



How to Make Your Content Marketing 25% More Efficient

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Welcome back, everybody. This is Life Science Marketing Radio. I am again at ACP-LS in Boston, 2017, and I'm talking to Ian Lurie, who is the ...

Ian: CEO of Portent, a Clearlink company.

Chris: And that's why I paused, because I know his company was recently sold and I thought, "Well, maybe his title is different." But still CEO of Portent. I just watched Ian give a great talk on content marketing titled, "Turning Content into Business." How do you create content and make sure it's driving leads or whatever it is you're looking for, and even revenue? So Ian, welcome.

Ian: Thank you.

Chris: Well, I liked your talk. A lot of people that listen to this podcast are obviously interested in content and content creation and so on, and we've talked about repurposing in the past, so you and I think similarly on that. You started out with this analogy, two types of content. One was a unicorn, and the other was a raft of chihuahuas. So just explain that.

Ian: Okay, so there's this concept in our industry of "unicorn content," which was coined by someone named Larry Kim. It's a really good idea, which is coming up with completely unique stuff, and instead of trying to do one-off really quick stuff, focus on doing the really unusual things. The raft of chihuahuas is

what we end up getting the option of doing, which is where our clients, our bosses come and say, "Do lots and lots and lots of content." The thing I most often tell people is actually, "Look somewhere in between. We need more badgers, because badgers are self-sufficient, and unicorns just don't happen that often." But the chihuahuas is what we usually end up with.

Chris: Right, and you had a framework that starts with, if I recall correctly, integration, resources ... You're gonna have to help me ... repurposing ... Let me see if I get it all ... approval, and prove it. Did I get it right?

Ian: Analytics. Yes, that's right.

Chris: Bingo. You pointed out some resources that I thought were actually pretty helpful. You're not a big fan of brainstorming.

Ian: I'm apparently in the minority, but no, I don't like brainstorming.

Chris: And one of the resources that you pointed out, for example, is, answerthepublic.com. When you've done things in life sciences, has that been useful?

Ian: It has. You have to dig a lot deeper for highly technical topics like life sciences, but it can be very useful. If it is not, then I usually tell people to go to Stack Exchange for life sciences. It has a whole biology section. Also, you can go onto Google, and just start typing a question or a topic or a term, and then it uses this thing called Google Suggest, and you'll see that dropdown that shows all these other things people search for, and that's not a bad place to go, too.

Chris: Right, and just to let people know, what we're talking about here is getting ideas for what content we ought to create, right?

Ian: Yeah. The reason I don't like brainstorming is it's telling you what you wanna write. Looking at Answer the Public or something like that is telling you what your audience wants you to write.

Chris: Yeah, exactly. I love that idea, definitely. And also you gave an example of going to SlideShare to see what was popular there. How would you use that? For example, you go to SlideShare, you see a topic that is popular, then you just say, "I'm gonna create something different, better." Are you skyscraping on that?

Ian: I'm not a big fan of the skyscraper method. What I do on SlideShare is I'll find something really popular. If I have a different point of view, or if I think I can expand on it in a real way, I might do that, but also I'll look at the most popular slides in that SlideShare. On SlideShare, you can clip slides, so if a lot of people clip one slide, I might go into more depth on that. I have to admit, I usually do that with my own stuff, but also you can take a look at someone else's, and without ripping off their content, you can provide genuinely valuable information. In fact, sometimes I'll even reach out to the author of that slide deck and say, "Hey, I wrote more about this," and they will often share it.

Chris: Nice. And then, another key element ... and I found this interesting because I'm big on planning, and maybe in a similar way, thinking about the questions your customers are gonna have, and building your content, assembling it around that ... but you said structure was more important than planning, and then you had this framework for your structure, which involved a ski analogy and then a level of branding, so talk about those things and how they fit in.

