

# Online Marketing Blog

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## 4 Steps to Social SEO Success

The sheer volume of social media marketing and search engine optimization advice posted online can make it difficult for companies to make sense out what direction they should take. There are many models and approaches to leveraging optimized content for discovery through search and how to develop social networks to engage customers and promote content. It comes down to fundamentals and I think the following Four pieces of the Social SEO puzzle can help companies of any size get started in a more meaningful way on their journey towards becoming productive on the social web.

**Listening, Content, Socialize and Measure** could just as well be represented as a cycle, but I think the forward direction is important because you can't reach outcomes without action. Any good social media marketing effort needs to begin with some kind of Listening program. That means using social media monitoring tools to collect, sort and manage social content according to topics being monitored. Content is the glue that makes search engines work and content is a critical part of the social sharing experience within social media. Speaking of sharing, socializing with other like-minded individuals as a personal experience can fold well with brand interactions as long as the needs of the buyer persona has been reconciled with business objectives. Successful efforts within the social web can be measured, and should be, in a variety of ways. Measurement justifies objectives and it's important to identify the right tools for monitoring real time and web analytics.

Here are a few more details on each of these steps. I encourage you to think about how your company is implementing these steps in your own social media marketing efforts. Are you taking shortcuts? Are you following through? Have you found more important steps to follow?

#### Listening

An essential start and ongoing component for a [social media marketing](#) and optimization effort is to leverage listening tools. As companies struggle to understand where the social web fits within their online marketing strategy, a social media monitoring program (listening) should be implemented immediately. Collecting social web data, organizing and managing it is essential for tapping into the conversations, influencers and real-time marketing opportunities that abound in today's internet environment. While there are many things you can listen for with a social media monitoring effort, here are four key elements for Social SEO success:

**Social Channels** - Which social destinations are your customers frequenting? Social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn? Or Twitter? What about media sharing sites like Flickr and YouTube? Forums, Blogs or Social News and Bookmarking sites? Social media monitoring will help you decide which social channels you should start testing and digging into deeper for participation, networking and promotion. For example, why invest in videos if the majority of influencers in your category spend their time on Twitter?**Social Keywords** - Good social media monitoring tools analyze tags, comments, anchor text and other forms of text to identify keywords associated with the monitoring topic. That keyword insight can help identify topics of interest as they emerge and influence content strategy decisions as well as social media optimization. Social conversations influence search behaviors and if you can identify relevant concepts that are emerging in popularity on the social web, why not create and optimize content around those topics so you're easily found via search engines?**Influentials** - A listening program will help identify the influentials within the topics you're monitoring providing the ability to prioritize who to connect with. As Brian Solis mentioned yesterday, Influence is the ability to affect intended outcomes and if you can provide influencers with something of value to them and their networks, it increases the reach of your own message and content substantially.**SERPs** - Social media monitoring tools don't track search engine results pages and that's why you should. All major search engines purchase data feeds from different social media sources and incorporate social media content within search results. Therefore, it's important to monitor search results for key terms relevant to your business and identify what social sources are being included. If Google is showing blog posts above the fold for a competitive keyword phrase, it might be easier for you to get exposure by commenting on those blog posts with a link back to your site or making blog posts about that topic on your own blog.

#### Content

Content makes the Social SEO world go round. One of the biggest growth areas in Online Marketing is the business of creating, optimizing and promoting content. Brands are becoming publishers, which isn't really new, but becoming more common. Big brands have funded TV shows, Radio networks and other forms of editorial ie content, for years. The ease of publishing online provides many opportunities for companies to engage customers with content. It's no longer enough to simply publish features and benefits information on products and services. Customers want more. Marketers would do well to create a content marketing strategy or as I like to call it, a Content Marketing Optimization Strategy. Inventory content assets such as web pages, images, video, audio, rich media and file types such as HTML, PDF, MS Office docs, Structured Data Feeds and RSS to assess what can be promoted via social channels and be ranked in search results. Map search keywords to search engine optimization content. Map social keywords to social media content.

If content can be searched it can be optimized and a well planned digital asset optimization effort that works in sync with social networking and promotions can efficiently get content to those that want it and also facilitate better search visibility. That is the essence of Social SEO.

### Socialize

With insight into the appropriate social media channels, influentials and a rock solid content marketing optimization strategy in place, it's important to have a plan on how to connect with the communities where customers and prospects spend their time. Three key pieces to socializing your marketing efforts include: **Buyer Personas** - Research what your customers do on the social web. What are their social information discovery, consumption and sharing preferences. What influences them to share and buy? **Grow Networks** - Time strapped marketers often fail to spend time growing networks. Some try to buy friends literally or through repeated incentives. Spend a small, but consistent amount of time growing networks organically. That might mean 10-30 minutes every day commenting, friending, following, liking and updating on a daily basis. There is no substitute for participation when it comes to growing a network that can have a real effect on your ability to promote content that gets passed on and on and on. **Promote** - Plan to develop a cycle of social interaction by reconciling the needs of buyer personas with business goals in your content marketing strategy. Grow networks that you can promote optimized content to. Blogs can often serve as an ideal hub for this kind of content with spokes to the various social channels for content promotion such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.. A cycle of social participation starts with creating & promoting optimized content & assets. That content gets noticed, shared & voted on, growing awareness. The increased exposure attracts more subscribers, fans, friends, followers & links. Increased links & social exposure grow search & referral traffic. Traffic & community help with research to develop & further grow your social networks for content & SEO.

### Measure

Success comes in many forms and with social media marketing and social SEO, it's the combination of social media monitoring and web analytics that provides the most actionable value. Social media monitoring tools are not only effective for initial Listening, but also to determine the social effect of your optimized content marketing on the social web. Off site engagement can be monitored, measured and analyzed in combination with web analytics tools that provide insight into what social traffic does once they get to your web site. Leveraging monitoring and analytics to inform future content creation, keyword optimization and social promotion is essential for staying ahead of the competition and being effective at meeting customer needs.

Obviously, the implementation of such a simplified strategy can vary widely according to the purpose, but with so many companies unwilling to commit to developing an overall [Social Media Roadmap](#), experimentation becomes a more reasonable alternative. Following a basic structure like the four steps listed above can help make a social media test or even a modest social media marketing program a lot more productive.

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## 10 Social Media Marketing Questions Answered by Engage!

I've been familiar with [Brian Solis](#) as many have, for several years. We've done a few [video interviews](#) with Brian and he's contributed to popular posts here like this one on [social media marketing](#) and this one on [content curation](#).

I have to admit that based on his early writing, I thought Brian was overly confident about the opportunities with social media. When I finally met him in person at a Media Relations conference we were both speaking at, I gained a much better understanding and appreciation for the talents and insight behind the evangelism for what has become the most significant change to the web since the introduction of search engines.

As a successful author, speaker and owner of Future Works, Brian has many opportunities to face tough questions from clients, peers and conference attendees. In the realm of social media, it's not unreasonable to have a lot of [questions](#) about the who, what, why, where, when and how.

How to start? How to create a strategy? How to find customers and influentials? How to create engaging social destinations? How to promote without offending? How to measure? How to report? Those are just some of the critical questions answered in Brian's newest book, [Engage! The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate and Measure Success in the New Web](#).

I promised Brian to talk about Engage! here months ago, which was a no-brainer since we already did a review of "[Putting the Public Back in Public Relations](#)". While I thought about a variety of perspectives to take on sharing my opinions of this book, nothing stood out until now. In the course of answering many social media questions on a daily basis, I've often referred Engage! to people as a resource. Therefore it makes perfect sense to share some of the top questions this book answers for marketers. Essentially, this is a list of 10 reasons why you should check the book out.

- 1. Where does social media fit in marketing and communications?**
- 2. What social tools and technologies are available? What are their differences and how do they work for marketers?**
- 3. How do you manage multi-channel social media participation? What tools are there for listening, publishing, promotion and measurement?**
- 4. Search results can be optimized, how do you optimize social media?**
- 5. How do you develop social networks and distribution channels?**
- 6. What are social champions and how do we find, engage and develop influentials?**
- 7. How do you develop a social media strategy?**
- 8. What are the logistical and process considerations for planning, implementing and managing social web participation for companies?**
- 9. How do we foster and manage social customer relationships?**
- 10. How can we develop social media teams in an organization and create a model for social participation within our organization?**

There you have it. Ten key social media questions that the new Brian Solis book, Engage! answers for communications professionals, business owners, marketers and social netizens all over the web. If you have different or more questions than those listed above, by all means visit Amazon and get the book. If you need

a person to walk you through the answers, then you can always talk to us at [TopRank Marketing](#) .

If you're in Minneapolis tonight, be sure to come and see [Brian present at Solera](#) from 6-8pm. For the millions of marketers that will not be in Minneapolis this evening, fear not. Vocus is hosting a free online event ([Retweet: Engagement Means Business](#)) all day tomorrow that features Brian Solis amongst others like David Meerman Scott and Deirdre Breakenridge.

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**Getting Connected at SES San Francisco**

The Search Engine Strategies conference from Incisive Media has really taken an amazing turn this year for the West Coast event. Not only have organizers moved the conference from San Jose to [San Francisco](#), but SES is now a part of an event called [Connected Marketing Week](#) that involves a coordinated effort from a number of organizations providing a 360 degree digital marketing experience.

San Francisco is one of my favorite cities and I think it's a very smart move to change venues but also to evolve SES into being part of a much larger event. Involving other organizations will give attendees an impressive selection of content to choose from plus even more ways to connect with industry experts, peers, vendors and attendees in general. This year I'll be giving a solo presentation on Aug 18th called, Content Marketing Optimization. Here's the official description:

**Content Marketing Optimization** (8/17 at 3:00 pm) The core of any search or social media marketing program centers on content. Digital assets, rich media, web pages, MS Office and PDF docs as well as content created and shared by consumers all offer opportunities for optimization. If it can be searched, it can be optimized! Online marketing is increasingly competitive and brand marketers world-wide are seeking real advantages that will improve the efficiency and impact of their Social Media and SEO efforts. This session provides unique insight into content based optimization strategies and processes as well as tactics for sourcing, creation and promotion of optimized content on the social web.

