

ACCELERATE!

**MOVE YOUR BUSINESS FORWARD THROUGH
THE CONVERGENCE OF
SEARCH, SOCIAL & CONTENT MARKETING**

ARNIE KUENN

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mom and dad. If you have ever met them, you know why.

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This will be filled with cliches just like every other book on the market. But, now I know why. An author’s name goes on the cover, the author gets the credit for the book, and the author gets all the attention. But I now realize it takes a team to get a book published. Below is that team, and I sure hope I haven’t forgotten anyone.

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follow up questions, and helped create the graphics used throughout the book. So thank you **James Constable**, **Ardala Evans**, **Abby Gilmore**, **David Gould**, **Kristi Hines**, **Ann-Marie Jancovich**, **Michael Schwartz**, **Kaila Strong**, and **Krys VanSlyke**.

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FORWARD

You see that gravestone? It reads “information intermediary.” For decades, we’ve relied upon middle-men in the guise of media to carry messages from our companies to our customers. We’ve created “news” and handed it off, hoping that the all-powerful press would find enough worth in our scribbling to tweak and redistribute it to the masses.

That era is over.

The first nail in the coffin was in 1997, when Timothy McVey confessed to the bombings in Oklahoma City. That day, the Dallas Morning News became the first newspaper to ever “scoop itself” and run breaking news on its website instead of holding it for the next day’s print edition. In geologic – or Joan Rivers terms – fourteen years isn’t that long. But to even conceive of an era when media ALWAYS and PURPOSEFULLY held back news so that they could print it on dead trees the next day? It seems positively Amish to modern sensibilities.

The speed and searchability advantages of online content has made information intermediaries superfluous. They are exacerbated by the fact that the business model to support these middle-men evaporated faster than a puddle of sweat in July in Phoenix. The Paper Cuts blog tracks layoffs in the newspaper business. It’s a somewhat grisly, yet fascinating reflection of the times. Just since 2007, the site has documented more than 35,000 layoffs at newspapers in the United States.

Yet during the same period, any objective examination would find that instead of news become more scarce due to the decimation of the newspaper industry

(and times have been tough for magazine, radio, and TV too), that conversely the quantity of content has soared. We are surrounded by more content, in more formats, from more publishers than ever before in human history.

And that's because of two inexorable trends that make the book you are holding incredibly important.

- First, every customer is a potential reporter.
- Second, every company must become its own TV station, radio station, magazine, and newspaper.

What's incredibly exciting about these trends is that they create a new breed of winners. Content marketing is a meritocracy. You don't have to be the biggest company in your industry to create relevant, compelling content that creates new customers and breeds loyalty among existing customers. In fact, most of the content marketing case studies in this book are about companies of modest size and means who didn't win with budget, but rather with craftiness, strategy, and understanding what types of content resonate with people. You can do that too.

The first step in being a successful content marketer – in being your own TV station, radio station, magazine, and newspaper – is recognizing that you actually have something valid to say. It's all too common for company owners and managers to overlook the incredibly compelling stories contained within the walls of their organizations. You get so close to the forest, you don't see the trees. If I had a dollar for every time a Marketing Director told me, "customers don't want to know *how* we make that; it's boring," I would be writing this foreword from a villa on Aruba.

Recognize that the story you believe to be banal is actually fascinating to some people. Okay, maybe not *everyone*. It's not like you're Lady Gaga. But to your customers and prospects, the stories of your company and its customers are important, and compelling, and interesting, and useful. The key psychological leap in content marketing effectiveness is to not be so darn modest. There's no such thing as boring companies, only boring people.

The second key to content marketing effectiveness is to remove the fear. And that's where this book is flat-out amazing. By offering a definable process – a chain – Arnie gives you the day-to-day playbook you need to

create and optimize your stories effectively. As you'll soon learn, content marketing isn't necessarily hard, but it can be complicated. And that's why this book is so indispensable. It shows you precisely where, when, why, and how to create and merchandise content, measure the results, and improve your results over the long haul.

The big advantage of this book is that it recognizes that content is just one leg of a three-legged stool that includes search and social. You can make all the content you want, but if nobody can find or share it, you're spitting into the wind. Content marketing isn't just about telling your stories (although without that, you have no chance at success). It's actually about telling your stories, making them findable, and ensuring that the people that consume your content want to tell others about how awesome it is.

This is the magic triangle of content marketing. This book is all about that triangle.

Prepare to be amazed.

Jay Baer, Co-Author of The NOW Revolution: 7 Shifts to Make Your Business Faster, Smarter, and More Social. Creator of the Convince & Convert social media blog

INTRODUCTION

I know a little bit about you. You understand that the world of marketing has been radically changing in the last few years to a new kind of marketing. There's been a growing shift to something called content marketing. You want to engage this phenomenon. You've done some homework, maybe read up on the subject or attended seminars – but you're still looking for more, that one key that will finally unlock the secrets of this new approach to marketing.

