

Content Marketing Q&A Series

Content Runner reached out to a number of experts in the industry to assist with our 2014 Content Marketing Q&A Blog Series. The response we received was tremendous, as the following contributors all agreed to answer our questions. We created this PDF to summarize their results and educate you on the latest trends in Content Marketing. Enjoy!

Contributors:

Stoney deGeyter is an author, speaker, teacher, husband, father and web marketer. He is the president and fearless pit crew leader of Pole Position Marketing, a results-driven inbound marketing agency established in 1998.

Phil Buckley has been working on the web since the late 1990's doing everything from early web development to system administration. He now helps companies increase their profitability through smarter code, better ideas and intelligent 21st Century marketing at New Media Leaders and 1918.com when he's not helping his new startup, Curagami, get off the ground.

Greg Gifford is the Director of Search and Social at AutoRevo, a software company that provides websites and online marketing to used car dealers all over the country. He's got over 15 years of online marketing and web design experience, and his expertise in local SEO has helped hundreds of auto dealers thrive while the industry has struggled during the recession.

Jessica Bosari has been blogging about personal finance, insurance, business management and various other topics for the past five years. She is quickly becoming recognized as a thought leader, offering in-depth analysis on topics that matter to the audiences of her clients. Find her site at <http://www.jessicabosari.com/>.

Rob Garner is the Chief Strategy Officer at Advice Interactive in Dallas, Texas, and works with businesses and brands to develop paid, earned, and owned strategies that drive visibility, engagement, and results. He is the author of "Search and Social: The Definitive Guide to Real-Time Content Marketing," (Wiley/Sybex 2013).

Dayna Moon brings more than a decade of digital marketing experience to the 3Q Digital family where she leads the team in evangelizing social media. Previously, Dayna held senior global marketing positions at independent agencies, as well as at AdParlor and AOL's ADTECH division. A native of the southern states and graduate of the University of Georgia, she has a passion for the SEC but is open to cheering for the Bay Area teams.

Mike Huber is currently the Director of Business Strategy for Vertical Measures and has been involved in Internet Marketing since the turn of the century. From SEO to Content Marketing, Mike has been involved at the strategic level for start-ups and traditional media companies, helping craft programs that have increased traffic and leads.

Frans Van Hulle is a "serial" entrepreneur with more than 15 years of experience in the online marketing industry. He has founded several successful companies, including lead gen powerhouse ReviMedia and boutique pet insurance provider PetPremium.

How has content marketing evolved in the last 2 years? What changes are you seeing in the services you deliver for your clients?

Content marketing is ever-evolving, and we're seeing an emerging demand for quality over quantity. With recent changes to the Google algorithms, clients are realizing the importance of having informative content written for the reader, not the search engine – if the writing is engaging and valuable, it will naturally result in social shares and links. And if you've already devoted yourself to a content marketing strategy, you're ahead of the game.



Stoney deGeyter: I think the primary way content marketing has evolved is that it has become its own genuine strategy. Over the years we've seen a lot of flash-in-the-pan "content marketing" strategies that were really just content development masquerading for another purpose. Link bait from several years ago comes to mind. Heck, even guest posting might fall into that category for many people. The idea is to use content to achieve something more tangible: links.

But I think what we are seeing more of today is using content to build engagement. That might include things that used to be called "link bait," guest posting, or other old-school strategies, but for a more noble purpose, for lack of a better word.

Content isn't just a marketing strategy, it is a legitimate form marketing. As marketers, we want to create content that provides value to our audience, and use that as a starting point for engagement. The rest (links, social shares, etc.) will come if the content is great.



Phil Buckley: Clients were initially curious about the Penguin changes, then they become frightened, and now they don't even want to talk about link building. They still understand that links are essential to an SEO strategy, but they are no longer willing to put their website at risk of a penalty.

The talk of "content marketing" underwent a similar, although opposite, discussion. At first, clients thought it was just another thing SEO's were selling, then they saw the idea hit mainstream acceptance, and now it's acknowledged as the a reliable path forward.

The problem with content is that it's work. The reason "traditional" link building worked is because it required almost no work from a client, just a check. Now consultants are telling clients they have to do work. Most have no interest, skills or time to be awesome writers. All of those out-of-work newspaper writers from last decade are suddenly in demand again.