We've posted quite a bit on the topic of content marketing, strategy and optimization. Here are a few for reference so you can get an idea of the type of information I'll be presenting at SES:

[Key Questions to Optimize Your Content Marketing Strategy](#)[Content Marketing Strategy with a Side of Social](#)  
[10 Steps to Optimize Your Content Marketing Strategy](#)

I will also moderate a session on the challenges and opportunities with convincing business executives on the ongoing value of investing in search engine marketing. Search marketing is just one of many marketing channels CMOs and Marketing VPs are responsible for. There is often a disconnect in the language and expectations of input to outcomes and this session will reveal first hand experiences from agencies and in-house marketers.

The lineup on this session is very impressive and includes: Paul Wilson, Chief Revenue Officer, iProspect, Rich Lesperance, Director of Online Marketing, Walgreens, Laura Lippay, Partner, Nine by Blue and Vivek Chaudhuri, Director, Search Marketing, Digitas Health. The official description:

**Selling Search to the C-Suite** (8/19 at 4:45pm) Your CMO still calls and wants to know why your company isn't number one for the most popular, random, non revenue orientated terms you have ever seen or heard about. Your entire day is spent answering questions about search. Search marketers and non-search marketers have traditionally had difficulty communicating in the language of their disciplines, often creating friction and unnecessary conflict. This very interactive session will explore how both disciplines can educate each other and explore such issues as the nominal percentage of marketing spend that is allocated to search.

Ron Belanger & Mike Grehan

This has been an exciting year for the internet marketing industry and my time as a member of the [SES Advisory Board](#) will always be appreciated. The connection between SES and TopRank's Online Marketing Blog goes back at least 5 or 6 years as a media sponsor and our agency TopRank Marketing has had a very good experience sending staff to SES events. Additionally, I've been very fortunate to speak at at least 10 SES conference in different parts of the world and look forward to continuing that relationship.

One of the people I've worked with at SES and Incisive Media over the years is [Matt McGowan](#). Matt has advanced quickly in the Incisive organization to Publisher & Head of U.S. at Incisive Media, which is the parent company to SES, Search Engine Watch and ClickZ. I reached out to Matt for attendee tips and for his

insights on making SES part of Connected Marketing Week:

**Please share a tip for conference attendees or sponsors on how they can get more out of participating with SES:**

Put aside a few hours and really look over the agenda and the expo hall floor. There are a lot of options, so choose the ones that are most important to you and your business. Remember SES SF is part of Connected Marketing Week so the options are endless! All partners were chosen based on their focus on education. The bar was set high.

**There's an increasing amount of competition in the marketing conference world. What advantages are there to attending SES and/or Connected Marketing Week over other events?**

Education. Most conferences sell speaking spots or put sales or commercial people on stage most of the time (yes, even other online advertising and marketing events). SES and the other partners involved in Connected Marketing Week do not (except for a few sponsored sessions which are clearly marked). We guarantee you will not be pitched. Instead, you will come away with pages upon pages of notes that will help you grow your company's profitability.

**What are you most proud of with the upcoming SES San Francisco conference?**

Pulling off Connected Marketing Week was no easy feat. That said, I am very happy with the outcome.

**Thanks Matt, we're looking forward to it!**

Adam Singer

No TopRank Marketing experience at a SES conference would be complete without liveblogging, so be sure to watch Online Marketing Blog August 17-19 when we'll be posting about 2 times each day as well as [Tweeting](#) and putting up photos and videos to our [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#) channels. Speaking of video, we'll be putting up another post with videos of our live bloggers talking about their expectations of SES and the sessions they plan on covering next week. That post will share our blogging schedule for SES including which sessions we plan to cover as well as a request for your help to tie-break a few sessions.

We've taken nearly 1,000 photos at various Search Engine Strategies conferences and you can see photos from our past SES San Jose (now San Francisco) events here:

[SES San Jose 2005](#) - Thanks to Thomas, we have some good photos to share since our "official" photos have gone missing. [SES San Jose 2006](#) - You'll recognize a lot of these photos as they've been "re-purposed" by SEO bloggers quite a bit. [SES San Jose 2007](#) - TopRank sent 5 bloggers to cover SES resulting in an all-time high in photos and posts. [SES San Jose 2008](#) - This set includes slides, candid shots and photos of the last, infamous Google Dance. [SES San Jose 2009](#) - A nice mix of candid shots and Search Bash.

If you'll be attending Connected Marketing Week and/or SES San Francisco, please be sure to visit the Content Marketing Optimization session on 8/17 at 3:00 pm. I will be presenting a lot of practical tips that you can use as well as a case study you haven't heard before.

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## 5 Tips on Twitter Chats Plus 8 Marketing & PR Chats to Follow

There are many tactics companies can implement as part of a smart [Twitter Marketing](#) strategy. Growing the initial following is important as is providing the budding community you're building with something of value to keep coming back and to spread the good word to their networks. One such tactic that offers value and brings people together is the Twitter chat. I've been involved with about 5 or 6 different Twitter chats as a guest and they are a unique experience. In this post I'll share my observations about what seems to work, some logistics and a few examples of some well-run Twitter chats for the marketing and PR verticals.

**1. Pick a great hashtag** - The hashtag ties your Twitter chat together. It should reflect the topic and be intuitive. Examples might be: #poetry #crmchat or #seo411 - Here's a list of over 150 chats, topics and the times they run at: [Twitter Chat Schedule](#).

**2. Decide a format and schedule** - Part of what makes a Twitter chat successful is that there is a consistent time that requires little reminder and also a format that's easy to follow. There are a certain number of early adopters on Twitter that "get" how #chats work, but there are many, many more who don't. They'll see a sudden flurry of #chat handles in their friend's Tweets and wonder what's going on. Make it easy for the audience you're after to join in and know when the next chat is happening. While there may be more, I've seen 2 formats stand out.

**Free for all.** This is where the chat is treated like a cocktail party and people start posting comments and questions and anyone that wants to, will reply. Its very much many to many and without the use of a tool like Tweepchat can be difficult to follow. **Outside guests or experts.** If you start the chat, you're the moderator. One of your duties if you choose the format of bringing in a guest is to find guests that your attendees respect and want to hear from. Prep the guest with how you run your chats in advance. Use a template email or web page to communicate this. If your guest hasn't participated in a chat before, they might need a little more guidance but once you've done one, the rest go pretty similarly. Prep the guest with questions in advance so they have an idea of what the specific topic will be. This helps them provide better answers more efficiently. Promote the guest and get the guest to promote the chat. Tell the guest what your group responds well to and give examples if you can. This will provide some appreciated guidance for the guest and help give the group what they're looking for.

**3. Create a web page explaining your chat** - While a Twitter @account for the chat is a good idea, it's also a good idea to have a static web page somewhere that the Twitter account can link to. People should also be able to easily find the About #chat page through search engines, so get some other pages or chat members to link to it using the chat name. Explain what the purpose of the chat is, who the moderator(s) are, when the chat runs (including time zone), if the chats are archived and where, and make it easy for visitors to spread the good word about the chat by offering social sharing links/buttons.

This page can live on your blog, your web site or you can easily setup a page on posterous, wordpress or blogger. If you want to explain more than what is reasonable on a Twitter page, a web page offers more room. A Blog, Facebook Fan page or LinkedIn group that explains the Twitter #chat can also be used and several #chats mentioned below do just that.

**4. Recognize #chat participants** - Call out participants during the chat by retweeting interesting things they've posted. List all chat participants on the #chat web page. Offer a TweepML list of participants to make it easy for someone to follow everyone in one in a single click. You might also manage a Twitter list of past guests, another list for moderators and another list for most active participants. Possibly promote the Twitter list on services like Listorious. Besides ensuring quality questions, on-topic tweets and great guests, recognition is a powerful thing to do in order to grow a Twitter #chat group.

**5. Archive the #chat** - Saving the threads of discussion that occur during the chats can be very useful afterwards. This is especially true if you have a good guest and/or participants that come prepared. I like to have about 10-12 pre-written Tweets with links to useful resources prepared before the chat even starts. That way when people ask questions I can answer immediately. I've done this several times and it's gone over

pretty well. Look through the Twitter stream of the chat and archive the whole thing or just the most interesting threads into a web page. Archived Twitter chats are an excellent source of content for your blog. Over time, archived chats can be a very useful repository of information, attract links and create search traffic for your web site.

**A few of my archived chats include:**

#socialmedia ([SEO and Social Media](#))#blogchat ([SEO for Blogs](#))AdWeekMedia Connect ([Intersection of Search & Social Media](#))#tw20 ([Search & Social Media](#))#MeasurePR ([SEO and PR Measurement](#))

Now that I've shared a few tips that Twitter #chat editors or moderators should consider, here are some of the best marketing and PR #chats to check out:

[#blogchat](#) - Run by @mackcollier, [#blogchat](#) is a long running chat that covers all aspects of blogging on Sunday nights from 8-9pm Central. View [transcripts and other info](#) here.[#journchat](#) - Run by @prsaraevans, [#journchat](#) is another long running weekly conversation (Mon 7-10pm Central) between journalists, bloggers and PR people.[#pr20chat](#) - Moderated by @PRtini and @JGoldsborough, [#pr20chat](#) is a weekly conversation (Tues 8PM EST) that focuses on public relations 2.0 topics.[#socialmedia](#) - @Marc\_Meyer & @JasonBreed moderate the [#socialmedia](#) chat, which of course, is all about social media and occurs Tuesdays at 12 pm Noon EST. Each episode is also tagged with a number, such as #sm1 #sm2 etc. View the [live stream](#) here.[#commschat](#) - @AdamVincenzini & @EmilyCagle run this UK-based Twitter 'communications' chat [#commschat](#) Monday nights, 8pm (UK time) on traditional / social media, PR, journalism, blogging. See the [Blog](#) and [FB](#) page.[#measurepr](#) - Run by @shonali, [#measurepr](#) covers measurement topics within the public relations and social media industries that kicked off on February 2, 2010, and is held bi-weekly on Tuesdays from that date, from 12-1 pm ET.[#prstudchat](#) - Run by @dbreakenridge & @valeriesimon, the monthly [#PRStudChat](#) (I thought "stud" meant "manly" not "student" the first time I saw it) provides a platform for conversation between Public Relations Students, Educators and Professionals. See more on [WTH.#imcchat](#) - Moderated by @bethharte & @abarcelos, [#IMCChat](#) is a chat for all of those interested in Integrated Marketing Communications and runs every Wednesday night at 8pm ET.