You've heard that today less money is being spent on traditional advertising – print, television, etc., because marketers are moving their money online. But when asked what online marketing means, you might think like many people, “Advertise on Google. Get display ads up!” But that's not it. The companies that are succeeding right now are the ones creating *content* that engages their customers and brings in the business. Content marketing is in the very beginning stages and still evolving. The truth is that, to some extent, everyone in this industry is trying to figure out the best approach, even the experts. This can make creating your own content strategy a confusing endeavor. That's where this book comes in.

Many marketing books present themselves like the consultant who comes in and says, “Here's the strategy you need, but I don't implement. I don't actually *do* it. That's for you to figure out.” But if you're going to be successful, you need to understand *how* to create and promote compelling content that brings in the customers – not just that you *need* to.

People like you pay thousands of dollars to hear people like me speak for 45 minutes at conferences about what it means to create that awesome

content. We put up 15 or 20 slides and tell you what you should be doing and get you psyched about the possibilities. So, you walk away from the conference excited, ready to implement. Then you get back to your office.

Now you're staring at your screen, saying to yourself, "Where do I start? I thought I took notes. I have the slides, but how do I get going?"

Then you start thinking about how the speakers cited examples of Ford Motor Company doing this, or Microsoft doing that, and now you start to tell yourself, "Sure, they have a \$10 million budget, but I'm a twelve-person company with a \$40,000 budget." So you give up; thinking it just can't be done without a big budget and substantial resources. Well let me assure you that companies like yours and mine are creating effective and compelling content – and they're doing this successfully, without big budgets. To prove my point, I am going to give you a few examples of small businesses that became big businesses through online content marketing.

I want this book to be the one you have on your desk that says *here's how you do it*. What I'm offering is a little different from what's out there, and I think it's what you need. You need to understand that a content marketing strategy is a *chain*, so to speak, and the links in the chain are each critical to its strength.

The links in the chain are:

- Strategy
- Research
- Content Creation
- Optimization
- Promotion
- Distribution
- Link Building
- Measurement

Each link is important but can only work when your strategy nurtures all of them. Think of a bicycle chain: When the chain is working your effort

translates to acceleration! Break the chain and you're going nowhere—your content marketing strategy falls apart.

Look, if you own a website, you're a publisher. Period. And we all know what happens when a publisher stops publishing. As they say in publishing, content is king. A strong content strategy requires that you know how to develop, promote, and distribute your material. You need to find ways to get great content happening – and keep it happening, over and over again.

My book aims to give you a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to execute a successful content marketing strategy – no matter how big or small your organization might be. Any one of the chapters in this book could be books unto themselves, but rather than write a multi-volume encyclopedia on the subject, I want to give you a portable field guide for your marketing strategy. Saying it another way, this will be a playbook for getting it done.

My goal is to provide a book that can be there for you when you're brainstorming for your next piece of content, when you are getting ready to upload that content, and when you are ready to promote it. I want to keep you excited. I want to help keep the ideas coming. In our company, Vertical Measures, we do this for a living. And since you're now a publisher in the new world of marketing, you need to do this for a living, too.

The good news is you can, both easily and effectively. Let's make it happen.



The Shift to Content Marketing - Understand What's Happening Online

“The number of Internet users surpassed 2 billion in 2010. That’s 30 percent of the world’s population. And a good portion of them are creating content, adding to the already gigantic deluge of information that can be found online. To make sense of the billions of documents and media that can be found, search engines have diligently served as our guide to relevant content. To that end, Google alone handles 88 billion queries per month — more than all other search engines combined.

However, the richness of signals from the social web, sites like Facebook and Twitter, are too powerful to ignore. Social behaviors are gaining increasing influence on the search experience. As consumer information discovery, consumption, and sharing behaviors change, so must social Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and content marketing.

Consumers expect more than the right answers in the search results. They expect to interact with what they find. As the Internet and social web evolve and grow, so must marketers evolve their content marketing strategy. The question is, “Are you ready?”

Lee Odden, CEO, TopRank Online Marketing,
TopRankMarketing.com, TopRankBlog.com

As Lee points out in the introduction to this chapter, nearly 2 billion people worldwide are online. When they want a product or service, they don't pick up a phone book. They go to the Internet and search via search engines or social sites because these methods promise fast results and relevant content — and generally deliver on that promise. It's the foremost way that people get their information, whether it's information on a product or service or if it's to find out more about their industry or current events. You name it, people are looking for it.

But you know this already, right? I think it's a good idea to revisit briefly the phenomenon of what's really happening online because we tend to take for granted that the Internet is part of our culture now. And when we take this phenomenon for granted, we tend to miss two important things:

1. The excitement that comes with being at the forefront of technology.
2. The fact that this is new to all of us, and *everyone* is trying to figure it out.

To some extent we have every right to take the Internet for granted because it's so embedded in our lives. But if you think about it, the Internet has a relatively short history compared to the radical impact it has had on us, and we're still in the infancy of this technology. The human race has not yet fully realized the potential of this kind of connectivity. The growth curve for Internet use continues to be sharp, even today; the percentage of people online worldwide increased 18 percent from 2008 to 2009. Driven in large part by the ability of the Internet to deliver more content at faster and faster rates for lower and lower costs, this explosive change to Internet usage has led to a massive cultural change.