There is still mostly crap being produced, let's be honest. It's about 20% better than where it was a couple of years ago, but that isn't saying much. Most writers are just not skilled in writing for the web, because they haven't been asked to. I fully expect to rewrite the opening line and maybe the first paragraph of almost all of the content that is turned into me. Writers tend to meander into the story, the web hates that.



Greg Gifford: Content marketing has really come to the forefront in the last few years. If you went to any SEO conference a few years ago, most of the sessions were about linkbuilding. Now, there are more content marketing sessions than you can count... And that shows how important it has become.

So many websites and businesses have realized that amazing content is what really matters – but without a solid content marketing strategy, the content just sits there and nobody sees it. We've definitely placed increasing emphasis on quality content and effective strategies for getting that content "out there".



Jessica Bosari: I'm seeing a much higher demand for thought-leadership content. Content marketers want thought-provoking pieces that address events in the news and how those events will shape the future for their audiences. They don't just want original content. They want original thinking.



Rob Garner: The biggest thing I've seen occur is a greater adoption of content marketing by advertisers as a whole. It used to be the smart and cutting edge marketers who were adopting this model. Now the space has become much more crowded. Content marketing has officially become a mainstream strategy, along with search, social, web development, media, etc.



Dayna Moon: Content marketing has emerged as a core component of many of the leading marketers' online arsenal for a variety of reasons. Arguably the "veteran" of the channel, blogging, opened the door for large corporate brands to develop more of a relationship with their targeted audiences – often providing updates on new products and initiatives. As technology often sparks idea and change, spin-offs in the form of micro-blogging and, most recently, infographics have gained a tremendous amount of popularity. As a full-service agency, it is our goal to lead with innovation and act as a consultative partner on behalf of and to our clients. As goals and objectives change, so will our strategies.



Mike Huber: I wouldn't say that CM has evolved in the past 2 years as much as it's become a more mainstream Internet Marketing tactic. The recent Google updates have certainly been a driver to that end, moving more and more webmasters to become involved in Content Marketing. As such, if you've been doing Content Marketing over the past 2 years you are ahead of most webmasters and you are enjoying the traffic.

With the recent focus on CM by more marketers, we are seeing increases in providing content strategies, content audits, content ideation and a combination of services that evaluate where the website is currently and how a content marketing program can be implemented effectively.



Frans Van Hulle: Google Updates have changed the game for most marketers in the sense that if you want your content to rank and to get linked, it needs to be informative and high-quality. There has been so much focus specifically on quality because content is now such a vital component in successful SEO. In that sense, content is even more king than before.

Distribution of content has become much easier thanks to social media. It also makes it easier to decide what type of messaging is most appropriate for which target audience. Social media has also increased the sheer volume which can be presented to end-users, creating a hunger for more and more content.

Content writing has shifted from traditional written formats to a more visual layout, including videos, infographics, webinars and graphics in addition to eBooks, blogs and whitepapers.

Where will content marketing be in 2018? What are your top 3 predictions?

Our content marketing prophets agree: content marketing that is thoughtful, reader-oriented and ultimately more human will be the golden chalice of internet marketing strategy in 2018. Marketers will need to be more and more focused on thought-leadership and ideas, and the presentation of content will expand to emphasize various media. From infographics to video to mobile-optimized material, the face of content marketing – if it hasn't evolved past that title – will be infinitely more colorful and engaging.



Stoney deGeyter: We will never get away from those who look for the strategy of the day that ultimately gets abused until it's penalized. While there is nothing wrong creating specific content strategies for different clients, if we keep our focus on building value then that will give us both unchanging and ever-changing content. Unchanging in the basic approach, anything of value is valuable. Ever changing in that it opens the door to a whole lot of content options that maybe we aren't using fully today (video, PowerPoint, etc.), to possibly other forms that have yet to be invented.



Phil Buckley: The same place it is today. The people and places that are already doing it well, will continue and very few will rise up to meet them. It's just too damn hard, so most will look for a shortcut.



Greg Gifford: In 2018, I doubt it'll be called content marketing anymore – it will just be standard business practice. It won't be something "extra" that you do for additional visibility or ranking boosts – it'll be something you just do every day.

Prediction 1 – Marketing/SEO agencies will have evolved into full-service idea-generators. As content becomes increasingly important, they'll need to hire subject experts in order to stay competitive.

Prediction 2 – Marketing/SEO agencies won't sell their services by showing ranking increases, they'll sell based on awesome content ideas or strategies.

Prediction 3 – Some agency is going to figure out the right way to offer affordable content marketing and strategy to small businesses, and once they figure out how to scale it, they'll be a huge player by 2018.