What are your favorite Twitter chats for Marketing and Public Relations topics? What advice do you have for running or participating in a successful Twitter chat?

Besides the tips above, there are great posts on how to run and participate in Twitter chats on [Mashable](#), from [Mack Collier](#) and [here](#).

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## Is Your Online Marketing Agency a Dud? 23 Signals of Credibility

Hiring outside expertise to grow thought leadership, sales and market share is essential for companies that do not have the internal resources to do so. At TopRank Online Marketing, we have conversations with companies every day that have deep expertise in their fields, but when it comes to online marketing, they've realized the need for outside advice to take the business to the next level.

If a pre-existing relationship doesn't already exist with a digital marketing agency it can be a challenge for companies to tell the difference between all the different consultants and agencies offering their services. Businesses use a variety of resources to find marketing consultants and when they do, there are several "signals" of credibility that can make the agency stand out over others.

As a "walk the talk" agency, here's a list of such signals that TopRank is either implementing itself or for clients. It's also an invitation to share which you feel are the most reliable or unreliable in the comments.

**CEO, Executive and/or Company Blog** ? Blogs can be exceptionally effective at communicating an agency's point of view and corporate personality. Company web sites tend to be dry and careful or conversely, full of hype. A well written and promoted blog can do absolutely amazing things for an agency's reputation in an industry. I think it's safe to say that TopRank's [Online Marketing Blog](#) is a good example of that.

**Social Media Footprint** - The boon in social network usage by members of the search marketing community gives abundant opportunity to see another side of an online marketing agency. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn get most of the attention but there are niche networks and groups that may be smaller in numbers of members, but very rich in influence with buyers. Promoting unique knowledge through social media formats and networks can give important indications of an agency's expertise in formats that can match the information consumption preferences of a variety of potential clients.

**Rock Star Employees & Thought Leaders** ? The ability for motivated staff to share their perspectives easily through numerous publishing channels online creates attention to talent that in the past, would have been squandered. Rather than seeing these brand individuals as potential liabilities, agencies that embrace and encourage smart expression of expertise can gain a significant advantage. Empowered employees that work with strong leadership within the agency are a powerful force.

**Conference Speaking** ? Baring it all in front of an audience so to speak, can go both ways. If the speaker knows their subject matter and can entertain as well, speaking at conferences, regional events, on webinars and at Universities can be very productive. However, if the speaker does not present well or ?know their stuff? things can go badly. Presenting "too much" secret sauce to impress potential customers can also fuel the competition, so there is a fine line between being a standout and being an competitive liability.

**Client Testimonials** ? Client success stories are often one of the first things that catches the eye when looking at different marketing consultants. Common mistakes include testimonials that are too enthusiastic or those that are benign but packed as if they're something special. Most importantly, testimonials should reflect issues of interest to the target audience.

**Case Studies** ? With more complex situations, companies want to drill down into specifics of how a company does what it does. The changing nature of the search marketing industry means a continuous set of problem/solution exercises. Case studies present a picture of a company's breadth and depth of ability to solve a variety of issues.

**Industry Awards** ? Getting recognized by a respected third party can mean a quick trip to the credibility club. However, such awards are only as meaningful as the credibility of the entities giving them out. There are an increasing number of awards in the digital marketing space and if an agency's accolades are made up entirely of awards and nothing else, you'll probably find them looking in a mirror before you see them in front of a computer.

**Being Quoted by the Media** ? Being cited as an authority on a particular topic in a high profile publication can transform an agency's reputation and credibility overnight. Getting profiled with a photo on the cover of a regional print publication had amazing effects for TopRank but not nearly as much as getting mentioned in a very favorable light in The Economist or mentions online by sites like Mashable, ClickZ, Yahoo SEM Blog, Microsoft Advertising Blog, Seth Godin's Blog, eMarketer, Search Engine Watch and Search Engine Land.

**Web Site's Design & Functionality** ? A web site still says a lot about a company. A properly designed and informative web site can foster a sense of authority and credibility. Increasingly, agencies are adding social features to their websites such as blogs or syndicating external feeds from social channels and curating that content for readers.

**Editorial Contributions to Industry Publications** ? Contributing articles to prominent online or print publications gives companies an opportunity to show their

unique problem solving abilities and expertise. By association with the publication, the agency also gets a boost in the credibility department. We've done this more in the past with publications like MediaPost, iMedia Connection and American Express OPEN Forum.

**Advertising** ? One way of "buying your reputation" is to advertise in all the places your target audience looks for credible information. Creative advertising on and offline over a period of time can do wonders when implemented with a strong editorial and social media marketing program. This takes a crack creative team and a very healthy budget.

**Conference Sponsorships** ? Primary sponsorships of the Platinum, Gold and Silver sort at prominent industry conferences can put companies front and center of the most desirable audience: Companies looking for more information on the industry and vendor sourcing. This also takes a healthy budget and as such, gives the impression that the sponsoring agencies are also very healthy. Media sponsorships are another avenue for promotion with most going to prominent print publications and some online pubs. Rarely if ever, is an agency allowed to be a media sponsor unless their blog or newsletter is highly visible and relevant.

**Frontline Staff** - Answering the phone, speaking to prospects in meetings, networking online and offline, front line staff behavior can have leave a big impression (good or bad) on potential clients. Account Management and Client Services staff that work with existing customers also have a big impact on word of mouth between clients and the other companies they might refer the agency's services to.

**Existence or Lack Thereof, of Embarrassing Employee or Executive Photos/Videos Online** ? If you've been to industry conferences, especially search marketing or blogging related events, then you know that attendees are "packing". Packing smart phones that is, equipped with cameras, livestreaming video, Twitter and Facebook. Why some companies actually promote irreverent behavior of employees, I don't really know. In fact, some agencies might even take seemingly blase photos and make them seem somewhat irreverent in the name of "humor". Without context, such images can be as damaging to a brand as if they were true.

**Client List** ? You are who you associate with. Big brand clients brings a whole other set of challenges and opportunities. But seeing those big names often gives lesser known brand prospects a certain kind of warm fuzzy feeling, "If this agency made it through the vendor sourcing process with a Fortune 50 company, then they're probably of the right caliber for my \$500m company."

**Search Engine Visibility on Competitive Industry Terms** ? I can't tell you how many times companies have said, "We found you on Google by searching for (insert industry term here) and we figured if you can do it for yourself, you can probably do it for us." I know, I know. There's so much wrong with that kind of ranking logic these days, but it's a fact of life in the search biz. Search engine visibility is a form of public relations and showing up for relevant, broad terms (as well as your niche specialties) makes your brand name (if your Title tags are written properly) associated with those terms.

**Brand ? Message, Identity, Logo** ? There's a lot that goes into creating a brand. I like the definition: "A brand is a promise kept". Each interaction between a prospective company and something that communicates information about the agency is an opportunity to make a brand promise. Repeat interactions provide the opportunity to keep that promise. Thoughtful messaging and a well designed logo also convey important messages that evoke feelings which can either build or detract from credibility.

**Press Releases** ? Sending out non-news press releases, "We just moved to a new building?" or "We launched a new web site design?", is worse than not sending any press releases at all. But sending out press releases to wire services and directly to cultivated lists of relevant industry publications sends signals of your credibility. And with clever pitching, they might even get you some press coverage.

**Research Published** ? In the same way that faculty at Universities gain prominence and reputation by publishing research in professional journals, companies that have the insight and resources to conduct real research and publish their findings create very strong signals of credibility. It is not only the execution of such research that makes it an effective "signal" though. The intelligent promotion of these learnings is as much or more important.

**Industry Association Involvement** ? Investing in the future of the overall industry through association involvement can give the impression that a company has a higher level commitment than those that are not involved. Being involved with setting industry standards, guidelines and even training programs can set an agency apart and give an indication of their expertise.

**The Agency's Offices** ? While many internet marketing agencies operate virtually, most maintain physical offices. Depending on the manner in which the agency pitches potential clients, those offices can give an impression of the agency's style, personality and health.

**Word on the Street, Buzz, Word of Mouth** ? First and foremost, doing good work is the cornerstone of building positive word of mouth. At the same time, successfully engaging the tactics on this list will build positive buzz, but the longevity of that buzz is only sustainable if the agency has something significant in it's ability to deliver results, to back it up. There is such

a thing as over-marketing and people are smart enough to realize that one company can't do everything. Making it easy for clients to pass on the good news or making sure testimonials are properly promoted can extend a company's reach with nominal marketing investment. **Being Included on Industry Lists of Top Agencies** ? No matter how you slice and dice it, getting included on a list sends a signal. Lists are inherently controversial because getting included means others are excluded. If you know how to create and promote the right signals, like doing great work for clients and letting the world know about it, getting on the kinds of lists that build credibility is pretty straightforward. Leaving it to chance and expecting inclusion based purely on merit is flat out naive.

If you have experience hiring outside marketing expertise, especially online marketing services, what signals of credibility carry the most weight? What signals have you found to be unreliable? Please share in the comments below or join the conversation on [Facebook](#).

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**Video: Marketing Lessons From the Grateful Dead**

Sometimes we learn best about doing things in new and innovative ways by understanding them in terms of something we already know. Stories provide useful context and perspective and that's exactly what David Meerman Scott has done with his latest book that's just been announced: "**Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead: What Every Business Can Learn from the Most Iconic Band in History**".

A longtime fan of the Dead, David co-wrote the book with HubSpot co-founder and fellow deadhead, Brian Halligan to share the brilliant innovations the Dead brought to the business of marketing music and building an incredibly passionate community of brand enthusiasts.

While we were both speaking at the Vocus User's conference in Washington D.C. last month, David took a few minutes with me to do the following video interview on his new book:

Here's a summary of the book and the lessons we can all learn about marketing, social media principles and thinking outside the "rules" of business as usual:

"The Grateful Dead broke almost every rule in the music industry book. They encouraged their fans to record shows and trade tapes; they built a mailing list and sold concert tickets directly to fans; and they built their business model on live concerts, not album sales. By cultivating a dedicated, active community, collaborating with their audience to co-create the Deadhead lifestyle, and giving away "freemium" content, the Dead pioneered many social media and inbound marketing concepts successfully used by businesses across all industries today."

The book can be ordered on [Amazon](#).