Not only are new users figuring this out and getting on board, but as technologies change seasoned users need to adapt. Take, for example, blogging. In effect, a blog is nothing more than an opinion column democratized so that anyone can have one. Blogging began to take off around 2004. Today, with an estimated 180 million or more active blogs on the Internet, it's a major source of shared information. Blogging has redefined how we understand our contemporary life, so much so that major cultural events (on or offline) are measured in part by their effect on the blogosphere. Take the Egyptian Revolution¹ in early 2011 for example, much of it was credited to the use social of media.

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Egyptian_revolution

With the customer's attention shifting online, so has the focus of marketers, and it has required new marketing strategies as we begin to understand how users interact with the Internet and how the Internet works for users.

Simply put, web users are consumers of content. Therefore, you need to deliver compelling content that will engage your customers and keep them coming back for more. People are calling this "The New Marketing." Most significantly, web users are *searching* for content to consume. This is key for any business's relevance and branding. In fact, Vanessa Fox in her book *Marketing in the Age of Google* emphasizes, "Those businesses that don't realize that we've experienced a shift in consumer behavior and that customers and customer data are now centered on search will lose market share to those that do" (30²). Fortunately, it isn't too late to get on board. You haven't missed the boat, but you don't have the luxury of *waiting* to build a content marketing strategy, either. To put it a bit more bluntly, in the words of Brian Solis, you need to "Engage or Die!" (*Engage, xiii*³)

People spend their time online, and that's where your marketing strategy needs to go. Your potential customers are online for a variety of reasons. The public relations firm Ruder Finn conducted a survey asking, why, exactly, do people go online? They categorized their results into the following seven reasons people use the Internet, descending from most common reason to least common:

- To Learn (self-education, for research, to keep informed)
- To Have Fun (to pass time, to be entertained, to escape)
- To Socialize (to connect, to share, to discuss, to be part of a community)
- To Express Yourself (to opine, to entertain others, to emote, to be creative)
- To Advocate (to influence others, to activate support, to join a cause)
- To Do Business (to work, to manage finances, to sell)
- To Shop (to purchase, to compare)

The survey found a key demographic: "More than twice as many people go online to socialize (82 percent) than to do business (39 percent) or to shop (31 percent)⁴." Surprised? Here's the thing: The shift to reaching out to

2 Vanessa Fox, *Marketing in the Age of Google*,

3 Brian Solis, *Engage or Die*

4 <http://www.intentindex.com>

customers while they're using the Internet means that you have to engage them in what *they're doing* online. From the list above, it's evident that the critical mass for your content strategy will center on the top three reasons people are online: to learn, to have fun, and to socialize.

You may want them to shop on your site, for example, but you connect with them by providing some form of entertaining content that leads them to your site. Users *want* to engage with the content they find; that is, they *want* to stay on the page and interact with it. If the content doesn't engage them, they move on, or bounce, and continue searching.

Your Clients Are Searchers

Internet users are content consumers. They rely on search engines and social sites to meet their needs quickly and efficiently. It has been determined that people are less likely to type a web address into their browser's address bar but instead will search for it with Google or Bing. In this way, the act of searching is the point of entry to the Internet for a user's session. Therefore, this is also where your marketing needs to start. It's critical that your pages rank high in search because you need to be available to them right away, at the moment their session begins. Think about it: When your potential customer searches online, there are only two possible outcomes – either they find *you* or they find your *competitor*.⁵

When we talk about surfing the web, think of the search engine as the surfboard. The goal of the surfer is to catch a great wave and ride it out, cutting and diving as it curls, mastering the power of the wave. If a surf run ends with a wipeout, the surfer will get back on the board and paddle out to the next wave. The same can be said for Internet users. The search engine is like the board that brings the surfer to the wave – it's the primary tool whereby users express what their interest is in the form of a query, and the search engine finds relevant content to meet that request. The wave is like the content they find. Internet users want to be engaged with the pages that the query brings back. A good run keeps the surfer moving through the wave, and the same is true of good content. If the content that the search engine brings back isn't relevant, or isn't engaging, the users will bounce, going back to their query to look at other results or refining the search.

5 Kristina Halvorson presentation

As you develop your marketing strategy, it is crucial that you understand this dynamic, which is composed of two key factors:

- Searcher's intent, or how people search
- The goal of search engines and how they work

How People Search

First, let's get to know your searcher. Internet users are impatient, but this shouldn't surprise you. They want the best results with the least amount of effort. Searchers don't spend time wading through pages of results after their query. In fact, people tend to not go past the first page at all. The search population has largely caught on to how Google works and users are more comfortable refining their search rather than going through pages and pages of less and less relevant results.

