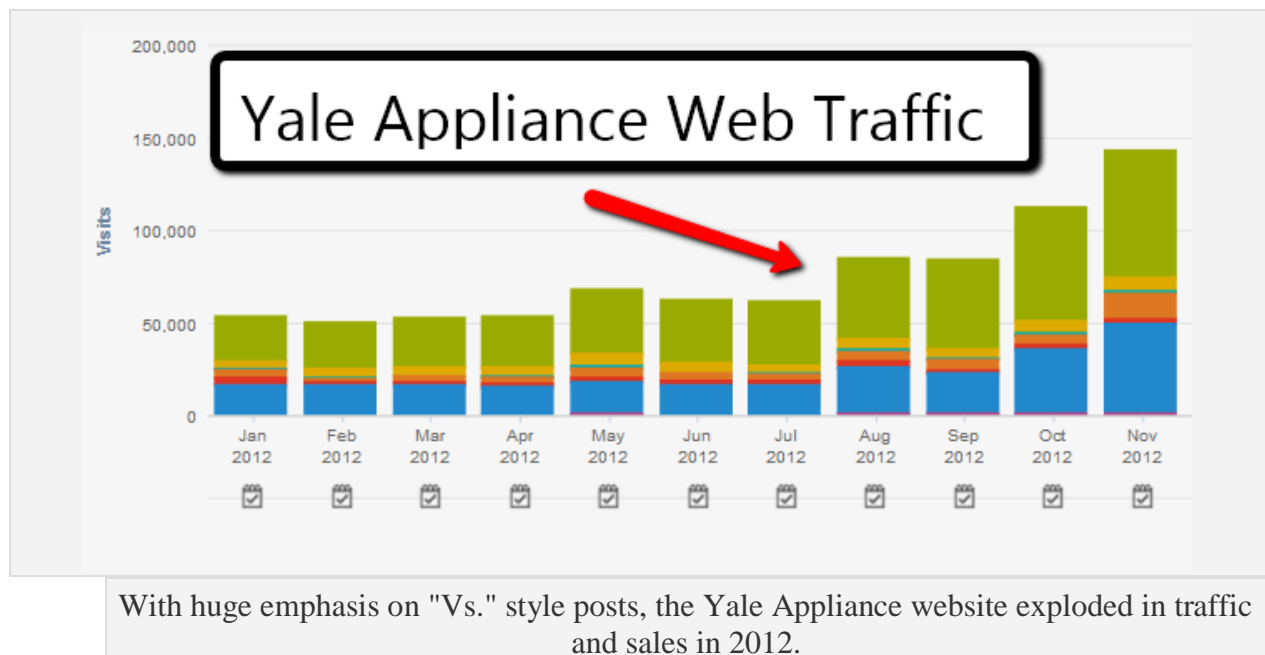
Each year, we at River Pools and Spas meet with well over 100 households in the Central Va/Richmond area with respect to their inground swimming pool installation. And because so many folks know our thoughts and feelings (from this website) on all things "pool construction", they often ask us who are some of the other builders and competitors we have in the area.

Never ones to shy away from being blatantly honest with respect to competition, here is a list of some of the companies that have a solid inground pool building history in the Richmond area:

1. Pla Mor Pools: Having been around for years, Pla Mor pools is located in the Mechanicsville area, and specialize in vinyl liner inground pools. The company

When consumers type in "Best Pool builders Richmond Virginia"--they land on this article. Not only that, this article ranks for a variety of my competitor's keyword phrases as well in search engine results.

I've also had many clients experience tremendous success by prolifically reviewing and comparing products, brands and services. One such client, **Yale Appliance**, has garnered national attention in the kitchen appliance industry by creating a mountain of "vs" related posts, therefore addressing core subjects and issues their customers want to know.



Lesson: Stop pretending your competitors don't exist. Your customers already know they exist, so find a way to deal with it, to your advantage.

3. Review Your Competitors

In every industry there is good and bad. There are good products and bad products. There are good services and bad services. There are legit and non-legit companies. The list goes on and on.

But if you want to be known as a trusted voice and source of consumer information, this is the type of content that needs to be on your website, blog, and other marketing platforms.

I first started experimenting with digital reviews in 2008 with my swimming pool eBook, "How to buy a fiberglass pool the right way from the right company at the right price." After that, I took it a step further by giving my honest opinion of manufacturers on my company blog, seeing huge success with each article written.

[Current Articles](#) | [RSS Feed](#)
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Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?


Posted by Marcus Sheridan

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Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?

Two of the most prominent fiberglass pool manufacturers in the industry are Viking Pools and Trilogy Pools. Having installed both pools during our 8 years in business at River Pools, as well as working with pool owners across the country through PoolSchool, I've established opinions regarding the two

Articles like this one comparing two different lines in the swimming pool industry get read thousands of times a year.

Within a year's time of doing these things, my personal and professional brand in the fiberglass pool industry became such that I was receiving multiple emails every single day from consumers around the world asking me what pool they should buy, who they should buy it from, and how they should go about doing it. Because of this, the information on our blog had an incredible influence, for good and bad, on manufacturers within the swimming pool industry.

As my friend **Jay Baer** would say, the River Pools and Spas brand had become a "[Youtility](#)" within the industry—the go-to place (utility) for honest and useful consumer information.

The same occurred after months writing with The Sales Lion. As a HubSpot partner, I created content that was open in discussing the software's problems, benefits, competitors, etc. By so doing, I've become known by many as a trustworthy voice on all things HubSpot, and have a very large foundation of HubSpot clients to show for it.

The Biggest Problem with Hubspot in 2012 and Beyond

by Marcus Sheridan



As most of you are well aware, I'm a passionate fan of **Hubspot**. The Boston-based company and all-in-one social media platform gave me the tools and information I needed in 2009 to save my swimming pool company and turn our website into the #1 trafficked site of its kind in the entire world.

After experiencing so much success with

Even though I'm a HubSpot partner, by giving an honest take on their strengths and weaknesses, I'm able to generate traffic and trust. Just Google the phrase "HubSpot problems" to see what I mean.

Lesson: Consumers are reviewing you. They're also reviewing your competitors. It's your choice where that conversation takes place.

4. Use platforms and methods that have not previously been used in your industry

As someone that consults with businesses about digital marketing on a consistent basis, one of the first questions clients like to ask is the following:

Who else in our industry is having success doing it this way?

Although this isn't necessarily a bad question, it can be a sign of negative things to come.

Why? **Because it really doesn't matter what other companies have done in terms of digital marketing and what platforms they've been on.**

- So what if no one has a blog in your industry?
- So what if no one uses video effectively?
- So what if no one has found a way to utilize Facebook and get returns?
- So what if no one has a podcast in your realm?

ONGOING
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Calculating your Credit Union Data Center TCO (total cost of ownership)

Written by [Kirk Drake](#) - Cloud Topics - No Comments

If you are a credit union IT professional and you are trying to calculate your costs of running a data center this post is for you.

Ongoing Operations has 7 former Credit Union IT Managers or CTOs on staff. Of this group we have built



Despite the fact that they're in an industry where practically no one is blogging, Ongoing Operations (client) has managed to quickly rise to prominence because of their astounding content marketing efforts.

Lesson: What other businesses have and have not achieved from a marketing standpoint doesn't mean squat to you. Their methods and their vision aren't yours. Forget 'em and start your own trend, regardless of the actions of others.

5. Be Everywhere

Although [Pat Flynn](#) can certainly speak to this better than I can, this is a trend that really started to pick up greatly in 2012 for individual brands and companies alike. Essentially, the principle of "be everywhere" comes down to our ability to communicate with our audiences in as many forms/platforms as possible, as consistently as possible.

Granted, I'll always be a firm believer that spreading ourselves *too* thin is not a good thing, but if there are ways to find greater reach without sacrificing quality, then we should do it. To give you an example as to what I'm talking about, no brand and businesses exploded more than [CMI](#) (Content Marketing Institute) did last year. Let's take a moment to analyze their strategic growth and "be everywhere" methodology:

- They took the CMI blog to new heights by posting beefy, quality content on a daily basis--leveraging the knowledge of industry experts and other businesses around the globe to form a very sound, guest post driven blog.
- They came out with the premier traditional magazine in the content marketing industry—CCO (Chief Content Officer) Magazine

- They grew Content Marketing World into a massive conference for marketing professionals on a global level.
- They started offering smaller Content Marketing World conferences and workshops around the world.



CMI is rapidly becoming a global brand, all because they understand the principle of "Be Everywhere" so very well.

These are just a few examples of what Joe Pulizzi and the CMI gang did this past year, but without question, they were literally everywhere preaching the word of content marketing, establishing themselves as the clear leader in a growing industry.

Lesson: Whether you're a mom and pop business or a massive corporation, finding more ways to communicate, teach, and reach others in your industry could provide major brand and business benefits in 2013.

6. Challenge the Status-Quo at Every Corner

Let me just be very frank for a second and say that most industries lack guts. I openly say this because every field has major problems, issues, and inefficiencies that no one wants to talk about. (*Note: When was the last time you saw anyone that worked for the IRS talk about their terrible waste issues? Answer: Never*)

To give you an example of what I'm talking about, for years fiberglass swimming pools were installed on top of sand. My swimming pool company, having been taught this method, installed our first 300 pools on top of sand.

Installing a Fiberglass Pool Properly: Sand vs. Gravel, Which is Better?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



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There is a famous bible verse that applies to this important subject:



"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

"But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Because we saw a problem with the status-quo in the swimming pool industry, we decided to do something about it.

But, over time, we started to see issues popping up—issues we knew could have been prevented had there been a better base for these pools.

So despite the fact that we were in a major minority and got attacked for it, we wrote extensively about the need to install fiberglass pools on top of gravel when they're in the ground. And because of this educational push, today, 4 years later, the majority of fiberglass pools built in the US are built on gravel.

The same applies to The Sales Lion. All over the web, I see lots of things being taught about inbound marketing, content marketing, and social media. I feel much of the information being taught out there is exceptional. But there are also times I feel bad advice is being given, at which point I'll write articles that openly disagree with the opinions and sentiments of others (respectfully).

Although this may open me up for attacks, it also shows that I'm my own man with my own opinions and experiences—something that businesses are often looking for when they seek to hire any type of consultant.

Lesson: Great companies and brands don't just "accept" everything as it is. Neither should you. **Develop a sound opinion and share it to the world.**

7. Become the Wikipedia of Your Industry

This is another area where I philosophically disagree with a few others in the social media realm. Based on every content marketing campaign I've seen achieve huge success for businesses, there is one over-riding principle that makes all the difference: **They Ask, You Answer**



The screenshot shows the Block Imaging International, Inc. website. The header includes the company logo and a navigation menu with links: 'refurbished medical imaging industry blog', 'home', 'about us', 'news', 'testimonials', 'category', 'my account', and 'block is bu'. Below the header is a Google Custom Search bar. The main content area is titled 'Refurbished Medical Imaging Industry Blog' and features a post titled 'How Much Does A C-Arm Table Cost?' by Chris Sharrock, dated Fri, Dec 28, 2012. The post includes social media sharing buttons for Facebook (1 Like), Email Article, Twitter (0 Tweets), Google+ (0 +1s), and LinkedIn (Share). The text of the post starts with 'Succinctly: new c-arm tables range in price from \$7,000 to \$70,000. Now, while you're probably thrilled to get your answer up front, you're probably also left wondering if there's anything we can do to help you better understand this huge range. Succinctly: there is.' A 'Read More' link is provided. To the right of the text is an image of a C-arm table with the caption 'C-Arm Table Pricing'.

Because they're willing to address the questions they get from customers day in and day out, Block Imaging (client) experienced huge benefits from their content marketing efforts in 2012.

In other words, if a prospect or customer has ever asked you a question, the answer to that question should be found on your company website. By doing this, a company will be viewed as the ultimate teacher and voice of their industry, and gain the respect of the 2 parties that dictate everything when it comes to success—**search engines and real people**.

Lesson: Make the choice to **control the conversation**. It can either happen at your house (your website and other platforms) or someone else's place. Why not choose yours?

8. Dance with the Influencers

In every industry and in every realm, there are influencers. Some might be bloggers, some might be media outfits, others might be buying groups—the list goes on and on. But if you're looking to have incredible brand recognition in your industry, it's important to establish relationships with

these groups. Sometimes you may want to write about them, mention them, or simply drive business their way. But make no doubt, attaining success is much easier when it's a team effort.



Joe Pulizzi is just one of many people who helped make 2012 my most successful professional year ever.

On a personal level, I know I never would have attained nearly the success I've been able to manage in this industry if it wasn't for the likes of great people like [Michael Stelzner](#), [Jay Baer](#), [Joe Pulizzi](#), [Mitch Joel](#), [Gini Dietrich](#), and others. If it weren't for these folks, much of the stuff I've said or written would have fallen by the wayside and been read by few people.

Lesson: Like it or not, influencers exist in every field. If you sincerely embrace and help them, they just may help you as well.

Why Your Opinion Doesn't Matter When it Comes to Great Marketing

That's right, it doesn't, **and neither does mine.**

Just look at the election for a second. Opinions and projections were incredibly diverse on both sides. Thoughts about which party and candidate had the most "momentum" kept coming up again and again.

Yet when all was said and done, none of those opinions mattered until the final votes were counted. Then, all of the sudden, some folks appeared smart, while others didn't.

Such is life and such is marketing.

The final numbers are really the only thing that matters.

But It's "Cool"

3 years ago, when I decided to embrace online marketing with my swimming pool company I was taking a hard look at my website and doing whatever I could to make it better. During this process, I learned that having a black background with white text (which I had) on a website was not good if you wanted your visitors reading a lot of text, as this combination is hard on the eyes.

When I read this information, although it did make sense (*After all, when was the last time you read a book that had black pages and white text?*) I had one big problem-- **I liked the way my website looked.**

I thought the black background looked "**cool.**"

I thought it looked professional.

And I didn't see what the big deal would be.

But then I read the numbers and studied further and realized a very important point-- my opinion about the color of the background **didn't matter**. If I kept things the way they were, readers (potential customers) wouldn't stay on the site as long to read because their eyes, without them even realizing it, would get tired and lose interest.

My eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt
My eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt
My eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt
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My eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt, my eyes hurt

Eventually, I changed the background and font colors of my website, but looking back, my reasoning (personal opinions) for keeping the site the way it was for as long as I did was a seriously

dumb one--and one that we see over and over again with business owners and marketers all over the world.

Opinions Equal the Death of Great Marketing

When it comes down to it, personal opinions kill successful marketing plans each and every single day. Take for example the business owner or marketer that...

- says they "don't read blogs" and therefore doesn't want a company blog.
- thinks "Facebook is for gossip and political rants" and therefore dismisses its utility.
- believes "SEO doesn't exist" and then misses countless opportunities for free web visitors.
- is contrary to doing anything that doesn't fall under "social media"—even though a proper Pay Per Click campaign would work in his/her market.
- only wants to [sound intelligent](#) with their web copy instead of writing in a way that is personable, understandable, and gets results.
- doesn't listen to [podcasts](#) and therefore thinks having a podcast would be a complete waste of time.
- refuses to change the copy in an ad even though a [split-test](#) has shown the copy is less effective

The examples go on and on and on.

And as one last example, I'll use one from **The Sales Lion**.

For many, many months I've read articles and stats about the power of pop-ups for list building. Notwithstanding, each time I thought about having a pop-up on The Sales Lion, I rejected the idea.

Why?

Because I didn't like them.

That was until I saw sites like **Social Media Examiner**, **Content Marketing Institute**, **Amy Porterfield**, and others using them—all with great success.

How To Turn Your Facebook Page Into A Sales Machine

Download this action-packed chapter from my brand new book, Facebook Marketing All-in-One for Dummies (it's FREE!)

Inside you'll learn:

- Three proven strategies to increase your Facebook fans within just 48 hours
- How to position yourself as the #1 expert in your field (even if you're just starting out)
- Five little known ways to attract highly-targeted prospects on autopilot



With great sites like this one from Amy Porterfield using Pop-Ups, I knew it was time to accept the positive results over my own opinions.

Finally, after swallowing my pride and opinions, I added a pop-up here on The Sales Lion. It's not too annoying to regular readers because it only appears once every 30 days if someone has seen it already, but the results speak for themselves, with an additional 10-20 sign ups each day coming from the pop-up form alone, which means my newsletter list and the number of folks reading the eBook are growing at a really nice rate these days. (**Note**** *The pop-up I use here is by [Pippity](#) (none aff.), and I've been very happy with it.*)

The bottom line is this my friends—We've all got to get used to the idea that our opinions don't really matter when it comes to smart marketing. **The way we think, act, and talk isn't the way others think, act, and talk.**

And the moment we can separate the way *we* feel versus the actions and decisions that get real results, we're going to be way, way more successful.

Blogging vs. Podcasting: Which is Better for Building Brands, Followers, and Trust?

I fly a lot these days. And for those of you that fly much, you also know that flying with a friend is way better than flying solo. Luckily for me, I'm often accompanied by [Mitch Joel](#). We fly

together a bunch. When Mitch isn't available, [Pat Flynn](#) may step in, or possibly [Srinivas Rao](#), [Jay Baer](#), or my friend [Michael Stelzner](#).

OK, maybe these guys don't actually "fly" with me, but after listening to their enlightening conversations and words for a few hours, it certainly feels as though we've just engaged in an incredible dialogue.

You see, all 5 of these gents, as many of you already know, are prolific podcasters, and despite the fact that I don't physically "talk" to these men much, I sure feel as though we converse all the time.

And that's the magic to [podcasting](#). It's also exactly why I started the [Mad Marketing Podcast w/ The Sales Lion](#) a few months back. I wanted to provide others with an intimate picture of the inner-workings of my mind, just as Joel, Flynn, Rao, Baer and Stelzner have done with their podcasts so very well.

That's also why it brings a massive smile to my face when I get emails like this one that hit my inbox today:

Hi Marcus,

I took you and Michael Stelzner with me on my afternoon hike the other day, and have to tell you how much I enjoyed listening to both of you. Your honest, transparent, personable style really resonated with me. I had to stop at the top of Upper Granite Loop and send a quick email to a couple of my clients to ask them to come up with a list of their top 10-20 most asked questions by their customers. Since then, I have sent them the link to that podcast and asked to set up a meeting with them to discuss it further...

Thank you again, for you content and for sharing your passion and wisdom.

Your new fan,

Susan

Pretty cool, huh?

You see, I've been creating textual content for 3 years now on The Sales Lion. Currently, this blog has about 19,000 comments. But never have I received emails like the ones I get from listeners of my podcast.

Blogging vs. Podcasting: Which is Better?

All this being said, trying to compare blogging and podcasting and answering the "Which is better?" question is no easy task—nor is it possible considering like so much in this industry, the answer is "it depends."

The thing about podcasting is that for those who are podcast listeners, it's incredibly effective in terms of building a brand and trust from listeners. With blogging, we're lucky to get someone's attention for more than a couple of minutes. But with podcasting, they'll hang around and listen to our thoughts for 30, 45, even 60 minutes sometimes.

Plus, a connection with the podcaster is **deeply personal**—as voice inflection, sarcasm, humor, and enthusiasm can all be portrayed and understood so much easier than when they're done in textual form.

The Elephant in the Room

Despite this, podcasting has one major “elephant in the room” that no one can ignore—**not enough people listen to podcasts**. Heck, some folks reading this article have never even heard the word until now. Furthermore, podcasting doesn't have the potential shelf-life and reach benefit of SEO like textual content can offer.

If I were to break out efficacy of business communication platforms for the “average” business (again, this can vary drastically), I'd rank the top 3 as follows:

1. **Textual Content** (blogging makes up a large portion of this)
2. **Video Content** (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)
3. **Audio Content** (podcasting is obviously the core here)

But if a business really understands how consumers think, act, shop, and feel—they'll also know that it's important to communicate in ways that consumers “get it.”

For some, that will be text.

For others, that will be video. (percentages are growing more and more in this arena every day)

And for another small sector, it will be audio—the podcast listeners.



Just as children have unique learning styles, so do consumers, and the most effective businesses no how to tap into each.

The question then becomes one of focus. Where should companies spend their time and resources in their content creation?

One Thing First

Personally, I always go back to this rule:

Get good at one thing first. Once you've gotten really good at that, move on to the next.

Remember, being GREAT at one marketing element is way more effective than being terribly average in 3 or 4 areas.

On a personal level, I spent about 6 months with textual content/blogging before I dove into video. I didn't get around to podcasting until 3 years later.

Today, I absolutely love all 3 for their unique capabilities.

I'm not saying this should be your timeframe, but I am saying that in an "ideal" world, it's great for you and your business to be able to spread your message **to match as many consumer communication styles and preferences as possible.**

Frankly, we could carry on this conversation comparing blogging and podcasting for quite a while. But hopefully you see my point. Both have value. Both communicate in a different way, often reaching a different audience and set of people.

Ultimately, the key is a willingness to experiment with both, stay diligent, and then watch the results. Pat Flynn often credits podcasting with his brand explosion. For my swimming pool company, video played a HUGE role, along with the blogging. For TSL, it has been a mixed batch, each holding their own.

So although the answer to the blogging v podcasting question is, "It depends," one thing is for certain—both can do wonders to build your company's brand, followers, and consumer trust—and that's all that truly matters.

7 Reasons Why Blogging is Failing to Generate Leads For So Many Marketing Agencies

As many of you know, a few weeks ago I asked my newsletter readers to send me their blog URL if they hadn't been seeing much success to generate traffic, leads, and sales. Of the 200 or so readers that responded, about 30 of them were marketing agencies of various sizes, a number that frankly left me quite a bit to think about. (**Note**** *When I say "agency," I'm referring to companies from 1-1000, so bear with me on the semantics if you will.*)



Marketing Agencies + Blogging
= NO LEADS

Upon much thought and analysis of all these blogs, one thing became astoundingly clear:

Blogging and inbound marketing isn't working for a huge percentage of marketing agencies, social media "consultants," and many other businesses in this online realm.

So the question begs...why?

Why are companies that teach marketing failing to find success in what they're preaching from the rooftops that everyone else do?

Here are my thoughts as to why this phenomenon is occurring, and also why I think it will only get worse and worse with time.