Jessica Bosari: Evergreen content is evolving to take on a whole new meaning. The market is saturated with short, instructional and educational topics. To be successful going forward, evergreen content will need to be presented in greater depth with high authority sources. Images and video will also become more important in those articles.

Storytelling and humor will matter more in content. These traits build stronger connections with readers and demonstrate the author's authority on a given topic.

People want more excitement and drama in what they read, which can also be related through factual storytelling. The audience wants to feel something. Make them laugh or make them cry, so long as you make them react.

Content will become more expensive as the demand for thought-leadership content grows. This type of content takes about three times as long to produce compared to the traditional blog topics marketers are used to producing. It requires stronger informational sources, a greater focus on visual accents (multiple images, embedded video, etc.) and independent thinking. In addition to being more time consuming, the analytical skills required aren't as readily available in today's pool of web writers.



Rob Garner: The first would be that content marketers and companies will become more like media producers. Content marketing is more than just writing blog posts, and there is still an ongoing education curve. Second, marketers will realize they have to do more than just produce content to get seen and shared. They have to create great content. So it will be less about the content itself, and more about the idea behind it. This is true today, but it will be even more true in 4-5 years. Third, we will see more of the brand newsroom approach to content. While some marketers are already doing this, it will be more of a differentiating factor in the future and will set the good content marketers apart from the great ones. Content is already at the speed of “now,” but marketers have a long way to go to catch up.



Dayna Moon: Content marketing will continue to play a viable role and be a strategic and relationship-building channel for marketers. Brands are emerging as thought leaders and engaging in two-way conversations to foster an enhanced level of trust; however, consumers and fans still place a high degree of trust in their “social circles.”

Visual storytelling will gain in popularity as ad formats take on larger and more creative elements

Following in the footsteps of dynamic creative, content will become more and more interactive and unique to the individuals

Wearable Tech – Google's Glass and Twitter's Helmet (among others) have provided a peek at the future of wearable technology and the opportunities for brands that produce great content to further connect with their core audience and add value within daily activities.



Mike Huber: Content Marketing will certainly evolve over the next 4 years. I think we need to make sure we are considering all screen sizes when we produce content. More and more people are accessing information on tablets and smart phones. We also shouldn't forget that some older channels of distribution should be considered as components of your Content Marketing. For example, email marketing is still a great channel for content distribution and many marketers are missing this all together.

Top 3 predictions

1. Companies will create a content 'culture' internally; actually dedicating resources and creating departments. This is becoming more and more important and the C-suite is starting to understand the importance of providing content that helps people solve problems and make decisions. This is also coming about as people like Arnie

Kuenn evangelize on the importance of Content Marketing.

2. Smart companies will move to responsive design. With all the new screen sizes, it's important to make sure your content fits the screen and with CSS3/HTML5 there is no reason not to accommodate.

3. For many companies, the last place readers find their content is on their website so promotion and distribution are still very important aspects of sharing content. I think that more and more opportunities will evolve to help us market content.



Frans Van Hulle: Mobile Content- By 2018, 90% of content will be consumed on mobile devices, which will have a great impact on how content is displayed across different devices. The approach towards digital display of content will become more seamless, meaning that it won't matter which device you're using to access content.

Relying on Analytics- With so many different distribution channels available, it will become even more important for companies to measure metrics—whether it's the number of downloads or leads, traffic or order volume. Since content has become so central, users are flooded with new information every second. In order to produce content that sticks, it's important to figure out what users really want to see and read.

Dynamic Content- Since most consumers will access content on mobile devices, content will become much more interactive and visual in order to attract end-users to click, like and share. This means that we'll see a steady rise of video-related content and dynamic screen experiences.

What are your favorite tools you use for producing content? What do you primarily use them for?

There are a number of incredibly helpful tools that will facilitate content production. Whether you need to organize your thoughts, type them out, or transform them into an infographic, there are endless resources to achieve success. Most of our experts couldn't live without their word processing programs and, understandably, a source of knowledge, whether that's the client, a writing service for hire, or the latest social media trends.



Stoney deGeyter: My favorite tool is the keyboard. Seriously. If I just start typing, eventually something half-way decent will come about. Then I just go back and delete the junk. Other than that, it's just a matter of staying educated in my industry so I know both what people are interested in and how to meet that need in a new or unique way. I don't care where I write (in WordPress, Word, iOS Notes, etc.), as long as I get the result I want.