The simple definition of a search, or query, is a request articulated in the form of a short keyword phrase, generally no longer than three words, entered into a search engine. A query is driven by the searcher's need for something that they believe can be found on the Internet. Since there is a massive amount of "stuff" on the Internet, there are, consequently, a number of ways that we could classify the kinds of searches people perform. A very useful classification comes from Andrei Broder's seminal essay, "A Taxonomy of Web Search,"⁶ which has become the industry standard. In his essay, he presents three kinds of basic web searches:

- **Navigational:** These are queries that have a specific, targeted intent. Users expect the search engine to go straight to a specific site on the Internet "either because they visited it in the past or because they assume that such a site exists." An example could be searching for "ford.com" when the searcher wants the home page for Ford Motor Co. The searcher could enter "Ford Cars" for the same reason and would click on the same result because the intent was the same – to go directly to Ford's main web page and begin exploring Ford from there. Generally, there is only one result that the searcher expects. Another example would be, for instance, a searcher who is aware of a breaking news item that her local broadcast station, KPNX Phoenix,

6 Andrei Broder, A Taxonomy of Web Search

is covering. She searches for her local station in the search engine. The results might include the home page for the news station, but it might also display a link straight to the breaking news item. She navigates directly to the breaking news item; though it was not exactly a place she had been before, it was specifically her intent to go there when she approached the search engine.

- **Informational** (also commonly called Research): These queries are about information retrieval, and when the typical searcher thinks of what a search engine “does” for them, this is the kind of query that comes to mind. Informational queries cover a broad range of query types, and can include searches for specific places, like “Washington, DC”, or facts, such as “when was the French Revolution.” Informational searches can also include product reviews and comparisons, where the searcher might enter “golf club” to compare types of new golf clubs on the market. This search might lead users not only to articles on the subject but also to vendors selling the product or local stores where golfers could test some of the brands they are considering. As the user conducts pre-purchase research, all of these results would be useful.
- **Transactional:** Here, the searcher is looking for a site on the Internet where further interaction will happen; that is, the searcher wants to shop for clothes, download music, or view a video. This is a kind of search similar to the informational type, but the distinction is the searcher’s intent. The searcher expects a specific transaction to occur as a result of the query and is less willing to explore alternative options. If, for example, the searcher wants to see a video clip of the running of the bulls in Pamplona, the searcher would not be satisfied by getting results for photo images or links to purchase Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. The intent was to have a transaction with a video.

In all cases, a user enters the query with some degree of knowledge of his or her own intent for performing the query, as well as some expectation of the kind of content that will satisfy the request, whether or not this can be articulated at the outset. In fact, particularly with informational searches (less so with navigational), a searcher’s intent may have been so general that the results that come up actually hone in the searcher’s intent by suggesting *more relevant* results than the searcher anticipated. Here’s an example. A searcher performs a query in Google using the keywords “Charlie Chaplin”

because she’s curious to know more about the actor. In the results, she finds a number of useful biography sites, including charliechaplin.com, but also on the results page are images of Charlie Chaplin and YouTube videos of some of his performances. All of these results are relevant because they compose aspects of his life and because other searches for these keywords have resulted in clicks for these types of content. She may not have intended to click an image of the actor at the outset, but she may find what she sees interesting enough to first click on an image and engage the content that she finds there, rather than click on a text link.

Andrei Broder’s essay was written before the real advent of social media, but if social media had been around, he would have certainly included search within social media. It’s a newer phenomenon, and right now, it’s a technique used by more savvy users. But with the explosion of social media, the general Internet user is gaining more savvy. In fact, Twitter – one of the big five social media sites – has been getting search activity that exceeds that of Bing and Yahoo! combined (as of April, 2010). This means that you seriously need to understand how search works in that arena so that you can be found there.

Search in social sites is performed somewhat differently than through a search engine. The search is somewhat informational in nature, but rather than seeking information across the Internet, the user is looking for results that are specific to the social media being searched. This can be incredibly useful for a searcher and can lead to adding the social entity to the feed list, incorporating updates beyond the original search. For example, assume you want to know about the upcoming concert schedule for the Dave Matthews Band, and you’re hoping you can land some tickets when the tour dates are announced and sales begin. You are logged into Facebook, so you quickly search for the band’s profile, you indicate you “like” it, and you start to follow the band’s updates. Suddenly, you’re getting content directed to you from the band. The same can be done for Twitter, but in that case you can search topically for what people are “tweeting” and join their conversations by following them.

The end result of any search is essentially the same from the searcher’s perspective. Regardless of the kind of search they perform, searchers expect their search to end with relevant, engaging content. If the searcher lands on a page and does

not find relevant, engaging content, he will leave and revise the search. Searchers don't stick around. This holds true for search engines and social media alike.

Our clients often ask us, "What is content, exactly?" We're always glad to hear them ask this question because it means they're starting to think like a publisher. Content is not just text, despite the knee-jerk definition people want to give it. Content is any multimedia experience that engages the user, enabling him or her to interact with it. If users stay and interact with your media – if it holds their attention – then they're engaged.

There are a ton of content possibilities that you can use to engage your audience, including video, infographics, audio files, and photos. A quick laundry list of text-based content shows there's also a wide range of other possibilities, such as technical papers, news articles, blog posts, and top-10 lists. Later in this book we'll get down to the nitty gritty with your options. I've got a list of content ideas that will make you a content-producing champ!

In the meantime, as you work your way through the book, remember: Content is simply anything that can be produced on the Internet for human interaction. *Engaging content matters enough to the user to cause him to stay and experience it.* So that's where your content needs to begin.

