



The Intelligent Content Playbook:

The Top Strategies and Advanced Optimization
Techniques from the PowerPost Masterclass Instructors



POWERPOST®

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In addition to overseeing PowerPost's own brand marketing program, Scott leads a dedicated marketing team that develops content-centered digital strategies for clients like Nestle-Purina, Centene Corporation, AAA, Ty Toys, Navy Pier, United Auto Insurance, Cannon Safe, Primeval Labs, and S&S Activewear.

PowerPost Masterclass

Together with his team, Scott created the PowerPost *Brand Publishing Masterclass*. The *Masterclass* is a unique, expert-level webinar series for senior brand and content marketers. The series assembles the most thought-provoking marketing educators, and shares crucial insights to help brands cultivate loyal audiences and master owned media.

Past presenters include:

- Michael Brenner, CEO of the Marketing Insider Group
- Adele Revella, author and CEO of The Buyer Persona Institute
- Park Howell, Founder of The Business of Story
- Michele Linn, Co-Founder of Mantis Research
- Mike Kaput, Director of Marketing Artificial Intelligence Institute
- Shane Barker of Shane Barker Consulting
- Julia McCoy, CEO of Express Writers
- Chris Penn, CEO and Founder of BrainTrust Insights

Visit powerpost.digital for more information on PowerPost content creation software, services and strategies.

To find out more information on upcoming *Masterclass* webinars, and to subscribe to the PowerPost email list for helpful reminders, please visit powerpost.digital/masterclass.

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Introduction:

The Best Learnings from the Brand Publishing Masterclass

The *PowerPost Brand Publishing Masterclass* is a regular free webinar for content marketers and brand publishers, featuring expert guest instructors who share advanced concepts and techniques, and lead a truly expert-level conversation.

If you're interested in attending the next Masterclass, the registration is available at powerpost.digital/masterclass. To be kept up-to-date on upcoming webinars, sign up for our weekly newsletter at powerpost.digital.

When we created the *Masterclass*, we saw an opportunity for a forum that allowed great content marketing presenters to offer counter-intuitive insights, talk about the ways in which the conventional wisdom might be wrong, and identify common misunderstandings and misapplications in the content marketing field.



Over the course of the last year, we've had some amazing presenters contribute their wisdom. Everyone from Chris Penn talking about artificial intelligence, to Adele Revella dispelling the myths of customer personas.

As we were collecting all this wisdom, we at PowerPost wanted to be sure that this useful information **didn't disappear after each class was over**. Instead, we took the time to **collect the best information together** in a format that was both useful and enjoyable.

I'm a big fan of the author and podcaster Tim Ferriss. His podcast, The Tim Ferriss Show, dissects the habits, practices and attitudes of top performers in various fields.

After he had recorded a number of these podcasts, Tim realized that all this amazing wisdom was **trapped in individual podcast episodes**. It wasn't aggregated into a format that was immediately useful. So he collected the best insights from many of his interviews, and created a kind of quick-reference guide.

That exercise turned out so well that he published it as a book called, *Tools of Titans*. Every chapter features tips and lessons from a specific former interviewee, expressing a distillation of the wisdom that they imparted. It's a tremendous book.

That book serves as the inspiration for what we wanted to do here. We wanted to create a reference featuring the very, very best learnings of these marvelous presenters who've partnered with us over the past year.

This is very dense with good information. I encourage you to read it once front-to-back, and then to refer back to individual chapters as you need them. We've included helpful links to the the original presenter, their materials, and the video of their original *Masterclass*.

So let's get started.

The Content That Gotcha Here Won't Getcha There

In the beginning days of content, most companies were slow to see the wisdom of centering one's entire marketing program on content publishing and promotion. So if you were early into the content marketing space, **you faced little competition.** Back then, ranking on desirable organic search phrases was relatively easy.

Now brands are catching on in a hurry, producing metric tons of marketing content. A few years back, a marketer named Mark Schaefer wrote a blog called, [“Content Shock: Why Content Marketing is Not a Sustainable Strategy.”](#) In it, he noted that, “Depending on what study you read, the amount of available web-based content, the supply [in the supply and demand economics metaphor that he applied] is doubling every 9 to 24 months.”

Doubling every 9 to 24 months!

The world is getting flooded with content, and because of this, **it will become harder and harder for the average piece of content to get seen, link to, engaged with, or otherwise appreciated.**

Chris Penn, an AI and Analytics expert whom we will talk about further in the book, now tells us:



“The days of ‘good enough content’ aren’t good enough anymore.”



Let's explore this phenomenon using some data. The two most obvious measurements of content visibility are engagements and Google ranks, and we're already seeing evidence that the fight for both is getting fierce.



“From the highest to lowest points, the **output of content per brand increased 35%** per channel across 2015, but **content engagement decreased by 17%.**”

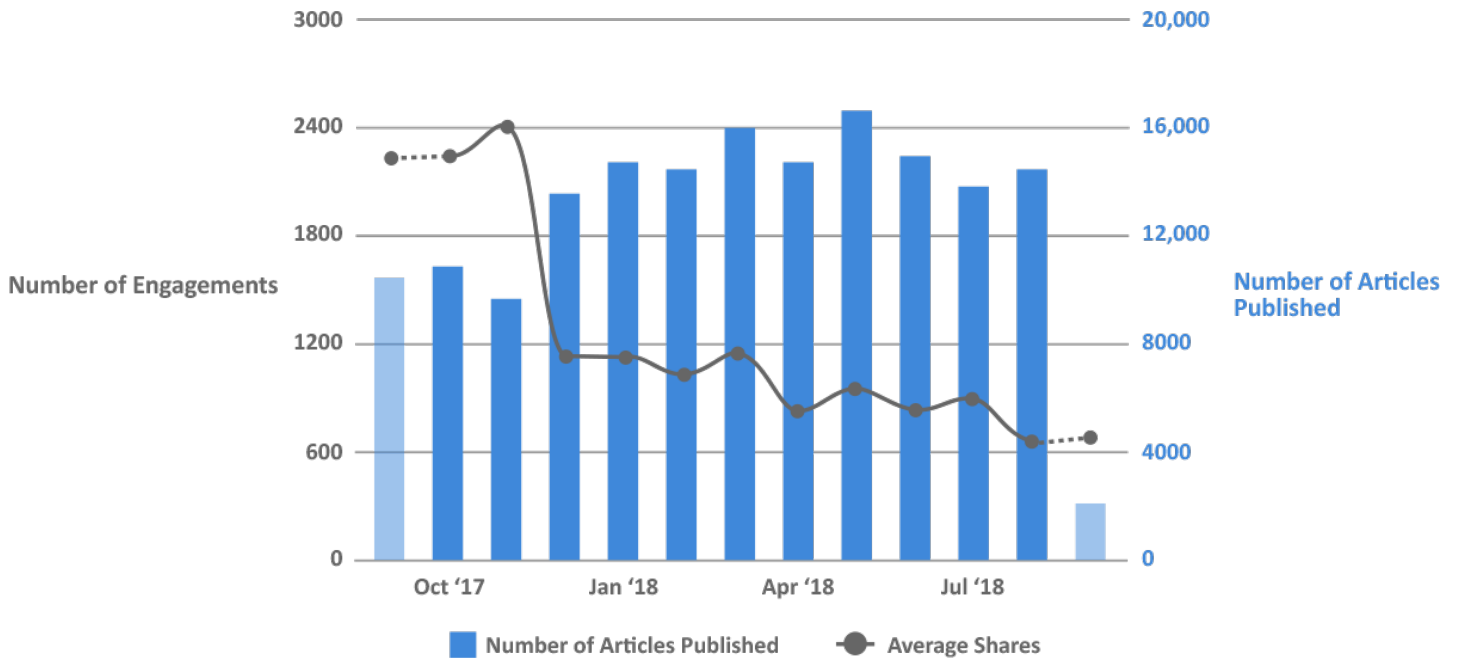


TrackMaven: *The Content Marketing Paradox Revisited*

Despite publishing significantly more content, **published articles are getting fewer and fewer engagements.**

This is the average article engagement for the domain BuzzFeed.com:

Buzzfeed.com Engagements & Content Published Over Time



[Source: Buzzsumo Content Analyzer](#)

The blue bars represent the number of articles published on BuzzFeed throughout the year 2018. That little line that you see falling from left to right is the average amount of engagement that each post got throughout the year.

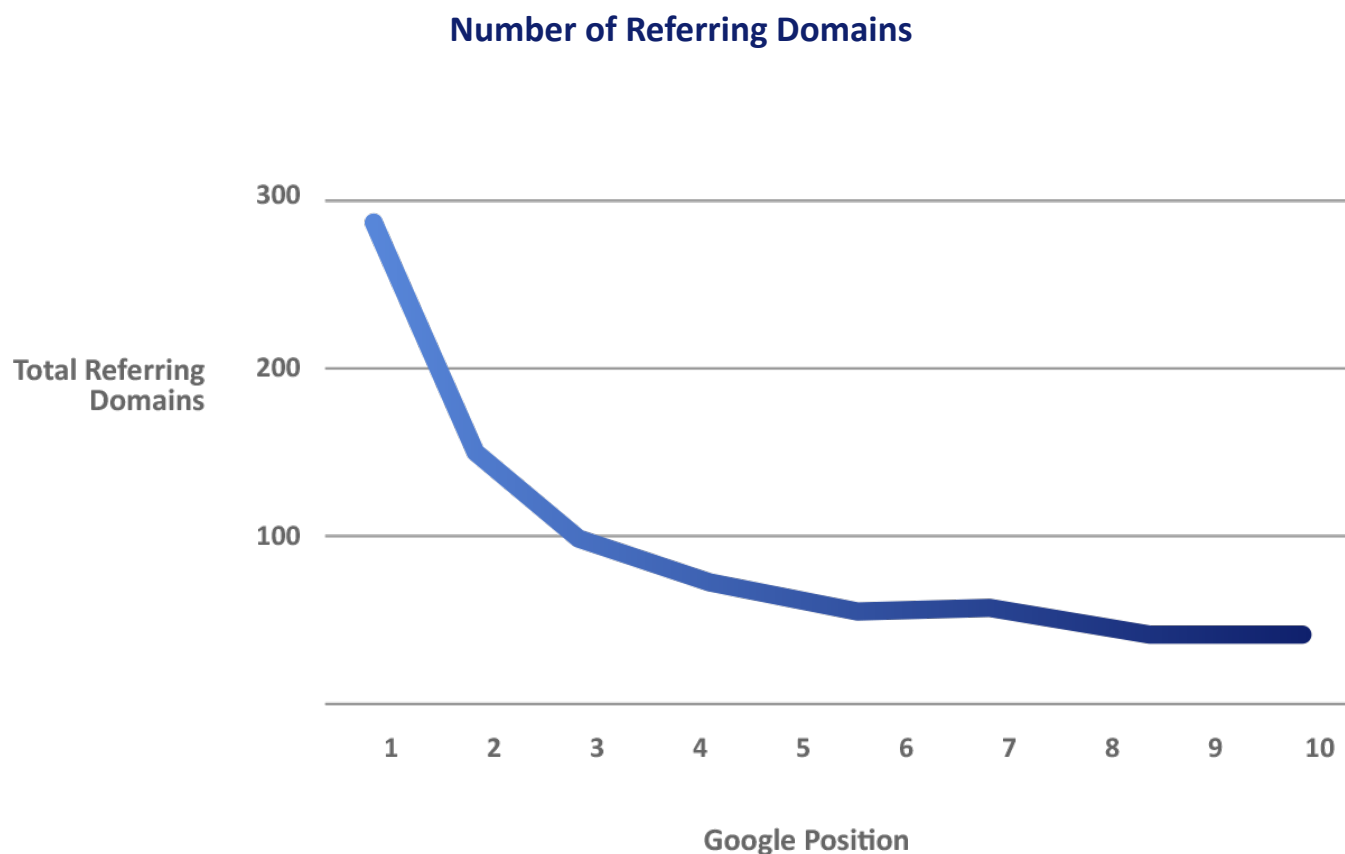
This trend is happening everywhere. More and more, our marketing content is seen by fewer and fewer people.

