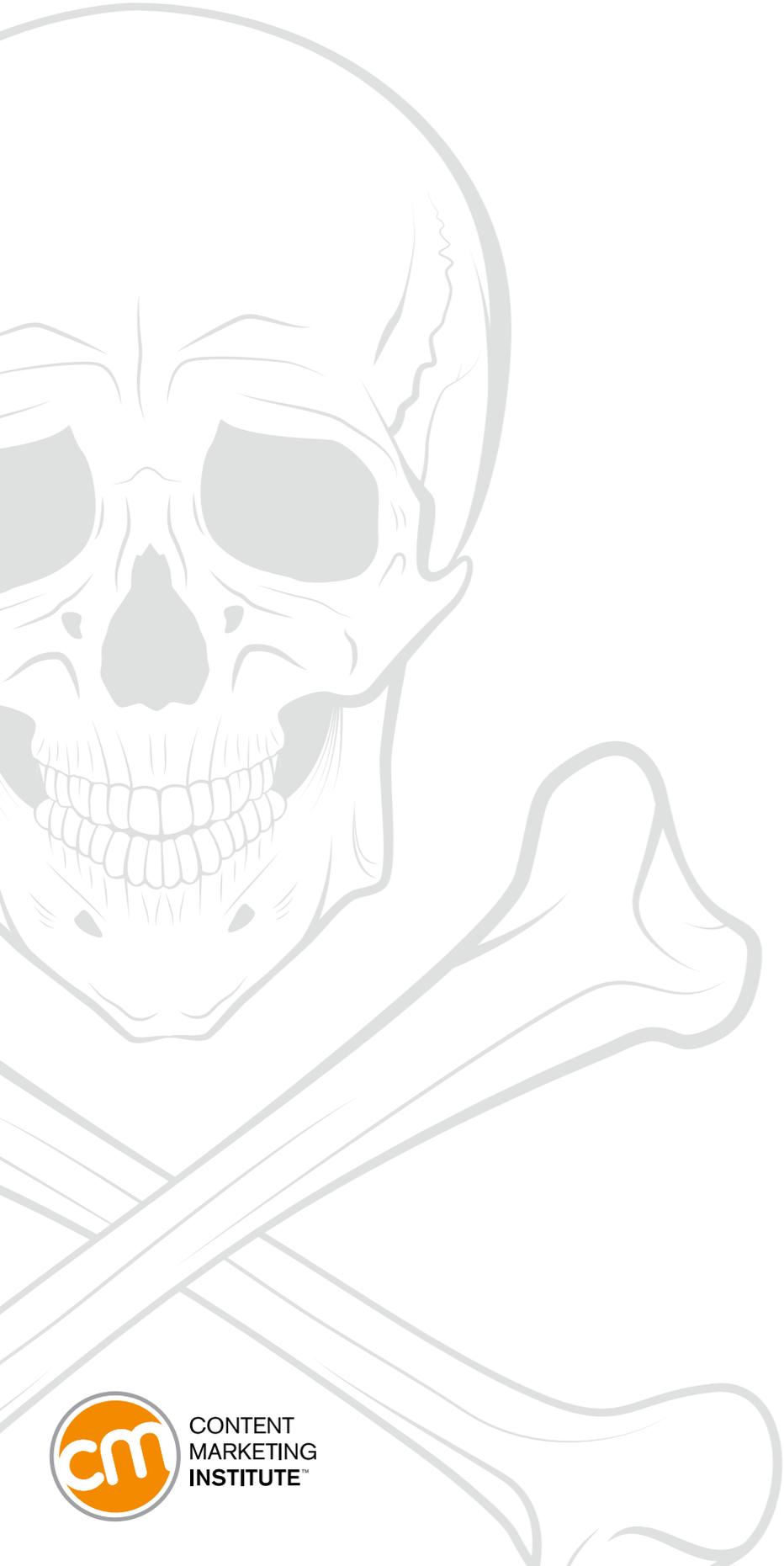




# **13** CONTENT MARKETING **MISTAKES** THAT ARE POISONING YOUR PROGRESS



CONTENT  
MARKETING  
INSTITUTE™



## **It's time for some tough love: If your content marketing isn't performing as well as you expected it to, it's probably not the discipline's fault — it's yours.**

Content marketing works — we've seen the success stories from dozens of businesses, large and small. But it's not a "set-it-and-forget-it" kind of technique. It takes time, dedication, and a solid plan right from the start. It also takes flexibility and the willingness to continually tweak your formula so that you're always getting peak performance.