The Search Engines Have a Goal

The mission of any search engine – particularly Google, the giant in this arena – is to find the best and most relevant content for a person's search term. Here is Google's stated philosophy: "The perfect search engine would understand exactly what you mean and give you back exactly what you want." This is a pretty high bar, but it's exactly what every search engine tries to do because that's what users demand. The competition among search engines is driven by the results they can bring back.

In order to provide search results, search engines need to know first what content is available on the Internet. So, programs were developed to trawl the web with the goal of reading every page. These programs, called web bots, web crawlers, or spiders, actively read and analyze the content across the Internet and store it for retrieval in queries. As part of their cataloguing, bots measure the updating activity that occurs on a site, which affects the

frequency at which it will return to read each site to look for new content. For example, bots check CNN.com almost continuously because the content is always updating, and generally users want the latest headlines and breaking news. On the other hand, the bot might read the website for, say, Todd's Garage and see that nothing has changed, so it will check back a week later and see that still nothing has changed, and again check back a month after that. The frequency of attention from the bots reduces as the website remains stagnant. To a search engine, this can be a signal that the pages are less relevant.

When bots read a page, they look for certain information on the page in order to understand it. In a way, bots read the text content on the page just as a human would. Page headers, or H1 Tags, and the page's text content are major sources of keyword matchups. Just as humans do, bots (and the subsequent algorithm processing the data) seem to pay attention to bolded words within the text content. The title tag at the top of the page is actually a tool for the human user (this is what clues you into the page when you are juggling a number of tabbed pages in your browser, or when your pages are minimized on your computer desktop), but bots also take advantage of it, deriving from this information that you want this page to be known at a glance as being about this information.



Figure 1: Site Pro PPC Optimized Webpage

Since the bot and algorithm is a computer program and not a human, it also looks at the page in a different way than humans. Algorithms pay

attention to the URL page name, which human users care little or nothing about. To the algorithm, however, this information defines the page from an organizational standpoint and can indicate how the webmaster views the page's meaning. Keywords in URLs help the algorithm identify keyword relevance. Unlike humans, bots can't *see* images, so the title and the metadata that describe images are critical to a bot "knowing" that the image has keyword relevance (though in the near future users will probably be able to search by image, rather than by image metadata). This is true for video as well. In the background of your web page is metadata about the page itself, which is yet another way that the bot can determine content.

Using all of these clues, bots are able to gather a huge amount of information about a piece of content and determine its relevance to search. Therefore, this is the playing field when you are developing your own content. As we get into Search Engine Optimization (SEO) later in the book, we'll consider different methods to optimize the ways that bots look at your web page and help them understand how you *want* to be relevant.

Relevance and Ranking in the Search Results

From a short keyword query, a search engine's job is to determine the searcher's intent – what kind of search is being performed? Is the searcher performing an informational search? Or is the searcher shopping for a product? What kind of result does the searcher want to get back? The search engine then must compare all the available content on the Internet to the query and produce a set of results that are relevant to the query, ranked in descending order of relevance. All this gets accomplished within a fraction of a second, something that continues to amaze me.

Obviously, the Google algorithm (as with any other search engine algorithm) is proprietary, so we can't know *exactly* how it works, but we can see it in operation and make some very good assumptions about what it does. Because a keyword phrase is not a standalone indication of specific meaning, search engines need to use other means for making a determination of meaning so that they can determine relevance. Effectively, the philosophy for determining relevance within a query is based on these premises:

- People will not spend time with irrelevant content. They will stay and engage, or they will bounce.

- People tend to search for the same kinds of things, but people are individuals, too.
- People will share relevant content with one another by linking their content to other relevant content.

As I've mentioned, you want to engage your audience with every piece of content that you produce. Not only is this imperative for the user's experience with your product, but Google records each search session as part of its algorithm for determining relevance. This has become increasingly important, as implied by the Google Panda update in February of 2011. By recording sessions and analyzing the rate of bounce or engagement by page, Google can derive the relevance of that page for the average searcher relative to that particular keyword query. Sites that have high rates of bounce might be ranked lower in the result set. Conversely, sites that have high rates of engagement will be ranked higher in the result set.

As part of this analysis, Google offers keyword suggestions in the search tool when a searcher begins entering a keyword. Based on popular searches, Google suggests popular keyword combinations that relate to the keyword the searcher is currently entering. By offering this kind of help, searchers can have their query refined without having to spend time refining it themselves.

Bounce rate alone as the determiner of page relevance would only work if all people intended to find the same kinds of content when they performed a particular keyword search. It goes without saying that this is not the case. After all, people are individuals. So, to help tailor results to particular users, Google records *individual* user sessions, thereby attempting to identify trends in individual search activity. An individual can have a Google account – and in this case, Google has a larger set of information about the searcher whenever he or she is logged into the account – but Google also records individuals who are not logged in. A particular user's day-to-day activity will inform Google of that person's interests and will influence the result set.