Engagement is one of two major ways of getting eyeballs on your content. The other way is getting Google to see it as authoritative. So we ask: is it also getting more difficult to rank on Google due to the proliferation of content?

Being good content and SEO marketers, we know that **backlinks**, meaning hyperlinked citations that back the original content on your site, are one of the major factors affecting Google's PageRank algorithm.

"Domain Authority," the degree to which Google considers your site to be a credible and valuable search result, is based in large part on the number of referring domains you have linking to you.

Backlinko did an analysis of a million Google results and found that, on average, the number one ranked search result had 300 independent referring domains.



[Source: "We Analyzed 1 Million Google Search Results. Here's What We Learned About SEO"](#)

Let me emphasize this: the sites that achieved top ranked search results had, on average, **nearly three hundred** independent referring domains linking to them. Attracting that many backlinks to your content is not at all trivial.

Earlier this year, BuzzSumo [published an article that voiced the following conclusions:](#)



1. **Social sharing of content has been *cut in half* since 2015.**
2. **70% of all content published in 2017 got *zero* inbound links.**

Note that second point: Seventy percent of all content published in 2017 got zero inbound links. Seven out of 10 content pieces you wrote in 2017 **did absolutely nothing** to promote your Domain Authority, the central factor that determines where Google might feature your site as a search result.

Imagine that. Imagine throwing away 7/10 of your productive time. Imagine burning seven out of every ten dollars you spend on your content department!

The trend is clear: In the future, **our content will have to work harder to be seen.**

Creating “Armor Piercing Content”

So how should we create content that has the best chance to be seen, engaged with, and ranked highly on organic search engines?

Well, it turns out that the content which most successfully cuts through the clutter tends to share some common attributes. If we learn what these attributes are, we can teach ourselves how to create high-performing content **systematically**.

The BuzzSumo data featured above came from [a study they conducted](#), which suggests that there are a number of factors that contribute to content achieving high shares and ranks. Here are three of the top figures they cited:

1. **Popular sites that produce regular authoritative content are more likely to gain shares and likes.**

2. **Serious and authoritative journalism that takes a position on a current topic can achieve more links as well as more shares.**

3. **New insights based on deep research can achieve more links.**

Do you see a pattern here?

Going forward, the content that's *gonna getcha there* is all going to be **authoritative, journalistic, long-form** and **well-researched content** that people are going to **want to link back to for reference value**.

And the bar for what constitutes reference value is **set a lot higher than before**.

People are not going to link back to unuseful, fluffy material. They're going to link back to something that provides **new** and **deep information**.

Therefore, content in the future must be produced and optimized perfectly—that is to say strategically, journalistically, and backed by data—in order to be seen at all.

And so...

- In order to be **seen** and **appreciated** in a noisier environment...
- In order to actually **break through** to people's inboxes...
- In order to be among the smaller and **smaller consideration sets** of subscription materials like newsletters and podcasts...
- In order to penetrate the **tougher shields** that your audience will use to keep the content noise and clutter out of their lives...

...our content must become **armor-piercing**.

It must become **"Intelligent Content."**

The 7 “Musts” of Intelligent Content

When we say, “Intelligent Content,” we are talking about a specific group of attributes that make your content visible in a noisier world.

Intelligent Content MUST:

- 1.** Have a unique, strategic fit and be intelligence-driven
- 2.** Be strategically repurposed, in order to scale
- 3.** Answer questions your buyers are asking
- 4.** Tell a story (and most of it doesn't)
- 5.** Focus on your customers, and not you
- 6.** Be written in an authoritative style, and incorporate original research
- 7.** Leverage AI to an increasing degree

We're going to focus on each of these musts one by one, highlighting a different Masterclass presenter for each chapter.

Let's begin.

Intelligent Content *MUST* #1:

Your Content *MUST* Have a Unique, Strategic Fit and Be Intelligence-Driven



“You need to know what your neighbors, friends, and competitors are publishing in order to ensure that you’re creating *the most engaging, differentiated content.*”

Ellie Mirman, Crayon

This first section is actually contributed by me, from a Master Class I gave early on in the series. I feel strongly that content Intelligence is increasingly crucial, and something every content creator should understand.

The biggest problem with data-driven content right now is that people are obsessed with their own analytics. “What can I write that’s similar to what’s worked for me in the past?”

But relying on Google Analytics is **one of the slowest ways to learn about what content needs to be written** because it is always based on what you’ve published previously.

Google Analytics won’t tell you anything about the underlying demand for certain content topics **unless you’ve written something like it before.**

Content Intelligence tools let you look at engagement performance for content that **other domains are publishing**, whether they be competitors, influencers, or your industry at large.

Content Intelligence tools let you look at engagement performance for content that **other domains are publishing**, whether they be competitors, influencers, or your industry at large.



“Content intelligence is the art of using other people’s data.”



PowerPost

Nothing helps you learn what to write faster than learning it from what’s **working well for everybody else**, not just yourself.

Without special intelligence tools, it’s incredibly hard to trace social engagement metrics back to the published content that produced them. Several technology providers have them, like BuzzSumo and Crayon. The PowerPost software platform features a unique intelligence tool called [Ask PowerPost](#), integrated right into its content creation functionality.

Content Intelligence: “Other People’s Data”

Content Intelligence tools don’t just help you create data-driven, resonant editorial. This technology is useful for many other purposes.

Create more targeted, resonant content

Understand their industry’s content/social media ecosystem

Engage their clients and customers with timely insights

Benchmark their content performance against competitors

Identify Influencers

Monitor their brand conversation

I'll leave you with two example strategies that you can use immediately. If you wanted to base your editorial content on the best data available, this is exactly how to do it.

The first strategy we call **“Write the Definitive Version.”**
Three simple steps:

Step 1

First, you use a Content Intelligence tool to analyze the best-performing content among your competition in a certain realm or through a certain date range.

Step 2

Then, you look for an example of specific piece of content that did well, that people readily-consumed and shared, within that topic. But you're looking for an article that's not very well fleshed out. Something like a 300-word blog... perhaps a roundup or a listicle.

Step 3

Then you take that topic and formulate your own more in-depth take.

And then you write the definitive version of that article.

You re-write their article to be:

- **Better**
- **Stronger**
- **With more sources...**
- **...and more cross-links...**
- **...and more quotes**

Step 1

Find the best performing content among your competition



Step 2

Pick a top performer that aligns with your subject matter



Step 3

Write a definitive article on their topic - better, longer, more sources and quotes



You really do a job with it. And you know it's going to be successful when you publish it and when you promote it because you saw that same topic be successful elsewhere. You could base an entire content program on nothing but that one strategy, and have a complete, data-driven editorial calendar indefinitely.

Here's a related strategy for intelligence-driven content...
look for whitespace in a popular or trending subject area:

Step 1

Use your Content Intelligence tools to look for a specific subject that a lot of people are talking about, something that's very popular or trendy right now. A little while back, for example, everyone was talking about micro-influencers. Everybody and their brother wrote some kind of take about micro-influencers. Some of it was good, a lot of it was not.

Step 2

You look within this space for an angle that nobody's really talked about yet. You could say, "Okay, how about we write something within the micro-influencer domain... **micro-influencers for enterprise**, nobody's really talked about that yet. **Micro-influencers for healthcare**, nobody's really talked about that yet."

You're looking for a niche that hasn't been covered within a very popular trend.

Step 3

And then you write the related article based on that.

Step 1

Find the best performing content among your competition



Step 2

Pick a topic area where multiple articles are addressing the same topic



Step 3

Write a related article with an angle that no one's touched yet



Those two strategies alone could provide you with torrents of content for a long time to come.

For More Information

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Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/become-content-intelligence-super-agent-build-benchmarks-create-hyper-targeted-content-spying-competitors-successes>



Intelligent Content *MUST* #2:

Your Content *MUST* Be Strategically Repurposed In Order to Scale



“Repurposed content reaches more leads in more places and extracts more value from content marketing investments. Most importantly, it scales. An eBook begets infographics, which (with narration) can beget videos, etc. — all in exponentially less time than each asset would take to create in a vacuum.”

Mike Kaput, Marketing Artificial Intelligence Institute

This chapter was originally presented by Steph Nissen from Atomic Revenue.

Content atomization and repurposing are concepts that everybody thinks they have implemented, but few people actually practice. This is because no one experiences any actual gains from content repurposing unless there's a **structure in place**.

In this chapter, I'll be referring to atomization and repurposing somewhat interchangeably, though technically “atomization” is the breaking apart of something big into smaller components. Many times, when content is strategically repurposed, many small things can be zipped together into one big thing.

If we start with an existing eBook, for example, we know generally that we can **create other pieces of content directly from that eBook**. We can create some blogs from that eBook, right? We can create an infographic from that eBook. But for most content departments, that's where it typically ends.