7 Reasons why Blogging and Inbound Marketing are Failing for So Many Marketing Agencies

1. Unbelievably High CSI: Some of you have heard me [talk about CSI before](#). In marketing terms, this stands for “**Content Saturation Index**,” and it is at the core as to why so many of these agency blogs are failing. Think about it for a second: How many blogs are there about marketing and social media? The number is in the thousands, which means in order for someone to rise above the noise, they have to do some pretty amazing things. Furthermore, with the CSI being so high, Search Engine Optimization is extremely difficult in this industry. With everyone targeting prevalent keyword phrases, garnering organic traffic and rankings isn't easy to come by, and can be incredibly frustrating as well.

As I've stated before, the #1 reason I was able to dominate the swimming pool industry so quickly wasn't because I was awesome, but rather because of an extremely low CSI—thus leaving almost any keyword phrase I really wanted up for the taking.

2. Terrible Blog Titles: This is the one trend that surprises me the most. Despite the fact that witty and catchy blog titles are generally **a waste of time unless you have a huge subscriber base of readers**, a huge portion of marketing blogs still overlook solid SEO practices with their titles and end up coming up with catchy references for what is an incredibly meager group of subscribers. And yes, even though I said the CSI of this industry was high, it doesn't mean by any stretch search rankings are impossible to achieve with the proper techniques, something I'll now discuss further in #3.

The Most In-Depth HubSpot Vs. WordPress Review Ever Written

by Marcus Sheridan



In this article, you see I had a very clear keyword goal (HS v WP) but still managed to have a catchy title. Today, this article ranks very well for this important keyword phrase.

3. Poor to Non-Existent Targeting of Specific Industries: This one is important, and if you don't pay any attention to the rest of this post, I hope you pay close attention to this one, because it applies to all businesses, not just marketers. Let me give you an example of 3 blog posts that go from good, to better, to best:

- a. Does inbound marketing work? (good)
- b. How long does it take inbound marketing to work? (better)
- c. How long does it take inbound marketing to work in the technology industry? (best)

Just a little over a year ago I would have considered choice "b" here to be a great blog post title. But with so much content saturation over this time period, we're now entering a phase where niche and industry targeting is very necessary for marketers.

But if you think about this, it makes a ton of sense. If you're in the tech field and you want to know how long it will take inbound marketing to work in your industry, there is a very good chance you're going to go to Google and type in "How long does it take inbound marketing to work in the tech industry?"

The competition (CSI) for such phrases is much lower and therefore the ability to do well in terms of traffic, leads, and sales increases exponentially.

[Home](#) » [Blog](#) » Article

How Inbound Marketing can Help Lawyers Build their Practices

Posted by [Matthew Stock](#). [Leave a Comment](#)

[!\[\]\(4fc2f7cc81639d6310529267a2ee602c_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(714d70875eaf0e2f34d0a261eaf96dad_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(dc7d17b015a4a5f15a29473bc04652a8_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(5c0abc957d80f247ea343c3880b3dca2_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(6899a0bcd8d53896b1590da3ef0ba47b_img.jpg\)](#)

Before I wrote this post, I talked to U.S. Waterproofing's chief content officer who is a lawyer and former bar association executive. He's always enthusiastic about Inbound Marketing but he really got excited about everything it can do for law firms so this isn't just the opinion of a basement waterproofing guy.



How much rain have you made lately, counselor? Are you and your firm finding it more and more difficult to generate new business, whether your practice is focused on individual or corporate clients?

My friend Matt Stock nails a perfectly targeted title with blog post for his company, Inbound Storm.

4. Blah,blah,blah: Although I'm a firm believer that some content is better than no content, the reality is the marketing industry is full of blogs that simply **are boring with few opinions, no personal voice, and often times little thought provocation**. As to why this is, I'm not totally sure, but I know it doesn't work very well to be lukewarm in an industry as dense with content as the marketing realm.

In fact, I strongly feel the main reason **The Sales Lion** has risen above the chatter in the marketing arena is because I have strong opinions backed up by personal experience, which brings me to my next point.

5. A Major Lack of Case Studies and Personal Experiences: I'd be lying if I said I wasn't amazed at how few of the blogs I looked at recently discussed stories of clients they had helped and the results of said labors.

Like I said a while back, **consumers and businesses are not terribly interested in theory these days**. They want to know the victories and success stories your agency has had. They want to

know why you're good at what you do. And they want to know if your help will make them more money than you'll cost.

If you can't show this in your content, then there is a good chance you're phone isn't going to ring.

7 Companies That Jumped on a Viral Craze at Just the Right Time

131

Like

478

Tweet

20

+1

in

in Share

Remember what you thought when you first saw the Old Spice guy? When you heard the musical stylings of Carly Rae Jepsen in the emotional roller coaster "Call Me Maybe?" How about when you saw the inexplicably catchy "Gangnam Style" dance? These are some examples of virality (the marketing kind) at its best.

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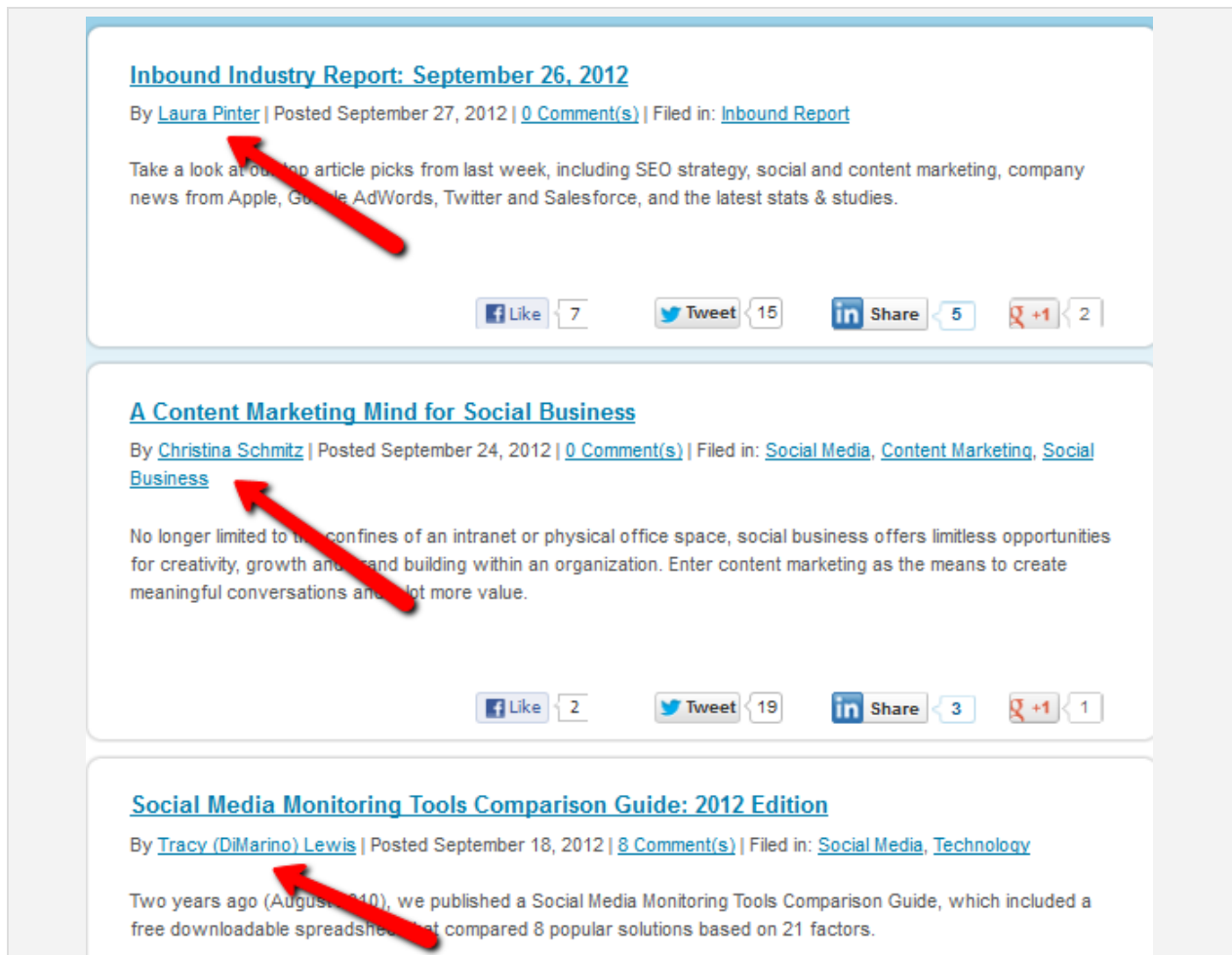
Posted by Rachel Sprung

Comments

Tags: inbound marketing, introductory

HubSpot always does a masterful job in looking at the marketing success stories of other companies and how they were able to achieve their results.

6. Poor Utilization of Writing Talent: I'm always astounded when I see an agency with 10+ employees yet only one person is blogging. The way I see it, **if someone is teaching others to blog and produce content they should be doing it as well.** Plus, when companies learn to leverage the writing and brain power of their existing employees, the amount of content that can be produced is astounding. Just look at [HubSpot](#), [Kuno Creative](#), or [PR 20/20](#) if you want to see companies doing this the right way.



Easily one of the best marketing agency blogs, PR 20/20 utilizes well a multiple blogger platform.

7. Awful Networking: To be frank, some industries don't require great networking with others in your field to be successful. For example, I networked with a grand total of ZERO people with my swimming pool blog, but that was again made possible due to the fact that the CSI was so very low. On the other hand, after a year of writing on The Sales Lion with little traction, I realized that strategy wasn't very effective and if I didn't start networking much better, I'd never rise above the chatter.

To see examples of exactly how you can get this done, [read this article](#).

Going Forward

As I said at the start of this article, I don't see this problem with agency/social media/marketing blogs going away. As more and more blogs pop up daily, more and more people will find lead generation incredibly tough to come by in this extremely saturated industry—**arguably the most saturated subject in the online world today**.

This being said, I have found that one of the best ways marketing agencies can deal with this problem is to actually **get out and speak to real people**. In other words, if you're trying to generate clients for yourself and/or your agency, you need to start teaching as many groups of people as possible. Whether it's at a conference, at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, or at a simple lunch appointment—the **value of face to face lead generation is making a huge comeback in this industry**. Yeah, I know it may sound surprising and even ironic to many, but starting a blog and calling yourself a “marketing expert” is as quick a way to credit card debt and business failure as any in today's society.



Along with this blog, speaking has been a major lead generation tool for me over the past year. In fact, there are many marketing consultants that draw almost 100% of their leads from speaking to groups of people.

But as I stated above, if you truly want to have a **GREAT** blog with great results, **average is going to get you nowhere quickly**.

So have opinions. Target. Write intelligent and strategic titles. Utilize your employees. Learn to network.

And most of all, **just be exceptional at what you do**.

Easy? Nope. But without question, the opportunities are still there.

33 Irrefutable Laws of Content Marketing that Will Outlive the Internet

You've heard me say this before, but **content marketing isn't new**. These days, we just call it something different than we called it before, which is fine.

Heck, about 2000 years ago a group of like-minded people all worked together to write a book that was full of stories, answered lots of questions, and was loaded with calls-to-action.

Today we call that book "**The Bible**."

Yep, the principles that made the Bible successful are no different than the principles that separate good from bad content marketing today.

It is for this reason I decided to write the following 33 Laws, as I truly feel that if all companies understood what content marketing was as a "principle"—their ability to have success and then implement it would increase exponentially. That being said, here goes:

The 33 Irrefutable Laws of Content Marketing that Will Outlive the Internet

1. **They Ask, You Answer** (If your company has ever been asked a question from a prospect or customer, it's your moral obligation to answer it.)
2. The goal is to be **helpful**...not appear intelligent.
3. Great listeners never run out of content.
4. When you ask people to do something, they're more inclined to do it. (i.e. Calls to Action)
5. If you're biased in the way you communicate, you won't earn trust.
6. People will remember "stories" over "facts" any day of the week.
7. All this marketing stuff we talk about is essentially the act of listening, communicating, and teaching. The rest is just fancy words.
8. The best **teachers** will always gain the most trust and respect from the audience.
9. Enthusiasm and passion always beats dry and boring.
10. [Insourcing](#) content almost always beats outsourcing in terms of results.
11. The world is looking for leaders, in every industry.

12. Leaders sell more stuff.
13. Some “just OK” content that is **published** will always crush “awesome” content that **never gets published**.
14. “Get Better” is more important than perfection.
15. Great content marketing companies don’t allow their competition to dictate what they do and do not write about. Their sole guiding light is the ideal customer—**and no one else**.
16. You have to produce average content to learn how to produce great content.
17. Everyone has a story to tell—most just don’t realize nor appreciate their story.
18. Amazing stories pertaining to our industry are all around us—if we can just see them unfold.
19. Content Marketing as a “[culture](#)” will always beat content marketing as a “program.”
20. Industry thought leaders put their opinions out there and are strong enough to take it from both sides.
21. The best content marketers embrace **who they are NOT** just as much as they embrace who they ARE.
22. The more red tape, lawyers, and bottlenecks a company has, the more they stink at content marketing.
23. Consumers see the world in terms of their “problems”—not your company’s “stuff” or “products” or “features.”
24. **Great companies don’t care that others have addressed subjects**. They want the world to know **their** doctrine on the subject matter.
25. “Useful” will always beat “Amazing”
26. Not all questions have a direct answer, which is why great content marketers understand how to explain the magic words—“[It depends](#).”
27. If top to bottom buy-in for content marketing doesn’t exist within an organization, the chance that a company will fail with content marketing is very, very high.
28. The greatest content marketers have a keen ability to think ***exactly*** as a consumer.
29. Content marketing success is a journey, not a destination.

30. Honest, transparent content will always be the minority—making it one of the most powerful trust-building methods in the world.

31. **If you try to sound smart, you'll look stupid.**

32. People learn different. Some want to read text. Others want to watch video. And others want to hear words. Great content marketing companies don't fight this, they embrace it.

33. Platforms come and go. **Principles never die.**

Chapter 4: Using Your Content to SELL

I Teach, Therefore I Sell

First of all, I'd like to thank [Rene Descartes](#) for his inspiration behind the title of this blog post. I do believe that if Descartes was around today he'd be thrilled with the direction of sales and marketing around the world. But to the point of this post.....

In this rapidly evolving Web/Sales/ Marketing 2.0 era, the days of slick tricks and manipulative techniques are going the way of the dinosaur. Consumers, more than ever, are getting smarter. They are more informed and prepared than ever. And they're just waiting to be fed.

And what do I mean by "fed"?

Well as we've talked about time and time again on this blog, *he who produces the most remarkable and valuable content in his field is king*. That's how it works—pure and simple.

Look at Steve Jobs.....Seth GodinWayne Dyer.

All of these men do what they do in extraordinary ways. **Steve Jobs** has dedicated his life to finding enriching technology that will bless the lives of others.

Seth Godin is the king of marketing today. The guy produces bestselling books faster than I can write a blog post. Every day he sits down at his computer and gives the world valuable and relevant information. And he gives it to us for free. No cost at all. Unbelievably awesome.

Wayne Dyer has over 30 best-selling books in the field of Self-improvement, Awareness, and Intention. The man has been doing this for years and years. Giving, producing, teaching, writing, speaking, helping, and persisting.

And what do all these men have in common? Although one could argue they share many, many

traits, I'd like to mention just one:

They are passionate teachers. Their lives are built around giving other people information and tools to enhance the life experience. And not only do they love to teach, but they've been doing it consistently every day for years and years.

And what has been the result of their labors?

Well other than the fact that each has positively affected millions and millions of people in their field, all are incredibly rich. And I'm not saying a little rich. These guys are multi, multi-millionaires. And for lack of a better term, these guys, among many appropriate titles, are great salesmen.

Selling and Prosperity are Beautiful

Now you might not feel that "salesmen" is the proper description for these men. My answer to this is simple: Selling is a beautiful thing, especially when it's a result of great teaching. Selling is not a bad word. Rather, it's poetry in motion. These men attract prosperity into their lives through their labors.

And the wonderful thing is they deserve it. In fact, they deserve every stinking penny they make. Heck, each one has made me way more money than I'll ever give to them. This is why I don't hesitate to give them my money. They are great teachers that offer great value which to me is worth whatever the asking price.

A Gift Economy

Today we live in a [gift economy](#). The more we give, the more we'll get back in return. It's beautiful synergy. Thrilling in the very least.

Zig Ziglar used to say, "If you help enough people get what they want, they will in-turn help you get *everything* you want."

Wow this statement is awesome. I've seen it work in the incredible lives of the men mentioned above but I've also seen the principle hold true for entrepreneurs, sales professionals, and small businesses across the world. No matter what the profession, this principle of teaching to sell will always hold true.

Why?

My friends will at times ask me why I blog so much. As I really don't do much "hard selling" here at The Sales Lion or my other blogs, some are confused as to what my ultimate goals are.

Fact is, I absolutely know, without any doubt, this blog is leading me down a new path of greatness. Just as my other blog catapulted my company to the top of its field, this blog is and will be the portal by which I can bless the lives of others. It is the means by which I can help small businesses to overcome the traps that so many succumb to. It is the way by which I can help professional sales people and marketers elevate their skills and reach results they never dreamed possible. And finally, this blog is my greatest learning tool. It pushes me. It forces me to think. It makes me better.

Abundance

But as I continue to walk this road of giving and teaching, the inevitable results will be abundance for myself and others. This is what life is all about. It's a universal law and is why I'm terribly grateful for the fact that I'm alive during the information age. Never before can so many people give value to others simply by the stroke of a key. It's unbelievable when you actually consider the beauty of it all.

So my challenge to you is to *give*. Give your knowledge freely. Know you'll get it back 100-fold. Think abundantly. Be the best teacher you can be. Teach, teach, teach. And as you become a great teacher in your field, know that you'll taste success. Know that you will sell freely and easier than ever before because you've established incredible relationships with incredible people. This is the world we now live in. Smile and embrace it.

Assignment Selling: The Essential Sales Technique of the Information Age

Have you ever heard the phrase "Assignment Selling"? Chances are, you haven't, but let me assure you it may be the most important part of your business' marketing and sales success in the future.....**that you're not currently doing**. Allow me to explain.

We've been talking a ton lately about content, education, and thinking like a consumer by answering *their* questions.

No doubt, the phrase "Content is King" is the latest rage, as well it should be. But what happens when content and information never get read? What happens when a consumer just breezes through it without truly making the effort to absorb its teachings?

The answer, as we all know, is: nothing. Nothing happens. Nobody learns. No progress is made. When it comes down to it, “*Content is King*” needs to be paired with the phrase “*As Long as Someone is Actually Listening.*”

To explain what I’m trying to say here let’s look at my other field—the swimming pool industry, as an example.

Often times prospects will excitedly call my store or send us an email requesting to have someone out to their house so as to give them information and a quote on a pool. And in most cases for just about every swimming pool company across the world, the process of setting up this appointment, other than a few “find-out” questions, is rather pitiful.

I say pitiful because I used to be pitiful in my approaches with customers as well. They’d call, we’d talk, and bam—appointment made. But before long I realized I was making one grave mistake—the homeowner didn’t have enough responsibility on *their* end. In other words, they were looking for someone to teach them in their home what they could already learn from the countless pages of content on my website.

Teaching vs. Selling

Because of this lack of responsibility, I found myself spending too much time teaching prospects on sales calls and not enough time selling. And regardless of what anyone in the world might say, **selling, and not teaching**, is what ultimately pays the bills.

Upon realizing the error of my ways, I became much bolder with clients. In fact, I started giving them “homework” before I’d come out to their house.

Yes, that’s right, I did just say *homework*.

For example, before I go on a sales appointment with an inground pool prospect I’ll send them the following information. Our company reference list of over 600 customers, a 50 page eBook all about swimming pools and options 3-5 Significant Articles from our company blog

As you can see, this is a lot of information—as well it should be. If someone is serious about a pool and knows they are getting ready to spend 30-70k, then they likely don’t want to make a mistake on their purchase—hence the call for great content and information.

When I set a sales appointment, I tell the prospect I expect them to read the information sent and check on the references as well.

And what if they say they don't have time to read the info or seem uninterested?

Then I don't go out to the home. Pure and simple.

When it comes down to it, if a consumer isn't willing to do their due diligence when researching an expensive product or service, this means only one thing:

All they care about is price.

And as I like to say—When it comes to running a successful business, ***Price Ain't Nice.***

Since I made the switch to assignment selling a few years back, I now find sales appointments are much, much better. Prospects are clearly informed. Trust, because of the content, has already been established long before I arrive. And what about closing rates?

As you might imagine, they've shot up drastically as well.

Start Giving “Homework” Today

So my question to you is what learning assignments do you give to prospects before your first sales meeting? Are you just asking a few simple questions or are you making sure the prospect demonstrates effort on their part as well?

If you're not yet implementing this strategy into your sales system, please start today. Come up with some type of “homework” for your clients and watch the dominoes fall as they may. I can promise you that if you take this leap of faith you will be greatly benefited and you'll spend much more time selling vs. teaching, you'll be happier, and your wallet will reap the benefits.

Why You Should Start Writing, Stop Hiding, and Quit Worrying About the Competition

This post has been building within me for months but finally boiled over the other day when Jens from Sly Marketing asked me the following question with regard to blogging and inbound marketing on my last article about [content creation](#):

I have recently talked to a few guys at a print design company, a fairly successful company with about 30 employees. They asked me about marketing, and I told them about inbound marketing and blogging. They were skeptical, because they didn't want to share anything with their

competitors. What if they just copied everything they did?

Although to someone like you or I that actually sees the “big picture” of content and inbound marketing, there is a surprising number of business owners in this world that are afraid they’ll be giving too much of themselves to their competitors if they embrace such a marketing paradigm. To these business owners, I offer you this suggestion:

Pull Your Head Out of Your Butt

Sorry for the strong imagery, but it’s the truth. The idea that other companies and businesses will copy you and get an advantage because of the fact that you teach, inform, and inspire is quite possibly the dumbest thing in the history of the world. In fact, here are 5 keys to remember if you’re hedging over the idea as to whether blogging and inbound marketing are right for your business:

5 Reasons You Should Stop Worrying About the Other Guy and Worry More About Yourself:

1. You’re Nothing Special (Part I): Ouch. That’s right. Your company is nothing special until you actually do something special. And what’s special today? Special today is giving more than anyone else. Special is embracing video, blogging, and social media in an effort to be the most informative company you can be. Special is willing to put yourself out there in the realm of public voice and thought and participate in the conversation. Unless you’re doing this today, **you’re nothing special.**

2. You’re Nothing Special (Part II): So here we are again, but this time we’re talking about the way your company does what it does. Let me give you an example: I was once talking to a manufacturing company about Web 2.0 principles. I told the owner the first thing I’d suggest is that he take video of every little thing his company does in the factory, how they do it, and what makes them so dang good. And do you know how he responded? If you guessed, “I don’t want my competitors to see how we do things,” then you were right. After wanting to splash a bucket of cold water on the guy’s head, I simply told him the following:

You’re not freaking Coca-Cola. You make stuff a lot like everyone else. So stop thinking your stuff is such a secret when it’s not.