Ultimately, Google concluded that linking from one web page to another is a particularly good way to determine relevance because content that is getting links pointing to it has been evaluated by a human and determined to be of human value. Thus, links to content should represent relevance and act as a sort of voting mechanism. Google has become the dominant search engine

because its engineers figured out this liking scheme before anybody else. Yahoo ranked websites differently, and with the arrival of Google people moved away from Yahoo because they felt that Yahoo's results could be unreliable.

The downside to linking is that marketers quickly figured out this scheme and began to develop link farms and other tactics, where links could be acquired wholesale in an effort to increase a site's rankings. Google constantly adapts its algorithm to penalize link farms and other paid-link approaches. The algorithm attempts to identify the *quality* of links as it indexes pages.

Links to a page and search activity help comprise a page's value when determining relevance, counting as "votes" for the page. The more votes for a page, the higher it will rank against competing pages. One of the goals for your content strategy is to increase the votes for your pages so that they will be the most relevant and engaging content for your target search terms.

As mentioned earlier, Google rolled out in 2011 one of its most significant algorithm updates in years, named Panda for one of the engineers on the project. The focus of the update was to penalize or remove low-quality content from the search results. According to Google, this impacted almost 12 percent of all search queries. That is huge. Millions of low-quality pages that used to be found on page one of Google searches are now nowhere to be found. Google has since stated that low-quality pages on a site can even cause the rankings for the entire site to decline, even the high-quality pages. The message from Google is loud and clear: Quality content just became king again.

Understanding the Search Engine Results Page

Let's take a look at the Google Search Engine Results Page (SERP) from the searcher's perspective. We'll focus on Google, since it gets 70 to 80 percent of search traffic, but Bing has a very similar search results page. When a query is entered, less than a second later, pages of results appear, and the ball is now in the searcher's court to identify what results are relevant to her particular needs. Search engines are continually reorganizing their results-page layouts in an effort to offer searchers an experience that leads them to their desired content faster. Despite these adaptations, the overall layout of the SERP has remained relatively constant.

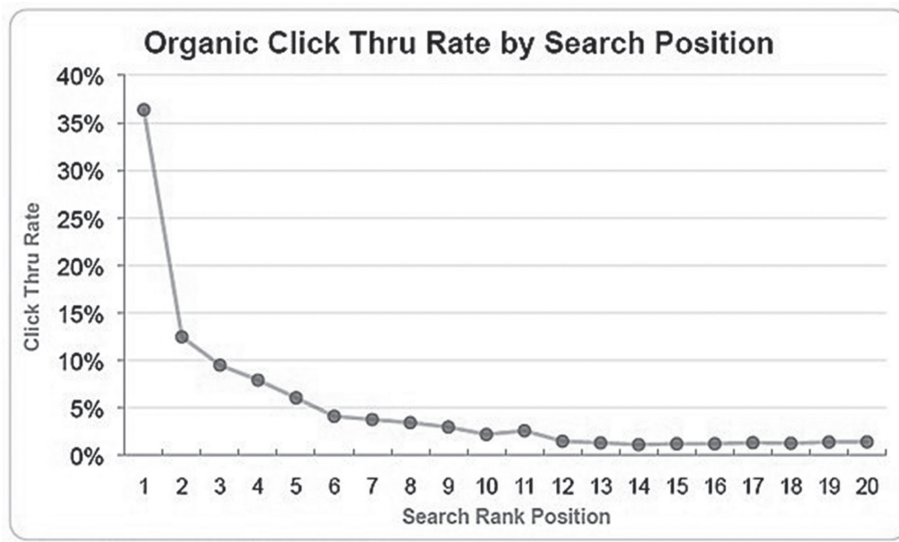
Search results can be broken down into two large categories: Paid results and Organic results. Paid results – or *Sponsored Links*, as Google labels them – are segregated at the top of the page and highlighted in pink (Bing's are highlighted in teal) so that searchers will know immediately that the results in this set are, in fact, bought and paid for. These results get a premium front and center location in the results page, but they are limited to three or four results per query on the top line. More paid results appear in a narrower column on the right. While sponsors pay to have their pages listed in this category, these results still undergo a similar kind of analysis that organic results undergo so that they remain relevant to the search term.

Organic results, on the other hand, represent the complete set of results possible for the keyword search. Organic results for some queries can amount to hundreds of pages of results, but the vast majority of searchers never leave the first page and practically never see page three.



Figure 2: Google Search Results Heat Map, Source: Did-it, Enquiro, and Eyetools

Take a look at the heat map showing the movement of a searcher's eye on a results page. The highest concentration is in the upper left corner, and includes the top organic search results. The fact is that the number one position in the *organic results* will get clicked nearly 40 percent of the time! And organic search results receive the bulk of clicks ahead of paid results, almost across the board. For that reason, this book will focus only on optimizing for organic results. The competition for page one is stiff, but the good news is that you can get in there if you produce different types of compelling content and then optimize them.



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Figure 3: Organic Click Through Rate by Search Position, Source: Optify, Inc. 2011

Clearly, searchers are more interested in organic results. For this reason search engines incorporate a number of tools to help searchers understand and refine their searches. When the results appear as links, the URL alone would be almost useless to the average searcher because it contains little or no information about the content behind it. So you need to understand the concept of metatags. The result set uses the page title tag text for the link to the content (and appears on the web page at the top of the browser). Beneath the link, the description metatag is a short piece of content that contains the keywords from the query displays, giving the searcher a sense of the page's relevance without forcing the searcher to go to the page to make that determination.

