



CLICKCONSULT®

presents

# SEO uncovered

An Advanced Guide to Organic Search

*Chapter 3 - Creative*

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## CREATIVE

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**While technical SEO is as vital for success in search as a skeletal system is to a person, it matters little without the creative adding flesh to the dry bones.**

*Beth Rycroft, Head of Campaigns and Social, Click Consult*

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, 39.33% of respondents to a Click Consult survey reported a thorough or expert level of knowledge when it came to content marketing. Despite this, 55.68% of respondents stated that they were either uncertain whether they would, or were unlikely to carry out a content marketing campaign in the next year. More than this, 70% of respondents stated that they had some level of concern regarding their potential to increase organic traffic over the coming year.

These figures appear to be in conflict and this is no doubt the result of the changing emphasis on importance of creative and content marketing. While historically, 'outreach' and 'campaigns' were intrinsically tied up with link building to the extent that there was little difference between the two, content marketing has grown to become something more than simple link building.

Content marketing is now a cross departmental exercise in visibility that has more in common with traditional media marketing campaigns than with early SEO outreach practices – and are consequently a much more effective tool in earning links, growing organic traffic and increasing conversions. Often, however, the more a tool can do the more difficult it is to use – and this can certainly be the case when it comes to the execution of a successful content marketing campaign.

Click Consult has previously covered the [optimisation of content](#), so here we will simply deal with the creation of content for [earned and owned media](#) purposes.

## MAKING THE MOST OF CREATIVITY

Creativity in marketing is no less difficult to harness than creativity in any other sphere – only it comes with additional constraints. Not only does it need to provoke a reaction, it also has to serve a pre-defined purpose (whether this is increased traffic, brand awareness, link building or any other) while ensuring it fits with a brand's tone, reaches its target demographic and represents a sufficient return on investment.

Really, content marketing represents the development of a promotional strategy for a brand – a strategy that not only does what's best for a brand's online presence but also operates in accordance with Google regulations and represents both the brand and the agency in a way they both feel comfortable with.

The catchphrase of a Russian herpestid this is not.

## WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

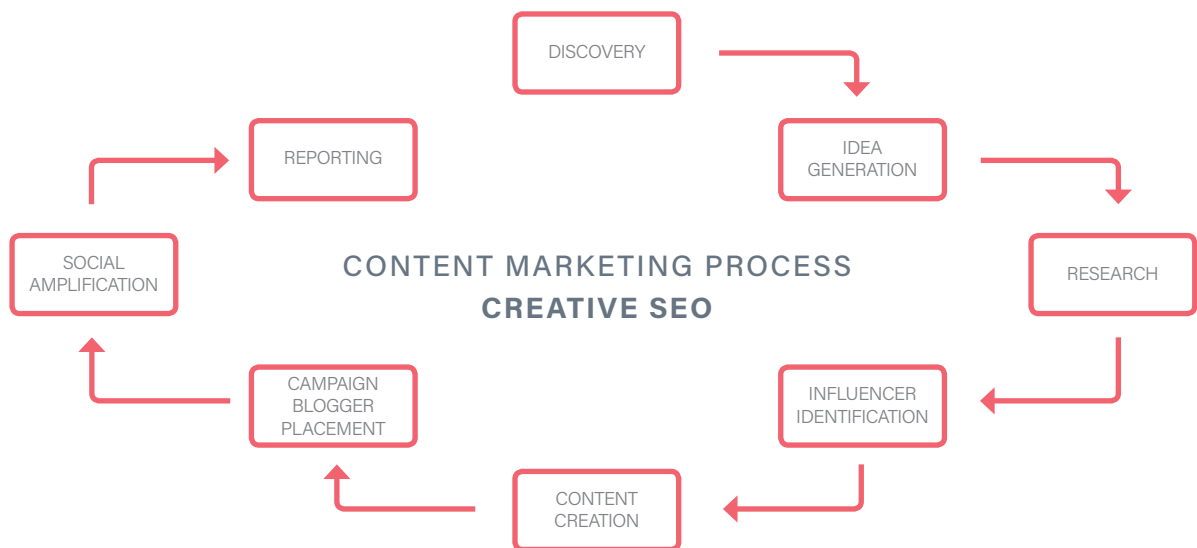
[Content marketing](#) is, really, the next step of SEO's evolution, it is not just about silo busting, but also about having all departments pull in the same direction, utilising assets across the business to develop creative, unique marketing collateral and outreach processes all built upon solid technical foundations.