So many businesses are so worried about hiding “important information” from their competition that all they’re really doing is hiding their value and “story” from the all-important consumer.

It’s crazy. If companies and manufacturers would start realizing this and stop paying so much

attention to what their competition supposedly knows, then maybe we'd hear a lot less complaining about how bad the economy is and more talk of profits in the marketplace.

3. You Can Lead a Horse to Water but You Can't Make Him Drink: Because of the way we embraced blogging, video, and inbound marketing in the swimming pool industry a few years ago, my company and I became the “voice” of the fiberglass pool industry.

And once we did this, guess what I then started doing? If you guessed that I shared every business “secret” I knew here on TSL, then you're right. Many people thought I was crazy. “Why would Marcus show everyone how he's had so much success?” is a question that has been posed quite a few times over the past year. And the answer to the question is simple—**Most business owners are lazy marketers.** They're the horse that doesn't drink. I can spell success out for them all day long but the majority (again [Pareto's Law](#) always proves true) simply don't do what it takes to be successful. Amazing.....sad.....yet very true.

4. There's Room for Everyone On Top: This may come across as a bit utopic but it's true. Having an abundance mentality, I firmly believe there's room on top for everyone. Thus, if I can help more companies to succeed, the laws of karma will in-turn bless me and my business as well.

Why is it that way? I have no idea; I just know that it is. Sure, it takes guts to show the world the right way to run a business, build a product, or offer a service—but it's this same mentality that blesses everyone while thrusting your company to the top of its field.

5. The Train is Already Leaving the Station: If businesses want to live in fear of great marketing, then they must understand this—The train called inbound marketing (blogging, video, etc) has left the building. Either get on or be left behind. Or, to put it in my most eloquent manner—**It's time to pooh or get off the pot folks.**

Success is not going to wait for coward business owners. Success will enter the lives of those persons that have a teacher's mentality. So, to all you business owners out there right now that are looking down this path of marketing and debating its merits, **look no further.** The time is now. Get on the train, there's still just enough time.

Content Marketing Tipping Points

Something magical happened to me in January of 2011. As I was reviewing all my stats and analytics from 2010, I stumbled across a very unique number that has changed my business and lead to our most profitable year ever.

But before I explain what I found, a little background information is in order. For the past 10 years, before I started teaching others about marketing, I was a “pool guy.” Yep, that’s right, I own a swimming pool company that installs inground swimming pools throughout Virginia and Maryland. During this time period, we’ve seen some major ups and downs, with none worse than the economic collapse of late 2008.

But with this crash we also experienced one of our greatest discoveries—**content marketing**. In fact, once we embraced content, and decided to become the leaders of the swimming pool industry (in terms of consumer education), our blog, website, and business exploded. Today, the site is the #1 trafficked inground swimming pool website in the world.

One Little Number Can Change Everything

Getting back to my original paragraph though, as I looked at the 2010 analytics, and compared all the leads versus the leads that had turned into actual customers, I noticed a trend that I’d never picked up on before.

To make a long story short, **if a lead read at least 30 pages of our company website, the closing rates, if I went out on a sales appointment, would shoot up to nearly 80%.** Considering the average closing rate for a sales appointment is 10-15% in the swimming pool industry, this number was astonishing.

Literally, with almost every “customer” I looked at, the number of page views was 30 or above. Heck, some were 75, 100, and even 250 pages viewed!

Once I realized there was a direct correlation between number of page views and closing rates, our entire marketing strategy changed as a company. We now dedicated all of our efforts to not only producing great content, but making sure our prospects saw and read this content—which would therefore help them reach this magical “**tipping point**” and almost guarantee the likelihood of the sale.

A Principle for any Industry

Also, once I began to investigate further and watch this “content tipping point” number in action, I realized the principle would apply to other businesses just as well as it did mine.

This being said, I started teaching on my marketing blog and in seminars the principle of content tipping points, and with each event came incredible feedback. As business owners heard the principle, they would go back to their web analytics and start to see that they, too, had a “tipping point” for their product or service. Once they understood what this number was, they would then engineer a marketing and sales process that would be centered around said number.

Learning *Your* Content Tipping Points

Although I could literally talk about the principle of content tipping points all day, if you’d like to know what yours is for your business, there are basically 3 things you’ll need to do:

1. Produce Content!

When we started blogging as a pool company, our website consisted of a total of 20 pages. Today, it has about 750. Had we not produced all of this content, we never would have known just how prolific some leads would be in terms of research (page views). We also would not have had the chance to realize that 30 pages was the core number for all of our content marketing efforts.

So if you’re not blogging, producing video, and creating other informational works on your company website, it’s time to get to it!

2. Beefy Analytics

Some of you might be wondering how I knew the page view numbers of our leads, which is a very good question. You see, something like Google Analytics tracks “visitor behavior,” not “lead behavior.” In order to do that, you’re going to need more. In my case, I use HubSpot analytics. Whenever a visitor comes to my website and fills out a form, they then become a “lead” and I can now start tracking their behavior.

If your company’s web analytics do not track lead behavior, I’d strongly recommend you consider a platform that will give you much more than you’re currently getting from the basic Google Analytics.

3. Web Forms

In conjunction with #2, if you don’t have places on your website where visitors can fill out forms (contact, free reports, blog subscription, etc.) then you won’t be able to get the information

needed to track their behavior, no matter what type of analytic platform you might be using. So be sure to give your readers ample opportunity and offers to be able to gather their information in exchange for your excellent content and services.

In closing, if you're looking to take your content marketing to another level, I'd strongly urge you to do your best to find out what your "content tipping points" are and then create a sales and marketing campaign built around this incredibly important number. By so doing, your sales cycle will likely shorten while your margins increase, and this year may just be one of the best years ever for your business.

Chapter 5: Finding Writing Inspiration

An Author's Peril: How to Keep Writing and Blogging When No One is Reading

I published my first paperback book when I was in college. It was of the self-help type, and after 18 months of hard work to write it and find a publisher, I could only dream big as to the success my first literary work would eventually have. But as the saying often goes, *it's a good thing I didn't hold my breath.*

Despite my high hopes, the book never took off, barely reaching 1000 sales. Sure, I was happy I'd have a little treasure for my posterity to look back on, but at the same time I felt it had generally failed in terms of influencing other people for good.

I published my next book about 3 years later. This time, I *knew* the book would take-off. It was the only of its kind and there was literally no doubt in my mind that it would end up being a best seller in its niche.

Soon thereafter, disappointment set in again. Yes, it did sell decently. Heck, it even eclipsed 5000 copies, a number that over 95% of all published books never reach. Notwithstanding, those numbers seemed so small for a book that I completely felt to my core would affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for good.

I was perplexed. Again, my desire to help others on a very large scale had fallen short. As before, a part of me was proud yet the other half felt genuine disappointment and a little sadness with the results.

A Story of a Fish

All of us have heard the story of *Moby Dick*. Yes, that's right, the tale of a whale and an interesting guy that called himself Ishmael. But what so many fail to realize about this novel is the fact that its author, Herman Melville, only experienced moderate success during his lifetime. In fact, *Moby Dick* was initially panned by most critics and did not explode in popularity and appreciation until the 1920s, roughly 30+ years after its author's death.

Why did Melville's epic novel take so long to catch fire? That's a great question, but in reality

it's just one of thousands of literary works that did not get noticed upon initial release.

I'm not inferring here with this example that we're all going to die before someone actually notices our literary genius. No, not at all. What I am trying to say though is that sometimes we simply cannot control outside forces. Timing and fate are very funny things. Just recently, as a matter of fact, I was reminded of this truism:

There's a Melville Moment in all of us

About 10 months ago I was getting my kids to bed when the phone rang. Not recognizing the number, I curiously answered the call and was surprised to find on the other end the editor of a prominent magazine. To my amazement and splendor, the gentleman said he had found my book to be the premier work in its class, and wanted to buy its rights so as to produce a shortened, article version for the magazine. As you might imagine, I quickly responded in the affirmative, grinning from ear to ear the rest of the evening.

A few months later the magazine was published with my article, and with its circulation of 1 million readers in 40+ languages, you can imagine the joy I felt. Finally, the teachings in the book were helping the masses of people I had envisioned 7 years before but at this point had all but given up on.

Keep Plowing Forward

I mention this little story because as writers, teachers, and communicators we all have our ups and downs. Our passions and dreams can be floating on clouds one minute and then buried in the deepest abyss the next. But the next time you think to yourself no one is reading or appreciating your work, remember that although you and I cannot always control time, we can control the art we produce. So keep writing. Don't give up on yourself, your blog, your business, or your dreams. Yes, there will be tough moments, but as the famous saying goes:

I never said it would be easy, I only said it would be worth it.....

So what's your story? Do you ever feel like you should just stop writing, blogging, or owning your business? How have you overcome these tough times and managed to find your "Melville Moments"?

7 Ways to Stop Staring at the Screen and Start Writing Your Next Great Blog Article

It's time to write. Your next scheduled article to post is already a day late on the calendar. You're nervous, frustrated, and feeling the pressure. All you see is a white screen in front of you. Call it writer's block. Call it burn-out. Whatever you call it, you've got it. And you're frustrated.

Such a scene is all too common with many bloggers and content marketers out there. Simply put, for a writer, there is almost nothing worse than the inability to **produce**. And when we can't seem to produce, the tension and frustrations can throw our whole world for a loop.

For the last few years of my life I've been blogging. Beyond the scope of running my swimming pool company and writing about 200 articles during this time, I've also written over 300 articles on The Sales Lion.

A kind gentleman who follows both of these blogs asked me a simple question recently :
"Marcus, how the heck do you do it?"

Good question. In fact, it's a question I've been thinking about myself lately because the truth is it's not hard for me to constantly produce new and original articles. Heck, if my mind had its choice, I'd write an article here on The Sales Lion every day but I realize that 3 articles a week is the perfect balance for most readers, so I'll just continue to build ideas upon ideas of possible articles and add them to my little list of "Future Posts."

But let's talk about this for a second. How can a blogger constantly come up with fresh and informative content without hitting the wall and losing his or her mind in frustration? Here goes.....

7 Butt-Kicking Ways to Stop Staring at the Screen and Start Writing Your Next GREAT Blog Article

1. See a Lesson in Everything: I follow many blogs on the Internet. And one habit I see many fall into is they just start saying the same thing over and over again in each article without integrating personal experiences into their writings. This, my friends, is a HUGE mistake.

You may have noticed that almost every post here on The Sales Lion relates a recent experience I've had in my life. Literally, I go about my day *looking* for life's lessons. To me, and I really mean this, every act that I'm a part of throughout a day has a morsel of truth that comes along with it.

More than anything, this is why so many bloggers struggle. When I hear a blogger tell me they simply don't have rich learning experiences I tell them they're wrong and their problem isn't a lack of great experiences and events in their life, it's a lack of recognizing and gleaning from said experiences. If you simply learn this one skill I can promise you'll never look at a blank

screen on your computer again.

2. Become a Master at Thinking Like a Consumer: For many businesses, this is huge. That's why I've talked so much about this skill in past articles. Business owners and marketers constantly assume that consumers know more than they really know, which therefore limits one's ability to teach, teach, and teach some more. The key here is to ask yourself every possible question (none are too basic) a consumer might have regarding your product or service and then start writing about it. I know this sounds like common sense but like the phrase says, "*Common sense is sadly uncommon.*"

3. Don't be So Dang Rigid: I'm all for having a blog schedule and for planning ahead, but I'm also a huge advocate of allowing yourself to feel inspired and follow those promptings when they come. For example, there have been times when I've started an article that I had planned only to find that my passion and thoughts at that moment were elsewhere, on another topic. Usually, this is because I just had another one of those powerful "life lessons" mentioned in #1 above and because it's so fresh in my mind, that's what I need to be writing about in that moment. So be flexible. Allow inspiration. Listen always to your inner voice.

4. Get to Know Your Body and Brain: I know, this one sounds kinda weird but stick with me for a second. We all suffer from fatigue, whether it is mental, physical, or spiritual. For me, because I write so much and my brain is constantly on overdrive, there are moments when I can see that if I try to write that second, the effort will be too great because my mind/body is "off" or simply tired. It's in these moments that I've learned to immediately stop what I'm doing and go for a walk, wrestle with my kids, hop on the elliptical, call a friend out of the blue, etc. By simply "taking a break," your mind and body will get a needed re-charge and you'll be off to the content races once again.

5. Forget Perfection and Just Write: Too many people want to be perfect when they write. I got past that a longtime ago and accepted the reality that *I ain't no Victor Hugo*. I know that I've got important things to share with the world and a few writing or communication imperfections are simply not going to impede my progress. So don't be so hard on yourself. Write.....then edit.....then smile.....then push publish.

6. Choose Passion Every Time: Remember, if you're blogging just to make money than your business model is doomed to fail.....miserably. Money is not a great motivator. Yes, it can get us excited but after a while, it becomes a curse. Do I make money because of The Sales Lion? Yeah, sure I do, but this blog isn't about the money. I *have* to write this stuff. It's literally begging me to exit my finger tips. This is passion, and I sure hope you feel the same about what you write.

7. Write with a Smile: Don't even ask me to explain this one, because I can't. But trust me, it

works. The next time you're in a little funk and the cursor doesn't seem to be moving, smile. And I'm not talking about a partial grin here folks, I'm talking about a big, fat smile. I promise that when you do this some crazy thing starts to happen in your brain and everything will just get easier. (I told you I couldn't explain it.)

I hope these 7 tips will help you in your efforts to be consistently great at blogging. They may take a little time to learn, but take it from me that I know they work and I use each habit every single day.

The Misconception that is Inspired Writing and Blogging

Around 9:30pm last Monday night my wife and I were having a discussion. It went something like this:

Nikki: What's on your work schedule tonight?

Me: Well, I need to post something on The Sales Lion tomorrow but I honestly am not sure what I'm going to write about.

Nikki: Oh, I'm sure you'll think of something, you always do.

Me: Yeah, I hope so.....(after a thoughtful pause) Maybe I'll write about success habits for the new year.

Nikki: There, just like I said, you always do.

This Ain't So Bad

Shortly after our conversation, I was sitting in my downstairs office, smacking the keys of my laptop, and pensively thinking about the habits that had made such a difference in my life this year. And as quickly as my fingers could type, before I knew it there was laid out in front of me a list of 20. With almost no previous thought of what I was going to be writing that night, the words were now taking care of themselves.

About 45 minutes in, the first draft was done. Never once had I stared at the clock. To me, it felt more like 10 minutes.

But there they were, 1700 words, and after reading the draft, a surprising thought came to mind. "Wow, this ain't too bad."

Frankly speaking, I knew it was good. No, not a good as in “*Look at my writing, it rocks*” but rather a “*These words have just been waiting to find their page*” type of good.

Those of you that have been writing and blogging for some time know exactly what I’m talking about. Sometimes your stuff is just OK and you know it. On other occasions it’s “pretty good.” But then there are the moments when everything seems to come together and you look back and say, “Wow, I just wrote that??”

This, my friends, is inspired writing.

The Results

The next day, once [the post](#) was published, I found my intuition had not led me astray. Quickly, personal emails started coming in. Twitter started to bustle. And Facebook really began to work its magic.

In fact, in less than a 24-hour period, the post received over 1000 visits from Facebook alone.

For some of the bigger bloggers out there, this number may seem like chicken-feed, but for me it was a big deal. After all, I usually get just under 1000 visits from Facebook over the course of an entire month.

Within 72 hours, the post had become my #1 trafficked article ever on The Sales Lion, and had also been tweeted and “liked” more than any other previous post. Furthermore, it was a lightning-rod for private emails of people telling me how it how touched them in some way, with the word “inspired” coming up again and again.

Just Start Writing

I don’t say these things with any intent to brag here my friends, I only mention them to make this critical point:

If I hadn’t started writing, the inspiration never would have occurred, and none of the “good stuff” would have ever happened.

Seriously, think about that for a second.

How many times have you said to yourself: “Oh, I really don’t have anything good to talk about today and so therefore I’m not going to blog”?

We’ve all been there—**every single one of us**.

Last Monday night, as I was discussing this subject with my wife Nikki, it would have been very, very easy to simply “pass” on the article and look for lightning in a bottle some other day. The inspiration, at least at first, didn’t appear to be present.

But again, that’s not how inspiration normally works. In fact, the idea (shared by many) that we should only write and blog “when we feel inspired” or “have something amazing to say” is a complete falsehood, and it’s certainly not the M.O. of the majority of the greatest writers and bloggers in the world today.

The Key

So here’s my writing advice to you:

1. Set a writing/blogging schedule.
2. When the time comes, open up your laptop.
3. Once open, start hitting keys.

As for the “inspiration,” well I guess we’ll just have to wait and see if it decides to join the party.

Chapter 6: Writing, Copywriting, and Communicating Like a Champion

How to Learn to Love Writing, Blogging, and Content Marketing

If someone were to ask you how much you enjoyed the process of writing, what would you say? Do you like it? Do you love it? Or is it a chore that you know needs to occur so as to produce content and continue to reach the personal or business blogging goals you've set for yourself or your business?

A Writer's Journey

As I was driving home today from a 3-day business meeting that completely consumed all my time and labors, I felt something within me calling out. Yes, my writing instincts had been pushed aside for the first time in many months. Needless to say, they were ready to be released.

While driving in my car and analyzing these feelings a little smile came to myself as I realized just how much of a mighty change has been wrought within me over the past 2 years.

You see, I used to abhor writing. I can remember those 500 word book reports we had to do back in middle and high school that were such a tremendous challenge. Later on in life, while in college, my English instructor flat-out told me I wasn't very good at writing. Was he mistaken? Likely not, but clearly the self-label had begun to take effect.

The Shift Begins

By the time I was 22, my feelings started to change. Just having returned from living in the country of Chile for 2 adventurous years, a desire within took root. I wanted to share my thoughts and experiences. I wanted to teach others what life had taught me. To do this, I knew I must confront my fears—*it was time to embrace writing*.

It was during my 20's that I wrote 2 books. The first was total drudgery. Less than a page a day with over a solid year of writing. It was tough. It was laborious at times. Despite the difficulty though, I began to see light at the end of the tunnel.

My second book came easier. I started to learn to [write like I talked](#). No longer would I have to scrutinize every single sentence as I did before. Although I still had a long way to go, the process of putting my thoughts to pen became easier and easier with each new word.

Finally, at about the age of 31 I embraced a culture of content marketing within my swimming pool company. For a solid year I wrote at least 2 posts a week. Again, things got easier and easier, and I became faster and faster. The blog literally changed the entire industry and lead me to becoming a major [thought leader](#) within my niche.

My Greatest Writing Challenge

Then came The Sales Lion in November of 2009. This new project ushered in even greater writing challenges. I was now in a field full of excellent bloggers. But I had a burning desire to build my personal brand and I knew each article that was published could literally take me to new heights.

At first articles took at least 90 minutes to write. Countless late nights were involved. The challenge was great, but so was my will to succeed.

Today, an article such as the one you're now reading, will typically take me 25-35 minutes to write. In most cases, as soon as I have a title worked out in my mind, I feel as if the article is already written. It's truly an amazing thing. No stress. No worries. Just enjoyment and inspiration.

There is a Writer in Each of Us

I mention this not to make myself sound like a smart guy, but rather to give “real” insight into the life of a “non-writer.” I cannot count the number of times I’ve heard someone tell me that they’d love to blog or embrace content marketing, but simply don’t think it’s possible because they aren’t good at, and therefore do not love, the act of writing.

To those persons, please understand that I’ve been there. Heck, we’re all there, on the same path. Personally, I know I have a long ways to go until I write magical prose with utter ease, but I can assure you that the thousands of hours I’ve now spent blogging have been worth every minute.

To close, I repeat my original question: How can you learn to love writing?

Answer: Find your passion. See yourself as a teacher. And start putting your thoughts down on that computer screen of yours.

The journey for each and every one of us along this road is a unique one. For some it may come

easy. For others it will be difficult. But for everyone it will be worth it.

7 Ways You Can Learn to Write Like You Talk

I've noticed an interesting trend lately as I've been reading the mountains of blogs and blog comments on the web. For whatever reason, I hadn't picked up on this before but now that I see it, I'm beginning to realize it's a big problem for many. Simply put, here's my concern:

Most People Don't Write Like They Talk

I really began to pick up on this phenomenon when I started looking at bloggers, the way they wrote their comments, and then reading their actual blog articles. What's crazy is that I have found many bloggers write *better* in their comments on other blogs than they do in their own posts. This is very interesting indeed and so the question is "Why?" What makes their comments a better read? That, my friends, is what I want to address here, and the answer is clear: ***They write comments as if they're actually talking.***

I know, sounds like too simplistic of an answer, but it's true. One of the greatest keys to writing in this age of Web 2.0 and building online relationships is by being *real*. Who are you? What's your style? What's your voice?

If people (your readers and audience) can't answer these questions, then you're in trouble. They must know you through your writings. If not, you've failed, and your brand will suffer.

So how does it happen? How can you write like you talk? Here are my thoughts.....

7 Ways You Can Learn to Write Like You Talk

1. Chill Out

That's right. Just chill. For example, when you talk to a friend, spouse, or relative do you worry about every single word? Are you worried your next sentence will be a belly-flop? Hopefully, you don't, because if you did your conversations would be as painful as P90X. So relax a little, will ya!?

2. Keep the Vernacular

When I say vernacular, I mean that although we all want to sound and appear smart, “reaching” for words can actually hurt our flow of thought and ultimately hinder words from leaving the tips of our fingers. (BTW, when I say keep the vernacular, you may want to filter a few words unsuitable for virgin ears)

3. Colloquialisms and ‘Funky’ Words are Fine

What’s a funky word? Hmmm, let me see if I can draw from a few of my regulars on The Sales Lion.