A searcher can specify at the outset of a query that he or she wants the result set to be limited to a certain kind of content. Google will filter the results to only those specific results that match that category. For example, a result set can be limited to images, videos, blogs, news items, and so on. This same filtering can be applied after the initial search query has been entered in the "Everything" set. If the searcher was, in fact, interested only in blogs, he or she could click to blogs related to the search without re-keying a query.

For searches that Google assumes are transactional, or location-based, the results will automatically incorporate a mixture of result types, in addition to rows of links. A map identifying nearby retail locations will display.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "shoe store phoenix". The search results include a mix of text-based links and a map. The text results are as follows:

- Phoenix Shoe Stores in Phoenix AZ Yellow Pages by SuperPages**: Directory of Phoenix Shoe Stores in AZ yellow pages. Find Shoe Stores in Phoenix maps with reviews, websites, phone numbers, addresses, ...
- Phoenix Shoe Stores | Shoe Stores in Phoenix, AZ - YP.com**: Find shoe stores & Shoe Stores in Phoenix, AZ. Read business reviews, find driving directions, and more. shoe stores on YP.com.
- Phoenix Shoe Stores**: 413 businesses reviewed for Shoe Stores in Phoenix on Yelp. Read about places like Runner's Den, DSW Shoe Warehouse, Last Chance Bargain Shoes & Apparel, ...
- Last Chance - Nordstrom.com - Shop from over 500 brands**: Last Chance is our final-clearance store for returned and overstocked ...
- 1919 East Camelback Road, Phoenix**: (602) 249-2843
- Shop Brand Name Shoes, Boots & Sandals for the Entire Family...**: Shop FamousFootwear.com for a great selection of women's shoes, men's shoes and kids' shoes with free in-store returns and exchanges!
- 1925 E Camelback Rd # 130, Phoenix**: (602) 279-5269
- Runner's Den**: Runner's Den is Arizona's original running and walking store. For more than 30 years, we have been "fitting the running needs" of Arizona's athletes.
- 6505 North 16th Street, Phoenix**: (602) 277-4333
- Roxy - Scottsdale Fashion Square**: www.fashionsquare.com/
- 7014-590 East Camelback Road, Scottsdale**: (480) 946-1366

The map on the right shows the location of the search results in Phoenix, Arizona, with various shoe stores marked on the map.

Figure 4: Google Local Search Results

Or, depending on what you search, the search engine might display some videos, if people tend to go straight to video search for a particular keyword. It might bring up a set of images for the same reason. Take, for example, a search of the term "Leonardo DiCaprio." Based on the algorithm's assessment of the available content and the relevance to the search term, people tend to want images of the movie star as well as information about him. The result set automatically includes images in addition to the text links, even though the searcher did not specify that images were sought.

The amazing fact about this kind of relationship between search engine and user is that the searcher wants the best results but may not be able to articulate what the best results might be in terms of the simple query. Searchers rely on the search engine to do that for them.

This means that by diversifying the content you produce – for local search, images, video, etc., – you will create many more ways of being found online. In an offline context, this would be like putting out ads on multiple TV venues, billboards, and in magazines. It's the same for the Internet; you are creating more opportunities for people to see your brand, and engage with your products and services.

Everyone is Social and They're Talking Online

Since we're talking about what's happening online, we can't ignore social media. What began with computer-geek chat rooms has evolved into a worldwide cultural phenomenon. The Internet has become, not surprisingly, a zone of social interaction. Referring back to the Ruder Finn survey, we can see that an enormous percentage of people are drawn to the Internet for what could broadly be characterized as "social reasons." People go to the Internet specifically *to socialize*, which Ruder Finn describes as connecting with people, sharing information or media with them, participating in discussions, and being part of a community. But we can expand this social phenomenon to a certain extent to the category of *self-expression*; that is, opinions are given to be heard, as with sharing emotions and creativity, and often the one who engages in self-expression does so on a social media platform, such as MySpace or Facebook. The *advocacy* category is a very social one, too. The advocate influences others and works with groups for a cause — the advocate is not typically a lone crusader but rather a member of a movement, and often times movements call for support, which take the form of grassroots, social campaigning. The members of the movement themselves tend to have forums for discussion or blogs to keep each other updated on the current events connected to their cause.

You might ask, "So how does that matter to my business?" Well, here's the skinny: It's pervasive, so chances are your customers are already engaged with social media. The number of people using social media has grown rapidly in the last few years and doesn't show signs of slowing down. Ac-

ording to a January, 2010 Nielsen survey, the growth of social media is occurring on a global scale. While the United States leads the charge with 142 million unique visitors to social media sites in December, 2009, Australian users spent the most *time* on social media sites, at nearly seven hours per month. Think of social media as a form of word-of-mouth advertising – which is the best kind of advertising – but it's a new word of mouth, where word travels much, much faster.

