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## Reality Check: How to Tell if Your Marketing Content Is Actually Valuable

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 INTERMEDIATE

We marketing folk talk a whole heck of a lot about "[creating valuable content](#)." In fact, a quick site search of our own blog turned up **over 1,400 results** for the term "valuable content" alone. And that doesn't even include the multitude of other variations of the phrase we've used, like "helpful content," "educational content," "remarkable content," or "quality content."

But let's be honest with ourselves, marketers. Is our content *actually* helpful? Or is all this talk just lip service to the oft-cited "create remarkable content" inbound marketing credo?

I think some of us might be coming down too hard on our content, while others are probably being too lenient. So I thought it might be good to create a checklist of sorts that we can refer to as a reality check when we're publishing content. It might quell the fears in some anxiety-prone marketers that their content truly is valuable ... and send some back to the drawing board. Don't worry -- it's all [for the love of marketing!](#)

## **The Qualities of Truly Valuable Marketing Content**

### **1) The topic addresses your target persona's needs and questions.**

One of the first questions a content creator should ask is, "For whom am I writing this piece of content?" (Brownie points from the grammar nuts?)

You're going to have a tough time creating a piece of valuable content if you haven't identified who your target persona is, because it's hard to know what kinds of questions they have that need answering. Once you've [created your buyer personas](#) and sussed out what their pain points are, ask yourself whether the piece of content you're creating addresses an aspect of those pain points.

For example, the reason I'm writing this blog post is due to the fact that several leads and customers have asked if I could check out their blog content to see if it's the kind of educational content great inbound marketers create. Hmm ... if leads and customers are asking this kind of question -- people who we've already identified align with our target persona -- it's pretty safe to assume there's hundreds, thousands, MILLIONS (okay, maybe just thousands) of people out there that need help figuring out what are the concrete qualities of valuable marketing content.

### **2) It's aligned with the reader's understanding of the subject matter.**

You might find that there are certain pockets of your audience that are more advanced with industry concepts than others. We've certainly found that -- some of our readers are just learning about inbound marketing, while some have been practicing it for years. Or perhaps there are readers out there that have been inbound marketers forever, but they *just* decided to get started using LinkedIn. That's why we started putting skill-level tags on all of our blog posts and ebooks, so readers could gauge whether the content was right for them before they invested too much time in it.

## IS THIS BOOK RIGHT FOR ME?

Not quite sure if this ebook is right for you? See the below description to determine if your level matches the content you are about to read.



You don't necessarily have to go this far, labeling your content with skill-level tags. But you should keep in mind your reader's level of understanding of certain concepts when creating content. After all, a piece of content that's either too elementary, or goes right over their head, doesn't offer them a ton of value.

### **3) It's aligned with the reader's stage in sales cycle.**

Before you ship a piece of marketing content, consider whether it's the right type of content -- or even the right channel to publish that content -- considering your readers' stage in the sales cycle. There are certain channels, content types, and subject matters that are really only appropriate for readers at a certain stage in your marketing funnel. Here's a general guideline to keep in mind:

## Mapping Marketing Offers to The Sales Cycle



This means you don't saturate your Twitter account with links to product data sheets -- nobody cares. It also means you don't bombard your [marketing qualified leads](#) (MQLs) who are just trying to get your purchase order signed off on by legal with invites to top-of-the-funnel webinars. Swap those two, and you're doing alright.

#### 4) The tone is clear and accessible.

It's always healthy to do a business babble check on your content. Business babble is how people who want to sound wicked smart talk and write.

"Sound" being the operative word.

Read through your content to see if you're saying things as clearly as possible. If you have trouble nailing an accessible tone in your writing, a good rule of thumb is to simply write how you speak to a friend. I'll use the example of explaining what SEO is to my grandma -- this is a real-life example from the last time I went home for the holidays :-)

*"You know when you go to Google and type something in -- like how late the grocery store is open? Well, you usually click on the first few results, because they answer your question the best, right? That's what SEO is -- it stands for search engine optimization, and it's all about finding a way to get your grocery store to show up in the top of Google."*

And for comparison sake, the business-babbly way of explaining that would be:

*"SEO describes the practice of optimizing the instances and placement of your site's web pages in the SERPs based on a user's search query to help solve for greater traffic and conversions."*

Some of us can probably parse that second one ... but why should we have to? Just make it easy to get through, and don't leave anybody out by speaking in more complicated terms than are absolutely necessary.

### **5) It's written with specificity.**

Part of writing with a clear tone means writing with specificity -- in other words, writing *exactly what you mean*, and avoiding broad, general statements. Or at least avoiding broad, general statements that you don't couple with specific details that help clarify your meaning.

