

A newsletter designed to help you build strong member relationships, retain supporters and improve communication with your patrons.

March 2015

## Content Marketing in the Time & Budget Crunch



In 1895, John Deere published a small magazine containing helpful articles for farmers. He was no doubt hoping to sell them a tractor one day, but his magazine was just to get the ball rolling and build a relationship. That may have been one of the first examples of intentional “content marketing” -- Deere

was a man ahead of his time. Over the last 20 years, driven by the revolutions of the New Media Age, content marketing has boomed. Today it is the biggest of big deals.

Marketers in non-profit associations have been a little behind their counterparts in the for-profit world in capitalizing on the potential of CM, and there are some reasons for this. Associations face a unique set of challenges. A recent industry report revealed 12 challenges in particular that non-profit professionals face in doing CM. The two standouts at the top of the list were “Lack of time” and “Lack of budget”.

With these specific pain points in mind, here are **5 Tips for Creating More Content in Less Time for Less Money:**

**1. Crack open the doors to the vault.** A common feature of association websites is the “members-only” area. The idea, of course, is that it creates a benefit exclusive to membership, which is a great selling point. The problem is that this has become far less effective today because your prospects can *Google* anything -- even the most specific and technical of questions -- and have more free information available to them than they could ever hope to read.

Members-only areas have tended to become “silos” that hold back your best stuff from being used in CM. And if these vaults are not the selling-point that they once were, maybe it’s time to throw open the doors and get the content out there in public to help make you famous.

This solution doesn’t have to be “all or nothing”. Maybe

your member-only area is still something your audience wants, and you decide to keep it. At least consider cracking the door a little.

**2. Harness your whole team.** If your CM strategy depends on one content creator, then when the time crunch is on (is it ever “off”?) not much is going to get done. Many hands make light work, so spread the burden around. Make every staff member responsible to produce a bit of content each week/month, and the accumulated effect will be large.

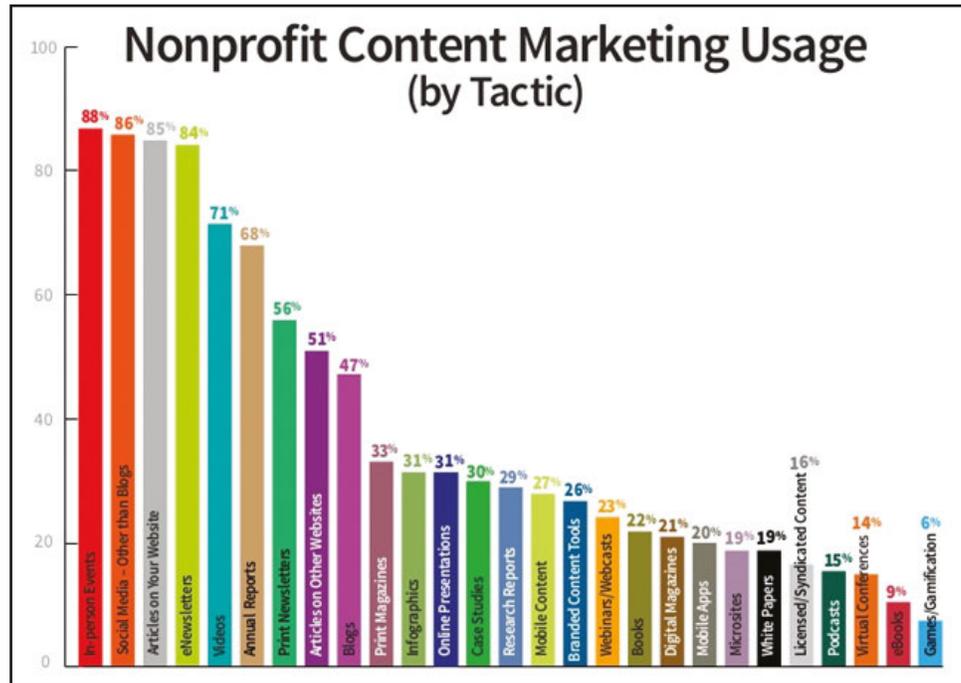
Get everyone together for a meeting and brainstorm as many ideas as you can. Then allocate topics to each staff member and set completion dates. Finally, provide a simple “writing guide” that helps to keep everyone on the same page and producing the kind of content you want.

