

# Great Ideas for Generating Great Content

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# It's not that you're incapable of coming up with good ideas. Sometimes it's simply not believing you can, or failing to be aware of ideas that are right in front of you.

I remember the first time it was suggested that I start a newsletter to reach out to prospects and customers. This was before blogging really took off. So not only did I need to think about the content of a newsletter, I had to come up with a design.

As a designer, the layout wasn't a problem. But I couldn't imagine I'd have enough content for a monthly newsletter. We're not even talking a multi-page newsletter... just one page!

After an amazing amount of procrastination, I took a leap of faith and started my newsletter. I committed to putting it out on the first of every month. And something strange happened once I made that commitment. I started coming up with topics at just about every turn.

It's not unlike the classic experience most of us have when buying a car. You're thinking about a car in particular you might want to buy, or you've just bought it. Suddenly, you start seeing that model of car everywhere. It's not so much a matter of the car not being there before, you're just more aware of it because it became a primary focus for you.

A similar phenomenon occurs with creating content. When you commit to it, you see potential articles for your audience everywhere. Even negative or funny situations are filtered through the thought of, "*How can I turn this into an article for my readers?*"

Let me give you an example. Here's an article I wrote on one my blogs about a real-life experience:

Many years ago, I heard a tape (and just by using the word tape, you can guess how long ago it was) by business and motivational speaker Denis Waitley.

He talked about how a salesman in a men's clothing store was complimenting him over a suit he was trying on. The salesman said something like, "*That suit is really you. Not everyone can wear that type of suit. But on you, it really comes to life.*"

Waitley bought the suit.

When someone compliments you like that, even if it's a salesman and you're a bit suspicious of his motives, it does tend to make you stand a bit taller and prouder, right?

I flashed back to that story the other day while at a men's clothing store. I'm speaking in Australia soon about content marketing and wanted a new pair of slacks and possibly a new dress shirt or two.

I explained that in addition to speaking in front of a group, the presentation would be video-taped. So I was looking for clothes that would look great on the screen and go good with my Washington State tan. (For those who aren't

familiar with the Pacific Northwest, anyone with a tan is either from out of town, or got it artificially. We generally tend to be a bit pasty.)

The salesman brought out some traditional dress shirts, then tossed in a type of turtleneck, not unlike what Steve Jobs of Apple wears. It wasn't really my style, but I decided to try it on since the guy was insisting I might like it.

When I came out of the dressing room and stood in front of the mirror, he said, "*Hey... that makes you look like a distinguished professor.*"

He lost the sale on that shirt right then.

I immediately thought of the Waitley story. I couldn't read the salesman's mind, but I think he was feeding me a line to make a sale. Or perhaps he was sincere.

But the reason I dismissed the turtleneck was because I had no desire to look like a "distinguished professor."

Fair or not, here's what came to mind when I heard that phrase: Someone who has been around a long time in the classroom, not in the business trenches. Someone who tells students "these are the facts," not a business colleague who says, "this is my experience, but there are no concrete rules."

In other words, the phrase had negative connotations in this scenario. (And no offense to professors. I know many have lots of real-life experience to share. I'm just relating my initial reaction.)

The salesman had no way of knowing that. And I think

that was part of his mistake... he didn't really take the time to get to know me or bother to ask what type of image I wanted to convey. Instead, he probably made some assumptions based on his experience with other customers.

So here's my question for you: When you're talking to a prospect for the first time, are you taking the time to ask questions and really understand what he or she is after? Or are you, in a manner of speaking, trying to talk them into a shirt that isn't right for them?

It's vital, if we're to be respected and called upon for our expertise, that we make sure we understand the true needs of the prospect. We don't want to rush through the sales process because we're afraid any delay might give them a chance to change their mind. And we certainly don't want to give them something that we find out too late wasn't in their best interest.

Ask questions. Understand the true need. Then make appropriate recommendations that will solve that need. Don't try to shoehorn the prospect into a solution that isn't a good fit.

That was the article. Before I even left the store, I started writing it in my head.