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**SEO Tops Digital Marketing Tactics for 2011**

Here we are just past the halfway mark in 2010 and we've tapped into the stream of future marketing planning with our readers for 2011 with a poll. Our question? What 3 online marketing channels & tactics will you emphasize in 2011? The number one answer? Not social media, not email marketing. The top digital marketing tactic for OMB readers in 2011 is Search Engine Optimization. Our poll this year provided 44 different answers to choose from ranging from display advertising to no holds barred spam. Over 200 readers took the poll and made their choices. While there are many signs of marketing budgets making a recovery, the vast majority of marketers are still focused on planning the most efficient and effective online marketing mix they can for the new year.

Hopefully the responses from our poll will be helpful in making those choices as budgets and strategies are planned for 2011.

The top responses in this year's survey reflect a more holistic perspective that includes search, social media, advertising, content and email. While [social media marketing](#) continues to get a lot of media attention and companies are investing more (\$1.2 billion 2011, Forrester), search marketing (PPC and SEO) gets the lion's share of digital marketing budgets (\$20.7 billion 2011, Forrester).

A new entrant to the top 10 this year is [content marketing](#) which is a reflection of the increasing importance on providing more than just product/service features and benefits to customers in order to get them to buy. Content is the glue for the intersection of SEO and Social Media. Content is often the outcome of social interactions online and content can be shared and linked to, increasing it's visibility within all kinds of search. I wouldn't be surprised if Content Marketing jumped a few more spaces next year. According to the [Junta42 Content Marketing Spending Report](#), 59% of marketers surveyed planned to increase content marketing spending in 2010.

Advertising through Pay per click and social media rated well, but not concomitant with budgets. That is more likely an indication of the topical focus of Online Marketing Blog which pays less attention to advertising than Search Marketing, Social Media, Content Marketing and Online PR.

Keep in mind, the results of this single question poll are a reflection of our readers and with 232 responses, isn't a significant sample size for making broad generalizations. It is however, useful insight for our readers to see what others are focusing on. Online Marketing Blog is rated well as a marketing blog and has a significant readership in the marketing community.

You can see the full set of responses and all [44 digital marketing tactics](#) here.

Are Search Engine Optimization, Social Networking and Blogging your top digital marketing tactics for 2011? If not, what areas will you emphasize next year?

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Like many others, I recently purchased an iPad out of curiosity. While my intentions were of discovery, I quickly found some productivity gains with blogging.

The upside to blogging with an iPad is that it's portable and you can easily log your thoughts on a screen that is a lot more convenient than typing into an iPhone or other smartphone. Also, there are a number of apps to make it fairly easy.

The downside is that even though typing is easier on a much larger screen, typing on a screen vs. a tactile keyboard still takes some getting used to, even if you're an iPhone owner. I also found some issues with copy/paste and for web based tools, anything that uses Flash is a no-go.

Here are several tips and tools that you can use to become productive more quickly when blogging using an iPad. Each icon links to the app store and this post was written entirely on an iPad.

**WordPress App** - The free app for WordPress is handy and is of course a very limited version of the web based version. The advantage of using the app is a simplified view and larger editing area. Basic functions like create, edit and delete of pages, comments and posts is available. If the limited nature of the app doesn't work for you, the web based version works well too, albeit with smaller text and work area.

Bonus tip: Another handy blogging tool for iPad is BlogPress, which now supports updating Twitter & Facebook as well as upload & embedding of YouTube videos.

**Dragon Dictation** - One very handy workaround awkward typing on the iPad is to use speech to text. I had pretty low expectations of Dragon speech to text software but it's pretty easy to use. You just speak into the microphone on the iPad and then copy the text from Dragon software over into WordPress or wherever it is that you're blogging with. There might be a few small edits to make, but I found it to be pretty efficient and pretty accurate. Speech to text saves a lot of time and it's something you can do when typing isn't convenient. In fact, most of this post was done with Dragon.

**PhotoPad & Built-In Screen Capture** - With many blog posts, I capture images as screen grabs and then do some editing to customize for a particular blog post. iPhones and iPads can easily take a picture of whatever is displayed on your screen by holding down the top and bottom buttons at the same time. The image is automatically stored to your images folder.

Then I use the free PhotoPad app to open the image and do basic editing. Upload the image using WordPress and you're all set. Editing options are very limited and I would love to get other recommendations.

**Disqus Pro App** - We use Disqus to manage comments on Online Marketing Blog, so moderation duties can be handled in part with this app that is made for iPhone, but usable on the iPad.

**Echofon Pro** - What good is writing a great blog post (or dictating one as in our case here) if no one knows you've published it? That's where tools for Twitter and/or Facebook come in. I use Echofon for my Tweeting activities on my iPhone 4 and the iPad. In regards to blog promotion, it's a quick way to share links to your best posts. There is a Tweetdeck app for iPad too, but I've had little luck getting it to work.

**Analytics App** - If you need a quick fix for top level web stats for your blog and you use Google Analytics,

then this app comes in handy. Like the other apps on this list, it's limited, but can offer you info on the go.

Will the iPad serve as a replacement device for blogging over the laptop? For now I would say no. The limited features of the iPad apps over their web counterparts means too much switching back and forth between app and browser. However, I do see the iPad providing more convenient access to blogging than a cell phone. If you're like me and manage a large number of draft posts at any given time, being able to finish off a post in between watching streaming movies on Netflix or HuluPro can add a slice of productivity to an otherwise all-entertainment device.

There are many other apps for iPad and if you have found some that are particularly useful for blogging, please share in the comments.

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### **3 Things You Should Know About the New PRWeb**

As a longtime customer of PRWeb, I've seen many changes over the years. The oldest optimized press release I could find [of mine](#) that's still online dates back to mid 2001 and in the years since, it's been an evolving relationship moving from customer to consultant.

From the days of talking new features as a super user with founder David McInnis to our current role as search and social media consultants, the focus on innovation and serving customers has always been a mutual focus. I've had the pleasure of getting to know Vocus Product Manager for PRWeb, Jiyang Wei, Director of Online Marketing, Meg Walker and Vocus CMO Bill Wagner as well as other members of the Vocus team and they've been working very hard to make an array of substantial changes to the [PRWeb](#) platform to better serve customers.

PRWeb innovated the entire idea of the optimized press release and was in use by hundreds if not thousands of SEOs long before any other wire service thought to start following their lead and offer SEO friendly features. Now PRWeb has launched a new design, site architecture, press release templates and resource center that provides even greater Search Engine Optimization and Social Media exposure benefits.

Here's a quick video tour of the all new PRWeb that's worth a look:

**More SEO & Social "Built Into" the Template** - The press release template that PRWeb uses to publish press releases offers critical opportunities for customer discovery, consumption and sharing. That means making it easier for readers to find press releases by baking in more search engine friendly features, providing more room for media such as images and video, offering social sharing options and optimizing code for faster loading pages.

**Centralized News** - In particular, the move away from showing over 100 press releases on the PRWeb home page to a dedicated [news center](#) with specific industry category pages will allow even more entry points via search and give customer press releases even more exposure, especially in the long term. With over 500,000 pages, implementing SEO friendly design and architecture changes to a site like PRWeb is no small feat. Structuring the news center according to industry categories creates more of a news destination vs. a repository of press releases. Better design and content organization provides a better user experience and will attract more links.

**More How To Online Marketing Resources** - Another major enhancement for the new PRWeb site is the [resource center](#) with a growing collection of useful how to tips, articles, videos, webinars and white papers for everything from press release writing tips to general online marketing topics. Seeing [examples of press releases](#) organized by specific industry gives marketers useful insight for making their use of press releases successful.

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**SEO Basics: Telephone Game & the Fresh vs. New Content Debate**

There's a game of telephone going on about a hundred different theories of [Search Engine Optimization](#) and the influences or signals that affect search visibility. One that I continue to hear revolves around the notion that search engines like fresh content. I'm sure the genesis was something like: Someone told someone else at a conference and they posted it to a forum where someone read and blogged it and then someone else Tweeted it whereupon someone else blasted it via Ping.fm and Hootsuite. This sort of cycle repeats over and over again.

The point is, with telephone game advice on SEO or any other topic, the message gets diluted. Fresh content apparently means different things to different people and the version I continue to hear from SEO "experts" (agency, independent and in-house) is that search engines like websites that change their content often. The logic is that changing content on a page will attract search engine crawlers more frequently and somehow improve search visibility for the page.

**Room for clarification.** Changing a home page or news page with updates is good for website visitors because it gives them something new (hopefully) with each visit. Updating of content such as news links that allow search engine crawlers to follow those links to new content is also a plus. Refining on-page keyword optimization as needed is a best practice as well. But changing the text on a page for the sake of change, thinking that such a modification will improve search engine visibility, is a great example of the SEO telephone game.

**The real opportunity** with "fresh" content concerns adding new content (new pages) on a regular basis. Adding new pages provides a number of benefits: Each new web page added to the website creates a new entry point and a new destination for links from other websites. Creating topically specific pages with text, images, video or other media provide a better user experience and gives other websites interesting content to link to. Of course a quantity of quality links from other relevant websites increases direct traffic and can positively influence search engine visibility, sending even more qualified visitors.

There are many budding search marketers out there and since there aren't any singular sources of great SEO training, much of the information distribution occurs through a sort of telephone game. Website owners must make the effort to know the difference through their own testing and if it makes sense, engaging an experienced and reputable [search engine optimization](#) consulting firm.

So when you hear webmasters or marketers talk about the need to update existing content, understand that the opportunity to have the most impact on serving customer and search engines is through scheduling the creation, optimization and promotion of new content (text, image, video, rich media), not just changing text on a page to somehow "fool" search engines into thinking your web pages are fresh.

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**Smarter Ways to Get Content Ideas for B2B Blogs**

One of the most common challenges of business blogging is sourcing content. The range of things that can interrupt content creation are important obstacles to overcome because without content there is little reason for readers to return. Blogs are fairly easy to start and if you've been a reader of this blog, chances are pretty good that you have started your own blog (personal or for biz) at some point in time. Many of the companies TopRank Marketing consults with have either started business blogs and need help or want to start a new blog to advance a variety of business goals. In fact, in our [blogging survey](#) earlier this year, 95% of respondents indicated they incorporate blogs as part of their search engine optimization efforts. Many others use blogs for public relations, customer service, product support and recruiting.