Dufus

Ding-Dong

Barf

Shnikees

Wacko

Un-stinking-believable

Dude

Dang

Catch my drift? The words above are just a few “unique” terms that have been found in my past articles. But considering I write exactly as I talk, the articles just wouldn’t seem “real” to me unless they were included, plus you guys wouldn’t know just how goofy of a guy I am.

Another example of this is my buddy Leon in Australia. Many of you have seen him comment on here with his hilarious colloquialisms from “down unda” that always make readers smile, and without such phrases, Leon wouldn’t be nearly as appealing. So although filtering and professionalism do have their place, be careful to maintain your genuine voice, got me *mate*??

4. Smile While You Write

Seriously, this tool is awesome, and a great way to gauge if you’re taking yourself and your writings too seriously. Smiling means you’re happy. Smiling affects your entire physiological state. Smiling carries over into your writing and will make your words and message more vibrant to readers. My point? SMILE!

5. Tell a Story at Every Opportunity

I’m mystified how often people write without stories. It simply makes no sense to me

whatsoever. When we talk to our friends, we always use stories. They're intricate. They're effective. Audiences not only perk up when a personal experience or story is told, but they are also able to turn your words into a picture much easier.

Just look back on my blog. Out of hundreds of articles on here, I'd bet less than 10 are without some personal experience or observation on my part. If you're not following this pattern, do yourself a favor and start writing about your life today as it will make the process of content production much, much easier.

6. Grammar Ain't all it's Cracked Up to Be

Look, I'll be the first to admit that proper grammar and writing style do have their place and are certainly important (especially in certain types of business), but many writers get too dang caught up in **the rules**. For example, I have this lovely habit of starting sentences with the word, "and." General grammar rules don't smile upon this, but I frankly don't care. I write like I speak, so I guess "the rules" will just have to live with it.

7. Stop Trying to Impress Everyone

Seriously, have you ever written something and worried about whether or not your "style" would impress others? If you have, ya messed up. Want to impress readers in this new age? Try honesty, sincerity, and transparency. If you simply focus on those 3 writing characteristics, you'll eventually find great success in your niche.

Is the Curse of Knowledge and Bad Vernacular Killing Your Sales and Marketing Success?

I had an amusing experience the other day that was quite symbolic of the problem so many businesses, marketers, and salespersons are having all over the world this very minute regarding their communication.

To make a long story short, I contacted a business regarding the innovative topic of Geothermal Heating for swimming pools. I wanted to do a blog post for my pool business on this novel subject matter and asked the company if they would be interested. They said they would and this is what was sent back to me, word for word:

DX Geothermal, sometimes referred to as water less geothermal is the most efficient heating system available. The DX system uses copper tubing buried in the ground to which the systems refrigerant circulates thru. Because of this, the constant, renewable temperature of the earth being directly transferred to the system's refrigerant gives us constant and greater efficiencies that are not obtainable with traditional air sourced or water sourced heat pumps. Gas fired systems are only 80 to 90% efficient, air sourced heat pumps are about 200 % efficient provided the outdoor air temperature is high enough to draw heat from and water sourced geothermal systems approach 300% but the added cost of operating a ground water pump and the maintenance of the groundwater side detracts from this. DX heating efficiencies range between 400 to 600% and remain constant regardless of outdoor temperature and weather conditions. Another advantage is, unlike water sourced systems that require deep wells or large areas of closed loop tubing buried in the ground. We can install systems with in as little as a 12 by 12 ft. space for drilling. These systems are virtually maintenance free as there is no outdoor coil that requires annual cleaning and no water circuit on the ground end to be maintained. With a properly sized system, we can maintain the desired pool temperature year round without the use of any other source of heat. The system life is 20 to 30 years as well.

Huh?? Say What??

Ok, if you were able to make it through that without your head spinning in 400 different directions, then you're clearly much smarter than me. Now granted, maybe the nice gentleman that sent this didn't fully understand what I was asking for, but if I'm being realistic this guy is just suffering from the same communication disorder that so many business people and salespersons around the world make every day when discussing their products. This disease has become known as:

The Curse of Knowledge

I read a great excerpt on this lately from Yihong Ding over at [Semantic Focus](#) discussing this very interesting topic. The article states:

There are many examples of the Curse of Knowledge in the book Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, written by Chip and Dan Heath. One famous example is the experiment of "tappers" and "listeners." A tapper heard a well-known song, such as "Happy Birthday to You" or "The Star-Spangled Banner," and then he tapped out the rhythm to a listener by knocking on a table. After hearing the rhythm being tapped, a listener was then asked to tell the name of the song. According to the book, after repeating this experiment many times the tappers believed that the listeners should have correctly guessed at least 50% of their tapped songs. In reality, however, the listeners only guessed 2.5% songs correctly.

This is a fantastic demonstration of the Curse of Knowledge. The tappers knew the song when

they were tapping (so they were like experts), while the listeners knew nothing prior to hearing the tapping (so they were like laymen). The tappers had failed to deliver what they believed to be easy to the listeners. It was the Curse of Knowledge that produced the significant gap between 50% and 2.5%. When we think that we have succeeded in explaining our knowledge, we in fact did not.

Every field, no matter what its category, has its own vernacular and “knowledge.” And the people in that field, all too often, lose touch with reality in terms of their ability to discuss their products, services, job descriptions, etc. with other people. They just naturally assume everyone else knows what the heck they are talking about, which couldn’t be further from the truth.

Computer Nerds Just Don’t Get It

This is especially true in technical fields like the Internet. My goodness, some computer nerds suffer from the curse of knowledge so much that they’ve almost reached the point of speaking a completely different language. It can be crazy in some cases.

To give you an example, I did a local search of a company that offers computer services in my area. Under the “services” section of their company website, they offer the following (again, word for word): Securing Infrastructure Research, Design, and Implement Technology to increase efficiency and security Provide repair services for current Technology on a monthly maintenance fee or incident basis Ability to offer remote support services to ensure your Infrastructure stays optimized Pre-wire new or existing business construction for current and future Technology growth Proactive System Management Standardization and Optimization of business Infrastructure Server build, support, and implementation Networking Implementation

Now I know many of you reading this will think that such phrases make plenty of sense. But for 90% of the prospects and business owners (at least in my rural area of Virginia) that browse over this website, they really won’t have a clue as to what it’s saying. In fact, I visited three more local websites in my area to find they all suffered from the exact same problem.

So my question for you here is, are you suffering from “The Curse of Knowledge”? Are you speaking and communicating to others (such as your customers) in such a way that they clearly understand you?

Or are you making the terrible assumption that they share your knowledge, your vernacular, and your way of thinking?

Overcome and Succeed

If you can overcome this problem, I can guarantee that it will put you at the top of your field in terms of communicative abilities. So take pride in your abilities to be understood. Take pride in your simplistic, succinct, and informative writing and speech. Take pride in knowing that because you choose to explain things in a manner for all to understand that you are able to have great influence and success.

Dumb It Down, Will Ya?!!!

I had an “SEO expert” call me last week and this was his opening line: “Mr. Sheridan, do you realize your site is not optimized for many important keywords in your niche?”

As soon as I heard this question, I debated having a lot of fun with the guy and continuing the conversation, or just simply letting him be and allow my pity to quickly end the conversation.

I chose the latter but as I hung up the phone, a simple thought came to mind: **“This guy is too dumb to dumb it down.....and he’ll never make money because of it.”**

Yeah, kinda strong, but it’s true. **The Curse of Knowledge is Getting Worse**

My friend the “SEO expert” wasn’t different than most folks though. In fact, his actions represent the majority—in all industries, niches, and segments.

In the early days of my blog, when I had like 5 readers, I talked extensively about the [Curse of Knowledge](#), and how most business owners and employees use a vernacular well above their clients, thus destroying common sense communication and sales in general. And as I continue down this road of teaching and speaking about sales and marketing, I’m seeing the curse of knowledge more and more and more.

Just last week, as I was speaking to a variety of SEOs and marketers at the Marketing Sherpa Optimization Summit, I asked the group a very simple question: “Everyone (in the world) knows what optimization is at this point, don’t they?”

As I expected, the majority of people in the room shook their head in the affirmative—another sign that most simply don’t understand their clients and prospects.

My follow up went something like this:

“Actually, NO. Most people have no clue what the word “optimization” is. In fact, 95% of all business owners still don’t know what a “keyword” is. Furthermore, most of the people in the SEO and marketing industry use a slew of “common words and phrases” that very few small businesses actually ‘get’.”

Stupid Acronyms!

And speaking of common words and phrases that most people don’t get, I’ve got to take a second to mention a second curse—**The Curse of Acronyms.**

I’ve got to tell you, in general, I hate acronyms. They stink. (except TSL of course, which is the coolest!!) They assume people have a clue when they don’t. And often times they kill good conversation and ultimately cost people (that’d be you and me) lots of money. Here are a few examples of the most commonly used: ROI (Return on Investment), ROS (Return on Sales), B2B (Business to Business), B2C (Business to Consumer), CMO (Chief Marketing Officer), CRM (Customer Relationship Management), CPC (Cost Per Click), CTR (Click Through Rate), SMBs (Small Medium Businesses).

Although I could go on and on with a list of acronyms, I’ll stop there and just say this:

If you’re utilizing acronyms all of the time in your sales, marketing, and content—you’re losing lots of money. Yeah, sure there are many people that know what they mean, but there are many more that don’t know what the heck you’re talking about— they’re just too embarrassed to admit it.

This rule obviously also applies to any other industry or trade specific words that are applied to your niche.

Our Goal is NOT to be a Genius

At the risk of sounding a bit prideful (please don’t take it that way), the #1 compliment I receive regarding my speaking and writing is this:

“Marcus, you said it in such a simple way.....now I get it!”

Do I ever get accused of being a genius? Nope, but that's not the goal. The goal is that *everybody* gets what the heck it is I'm saying.

When we speak or when we write, we have a choice to make folks—We can try to impress *ourselves* or we can solely work to enlighten the *audience*. But be rest assured, the more “big words,” acronyms, and scientific stuff you say—the less you'll actually communicate a lick of value to your audience (at least in most cases).

Because I have the ability to simplify subjects, and because I try to never speak above my audience (whether it be a single client or a room of 500 people), I'm beginning to experience tremendous success in my life. As an example, I've been traveling around the country in the last few weeks to help existing HubSpot clients find success with their inbound marketing.

But do I bring any more knowledge to the table that HubSpot doesn't already do with their hundreds of awesome employees, thousands of articles, and slew of helpful videos?? Nope, not at all, but the one thing I can do pretty darn well is explain how the system works to average the Joe and Jill that have a desire but simply don't “get it.”

So that's the challenge folks—start dumbing it down and stop assuming your clients know more than they do. If you do this, I can assure you the results will be astounding.....

Baseball, Persistence, and How I Became a “Natural” Writer

Let's Play Ball

I need to tell a story. My son Joseph (aka JT) is in “coaches pitch” baseball this year. Basically, coaches pitch works like this: Kids, ages 6-9, are pitched a baseball from a machine. This machine tosses the ball at about 40 mph and consistently throws strikes down the plate. So as to keep the inning moving quickly, each child on the team gets a total of 6 swings to hit the ball. If they haven't hit the ball within 6 swings, they've struck out. Once every player has had 3 at bats, (3 total innings), the game is over.

As you might imagine, kids this age trying to hit a little ball going 40 mph and only having 6 swings to do so often times doesn't work out too well. Heck, it's not unusual to see coaches tossing the ball (very slowly mind you) under-handed to the kids because they simply can't seem to hit the machine.

But as luck would have it this year, my son was drafted (that always makes me laugh) by a lady named Tina Moss. Along with her husband Bill, Tina takes coaching these youth very, very seriously. This was evident in the first practice of the season, where she laid out 2 simple, yet profound rules to kids and parents:

1. The team would practice twice a week, no matter what, and attendance was expected.
2. Everyone would learn to hit off the machine, and there would be no underhanded pitches during the game. (In other words, they were going to work very hard.)

Personally, when I heard Coach Tina say this, a big smile came to my face. Yep, she was going to push these kids, and she wasn't going to allow an apparent lack of "talent" or "ability" get in the way.

Of course, once I watched the results of the first practice, I was a little concerned for Tina's wishes, as there was one big problem—a lot of our players (keep in mind these are very young boys and girls, many of which have never played ball) simply had no clue. Unfortunately, talent was not going to carry this group. Wondering how Tina would react, I just sat back and allowed time to tell.

Over the next 5 weeks, my son's team practiced a total of 10 times. Rain or Shine, somehow the coaches managed to work with the players. Even more amazing, they would have "special" practices for the kids that couldn't hit well. Unlike the kids in Malcolm Gladwell's "*Outliers*," none would fall victim to a lack of attention from coaches. Simply put, Tina's will to help them succeed would overcome any deficiencies their apparent "lack of talent" might induce.

Game Day

Finally, just last week, after hours and hours of practice, my son played his first game. Watching our kids warm up, I was amazed at their smiles and confidence. It was obvious they were ready to play some ball.

The game started with the other team batting. Within no time, I realized their kids weren't well prepared. In fact, I talked to one of the parents and was told they had only had 2 practices over the previous weeks. That's right, they had 2, and we had 10.

After a quick first half of the inning which saw their kids miss ball after ball from the machine, it was our turn to hit.



Me and my boy, future Hall of Famer

With coach Tina standing on 3rd clapping and cheering her future stars on, the hours of hard work were ready to shine.....and boy did they ever.

To make a long story short, these were the actual results of our players:

24 at bats, 24 hits

And the other team? 3 hits.....total.

That's right, in a 3 inning game, all 8 players on our team hit the ball *every time*. But not only that, every hit was made **by the 3rd pitch**. Not a single child needed 6, much less 4, pitches. **3 was it**. As a father and huge sports fan, I was literally blown away by what I witnessed. Kids, who just weeks before didn't know where to stand at the plate or even how to hold the bat were now ripping balls into the outfield.

Let's Quit with the Lame "Talent" Excuses

So what's my point with all of this? Well, to be completely frank, my days are filled with businesses owners explaining to me *why* they don't have talent with the web, technology, and content marketing. If I had a dollar for every time I've heard someone tell me, "I'm just not a good writer," I'd be a rich man. **The reality is that we all stink at writing in the beginning.** In fact, and I will bet my life on this, none of us came out the womb knowing how to slap words and sentences together. Somewhere along the line, each and every one of us, little by little, had to learn it.

When I was a kid in 4th grade, I was labeled a "below average reader." They put me in a group of other "below average kids" at a separate table from the rest of the class and I was happily made fun of for being in the "remedial group."

Fact is, I couldn't read (and certainly not write) worth a lick for a long time. When my brother was 9 he could devour a comic book in 5 minutes. As for me at the same age, I just remember looking at the pictures, because the reading part of it was too tough.

Later on in life I got poor grades in English. Then in college my professor told me I couldn't write very well. Personally, I wanted to punch the guy.

So did I roll over and play dumb? Heck No. I got mad and **wasn't afraid to stink at writing**. I had stuff to say, and I knew eventually I was going to figure out how to say it on paper without sounding like an idiot.

The Making of a Writer

So two years ago I started blogging. Looking back at those articles, I can only shake my head at how poorly written so many were. Here, have a laugh week and check out this one, [my second post on TSL](#). But since that time I've written over 400 articles on my different blogs, which

accounts to be somewhere around 400,000 words worth of info along with 500+ hours of sweat equity. To give you a better feel for this, most of Seth Godin's books are between 30,000-50,000 words, which is like saying I've written over 10 books during the past 2 years.

The humorous part to all of this is the fact that these days people tell me all the time I'm a "natural" writer. But much like the kids that struggled to even swing a bat their first day of practice, the road to writing has not been an easy one for me. Has it been arduous? Heck yes. Have there been ups and downs? Yes again. But has it been worth it? Well, just like the kids on my son's ball team would tell you, **yes, it surely has.**

Chapter 7: All About HubSpot

Note***In 2011 I became a HubSpot “Partner,” which means companies can sign up to HubSpot under me. If you’re interested in possibly learning more or signing up for HubSpot, please contact me directly at marcus1@thesaleslion.com . You can be assured I’ll give you my honest feedback on whether or not it makes sense for your organization.

The Most Important Customer Review of HubSpot You’ll Ever Read

We live in interesting times. For small businesses throughout the world, it’s a time when many are realizing the need to make a change. The old stuff no longer works. Whether it’s radio, TV, print, direct mail, etc.—the times have changed. These forms of outbound marketing are, more or less, dead in most industries. Inbound marketing (attracting people to your site) is the new wave, the future of the way all small businesses will think and act. But for a HUGE majority of these businesses that are the heart of the world’s economy, there’s a major problem—

Online Marketing and Web Design are Hard, if not Impossible, if You’re Not a Tech Nerd

The direction of your company may very well lie with HubSpot....

I used to share this same problem. For 7 years I was the average pool guy running an average swimming pool construction business, attempting to fight the tide of web consumers that I was out of touch with. Even worse, I was a complete and total web dufus. Although I wanted badly to be in control of my own website and its content, my hands were completely tied. I was stuck. And I knew I’d soon go broke if I didn’t make a change and get with the 21st century.

Luckily for me though, I stumbled upon a website that “grades” other websites on a scale of 1-100. Eager to see where my company’s website would score, I entered our information, and out came the grand score of 17 out of 100. In that moment, [HubSpot’s WebGrader](#) tool gave me a smack in the face like nothing else had done up to that point. It was the moment of truth.

It was also in that moment that I made a commitment to get out of my comfort zone and learn what it was to have a great website for my business that would surpass the needs and expectations of today’s consumer. Within a half-hour of learning more about HubSpot, I knew I’d stumbled upon what I was missing—the bridge that would take a web dummy to web, or should I say “Inbound marketing,” expert.

Rocketing to the Top

Over the past 20 months I've been engulfed in following the teachings of HubSpot's system and doing everything I could to take my business to the next level. And without question, boy has it worked. To make a long story short, our site is now one of the top swimming pool websites in the country. Its blog is nationally recognized. Organic (free) search has shot through the roof and our brand is so well known that the sales process is quicker and easier than it has ever been. *All this while trying to be a "pool guy" in a very down economy.*

So much has HubSpot changed my business and life that I now give web and marketing classes to other businesses. I'm the type of guy that believes in the law of abundance. I believe that good things need to be shared so that we can all stand at the top and share in success. This is also why I'm writing this article on my own volition as a HubSpot customer. By no means has HS (we'll call them that for short) asked me to do this.

But as I've read various reviews of their product online, I've taken offense by certain people and companies that have talked down their product and system without really having a leg of experience to stand on and therefore make judgments. That's what makes this review different. I'm just like you. We're in this together.

So the following is a list of common questions and concerns I've seen mentioned regarding the HS system. I'll do my best to be succinct and frank with each answer, as I feel that's always the most effective means of communication.

Does It Work?

Does a bear poop in the woods? Oh, sorry, just had to slip that one in there. Yes it works—**for those that make it work**. In other words, there is this myth out there in the world that some webmaster guy or group can magically make your company appear on the first page of Google for just about any phrase you'd like. This is a total lie and all those guys should be imprisoned, at least in my humble opinion. The fact is establishing a strong web presence does take work and effort.

But the beauty behind HS is that they provide you with all the tools and resources necessary to do so. And when I say all, I really mean ALL—hence their all-in-one system. Whether it's blogging, web design for dummies, video marketing, social media, analytics, etc, HS gives you the tools necessary to do very well with each—and measure your effectiveness with each while you're at it. For anyone that says, "HubSpot doesn't work or didn't work for my business" I give you this rebuttal: HubSpot wasn't the problem, you were simply too lazy to make it work for you. They gave you everything you possibly needed, but as a wise man once said:

You can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

What Benefits/Tools will I Get by Using HubSpot?

Control: This is an absolute no-brainer. HS has one of the simplest content management systems I've ever seen. For those of you unfamiliar with this phrase, it's basically a system that allows "Non Techies" to design their own websites with almost no previous programming or code knowledge. Such a tool allows business owners and their employees to overcome the terrible **bottleneck** of having a webmaster and ultimately take back the keys to their web marketing vehicle. This sense of empowerment is amazing, but it's only a fraction of the HS benefit.

Analytics: HS has intensive analytics tools built in that allow you to track everything you can possibly know about your web and social media traffic. With mountains of charts, stat sheets, etc; you will be able to have a firm grasp on the best and worst pages of your website. You'll know what is generating leads and what's not. And you'll also have a clear idea of words that you rank for in the search engines and ones that you can improve on.

SEO: Search Engine Optimization, or your ability to show up on the first page of Google's (and others) search results, is a key to web marketing that cannot be ignored. Because the search engines can be hard to understand and rather fickle, HS has various tools that allow you to know the SEO strengths and weaknesses of each page on your site, therefore allowing you to make adjustments and better optimize each page, which will in-turn mean more traffic, leads, and ultimately sales.

Competitors: Do you know how good your competitor's websites are? If you don't, then you're missing out. HS not only tells you all the words/phrases your competitors rank for in search engine results, but they will also tell you about the links your competitors have coming into their sites, the grade of their site, and if they're moving forwards or backwards in terms of their web effectiveness. Simply put, this tool is incredible and a must for any business.

Awesome Lead Analysis/Tools: HS is all about getting you more leads and converting those leads into sales. This is why they've set up tremendous systems for creating lead capture forms, automated email follow-ups, and lead grading. When it comes down to it, the more you know about your leads, and the more you can nurture the leads in your sales funnel, the more sales you'll make. It's that simple and it works.

Super Simple Blogging Platform: Every, and I mean EVERY, company must have a blog if they expect search engines and consumers alike to take them seriously. HS makes it easy for

your business to integrate a blog directly into its website, which in-turn enables you to build more subscribers and leverage blogging as an SEO tool. Along with the blogging platform, HS has many built-in analytics tools to help you know which blog articles are working and which ones need improvements. This tool alone made HS worth its weight in gold as it saved/made my company thousands of \$\$\$ in increased leads and sales through great consumer education combined with a concise SEO strategy.

How Much Does It Cost and Is HubSpot Worth It?