You see, I had trained myself to filter just about anything that happens to me through the "*How can I turn this into an article for my readers?*" question.

So I'm going to ask you to take a leap of faith with me. If you're struggling with the idea of consistently coming up with ideas, trust that the ideas will come as you commit to the process.

But I want to do more than just ask that you take the leap. I want to give you some actionable ideas to get you rolling.

These are some of the same ideas I use to generate content, so I know they work.

The main thing to keep in mind is helping the reader. With content marketing, we want to provide value. As I talk about in my *Extending Your Virtual Handshake* presentation, we want to be seen as a trusted advisor, not a salesperson.

Yes, we're ultimately wanting to sell something. But there are many ways to go about it. Keep giving people value and when they're ready to buy, you're more likely to be at the top of the list.

OK, let's get started...

## 1. Begin playing a mental game with yourself

For about 2 - 3 weeks, I want you to take just about every experience and ask, *How can I turn this into an article for my audience?*

Now, I'm realistic... not every experience makes for a good article. And you won't be able to do this non-stop through your waking hours.

But let's start right here. Based on what you're reading in this guide, how can you translate this information into something that makes sense for your readers?

Even if you think this is the worst thing you've ever read, can you pull an article out of it? How about, *How Not to Write a Helpful Guide?*

So even if you feel you got nothing of value from this guide, you can come up with an article about how you got nothing of value.

Of course, that's somewhat of a trick. If you hate this guide and get nothing from it except an article on how much you hated it, technically you got something from it.

Stuck in traffic? Pull an article out of it.

Rotten customer service experience? Definitely an article.

Read an interesting book in your field? Write about it.

Again, not everything lends itself to a great article for your audience. But I would be willing to bet that if you're new to content marketing, you're not tapping into the wealth of ideas floating in front of you each day.

## 2. What are your customers/prospects searching for on your site?

Conveniently enough, people who are already or may want to start doing business with you are giving you clues on what to write about.

If your site or blog has a search function, what keywords are they using? Taking this idea a step further, are you checking your website stats to see what keywords are bringing them in from the various search engines?

Most sites have this functionality built-in. If that's news to you, you really need to learn how it works for your site.

Here's a simple example from one of my sites, magalogguy.com. Until I got more consistent with checking user keyword searches,

I was primarily writing about magalogs. But in the magalog family, there are variations... bookalogs, slim jims, and tabloids. I had mentioned them in passing, but hadn't written an article dedicated to each one.

But then I noticed I was getting a lot of hits to my site from the term "slim jim marketing" and related searches. Based on the search terms, I knew people weren't talking about the snack or locksmith device, also known as slim jims.

As I mentioned, I had never written a dedicated article about slim jims. Yet from the searches on my site and hits from search engines, people were basically telling me, "*We need information about this, not just passing mentions of it!*"

I may not be the smartest guy in the world, but it didn't take a genius to see what I needed to do. Thus, a full article (and even a YouTube video) was created to explain the slim jim marketing format.

Now, when people search on slim jims for marketing purposes, they're being directed to my content that gives them great information and establishes me as an expert in that area.

### **3. What are your sales and support staff being asked about?**

This idea is usually for companies that are large enough to need sales and support staff. Although if you're a business of one, you probably are the sales and support staff.

Sales and support are on the front lines, dealing directly with customers and prospects.

The sales team is fielding a ton of questions before they close a

sale. And the support team is probably being asked questions about your product or service you could have never dreamed of on your own.

Some of the answers may be included in support documents or your marketing material. But why not turn them into blog articles where you can expand on those topics and inject a bit more personality?

And when spreading your content to prospects in social media channels, pointing people to a personal article is much better than pointing them to a dry, just-the-facts, support document.

If you are a solo operation and not getting a lot of these questions directly for some reason, it may feel like cheating, but do larger competitors have an online FAQ that could tip you off to topics you could write about?

I'm not saying you should go to another site and copy/paste information on your own site. That's bad and completely unnecessary.