Whatever the reason for starting a blog, long time content creation with B2B blogs requires creativity, social participation and a smart feedback loop. Here are a few specific ways to generate content ideas for business to business blogs:

**Editorial Calendar** - Smart B2B bloggers treat their blogging effort as an editorial endeavor. Publishers of newspapers, magazines and other news media operate, in part, based on a calendar of topics. For business bloggers, this means creating scheduled blog posts according to topics that support the intersection of customer interests and the value the company can provide to those customers. If a company sells red widgets then the editorial calendar will schedule blog content around the needs of customers that buy red widgets. For example:

Widget reviews  
Tips on buying widgets  
100 uses of widgets  
Widget industry news  
Interviews with authorities on widgets  
Liveblogging widget conferences, webinars, podcasts  
Lists of widget facts, statistics and resources  
Archived widget Twitter chats  
Widget book reviews  
Weekly widget Q/A  
Widget surveys  
Widget industry event calendar  
And so on

The editorial calendar can schedule ongoing post formats as well, such as Widget Reviews on Tuesdays and Widget Tips on Thursdays so that content can be created in advance and scheduled to post. This allows a other days for spontaneous, reactive and on-demand content outlined in the next few tips.

**Search Marketing Keywords** - As a blog develops a body of work published to the web and the business incorporates a mix of marketing and PR tactics to drive traffic to the blog, the web analytics in place to measure visitor activity will reveal many useful content opportunities. The low hanging fruit here is referring keywords. Whether the blog is optimized for a set number of keywords or not, any kind of crawlable content that has quality links to it will achieve some level of visibility within search engines. Watching the keywords that send traffic to a business blog can be insightful and help inform what customers are interested in. Keyword referring information can be analyzed across different time intervals, entry/exit pages, goal pages and conversions to determine weighting of importance and potential impact on blog goals.

**Social Media Keywords** - I've been promoting the idea of social media keyword research for over a year at conferences, in my presentations and in various blog posts. Monitoring real-time news for editorial opportunity is something public relations professionals have been doing for years. With search engines' improved ability to crawl, index or syndicate and then publish real time streams of information from the social web, there exist numerous opportunities to monitor and tap into content ideas.

In the way that media placements and prominent advertising drive search traffic, so do social conversations. Monitoring trending keyword topics from social participation such as blogging, comments, Q/A sites, tags, Tweets, status updates and similar sources can reveal opportunities to create content on a BtoB blog. If customers are talking about a particular topic that intersects well with your company's products/services on social media sites with increasing frequency, then it makes sense to leverage a blog to publish and syndicate via RSS what they're looking for.

Offer contrarian views, concrete research or more compelling points of view and you can capture readers that are researching. Social media monitoring tools are the most likely way to capture what social keywords are trending, but I have yet to find a service that does this well and none that interact with search keyword

research tools. At least not yet.

**Repurpose Content** - The social web for the most part, has a short memory. That does not mean you should re-publish content from 2 years ago in a "Blast from the Past" format. But it does mean that you can revisit topics that were previously well received to update them for today's business environment or simply to update information. We've covered [re-purposing content](#) a number of times and here are a few specific tips: Turn Powerpoint decks into articles/blog posts Use email interview Q/A with journalists that didn't get published Break up a long article you've had published into a series Rewrite press releases in a conversational or blog post format Aggregate specific tips on a topic from numerous old posts

**Exposing Your Thought Leaders** - Doing interviews with industry thought leaders is a great way to create interesting content and tap into their audiences for exposure. What's also important is to connect with and interview internal thought leaders, whether they are business leaders that the PR department is pitching to the media or product managers and engineers. Interviews with these busy people can be done via phone and then transcribed into text. This makes it easy for the interviewee and also provides both audio and text versions of content. Questions can be keyword optimized and responses can inter-link using anchor text to support your SEO efforts.

**Bonus! Content Curation** - A fast emerging area of content marketing, especially in the B2B space is the notion of content curation. We interviewed 10 [content marketing](#) industry thought leaders on this topic recently that give insightful definitions as well as where curation and creation fit within an online marketing mix. Syndicating content from other topical sources into a central location can help companies create a destination of value to readers where they can go to get industry news. Some software systems can manage all of this like our client [Curata](#) or you can construct this type of site using RSS and RSS to HTML tools like CaRP.

What creative ways have you found to keep the content creation machine alive with your business blog? Have you found success in repurposing content or sourcing ideas from keyword referring data? Have you tried real-time content sourcing through social keyword monitoring?

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**Moving from Fragmented to Segmented Online Marketing**

Companies today have a virtual smörgåsbord of options when it comes to marketing their products and services online. Lack of expertise, numerous tactical options, pressure for sales in a down economy and the tendency to chase shiny objects cause many online marketing efforts to be fragmented. I really doubt that a significant waste of effort and disconnect with customers is part of any company's online marketing strategy. But it's happening. A lot.

Marketers must prioritize what will work best and in the mix of online marketing tactics. According to [eMarketer](#), SEO and PPC have been rated the most effective for conversions and ROI and while some companies are using software like [PPC management tools](#) to make things easier, there's a lot more to consider for better segmentation.

With any type of marketing, relevance is essential for achieving a profitable program. When it comes to search marketing, understanding customers, the keyword searches they use and the offers they're most likely to respond to are essential.

In order to move your online marketing from fragmented to prioritized and more relevant through search, here are 3 key concepts search marketers should master.

#### 1. Understand searcher personas

It's fundamental marketing to anticipate and understand customer needs.

To really make a difference with more targeted online marketing, search marketers need to become more sophisticated in their understanding of customer profiles and developing personas to represent who they're trying to attract via search. Delivering generic content to a searcher looking for a specific product is a common mistake that creates a disconnect for search engines and customers.

"Searcher personas and search acquisition workflows are integral to the way I approach search strategy. Before you can start attracting visitors to your web site, you need to know who you are attracting and why."

[Vanessa Fox](#)

Knowing what kind of content and types of [digital assets](#) your customers will respond to can improve effectiveness at driving "organic" search traffic. The same goes for designing Pay Per Click ads and landing pages that are relevant to the needs of customers you really want to reach.

#### 2. Develop an ideal keyword mix

Many companies start with a list of keywords they think are best for SEO and implement them with on-page optimization and link building. According to **MarketingSherpa's 2011 Search Marketing Benchmark Report** ([SEO Edition](#)), 67% of small businesses place more value on on-page optimization over keyword research. Don't make the mistake of thinking your ideas about keywords are more important than those of your customers.

Developing a keyword glossary is essential and starts by collecting a raw list of concepts, topics and phrases from sources like website content, interviews with front line employees and actual customers, competitor web sites and good old fashioned brainstorming. That raw list is brought into a [keyword research tool](#) that will output provide a list of actual search phrases plus variations sorted by popularity.

Understanding keywords from the perspective of the searcher and where they are in the buying process allows the search marketer to properly optimize content, landing pages and ads accordingly. Same goes for making the ads and landing pages more relevant because it leads to better performance with click through rates and conversions.

From an organic perspective, specifically optimized pages that have attracted relevant links from other related web sites will result in higher rankings for keywords that are being targeted. Customers will self-segment themselves with the search terms they use. By developing an ideal keyword mix that is focused

on customer needs and the solutions offered by your products and services, your search marketing efforts will better target customers in a relevant way and increase sales.

### 3. Optimize content for specifics

Content can mean web pages, digital assets and any other documents that can be optimized for organic search. Optimization also applies to landing pages used with pay per click advertising to improve quality score. If you read Online Marketing Blog with any frequency, you know my mantra: "If it can be searched, it can be optimized."

If you don't have enough content to accommodate all the keywords you're targeting, then you have an opportunity to create more content. A common misconception is that updated content is important, when the reality is that adding new content that reflects the search needs of customers is what's important. The addition of every new web page means another potential entry point to your web site via a link or search.

Being focused helps search engines understand and rank pages so that customers get what they're actually looking for. Delivering on the promise of a compelling search result is priceless for conversions.

#### Wrap-up

Fragmented marketing with search helps no one. Marketers would do well for themselves and the customers they're trying to reach by paying attention to the development of searcher personas, developing quality keyword research and optimizing specific pages and digital assets for specific phrases according the searcher needs in the buying cycle. As a result, you'll deliver a more relevant experience for both search engines and customers.

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## 3 Essential Small Business Search Marketing Trends

"Qualified", "showing intent to buy", "high conversion rate" and many other phrases are used to describe search engine marketing. As a [\\$16 billion industry](#), Search Marketing including SEO (search engine optimization) and PPC ads (pay per click) represent a substantial opportunity for small businesses to connect with customers at the moment they are looking for products and services to buy.

Even though Search Marketing presents an attractive opportunity to grow online sales, many businesses are too busy running their companies to stay on top of future trends. To that end, here are three search marketing trends worth paying attention to:

**1. Online & Offline Marketing Integration** - Forrester Research estimates \$917 billion worth of retail sales in 2009 were "Web-influenced" in contrast to \$155 billion of consumer goods sold online in the same year. Small businesses must pay attention to customer search online influencing offline purchases as well as the influence of the in-store experience on searching and purchasing online.

**2. Mobile Device and Local Search** ? Companies must recognize consumer trends towards mobile search with the [proliferation of smart phones](#). The web experience has definitively extended beyond the personal computer to mobile devices such as iPhones, Blackberries and iPads. Marketers must understand their customers' use of mobile search and what the marketing opportunities are.

Companies that serve customers in specific regions or with geographically specific needs must be present in local search results, map results and specific geo-location queries. Segmenting potential customers through geo targeting with paid search advertisements will help focus the right ads on the right customers.

**3. Social Media Advertising** ? Savvy small business marketers are increasingly realizing that the opportunity to reach customers extends beyond traditional paid search into the booming social media space. Having [surpassed Google](#) as the most visited website for the week ending March 13, 2010 and with over 400 million registered users, Facebook offers a significant audience that shouldn't be ignored. Social networks like Facebook can provide online marketers hyper-targeted advertising opportunities that can tap into new customer segments and serve as a complement to other paid search programs.

Whether it's incorporating online and offline influences with search marketing, diversifying PPC advertising networks, leveraging local and mobile search marketing or extending advertising programs to include social media, small business marketers that capitalize on these trends will gain a competitive advantage. Of course, if they hire an [online marketing agency](#) like TopRank Marketing, that advantage may come even faster.