Content marketing is about the creation of high quality materials, that are totally unique and that will attract and then engage with audiences online. If you want to make sales and turn your leads into conversions in the digital age, then you have to be involved in or preparing to undertake content marketing.

Initially this will involve ideation – and the key to this is to actively encourage participation and to harness the ideas of the assets you already have at your disposal. The staff you currently employ can represent fertile soil for ideas. Encourage thinking across departmental boundaries and create a cycle of idea generation and feedback to develop strong, targeted ideas.

Once this brainstorming is underway, the development of bespoke assets can begin – whether this includes press releases, quizzes, infographics slideshows or any of a myriad number of possibilities, the idea is to have them anchored to a key premise or target, to make each piece of the puzzle a part of a big picture.

## CONTENT MARKETING WORKFLOW



With this campaign cycle in mind, it is clear that they must draw from all areas of a business to gain the most from a content marketing strategy. Content marketing campaigns are always likely to produce results, but a well thought out, and well researched strategy will take you to the next level. We'll deal with this cycle again in an upcoming instalment on relationships, but for now – these are the main steps applicable to content.

### DISCOVERY

At the beginning of your campaign there should always be a discovery process. This is another place where the creation of consumer personas (discussed in the [strategy chapter](#)) can prove extremely useful. You will already have research on demographics, device use and activity times as well as keyword research on search terms and common questions (and will have similarly researched competitor activity).

This data can be pulled together here and then used in combination with the delineation of the content marketing campaign's objectives (whether this is increasing traffic, earning links, increasing conversions etc.) to identify which segments of your audience or consumer base you will need to target and, therefore, how the campaign can be conducted to give it the best chance of success.

## IDEA GENERATION

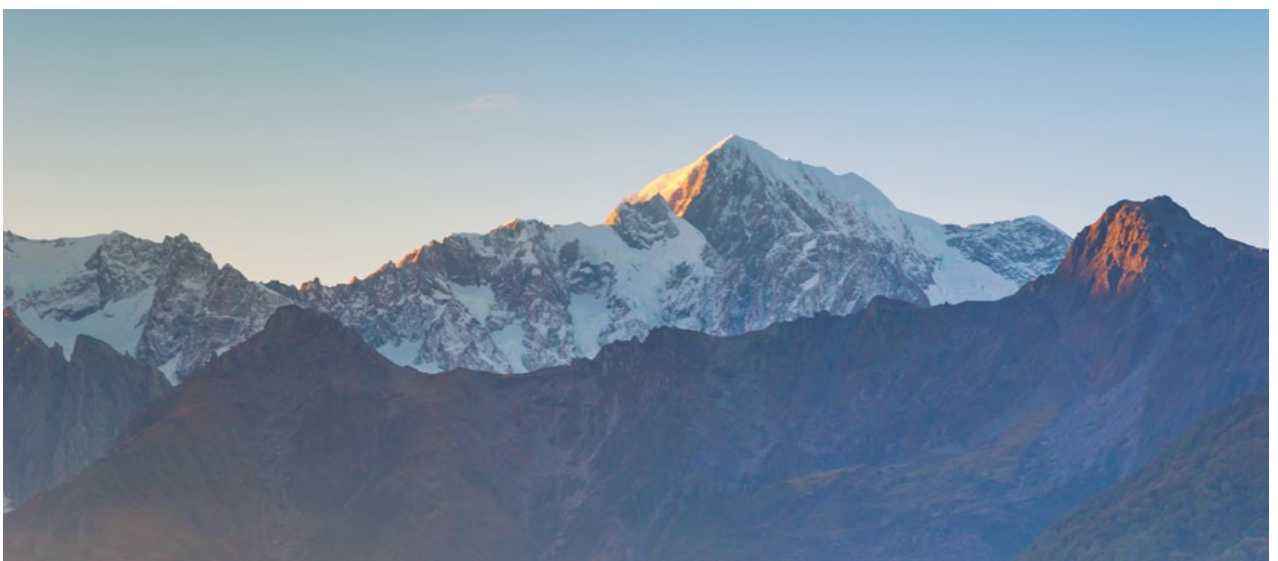
Clearly there are no guaranteed methods of reaching the right idea, but there are certainly ways of improving your chances of getting there. If idea generation is to be successful, it's important to use all of the creative resources at your disposal – and this means embracing the fact that great ideas can come from anywhere in the company. The people a brand employs are employed, at least in part, for their knowledge or ability to gain knowledge of the brand and its industry, so when it comes to idea generation a company which does not take advantage of this vital asset is missing out.