Here's what I mean. (See?! We're doing it right now, guys!)

If you're writing a blog post about how to measure the ROI of your Facebook presence, one of your points would probably be about the importance of measuring the month-over-month growth in engagement on your page. But are you going to explain exactly *why* this is an important metric to measure? Or is it just part of a laundry list of things you should measure ... without detailing the purpose of performing that measurement? Furthermore, are you going to tell the reader where in their Facebook account they can get metrics like this?

As a reader, I'd want to see information like:

- Growth in engagement is important to measure, because more engagement means that you're probably showing up in Facebook's News Feed more often.
- That's because of the way Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm works -- favoring content from brands that receive a lot of engagement.
- As such, it'll be easier for you to grow your reach on Facebook, and this is an important metric.
- If you want to measure the growth of your engagement, you can go to Page Level Insights in Facebook and export consumption metrics into Excel.
- I might even want some screenshots.

Prescriptive content like this, which bridges the gap between theory and execution, is way more valuable than general content that touts best practices but doesn't tell the reader how to *do* anything.

### **6) You use examples to clarify your theories and instructions, and those examples are relatable.**

Dude, we just did this. A few times, actually. It's why I did a business babble compare and contrast, and why I included a screenshot of an ebook with a skill-level tag in it.

Examples demonstrate the concept you're trying to explain in a real-world scenario. And real-world scenarios mean way more to a reader than hypotheticals.

You should also make sure your examples help demonstrate how the concept you're writing about would work in your readers' daily lives. Selling SEO software to lawyers? Use examples about conducting keyword research around legal search terms. Selling children's clothing to moms? Use examples that talk about getting grass stains out of the knees of your kids' jeans. Even if you're selling across multiple industries or targeting more than one persona, you can still try to find some common ground. That's why examples in our content are often about marketing -- people reading a marketing blog all have a basic understanding of the concepts, so the examples will resonate.

### **7) You use benchmarking data.**

A simple way to make your content incredibly valuable is by adding benchmarking data when it's available. It's a way to let your readers know whether they're on the right track with whatever it is you're teaching.

For instance, when we wrote a blog post about [how to properly launch a mobile app](#), the first thing we told people to do was define success so they knew whether their app launch was, you know ... successful. That's why we gave them this benchmark:

#### **Step 1: Define Success**

If you're aiming for a successful mobile app launch, you need to define what success looks like. Set some measurable goals around your launch. I recommend measuring success around your active install rate -- this tells you retention rate, or the number of people who install your app and then don't uninstall it -- the number of ratings you receive, your average rating in the app marketplace, and if you're selling your app, revenue generated from your app. To help you set some benchmarks, most free mobile apps have a higher active install rate during the first month, **usually around 50%, after which it levels off around 30%**. The average app store rating is a 3 (out of 5), for which you should certainly strive much higher to maintain a healthy active install rate.

Because without it, it wouldn't be that valuable. I mean, how would they know if they were successful without knowing what "success" is? If you can provide some sort of data point that indicates whether your reader is doing something right or wrong, or even that helps illustrate a trend your reader should know about, your content will be far more valuable.

### **8) You selected the right content type to explain your concept.**

Finally, whether your content is valuable or not has a lot to do with the shape it takes -- blog post, ebook, tip sheet, video, podcast, infographic, visualization, graph, cartoon -- you get the picture. There are some concepts that are best communicated in some of these forms, while the other content types should really be left for other subject matters. If

you've selected a content format type that aligns really well with your subject matter -- like [a video and accompanying blog post to explain how to set up your Facebook Timeline](#) -- the content will be easier for your audience to consume. And the easier it is to consume, the more they'll get from it!

## **Don't Underestimate the Value of Pure Entertainment**

This is all a lot of work. Can't we just have a little fun once in a while?

Yeah, you totally can. I think there's a lot of value in publishing content that is just there to entertain ... once in a while. You might learn a little bit along the way, too, but it's alright to intersperse your educational content with a little fun. We like to refer to this as the dessert at the end of a healthy meal. You finished your peas and carrots content, now you get a scoop of infographic ice cream. Enjoy. In fact, our readers were lucky enough to have some ice cream for breakfast yesterday morning, with this [blog post and slideshow relating social media to coughSEXcough](#).

It's good to give your readers' brains a breather once in a while with content that's a little bit lighter. Plus, it helps you build your brand, be more likable, and strengthen the emotional ties your reader has with your content.

*What other qualities do you think inbound marketers should check for to assess whether they've put out a valuable piece of content?*