Somebody says,

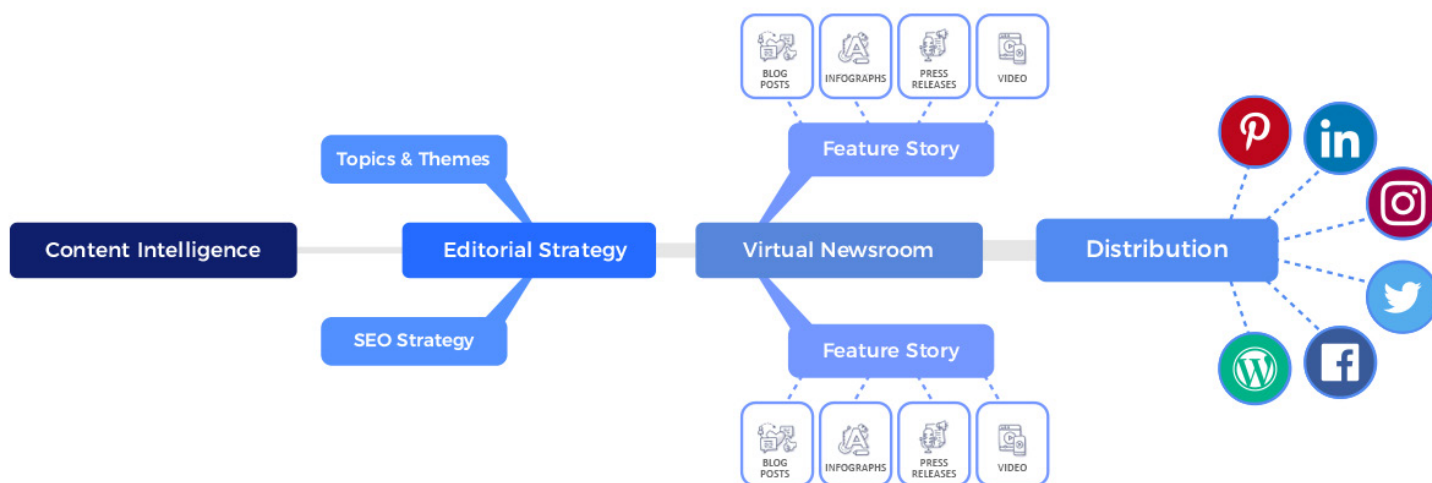
“Well, why don't you create an infographic from something in that eBook?”

“Okay.”

And then you take it back to your desk and you think about it, and it just stops there.

What you need in order to be able to repurpose strategically, and to take advantage of the savings of time and effort that result, is an **institutionalized, consistent process that concentrates all the hard thinking in one meeting**. This sets you up with specific to-dos for at least a month.

So this is how the structure works at Powerpost.



PowerPost is structured like a newsroom. Everything revolves around a regular editorial meeting where feature writing gets assigned.

You can see on the left side of the diagram that there are several inputs that feed into editorial strategy:

Input 1

Content Intelligence data, as discussed in the last chapter.

Input 2

Factors from our SEO strategy. We discuss the phrases on which we want to rank, as well as our analytics from previous months.

Input 3

Topics and themes we'd like to cover because they're important to our brand.

For example, the first part of this year, every month we took a chapter of our most recent eBook ([The Brand Publishing Roadmap](#)) as our master content theme.

We have a two-stage assignment breakout from that editorial meeting:

Stage 1

The writing assignments are for what we call “feature articles,” some people call them “cornerstone articles.” But those are the larger, more reference-style blogs that we want to produce. And we produce a certain amount of those a month.

Stage 2

And then we break those out further and create companion pieces. We ask ourselves questions to help us envision which type of shorter-form media would pair well with the feature articles, such as:

- **“What infographic would be a companion to this?”**
- **“What video might be a companion to this?”**
- **“What smaller blog or round up might maybe a companion to this?”**

These are all pre-assigned and pre-thought out in a very deliberate strategy, so that we save time and energy not having to rethink them all the time.

Repurpose with Purpose

Now, if you tried to repurpose every piece of content that you produce you’d go absolutely nuts.

Nissen suggests that we select content for repurposing based on two criteria:

- 1. Content that is timeless (evergreen)**
- 2. Content that is valuable**

We assess value in two very easy ways.

Google Landing Page Statistics

You look at your Google Analytics to see what content has been the most popular with the least bounce rate based on your site content on your landing pages.

Social Media Engagement Insights

You can also look at engagements within your social media “insights” screens. You want to look for the content-related posts that received the highest organic engagement relative to your average.

The main content repurposing question that most people ask is, what do I repurpose this content **as**? What **format** is best? You wanna create a quick-reference guide like this one, and keep it handy so that you don’t get into a rut.

Atomization Ideas

- Blogs
- Social Posts
- Images
- Infographics
- Videos
- Whitepapers
- eBooks
- Presentations
- Webinars
- Podcasts

You want to invest some discipline in mixing up different formats and trying out new ones. It’s very easy to say, “Okay, this month I’m going to break up a big blog post into four little blogs. Next month I’m gonna do four big blogs and four little blogs....” and on.

Try videos, even if they’re shot on a phone. Turn it into a video series. Make one really excellent infographic about something you’re going to reference over and over. Try to create formats that stretch your comfort zone.

We'll discuss content formats further in the upcoming chapter on original research.

It's important to note that atomization also works in reverse. You can take a bunch of blogs that are shorter form that you've created, and zip them all up into a longer-form piece of content. This eBook that you're reading started as separate webinars that were combined together into a best-of webinar, and further refined into the form you're reading now.

So that is the "MUST" of repurposing. You **must** create the most efficient process possible so that your content assets are not created one-by-one from scratch.

And that doesn't happen without an established process that you stick to every week, every month.

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Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/repurpose-with-purpose-scale-up-your-content>

Intelligent Content ***MUST*** #3:

Your Content ***MUST*** Answer The Exact Questions Your Buyers Are Asking



“Too often, Buyer Profiles are nothing more than an attractive way to display obvious or demographic data. Defining markets based on demographics—data such as a person’s age, income, marital status, and education—is the legacy of 60 years of selling to the mass market.”

Adele Revella, *Buyer Personas*

This is one of the most valuable presentations from the *Masterclass*. There is so much BS in the world of personas, and Adele Revella is adept at helping people **truly** understand their audiences.

In marketing, personas have evolved into this kind of cutesy exercise that just gives creative types something to do.

Anyone who has ever worked with agency clients has seen the notorious fluff-persona straight out of The Onion: “This is Suzy, she is a soccer mom, this is what her room looks like, this is where she does yoga...” Every little intricate detail except, perhaps, **how she might actually buy your product**.

Revella is very serious about making sure that companies have **only as many personas as they have distinct buyer journeys**. Most companies have way too many.

Marketing for high-consideration purchases (most frequently B2B, but not always) is mostly about **building trust**. The personas should really focus on answering questions like:

- What does this prospect need?
- What are they looking for?
- What are they trying to achieve?

The persona should focus on **answering their (exact) questions**.



“Effective messaging emerges at the intersection of what your buyers want to hear and what you want to say.”

Adele Revella, *Buyer Personas*

Revella is a proponent of getting this information from interviews directly. **Most people just guess at what their customers need**, and I’m guilty of this too. Everybody guesses at what questions buyers are asking.

From time to time we may go and ask our sales team, “Hey, what questions are coming up frequently in the buyers’ conversation?” But we’re **not taking the necessary step of interviewing people** who have become clients (or people who were close to becoming clients), and figuring out what happened **behind the scenes** while they were considering options.

The following chart is an example of questions that are asked in the different stages before somebody becomes a client. These buying stages and questions are different for everybody in every industry, and this information is only really garnered by doing the interviews and getting data from the prospects who have considered you.

Each Persona Asks Different Journey Questions

1. Trigger Point “I need a solution”	AWARENESS	Is my team working as efficiently as it could? Are we spending budget money needlessly? Is there a skills issue that technology could address? Do existing systems need to be better integrated? Could new technology lead to higher quality deliverables?
2. Assess Pros & Cons 3. Research Suppliers 4. Evaluate Suppliers	CONSIDERATION	Who are the major vendors for what I need? How do your public reviews compare to your competitors? Do you have experience working in my industry? Can people adopt your product without training? Do you offer high quality support?
5. Evaluate Pricing against Budget 6. Approve Decision	PURCHASE	How does your pricing compare to your competitors? Is your pricing model flexible? How will you adjust pricing to meet our needs? What should I expect during the onboarding process? What kind of training will we receive? Is your company likely to be around long term/ acquired soon?

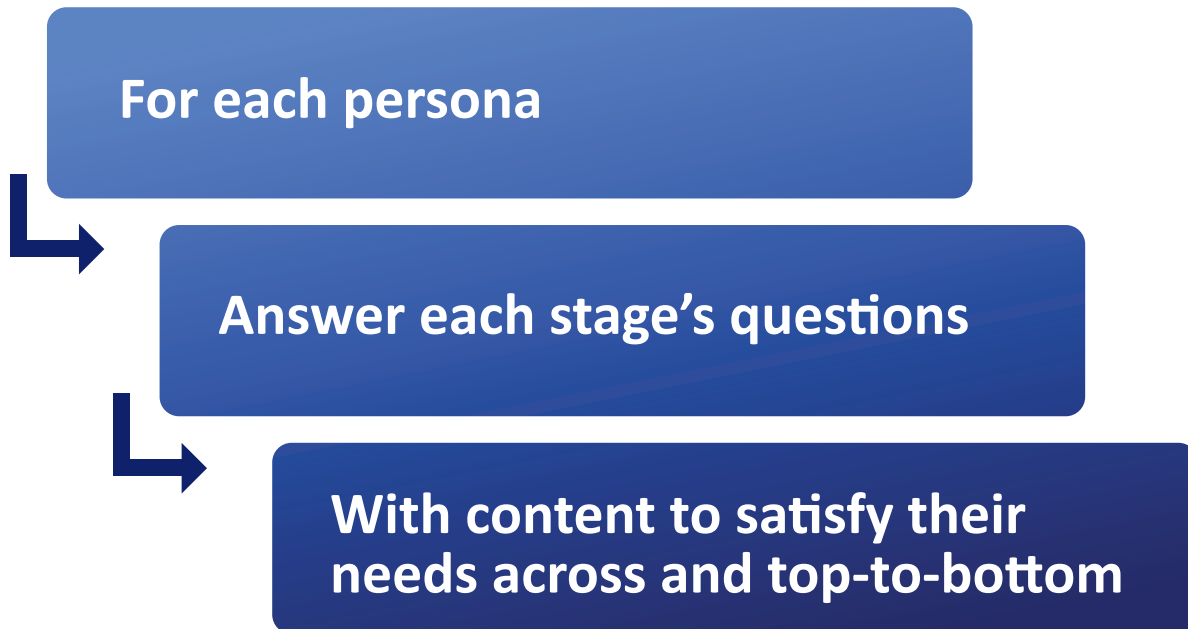
Content That Answers Questions, Step By Step

There's a very excellent paint-by-numbers way to create on-point, persona based content simply by mapping out the true customer questions and then creating content pieces that answer those questions.

If you answer buyers' questions distinctly for each persona that you have, using a piece of content that's appropriate to that stage, then you've got your entire editorial calendar right there!

Line up your persona journeys (the stages and questions) side-by-side. If the questions that the personas are asking aren't distinct (i.e. they match each other perfectly) **then you don't need separate personas.**

Answer The Important Buyer Questions For Each Persona



Now, you just create different content pieces to answer each question, up and down the Buyer's Journey. For each persona, you want to answer the questions from each stage, with content to satisfy their needs all across the process.

The following table is what you'll end up with.