Phil Buckley: I like using a service like [Content Runner](#) to get the meat of an article. I then spend about 30 minutes editing and giving it the specifics that make it mine. I can edit all day, but creating from a blank page is a lot harder.



Greg Gifford: My favorite content tool is the client. They've got so much more knowledge capital than anyone on our team, and we've gotten pretty talented at mining their knowledge gold. Once you get the awesome nuggets of knowledge, we can turn the team loose and do awesome things.

We're big fans of a company called CopyPress. They started out as a copywriting company, but they've grown into a content company. They can create anything from written content to interactive experiences and videos. They're affordable, fast, and really good at what they do.

We also love a little social tool called Sendible. It's awesome for managing tons of social profiles and posting to sites for multiple clients. It's also got the best Google+ integration of any social tool on the market.



Jessica Bosari: I write in Word and customize the grammar and spelling checker to fit Associated Press (AP) style, plus the idiosyncrasies of individual client requirements. I also use AP's Style Guard plugin with Word to help me spot potential errors. Most often, my clients request I use Flickr and Wikimedia Commons to source images, although my personal preference is for MorgueFile. To keep all my work and personal life organized, I've started using Task Unifier alongside Toodle.do and it's worked out very well for me.



Rob Garner: I like using search tools as a gauge for content performance, and social tools as well for determining distribution and reach. But, by far, my favorite tool is my brain.



Dayna Moon: In terms of production, "native" content produced by those closest to the brand and/or company who really live and breathe the culture will produce the highest level of engagement. Free alert tools such as Google Alerts, Flipboard, Twitter, etc. are useful in determining what's trending and gaining the most buzz. At the end of the day, the "best" content wins – defining what "best" means is the biggest challenge for a majority of brands.



Mike Huber: I think the tool is predicated on the outcome. We use Word and a number of CMS backbones, Adobe Suite, Video editing tools...really whatever is needed for the particular content format. The format of the content will also dictate the tools used.



Frans Van Hulle: We work primarily with WordPress to create websites and blog posts. We also like to use visual and graphic creation tools that allow you to convey content with the help of graphics, such as canva.com, which allows you to create your own online posters, cover photos, or social media graphics. Info.gram is another great tool that also allows you to create simple infographics. Lastly, Evernote is great for note-taking, organizing content and providing inspiration.

What platforms offer the biggest opportunities for content marketing outside of Google? What's a hidden gem that other marketers aren't talking about where you've found success?

Everyone seems to agree that the key to non-Google content marketing is knowing your audience and knowing them well. Recent changes to LinkedIn have enhanced its content marketing possibilities, and visually-oriented, highly shareable content published on social sites like Pinterest are gaining momentum. Keeping on top of trends is integral to relevant marketing strategies.



Stoney deGeyter: The biggest opportunities outside of Google lay within niche platforms. As platforms become more diverse, audiences become spread out. It's important to find where your target audience is active, even if it's a small little-known platform, and join them there.



Phil Buckley: I think one of the most interesting platforms right now is crowdfunding. Interestingly, people don't even think of it as a platform like email or social media yet, but it's coming. I love that you have a very limited time to tell your story, convince and convert.



Greg Gifford: On the corporate side, our biggest bang comes from LinkedIn. We've got our own group, and we've also joined a few key industry groups. We get exponentially more traction from LinkedIn than from every other social platform combined.



Jessica Bosari: I don't think there are very many secrets in this business. The information is out there for anyone to find. So long as you stay current on the biggest influencers in content marketing, you have good information.



Rob Garner: I really like LinkedIn as an opportunity and a gem. They have recently expanded content sharing, and their platform offers so many opportunities for marketers, well beyond B2B.



Dayna Moon: Visually focused platforms such as Pinterest, Vine, and Facebook's Instagram provide a great opportunity to connect with fans while showcasing how the products or services are actively used. As social media has expanded, so has content, giving brands an opportunity to provide thought leadership, establish relationships, and, more importantly, educate their communities and audiences.



Mike Huber: Again, the content format will dictate what platforms to use. When you say outside of Google, do you consider YouTube outside? Pinterest is all about images. So again, the channel is a lot about the format of the content.

A gem that most marketers are ignoring is LinkedIn. They just opened up the opportunity to publish content on their site and they are well positioned for B2B.