I'm always baffled when a potential HS customer calls me as a reference and they think HS is expensive. Currently, HS has a few different “tiers” that companies can choose, but at the time of this writing, their “Basic” package goes for about \$4000 per year and the “Professional” package is about \$12,000. My swimming pool company and The Sales Lion both use their Professional package. What's really perplexing to me though is the fact that businesses will blow thousands a month on the **Yellow Pages**, or radio, or direct mail, etc.—all of which have very short-term results and practically no residual—yet these same companies hesitate to spend a few thousand dollars *a year* on a system that will bring them leads, at an increasing rate, **FOREVER**.

What am I missing here? For me, spending 12k a year on what amounts to 90% of my company's advertising is utterly laughable. When it comes down to it, if companies really understand how much \$\$\$ HS will save them (assuming they do their part) then they'd be offering to pay more for the system just to get up and going tomorrow. I really mean this with all sincerity—It's worth every penny.

Who Doesn't the HubSpot System Work For?

Lazy people. Sorry, but it's the truth. If you're lazy, go spend all your money and buy a \$2000 monthly ad in the Yellow Pages.

Will HubSpot's System Be Surpassed by other Better Systems?

A legit question, but let me just say this. Since I've been using the HS system, they've changed and added tools on a weekly basis. Some have been minor, some have been major, but the key to understand is that by no means are they a static company just resting on past success. I once visited their place at Cambridge and upon meeting their staff and CEO I realized they were **a bunch of awesomely passionate marketing and computer nerds trying their guts out to improve their system for businesses like mine and yours each and every day**. The constant developments in their system are a reflection of this and I can only imagine how many great

tools the company will come up with in the future.

What Makes HubSpot Different?

When it comes down to it, I think the great difference of HS is the fact they are changing the culture of Internet/inbound marketing as we know it. They believe in teaching the masses (see [their blog](#) and self-help articles, they're amazing) as much as possible so that any man or woman, no matter their background, can be their own webmaster and SEO. They give, give, give with the hopes that businesses will understand this great paradigm shift and therefore embrace the HS way. In fact, when I think of HS, this phrase always comes to mind, as it's a perfect reflection of their business model:

Give a man a fish and feed him for a day.....Teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime.

So that's my suggestion to you. It's time to learn how to fish. It's time to change your life. If you've been considering HS and haven't pulled the trigger, then I'm here to tell you that you've wasted enough time, so let's get with it. Why delay success?? And remember this critical key:

If you just follow the HS inbound marketing system and use all their tools, you'll automatically be ahead of over 90% of the businesses in your industry who are still living in the stone-ages.

Think about that for a second. It ain't an exaggeration. Again, once you truly understand this you'll stop waffling over whether or not HS is worth it and you'll start realizing that this decision will impact your business likely more than any other decision you've made since opening its doors.

Top 5 HubSpot Customer Problems and Solutions

As anyone who reads my blog on a regular basis knows, my experience with HubSpot started as a "Non-Techie" business owner who was struggling to grasp web marketing in a rapidly changing, technology-based economy. Luckily though, before my business fell too far in the tank, I was able to learn and embrace the concepts of inbound marketing while leveraging all of HubSpot's tools to create what is today the most popular swimming pool blog in the world.

Notwithstanding our successes as a company, the process of learning to utilize HubSpot (HS) was not an easy one at times, and many mistakes were therefore made along the way. That is why I eagerly wanted to write this article, as most new HubSpot customers need just a little

guidance and direction when it comes to getting the most bang for your buck while using all of HS's incredible inbound marketing tools. So without further ado.....

Top 5 HubSpot Problems and Solutions

1. Poor Blogging Strategy Due to Bad Titles and Topics: I could go on and on about this one. But to make a long story short, the key to great small business blogging has to do with thinking like a consumer, not as a business owner.

What I mean by this statement is the fact that business owners and content marketers often fall short of their blogging potential simply because they don't write about topics in such a way that consumers, or search engines for that matter, care.

This is why I always tell clients to do the following: Ask yourself, "What are the top 25 questions consumers have regarding my product?" Write each one of these questions down, *exactly* as a consumer would word them. These questions are the titles of your first 25 blog articles, which equates to over 3 month's worth (2 articles every week) of powerful content marketing. Now get to work, and don't deviate from the plan.

You may think this exercise seems silly or too basic, but it works. I've seen it happen over and over again. In fact, it will form the foundation of a powerful long tail keyword strategy for your company's blog and therefore benefit you for years to come.

2. Not Using/Understanding the CMS: As most people are well aware, HS has a super-simple content management system (CMS) that allows anyone, without a lick of code knowledge, to be a successful web designer. I can say this from experience because even though I'm still not code-savvy or a "programmer" today, I've designed multiple websites with the HS CMS. Unfortunately, when some people get started with HS, they simply don't take the time to "play" with the system. And when I say play, that's exactly what I mean—tinker, experiment, test.

Clients should act like they have a new iPhone and get to know all its fun little features. Because HS cares so much about their clients having success with the system, they've created an extensive training library and "boot camp" to enable you to quickly become skilled with the system. With such tools, there's simply no excuse for someone not to become well-versed quickly with the HS CMS.

3. Don't Take Advantage of Analytics: This one is very similar to the CMS topic above, but because HS has so many analytics to look at, new clients that don't have much of a tech background can get overwhelmed and therefore dismiss all the wonderful analytics all together.

Needless to say, this is a *huge mistake*. Just as with the CMS, HS has set up training videos and articles to help their clients take advantage of each and every tool that's available to them. When it comes down to it, reading analytics and understanding traffic patterns of your website needs to be a daily ritual and will play a major role in any company's inbound marketing success.

4. No Lead Capture: What's the use of having a site that gets a lot of traffic if it doesn't also generate sales? I don't know about you, but I'd choose leads and sales over traffic any day of the week. The fact is though; increased traffic should equate to more leads, which will ultimately lead to more sales. This is exactly what happened with my swimming pool company and is what has happened with any HS client we've ever had at Biz Buffs. Unfortunately though, I see HS customers all the time that only have one or two lead capture items on their *entire* site. Such actions make me slap my forehead, as I know this person is likely thinking HS and inbound marketing doesn't work when in reality they are doing it completely the wrong way.

Because HS understands the importance of lead capture, they've created multiple tools that will allow you as a client to create and insert forms, buttons, and landing pages throughout the site. In fact, as a general rule of thumb, you should have at least some type of offer/lead capture on every page of your website. When done the right way, this will inevitably increase leads and drive sales.

5. Not Enough Time: Ahhh yes, the "I'm too busy to do inbound marketing" statement. Yep, I've heard it before and every time I hear it I can only shake my head in disbelief. The reality is that if businesses and business owners really understood the importance and power of proper inbound marketing they'd never put it on the back-burner. They'd never dismiss it as something to be done "next week."

In fact, inbound marketing is so important I'll often suggest to clients (who are too busy or don't have staff available to help) that they hire someone solely for the purpose of content and video production, social media interactions, etc. Although some business owners initially balk at the idea, once they see how much money they save on advertising because of such a strong web presence they're always grateful they had the faith that inbound marketing would work if they just gave it their proper attention.

So those are your top 5 HubSpot problems and solutions. I can promise you that if you but only follow these 5 steps your HS experience will be life-changing for your business and inbound marketing will become the core to every success within your company. I've seen such results happen over and over again for other businesses and I hope that you will soon embrace this great change for your business as well.

7 Keys to Remember When Starting with HubSpot

1. Don't Wait to Start Using the CMS (assuming you currently have “control” problems)

For some dumb reason, when I signed up with HubSpot I only used their Content Management System for our company blog, and *not* for the rest of the website. So although I was getting tremendous value from their analytics and the SEO the blogging was bringing my way, I was still hand-cuffed in terms of designing our website. In hindsight, I was simply afraid that if I converted my site to the HubSpot CMS, I'd be married to the company forever. Also, I think I still lacked the belief that I could actually be my own web designer.

Luckily though, with the help of a few great HubSpot employees, I finally “saw the light” and went “all in” with a complete website conversion. What's crazy is that I waited 6 entire months from the time I started with HubSpot before I made this move. But as soon as the conversion was made, and I realized just how easy it was to manipulate and design my site's pages, my creative energies and juices ran wild. I literally felt like a new business owner and frankly I feel like a big dummy for not making the change from the get-go. But as they say, it's better late than never.

Note*:** Because of its design limitations, the HubSpot CMS may not be a great fit for every company, especially existing sites with special code, graphics, design, etc.

2. Attend Bootcamp and Watch the Training Videos!!

I'm not sure what it is about men and directions, but we're all apparently born with this thing that prevents us from making life much easier and actually reading the directions versus doing things the hard way. Such was the case when I started blogging and using the CMS. Although I was doing quite a few things OK, I was missing out on many skills and features because I hadn't taken the time to learn about all the awesome analytic tools that were available to me.

This is why I strongly urge everyone starting with HubSpot to not just lean on your initial consultant to learn the system, but rather utilize their incredible training articles and videos so as to establish your base and then use the consultant to clarify any confusing points. Remember, the goal here is **self-reliance**.

3. Embrace Blogging (i.e. Better Teaching)

I've talked about this a ton but it's still a huge mistake I see with HubSpot clients I now consult with. Nothing has changed my company, as well as my life, like blogging has. The organic (free) traffic that we receive to our site on a daily basis is mindboggling compared to what it was 2 years ago. Looking back, I only wish I had been a little more consistent with my blogging early on, as well as a little more clean with the look of each blog.

For example, my first blog articles were very plain—no photos, bullets, embedded videos, etc. But once I started blogging at least twice a week, as well as worked on the general “look” of each article, the traffic and subscribers increased drastically in volume.

4. Utilize Forms/Landing Pages

As you likely already know, HubSpot makes it really, really easy to create lead-capture forms for your website. For some dumb reason, I waited months to utilize these great forms.

Notwithstanding, today my site has some type of lead capture on almost every page and the amount of leads we have in our system today versus what we had a year ago is staggering.

5. Lead Nurturing is Awesome

Going hand-in-hand with great lead capture forms, HubSpot’s automated lead nurturing system makes the life of a business owner and marketer much, much easier. For example, my swimming pool company sends out a free DVD to customers who fill out a form on our webpage, and without me doing anything, the lead will receive a nice follow-up letter 5 days later asking them what they thought of the DVD.

This tool has been a tremendous asset in preventing any customers that for whatever reason did not receive a DVD to be able to notify us instead of thinking we’ve forgotten about them. It also has lessened the amount of time-consuming email follow-ups we have to do with our lead base.

6. Throw Yourself into Analytics/Sources/Keywords and the Rest of Your Dashboard

HubSpot has some of the greatest analytic tools in the world on their “dashboard.” These analytics let you know amazing things about your customers, but the key is that you actually take the time to become familiar with the dashboard, especially these analytic features. I’m always amazed at how many HubSpot users I talk to that aren’t even using *half* of the awesome tools available to them with the system. Here’s a general rule of thumb: **You should get to know the HS dashboard like the back of your hand.** (And no, I’m not kidding.)

7. Be Patient!!

Rome wasn’t built in a day, and nor will your ability to understand HubSpot. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself, and certainly don’t get overwhelmed. If you’re patient but hard working and determined, little by little each day will get easier and easier.

4 Reasons Why Internet Cookies (Lead Tracking) Will Rock Your Business' World

Cookies.....Mmmmmm.....Just the thought of them gets my salivary glands working. And no, I'm not talking about the ones Grandma used to make. I'm talking about the Internet kind. And trust me when I say that these cookies, if you try 'em, will be the best you've ever had.

What the Heck is an Internet Cookie?

But before we go into the reasons why Internet cookies are the greatest thing since sliced bread, let see how our friends over there at [Wisegeek](#) define these "sweet" marketing tools:

A computer cookie is a small text file which contains a unique ID tag, placed on your computer by a website. The website saves a complimentary file with a matching ID tag. In this file various information can be stored, from pages visited on the site, to information voluntarily given to the site. When you revisit the site days or weeks later, the site can recognize you by matching the cookie on your computer with the counterpart in its database.

So for those of you that are new to this term, did you get all that?? Well, if you didn't, just look at it this way. Every computer, just as a vehicle has a license plate, has its own address. This address is referred to as an IP address, or Internet Protocol address, and is a numerical label assigned to just about every computer on the web. The beauty behind cookies is that it knows when your car (computer) and license plate (IP address) have entered the building (website).

In fact, because your address is recorded and always being monitored, cookies enable a website to "follow" you wherever you go while you're on their site. As you can imagine, knowing where your customers have been on your website, the pages they've viewed, how long they spent on each one, and how many times they've come back, is an extremely powerful sales and marketing tool.

It Starts with Lead Capture

But before we cover just what cookies can do for you, understand that the only way cookies even work in the first place is if a visitor to your site fills out a form. This part is key. When a customer fills out a form, cookies are then attached to the IP address and at that point the benefits begin.

And one other point—Many people turn the cookies to their computer off, therefore disabling others to track their actions when visiting that site. Notwithstanding, many others allow cookies and its benefits to you as a business owner and marketer are incredible. So let's check out what this awesome tool can do for you and your business.

4 Reasons Why Cookies Are Stinking Awesome

They can tell you how the visitor found you: Lead tracking is an essential component of any marketing plan, and it's imperative that we're able to track how our customers are finding our site. Did they arrive via Pay Per Click? Was it an organic search? Maybe a referral from another website? Either way, as we see how customers are finding our site we are then able to focus more attention on that area and have more direction with our web marketing focus.

They can tell you how many, and what pages, a lead has viewed: In this information age, an informed consumer will make or break a sale for a business every time. For example, my company's website has about 250 pages. And after looking at lead activity for about a year now, I've come up with the following ratings system:

1-5 Pages Viewed: Likely not very serious and maybe misinformed. Good chance this person is not yet in the "buying" phase.

6-10 Pages Viewed: Luke-warm shopper. Still has not spent nearly enough time to become informed and educated, but showing signs of hope. Will need quite a bit of teaching if/when we meet for a sales appointment.

11-20 Pages Viewed: Relatively serious shopper. This person has taken a decent amount of time to become informed regarding our company and products, and therefore has a solid foundation. Still could use quite a bit of knowledge and teaching though.

21-50 Pages Viewed: Serious Shopper. Very informed. Looking to make a decision, likely soon.

50+ Pages Viewed: Red Hot Lead. This person knows just about everything there is to know about me, my company, and my product. Not only is this person going to buy, but it appears they're already sold on us.

Now you may be thinking it's not a good idea to judge a lead before you actually meet them, but I'm here to tell you that if you follow customer patterns long enough, including the type and number of pages viewed, you will be able to thin slice quickly just how serious they are about

buying, their hot buttons, and their overall product/company knowledge in general. Although I always keep an open mind when meeting with a prospect the first time, the numbers almost never lie.

3. Number of Site Visits: Who do you think is more ready to buy—Someone who has only visited your company’s website once or someone who has visited your site 4 times in the last 48 hours? I’m sure we’d both agree that you’d choose the latter, which only makes sense because that person is obviously thinking quite a bit about your product and appears to clearly be in a “buying” mode.

4. Visit Notification: Holy Cow, this is one of the coolest tools ever. Imagine that you recently gave a client, we’ll call him Jeff Jones, a quote and upon following up with Jeff, you leave him a message only to receive no response. Undeterred, you try calling him a second time but again receive no call back. By this point, you dejectedly give up hope that Jeff is interested and decide to file his information and quote away. But two days later, out of the blue, you get a notification on your blackberry that says, “Jeff Jones is visiting your website.” With a new-found hope, you call Jeff and this is how the conversation goes:

You: Hello Jeff, it’s Marcus Sheridan (Cool name!), how are you?

Jeff: Marcus, hello, I’m so glad you called me. You’re not going to believe this but I just got off your site!

You: (w/ a big smile in your voice) No way! Well I guess it was meant to be then, huh Jeff?

Jeff: Wow, I guess so. But I’m glad you called.....

I’ve literally had a conversation similar to this one countless times with clients of mine. I’ll give up on them and then, out of the blue, I see they’re visiting my website. And as soon as their name comes across my blackberry, you better believe I call them that second. Can you imagine the power of such a tool?!!

The following is an actual lead from my website. Take a look at this person’s stats and then we’ll talk about what it all means:

Activity Summary Most recent visit 1 hour ago, 11 visits since March 22, Average of 25 page views per visit, 275 total page views, 81 unique pages viewed, 1 form submitted, Found site via Google Search for: Virginia Fiberglass Pools, Better than 99% of Leads

Now tell me, just by looking at these stats, what type of customer do you think this person is?

Yep, you guessed right, this customer is **AWESOME**. Which is why she was one of the easiest sales I've ever made. The person was so well informed, and had gone over so much of our website, that by the time I met with her she was basically completing my sentences. She literally knew everything about me, my company, and my products. No doubt, she was a dream customer, *but I knew this even before our first visit.*

HubSpot and Cookies

Although I could literally talk about the power of cookies for your business all night long, I'll close with one last point. As many of you already know, the analytics I use with my website, as well as all the forms I utilize with their corresponding cookies, are just another benefit of using [HubSpot](#). This simple HS feature has made me thousands and thousands of dollars over the past year that I would clearly not have made had I not been using all the powerful tools that come with the HubSpot content management system.

The reason why I toot HubSpot's horn so much is not because I'm a paid employee of theirs, but rather because my time with them has altered my life in profoundly positive ways and completely revolutionized the marketing 2.0 strategies we utilize as a business.

Don't Delay Another Day

But whether you plan on using HubSpot or not for your website, make sure as soon as you're done reading this article that you find a way, if you're not already doing so, to implement cookies into your business' marketing plan. Sadly, the few words I've written about the power of cookies here on this post in no way do the topic justice, but hopefully it's a start for anyone previously unaware of this powerful tool. You now have the knowledge, so don't hesitate to make it work for you!

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How to Sign Up with HubSpot and Working with The Sales Lion

So you're interested in possibly signing up for HubSpot, are you? That's great, but it's important to understand the following:

HubSpot is just a tool, and **only as good as the person using it.**

HubSpot and inbound marketing **will not work overnight.** (Usually great results are seen between the 3-12 month time period)

HubSpot and inbound marketing **require time.** (I tell everyone, the first 2 months require about 10 hours of dedication a week, and then goes down with time.)

HubSpot and inbound marketing are a **culture.** To have success, you must stay at it and be consistent.

HubSpot is amazing, but it's NOT a magic pill.

Signing Up with HubSpot Through The Sales Lion

As most folks know, because I had so much success with my swimming pool company and HubSpot, **I now teach other businesses how to replicate that success.** Coming from the side of the “average Joe business owner,” **I am able to speak the language of my clients and show them exactly what they have to do to start the inbound marketing race running.**

As a HubSpot partner, many clients sign up underneath me. Typically, we'll do a “boarding” or training to get the client up and running, and once they feel self-empowered and able to fly, I “push them out the nest.” This means my **clients aren't paying a large retainer to me every month because their training is such that it enables them to powerfully take control of their own inbound marketing destiny** with the right plan, vision, and support.

The cost of signing up with HubSpot underneath me as opposed with going to HubSpot directly means that you will spend **the exact same amount of money for the package.** But, because I do make a commission off of anyone that signs up with HubSpot underneath me, I also offer a **FREE 1 hour, 1 on 1 coaching session** to anyone that signs up. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier,

I do offer training courses, consultations, etc that empower folks to take charge of their HubSpot and Inbound Marketing, which is nothing like anything offered in the entire industry.

If you're interested in HubSpot and would like to sign up and also receive your FREE consulting, please email me at **marcus1@thesaleslion.com** and I'll contact you immediately.

Chapter 8: Web Design that Wins

The 8 Major Mistakes of “New and Improved” Website Redesigns

Since returning from my conference in Vegas last week I have been very pleased to receive multiple emails from business owners who are stoked to embrace proper web marketing and finally bring their business up to speed with the information age. At the same time though, a large portion of these businesses owners are getting ready to make a monumental mistake. Why? They don’t realize this essential truth:

A New Website Doesn’t Mean Squat

That’s right, it doesn’t mean squat, at least in most of the cases. You see, the majority of “new and improved” websites I see for small businesses are no more than a better looking version of their previous train wreck.

It Ain’t About Looks

A web redesign has very little to do with “looks” or “appearance.” In fact, the most successful web marketing small businesses understand that what defines a truly great website comes down to 2 essentials: **Freedom and Content**

What do I mean by **freedom**? Freedom means that you as a business owner can make immediate changes to any part of your website. Want to announce a sale? You can do it immediately. Want to post a new video? You can do that too. Want to quickly send out a mass email to customers on your list? No problem.

And what do I mean by **content**? To make a long story short, content means that you see your sight as an information vessel for consumers and you do everything possible to teach them the good, bad, and ugly of any possible decision they will make regarding your products or services. It means you blog regularly. It means you utilize video. It means you see everything you do as a

teaching opportunity.

So my question to those of you who are in the process right now of getting up your new website is can you say these two simple things? Will your new website facilitate your freedom of design, creativity, and thought leadership or will it again be stifled, just as it has always been, by a webmaster that holds all the keys?

For those of you that have said “yes” to these two imperatives, I submit a further look at the necessities of your new site, otherwise you are just spinning your wheels and wasting your dollars:

The 8 Essentials of a New Website Design

1. An information and consumer driven blog: At the very minimum, write at least one new article a week.

2. Video utilization and You Tube: Visually show all the steps and elements of your product or service.

3. Social proofs from existing customers, usually coming in the form of written and video testimonials.

4. Owner and staff bio pages: Tell us about yourself, your family, your goals, your mission.....tell us about YOU.

5. Lead capture forms on every page: That’s right, every page. Whether is a blog subscription form, a free eBook to download, or a “contact” form—you must give your clients an opportunity to take the relationship to the next level on each and every page of your site.

6. Social Media Integration: Sorry, but it doesn’t matter if you don’t like or appreciate such social mediums as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The only thing that really matters these days is what your customers like, and as anyone who has been alive will admit, consumers love social media. It’s a part of our society now, and there’s no turning back. So accept it, embrace it, and start using it today.

7. Some type of content management system: This is a little behind the scenes (the website viewer doesn’t notice) but it sure as heck is a must for just about any business today and beyond. Whether it’s a more advanced/complicated CMS like Drupal, Joomla, or WordPress—or even a more simplistic system like HubSpot—you need to be able to make immediate changes and additions to your website, whether you are a “computer guy” or not. In today’s world, being a “computer guy” is grossly overrated thanks to the power of content management systems.