**3. Re-purpose content.** Just about every piece of content in your current arsenal has the potential to be re-spun into more content of a different kind: whitepapers can be broken up and turned into blog posts, blog posts can be stitched together to create a report, webinars can be typed up into articles, an article can form the basis of a new podcast ... and on it goes. It’s time-efficient and low cost, so invest an hour or two thinking through all the ways your current content can be quickly recycled.

**4. Curate content.** There’s a lot of great content already out there that you can simply “collect” and promote to your members. People love to go to art galleries and museums where they can see many pieces all gathered in one space. Likewise, you can provide a great service to your members and prospects by curating the best content for them. This is such a big topic we’ve dedicated a separate article to it in this issue (*see page 3*).

**5. Outsource.** If the time crunch is your biggest problem, and you do have some budget to spend, consider using freelance help for additional content creation. There are numerous online sites such as *Elance*, *Odesk*, *Guru* and *Freelancer*. Advertise a few small jobs and try out different writers. When you find a reliable writer who produces good work, build an ongoing relationship with them. A small stable of writers can produce a lot of content.

# Nonprofit Professionals Use an Average of 11 Content Marketing Tactics



The most effective nonprofit professionals use all of these tactics more often than their least effective peers do; however, they use some of these tactics a *great deal* more frequently, including videos (80% vs. 60%), articles on other websites (59% vs. 38%), blogs (58% vs. 38%), infographics (43% vs. 18%), and online presentations. (43% vs. 19%).

*Chart courtesy of Content Marketing Institute / Blackbaud, 2014*

## Is Blogging Outdated?

The use of social media channels in content marketing has so taken the spotlight that blogs may appear to some to be “old hat” now. Have they been replaced by Facebooks and Twitter feeds? Is there any going back to writing posts once you’ve taken up with Pinterest and Instagram?

Before you abandon your blog completely, however, consider some of the powerful benefits it offers:

■ **It provides a hub.** All of the social media platforms are online “real estate” that is owned by someone else. You have no control over it. If, over time, one of these platforms evolves into something that is not compatible with your goals, or if their audience shifts and is no longer your target demographic, or — even worse — if a platform shuts down altogether, all the work you’ve put into building content there may be compromised or lost. Your blog, however, is under your control, and it functions as a “hub” that you can always link back to from all your social media channels.

- **It brands you as an expert.** This idea of the blog as a hub for your content marketing also helps you in terms of online authority. When you post content to social media platforms, your content is spread out and interspersed with content from many others. Your blog, however, provides a place that showcases you and builds your reputation as an expert voice in your field.
- **It helps you with SEO.** Blogs have always been loved by the search engines, and that is still true. When your blog is connected as a part of your association website, it ensures that your site is seen by the engines as a resource that is regularly being updated with fresh content. Static sites with a limited number of pages are less likely to rank.
- **Analytics.** Your content out on the social networks is quite difficult to track in terms of traffic; until someone shares it or leaves a comment you don’t know who’s viewing it. When you have a blog, however, you can track enormous amounts of information using tools like Google Analytics.

# Using Content Curation to Build Your Expert Status

When you hear the word “curator” you might very well think of someone who works in an art gallery or museum. They are experts in their field who spend time researching and gathering together a collection of things to exhibit.

In the same way, “content curation” in online marketing is the collecting and promoting of links to the best examples of content available: the most instructive blog posts, funny or fascinating videos, beautiful images, great productivity tools, or even insightful tweets.

Social media is actually turning lots of people into curators, though many don’t even realize that’s what they’re doing. From high school kids to retirees, people spend hours online finding things that they like and posting links to them in their own social networks. Those with a refined sense of humor or a discerning eye for beauty can garner a large following of people who just like to follow the things that they’re finding on a regular basis.

This is a small example of a very powerful idea. Savvy marketers who get intentional about curating the right content can use it as a tool to build their audience and a voice of authority.

An example of a simple act of content curation might be finding a link to an article and promoting it on Facebook with an editorial comment. Over time your Facebook page becomes a resource in itself, pointing to lots of great content. A more advanced kind of curating is the “round up post” on a blog; a post that introduces a topic and then lists a number of links to the very best resources available on that topic. These kind of blog posts will often be bookmarked and returned to again and again.

Curation that is done well is not just some “cheat” to use the content of others instead of creating your own, but rather it contributes something of value in itself — it adds new meaning to individually beautiful things. By bringing them together they are enhanced and form a picture or story.