If your content marketing program is bringing in leads, engaging prospects and customers, and achieving strong ROI, then this e-book isn't for you. But if you are running into problems that are keeping you from reaching the success you deserve, it might be time to take out your chemistry kit and make some adjustments to your formula.

Because every troubleshooting expedition can use a map, we've gathered some helpful guidance from Neil Patel — founder of KISSmetrics, and one of CMI's most prolific and experienced contributors. Neil's words of wisdom can help you overcome the barriers to success and get back on the right path.



# YOU GIVE UP

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As Joe Pulizzi once said\*, “Content marketing doesn’t usually fail because of content quality. The main reason is because it’s inconsistent or it stops.” Neil’s advice? “Never, ever quit.”

Many businesses view marketing through the lens of the annual report. Quarterly earnings, key performance indicators, and metrics must be up and to the right on the graph to validate a current marketing technique. The problem is, content marketing doesn’t work this way. Results may not come instantly; and even if you are fortunate enough to achieve “overnight success” with a particular piece of content, these types of wins may not have a sustainable impact on your business’ goals.

If you are committed to the technique but you still aren’t moving the needle, don’t get discouraged and give up. Look for trouble spots, like the ones described below — a few simple tweaks here and there may be all you need to shake things up and forget that you ever doubted your content marketing’s potential.



# YOU ARE FOCUSING ON QUANTITY, NOT QUALITY

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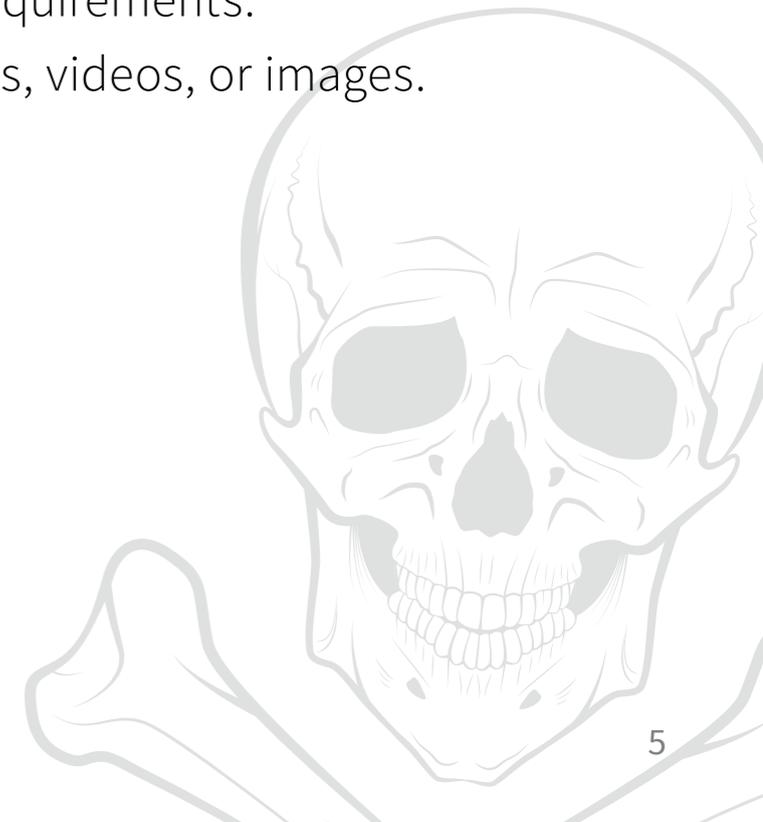
Why is quality important? There are many reasons, including it builds trust, increases your engagement, and drives thought leadership. But paramount among all those reasons is this: Content quality is important because Google thinks it's important. And since Google sends you more traffic than any other source, it gets to set the standards.