I am saying you could look at that content for inspiration on creating something to discuss with your audience. Your own unique experiences will always give you a different take on any topic.

### **4. Ask current customers about the issues they're grappling with**

Sometimes we miss resources right under our noses. Maybe we just don't want to bother customers or clients.

But just because they've bought from you doesn't mean every need has been solved. That's why it's good to check in every

so often, colleague-to-colleague, and see what issues they're dealing with. This can tip you off to all sorts of new topics to write about.

A nice bonus to this idea is that it may open your eyes to some value-added services or products you can offer. Or, as I've found out with some of my clients, I can tell them about other services I already offer that they didn't know about.

### Bottom Line

Every article you write for your blog (or every video you create if you're a video blogger) should have value for the reader whether they buy from you right now or not.

For some purchases, it may take months or even years before a final decision is made.

Your personalized blog articles give you and your prospects a reason to keep talking during this decision period.

For current customers, this content provides continual value and helps build customer loyalty.

It also gives people a reason to keep returning to your site.

And it's certainly a huge boost to driving traffic to your site.

### Where to go from here

Content marketing, creating content, and repurposing content are huge topics. Admittedly, it can be overwhelming to get started and put a good system in place. I wanted to give you some ideas to get started, but it's a virtually unending topic.

So, I want to offer you three options to help you take the next

step and continue the journey as effectively as possible.

**1. Attend my *Extending Your Virtual Handshake* webinar or live presentation.** This is where I cover the basics of content marketing for the beginner, and talk about almost two dozen different channels that you can repurpose that content. After all, if you're creating content, you might as well make that content work as hard as it can for you. This is where many businesses stumble. They create great content, but it dies a quick death in the blog archives. There's no need for that! We can breath new life into that content.

**2. One-on-one consulting.** This is an opportunity to work directly with me and come up with ideas and plans that are specific to your situation. When I speak in-person to groups at events, I always make time for the personal interaction away from the stage. That's when we can dig in and work out a plan that is tailored to *you*. While we might not be able to meet face-to-face, a phone call is the next best thing.

**3. Sign up for my *Extending Your Virtual Handshake* updates.** There is a lot more to share on this topic. It's a real passion for me and I want to give you the tools and inspiration to make it work for you. To sign up, and get other resources, please visit: <http://mikeklassen.com/resources>

### How to Contact Me

I believe in being accessible. So if you have questions about what I've written in this guide, feel free to contact me at: <http://mikeklassen.com>

I look forward to hearing from you and doing what I can to help you get started with content marketing and repurposing.

# About Mike Klassen



**Mike Klassen** is a consultant, speaker, author and direct marketing graphic designer, helping businesses boost sales and create more personal connections with customers and prospects.

He speaks extensively about content marketing and content repurposing, showing how businesses can stand out from competitors while solidifying relationships with customers and prospects.

In his role as a direct marketing graphic designer, Mike works with clients to leverage their content through magalogs, books, sales letters and training material.

In addition to helping clients around the world, Mike works directly with businesses on the stage and in the classroom. His experience is shared in articles and advice that have appeared in *Print Professional Magazine*, *ESBJournal*, *Home Business Magazine*, and *Inside Freelance Design*.

He's also the host of the *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections Podcast* and co-host of the *Neanderthal Marketing Radio Show*, both available on iTunes.

Mike is the author of *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections: Maximizing Your Content to Boost Sales and Generate Better-Quality Leads*.

To learn more about Mike and how he can help you boost sales or speak to your group, visit: <http://mikeklassen.com>

*[Mike's] presentation was a stand-out among our delegates. His content was well thought-out and he provided lots of examples and tips on how those listening could take immediate action on the points he had to share. What else I loved about Mike was the fact that he was extremely approachable and our members enjoyed lots of face-time with Mike as he helped them through various issues relating to Marketing and building their personal and business brand. We'd welcome him back anytime and would highly encourage any organisation to engage Mike wherever in the world they may happen to be.*

## **Dale Beaumont**

Author of 16 Best Selling Books

Founder and CEO of Business Blueprint