8. A vision: Do you know where your website is going? Seriously, what's the goal of the thing? If you don't know this and if your site doesn't reflect this vision, then you're off track. Know your website's destination, and then make this destination a reality.

I really do hope those of you that are in discussions with a web designer right now will consider this list. Don't allow yourself do this half way and certainly don't let a webmaster rationalize mediocrity. Do it right the first time. Make no exceptions. Don't tell yourself that you'll add this or that element later. No, put yourself in the position to do it right immediately (meaning you have the ability to build all of the above) and I can assure you that such a move will not only save you major time and money right now, but it will also lead to major web marketing success as you continue to add content and value to your new web vehicle.

5 Profoundly Important Parts to Every Business Website in 2014 and Beyond

I don't know what it is lately, but I swear it seems like 4 out of 5 companies I talk to are in the midst of redesigning their company website.

But I get it, **times are changing fast**, and consumer expectations are changing even faster. What was "acceptable" just a few years ago is now viewed as "not enough."

Because the way consumer's vet, judge, and decide on companies and products in the information age, the importance of having a GREAT website has never been so high.

And mark my words, **this trend isn't slowing down.**

The bar will only continue to be raised.

Search engines and consumers alike will only get smarter.

That's the world in which we're all a part of.

That being said, because so many companies are currently in the midst of a digital overhaul, I felt it necessary to discuss 5 website features I feel are a must for success in 2014 and beyond. Here goes:

1. A Home Page with Immediate Answers:

Smarter is Better

Solutions for *Smarter* Content Marketing



Here's what we've got for you:

- ✓ 15 high-impact ebooks on content marketing, SEO, email marketing, landing pages, keyword research, and more.
- ✓ A 20-part internet marketing course that lays out a comprehensive path for your own online strategy.
- ✓ An organized reference guide to the "best of the best" of Copyblogger.com, and how it all profitably fits together.

✓ Free Registration

Build a Smarter WordPress Site



Hosting



Design



Traffic

If you're looking for a model homepage that is the essence of intuitive, clear, and user friendly, the Copyblogger homepage is the perfect model.

As many of you know, I speak a lot. And over the past few years, I've asked thousands and thousands of people a simple question: **What makes you fall in love with a company's website?**

Far and away, the #1 answer (and it's not even close) looks like this:

"I want to find what I'm looking for, and I want to find it quickly."

Such a profound statement really, and so telling as to where we're all headed on the web.

When it comes to a great website, consumers **MUST** be able to navigate **IMMEDIATELY** to what they are looking for. More than ever, their **impatience** is at an all-time low, which means the first 10 seconds of their experience on a homepage is utterly critical—either we give them what they’re looking for or they’re gone.

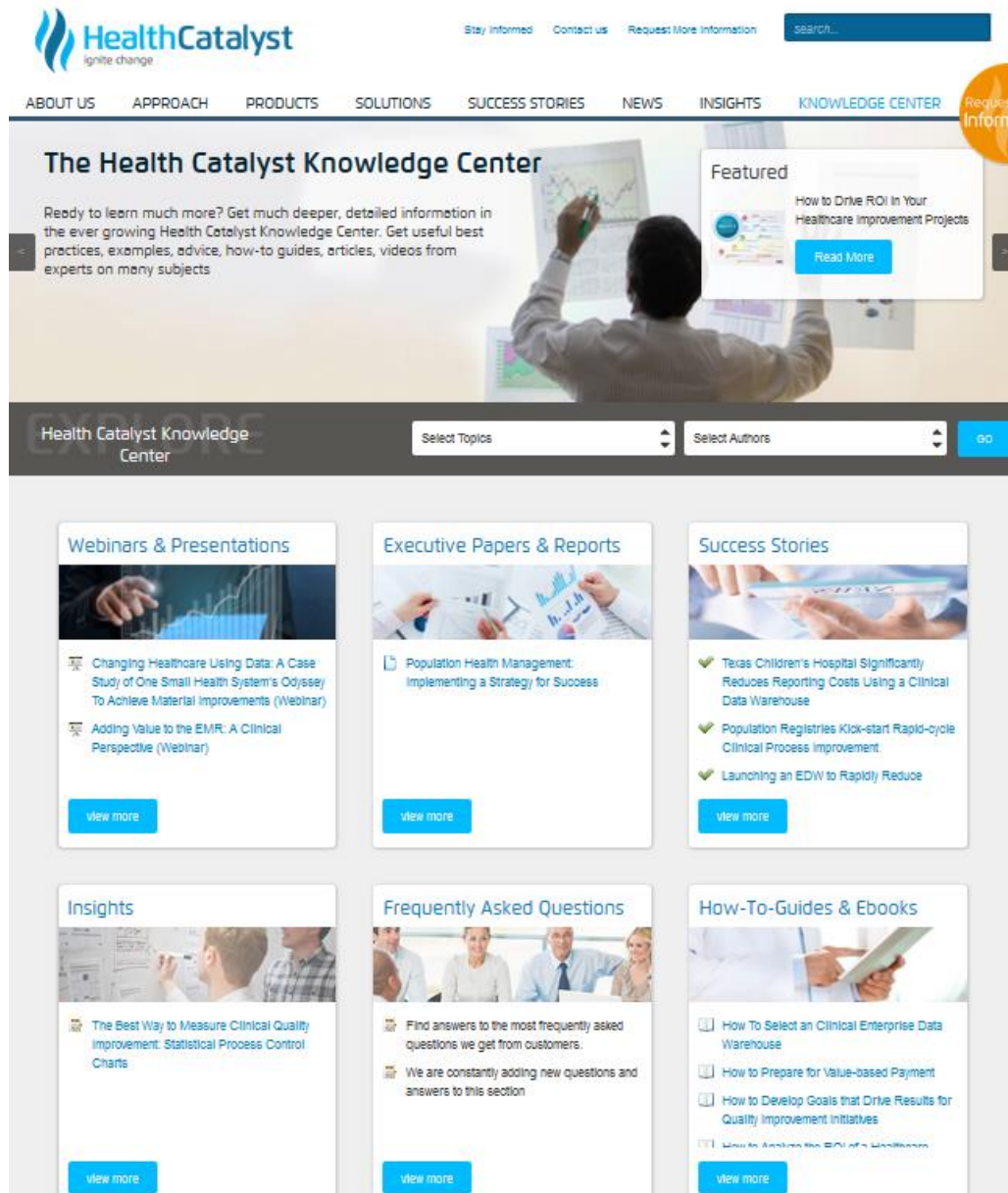
This means messaging should be clear, simple, and concise. Furthermore, excellent and intuitive navigation is a must. Ask yourself this very simple, 2-part question:

Within 10 seconds of being on my website, could a first time visitor:

1. Understand that we (as a company) are able to solve *their* problem?
2. Know where to go to get the answer to said problem?

I call this the “10 Second Rule of Homepage Design” and few companies do it very well.

2. An Education Center



Just having a “blog” won’t be enough in 2014 and beyond if your goal is greatness. Health Catalyst (client) realizes this, and has created what they call their “knowledge center,” which is literally full of all their education materials in a multiplicity of forms.

For a long time, I’ve been discussing the concept that a “blog” should be thought of as a place where a business embraces the philosophy of **“They Ask, You Answer”**—and takes each question they get from prospects and customers and answers them in an honest and transparent manner.

As I look ahead to 2014 and beyond, I think the next iteration of a “blog” is the actually transformation of the name (something I’ve never liked anyway) to a more complete and robust educational experience—hence the **Education Center**.

In an ideal world, an education center is not only wrought with answers following the “They Ask, You Answer” philosophy, but it also is laden with multiple means by which a site visitor can take in the information—be it articles, videos, webinars, live chat, podcasts, utilitarian apps, etc.

Yes, this is a section of the site that doesn’t occur over night, but it certainly is feasible with enough focus, dedication, and commitment to truly being, as I always say, “the best teacher in the world at what you do.”

3. “About Pages 2.0”

Fosters curiosity. Embraces honesty.
Remains humble. Is bold. Challenges
convention. Has fun. Keeps learning.
Shows respect. **Helps clients.**

Meet our Wild Boys. And Girls.

Zach Eric Shaun Kristen Jordan

George – Two words: Justin. Bieber.
George Thomas | Inbound Marketer

With over 15 years of industry experience, George has been in the marketing game almost as long as The Biebs has been alive. Certified in Inbound Marketing and social Media, George has become the go-to guy for marketing and business management strategies. While we turn to him to strengthen our business, he turns to Philippians 4:13 for his strength.

Office Nickname: Big Easy

Connect with George: @ in t f g+

George's Favorites

- Singer: Shawn Mullins
- Candy Bar: Skor
- Vehicle: Hummer
- Kitten Name: Notinmyhouse
- Cartoon: Space Ghost

I’m a big fan of the folks at Wild Boy Design. Their website, and their About page, exudes their exceptional personality and marketing zeal– and tells a story in the process.

Most companies have an “about” page of some type on their website, but the truth is, most about pages do little to let others (consumers) have a real peak into the “soul,” and people, of the business. (props to [Wild Boy Design](#) above)

We’ve all heard the phrase: **People buy from those they know, like, and trust.**

Although this statement may not be true 100% of the time, it sure as heck carries the day in a very large majority of business transactions all over the world, again and again.

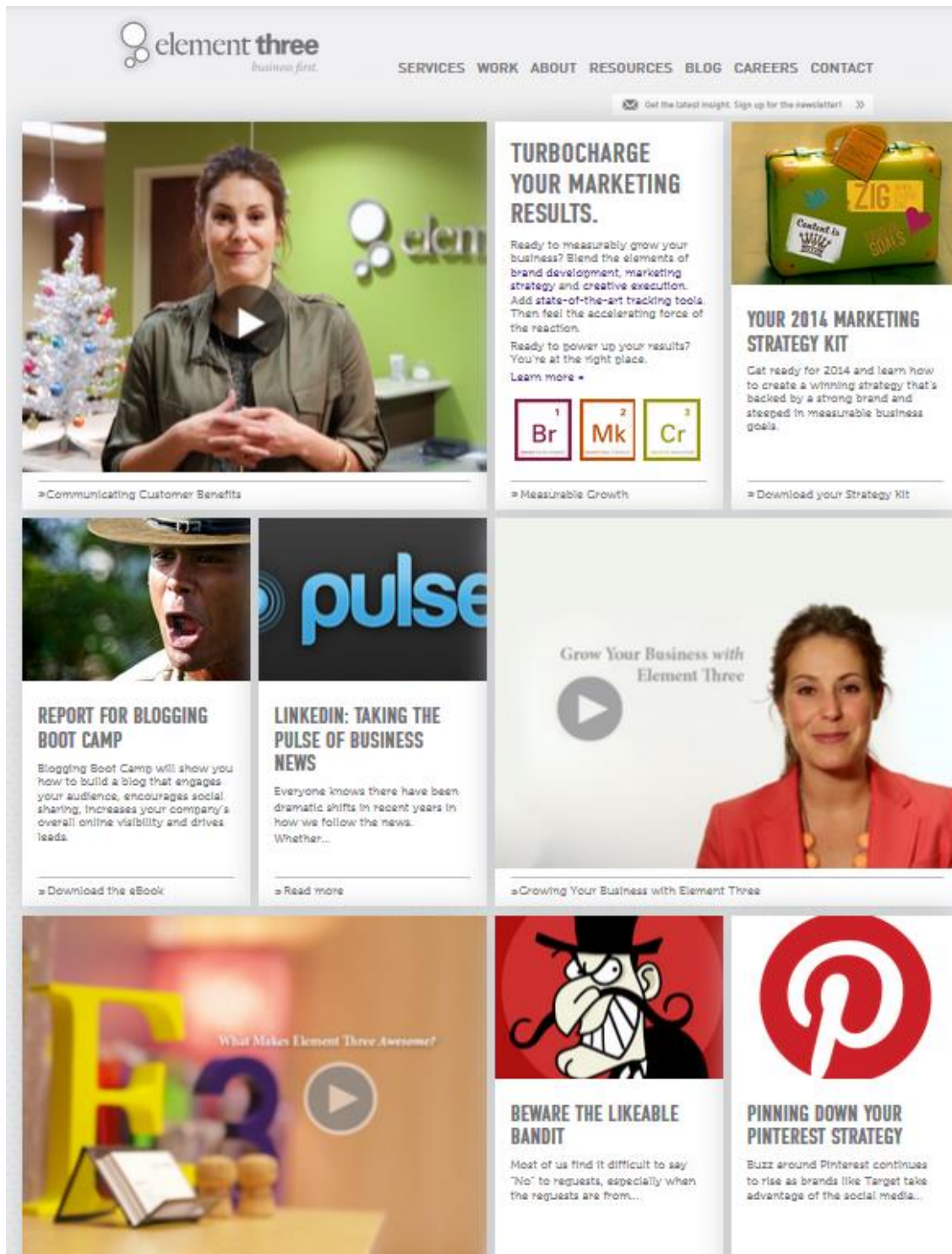
This being said, most businesses make a huge mistake when it comes to creating these personal relationships of trust well before the first “contact”—be it face to face, on the phone, etc.

For example, most companies have a sales force (be it 1 person or 1,000). To put it in blunt terms, the basic goal of each one of these sales professionals is to meet with clients and ask them for their money in exchange for a product or service.

This being the case, why would so many organizations essentially “hide” their sales staff from the world (digitally speaking) and wait for the opportunity to build necessary trust needed for said transaction? Wouldn’t it make way more sense to do everything in their power to enhance the “know, like, trust” factor long before first contact?

This is exactly why about pages (on a website) should truly allow others to get a feel for any employee who regularly works with clients and prospects. Just having a picture of the “team” in 2014 isn’t enough. Individual pages with more complete and personal information are critical. Furthermore, a site visitor’s visual senses should be spoken to as well, with photos and videos of the employee as well.

4. The Visual Learner



Companies like Element Three understand the power of visual on their website. As you can see from their homepage, they have a great mix of video, photo, and text.

It's no secret—**video is a big deal.** (see YouTube)

Photos are kind of big too. (see Pinterest, Instagram, Etc.)

The digital age has also ushered in with it the visual age—a time where more and more people, especially the younger generation, are choosing visual over textual when it comes to their preferred form of learning and communication.

Studies have shown that over 60% of all people are visual learners, and this isn't a number going down whatsoever. In fact, it's only going to continue to move in an upward trend.

This is exactly why great websites not only appease the visual learner, but exceed their expectations. It's also why a company's ability to excel at “**visual teaching**” will be a monumentally important part of content marketing success going forward.

5. The Pricing Section(s)

WPengine Plans About Us Support Blog Contact

Plans & Pricing

Try Us Risk Free For 60 Days

Our Clients Love Us

CMA Constant Contact ID foursquare GeekWire

Personal	Professional	Business	Premium
\$29.00 per month	\$99.00 per month	\$249.00 per month	Let's Talk!
1 WordPress Install 25,000 visits / mo. Unlimited Data Transfer 10GB Local Storage	10 WordPress Installs 100,000 visits / mo. Unlimited Data Transfer 20GB Local Storage	25 WordPress Installs 400,000 visits / mo. Unlimited Data Transfer 30GB Local Storage	Unlimited WordPress Installs Millions visits / mo. Data Transfer By Volume Unlimited Storage
Host My Website	Host My Website	Host My Website	Contact Us

Whether you put your actual prices or not on your website is up to you, but no matter what, the subject must be addressed. In this photo, we see a snippet of the great pricing page from WPENGINE.

For 4 solid years I've been preaching from the roof-tops the importance of **addressing the subject of pricing** on your company website. At the time, when I started this movement, many in the marketing world gave me a hard time, making statements like, "The example of River Pools is not comparable to other industries."

Boy were they wrong. 😊

Fast forward to today and with dozens and dozens of very successful clients under my belt, EVERY SINGLE ONE has embraced this philosophy with—often times—**massive results**.

Here is the thing: Ask a room of 100 people how they feel when they go to a website and struggle to find cost and price information.

100 out of 100 will use words like:

- Frustrated
- Mad
- Upset

This is exactly why it is excusable in my opinion to simply ignore a question that every single prospect and client wants to know about.

Does this mean you post all your prices, wages, and margins on your website?

Of course not. Heck, you don't even have to list a single number if you don't want to.

But you DO have to address the subject. You DO have to explain to the world why the answer is "**it depends**." And ideally, you should do this openly and honestly on a visible and prominent section of your website.

Remember, it's your choice as to whether or not you address consumer questions, but know this—**if you don't, someone will**.

And that someone will earn the trust.

Chapter 9: A Little About Social Media

Why Facebook and Twitter Don't Mean a Dang Thing for Online Success in Certain Industries

I've come to the conclusion that the most overvalued number in all of social media and marketing is that of total "tweets" and Facebook "likes" when it comes to blog posts.

Now, now, before the hair on your neck stands up and you start screaming, please understand there are always exceptions to generalized statements, as is the case here. Notwithstanding, I'm tired of seeing so many business owners worried that their content isn't getting "liked" and "tweeted" when all they really should be caring about is that **their stuff is getting read and accomplishes the bottom line goal of making money.**

That's right, I say "making money" because all the content and blog posts in the world don't mean squat unless they are leading to more trust, leads, and ultimately paying customers. But I digress.....

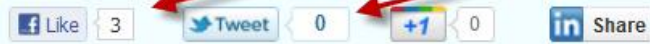
First Impressions in Social Media Don't Mean Much

What do you say we have a little activity, shall we? I'm going to show you screen shots of blogs on my swimming pool website, including the social media stats of each (indicated with the red arrows), and then **I want you to guess how many times that article has been read.** Sound good? Here goes.....

#1. Fiberglass Pool Prices Article

Fiberglass Pool Prices: How Much is My Pool Really Going to Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



How much does a fiberglass pool cost?or.....What's the price of a fiberglass pool?



This, of course, is always one of the first questions a pool shopper has when starting the research process for a fiberglass pool. The problem with answering this question, though, is the fact that a swimming pool has so many options it can be very tough for one to truly know what the price to swim in a fiberglass pool will be. Notwithstanding, I'll do my best here to give you some realistic price ranges as to what most people will spend. (And remember, these prices are AVERAGE, and can vary drastically depending on the product, the region

#2. Fiberglass Problems Article

Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions

Posted by Jason Hughes



By Jason Hughes

If you're considering the purchase of an inground fiberglass pool and done any research on the web, you've probably come in contact with some discussion of the problems associated with fiberglass pools. The

#3. Above Ground and Inground Cost Article

How Much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



How much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

By Marcus Sheridan



One of the first questions a pool shopper asks themselves when they begin the process of buying a swimming pool is: How much does a pool cost, and what are the expected prices for the different types of swimming pools?

#4. Fiberglass vs. Vinyl vs. Concrete Article

Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

Posted by Jason Hughes



Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

#5. Small Inground Pool Designs Article

Small Inground Fiberglass Pool Design Awards for 2010

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



One of my favorite parts of maintaining a blog about the fiberglass pool industry is the chance I have to look at the unique designs that manufacturers are coming up with as the industry progresses. Last year, we posted another very successful article regarding the [top fiberglass pool designs of 2009](#) but this year I wanted to break things down even further and

#6. Pool Patio Materials Article

Pool Patio Materials: Stamped Concrete vs Pavers

Posted by Jason Hughes



By Jason Hughes, www.PoolSchool.us

So which is the better swimming pool patio material: Stamped Concrete or Pavers? That's currently the debate in the pool patio world. Both are durable, relatively affordable, and look great; that's probably why consumers find them the two most popular options on the market today. But which is better? Let's discuss the pros and cons of each so you can decide for yourself.

#7. Viking vs. Trilogy Article

Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?

#8. Swimming Pool Plumbing Article

Swimming Pool Plumbing: Rigid PVC vs. Flexible PVC, Which is Better?

Posted by Jason Hughes



Swimming Pool Plumbing: Rigid PVC vs. Flexible PVC, Which is Better?

By: Jason Hughes <http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/>



Visit any online pool and spa forum and you'll find that a leak is one of the most frustrating experiences a pool owner can have. Finding, fixing, and not to mention paying for a leak will make anyone want to pull their hair out! Needless to say, a pool builder needs to use the best installation methods and building materials available to

Your Impressions?

Now that you've had a chance to see how each of these articles did in terms of tweets, shares, G+, and Linked In, what would you guess were the total number of page views (reads) for these articles? To review, here are the social media stats for the group: 19 Likes 1 Tweet 2 Google + 0 Linked in Shares

Pretty Impressive, right?

In fact, many "experts" in the world of social media marketing would submit that these pieces of content were a **complete failure**. But alas, those folks would also not know the following stats, exactly as they show today in my site analytics:

Article #1: **50,432 page views** with 471 inbound links

Article #2: **46,002 page views** with 424 inbound links

Article #3: **39,229 page views** with 707 inbound links

Article #4: **20,327 page views** with 185 inbound links

Article #5: **18,362 page views** with 196 inbound links

Article #6: **14,893 page views** with 157 inbound links

Article #7: **12,752 page views** with 123 inbound links

Article #8: **8,765 page views** with 208 inbound links

Grand total for the 8 articles: **210, 762 page views** with **2,471 inbound links**

What does all of this really mean?

Now you may be thinking, “OK Marcus, you got a few page views and links, what does that really mean?”

To which I’d respond, “Dang good question!”

But seriously, upon looking deep into my website analytics (using my HubSpot tracking tools) I can account for at least **\$2,000,000 in sales from these 8 articles alone**. There is a good chance the number is higher, but it’s at least that much.

This number brings me back to my original question: **Were these articles a success?**

By this point, we all know the answer is a resounding YES.

But there are many lessons to be learned from numbers such as these, and here are a few:

1.Many, many industries and niches should not be using “tweets,” “likes,” “shares,” etc as true success measurement tools. (This is especially true for thousands upon thousands of blue-collar industries where consumers focus on reading and researching, *not* sharing.)

2.Just because something doesn’t get shared on Social Media doesn’t mean it’s not a “cash cow”–(drawing huge amount of visitors [usually through SEO], leads, and ultimately customers.)

3.Every business, industry, and niche needs to find what social media platform their customer are mainly using.....and then go after said platform like there is no tomorrow.

For some folks, this may mean your company focuses all of its attention, at least first, on creating great content through text and video on a blog. For others, it may mean you have the best Twitter account in your industry and drive much of your business through said account. As I’ve stated again and again, it goes back to the concept of [knowing your shtick](#) and shying away from being a social media jack of all trades, master of none.