Content Created for Each Persona, at Every Stage

		STAGES				
		AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	DECISION	RETENTION	ADVOCACY
PERSONAS	Mid-Market/ Enterprise Content Creator	Mid/Enterprise-segmented Newsletter Blogs on alignment/communication/etc. Scaled-volume tips, listicles"	Team workflow videos/webinars Editorial process resources Short functional demos with product Segmented Email Nurturing	Buyers Guide Competitor Comparison Live Custom Demo Industry-Specific Case Studies	Onboarding Email Nurture AI-Driven Support Chat Selected Tutorials on Scaled Workflow	Networking Invitations Invitations to Rate Product
	Director/ Vice President/ CMO	Director/VP-segmented Newsletter Blogs on program ROI measurement Content program checklists, guides	Content ROI videos/webinars Competitive resources Content Team Admin demos with product Segmented Email Nurturing	Buyers Guide Competitor Comparison Live Custom Demo Industry-Specific Case Studies	Onboarding Email Nurture AI-Driven Support Chat Selected Tutorials on ROI Reporting Hand-selected Curation from Account Mgr	Networking Invitations Warm Intros and Referrals

Down the y-axis on the left-hand side of this table, you list out each persona you have. This is why you want to keep it minimal, because you'll be creating different content for each persona.

And across the x-axis are the journey stages. We've got **awareness**, **consideration**, and **decision**. And then the two stages that nobody ever thinks about: **retention** and **advocacy**—how we keep customers and turn customers into advocates.

And then, for each of those fields in the table, you come up with content that answers those buyer questions.

In this example, I have created two personas. These are differentiated by seniority but yours might not split up that way. Now ask yourself, what content might they receive that would help answer their questions?

In the awareness stage, perhaps a segmented newsletter. Maybe we create hyper-targeted blogs talking about ROI in the CMO's case, as opposed to content creation in the writer's case.

There can be some content overlap. When you get down to the decision stage, for example, both personas might use the same buyers' guides to answer their last-minute questions. What is important is that you've got all your journey questions mapped out, and matched to specific content formats and types. Now all that's left is to prioritize what to create first, second, third and you are on your way.

Your Buyers Are Not Just Looking at YOUR Site...

One final point about personas. Where does your content go? Where should you publish it?

This is another thing that we all do wrong: we all put our content on our own website. **And nowhere else.**

In high consideration decisions, stakeholders are researching all over the place. People are talking to influencers, they are listening to podcasts, they are contributing groups, they are Googling everything they can, rating on review sites, right?

You will find that every persona that you interview is going to tell you about **distinct places that they consulted in order to arrive at their initial consideration set.**

I might have become aware of your offering because of a Google ad, I might have seen you because somebody recommended you. It's different for everybody, so you have to ask the question in order to get that information. Analytics alone won't tell you this story.

The exercise then becomes about putting your content not on your own website but on these research points where people are garnering information.

In other words, you want to make sure that your review site presence is fully optimized, that you're represented in LinkedIn groups that people are consulting, and things of that nature.

Don't just focus on your own site. Ask your customers and prospects where they're getting their initial information, and get your content where it will be seen!

For More Information



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LinkedIn: [Adele Revella](#)

Twitter: [@buyerpersona](#)

Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/personas-everything-youve-heard-wrong>

Intelligent Content ***MUST*** #4:

Your Content ***MUST*** Tell a Story (And Most of It Doesn't)



“The idea of storytelling has become all the rage in marketing. Leaders across industries are talking about it, but how many are actually doing it?

About 10 percent.”

Skyword

“Why Only 10 Percent of Content Marketers
Have Embraced Brand Storytelling”

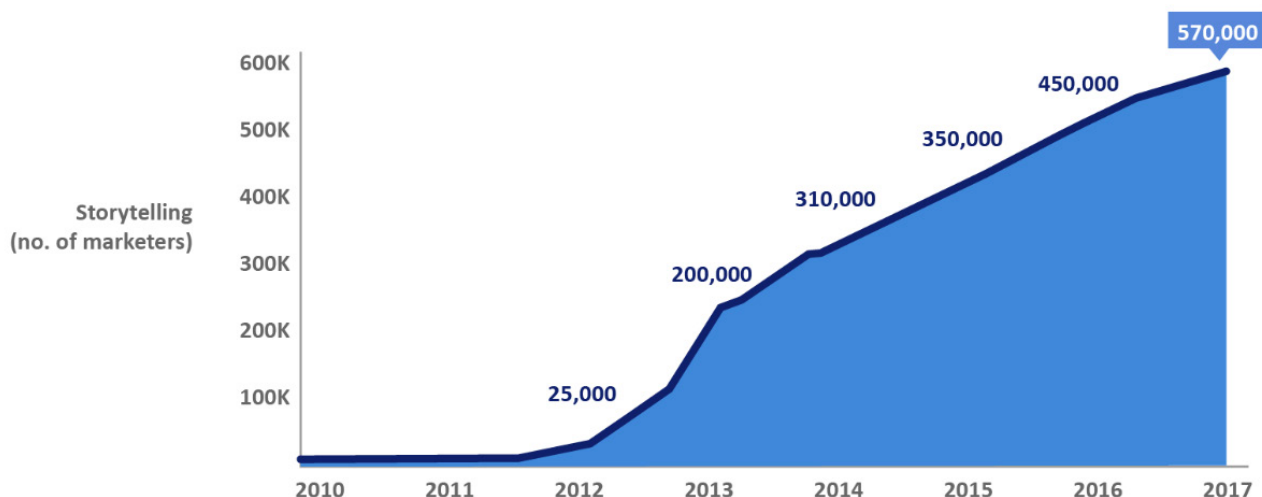
Park Howell began his Masterclass presentation by highlighting the absolute lack of true storytelling technique in modern content marketing, despite the fact that most writers consider themselves storytellers.

To emphasize the point of how important storytelling is, he shared this graph that shows the number of LinkedIn profiles that contain the word “storytelling.”

As you can see on the following page, more and more marketers, when marketing themselves, are saying, “I’m a storytelling marketer!”

And yet nobody is actually telling a story.

LinkedIn Profiles Containing “Storytelling”



When we talk about actually telling a story with your content, a true story involves a **specific person** in a **specific setting** going through a **specific obstacle or trial**.

Our brains, Howell tells us, are not equipped to think in listicles. They are equipped to think in **single-person narratives**. Yet most writers say, “Okay, I’ll tell a story but I’ll do it generally. I’ll talk about these kind of people **in general**...”

No, no, no. Specific person, specific place, specific circumstance.

If you pay attention to excellent writing—perhaps you subscribe to something like *The Atlantic* or *Time*—you notice that first class magazine writing usually starts out with a story about a specific person, who serves as an example of what topic the article is covering.

You will never see story-driven writing start out on a theoretical concept. The piece will start out by launching into a very specific narrative: “Mark Burman woke up on his 50th birthday, not realizing that life was going to change forever...he just went down and kissed his kids like it was any ordinary day...”

And then we, the readers, come to find out that person is an example of the point that the author is trying to get across.

In order to create a powerful narrative, Howell talked about the **three-act structure** common to most stories. You should recognize this structure from most every movie you've ever seen.

ACT 1

First, you have to introduce the characters using exposition. Your exposition will give some details about the main character and the current situation. The first act typically shows you how much your main character has got to lose (a family, an exciting life, a good situation, etc.) so that we feel tension when an obstacle or threat is introduced.

ACT 2

Normally this is the longest part of the story: conflict and rising action moving toward a climax at the very end of the act. At that point, you find out who is gonna get their way and how things turn out.

ACT 3

This act is the resolution or what's sometimes called the denouement. What's the new status quo coming after the conflict. How did our hero end up? Better off? Worse off? Both?

Park taught us a great model to help us construct a powerful narrative, and it goes like this: **“And,” “But,” “Therefore.”**

Brand Storytelling: The “A.B.T.”

Make a declarative statement of agreement

AND increase its importance.

BUT then inflict contradiction or conflict.

THEREFORE, resolve the problem.

Source: Park Howell [The Business of Story](#)

I would like to introduce this person, this person has this going on for him or her,
and also this, **and also** this...

But now we’ve introduced some kind of contradiction or conflict. Our protagonist can’t go forward as they’ve been going on before.

Therefore this is how it ends... And brand storytelling has to include these elements, right?

Here’s the PowerPost story in this model:

The PowerPost Story

PowerPost was founded by Dan Curran. In the past, Dan was a partner in a traditional ad agency **AND** got to work on some of the most recognized consumer brands in the world.

BUT - He realized a few years ago that interruptive advertising was dying, and brands would center their future strategies around operating more like media companies with publishing properties.

THEREFORE - He created PowerPost to provide brands with the technology and services that would help them master Brand Publishing.

Storifying existing content is another data-driven content strategy on its own:

Storifying as a Content Strategy

Step 1

Find the best performing content among your competition



Step 2

Pick a top performer that aligns with your subject matter



Step 3

Create a superior article using proven brand storytelling techniques



You can find great articles that receive high engagement, but that aren't written as very good stories. If you rewrite them using proven storytelling techniques, they'll serve you very well.

For More Information



PowerPost Masterclass Presenter: Park Howell, The Business of Story

Facebook: [Business of Story](#)

Twitter: [@ParkHowell](#)

Instagram: [@businessofstory](#)

Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/called-storytelling-killing-content-costing>

Intelligent Content *MUST* #5

Your Content *MUST* Focus More on the Customer Than On You



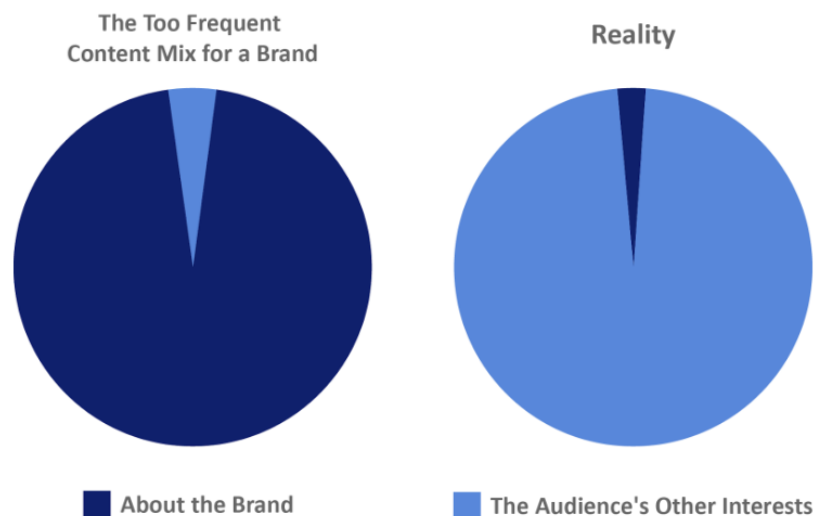
“Develop content from a social-first perspective. Speak to individual interests and needs.”



Mike Brown, Brainzooming

The following chart, courtesy of Mike Brown, shows us the all-too-frequent content mix on the left, and the ideal mix on the right.

Here is the Answer that Brands Miss





“Stop boring your audience with the same self-serving shtick.”



PowerPost

The typical branded content topic mix that we see features **99 percent of its content talking about the brand itself**. Brand, brand, brand. What’s left over is just this little sliver of creativity or human interest.

Most people say, *“Okay, I guess the mix should be closer to 50/50, right?”*

No. Actually, the ideal is the **exact inverse of what’s typical**: You should speak very, very little about your brand in your branded content, and you talk mostly about the **experience of your customer**, and **what they’re going through**, and **what questions they’re asking**.