Frans Van Hulle: For one of our brands, PetPremium, Pinterest has proven to be a great platform. It allows you to easily acquire new followers and lends itself as a great tool for content marketing because you are still able to focus on specific keywords. Because of the nature of Pinterest, it is actually easy to spread your content across the platform and attract website visitors.

How do you gauge the effectiveness of the content you produce for yourself as well as for your clients? How do you measure the ROI on content?

Engagement is the name of the game when it comes to the return of investment on content. If your audience is commenting, linking and sharing, you have tangible evidence that your content has been effective. Analyzing data such as site traffic and time-on-page is critical if you want to truly measure the value of your content. When the numbers show that your audience is both growing and spending real time and money on your content, you and your clients reap that benefit.



Stoney deGeyter: Different content has different goals and therefore each piece has to be measured differently. Some specific things that we do look for, again depending on the content, is engagement, social shares, downloads, form submits, links, conversion assists, etc. Before any piece of content is developed it's a good idea to know what the end-goal is. That will help you determine how you promote and, ultimately, measure the success of the content itself.



Phil Buckley: Content has to serve one of three masters. First is conversion. If I have a button at the bottom of a landing page, then revenue is the boss. Second is helpfulness. If a piece of content helps my community they'll let me know with comments, links, and social recognition and shares. Third is interest. Long form content that is meant to teach needs to be read – so I want the time-on-page to show that.



Greg Gifford: We measure ROI by monitoring traffic and conversions. Whether it's for our own company or our clients, we want to know if the content either created social engagement or website visits, and we want to know if either of those led to conversions. Whenever we push out links to social platforms or other sites, we're incredibly granular on our URL tagging so we can see exactly what happens with traffic and conversions.



Jessica Bosari: On my own websites, shout outs from readers and potential clients show me that I am doing something right. Unfortunately, finding time to address metrics on my own websites is very difficult. I place most of my focus on the work I do for my clients. My measurement of success on that level is their continuing to use me regularly and their positive feedback. I live for that!



Rob Garner: I look at traffic, direct response goals, distribution and reach (Did it get shared? Did it reach areas outside my primary channels?), comments on posts, and social interaction. There are myriad ways to measure the ROI on content, and all of them are subjective to specific client goals.



Dayna Moon: Traditional KPIs such as increases in traffic, awareness, time spent on page, etc., are great indicators of engagement and whether the content produced is resonating with the intended audience. If a download or tracking is in place, any type of request for information, email capture, or lead generation will also indicate the overall effectiveness.



Mike Huber: We measure everything from traffic increases to time on site and lead generation numbers. Measuring content ROI is all about identifying your goal(s) up front. Do you want to gain more followers? Boost brand awareness? Establish thought leadership? Some metrics are softer than others, but if you identify your goal and consistently publish content to meet those needs, then you can tweak your content offerings as needed month to month.



Frans Van Hulle: ReviMedia is not that focused on ROI when it comes to content. However, we are trying to lend thought leadership to industry peers and to build brand awareness through high-quality content, all stuff that is hard to measure. One of the ways we measure our effectiveness with the content and social media is Klout, which gives a good indication of our authority and impact.

Do you provide clients guidance on Content Strategy? If so, what are 2 critical things most companies forget about when they create their strategy?

The takeaway advice for clients is to “know where your arrow is pointed.” Most of our panel believes that clients need to be more careful about their content strategies, specifically improving on identifying goals, reaching the correct audience, and avoiding outdated marketing techniques. Using tools such as content calendars can facilitate the strategy, and it’s important for the client to remember that this is not a “one-and-done” process. The changing face of content strategy should always be at the forefront of any client’s marketing plan.



Stoney deGeyter: First, have a goal. Second, have a plan to achieve that goal. Content for the sake of content generally isn’t going to be all that valuable. Determine what you want to happen and what needs to be done, so that the content and promotion efforts behind it achieve the goal.



Phil Buckley: I don’t find that they forget anything during the strategy setting, but they sometimes stumble back to their old ways during the execution phase. Bringing it to their attention usually cures them.



Greg Gifford: We don’t really provide guidance – we steer the ship. That’s why our clients hire us. When we talk to clients who want to be more involved, we stress the importance of 2 things: setting a content calendar that actually gets used, and making sure that there’s accountability in following through with the process.



Jessica Bosari: I offer guidance and suggestions, but always let the client take the lead because many content marketing strategies are based on subjective opinion, rather than hard data.