This post was excerpted from my article that was originally published on American Express OPEN Forum. Be sure to visit [5 Search Engine Marketing Trends That Impact Your Business](#) for the other 2 trends.

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**10 Reasons Why Your Analytics Are Failing & 13 Tools To Help**

Web Analytics are a key indicator to the health and performance of any website, but online marketers often get lost in the complexities and details, forgetting how important analytics actually are and why.

Analytics can provide a wealth of information but marketers often look at high level indicators such as: top content, bounce rates, entrance sources and keywords without tying it all together. In most cases, there is a tremendous amount of insight that can be used to make smarter marketing decisions, but most companies barely scratch the surface. At the OMS Minneapolis event last week [Adam Proehl](#) gave an excellent presentation on analytics failures and successes. I've taken my notes from that presentation and combined them with my own opinions to create this list.

10 reasons why your web analytics are failing:

**You speak numbers to non-number people.**

It takes a numbers person to dig through large amounts of analytics data, figure things out, and draw conclusions. However, most people aren't "numbers" people.

Many marketers like charts and clear, action orientated data. Charts are good, numbers in red and green help, and so does simplification. Don't present tabular data just because it makes sense to you. Try and think about who you're presenting the information to and how they like to consume information. Some people like tables, others like graphs. As online marketers make an effort to understand the audience on the web they're trying to reach, so should they understand the internal audiences that they report results to.

**The statistics are fuzzy.**

It's easy to combine different pieces of data and come out with a great conclusion, even if they don't go together.

For example, did you know that Michael Jordan and I have a combined total of 6 NBA championships?

While that statement is true, the conclusion is a bit skewed. Yes, Michael's 6 plus my 0 do equal 6, the fact is that I didn't do any of the work for those championships, but I'm still getting the credit as I was included in the statement.

In analytics it's important to break out the data so that it makes sense, not just so it looks good. It's easy to combine two pieces of information in ways that make things look really good, but in reality, is something being hidden?

**The averages are flawed.**

Averages are great unless there is a major spike or dip. Then they have a tendency to skew the data a bit too much.

Based on the graph above, you could say that we're averaging 1652 people from StumbleUpon a day. But in reality, most days there were less than 50. The big spike just screwed up the average. As quickly as that spike came, it can also disappear and making decisions based on the daily average isn't a best practice.

**Sometimes things just don't work.**

There are lots of things that can go wrong with the analytics from a website and that has to be taken into account. The tracking code could be implemented incorrectly, maybe some special tagging was setup improperly, there could be issues with site architecture or maybe there are just things that are out of our

control.

Analytics isn't perfect and the reporting is never going to be 100% accurate, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the numbers are wrong.

The important thing is to fix the issues you can and work with the numbers you have.

### **You don't understand the customer.**

Why are people visiting our site? What are they doing while they are here? What stage of the buying cycle are they in?

Thinking that you know your customers is one thing, but you really need to watch their behavior and see what they are actually doing.

Maybe visitors are focused on research or maybe they can't find what they're looking for when they get to your site. These are things analytics can tell you if you look and once you know what your customer is doing, you can modify your site to fulfill their needs.

### **You don't connect the conversion dots.**

Getting visitors to the site is one step. The next step is making sure you have content that is going to satisfy their need. As stated above, analytics can help with this, but once prospects fill out the contact form, what happens next?

How many decisions are made by looking at top level analytics alone? Someone has to tie leads back to the website to determine what is working and what isn't.

For example, in a B2B situation, a whitepaper download may be bringing in lots of leads, but none are qualified. Maybe there is a CTA (call to action) form that is bringing in few leads, but they convert very well. Analytics can't tell you what happens with a lead after filling out a form, and connecting that data is very important.

### **You don't dig deep enough.**

Looking at one metric in analytics and making a decision seems like a good idea unless you're not seeing the whole picture.

A good example would be bounce rates to a landing page. Just because the bounce rates are high, doesn't necessarily mean it's bad. You need to dig into the data and find out the conversion rate as well. Changing a landing page because the bounce rate is higher than normal but that also has a higher than normal conversion rate may result in lost sales.

### **You don't tie in outside data.**

Marketers should be looking at other online and offline marketing efforts and tie them into web analytics wherever they can. Ideally, an online marketing program should track different sources for different outcomes such as: people from Twitter to conversion, knowing which conversions came from email campaigns and what offsite marketing tactics are working.

### **You don't take the time.**

Analytics isn't easy. It's not something anyone can do in an hour a day (except maybe those that read [this](#))

[book](#) of course). If website marketers really want to get valuable information out of analytics, they need to invest time and resources into talent that can make that happen.

Analytics can seem complex and yes, it takes time and talent to make sense of them, but in the end analytics can paint a picture of how users are interacting with a site, what the user behavior is, and point out ways to make your site more successful and profitable.

**Bonus: 13 analytics tools to help you out.**

[ShareThis](#) - Social sharing button that can tie data into Goggle Analytics. [Snip and Tag](#) - Firefox extension that allows you to easily copy a URL and tag it with Google Analytics code. [GA?](#) - Firefox extension that quickly shows if Google Analytics is installed on the page or not. [Better Google Analytics](#) - Firefox extension that enhances Google Analytics. [Enhanced Google Analytics](#) - Another Firefox extension that enhances Google Analytics. [Twitalyzer](#) - Analytics for social relationships. [Bit.ly](#) - URL shortening with analytics. [Google URL Builder](#) - A way of tagging URLs with Google Analytics code so they can be tracked on external sites. [Excellent Analytics](#) - Microsoft Excel plugin to pull Google Analytics data directly into Excel. [Site Scan GA](#) - Scans a website to find out what pages have analytics installed and which ones don't. [Web Analytics Solution Profiler/Debugger \(WASP\)](#) - Firefox plugin that debugs analytics. [Crazy Egg](#) - Heat mapping tools that allow you to visually understand user behavior. [ClickTail](#) - Heat mapping tools that also track where users are when they bail on a form.

What are some of your favorite web analytics tools?

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**Lee Odden On SEO And The Social Web ? OMS Minneapolis Keynote**

Lee Odden, [TopRank Online Marketing](#) CEO gave the opening keynote of Online Marketing Summit Minneapolis. Lee spoke on the intersection of [SEO and social media](#) and provided key takeaways for companies on achieving success.

As the social web and search engines integrate and innovate tighter, the intersection between search and social is growing more meaningful daily. Following is a summation of this info-packed presentation:

What would happen if your Google traffic disappeared tomorrow? What impact would that have on your marketing and your business? For many, this could be disastrous. This highlights the importance of diversifying your brand's referring sources and share of voice around the web.

Search and social are intersecting in many ways: when you look at a comparison of the top search engines, more and more of the engines themselves are on social platforms, and more of the results on the big engines are social.

Think about amplifying the results you are getting from natural SEO by amplifying your content through social channels.

Google dominates search, but should it dominate your marketing?

Lee shared some stats that help support the diversification of your traffic and digital influence: 90% of consumers trust peer recommendations, according to Nielsen, but only 14% trust advertisements according to Larry Weber. Facebook added more than 200 million users in less than a year according to the Facebook timeline. Facebook tops Google for weekly traffic in the US. 2nd most popular search engine isn't Yahoo, it's YouTube according to comScore. 80% of companies use social media for recruitment, 95% of those are LinkedIn.

The stats paint a clear picture: that social is vital to integrate with search and your marketing program overall. According to SEMPO, 35% of B2B companies integrate social media and search engine marketing programs. Is your brand?

HubSpot is a great social/SEO example. They receive 20,000 leads a month from inbound efforts.

What about search and social as it integrates with PR and media relations? To research stories: 89% of journalists use blogs, 65% use social networks, 52% use Twitter. [Jon Gordon](#) from NPR noted:

I use search engines on almost every story. I use social networks to find additional sources as well as for the story idea generation and story feedback.

### **How to leverage SEO for marketing and PR:**

If you already have a keyword glossary, that can be shared with PR to leverage for their content creation to be optimized for journalists.

### **How do SEO and social media intersect?**

Add a layer of search to your social activity: are you leveraging keywords across your social web participation? If not, you should be. Give your keyword glossaries to your [social media marketing](#) and PR team to use across marketing efforts. Cumulatively this leads to better visibility not just in Google but in social search as well.

One of the problems of social media and SEO is that they are usually put in silos within an organization. But,

you can bring them together to amplify results. You can't afford not to combine social and SEO. In fact, if you are in a competitive category, it's difficult to compete if you aren't engaged. As just one example, it's difficult to acquire lots of high quality, organic links unless you can promote great content to a significant number of people.

## **Ecommerce is social**

Target, 1-800 Flowers, and other e-commerce brands are going social. They are integrating their online purchasing with social sites in order to tap into networks along with purchasing. Companies that are doing this type of activity are training their customers to make social a part of the purchasing process.

## **Customer service is social**

Large brands are leveraging social tools for CRM purposes and sales opportunities. All you need to do to see the opportunity is query a topic customers are seeking information on and you can be the one to respond.

Most importantly, people are social and people search. As long as there is content that can be sorted, there is an opportunity to optimize it.

Is social a threat to search? No - search isn't going anywhere. Social sites are popular but according to both consumer data and the nature of the web they are not a threat to search.

## **4 keys to Social SEO:**

Listening, content, socialize, measurement

**Listening** ? understand the channels so you can make smart decisions about your tactics. Listening also provides you social keyword research to mine data from your target audience. If you have ever created a social listening report, you know it's keyword-based and the value of understanding the language audiences use.

**Content** ? The thing that makes social or SEO fantastic is content. If you don't have a great message, you don't have anything. Take stock of content assets in order to be able to maintain consistency with communications. After inventory, you can sync that up with an editorial plan. Skipping this step can lead to failure: for example, many create blogs and run out of things to say quite quickly. Without a plan, it's easy to get stuck. Next, map your content to those social keywords developed to maximize visibility in search.

**Socialize** ? give to get, and grow a network of relevant people. Even if you have great content, no one will know to link to it or share it unless you promote it.

Distribution channels are essential ? create content around the needs of your customers and send through distribution channels that are independent of Google ? for example, RSS, email, social, media/PR and contributed articles. The kicker is if done effectively, your performance in Google skyrockets.

Cycle of social and SEO:

**Measure** ? get social monitoring tools and social analytics in place in order to understand and get feedback on your content and participation. Look at the performance of your content and your competition's content in order to provide insight.