This chart shows Mike’s formulation of what he calls “Social-first Content.”



Social-First content starts with audience needs and interests on the top.

- So who is this for, exactly?
- Do I really understand my audience in a way that I'm just not guessing at it?
- Do I have input from them and I understand them.

Then sweeping down to the right, we create compelling content and interaction (everybody thinks that their content is more compelling than it is, by the way).

And then finally, after all that's done, we integrate our brand considerations, making sure our content ideas are aligned with our messaging goals.

So let's go through a couple of examples from actual social content that illustrates each component of Social-First Content.

AUDIENCE NEEDS + COMPELLING CONTENT + YOUR BRAND

First of all, "**Audience Needs.**" Who is the individual I'm speaking to?
And what is their particular experience?

In particular, think about the following:

- Can we involve customer stories directly?
- Are customers submitting pictures to us or telling us stories about their experience?
- Can content be shaped by people's customer journey questions (as we discussed in Adele Revella's chapter earlier)?

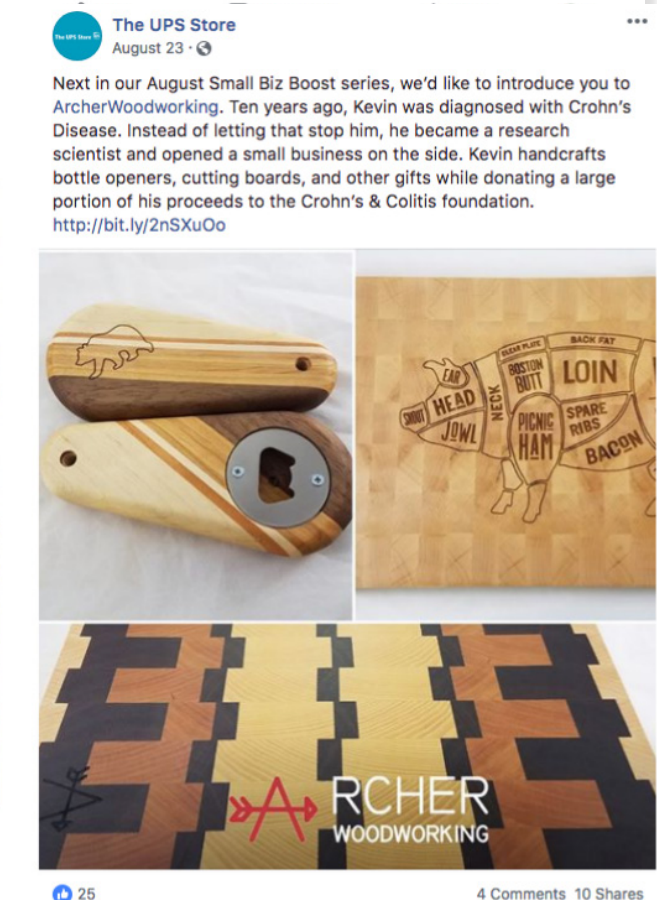
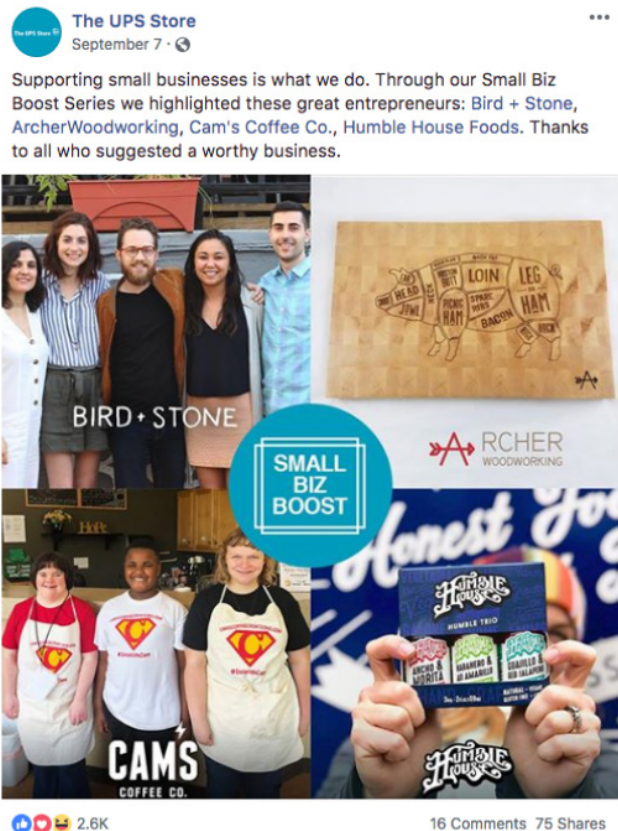
Take this example. The UPS store chain considers its core mission to help small businesses, since that demographic makes up such a substantial portion of their customer base.

The UPS store’s social content demonstrates sympathy for the daily struggles of small business owners. Their “Small Biz Boost” series highlights businesses that have a compelling story or support a worthy cause.

Customers are encouraged to nominate exemplary small businesses through their social channels. The winning small businesses benefit from the exposure on The UPS Store’s social media.

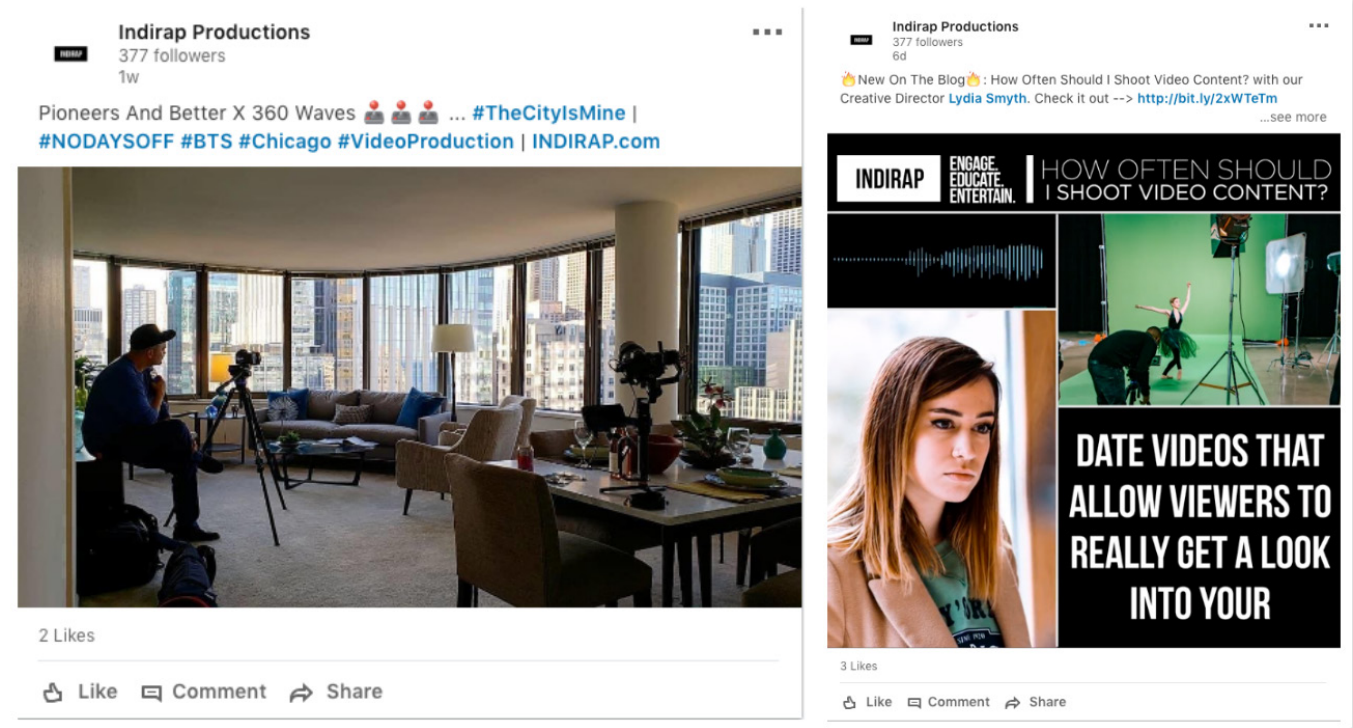
This is truly an audience-first example of content. This is not your typical, “Buy our products, buy our products, here’s a product shot, BUY OUR PRODUCTS!”

If you think about it, how much of your current content, at its core, says something like, “Buy my product!”?



AUDIENCE NEEDS + COMPELLING CONTENT + YOUR BRAND

Next, “Compelling Content.” What is actually compelling? Well, by compelling, we mean is there a way to make it more localized, personalized and visual.



Here is content from Indirap Productions, a B2B video content creator in Chicago.

Indirap features beautiful video and behind-the-scenes image content from their photo shoots. Their visual style incorporates a lot of stylish city shots to make the locale a character in their video story.

They use an arresting, quick-cut style that forces you to stop scrolling and view their posts in their entirety. Mixed into their content is documentary-style video, where employees share insights directly to the camera.

Their content is exciting, tells a specific story, and it's all as visual as it could possibly be. That is compelling content!

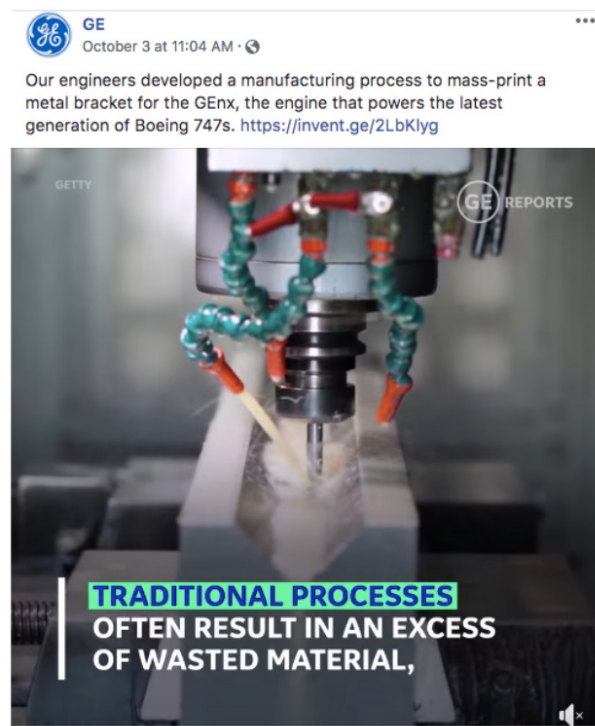
AUDIENCE NEEDS + COMPELLING CONTENT + YOUR BRAND

And then, finally, “Aligning It With Your Brand.” Not just your brand, but what is cool about your brand? Everybody’s brand has some kind of “Ooh and Ahh” factor if you dig deeply enough... but we rarely do that.

When you think of GE, you think of big expensive equipment, doctors’ offices, and so forth. But GE’s social team are **experts** at finding the cool in their brand.