**Consider [Google's own explanation](#) on why quality is essential:**

*“Provide high-quality content on your pages, especially your homepage. This is the single most important thing to do. If your pages contain useful information, their content will attract many visitors and entice webmasters to link to your site.”*

# Here are some requirements for creating content that achieves high-quality status in Google's robotic eyes:

- ▶ The content on the page should be unique.
- ▶ Don't stuff it with keywords.
- ▶ Use internal links to make it easy for users to navigate to other content you offer on a related topic.
- ▶ Focus on a single subject (you can always link to additional pages on related topics, or break a complex topic into multiple parts).
- ▶ Use affiliate links or ads with caution (or not at all), as they may detract from the user's experience and engagement.
- ▶ If you create pages dealing with finances, medical information, or other sensitive topics that are subject to regulation, make sure your content is accurate, trustworthy, and meets all legal requirements.
- ▶ Your content should include helpful features like takeaways, key data, explanations, videos, or images.





# YOUR CONTENT IS ALL ABOUT THOSE LINKS

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Speaking of Google, another quality-related error many content marketers make is that they focus on getting links to and from their content, rather than on creating content worth linking to. While old-school SEO was all about the links, today there are a lot of other factors that have a greater impact on your content's rank and influence. These include citations, brand mentions, and link quality.

To ensure that your content strategy is supported with best practices that will organically draw audience interest, avoid shady link-bait practices like:

- ▶ Creating pages with little or no original content
- ▶ Cloaking
- ▶ Using sneaky redirects
- ▶ Adding hidden text or links
- ▶ Creating doorway pages
- ▶ Loading pages with irrelevant keywords



# YOU AREN'T MARKETING YOUR CONTENT

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As Neil explains in his [Advanced Content Marketing Guide](#), “The secret to content marketing boils down to three things: creating great content, making sure it gets found in search engines, and promoting it to your followers.”

If you don't [market your content](#), it will never get the chance to spread its wings and bring in new fans and followers, let alone new prospects and customers.

## If you haven't been giving your content the promotional support it needs, consider adding one or two of these tactics into the mix:

- ▶ **Leverage influencer marketing:** When influencers promote a product or service, their circles are likely to respond — both through immediate action and by spreading positive brand association.
- ▶ **Activate your followers and subscribers:** Get your audience members excited about your content and they'll share it with their networks on your behalf.
- ▶ **Create Google AdWords campaigns:** If you're promoting a new white paper or e-book, you can create display campaigns to raise awareness and remarketing campaigns to retarget visitors who abandon your content before taking action.
- ▶ **Develop social media campaigns:** Sharing your content on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram may not make your content a viral success story overnight, but every interaction it earns from the members of your community has the potential to create a ripple effect that can impact your bottom line over time.
- ▶ **Build email marketing campaigns:** Think of a well-executed email strategy as the backbone of a successful content marketing program. It's an essential structure that supports your various content efforts and is the best technique for [building a subscriber base](#) — which helps you stay at the top of your readers' minds.
- ▶ **Experiment with native advertising:** This in-stream content distribution technique uses ads that appear as part of the typical browsing experience, extending the reach of your content to audiences that may not be exposed to your owned channels.



# YOUR WRITING IS DULL, IS POORLY CONSTRUCTED, OR LACKS FOCUS

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Writing high-quality content is a challenging task; and, let's face it, not every content marketer is cut out to become the next Hemingway. But, if your content isn't performing properly, a failure to follow the basic mechanics of quality writing may be the source of the problem.

For content marketing to succeed, your company's ideas need to be communicated clearly, logically, and in a compelling way — and nothing hinders good communication like sloppy writing, confusing or disorganized ideas, or discussions that leave readers hanging.

## Here are some tips for constructing your content in a way that will grab audience attention, get them excited, and spur them to take action:

- ▶ **Stop using third-person corporate gibberish:** Which is more interesting: “*CorpCorp has recently been selected by the best-practice board to be the recipient of an annual merit award,*” or “*Woot! Guess what, guys! We just won a prize — a big one!*”?
- ▶ **Write like a human — and don’t be afraid to write long stuff:** Long is not boring. Long is trustworthy, shareable, engaging, and valuable. If you’ve never written a 2,000-word article before, give it a try.
- ▶ **Make your point clear and compelling, and deliver it quickly:** Exciting content has a clear point of view and isn’t ashamed to show it. Make sure your point is stated in your headline, is explained in the first few lines of content (i.e., before your reader loses interest and moves on), and is supported throughout the rest of your effort.
- ▶ **Structure your discussion logically and present it in a readable way:** As you research and write your article, don’t merely string together a few random thoughts. Instead, create an outline of your ideas to give your discussion substance and a logical flow. Then, follow user experience best practices to lay out your content so that it’s easy to read and visually engaging.
- ▶ **Don’t forget the conclusion:** As content creators, we labor over headlines and opening lines, but we often forget what to do when it’s time to say, “This article is over.” Give your readers something to remember by including a strong conclusion that sums up your discussion, reiterates your main point, and directs readers toward the next step you want them to take.