4. To reiterate one more time, I think Twitter and Facebook can be great tools. They can also be decent success indicators. But every industry, and every consumer, is different.....**and we must never forget that.**

Why Our Definition of Social Media Engagement and Interaction is Wrong

This past week, as I often do while traveling, I was listening to **Mitch Joel's** great podcast and his [recent episode](#) with **Bob Hoffman** of the [Ad Contrarian](#). Always one to masterfully combine pessimism and years of rich experience when discussing marketing, Hoffman’s pessimistic outlook on such phrases as social media “**engagement**” and “**interaction**” not only gave me a good snicker, but also prompted this post.

Apparently, we like the word “Engagement”

If you look across the web and social media marketing realm, how often do you see the words “engagement” and “interaction” being thrown around? Frankly, the two have been so used and abused that I don’t know if anyone really “gets” their relevance any longer.

That being said, let me ask you an important question, and please give it a second of thought before you simply read on:

How do you define "engagement" and "interaction" within your company's marketing campaign?

Is it based on comments to your content?

Social media shares?

Someone calling your store or office?

Making a purchase?

These examples and more could fit your company's definition of engagement I'm sure, but I'd submit another point.

Reading *Is* Interacting

Often times when I speak at conferences I'll show audience members the incredible number of pages single individuals will read on my swimming pool website when in the process of researching a pool. Believe it or not, many of the customers that buy a swimming pool read at least 100 pages of the website before we ever even have the first sales appointment. (**Note**** *I know this because I use HubSpot*)

Some have even read over 500 pages.

Think about that for a second... **500 pages??!!** Can you imagine reading 500 pages of any website???

Believe it or not, it's becoming more and more common with our swimming pool customers. But not only that, it's quite common with my marketing clients as well.

For example, most companies and brands that contact **The Sales Lion** for help have read my eBook before we even have our first conversation—which means they've already read over 250 pages of my content.

And would you say these folks are "engaged?" Would you submit they are "interacting", even though it's not necessarily a "true conversation" such as are found within a Facebook page, tweet, or blog comment?.

Content Interaction vs. Social Interaction

I don't know about you, but I choose "content interaction" over "social interaction" any day of the week. This may sound sacrilegious to some in this industry, but because great content (when read and absorbed) is literally the [best sales tool in the world](#), why would anyone see it any other way?

Furthermore, how come so many, like the Ad Contrarian, do not see great web content in this same light? Why aren't page views considered to be a social media interaction? And why aren't companies targeting page views (content marketing) as more important than total likes, friends, followers, shares, pins, or whatever else you can add to the list??

The Education Economy

To me, this entire conversation goes back to what I consider the "**education economy**." In this day and age of information-driven consumers—brands, if they want to be great, must be master listeners, teachers, and content creators, which therefore leads to consumer engagement, interaction, and true advancement. Yes, this "engagement" may not be the kind that shows up in an [Edgerank](#) or **Klout Score**, but is sure as heck leads to trust, branding, and sales.

And when all is said and done, do the rest of the metrics really matter?

Chapter 10: eBooks and Other Good Stuff

5 Reasons Every Small Business in the World Should Write an eBook

That's right, you should have an eBook. And no, you're not the exception. What, did you say you were an auto mechanic? Yes, your company needs an eBook. I'm sorry, did you say you were a roofer? Yep, you too, you need an eBook. So you're a professional lion trainer.....Wow, you *really* need an eBook.

A lot of people out there in the world of business think eBooks are some weird thing found on the Internet that only teaches other weird people how to make more money online.

Although this statement may partially be true, it's far from the reality. It's time to shed a little light on this thing called small business and eBooks.

My Story

A few years ago I wrote an eBook for the swimming pool industry. The eBook was entitled "How to Buy a Fiberglass Pool the Right Way, at the Right Price, from the Right Company." When I wrote the book, I really only had two main reasons: There was a huge need and I saw an opportunity to make a decent supplemental income off of said need.

But little did I know that such an eBook would initiate a major change in my life and in my business. And as time went on, I came to understand more and more the incredible benefits that any business can attain simply by taking the time to achieve such a work. So let's talk about these benefits and then maybe some of you average Joe business owners out there (like me) will make writing an eBook a goal.

5 Small Business Benefits to Writing an eBook

1. Your Company Doctrine

That's right, your company needs its own doctrine. What do you believe? What methods do you adhere to with your product or services? For example, in my swimming pool eBook, I stated that

it was a moral imperative that a fiberglass pool was back-filled with stone/gravel instead of sand.

At the time, this was not a construction technique that was heavily practiced around the country. But because of the influence of the eBook, as well as our company blog, it is now the majority. In fact, I've had pool builders from various parts of North America call me over these past few years and tell me how a customer had bought my book and required the builder to use gravel instead of sand. Pretty powerful, don't you think?

So don't be afraid to come up with your company's doctrine. What is the gospel according to YOU? By so doing, your eBook will set standards for greatness and also act as a compass for you and other businesses in your niche.

2. Forced Cognition

I've talked about this concept before but I'll never grow tired of it. Here's how it works: The more you think and write about something the better you'll get at explaining it to others. For example, I write about sales and marketing all the time. Do you think it's hard for me to talk to a client or give a seminar on this stuff? Heck no, it's a piece of cake, but that's only because of constant thought regarding the subject matter.

3. Become the Authority

Would you like to be an authority in your field? If not, then I dare say something is wrong and you need to choose a subject/profession you care more about. Since writing my eBook and writing so much about fiberglass swimming pools, I've essentially become the consumer voice of the industry. This year alone I was asked to fly around the country to consult with homeowners that had read my eBook and wanted to pay me to oversee their pool installation.

I was also called by lawyers on various occasions to give "expert" testimony on the subject. I could go on and on about this one but just ask yourself this: How many of your competitors have written an eBook that teaches consumers about your product? In almost every industry, the answer is less than 1%. Think that might make an impression?

4. Knowledge Equals Trust and Sales

Before I go out to a customer's house to sell them a swimming pool, guess what they're required to do? Yep, that's right, they have to read my eBook. By so doing, they will become more informed on fiberglass swimming pools and options than 99% of pool shoppers in the world.

But not only will the potential customer now be very informed, but they'll also know my stance on everything. They'll have invested their time to read my teachings, and because of it, they'll feel informed and prepared. Once they've reached this point and read the book, what do you think happens to closing rates? That's right, they go way, way up.

I call this process of required reading [Assignment Selling](#), and it has literally changed my life as a sales and marketing professional.

5. You Now Have a Ton of Killer Content

Guess how many swimming pool articles my eBook made? If you guessed “a lot,” you're right. There is nothing easier than taking a large eBook and turning it into 25 blog posts, or taking 25 blog posts and turning them into an eBook.

But the key here is content. No matter what your business is, you must accept the reality of content production. You've got to embrace and become passionate about giving great information to your consumer base. Once you get this, your life as a business owner will get much, much easier.

So there you have it folks, 5 reasons to get on your horse and start that eBook that's just waiting to leave your brain and find its place on paper. Oh, and one final thing—No, the eBook does not have to be that long. Anything more than 10 pages is pretty dang awesome in my book, so don't let length hold you back. Get 'er done!!

5 Reasons Why Most Follow-Up Emails Stink and What You Can Do About It

Do your emails to prospects and customers stink? Seriously, what type of response are you getting as you follow up with leads and touch base with your established customers? If you're like most small businesses, chances are you're frustrated with the poor percentage of responses you're getting back.

One minute you think you've got a hot lead. The next minute you're back to the drawing board. Trust me, I've been there. Heck, I think anyone who attempts to sell or market anything whatsoever has experienced frustrations over a lack of what we'll dub “*Email Response Love*.”

Follow-Up Frustration

This was certainly the case at a recent conference I taught at for builders in the fiberglass swimming pool industry. You see, the way it works in the fiberglass industry is there are manufacturers and builders. The manufacturers are typically larger businesses and therefore have stronger marketing departments. This allows them to generate consumer leads on their websites and in-turn send the lead to whichever pool builder is in that consumer's area.

Often times, these leads do not consist of a phone number and the only information a builder has to work off of is a name and email address. And the following up with these leads is often the center of great frustration for pool builders trying to generate sales appointments with consumers who are slow to respond.

This scenario is essentially no different than most small and large businesses throughout the world. More and more, consumers are slow to give out their personal information. And often times, a simple email is the only channel by which a business can work its marketing magic and initiate a relationship with the prospect or potential customer.

They Stink

The problem with follow up emails is essentially the same across the board. They're boring and they stink. Here's an example:

Dear Prospect,

We would like to thank you for your interest in a Widget 2000. In order to help you learn more regarding our Widget 2000, please respond to this email or call me directly on the number below.

Sincerely,

Sales guy

888-555-666

Widget Industries

Ok, now you might be thinking that most follow up emails aren't that bad, but let me tell you that they ain't much better. I've seen countless examples of company email follow ups and at least 90% are seriously lacking in originality, content, and character. But when it comes down to

it, you've got to ask yourself the following question:

How much value do my emails really have?

Although this may be a tough question to answer for some, I have listed five essential components of follow up emails. Since I implemented all of these tools in my email arsenal, the response I've been getting from customers is phenomenal and the rate of response has shot up drastically. Here goes:

5 Essential Tools to Awesome Email Follow Ups

1. You Tube Video

Let's just start with the best first, shall we? As everybody who reads this blog is well aware, I've been preaching from the rooftops for some time now that if you're a small business owner and you don't own a flip camera, then you need to have your brain examined. The reason why flip cameras can literally transform a business is because they are the simplest tool available on the market today to produce You Tube videos.

The power of You Tube for small businesses is utterly unbelievable, which is why business owners and their marketing departments should be looking to produce these short videos every possible chance they get. My company has about 100 You Tube videos that we've produced and these actions have branded us on a national level. In late 2009, I started including the You Tube videos in all my email follow ups as well, and the results have been extremely positive.

An example of this would be:

View this awesome Fiberglass Pool Installation Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osQqatNgKzw>

What's even better is the super nerds over at Google have now made it possible to send You Tube videos via Gmail and the receiver can actually see the video on the Gmail window, which is awesome. In other words, all one has to do when sending an email is insert the URL link to that particular YouTube video and the video will appear at the bottom of the screen for the viewer to see, without even leaving the page. (Currently, this is mainly a Gmail feature.)

Just imagine what your business could do by integrating video into your emails. Instead of introducing yourself or your products by words alone, you can add the power of visual. **Dang I love technology**..... And again, if you haven't already done so, stop being a slacker and pony-up \$150 for a simple flip camera!

2. Attach an eBook

eBooks are awesome for a variety of reasons, one of which is the fact that customers will actually read them. Not only does this eBook sell at a national level (making me a nice supplemental income), but I also send it out for FREE with every email that goes out to a new lead. For example, lead emails will say something to this effect:

I've attached here a copy of my popular swimming pool eBook. I can promise you that this 55 page guide will completely enlighten you as to the mistakes people make when purchasing a swimming pool. It will also heavily discuss pool options, pricing, sizes, manufacturers, etc. Please take the time to read its pages, as I can assure you it will be well worth your time.

As you can imagine, when a consumer, who is contemplating spending 30k+ on a swimming pool sees this, they are very likely to read the book and receive a lasting impression from the supplier of that valuable information.

3. References

Our company sends (via attachment) a complete customer reference list to every new lead that comes to our system. In other words, before I even meet a prospect the first time they have already received 600+ names, addresses, and phone numbers of happy customers that have done business with my company. And can you imagine the reaction I get from potential clients upon receiving such a list? Nothing short of surprise and amazement are the results of such a mountain of information.

4. Links to Your Blog

Blog, blog, blog. Along with video, blogging is the greatest marketing tool a business has in this Web/Marketing 2.0 era. This is why it's imperative your company maintains an active blog and also why every email you send to every customer should have a link to a recent and/or applicable blog that your company has written. In the case of my business, we always place strong and eye catching article titles at the end of our emails, just before the signature, and it appears in this manner:

And make sure you review these compelling articles from our blog:

[7 Deadly Sins of a Fiberglass Pool Installation](#)

[Fiberglass Pool Manufacturers: Who Will Survive?](#)

5. Questions

Too often, follow up emails are only about the company, and not enough about the customer. Emails should not only demonstrate to your customers that you're a thought-leader in your industry, but they should also show that you genuinely are interested in hearing the customer's concerns, thoughts, questions, etc. This is why every email to a customer/prospect should ask at least one, if not more, questions. I'm not going to give examples of questions here because that should go without saying, but again, the key is that you actually show the customer you care by submitting the question(s) in the first place.

So those are my top 5 additions to follow up emails that just about every small business in the world should be utilizing today. As you contemplate the implementation of these tools and techniques into your business, ask yourself the following question:

How many of my competitors are taking such strong action in their emails?

I'd imagine that likely none of your competitors are utilizing all of these tremendous tools, which is further reason for you to make such a change today. Do not wait. I can assure you that if you only follow these five steps you'll see a monumental improvement in your email marketing strategy.

Chapter 11: Further Inspiration

Get Uncomfortable: The Best Business and Life Choice You'll Ever Make

As I sat yesterday afternoon with my business partner Jason Hughes in a sauna at the Excalibur Hotel's health club in Vegas, I was brought back to a conversation he and I had exactly a year before in the exact same place, sitting on the exact same bench. Here's how it went:

Jason: "You did great in your seminar today bud."

Me: "Thanks man. But let me ask you something: Why aren't you speaking here too?"

Jason: (with a pensive look and half smile) "You know, I've never really thought about that.....I'm going to apply."

Me: (with a really big smile) "Awesome. You're going to be great. I can't wait."

You see, last year was my 3rd time speaking at the National Pool/Spa show in Vegas. And every year, Jason had attended my sessions and always been such a tremendous support. But being a “shy” guy, he’d never considered the fact that he could give an incredibly valuable seminar to attendees as well—that is, until I asked.

So, throwing caution and comfort aside, Jason trusted his gut. He applied to speak shortly after our conversation in the sauna. Weeks later, he was given the green light. And exactly one year later, he gave one of the best classes the swimming pool industry has ever seen on how to build a fiberglass swimming pool.

Am I proud of the guy? Yeah, you bet I am.

The Problem with Comfort Zones

I relay this story because it coincides perfectly with a statement given by [Peter Shankman](#) in his incredible keynote at Blog World LA :

“Nothing good ever comes from staying in your comfort zone.”

Ahh yes, how true it is.

I’ll repeat:

“Nothing good ever comes from staying in your comfort zone.”

As he will naturally admit, my dear friend Jason is an introvert. He is not one that has ever felt the need nor desire to be in the middle of the spotlight. Notwithstanding, the guy has amazing talents and abilities, and yesterday he was able to share them with many, many business owners that needed his help.

Thus, because he was willing to put himself in an uncomfortable situation, Jason touched lives, families, and businesses.

Such is the way life works.

My Uncomfortable Road to Success and Happiness

At 20 years of age and a sophomore in college, I decided to drop everything and [live in Chile](#) for two years. Uncomfortable? Oh yes. Rewarding? I can't even begin to explain the foundation that time period laid for the rest of my life.

At 23 year of age I was attending college again, but now married, and expecting my first child. To top it off, I was writing a book (a memoir of my time in Chile) and working 25 hours a week. Uncomfortable? Yes. Rewarding? My wife and I look back at our time in Morgantown with a fondness that simply can't be put into words.

At 25 I went into business with my two partners and opened a swimming pool company in Virginia. For years we struggled through hardships, [embezzlements](#), and frustration. Clearly, this was the most uncomfortable and stressful time of my life. Was it worth it? My goodness yes. The trials forced us to think in ways we never would have imagined. Without question, those years were the refiner's fire of my life.

At the age of 31 I embraced HubSpot, inbound marketing, and the Internet. Uncomfortable? Considering I'd always been a "tech-dummy," you better believe it was.

Rewarding? Everything **The Sales Lion** is, and all of the success this blog has had, is a direct result of that momentous decision. Plus, considering the fact that Inbound Marketing saved my pool company and gave me the opportunity to further pursue my passion of speaking and helping other businesses, I'd say, "Yes, it was dang worth it!"

Today, I find myself speaking around the country to different businesses, groups, and conferences. Without question, speaking to large audiences of people that expect to be fed great information and value can be a little uncomfortable. But the reward? My career has exploded. The message I bring literally is changing lives and saving businesses. That, my friends, makes any discomfort dissipate into the joy of knowing I'm doing what I was put here on Earth to do.

Is It Time to Leave Your Comfort Zone?

In the blog post I wrote, "[Hey Blogger, Eventually You Actually Have to Do Something](#)", I mentioned the fact that once a tree stops growing it dies. The same can be said for us as bloggers, business owners, and human beings. We must continue to grow. We must stretch ourselves just enough to experience the joys that come with such challenges.

So that's my charge to you on this day my friends. **Get uncomfortable.** Start that blog. [Push](#)

[record on that video camera](#). Send that application you've had sitting on your desk. Make that phone call that has been on your mind. The list could go on and on, but you know what that "it" is for you. And as you do these things, I promise **the rewards of tomorrow will far outweigh the discomfort of today**.

20 Life-Changing Habits That Will Make the Next Year Your Best Year Ever

The New Year is a fresh start for all of us.

This past year for me was a special and memorable one, and I've decided to make a list of the habits, behaviors, and actions that made such a year possible, as the momentum seems to keep growing by the day.

Instead of listing all the things you *should* be doing to make this year great, I want to talk about the things you may want to consider stopping as this new year rolls forward. I've been working on every single one of these habits for well over a year now, and I'd strongly urge you to consider each, as their impact on my life has been unbelievable.

But if you feel like some of these suggestions don't apply to your situation, then happily chuck them aside and move on to the next one.

Here goes.....**20 Life-Changing Habits That Will Make the Next Year Your Best Year Ever**

1. Stop Thinking you can do this alone.

That's right, you can't. We all have weakness, and we all need others to reach our full potential. Behind every great man and woman there are multiple pillars of support in the shadows.

Since the very beginning of time, man was not meant to be alone, and this principle has not changed whatsoever these many, many years.

2. Stop telling people, including yourself, that you're tired.

Seriously, how many times have you made this statement in your life? For some folks, it's their natural response to being asked, "How are you?"

But the hard truth is **no one cares that you or I are tired**. By verbalizing the feeling it not only becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, but it also brings others down in the process.

3. Stop Worry About Stupid Numbers that Don't Matter, Like Klout.

I personally talked with Joe Fernandez, founder of Klout recently. Here was our conversation:

Me: Joe, your system interests me, it's visionary, and I can see why many people put so much stock in Klout scores. Notwithstanding, if I'm going to be busting my tail anyway, I don't think it really matters if I know my Klout score or not, which is why I see no need to check it. What's your take?

Joe: Actually, that's very true.

The time has come for all of us to stop worrying about so many metrics that don't really mean a darn thing. In business, we should be worrying about **customers and profits**. In life, we should be worried about peace, happiness, and fulfillment. The rest, too often, is simply empty noise.

(Oh, and if you don't know what Klout is, don't bother looking it up, as it doesn't matter)

4. Stop Watching the News

I don't care if you're Republican, Democrat, whatever—the news stinks. I stopped watching it a little over a year ago and I became a happier person. The moment I realized 99.9% of what I was watching was outside my circle of influence, I happily let it sail off into the sunset without me.

(Note*** Just because you don't watch the news, doesn't mean you're not informed or don't care about the world. You'll be amazed at how the news will still find you if you adhere to what I'm suggesting here.)

5. Stop Allowing Yourself To Get Pinged to Death.

I laugh when people tell me they can handle writing a blog post while having their phone go off with every text message, email, etc. Fact is, we all grossly over-estimate our ability to “multitask.” In fact, because we can only have one thought in our head at a time, the idea of multi-tasking, for the most part, is a complete myth.

A few months ago I turned my phone on silent. No longer do I hear any pings. I check it every 30-60 minutes as needed, but it no longer runs my life.

Do yourself a favor and take charge of the technology, noise, and distractions in your life. I can assure you, it will make all the difference in the world.

6. Stop Wasting Your Vehicle Time.

Most people will not agree with this statement, but the majority of radio we listen to in the car is a complete waste of brain cells. Yes, music can be nice and soothing, but so can an inspirational or educational podcast, so can a book on CD, and so can silent meditation.

This past year I listened to well over 50 books, plus hundreds of talks and seminars, while looking through the windshield of my vehicle—and what a difference it made in my day to day thoughts and emotions.

7. Stop Waiting to Ask Others for Forgiveness

If there is anyone in life that you've had a falling out with, the time to carry that weight around with you must come to an end. Call the person. Whether you were wrong or not, **ask for forgiveness**. Just let it go. Let me assure you it will be one of the most empowering and enlightening experiences of your life.

8. Stop Saying Yes to Every “Opportunity”

The more successful you become, the more you'll need to say “no” to others. I never understood this principle until the magic of momentum came into my life so strongly in 2011, but today I find myself saying “no” much more than I say “yes.”

9. Stop Trying to Be Everything to Everybody.

Remember our little conversation about “[knowing your shtick](#)”? In business and in life, the quickest way to unhappiness and frustration is by trying to be everything to everybody.

Accept the fact that you're just not a good fit with certain people.

Accept the reality that your business wasn't meant to do certain things.

Just be good at being you. Embrace who and what that is, and run with it without looking back.

10. Stop Waiting for Your “Big Break;” It Doesn’t Exist.

I used to say to myself, “I think this might be my big break” whenever something “great” would happen. But shortly thereafter, things would get back to normal and I’d realize the “big-break” was just another small step in the path towards reaching my goals.

Today, I don’t think about “big breaks” any longer. I solely try to string as many consistent positive moments together, day after day, with the hopes that eventually it will snowball into the success vision that I currently have in my head.

11. Stop Reading This Blog If You Haven’t Ever Applied Anything I’ve Said.

No, I’m not kidding. If you’ve been reading my blog for months or years and still have yet to apply what you’ve read, **I beg you to unsubscribe this second and go do something that really matters.**

12. Stop Trying to Be on Every Social Media Platform.

You can’t be Mr. Twitter, Mr. Facebook, Mr. LinkedIn, Mr. Google+, Mr. Blog, and Mr. “Soup of the Day” social media platform. It simply doesn’t work like that. Again, know your shtick. Don’t be a jack of all trades and master of none. Find greatness in at least one area first and then move on.