Brainstorming is one area which should definitely be encouraged, when attempting to generate the best possible ideas. Hold roundtable discussions; each of your employees has creativity the brand can tap into and, in doing so, not only nurture the sense of inclusion they feel but their feeling of influence on the brand's direction and consequently their likelihood of buying into any eventual campaign (and sharing it). It is this kind of activity that makes John Lewis employees some of the best ambassadors for their brand.

This is an area where creativity and (dreaded buzz term) out of the box thinking should always be encouraged, but where campaign targets should also never be far from the front of your mind. An idea that might be spectacular success for a brand awareness campaign may nevertheless fail if the aim you have defined is that it should increase conversions.

*Top tip: cater to consumer feeling*

One of the best ways to ensure your campaign earns the 'hearts and minds' of your audience is to take stock of existing sentiment around the brand. This will reveal a lot about where you should be pitching (whether the information gathered is positive or negative), as it will show how the brand is perceived. Allow your tone to, in the words of a popular 40s song 'accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.'



## RESEARCH

This research takes many forms – while you may have identified a target and an audience earlier in the process, here you will be looking up similar content, checking out methods of execution, the reach of similar pieces, links generated, shares earned and weighing up the cost of developing your main ideas against their chances of success.

While it may seem to you that your campaign idea is a certain success, there is seldom anything new under the sun and it is at this point you can look to learn from the mistakes of others like it. Also research any any hashtags, delivery methods and media types that have worked either particularly well or poorly to maximise your chances of delivering the right content to the right people in the right way at the right time.

In addition to this, if the content idea you've decided upon involves conveying any kind of unique data, this is the stage to conduct surveys and data gathering exercises.

## CONTENT CREATION

We'll go into what represents 'creative content' in the next section, but for the purposes of this walk through the process, the quality and creativity of content is assumed and we'll deal with it simply as a given.

While in some cases it is best to have influencer input into the content you're hoping for them to help you promote, it is more often than not beneficial to have something waiting – meaning that your design team can be working while you're engaging with the influencers.

This does mean, however, that the content should be easy to adapt to various audiences – if you're working on a project with ten bloggers, you don't want to have to create assets from the ground up for each of them. Instead you need a more generic basis which can be personalised or segmented by the interests of your influencer's audience.

Again, by having a versatile and adaptable approach with your content, you open up a level of trust with your target influencers – allowing them to feel that you are both well prepared and open to their input and feedback while being able to harness their understanding of their audience to make the content more relevant to it and therefore more likely to achieve the targets you have set it.

Equally, don't over-brand your content – influencers work hard to build their audience and will fear losing it if they appear to be actively promoting specific brands and therefore losing their objectivity, so while you don't want to make your brand invisible, it's worth not pushing it too hard either.

# CREATIVE CONTENT

As promised, this section will deal with what constitutes 'creative content' and how to go about achieving it. The removal of density restrictions mentioned earlier also frees writers to better address another ranking factor – the production of what we have come to refer to as SURE content:

## SUBSTANTIAL

- More than competitors
- Aim for over 400 words
- Not automated or boiler plated
- Don't pad content out

## UNIQUE

- No duplication from other sites
- Limit the amount of in site duplication

## RELEVANT

- Direct titles
- Natural writing
- Latent semantic indexing

## ENGAGING

- Write for humans
- Converting content
- Shareable content

This underpins our approach to optimising content – it delivers information, it does so in a way no other source does, it is relevant to search queries which will find it and it is engaging. This acronym goes a long way to how we see and define a commonly coined, but seldom explained term: Quality Content.



## WHAT IS 'QUALITY CONTENT'?

Content is, to all intents and purposes, how we have come to know the creative arts in the SEO industry and it plays down both its importance to a brand's image and the skill of the practitioners. In the early days of SEO this was an understandable piece of minimisation. In the previous, keyword stuffed car insurance example, the phrase 'content' – as stuff we simply put in our metaphorical internet box for the purpose of increasing traffic, was certainly more accurate. In modern SEO, however, the term seems rather banal when used to describe some of the dynamic and engaging content the industry now seeks to produce and which Google has attempted to encourage.

As Google proceeds to make changes to their algorithm seemingly driven by improving user experience (UX), a good and ethical content marketing plan is becoming ever more important. The output for a blog, for example, should not be driven by the desire to display consistent freshness to Google's site crawlers, or even to generate links (though it should go without saying that a good content strategy will do both of these things as a matter of course); it should be seen as a first point of interaction with a brand's consumers.