# YOUR OFFERINGS HAVE BECOME PASSÉ

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Similar to the problem of poorly written content, relying on topics and formats that have gone past their expiration date is also an issue. These efforts may have been exciting and on target when you first published them; but after a while, even the best content can grow old and stale.

Letting your content become outdated diminishes its ability to attract and engage an audience. It can also reflect poorly on your company's ability to relate to readers' current challenges and concerns.

## To freshen up your content offerings, try these tips:

- ▶ **Think outside the blog:** Content marketing is more than just creating a blog and publishing articles. Consider shaking things up by experimenting with new formats, such as videos, podcasts, e-books, or webinars.
- ▶ **Paint a visual picture for your readers:** Using visual imagery in your content is an instant eye-catcher. But don't just stop at adding a few charts or photos to your usual blog posts. To increase interest, exposure, and engagement, try creating content in visual-centric formats like SlideShares, infographics, or videos.
- ▶ **Create a conversation:** In contrast to “push marketing” techniques, content marketing works best when the audience can interact with it. Try asking a question or offering up a controversial point of view that gives readers an opportunity to weigh in on the discussion.
- ▶ **Get real:** Being too protective of your business' plans, practices, failures, and successes can hinder your reputation as a transparent and trustworthy business. You don't have to spill company secrets, but offering a glimpse behind the scenes can really give your audience something to engage with and relate to personally.
- ▶ **Ramp up your content production:** If it's done intentionally and strategically, increasing your output velocity can demonstrate your business' ongoing commitment to successful content marketing and can help you reach new audiences and spur more feedback — which will infuse some much-needed energy into your efforts.
- ▶ **Give your content creators total autonomy:** No one enjoys reading content that obviously comes from a corporate entity; people want to hear from other people. Encouraging your writers to use their own voice to express your business' point of view can add some much-needed personality to the content you publish.



# YOUR STORYTELLING LEADS TO A DEAD END

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The phrase “content marketing” is misleading because you might think that the content itself does all the marketing work. But you can’t just expect readers to consume your content and instantly become loyal and engaged customers. You need to gently encourage them to take the next step in the purchase process, and that requires including a clear call to action.

People expect a request for them to take some action after reading content. That’s the whole idea behind marketing — you want people to do something based on the information they just received.

Start asking for action on your blog posts and other content forms. The CTA does not need to entail a million-dollar deal agreement. It just needs to be a mailing list sign-up, or a link to another resource you offer, or whatever other conversion point you are looking to support. Without it, you are simply creating a means that is unlikely to lead to a desirable end.