This social post is part of a video series called GE Reports, which highlights their cutting edge manufacturing processes in a way that makes it look like Tony Stark’s garage. That’s not an MRI machine just sitting unused in a doctor’s office.

That’s an active, visual take on an innovative process. It’s executed in such a way that you know there must be a fascinating story behind it.



For More Information



PowerPost Masterclass Presenter: Mike Brown, The BrainZooming Group

Facebook: [GoBrainzooming](#)

Twitter: [@Brainzooming](#)

LinkedIn: [Brainzooming](#)

Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/make-customers-star-content-stop-boring-audience-self-serving-shtick>

Intelligent Content ***MUST*** #6

Your Content ***MUST*** Be Written in an Authoritative Style, and Incorporate Original Research



“Authoritative Research and reference content are the [...] two types of content that consistently get links and shares.”

Steve Rayson, CEO, BuzzSumo

Michele Linn is a two-time Friend of the Masterclass, and her company helps marketers publish and amplify their own original research.

In the introduction, we discussed some research from BuzzSumo that talked about the kind of content most likely to get links and engagement moving forward. Here were their top three points once again:

1. Popular sites that produce regular authoritative content are more likely to gain shares and likes.

2. Serious and authoritative journalism that takes a position on a current topic can achieve more links as well as more shares.

3. New insights based on deep research can achieve more links.

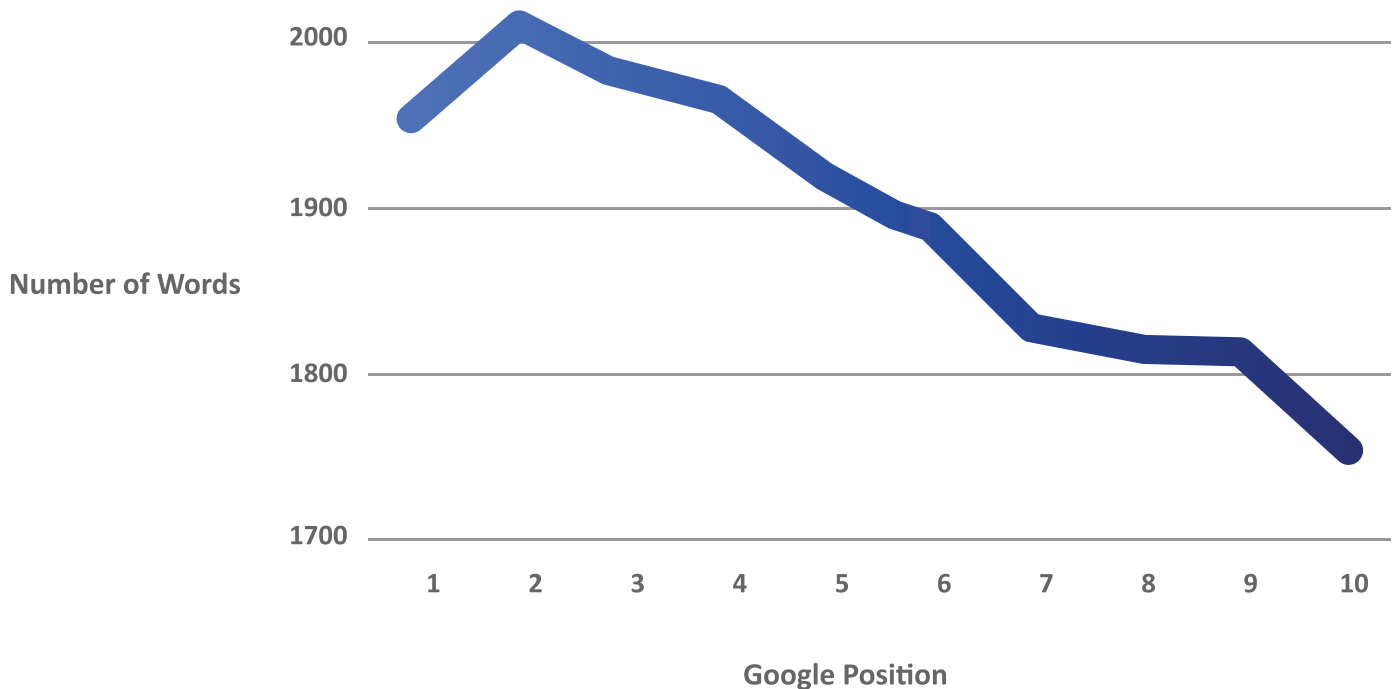
We noted the obvious emphasis on authority and journalism, which makes sense. When you read articles linked on Twitter, for example, do you usually take time to follow a link to some random post written by no one you've ever heard of?

No, you read articles and reporting from news outlets, magazines, and authoritative sources.

One important correlate of authority is the **average length** of a blog post, a figure that has gone up steadily over the past ten years. The following chart from Backlinko shows us that **the first 10 Google results of a typical search all return pages that are all, on average, over 1700 words long!**

How long are your average blog posts?

Content Total Word Count



["We Analyzed 1 Million Google Search Results. Here's What We Learned About SEO"](#)

As we supply more marketing content:

1. Bloggers will have **more choices of material to link** to for reference, decreasing the likelihood of backlinks to your own content, and lowering average Domain Authority.
2. Google will have **more content to select from when returning a search result**, increasing relevance for the searcher but decreasing average search volume to a particular article.
3. Social media consumers will have more **material to engage with**, diluting the average engagement that a post (and its linked content) typically receive.

Since engagement and rankings will be squeezed for everyone, content will have to be **special** in order for anyone to look at it. Your content will have to develop a *reputation for authority*.

This is why it is **crucial that you start developing original research!**

Making The Leap Into Original Research

Conducting original research is a topic that scares a lot of marketers. It's uncharted territory, it's specialized, it requires an upfront investment of resources, and if it's not constructed and interpreted correctly, it runs the risk of error and waste.

But **original research is necessary**. Experts like Linn and Andy Crestodina are starting to talk more and more about the importance of original research. As the content marketplace gets noisier and noisier, research that is **exclusive to you** has the highest likelihood to attain coveted backlinks and raise your domain authority.

What's more, it can provide enormous payoff if done correctly. You can fill an entire year's content calendar by atomizing a single well-done study!

When you undertake this for your first time, it's a **good idea to consult a little outside help**, to make sure data is collected and processed correctly.

There are a couple of tricks to being able to do research well. The first has to do with **topic selection**, which consumes a lot of time up front. This is Linn's formulation of the topics that make good research:

Interesting to my audience
+
Aligns with my brand's story
+
Has not already been covered

It can be difficult to find interesting, aligning topics that have not already been covered. The persona interviewing and buyers' journey mapping in Adele Revella's chapter will be extraordinarily useful here. After all, you don't want to guess at what information matters to your audience and have that guess be wrong!

No, you want to know exactly what information your customers need because they've **told you so directly.**

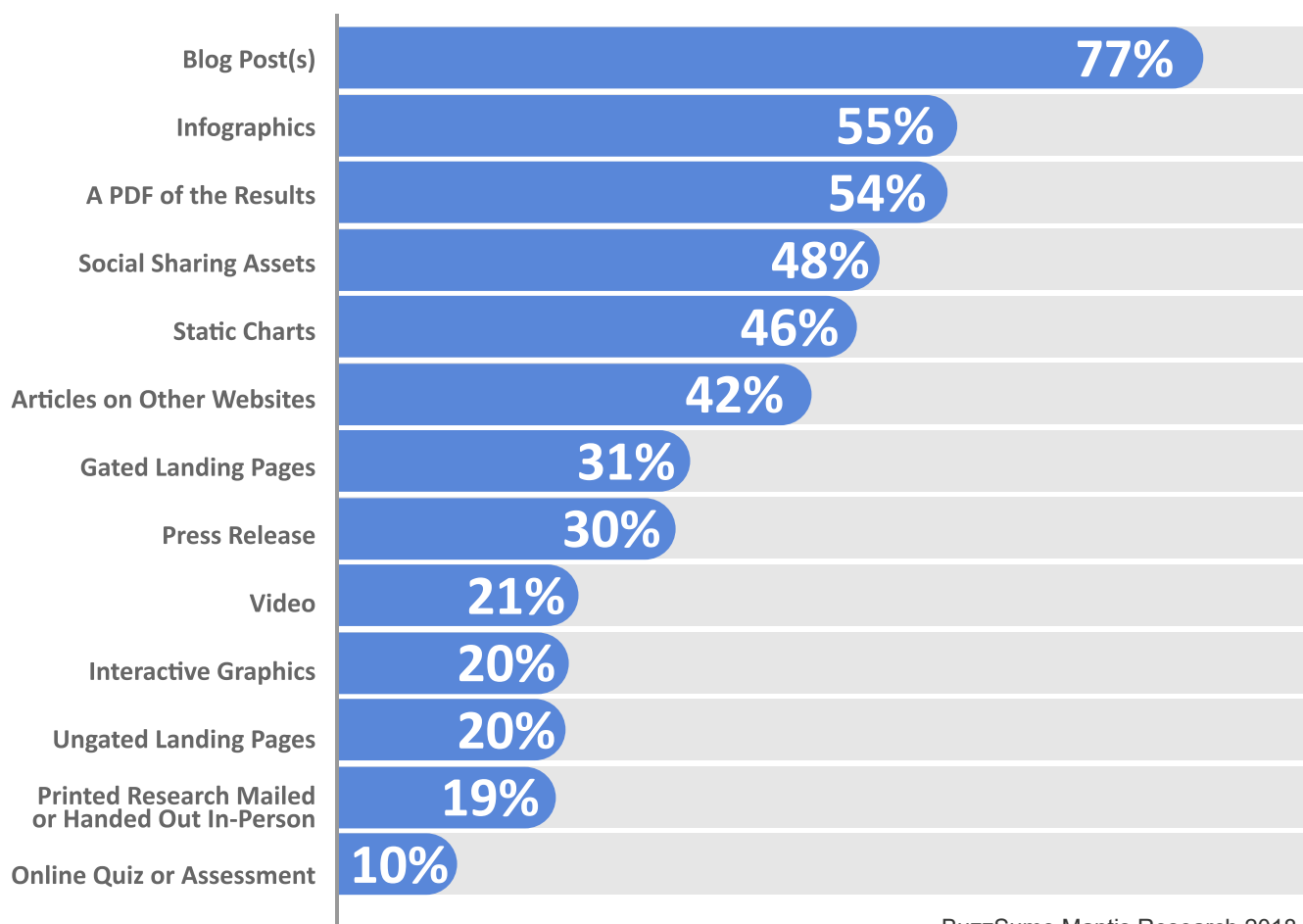
Once you have your topic, and you know the information you want to ask about, there's an entire process of question formulation and analysis that can be tricky without some guidance. I recommend that you use the link at the end of this chapter to view all the crucial details that Linn lays out in her [*Masterclass!*](#)

Really? A YEAR'S Worth Of Content From One Report?

I said once you have your research in, it's going to fill out a year's worth of material. And that's no lie.