Millennials, for example, comprise a difficult but growing demographic to target – with a recent study finding that 84% do not trust traditional advertising. It is, therefore, important for content to provide genuine opportunities for engagement, useful answers to questions, content which is written for your blog's consumers and not just for the Google algorithm – and a good SEO strategy will take this into account, optimising for interaction as well as for search.

In this regard, as mentioned earlier, your employees have the potential to be your brand's biggest fans, as the chances are that these employees will share a lot in common with your ideal consumer, so ask for advice on topics of interest to them. These do not need to be product or sales-driven, but should appeal to the interests, however tangentially, of your target audience. This is one area in which brands can certainly take their lead from Red Bull – which would not, perhaps, have been served so well by sponsoring people trying to stay awake during Monday board meetings or late night stocktakes. You can look to write, film or record content which will be of interest not only to your present customers but to potential customers and even their friends, even if it does not immediately seem obvious how it will drive sales.

With this in mind, the idea of 'quality' content becomes somewhat clearer. Though the key to your product descriptions remains clarity and concision, your content – that which is produced to represent your brand and reach out to your consumers – is defined by rules which will be familiar to writers, artists and film-makers, but possibly less to the business or technically minded.

It is here where the SEO industry has to manage the unmanageable, to produce a workable synergy between art and science, while the technical aspect is of the utmost importance, the success of a technically superb piece of optimised content is determined by the its SURE-ness. The following is a breakdown of key rules which producers of content in various mediums will seek to follow when approaching their work for a brand and which anyone seeking to fill their site with 'quality content' will also need to consider.

### *Top tips: written content*

- **Hold the reader's attention.** The author Kurt Vonnegut summed this idea up tremendously well in his advice to 'use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.' Whether you are responsible for your brand's written content or you have delegated the responsibility to another, your main concern must be that your audience, your brand's consumer must leave a piece of content, well... content.
- **Listen to your writing.** In SEO it is not really practicable for a producer of written content to 'have a voice' in the traditional authorial sense of the phrase, because their voice will change depending on the brand for which they are writing. Yet listening to the prose they produce is just as important – if you ever witness a writer mumbling under their breath, they are checking the rhythm of their prose, or losing their minds – weighted slightly in favour of the former.
- **Beware the cliché.** That is not to say don't use cliché – in SEO a shared language is important, and so the cliché aversion of the fiction writer must be somewhat subdued. Clichés become cliché according to their use (for extensive information on cliché, see any and all sports coverage); this offers the writer the ability to tap in to a collective culture, to immediately build a rapport. The danger is, of course, overuse – that is a stonewall fact.
- **Edit, then edit again.** This is again applicable to all forms of writing, but is probably more difficult in SEO than with any other form due to extremely tight deadlines. There is, in this regard, a necessity for the SEO writer to abandon all sense of ego and allow suggestions and criticism to pour in from across a team of other experienced writers to help them polish their work – generally in-between writing further pieces.
- **Have something to say.** This is another tip borrowed from fiction which takes on new significance within SEO. The SEO writer will not always be familiar with a subject they are writing about, or may not have an instant opinion or question about the topic, but good writing, engaging writing depends upon having something to say. Experience will make this easier for an SEO writer but whatever a brand is producing it must speak to the consumer.
- **Increase your vocabulary.** That is not to say that you should seek to be sesquipedalian in your prose – pretension does not make for good prose, but words are the building blocks of a writer and the more blocks you have, the quicker and higher you can build your tower.

### *Top tips: video content*

- **Use the right equipment.** If you can't tell your ABUS from your Go Pro, this is going to be an important place to start. The video camera you use to film a sports day will not cut it when filming a presentation, in addition to this is required a working knowledge of lighting rigs and sound recording, the failure to address any of which could leave you with a wasted budget.
- **Pay attention to audio.** If you have a voiceover, ensure that voiceover is done by a professional or, at least, a very proficient speaker. You ideally want the message rather than the voice in which it is conveyed to be the most important thing. Also, never 'make-do' with a take if the audio is competing with background noise. If a plane flies past, or a boy-racer's car roars past in the wrong gear, I'm afraid you'll just have to take it again from the top.
- **Edit to your audience.** Knowing when to shut-up is just as important as knowing what to say, if you know your audience, and the social channel you are aiming to use for your video's distribution will tell you some of this, you will know how long their attention span is. Do not exceed this.
- **Tell a story.** Even the most factual video can tell a story, and by this we're don't mean videos should be dramatised or fictionalised, but that they should have a beginning a middle and an end, and that the consumer should feel compelled to finish watching.
- **Be entertaining.** Everyone likes to be entertained, so even though a brand may not operate within the most entertaining industry, there will always be ways to make a message entertaining – whether this is with graphics or cartoons, or simply a well written script, the reason you are making a video is to capture an audience and the best way to do this is to captivate them.