# YOU ARE CREATING TOO MUCH CONTENT

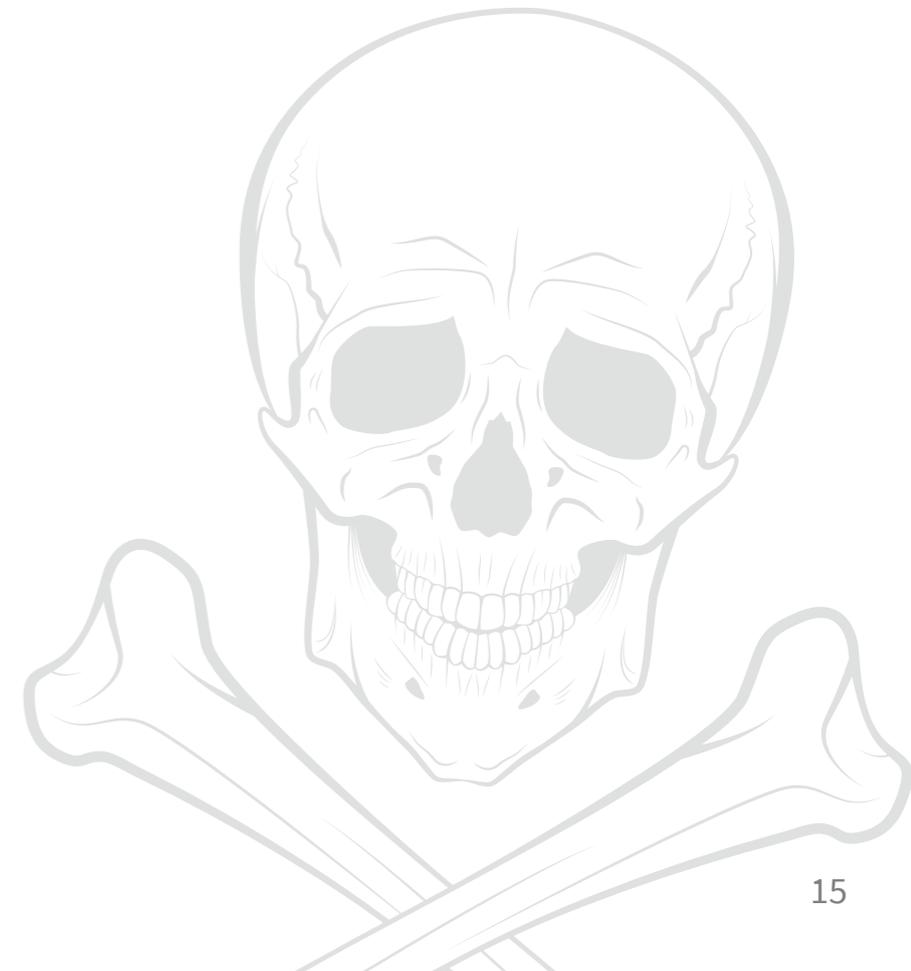
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Though kicking your production up a notch can be a way to re-energize a stagnant content marketing program, it's important to know when enough is enough.

It used to be that if you produced more content, you would win the content marketing game. Today, however, content generation has far surpassed search volume, as well as the ability of audiences to consume it all.

# Instead of producing more, concentrate on producing better. What does this mean?

- ▶ **Better content invariably means less content.** You can't produce the best possible content at breakneck speed.
- ▶ **Better content has an upper threshold.** You can only get so much better. Just like we reach a ceiling in quantity, there's also a ceiling to quality. When you reach this threshold, you need to find a new direction. And that new direction might be to look to create something different — not just do a better job of creating the same old content.
- ▶ **Better content depends on the audience.** It doesn't just mean longer or more detailed articles with perfect grammar and spelling. Better content is content that addresses the audience in more powerful and impactful ways.





# YOUR CONTENT MIMICS YOUR COMPETITORS' OFFERINGS

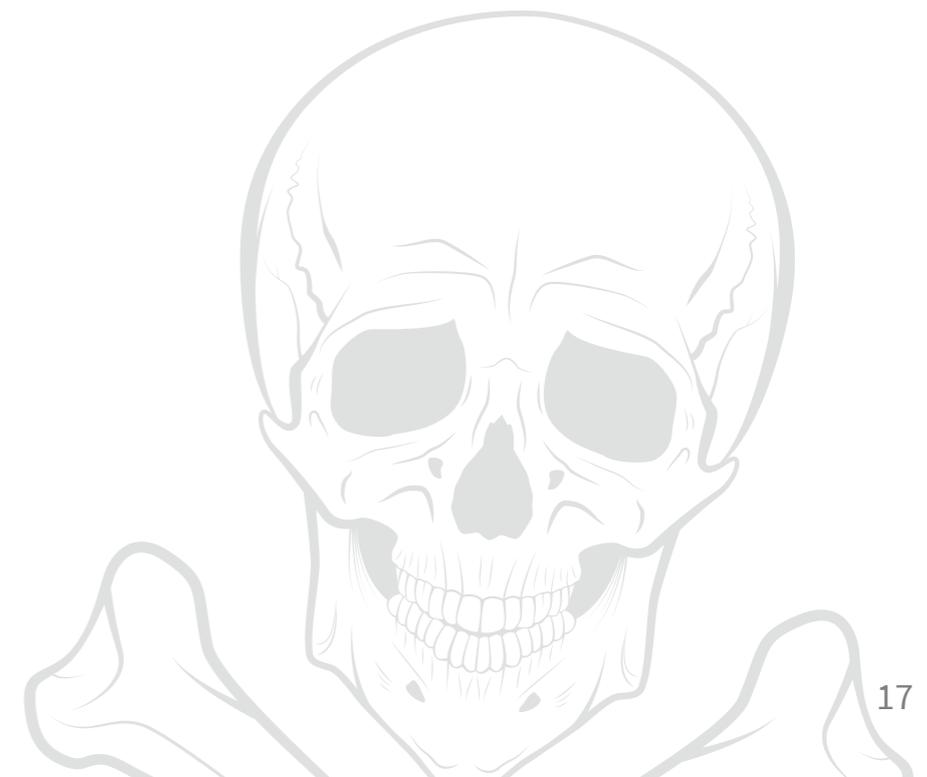
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It's important to keep an eye on what your competitors are up to with their content marketing. But rather than obsessing over or imitating their efforts (for all you know, they might be doing things wrong), your energy will be better spent on using that knowledge to identify areas where you can provide unique value, fill a need they aren't meeting, or otherwise distinguish your business from the rest of the pack.