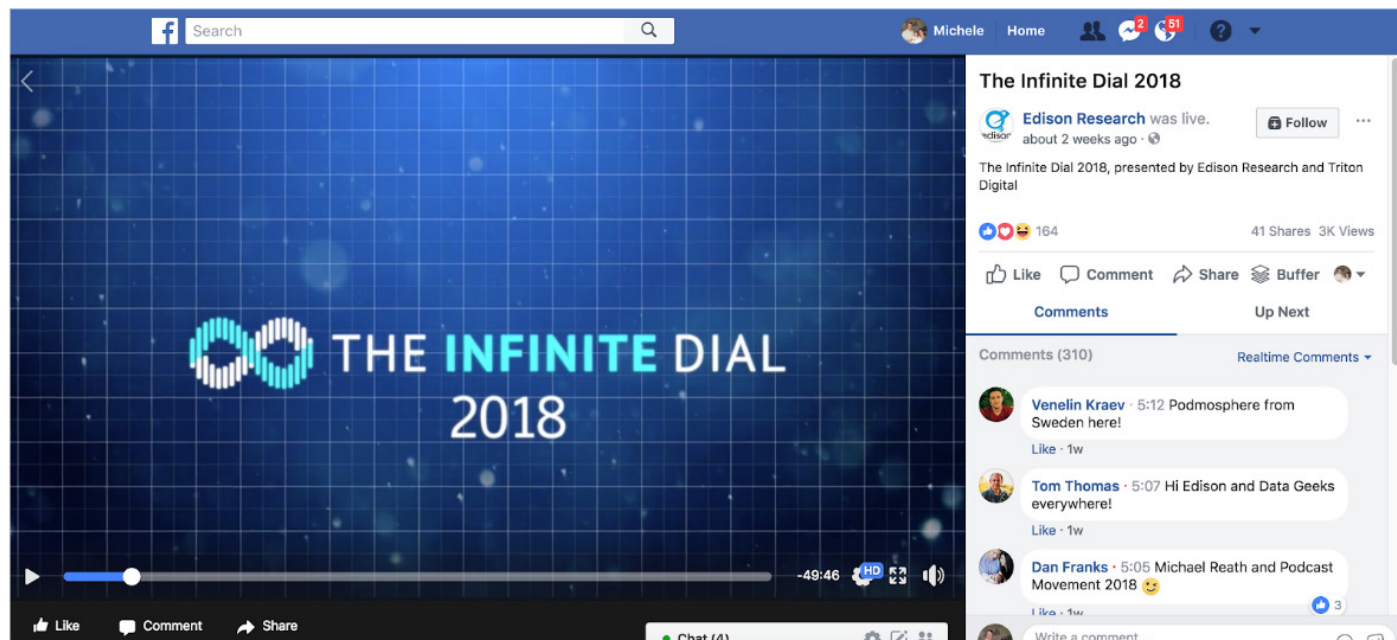
When you've got ahold of industry statistics that everybody wants but nobody has yet, it can be an extremely valuable source of backlinks. We're not just thinking about simple blog posts and infographics...we're thinking about atomizing this out to the nth degree! Press releases, videos, video series...

This chart from BuzzSumo & Mantis Research asked marketers to answer the question, **"What types of content do you produce from original research?"**



Let's go through a couple of content format ideas that lend themselves to research:

Webinars and Presentations



Source: [Edison Research / Triton Digital](#)

Webinars and presentations are a natural fit. Once you've got a piece of exclusive research that no one else has, people who run webinars like *The Brand Publishing Masterclass*, for example, will be extremely interested in having you on to present your findings to their audience.

Also, webinars are great for lead generation, because often you can get exposure to wider audiences.

Podcasts

Same with podcasts. If you have interesting findings to share, high-profile podcast hosts will be very interested in having you on to share those findings with their audiences. This is **why you want to spend a lot of time on topic selection**, so that your industry colleagues will see immediate value in your data!



Brand Newsroom 108: Michele Linn on the 2017 CMI B2B Trends Report

It's out! The Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs B2B "Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends Report" for 2017 has landed. CMI vice president Michele Linn joined the team to discuss the annual snapshot of the state of business-to-business content marketing in the North American market.

[Source: Lush Digital](#)

Video of High-Level Findings

A video of your high-level findings is somewhat intuitive, but you can also do a **video series**. I've seen great one-to-two-minute snippet series, stretched out over a couple of months, with one short (60 second) video for each data point and its implications.







[Source: National Restaurant Association](#)

Video Series Digging Into Findings

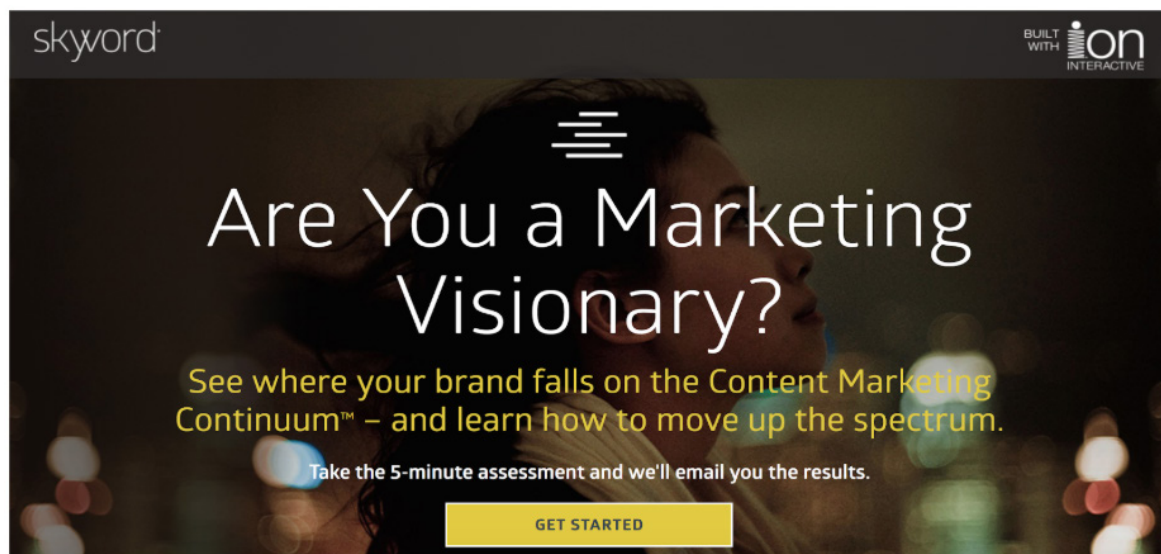
2018 Edelman Trust Barometer [PLAY ALL](#)

The 2018 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER reveals a world of seemingly stagnant distrust. Edelman executives share insights from this year's research. For more information, visit

 1:46	 1:11	 1:39	 1:12
Richard Edelman on the Battle for Truth Edelman 5.2K views • 1 month ago	Tonia Ries on a Polarization of Trust Edelman 934 views • 1 month ago	Ben Boyd on Trust Shifts Worth Watching Edelman 793 views • 1 month ago	Stephen Kehoe on How Business Can Lead Edelman 732 views • 1 month ago

[Source: Edelman](#)

Online Assessment

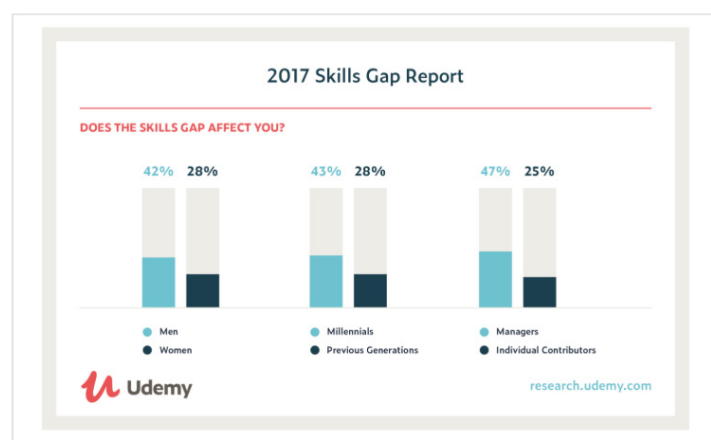


[Source: Skyword](#)

Assessments are quizzes you can take online. The well-designed ones go viral because people feel like they're finding out more about who they are. You can construct self-guided assessments so that people can see how they stack up compared to the rest of your data -- and you can offer customized feedback based on how someone responds.

Infographic

I would also recommend you put some significant time and thought into one master infographic (quality over quantity here) that shows your exclusive data in an easy-to-understand visual reference. One extremely well-built graphic will collect more backlinks for you than ten mediocre ones.



[Source: Udemy](#)

For More Information



PowerPost Masterclass Presenter: Michele Linn, Mantis Research

Facebook: [Mantis Research](#)

Twitter: [@MantisResearch](#)

LinkedIn: [Michele Linn](#)

Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/original-research-create-years-worth-content-one-survey>

Intelligent Content *MUST* #7

Your Content *MUST* Increasingly Leverage AI To Keep Ahead Of The Pack



“We are on the cusp of having AI-driven content tools that will do some amazing things, particularly with natural language process. We have to train ourselves to look in constantly on the latest developments in AI for content.”

Chris Penn, Trust Insights

Chris Penn is one of the smartest people I've ever talked to. His Masterclass gives us an incredibly detailed peek into what AI is going to offer content marketers.

There are already some very interesting AI applications for content marketing. The Content Intelligence tools within PowerPost, for example, leverage Machine Learning in order to analyze social sharing attributes like velocity and virality.

But the really cool content AI applications (like AI engines that can write articles as a human would), while getting nearer everyday are not quite mature yet. As content marketers, we have to train ourselves to keep checking on developments in this space. They'll start popping up, little by little, either within established SaaS platforms or as entirely new applications.

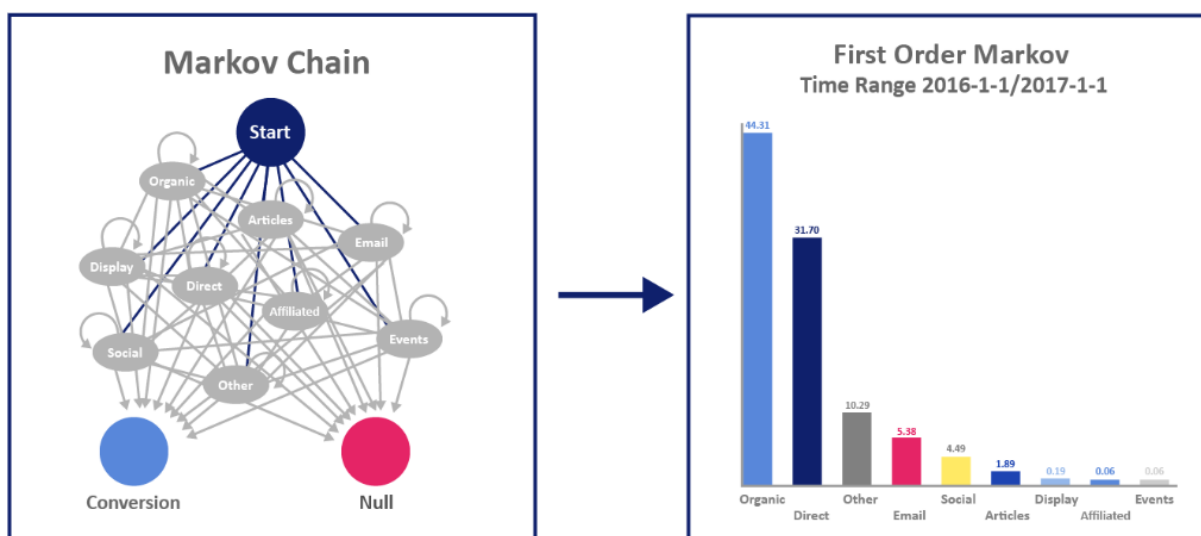
At its core, AI and machine learning can break down the enormous volume of content that's out there, and analyze it in new and different ways. It will provide us with understandings of behavior, connections and preferences that humans can't possibly analyze today.