13. Stop Denying Your Spiritual Side

I don’t care if you’re Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, whatever—the spiritual stuff matters. Finding happiness in life is about achieving balance on an emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual level. More and more, people are thinking they don’t need to lean on their spiritual roots to reach their potential, but the reality is we all need to look up a little more often and “return to source.”

14. Stop Doing What You’ve Been Prompted a Hundred Times to Stop Doing.

I'm not going to tell you what this one is because it's your prompting, not mine. I just know you keep getting it. So do I. Now let's stop making excuses and tackle the dang thing, shall we??

15. Stop Telling Yourself Why It Won't Work.

Was I ready to start **The Sales Lion** when I did? Heck no. There were a million reasons why the timing was bad, why the resources just weren't yet there, and why my lack of knowledge would hinder success.

But I did it anyway, and it was the greatest business decision of my life.

Stop counting the reasons why that prompting you've been getting won't work. Now start counting the reasons why it *will* be a success.

And when you're done, go launch that baby.

16. Stop Agreeing With Other People So Much.

The time has come to question the status-quo. It's also time to stop nodding your head "yes" when your favorite friend, writer, or political leader says what's good and what's not good.

Listen to your gut. Give heed to your intuition. You were given that gift for a reason—to use it.

17. Stop Saying You'll Start Eating Healthy and Losing Weight.

Fact: No one ever lost any weight by talking about dieting.

So instead of talking about it, start eating less, working out more, and taking back control of your physical self.

18. Stop Texting and Driving.

I'll be honest in saying I used to have this problem, but I got tired of seeing and hearing about

people dying due to distracted driving. Today, I drive with my phone on silent and despite the fact that I don't answer my messages in real-time, life still finds a way manage OK.

19. Stop Consuming So Much Information without Doing Anything.

Seriously, do you really think that next eBook for \$27.99 is going to tell you way more than you already know? It amazes me how many people would rather “consume” all day than actually apply the teachings they've been reading and hearing again and again and again.

The fact is most of us don't need any more information, **we just need to actually do something.**

20. Stop Waiting to Tell Those You Most Care About How Much You Love Them.

I'm serious about this one. Many of you know what I'm talking about because you've recently experienced the death of a loved one.

One of the greatest moments of my life was when I wrote my grandfather a very long letter, expressing my deepest personal feelings and sentiments, shortly before he died a few years ago. I cannot imagine the regret I would have had I not listened to the prompting I received and written him that letter.

Afterword: Hiring The Sales Lion to Build Your Brand, Business, and Bottom Line

Content Marketing Consulting Services

(Keynotes, Workshops, Short/Long Term Consulting)

As the first person who really started the movement of making content marketing a culture within organizations, Marcus Sheridan and his team at The Sales Lion work with businesses of all sizes in the following capacities:

In-House Content Marketing Workshops:



Speaking at an in-house content marketing summit, Marcus Sheridan can invigorate a culture of content marketing within your company.

If an entire organization is going to embrace content marketing and each employee is going to catch the vision of seeing themselves as a teacher/content producer, an in-house summit is a must to achieve maximum results. As the first person in the marketing industry to teach that **"Yes, your employees can all produce content!"** for the company's marketing success, Marcus Sheridan will come to your organization and spend a day teaching the following principles:

- What is content marketing and how does it affect a company's ability to generate more business?
- How do Google and the other search engines treat content and how does the average consumer shop/research online?
- How can great content affect the company as a whole but also every employee individually?
- How each employee can teach the world what it is they do, and the results that come with a teacher's mentality.

With multiple case studies as to how this one event has literally changed entire company cultures and marketing success around the globe, this is one service you should strongly consider--**Just read this amazing testimonial from the largest retailer of kitchen appliances in the entire northeast:**

*I've been blogging since 2007 with pretty decent results. **Or so I thought.** Our average post would garner anywhere from 200 to 500 views. I happened upon Marcus' profile during a Hubspot seminar and figured I would call him. I really didn't believe he would have that much teach me. After the first hour of our first session I realized that I had been blogging, **but not business blogging.** There is a huge difference. Marcus teaches how to be found organically, how to properly engage your prospects and how to write a call to action to turn these prospects into customers.*

*The results speak for themselves. In December of 2011, we had 18,000 visitors to our website through organic (which is free by the way) search. In September of 2012, with **48,000 visitors from organic search** just using Marcus' business blogging techniques with an average post of 1000 views(and climbing).*

*We also had Marcus speak to the staff to infuse the idea of content marketing to the staff. **Now everyone is a blogger.** We blog 5 to 6 days a week and own the **top three slots on Google for approximately 141 keywords.** Our business in a highly competitive market is **up about 15%.** We have also reduced marketing costs by approximately \$500,000.*

*If you follow his plan, the culture of your company will change. You will evolve from shouting at people through advertising to advising them through strategic business blogging. **You will be amazed.***

Sincerely,

Steve Sheinkopf

CEO

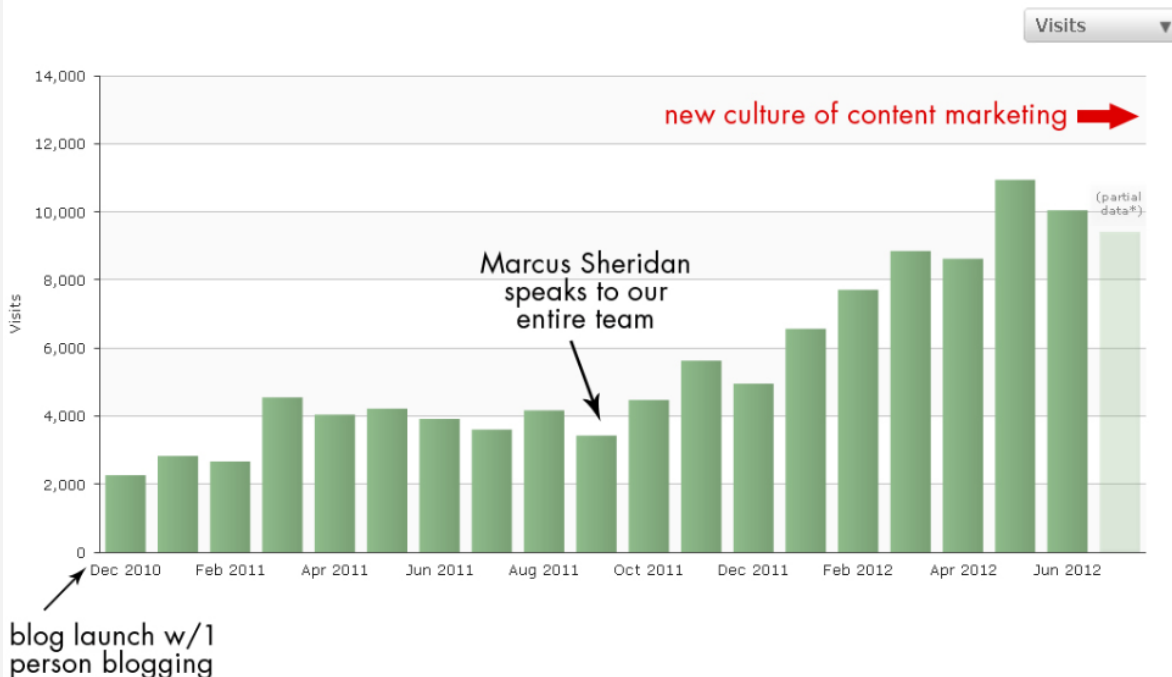
[Yale Appliance And Lighting](#)

CCO Training

Are you looking to hire a CCO (Chief Content Officer)? Would you like to train them to be the best in their industry? The Sales Lion team can help.

Visits for Organic Search

Dec 1, 2010 - Jul 31, 2012



This was a screenshot sent to Marcus Sheridan of Block Imaging's web traffic after he assisted the company with an in-house content marketing workshop.

With the rise of Content Marketing and the incredible need for businesses large and small to embrace a clear and effective content marketing strategy, Marcus Sheridan has taken the principles he originally applied to River Pools and now translated them into a system by which CCOs can achieve optimal results for their business.

General Content Marketing Consulting

Is your company's blog producing little fruit? Is your website low on conversions? Are you finding SEO to be difficult?

If so, then The Sales Lion team can help, as Marcus Sheridan now teaches other businesses exactly how he created the most trafficked swimming pool website in the world as well as huge success with The Sales Lion blog. Furthermore, Sheridan has now worked with multiple other industries and sectors and seen tremendous results wherever he has assisted.

Interested? Contact Marcus by emailing marcus1@TheSalesLion.com.

Speaking Services that Get Results: No Theory, No Fluff, Just Real-Life Application for Attendees

*"Marcus rocked Content Marketing World. **By far, he was the most talked about speaker at the event**, leaving a lasting impression of great content + amazing style. Looking forward to making Marcus even a bigger part of our event next year."*

Joe Pulizzi of [Junta42](#) and [CMI](#)



Many people think upon reading this blog that *writing* about sales, marketing, and personal development is my focus, but in reality my great joy in life (other than family) is the gift God has given me as a verbal communicator. At the risk of sounding rather cheesy, the one place I feel at absolutely peace and ease is when I'm able to speak to an audience and in some way help other people and businesses reach their potential. In a nutshell, this is my speaking style:

- High Energy
- Almost NO PowerPoint (who wants to be read to?)
- **Heavy Audience Participation**
- Loud Laughter ;-)



As for topics I speak about, here are a few that might be of interest to your company:

- **How to build your brand and become the voice of your industry through content marketing**
- **What is inbound marketing and how can it revolutionize the way you've done business?**
- **The power of transparent marketing and the myth of "secret sauce".**
- **Becoming a thought-leader in an age of followers**
- **How to integrate content marketing into your entire sales process**
- **Yes You Can!! The ability for business owners to be internet savvy in 2012 and beyond**



ANLA Conference, Louisville, 2012

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VY5pkn6K7vc>

Here's another testimonial from the very well-known **MarketingSherpa**:

Marcus Sheridan recently spoke at our Optimization Summit in Atlanta and he absolutely knocked it out of the park. His down-to-earth style resulted in a presentation that was both educational and entertaining. His passion for content marketing is infectious our attendees raved about his session, rating him as one of the highest presenters at our event. If you haven't had an opportunity to see Marcus in person, do it - he's outstanding.

Paul Clowe

Senior Director of Finance & Operations, Primary Research

MECLABS / MarketingSherpa



Keynote speech at Content Marketing World 2012

The following are my areas of specialty with speaking:

- Industry Trade Shows and Conferences
- Marketing Conventions
- In-House Social Media/Content Marketing Summits
- Schools/Universities

Speaking at HubSpot's User Group Conference (Note *This talk was given a perfect score by attendees in 2012, something that had not previously been done at the event*)**

[\[youtube\]http://youtu.be/9bXer2u9F2w\[/youtube\]](http://youtu.be/9bXer2u9F2w)

Interested in learning more about potential speaking services for your next conference or company event?
Contact me today at marcus1@thesaleslion.com .

A Look at Content Marketing Consulting Prices and Costs

Content marketing has certainly exploded over the past few years and because so many businesses are just now "getting it" when it comes to the power of great teaching (online) to garner consumer trust, traffic, and sales-- many folks are wondering **how much a content marketing consultant costs**, as well as what **duties** one might expect from said consultant.

Like any subject that is not a commodity, explaining general pricing guidelines for content marketing is no easy task, but based on my rates and the rates of many of my colleagues, I'll do my best here to help you get at least a general feel for what to expect.

Potential Duties of a Content Marketing Consultant

Let's start with the consultant's duties for a second. This is an incredibly vast area, but here are some potential offerings you might expect to see:

1. Content Marketing Workshops: For those consultants that are looking to establish a true "culture" within the organization of content marketers (employees that help teach the world about their industry through blogging, video, white papers, etc.) an initial workshop with the team is almost always necessary, especially if all employees are going to see the proper vision and understand "The Why" to content marketing, social media, etc. **Generally speaking, these workshops go anywhere from a few hours to possibly a few days, and can start as low as a few thousand dollars and get easily in the 20-40k range if it's an extended event. At The Sales Lion, our average workshop is in the 8-15k range.**

Having done dozens of these events over the past few years, I find that most businesses are best served with a 3-5 hour workshop with the main portion of the team (those that might be participating) and then another few hours with management to discuss the workshop's results as well as other details for successful implementation.

2. Social Media and Content Marketing Training of Key Staff (including Chief Content Officer): For a content marketing campaign to be very successful, it's generally necessary that someone on staff is the main champion, leader, and organizer of the marketing efforts within this realm. Often times, this person doesn't just "get" content marketing without some type of training that shows the ins and outs of such things as proper blogging strategies, video marketing, website conversion strategies, SEO elements, and many more duties.

3. Oversight of Content, Especially Blog: It's always a great idea to have a second set of eyes outside of one's industry to look at things like blog articles (and titles), videos, website pages, etc. to make sure each component of the content marketing efforts reach their potential. I know for me, after I've been able to train a company's employees in these areas for a few months, they can often handle things quite well themselves.

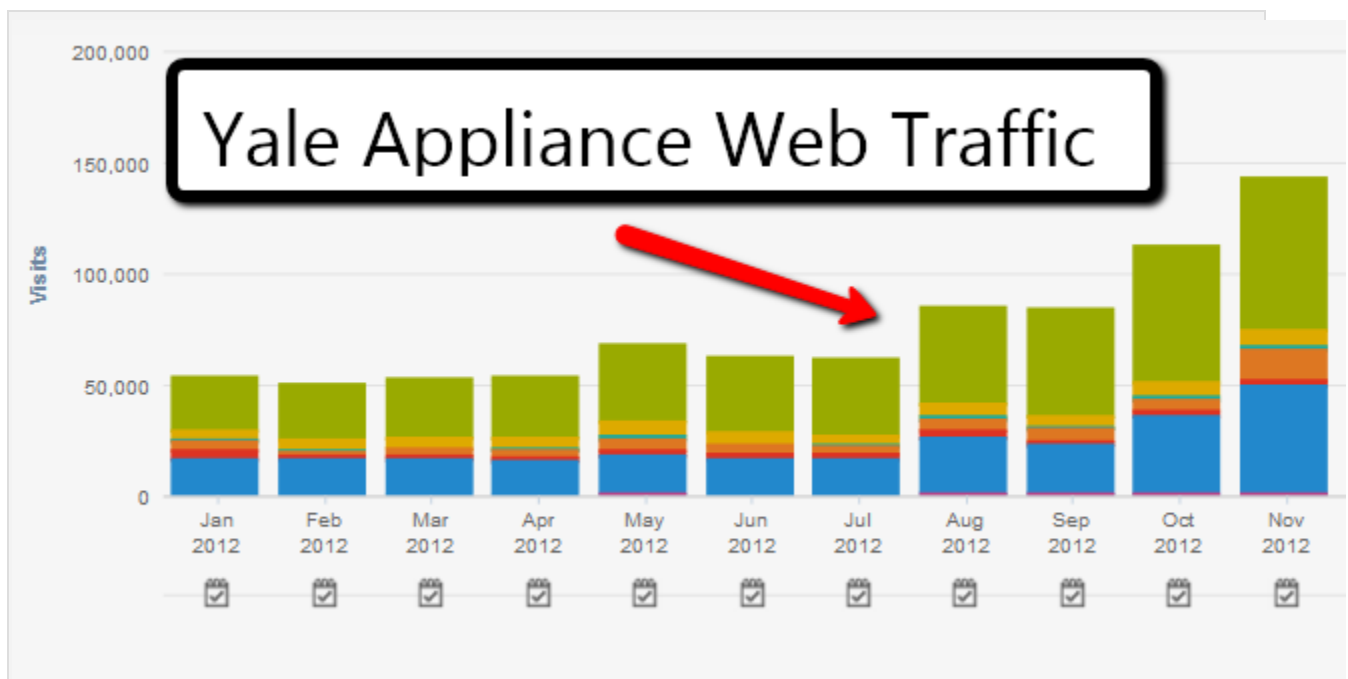
4. Pay Per Click Advertising: Believe it or not, Pay Per Click (PPC) still has major value for many companies and should not be disregarded by any company until experimented with and carefully considered. When done right, a great PPC campaign works in fluid conjunction with content marketing.

5. Email Marketing Campaigns: Just as with PPC, email marketing is a MAJOR component of a great content marketing campaign, especially if it's used to deliver blog articles, videos, etc. to potential and existing customers in such a way that it helps them progress further down the sales funnel.

6. General Web Design: Although most content marketers aren't "web designers," they should at least understand how a website's pages have a drastic effect on consumer action and conversions. This also includes the development of landing pages and call-to-actions throughout the website and other digital copy.

7. Social Media Integration: As [Jay Baer](#) loves to say, "*Content is the fire and social media is the gasoline.*" In some industries, where social is extremely prevalent (like retailers, restaurants, etc.), it's important to align content and social together in a way that gets maximum results. In other industries, platforms like Twitter and Facebook may not be nearly as important, but this does not mean they shouldn't be considered in the content marketing process.

8. Understanding Web Analytics: A great content marketing campaign is one that is tracked, followed, experimented with, and scrutinized when it comes to site analytics. This is necessary to show return on investment (ROI) and is also why web analytics beyond what Google offers is often times required. For example, all of my clients are taught how to use **HubSpot** to measure their inbound and content marketing efforts and the true ROI of their work.



Actual web stats for the massive appliance retailer--Yale Appliance--located in Boston, Mass. After meeting with Marcus in 2012 and revamping their content marketing strategy, the website traffic, especially organic, exploded.

Cost of Retainers for Consultants

As you can see from the list above (which could be much longer in fact), the duties of a content marketing consultant can get pretty expansive, as well as the time it takes each week to properly perform these duties.

For most small to medium sized business, consultants on retainer generally run anywhere **between 2-20k per month.**

For larger organizations and enterprise businesses, the number is more like **5-50k per month.**

When all is said and done, as an organization that is considering bringing in outside help to market your business to greater heights you need to be able to answer (to the best of your ability) these two incredibly important questions:

1. Because we are not currently maximizing the internet and digital realm with content marketing, how much is this potentially costing our business?

2. If we embraced content marketing and truly did it well, what are the realistic results in terms of branding and bottom-line we might expect?

I can tell you that if you think hard about those two questions, your process of hiring a content marketing consultant will be much, much easier.

Further questions? Need a quote for content marketing services? [Contact The Sales Lion team here.](#)

By Marcus Sheridan, President, The Sales Lion

The Cost of Inbound Marketing and HubSpot Consulting through The Sales Lion

With so many small to medium-sized businesses jumping on the inbound marketing and **HubSpot** train over the last 5 years, there has been a rapidly growing demand in the industry for consultants and specialists that not only understand how to use the tool that is HubSpot(HS), but also truly know inbound marketing(IM) application principles for any business.

Along these same lines, many companies have attempted applying IM to their business, in conjunction with HubSpot, but have found a tough go at it, **experiencing much less success that they'd hoped for and been left wondering if they should even continue using HubSpot at all.**

When I first became a HS partner and value added reseller, I figured the majority of my business would come from new sign-ups/clients. Little did I know that I'd actually become inundated in work from existing HubSpot users that knew they weren't using the tool to its fullest potential and came to me to get

better results while also seeking a clearer inbound marketing strategy. I've actually shared many such case studies here on The Sales Lion, with the stories of [Block Imaging](#) and [Yale Appliance](#) being two of the most profound.

That being said, if you find yourself looking to hire a HubSpot and/or Inbound Marketing consultant, you likely want to know what type of price range to expect for such a service. As you might imagine, there are some major factors that will dictate this cost, some of which I'll now briefly explain:

1. Insourcing vs. Outsourcing Your Content

So much of IM comes down to a company's ability to do such things as produce content, enhance the website, leverage social media, etc. In certain cases, when an organization has a deeper vision of IM and each employee sees themselves as part of the marketing department and a "teacher"—amazing things can happen. But to get to this point can be difficult, and some organizations simply don't want to fool with it. This being said, the more a company can handle in-house (insourcing) the less they'll spend on an inbound marketing consultant or agency.

Note*** *At The Sales Lion, in most cases, we train our clients to move from an outsourcing to insourcing method over time. Typically, this process equates to a 6-12 month consulting contract.*

2. Retainer vs. "Quick-Fix"

Many HubSpot partners and Inbound Marketing specialists work on a retainer model where they perform certain duties every month and get paid accordingly. Although this system works great for some businesses, others might not have the financial capabilities to spend that much, and therefore are left to attempt their own IM and HS strategies solo, with just a small amount of training.

Note*** *At The Sales Lion, we have packages for both systems based on the needs of the client. Most retainer clients are in the **3.5-12k monthly cost range**, whereas the "training only" clients generally spend a one-time fee of **3-4k**, depending on their needs.*



With so much explosive growth these last few years, the need for HubSpot specialists has also grown exponentially.

3. Number of Inbound Marketing Needs

As previously mentioned, doing all facets of IM effectively can take a significant amount of work, and therefore manpower as well, especially if the company doing it is a large organization. In fact, here are just a few of the main components of inbound marketing:

- Consistent Blogging
- Video-Based Content
- Social Media (Facebook Page, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, etc.)
- Web Design (proper placement of calls-to-action, landing pages, layout of content, etc.)
- CRM Integration
- Other Content (eBooks, whitepapers, webinars, conferences, etc.)

Note*** *At The Sales Lion, our specialty is business blogging strategies with a heavy Search Engine Optimization(SEO) and lead to sale emphasis. This being said, we are usually involved in all facets of website design, “other Content,” CRM integration, and video as well.*

4. Extent of Consulting (Workshops, virtual trainings, etc.)

Again, this comes down to the needs, size, and scope of a client’s situation. Some businesses are just looking for a small amount of phone-based consulting to get them on track. Others are aiming to create an organizational culture through the use of workshops and ongoing training. Therefore, depending on what is needed of the consultant, the price ranges can vary drastically in this area.

As you can see, with all these factors, it’s very difficult to say exactly what the cost of an inbound marketing/HubSpot consultant will be if your company elects to go that route.

Having been in this industry for a few years now with my own company and over 30 HS clients, and based on the hundreds of HubSpot VARs and IM specialists I’ve spoken with, **most retainer-based models for consulting start no less than 1k a month and will get as high as 20k or so a month, depending on the needs of the organization.**

More questions? Looking to get further numbers? Email Marcus at Marcus1@TheSalesLion.com