A lot of businesses are doing the same things with their content, or are using the same old standby tactics time and time again, and it's not working. For example, take a look at a couple common B2B marketing mistakes that keep getting repeated:

- ▶ **Publishing more white papers:** There is an assumption that white papers are a linchpin of B2B content marketing success. This isn't necessarily true. Focus instead on what works for your niche — and here's a hint: It might not be white papers.
- ▶ **Just doing a blog:** The blog is a great content format, but that alone doesn't constitute successful content marketing. A blog is only *one component* of content marketing. There are even some niches, believe it or not, in which a blog might not be a good idea.

Find what works for you. Don't swallow the line that content marketing in your industry *must* involve A, B, and C. Invent your own alphabet. Don't look for patterns to follow; look for your own unique path to success.





# YOU ARE LIMITING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR CONTENT FORMATS

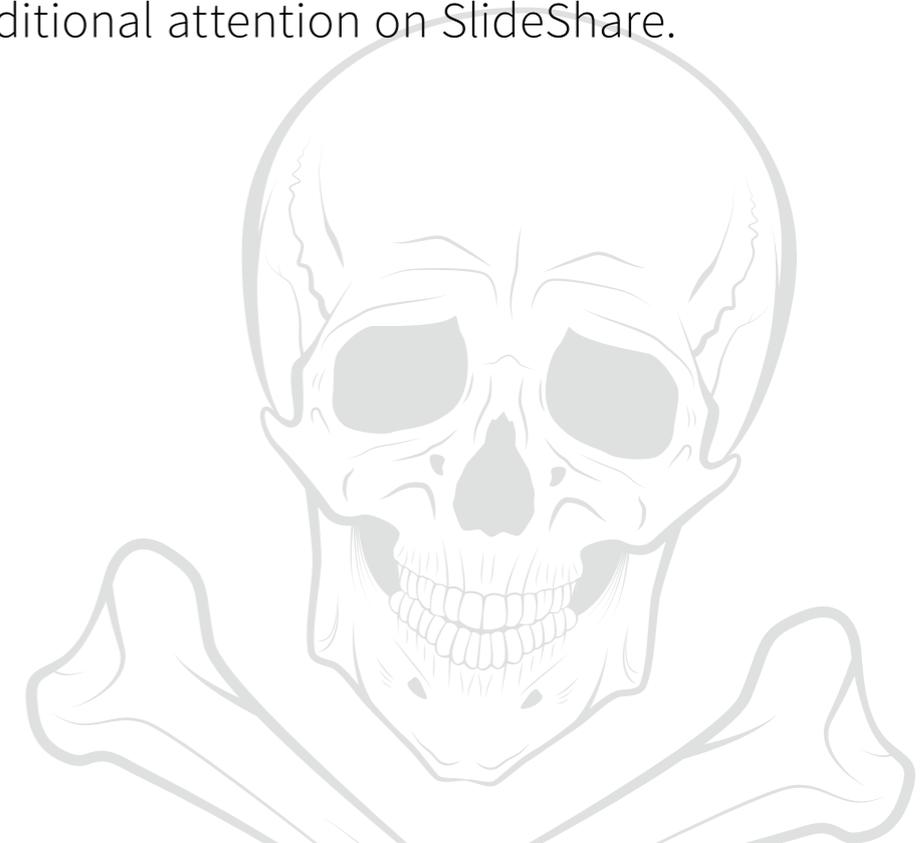
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As Neil mentioned above, content marketing efforts don't have to follow a set pattern or involve any particular elements. This applies to the format you use for your content just as much as it does to the content itself. If you are always doing the same old thing, how can you expect to get better results?