As a marketing tactic, content curation offers a number of benefits:

- If you’re starting a venture, like a new blog or website, it can help you get up and running quickly so that you have something to offer site visitors and the all-important search engines.
- As you consistently showcase the best content from around the internet in your area of focus, people will start relying on you as their source for information. They’ll use you as a filter to get to the good stuff quickly.

- You can curate to supplement your own “blindspots” — nobody is great at everything, even in their own niche.

## 7 Rules for Great Content Curators

- 1. Always keep a watchful eye out for content your audience will love.** The best content won’t necessarily be found just when you’re out hunting for it. You’ll come across it while you’re doing other things, so always be ready to bookmark a link to share later on. The best advice for this is that you need to really know your audience, what they are looking for, their problems and questions. The more you know them, the more you’ll recognize the content they’ll love when you come across it.
- 2. Learn to be discerning.** It’s about the quality, not the quantity, of the content you share. This is the attribute that sets the curator apart and gives them authority. Tools are available to “automate” content gathering, but it’s the human touch that really makes it “curation”. Where tools *are* helpful is in the gathering of material for you to evaluate. *Google Alerts*, for example, will notify you when new content is published on a topic you’re looking for.
- 3. Add your own touches.** Don’t just point to good content, comment on why it’s good. Does an article list 5 points? Suggest your own 6th idea that the writer didn’t mention. These touches enhance people’s perception of you as an expert.
- 4. Vary the ways you present curated content.** For example, let’s say there’s a hot topic that is generating a lot of discussion; a way to capitalize on this might be to curate the very best arguments on both sides of the debate, add your own editorial and invite your audience to jump in and add their comments.
- 5. Don’t neglect creating your own content.** Curation is not a replacement. You need your own stuff as well, or you might end up sounding like a mere echo of everyone else.
- 6. Be thorough.** If you try to take shortcuts it may come back to bite you. Sharing an article because you liked the headline and the cool image at the top, without actually reading it all, can really embarrass you. Maybe the author isn’t saying what you assume they are.
- 7. Make sure you always use proper attribution.** This is especially important in those cases where you are actually placing the content on your own site. If you quote someone rather than link to them, or embed a video or image — always follow the rules and etiquette of citing your sources.

# MEMBER-CENTRIC COMMUNICATIONS

A newsletter designed to help you build strong member relationships, retain supporters and improve communication with your patrons.

## About Us

GRC Direct specializes in the production of direct mail, print and various communications materials for associations, non-profits, businesses and government agencies. By teaming up with us, you're adding a quarter century of experience to your team, and gaining access to ideas and solutions for connecting with your audience in the most effective ways. We provide all the services you need for the entire production process under one roof, ensuring your project goes out without a hitch.

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## Book Review: "Content Rules" by Ann Handley & C.C. Chapman

**How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars  
(and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business**

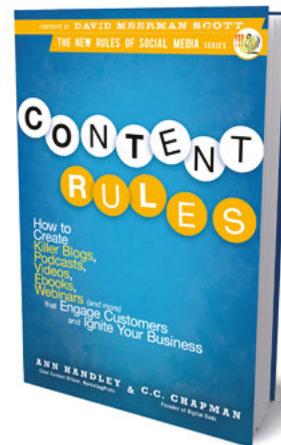
From the back cover: *"The one-stop resource for creating irresistible content and building a loyal following."*

The description "one-stop resource" sounds like just one of those things you say about a book to hype it. In this case, however, *"Content Rules"* fully delivers on the promise. If this were the only book you ever bought on the subject of Content Marketing, you'd have all you needed to build your own effective strategy. It's a reference you'll return to again and again.

**Ann Handley** is a noted authority on content marketing. She's been cited by *Forbes* among the most influential people in social media and blogging, and is Chief Content Officer at MarketingProfs. **C.C. Chapman** is a well-known keynote speaker and founder of DigitalDads.com

Any beginner who needs to get a handle on the subject, and others who just want to improve their game, will benefit from this book. **Chapter 6**, *"Share or Solve; Don't Shill"*, alone is worth the purchase price. It explains the number one reason so much content marketing fails.

*Highly Recommended!*



## WEBSITES AND BLOGS MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE:

[contentmarketinginstitute.com](http://contentmarketinginstitute.com)  
[elance.com](http://elance.com)

[odesk.com](http://odesk.com)  
[guru.com](http://guru.com)

[freelancer.com](http://freelancer.com)  
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