One frustration I often experience is having my hands tied as far as voice and style. Writing in first person, when done correctly, builds a connection and engages the reader, yet many clients say no to using “I” or referencing personal stories.

I also find designated word counts limiting. It’s hard to support an analytical opinion in just 500 words. To make a strong and impactful point, you need more wiggle room.



Rob Garner: Yes, providing strategic and tactical guidance is one of Advice Interactive’s areas of specialty. A lot of companies miss the opportunity of massive reach in real-time because they are overly and unnecessarily cautious about producing and distributing fluidly. The second thing they forget is there is a media value on impressions and engagement through content. When marketers begin to place a media value on audience engagement, they view content marketing in an entirely different way, and can justify moving more media budget to earned content.



Dayna Moon: As a trusted partner, we are consultative in nature and work alongside our clients to provide a multichannel strategy across that also includes content. Many companies forget that each channel has a slightly different audience and best practices. While it’s important to utilize a cohesive strategy, it is also equally important to tailor messages based on their channel.



Mike Huber: Absolutely. At Vertical Measures, we offer a variety of content strategy services. We find that many companies believe that if they begin creating content, new customers will simply find them. For content marketing to work, it has to be a sustained publishing effort, and promotion has to be a part of that.

Another misnomer about content strategy is that you need to develop your brand’s story, personas and a full-blown, 50-page strategy. If you’re an SMB, a better approach is simply to aim to help your customers. Identify their pain points and create content around that. A strategy will support that and more importantly, including tactics helps the client take action. We include topic ideation, content calendars detailed down to the content format and placement ideas. The more granular and more tactical our deliverables are, the better our clients are able to publish.



Frans Van Hulle: We are not giving guidance to clients, all our content marketing is related to our own properties. However, if I would have to give two critical things to think about in defining and executing content:

- Quality above quantity. Better to create 20 great content pieces, than 100 average, low value ones. Focus on creating master pieces
- Make a realistic content plan. Nothing more frustrating than defining a great content plan, to find out you are just not able to meet the objectives you set.

Which of the Google updates has impacted you the most and changed the way you create and market content?

Far and away, the consensus is that the most impactful Google update has been Penguin. By punishing many forms of link building, Penguin forced many people to overhaul their content marketing strategy. Many of our interviewees have been focused on the relevance of their content since before the update, and they largely anticipate that future algorithmic changes will continue to focus on the quality and context of content. While this may alienate inexperienced internet marketers or those trapped in the past, our interviewees believe that this will serve to “weed out” illegitimate marketers and reward those working hard to create relevant, engaging content.



Stoney deGeyter: None. It's always been about creating valuable content for us. However, when it comes to optimizing the title tags of content, I would say Hummingbird has caused us to not be so concerned about keyword placement in title tags. Yes, title tags are still important but the keyword doesn't have to be at the very front if you can create a more readable title otherwise.



Phil Buckley: Well the most recent are always the freshest wounds, so I will say Panda and Penguin have done more to push out the old, short-term SEO practices more than anything. But beyond Google, people are engaging with the web very differently now. People don't search like they used to, we are starting to use our networks now as filters and following what seems interesting from our Facebook feeds or Twitter or Google+. When you think about what you were doing on the web a decade ago and how you use it now it's mind-boggling.



Greg Gifford: We actually haven't been impacted by the updates... We've always stressed the importance of good content, so while we didn't always call it “content marketing,” that's what we've been doing for years. If anything, we've had more buy-in from potential clients who WERE hit by updates, since they realize that our process is what they really need.



Jessica Bosari: Penguin. No question. I've lost clients whose sites were destroyed by that algorithm change. Old black-hat marketing tactics came back to bite them, and many found the labor of going through and curating links too much work. Instead, they simply let their sites go.

The lesson here is that algorithms will be constantly evolving towards relevance. Stay relevant through the hard work of writing engaging content. There are no shortcuts for long term success.



Rob Garner: Penguin and Panda are, of course, the big ones, and we have shifted from being “keyword-centric,” to being more “audience-centric,” and “persona-centric.” We also focus a lot on local search and have a proprietary platform called LocalSiteSubmit.com that anchors strong local signals to Google, which in turn can make content more authoritative. The old days of easy and overly optimized SEO are gone, and I am actually very pleased about it in many ways, because it makes marketers think more about a long-term and sustainable approach to search, social, and content, which is a win-win for legit marketers everywhere.