Perhaps the most incredible result of social media is that it's becoming a place for search. Searching Twitter, for example, is like picking the brains of millions of people at once. When people are talking about your product or service, and they search the social media where the conversation is happening, it becomes another place for them to find *your* brand. In fact, if I was to make a prediction about the future of search, I'd say it's here, on social media sites. So, just as you need SEO for search engines like Google and Bing, you also need to keep SMO, or Social Media Optimization, as a part of your strategy. You need to have a social media presence, and all your content on social media (yes, your profile counts as content) needs to be optimized.

In light of SEO and SMO, your content marketing strategy will be barbell-shaped, in a sense. You need to network via social media in order to develop your online presence as much as you need to pay attention to search ranking – if you're planning on succeeding. It's through social media that your content will circulate most rapidly and you will get some of the best links pointing to your pages. A successful social media campaign will increase your search rankings, while at the same time bringing traffic to your site. In addition to content development for search engines, this book will look closely at how your content and social media presence will interact and how you can optimize both.

Local Search and Review Sites Matter, Too

As the web has become more and more social, websites have taken advantage of the wisdom of crowds, creating niche sites that open up possibilities for many businesses. One booming niche is local search and review sites.

Local search on Google and review sites such as Yelp.com are like the phone books of the 21st Century. When location-specific searches are conducted,

often local search results appear in the results. Not only do searchers use local search to find businesses in their metropolitan area, they can access review sites to give them customers' feedback on their experiences. These provide the searcher with even more relevance to their search. Obviously, the reviews that businesses get on these sites will have a major impact on the traffic that comes not only to their websites but also to their doorsteps.

Review sites, in particular, have a strong search component as well as a strong social media component. Review sites often pull aggregated data from web pages to create profiles for the businesses that are optimized for local search, which means that just by optimizing your website, your business could end up on review sites without you having to do anything at all. This will expand your footprint in the search results because your website could appear right next to your listing in Yelp.com. Even though a webpage that's optimized for local search can get on Yelp, I would recommend that any business with a brick-and-mortar establishment register with Yelp (basic registration is free) and other review sites. Registration allows you to optimize some of the components of your business's page, and you can engage as the business owner with the reviewers. By taking advantage of the social media aspect of review sites, you can make your page more customer-friendly, and you can show your commitment to the opinions your customers express.

Going Forward: Searchers Are Telling You How to Market to Them!

Between Google and Bing, we have the big two search engines determining search relevance by a very similar set of criteria. This is fortunate for us online marketers because we can, to a large extent, standardize our marketing strategies for the web and not have to spend an enormous amount of energy managing multiple approaches for different search engines ... at least for now. The key to ranking in search, as well as to creating a buzz in social media, is good, solid content. Period. So, as a producer of content, you are now a publisher. You need to see yourself that way.

Publishers need to make engaging content happen. If they don't – if *you* don't – you won't succeed. As they say, publish or perish. This means you need to create engagement. You need to create relevance. In a sense,

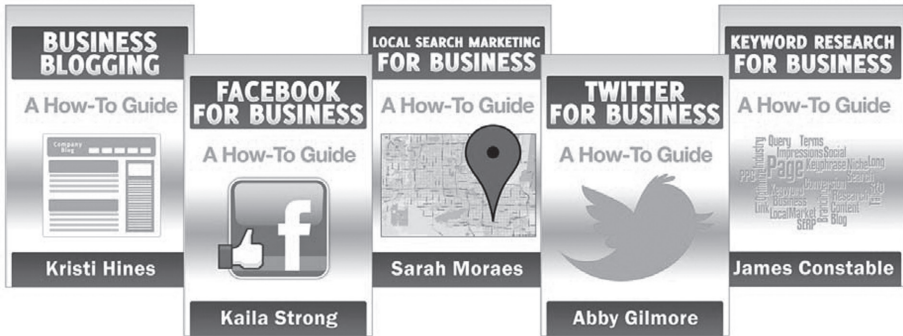
you need to learn to read the minds of the searchers in your market. The good news, the really good news, is that the web gives you free marketing data that will guide you toward creating relevant subject matter. It's like a sneak peek into the minds of your customers.

In some ways, your customers are doing your work for you. *Sweet!*

Conclusion

So, now you have a better understanding of what's happening online. Now you can see why the "new" marketing is fast outpacing the "old" marketing. It's time to build a content marketing strategy that engages the users that you want to reach. This book is about a marketing process that integrates key components, which when applied together will give you a strong posture to market your business on the Internet. The components of this strategy must be used together, like links in chain. When the chain is strong and being used at its fullest, the result is a robust online presence, both in search and in social media. But when the chain is broken ... well, just don't break the chain, okay?

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Arnie Kuenn is the president of Vertical Measures in Phoenix, AZ. Vertical Measures provides search, social and content marketing services, designed to help businesses improve their online presence and obtain more traffic and conversions. Mr. Kuenn has held executive positions in the world of new technologies and marketing for more than 20 years. He is a founding board member of the Arizona Interactive Marketing Association (AZIMA), has presented to thousands at conferences and online webinars, and is an instructor for the Online Marketing Institute and the Content Marketing Institute.