Here are four AI application areas to keep a good eye on, coming soon to a content platform near you.

Attribution

Source attribution, for things like lead generation and online purchases, is thankfully about to get much more straightforward.

AI Applications for Content: Attribution



Have you ever been asked, as I have, “How much money did that blog post earn for the company?”

How do you answer that? When you try and trace purchases and conversions back to individual pieces of content, it's nearly impossible. The trail tends to look something like the diagram on the left.

Customers, particularly in high-consideration scenarios, need to interact with your brand [many times, in many ways](#), before they purchase. People follow circuitous routes through their journey. First, they read this piece of content over here, then come back via organic search a few days later. Then they switch devices, and by the time they've converted, you've lost complete track of their path.

And that's just dealing with digital traffic. How are you going to share the credit for that conversion if it's helped out by an offline touchpoint like a trade booth visit?

One of the things that AI can do is clean all that up.

Companies like [Bright Funnel](#) use Machine Learning to give their customers a much more meaningful attribution picture, like the diagram on the right. Their AI modeling can better illustrate the value of the different traffic channels, and help you understand the relative importance of other factors like client role, time decay, and deal stage.

Chris would also want me to mention that the techniques used by companies like Bright Funnel are openly accessible to anyone. In his presentation, he emphatically encouraged people to pick up [the open source statistical software R](#) and play around with these techniques on one's own. The attribution modeling in the above figure for example, use a technique called Markov Chain Monte Carlo, which, though I haven't tried it myself, Chris tells me is easy to implement in R (it might be easier for him than for me).

Connection

AI can drive a better analysis of the nature of groupings within a network.

AI Applications for Content: Connection

Many of us have seen maps that look like this diagram below. Network maps like this show who everybody is linked to, using social media data for example.



Now what happens when you want to analyze not just connectedness, but **how that connectedness relates to the topics those people are posting about?** Up until recently this would have been impossible, but with machine learning techniques, we can start to see charts like this one:

This graph shows a network analysis of the Brexit debate using data from Instagram. Analysis like this can show you segments or clusters of a network not just by who is following whom, but by **the nature of what they're saying.**

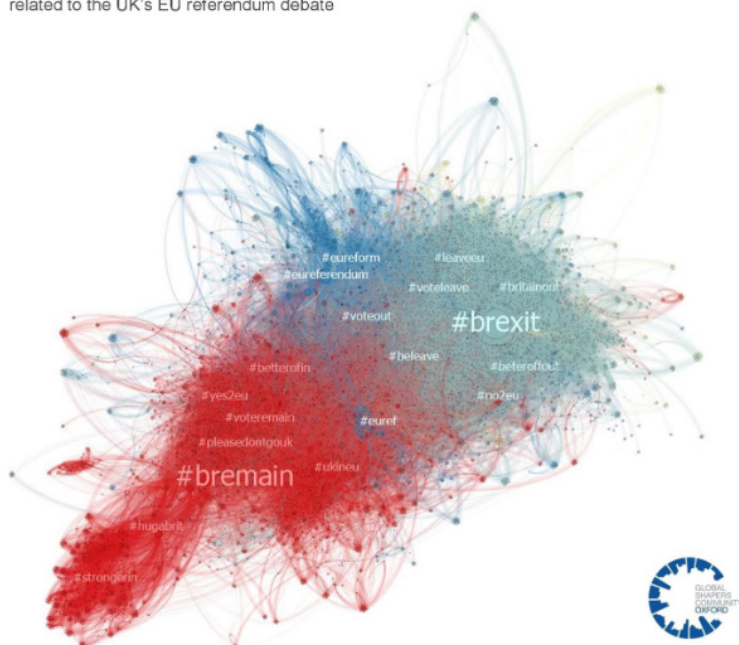
Now imagine being able see this kind of information about how your brand was being talked about on social media. You would be able to step back from the individual, case-by-case brand mentions popping up in your social listening software, and actually understand your social audience **as clusters of opinions.**

AI-driven network analysis like this gives us a much better idea of social segmentation, of sentiment, and of who is actually an influencer versus who merely sells themselves as one.

The EU referendum debate in the UK

Mapping polarization on social media

Semantic network analysis of 13,310 co-occurring hashtags on Instagram related to the UK's EU referendum debate



Source: Data visualisation and analysis provided by Vyacheslav Polonski, a Global Shaper from the Oxford Hub

Understanding

Social media contains trillions and trillions of data points about your target market, from their posts, their pictures, their conversations...

If only there was a way to harness all that information so you could **truly understand the mental state of your customer.**

AI Applications for Content: Understanding



[Source: Crimson Hexagon](#)

Earlier in Adele Revella's chapter on buyer personas, we mentioned that the best way to get persona information for high-consideration purchases was to get it through interviews. That's currently true, but persona interviews all have a major flaw: by and large, human beings are terrible at reporting their decision rationales. [Research suggests](#) that people tend to rationalize their choices after the fact, and convince themselves that they made a rational decision.

Machine Learning systems can now bypass the bias factor by analyzing enormous amounts of their user-generated content. One can now understand their target market **measurably better than they can even understand themselves.**

Crimson Hexagon uses [AI-powered Audience Analysis](#) to deliver this kind of understanding for its clients. This insight allowed one of its clients, Fender Guitar, to [create content based directly on its audience's preferences](#), rather than the kind of loose approximation that a persona would have delivered.

Prediction and Hyper-Personalization

In the last few years, we've seen content recommendation engines (think Netflix and YouTube) get much smarter, and content delivery become much more customized (e.g. Hubspot, Marketo) based on AI-driven audience segmentation.

Before Machine Learning, we were able to customize experiences in a very manual, laborious way based on segment categories. By contrast, the next generation of content delivery will be completely dynamic, building content experience in real time based on AI-driven personalization and the ability to predict the needs of the viewer.

[Narrative Science](#), for example, is a leader in AI-driven dynamically-written content. Their algorithm is already so good, that it's currently used to write play-by-play articles from data feeds (e.g. baseball game recaps, stock price movement, etc.). To give you an idea of their skill, [here's a sample article](#) that their program produced **all the way back in 2011!**

You could be using AI-driven prediction **right now**, to anticipate the dates that certain topics would be the most popular, and then build your editorial calendar around those predictions!

This is a predictive analysis that Chris showed during his Masterclass. It uses Google's search result information to predict when in the future a certain key phrase will be at its most popular. This can help you create an editorial calendar than **actually anticipates future trending searches**.

AI Applications for Content: Prediction

Campaign Forecast

Week of Ds	Marketing Courses	Media Training	Pre-Courses	Group Pre-Training	PR Courses	Social Media Courses	Social Media Training
April 8, 2018	76.93			52.48		56.08	55.21
April 15, 2018	62.67						56.63
April 22, 2018	56.67	64.20					60.25
April 29, 2018	56.99	77.68					59.96
May 6, 2018	55.45	70.03			62.00		53.95
May 13, 2018	50.78						
May 20, 2018	50.03						
May 27, 2018	56.92						59.80
June 3, 2018	63.86	56.83					71.60
June 10, 2018	58.21	76.60					75.25
June 17, 2018		75.22					68.38
June 24, 2018		57.99					57.91
July 15, 2018	61.76	62.76					
July 22, 2018	63.31	78.87				57.90	
July 29, 2018	53.69	85.38				63.43	58.83
August 5, 2018		80.93				60.57	74.46
August 12, 2018		71.89				57.91	82.54
August 19, 2018	54.78	64.05				58.96	74.56
August 26, 2018	58.00	60.66			54.63	58.94	59.79
September 2, 2018	57.63	63.20			57.40	53.79	52.88
September 9, 2018	59.20	70.03		54.43			59.24
September 16, 2018	65.09	74.88					73.82
September 23, 2018	71.25	71.66				55.13	83.03
September 30, 2018	73.62	63.44				60.82	79.07
October 7, 2018	75.35	60.12		56.64		59.99	70.86
October 14, 2018	81.75	67.49		58.80		59.28	69.17
October 21, 2018	89.44	80.27				68.82	73.97
October 28, 2018	85.45	83.36				87.09	76.19

Source: Chris Penn, BrainTrust Insights

Predictive analytics have all kinds of applications, from product rotation to seasonality analysis. This is the power of knowing ahead of time the exact periods in which certain content topics will be at their highest demand.

For More Information



PowerPost Masterclass Presenter: Chris Penn, Trust Insights

Facebook: [Trust Insights](#)

Twitter: [@TrustInsights](#)

LinkedIn: [Trust Insights](#)

Original Video Archive:

<https://www.powerpost.digital/insights/advanced-content-data-mining-unlock-hidden-insights-customers-content-using-machine-learning>

Conclusion: The Enemy is “Meh”

I hope that this turns out to be a valuable reference tool for you.

I encourage you to refer back to different sections and to explore some of these *Masterclass* presenters. These are the absolute best, most interesting, most powerful techniques and strategies coming from a year of hosting true content experts.

PowerPost’s mission is to turn brands into powerful content publishers.

PowerPost couples an **AI-driven content intelligence and creation technology** together with a team of **highly skilled brand journalists**, in order to help our clients produce this kind of long-form, authoritative, truly intelligent content we’ve discussed.

In the days to come, our content program execution will become more challenging, as other competitors and industry players fill the space. Our content will have to fire on all cylinders in order to stand out.

The lessons of *The Brand Publishing Masterclass* can be summed in one sentence:

“The enemy is ‘meh’.”

“Meh” content, content that looks the same as your competitors’ content, with only a vague idea of whom it’s for, what questions it answers, and what authoritative stance it’s trying to take, **is a total waste**. Once it’s published, it disappears down Orwell’s Memory Hole, never to be seen again.

Your content has to work hard today, and will have to work even harder tomorrow. Use the wisdom of these wonderful instructors to target your content with laser precision. Create wonderful, authoritative, originally researched material of unquestionable value.

PowerPost is here to help when you need us!

We’d love to provide your organization with a content consultation and free demo of the PowerPost software.

**Contact: Amelia Kaderabek • 312 809 0838
sales@powerpost.digital**