[Marketo](#) (a TopRank client) as an example created a social SEO strategy that focused on keywords and content their customer finds valuable as opposed to limiting themselves purely to keywords describing the product.

**3 things you can do now:**

- 1) Establish a listening program
  
- 2) Implement a content marketing strategy
  
- 3) Leverage social media marketing campaign management tools (which will be explored in a future post at TopRank Blog).

Be sure to check out the OMS [video interview](#) (in a phone booth!) with Lee, Rick Burnes from HubSpot, Joe Pulizzi from Junta 42 and Aaron Kahlow of Online Marketing Summit. We cover what tactics marketers should put a hold on, which big brands are not to be trusted (Twitter, Facebook, Microsoft or Google). Guess which brand no one voted for? And the best thing about OMS. Click the image below to see the video.

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**Thank You To Our Web Hosting Sponsor VISI**

For the past 3 plus years, TopRank's Online Marketing Blog has been hosted by Minneapolis based website hosting provider, [VISI](#). When our past host shut us down without warning for getting too much traffic, VISI and Online Marketing Blog connected and worked out a sponsorship. VISI is the only company with an ongoing ad on this blog.

Uptime for Online Marketing Blog has been amazing since we moved to VISI and customer service has been exceptional. With web site hosting, the ideal situation is to forget about them, to not even know they are there because things are working so smoothly.

But when situations arise, and a site goes down, you remember pretty quickly who your hosting company is. VISI was good about working with us when we had a major problem earlier this year and get the right equipment to meet our needs. As our traffic has increased, there hasn't been a blip of downtime.

Our relationship with VISI has gone well enough that when they launched a tier one cloud computing/cloud hosting service called ReliaCloud, they came to TopRank for Social SEO consulting services.

I'd like to thank Gary Elfert and the team at VISI for being "invisible" 99.99% of the time and being on the spot when we needed them. If your company is in need of high availability website hosting, check out [VISI.com](#). If cloud computing or hosting is your thing, then check out their service [ReliaCloud](#).

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**Win a Free Pass to Online Marketing Summit Minneapolis**

It's that time of year again and the ClickZ [Online Marketing Summit](#) will arrive shortly to the Minneapolis, Friday June 25th. The conference organizer has generously donated a free pass to the 1 day workshop for us to give away here on Online Marketing Blog.

The agenda covers everything from Social to SEO to B2B Blogging to Email Marketing. You'll be able to learn from a mix of client side marketers and agency subject matter experts on cutting edge strategies for more successful online marketing programs.

Companies presenting include HubSpot, Cargill, Exact Target and many others. I'll be giving the opening keynote presentation on SEO and the Social Web:

Core to many search marketing strategies is "Fish where the fish are" and the fish are decidedly hanging out on Google. YouTube, Gmail, Blogger.com and other online services from Google make its presence ubiquitous in the online marketing world. Now imagine if your website disappeared from Google tomorrow. What would that do to your marketing, your business? Google and search engines present a tremendous opportunity to attract new business, but it's important to diversify online marketing in a way that also benefits overall search marketing. For many companies, a relationship with customers is worth a lot more than a click, pageview or inbound link.

In this presentation you'll learn the value of diversification from the development of channels of distribution for optimized social content that is independent of, yet complimentary to search engines. Social SEO enables companies to realize search engine marketing benefits as well as long term, meaningful connections with a community of customers.

The cost for the 1 day event is \$369 but we'll give a pass away today to the most compelling Tweet that links to this post or comment below explaining why they should attend. The cutoff for making your tweet or comment is 4pm CST June 23rd and the winner will be announced at 5pm CST or after the same day.

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**Content Marketing: Definitions of Curation & Context**

Companies are realizing the value in "brands as publishers" and are making real commitments to the creation of content in their online marketing mix. It's no longer enough to provide fundamental features and benefits information about products and services to succeed competitively online. Consumers and of course, business buyers, seek additional information, resources and others to connect with on the topics of interest to them.

Some companies choose a pure creation strategy and find it to be a formidable undertaking, especially creating unique and valuable content over a long period of time.

Within the field of content marketing, curation is becoming a popular topic of discussion. Blending a mix of new content with the filtering and management of other useful information streams is a productive and manageable solution for providing prospective customers a steady stream of high quality and relevant content. Pure creation is demanding. Pure automation doesn't engage. Content curation can provide the best of both.

As I am prone to do with topics of interest, I reached out to a few industry thought leaders to get their take on defining [Content Curation](#) and where it fits within the mix in an online marketing program:

**Rebecca Lieb** - [@lieblink](#)

**Vice President, North America at Econsultancy and author of The Truth About Search Engine Optimization**

As an editor, journalist and marketer....what a great question!

Content curation, which can be defined as a highly proactive and selective approach to finding, collecting, presenting and displaying digital content around predefined sets of criteria and subject matter, has become essential to marketing, branding, journalism, reporting and social media - often, to mash-ups of all these different and disparate channels.

Content curation can take many forms: feeds, "channels" (such as on YouTube), it can appear on blogs, or even be the links you upload to social media sites such as Facebook. It can be an online newsroom, a collection of links, an assortment of RSS feeds, or a Twitter list. Whatever form content curation does take, it's around a topic, or a subject, or even a sensibility that speaks to the knowledge, expertise, taste, refinement, brand message or persona of the person, brand or company that has created the particular channel or source of content.

Why bother? Tons of reasons. It's a big web out there. More and more, people rely on trusted sources: friends, family, brands, companies, experts, you-name-it, to help keep them informed, educated and even amused. Need proof? Take [bOINGbOING.net](#), one of the web's most popular blogs whose traffic often exceeds that of [NYTimes.com](#). This group blog is nothing more (or less), that curated content; items its contributors and often its readers find and share with others.

Channels of content can be as specific as bee keeping equipment, or as amorphous as "what's cool." But they all serve multiple purposes, ranging from informing to engaging to entertaining. In an era where marketing is supplanting advertising and storytelling is an ever-more essential part of the marketing message, carefully curated content - well presented - is an immense brand asset, be it to a humble, over-caffeinated individual blogger or a Fortune 100 company.

**David Meerman Scott** [@dmScott](#)

**Author, New Rules of Marketing & PR and World Wide Rave**

I've been working with what I call syndication for 25 years. My first job when I got out of school was a bond trading desk and right after that started working with companies in the financial information space. I worked with Knight Ridder for 6 years and at a company at News Edge for 6 years as president of marketing. News Edge was the first, real serious aggregator of news in the corporate, financial and government spaces. So news syndication, news aggregation has been going on literally for decades.

What is Expedia, for example? It's an aggregation of airline and hotel feeds that then get aggregated to create content. What's Google? Google is an aggregation of a whole bunch of content.

I'm a fan of doing that but the challenge is how can you do it in a way that's interesting. You have to make a decision: Do you let the machines do the aggregation and the selection or do you let humans do the selection. It's a huge decision, humans or machines.

You also need to think about, how do you create the taxonomy and the folksonomy of how to turn that content into categories? That becomes a really big issue with content curation.

If you're a big company and trying to do this, and you have a B2B section, a B2C section, 15 products in 25 markets, in 58 countries, what do we do? Do we have 58 feeds for each country, do we have 25 different things for each category? It really becomes a big issue.

I'm a huge fan of content syndication, great stuff. Been going on for decades. But the two challenges for people that want to embark on a strategy like that is A: Humans or Technology and B: What's the taxonomy or folksonomy to put it together.

**Brian Solis - [@briansolis](#)**

**President Future Works and Author of Engage! The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate, and Measure Success in the New Web & Co-Author of Putting the Public Back in Public Relations**

Marketing in general, which can be content marketing, public relations or communications has a tendency to try and automate things to the point of obscurity or mediocrity. There is a value in curation and a value in creation. But when you start to think of things in terms of automation, I think that we're just feeding the system for the sake of feeding the system.

Now I think there's value in both and I believe that in order to garner some thought leadership, you have to become a thought leader. You can't do that through aggregating the thoughts and words and ideas of others.

Obviously you (as a company) have something to contribute, something to say, something of value to offer which is mostly likely why you're in business. I need to hear about that. I need to understand why I should consider you as a partner or whatever it is you've created. Is there something I can use, something I couldn't do before I came into contact with you?

Now in terms of curation, where it gets really interesting is that those thoughts, words and ideas of others can be helpful to establish yourself as a value added resource and as a place or destination for information.

**Ann Handley - [@marketingprofs](#)**

**Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs and Co-Author of the upcoming book, Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and**

## Ignite Your Business

Defined as it applies to online publishing: Content curation is the act of continually identifying, selecting and sharing the best and most relevant online content and other online resources (and by that I mean articles, blog posts, videos, photos, tools, tweets, or whatever) on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience.

What role should it play:

All organizations are now publishers - meaning, the company with the most engaging and interesting content is the one who wins. Content curation isn't necessarily anything new (finding the best stuff to share is what so many of us do on Twitter already, and what bloggers have long done, or what sites like Alltop or Digg have been doing). But recently, it's getting a little more attention as an emerging field of its own.

It can fit into an organization's content strategy nicely. How? It's a way for organizations to further their role as a resource to their audience. Sifting through the mountain of web content and finding the tastiest, choicest bits for your readers is a great way to build trust and authority with them, and to become a valuable resource for them on any particular topic. What's more, for organizations just getting into publishing online - for those just starting a blog, say, or a microsite - curated content can allow them to ramp up quickly, both from an SEO as well as content perspective.

That said, I have two cautionary pieces of advice:

1. Don't rely exclusively on automated content curation services to feed your own belly (to fulfill your content needs). I see content services like HiveFire as providing an intelligent stream of curated stuff, but you still need a real, live human editor to pick and choose and order the best stuff for your own audience. Warm-blooded humans still required, in other words.
2. Mix curated content with original content, and don't rely on the curated stuff alone. Content curating is a perfectly good way to extend the content of your own site, but only "in addition to" and not "instead of" your original content.

**Joe Pulizzi** - [@juntajoe](#)

**Founder Junta42 and Content Marketing Institute, Co-Author of Get Content, Get Customers.**

Content curation is editing on steroids. In actuality, content curation has been around since the dawn of the publishing industry. The job of the editor was to take the best information from around their industry and present that information in a manner that makes sense to readers.