Take SlideShare, for example. With its 3 billion presentation views per month, and more than 15 million monthly uploads, SlideShare is a content marketing powerhouse. But it's also one of the noisiest business-focused social channels. So if you want to stand out, try thinking outside the presentation deck and experimenting with other ways to share your insights.

## Consider these ideas for expanding your SlideShare horizons and getting more mileage from every piece of content you create:

- ▶ **Curate your existing content:** Repurposing your existing content on SlideShare is a genius-level move because it allows you to increase your reach without having to create new material from scratch. But remember, it isn't enough to just plug your existing content into a PowerPoint presentation and click Upload. You need to make it unique and valuable, and tailor it to the specific strengths of the channel.
- ▶ **Go visual (or go home):** The best SlideShares are those that tell a story in visual form. Try adding photos, illustrations, or animations to your text; creating an image-centric anthology of examples; or looking for other ways to create a more visual experience for your audience.
- ▶ **Make it camera-ready:** SlideShare is no YouTube, but it is a great place to upload your videos. You've gone through the effort of making a video, so you might as well give it additional attention on SlideShare.





# YOU AREN'T TRAINING YOURSELF TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE

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One big stumbling block to content marketing success — and a key consideration that often gets overlooked — is our own limitations on productivity. Content creation is hard work: It's not always easy to find time to be creative, insightful, and focused all at once; there's only so much time in the day to get everything done. But if you can unlock the secrets of becoming more productive during the time you have, then you'll become a better content creator, and your results will reflect your improvements. Period.

## Here is one possible framework for boosting your productivity:

- ▶ **Use the right tools:** Workflow-management tools like Trello can cut the complexity of planning tasks and make it easy to manage a multilayered project like blogging.
- ▶ **Form the right strategy:** A high state of productivity starts with the right foundation — [your content strategy](#). Make sure you have a clear and defined strategy before attempting to simply “be productive.”
- ▶ **Find your roadblocks:** Understand the events, people, or issues that prevent you from being productive. Then, remove them.
- ▶ **Follow the right systems:** Everyone has different systems for managing productivity. Whether you follow a standard process (like Getting Things Done (GTD) or Pomodoro) or forge your own path doesn't matter. What does matter is that you have a method for accomplishing tasks and staying productive, and you stick with it.
- ▶ **Make a schedule:** A consistent schedule is essential for maintaining production deadlines and meeting audience expectations. By developing and sticking to a set schedule, such as an [editorial calendar](#), you will gain a clear view of what needs to be done (and when) — which should help you avoid productivity pitfalls, panic attacks, and the stress of having to put out unexpected fires.



# YOU AREN'T GETTING THE HELP YOU NEED

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No matter how amazing and productive you are, content marketing isn't a one-man-band kind of endeavor. You are not the only one who has a part to play in the success of your content marketing efforts, so remember to ask for help when you need it.

## Here are some team members that should be involved in every successful content marketing program:

- ▶ **A marketing manager/CMO, etc.:** If you run a corporate blog, you'll need the input of the higher-ups to make sure you're on track with your objectives, tone, etc. These people are well positioned to provide some general oversight in creating an editorial calendar and setting KPIs.
- ▶ **A designer:** Designers play a crucial role in your content creation process and should be involved right from the start of every project. A blog design does more than look cool. It fulfills a crucial function — boosting usability, readability, and engagement. A designer also can participate in creating graphics, charts, tables, or other visual material to enhance the content you create.
- ▶ **A copy editor:** One of the best things you can do is use a capable editor to improve your content. You may do the main writing yourself, but a copy editor should have a hand in making improvements and fixing errors you may have overlooked.
- ▶ **A proofreader:** Some copy editors are proofreaders, but getting a second (or third) set of eyes on your work is a recommended practice. A professional proofreader will make sure that you seldom publish a typo.
- ▶ **A website manager or production editor:** When it comes time to hit the “publish” button, there's another layer of help that comes in handy: the website manager. It takes effort to take your blog post from its raw form in Microsoft Word or Google Drive and make it shine in WordPress or your CMS. A good editor can take care of this for you, handling formatting, image resizing, adding meta information, etc.