Dayna Moon: Any update to a platform will result in changes in performance, set-up and ultimately best practices and optimization. New and updated content on Google+ can have a positive impact on SEO rankings, especially utilizing a comprehensive digital strategy and analyzing performance across multiple channels.



Mike Huber: Penguin is the update that has impacted many of our new clients. Our advice is to fix this problem first prior to doing any content marketing. If you are in a penalty whether it's algorithmic or a manual penalty, adding content to your site won't help you gain traffic. Link building is still important. In fact, Matt Cutts said that links are still baked into the algorithm and will be used in the near future for ranking purposes.



Frans Van Hulle: The update that had the most impact was Penguin. The update that had the second-most impact was Hummingbird, although the effects of Hummingbird for us are not clear yet. Penguin profoundly influenced a lot of marketers to change their approach to content marketing because it had such an impact on SEO. Penguin made black hat practices punishable and therefore forced marketers to focus on quality content much more. Hummingbird looks at the context of content and user search intent and places more emphasis on educational and informational value.

What social platforms work the best for you to promote your content? What's one piece of insight that many people don't know when it comes to social promotion?

Follow your audience. There are about five huge social networking sites to help spread your influence; rather than doing some mediocre content marketing on all of them, promote yourself effectively and well on the few where you have built the greatest influence. If you have a product to sell, try Pinterest; its visual format and keyword focus lends itself well to shareability. Facebook is classic for combining written content and images, and you are able to target specific people, thereby igniting the curiosity of your audience and inviting future clicks and shares. Twitter is incredibly valuable for its ability to instantly connect with your audience and keep up with news stories and relevant media. In the end, the best social platform will be the tailored to your content needs. Once you identify your strengths and your audience, your way will be clear.



Stoney deGeyter: Again, it really depends on the content. Not everything gets promoted the same way and different social networks have varying strengths for particular types of content and the audience they are intended to reach. On a personal level, I'm not as good at engaging on social media as I should be, so I tend to gravitate toward LinkedIn that isn't all about the instant response that the other social networks like Twitter are typically built on. The most important thing is that you're promoting your content and building communities where your target audience is active.



Phil Buckley: The answer for this will be different for everyone, because the answer is "the network where I have the strongest network". I do think people don't see the power of Google+ yet, and that's unfortunate.



Greg Gifford: We pretty much stick with the big 3 for our clients – Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus. Those have the most bang for the buck, and are where the vast majority of their client base spend time. When we’re promoting our own content, we use those three, but concentrate a lot on LinkedIn. As I mentioned above, we get WAY more out of LinkedIn than we do out of the other three combined.

When it comes to social promotion, most people don’t get it right because they still like to make it “all about them.” It’s not an ego thing – even if you’ve created the best piece of content ever, you have to market it as something the customer needs... not as something awesome you made that makes you look cool.



Jessica Bosari: I think this definitely depends on your audience. Teens spend hours on Tumblr. If that’s your audience, it’s where you should be.

For the rest of us, Facebook is an excellent resource. When I have articles that are relevant to people I know, I will give them a shout out in Facebook with a link to the article. Making your social promotions relevant to specific individuals also piques the curiosity of others in the social circle. They click through just to see what I wrote about that was so important that I made a special shout out to that other individual.



Rob Garner: There is an enterprise tool called Right Intel that is fantastic for curation and production when used properly, and with a good-sized team. The biggest secret to social promotion is growing your network reach through increased followers, friends, likes, circles, etc.—meaning these people are following you. The larger the network (and the more engaging the content), the more successful your content promotion efforts will be.



Dayna Moon: In terms of reach and awareness, social media platforms have been integral in promoting content. The direct descendants of blogging, social platforms are a natural fit when engaging and establishing a relationship in an educational and conversational environment. And like any conversation, it takes at least two parties which some have overlooked when promoting content.



Mike Huber: Facebook still tends to have the largest reach of all the social networks. But it’s important to know your audience, and research where your target demographic(s) are spending their time already. Remember that you don’t have to be on every social channel, and you don’t have to be on Facebook. It’s best to pick the platforms that will work best for you. Being an active participant and consistently publishing compelling content on 1 or 2 social media channels is more valuable than having a stale presence across 10 different social networks.



Frans Van Hulle: Facebook and Twitter lend themselves in a great way because of the volume of content you can publish. Although we have not found “the business case” in this model yet, we’ll keep investing in this for branding and building authority purposes. For PetPremium, Pinterest has proven most useful because of the ability to focus on keywords.