The web's first crack at this was content aggregation, or having computers pull the best links and information automatically to make the "reader's" experience more fulfilling. But as we have learned, search is not perfect. Enter the content curation specialist.

As more content floods through all aspects of the web (as well as print and online), we'll need more brands stepping up to make sense of what we really should be paying attention to. Content curation is as important in the content marketing toolbox as is creation. We need both...and curation doesn't work without creation (much like Google trying to save the newspapers because they need great news to survive, but that is for another story). For some brands, curation may be enough. You can't find the resources to develop the most valuable, most compelling content in your industry? Then just tap into your network that does, and package that content to present you as the trusted industry leader. It's still a needed service, just a bit different from creation.

Where it will go, no one knows...but I've heard from smarter people than me that content curation is the future (even present) of media. I'd rather say curation and creation go together like Macaroni & Cheese...a splendid combination.

**Paul Gillin** - [@pgillin](#)

**Consultant. Author of The New Influencers and Secrets of Social Media Marketing**

I define content curation as the process of assembling, summarizing and categorizing and interpreting information from multiple sources in a context that is relevant to a particular audience. I think this discipline will be absolutely essential to content marketing in the future because of changes in the media landscape.

Just a few years ago, audiences were starved for information and the role of media was to create it. Today, we are drowning in information and the emerging role for media is to filter and organize it.

This is being handled accomplished on an ad hoc basis by social news sites like Digg and Sphinn; social bookmarking sites like Delicious and Reddit; news aggregators like Drudge Report; link blogs like Metafilter and Slashdot; friends networks like Twitter and Facebook; and even self-curated RSS aggregations. In fact, much of what goes on in social media is various forms of content curation.

Marketers can build trust with their constituencies by providing focused curation in areas that matter to their constituents. Original content will always have value, but curation is coming to have nearly equal value. The key is to stake out unique topic areas and to become the most trusted source in those areas. You don't need a lot of money to do this. You just need to know the subject matter very well.

**Erik Qualman**, [@equalman](#)

**Author of Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business and MBA Professor at the Hult International Business School**

Today, everyone is a potential media outlet. A curator understands their audience and is able to package created content in a digestible manner for them.

Creators need to view curators as distribution points for their content rather than as pirates. Content creators and curators that will thrive in this new world understand the importance of this symbiotic relationship. But is it symbiotic? In the end, almost every person is a little of both (creator & curator). After all, there is no such thing as a new idea and imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. These clichés symbolize the irony of the topic being discussed.

**Valeria Maltoni** - [@conversationage](#)

**Director of Strategy, Powered, Inc., Conversation Agent**

Content curation is one of the keystones in a content marketing strategy. It's like museum curation - harvesting, researching, tagging, organizing, and sharing - only two-way, because of the digital medium. Thanks to technology it also includes in an out feeds, and moderation and escalation, where necessary.

To maximize its impact, you want to integrate curation within a canvas of brand generated content and promotions in a forum that also highlights the best brand-related content from your own community of fans. The curator monitors conversations for opportunities to align the voice of the brand with the voice of the

customer, to engage outside content creators, to highlight the best third party content within the brand's sharing strategy, and inspire action.

**Pawan Deshpande - [@TweetsFromPawan](#)  
CEO, HiveFire (TopRank Client)**

Content curation is the cure for a broken content marketing strategy. Content marketing is about a brand producing valuable content, and prospects being educated with that content. It's valuable, it works and it's not going away.

But the only problem is that day by day, it's less effective as everyone produces more and more content. Brands are increasingly competing to get their content noticed. At the same time, prospects are increasingly spending more time searching for relevant content.

Content curation has emerged as a new and powerful way for marketers to seamlessly sift through the flood of content available to prospects. Like the owner of a high-end art gallery, you have to sift through the information from across the web and curate it to ensure that it is relevant to the customer. You will be navigating your prospects through this sea of content by leading them to the most relevant important information.

It's already happened in the consumer world: Sites like Digg (social curation) which have little or no original content have become key resources for information. Similarly we are seeing leading businesses take a similar approach to become the experts for their respective areas.

(Note: HiveFire makes a content curation product called [Curata](#), that blends creation with curation automation.)

**Marc Meyer - [@marc\\_meyer](#)  
Dir.of Social Media and Search, Principal at DRMG**

Content today is not your father's content... Hell, it's not even the content from 10 years ago. It's so much more now. So much so, it should be its own country. Curation for us, is part art and part science. At its core, it has as much to do with maintaining and preserving what has been digitally "created"-as it does in making sure that it lasts longer than a cup of coffee. And that's the challenge.

Loosely defined, the curation of content is a company's ability to create and then manifest digital assets that drive and maintain at the least, awareness. Content Curation holistically speaking, refers to a person's or company's ability to stay in front of the digital curve by managing those assets across the board.

Its role in a content marketing strategy is primary and cannot be downgraded to a perfunctory responsibility. Curation feeds the beast and thus it contributes greatly to a company's overall digital strategy.

Have you added a curation component to your content marketing mix? If so, are you doing it manually, automatically or somewhere in between?

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## Thinking Critically About Web Video

Web video is hot. Some say your chance to [be a pioneer](#).

How hot, and how much of an opportunity? [Recent reports](#) from comScore, consistently say more than 80% of the total U.S. Internet audience views online video in a given month. [YouTube's fact sheet](#) states every minute, 24 hours of video is uploaded to the network and 2 billion videos are being watched per day.

All this popularity has of course been driving a trend with marketers: the desire to create video as part of their [digital marketing](#) mix. Except sadly, it's almost never approached strategically.

Agency-side marketing/PR/digital pros: how many times have you had a client approach you after creating a web video and said "hey, we made this video, now make it go viral!"

Client-side marketing professionals: how many of you have had a CMO suddenly discover web video, only to enthusiastically push the team to concept something "because our competitors are doing it."

Due to these mistakes (and many others) most companies get web video dead wrong. Their content is too advertorial, there is a lack of genuine reason anyone would want to watch it, let alone pass it on. It doesn't pass the all important "so what" test of web content and feels contrived or lacks creativity. And these are actually just surface level problems, it goes deeper than that.

The real question you need to ask yourself is why am I making web video? What marketing problem does it answer, and how does it answer it? How does it feed digital marketing KPI/objective metrics? Am I doing it because I read an article about it in AdAge or because it's an elegant way to express my brand's story to the world?

### **"Let's make something viral" vs. let's create an ongoing dialogue**

By now, most companies understand blogging. And everyone knows you'd never create just one (even great) blog post and be done with it. No matter how popular that post was, just one blog post is not likely to provide long term value for your brand. You need to continue creating posts over time until you have a large opt-in audience that's consistently spreading your content organically. Consider the fact that a web video is not too different than a blog post. Successful text and video are both content formats that can be passed on socially, and successful archetypes of each share similar qualities.

Yet, the business world seems to place web video up on a pedestal as if it's some magic animal that plays by different rules merely because it's video. The rules are not all that different, and apply for both formats of content for it to spread socially. Creating one video that catches on may be nice, but this does not take advantage of the larger opportunity the web affords: to build up an audience of [true fans](#) who genuinely want to follow your every word carefully.

### **Poorly conceptualized content has no chance**

Short of advertising and interrupting users, there's not much you can do to create awareness for a poorly conceptualized video lacking the proper hooks. On the web, advertising is content - there is no captive audience and viewers can and will ignore your promotions if your videos aren't worthwhile. It has to be interesting, relevant and sticky if it has any chance of getting passed on. And with a firehose of content being uploaded to the web, most web video is likely to be lost in perpetual obscurity, perhaps given some life from search engines.

Unless you're a massive brand with deep pockets that can work with a high-paid creative team to concept some remarkable content, you're likely better off using video as you would any other social content. In other

words: use it to connect with your audiences in a genuine, meaningful way that follows your larger [content strategy](#).

The best part about treating video as you would any other digital content, is just like text: if you produce lots of it and experiment, you can begin to discover video content archetypes that work for you. Then, and only then, can you start to get agile with your video content production and iteratively get better until you can consistently create stuff that catches on.

### **With that said...you still need a community**

Web video by itself is tactical. If you're serious about [influencing the social web](#) you still need a community that's interested in receiving all types of your content being published in a channel agnostic fashion. Simply put, you need to build up a group who has affinity for your brand, its team members and ideas. Without this you're not feeding something larger. Even if you have a popular video with hundreds of thousands or millions of views, what's the point if you're not continuing the dialogue over time and nurturing those relationships?

### **Conclusion**

Ignoring the "viral video" bug many have been bitten by, web video is an opportunity for your brand and should likely be a part of your [content marketing](#) mix. But think critically about how it plays into your larger content strategy, and understand your reason for being with creating digital content in the first place.

Placing web video on a pedestal, as if it's so different from any other digital content, is the wrong approach. It has to be just as sharp, creative and relevant as your text-based content. Perhaps more so since we can't just scan a video and get the gist of it. And just like your written content you will need to build an audience before you can have consistent success.

For long term results, experiment and play around with presentation, formatting and ideas. Work to discover what it is your audiences react to and ensure that video is created in a way that benefits your larger social and SEO programs.

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**Take the 2011 Digital Marketing Poll**

It's safe to say 2009 and 2010 were breakout years for social media. Our last Digital Marketing poll showed 6 of the top 10 tactics as social media complemented by search engine marketing and email. Slimmer marketing budgets and mass media attention have inspired a rush to many types social media marketing tactics bringing a certain over-optimism about what the social web can do for a company's bottom line.

With the economy recovering slowly, what will 2011 bring? Are social media and content marketing the glue that brings multi channel marketing together? Is 2011 finally the year for mobile? Will companies focus on more holistic online marketing?

We'd love to hear your opinions in the **2011 TopRank Digital Marketing Poll**. Please take the poll here and share it, post it, bookmark it and help us reach over 200 responses:

Note: There is a poll embedded within this post, please visit the site to participate in this post's poll. Thank you for taking the poll and we'd sincerely appreciate your help promoting it. We even have an awesome short URL for you to share: <http://tprk.us/dm2011>

We realize there are a lot of choices in this poll and appreciate your time and participation a great deal. Our last digital marketing poll was of great benefit to many of our readers and we hope to tap into your expertise and opinion on a topic of interest to every digital marketing professional.

We are absolutely interested in your comments about this poll and about your opinion on the future of digital marketing. Did we leave any tactics out? Should we have?

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