# YOU AREN'T PLAYING TO YOUR CREATIVE STRENGTHS

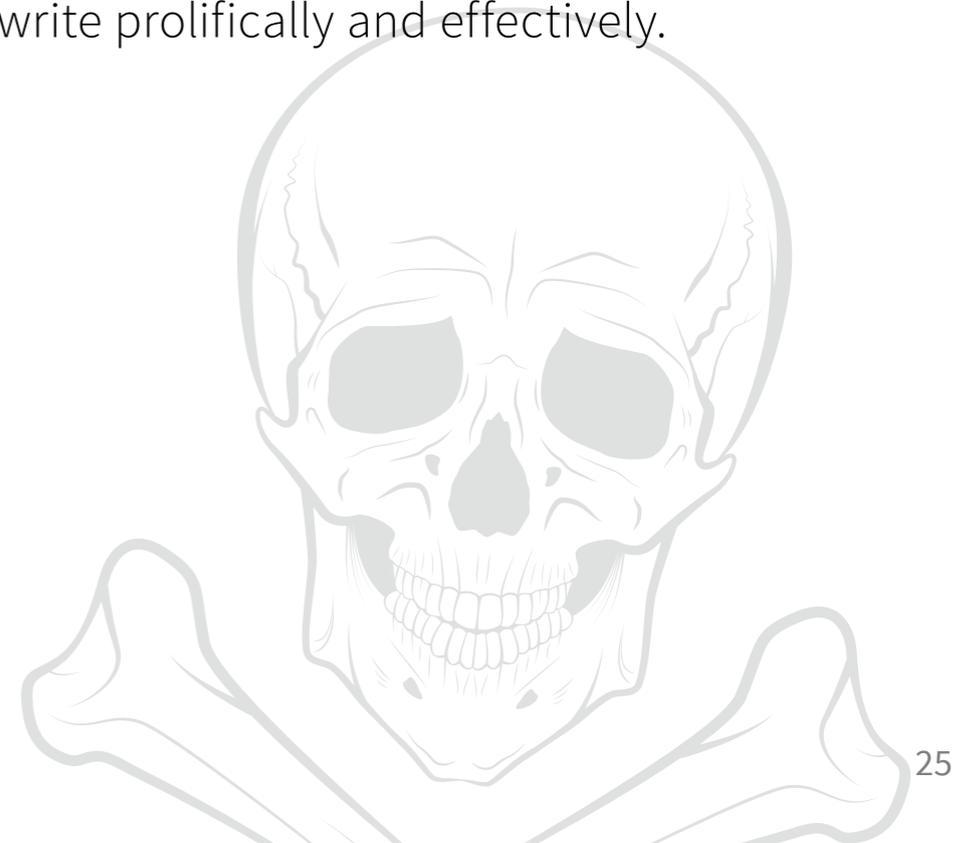
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If you have followed all the advice above and your content marketing efforts are still losing momentum, it could simply be due to flagging creative energy. Call it writer's block, mental fatigue, or whatever you'd like, but it's a real problem that can impact your content quality, productivity, and performance if it isn't managed effectively.

## After conducting some research, Neil learned some fascinating things about the best times to think and write creatively. Here are some of the highlights:

- ▶ Some of our most creative moments occur when we're not working. Activities like showering, exercising, sleeping, or running tend to produce those "aha" moments of sheer creativity.
- ▶ The morning is a great time to write because we have a full tank of willpower.
- ▶ Creativity also tends to be high in the morning because of the higher levels of energy and freshness.
- ▶ On the other hand, writing in the evening allows us to work without distraction. Plus, we have more ideas and experiences from the past day from which to draw.

The best content creators are those who know their personal best time for writing. They make writing part of a routine and daily habit, and then it becomes second nature for them to write prolifically and effectively.



It's time to come to terms with content marketing's ever-evolving nature. What worked for you at one time may no longer be enough to produce the results you want today, and any stumbling blocks you are encountering now aren't likely to just disappear as you march on toward the future. The good news is that by identifying and eradicating mistakes like the ones outlined above, you'll be giving your content its best possible shot at achieving success — and maintaining those gains for a long time to come.



*Neil Patel is a regular contributor to the [Content Marketing Institute](#) blog.*

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## About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multi-channel storytelling. CMI's **Content Marketing World** event, the world's largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and the **Intelligent Content Conference** event is held every spring. CMI publishes the bi-monthly magazine **Chief Content Officer**, and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. CMI is a 2012-2015 Inc. 500/5000 company. Watch this **video** to learn more about CMI.