### *Top tips: graphics content*

- **Use contrast.** By contrast we do not mean 'clash' – think of it in the same way as fashion. You want colours to stand out, but also to complement one another.
- **Use consistent font and colour palettes.** It is important for any brand to develop a consistent, canonical colour and font palette to impart a sense of order even when graphics deal with vastly different subjects. You want your consumers to have the reaction to your brand that they do to Coca-Cola or McDonalds – you want them to be able to recognise you on text and colour alone.
- **Keep it simple.** Your graphics do not have to scream and shout from every pixel. Don't be afraid of allowing your graphical elements the space to breathe. The less you do to convey the message, the less work your audience will do in receiving it.

## 5 STEPS FOR CONTENT SUCCESS

### 1. *Define success*

When creating content, we imagine international exposure, spin-off TV shows, or exposure leading to billion pound take-overs. However, success must be defined in a realistic manner. What would be the resultant visibility of the tweet if your twitter followers were to 'retweet' your post once; then by one of their followers each? Set targets constituting success for your brand. Content marketing's aim is to build an audience, that audience will not all come all at once.



### 2. *Know your audience*

Not as simple as it appears. Though your audience is interested in the product or service you provide, great content marketing combines interests, to capitalise on secondary and tertiary interests to aid with shareability. If you can cater to secondary interests your audience shares, this may overlap with interests of their audience, and so on.



### 3. *Match content to medium*

There are varieties which can be adapted to various mediums, communicating information to different demographics, but it is important to define terms. What you are looking to convey, to whom and in what tone. Allow this to determine the best medium(s) for your content.



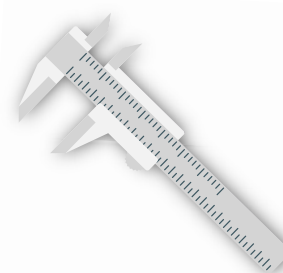
### 4. *Use the right channels*

Facebook, for example, is far more amenable for less formal, more social posts, while LinkedIn can be a good home for longer form written information and Twitter ideal for memes and short video/animation. Carefully consider the benefits of creating specific types of content, and measure it against your audience on these platforms.



### 5. *Measure and review*

At the end of every cycle of content marketing, review the performance of an asset against others you have promoted – incorporate analysis into your process and allow this to dictate, at least in part, your future ideation.



## FINAL WORDS

Creativity in the digital sphere is incredibly difficult to do right and well. There are currently over a billion sites presently online and, while you won't be competing directly with all of them, there is a lot of competition for each and every consumer's attention – and with [personalisation](#) creating data and media bubbles for us all, these consumers may become even harder to reach organically in future.

This makes creativity a primary concern for search marketers (this is the reason we've given it a section alongside strategic and technical SEO), while simultaneously being one of the hardest to recruit for. To succeed online it will be necessary to ensure that your content is virtually pitch perfect – as content for content's sake is already viewed dimly by both consumers and search engines and may eventually fail to make any impact at all.

So get creative! The online world is becoming increasingly demanding and your consumers will want to see quality content that is meaningful to them, and if you don't start working on that now, you may never catch up.



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## ABOUT US

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi-award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

As well as winning an FSB Award, Drum Search Award and a Northern eCommerce Award in 2016, Click has been a finalist in the European Search Awards, the DMA Awards, and the UK Digital Experience Awards, amongst others. Click Consult also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies' in 2016, and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies' 2016.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Blog

Click Consult regularly posts actionable insights on its blog – dealing with all aspects of search marketing. From technical SEO to PPC, content marketing and Analytics advice, the Click Consult blog has something for everyone of any ability.

### eBooks

Click Consult produces an in depth eBook on a particular aspect of search marketing on a regular basis, dealing with the latest best practices, changes to standard practices, methods of improvement and more.

### Infographics

Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

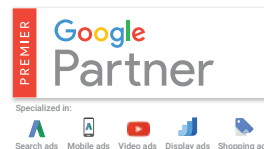
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