Ian: We break content up into three types, as far as difficulty, and three types as far as level of branding. What we'll look at is, we look at green circle, blue square, black diamond content, and if you know skiing, you know what those are, but even if not ... Green circle is content you can produce maybe once a week. It may be anything. It may be a blog post. It may be a tweet. It may be a product page, whatever. Blue square is content you can produce once a month, which may mean all you can do is a blog post or it's an entire new product page, or it's something much more in-depth. And then black diamond is something you can probably only do once a quarter, and that generally is gonna be things like entire new product lines, so content for a whole new product line, or content for a comic book literally explaining something, something like that. A podcast, maybe.

And then branding level, you have lightly, moderately, and heavily branded content. Lightly branded is something where, whatever you're writing, you're answering a question and there's really no mention of your brand. It's probably on your website, so the only mention of your brand is the webpage template itself. Moderately branded has the solution, but in the context of whatever it is that you offer. So I'm gonna go to my radish cooker analogy. If you sell a radish cooker, then moderately branded content would be, "Here is a radish recipe, and here is how you can use our cooker to prepare it," where the person reading it could go do it themselves using a different product, but

it's really easy if you just use their product. And then heavily branded is the straight pitch: "Here's our product. Please go buy it." And notice, heavily branded content is still content. So product pages, things like that, that is still content. Content does not mean blog posts.

Chris: Right. I have to ask, is there such a thing as a radish cooker, or did you make that up?

Ian: I thought I was making it up, and then someone sent me a whole bunch of links to radish cookers. So apparently, yes, you can cook radishes. I don't know why you would do that. It's like pumpkin-flavored chocolate. It just seems completely wrong to me.

Chris: So talk about the integration aspect of it. So you're starting out with some green circle content, lightly branded, and this is a thing that I think a lot of companies miss, but making sure that people are moving through your content, that you don't just throw it out and hope something happens.

Ian: Yeah. I mean, the classic funnel analogy is not the worst. You would put lightly branded content spanning the top of the funnel, and it's used to capture a very broad audience, whether it's one piece or it's a herd of chihuahuas or whatever ... I don't know if it's "flock" or "herd" or what ... and then, at the middle of the funnel is probably the moderately branded, and you're narrowing down how many people you have, and then at the bottom of the funnel is your heavily-branded. So it goes, "We have an answer for you. You can use our product to get to that answer. Just use our product." And you connect that content, so if you have that lightly branded piece, you'll say, "Hey, if you wanna learn more, go check out this." And the "this" is the moderately branded. So maybe the lightly branded, you talk about, "Here's how you separate one substance from another." The second one is, "Here's the actual step-by-step process, and we're gonna use our product as an example." And then the third level, the heavily branded is just, "Get our product and it will do this process for you."

Chris: So the question I always have on this, and I think about it pretty much the same way, but I'm always thinking, how many customers actually read this, they go to the link, they go to the moderately branded content, and then go right to the thing? Do you see in your analytics that it actually works that way, or people go lightly branded, moderately branded, leave the site, come

back another time, go to another moderately branded thing and then finish the funnel? I'm just curious of your sense of flow.

Ian: Oh, it's messy. It's really, really messy. It's rare that you'll see that nice, clean flow. What we do is we rely on seeing that once in a blue moon to tell us that something's actually working. Generally it's far messier than that. The way most analytics packages work, they'll track someone for up to 90 days, assuming that person doesn't clean out their cookies, so we can generally look back pretty well and get a good idea.

Chris: So you take someone, for example, who downloaded your e-book, you look backwards at their steps, and does that cover multiple sessions?

Ian: We're not gonna try and track individuals. We're gonna look at, "Ian downloaded the e-book and became a client." But before the download, we're not gonna look at, "This was Ian looking at these things." Generally what we're gonna do is just say, "All these people looked at these things and then downloaded the e-book, and we know that Ian, Jane, and Joan all became clients because of that." So we start with very anonymized content. It's much easier, and you don't wanna gate lightly branded content. You don't wanna make people log in or fill out a form, which would be the only way you could really track that.

Chris: Okay. My Google Analytics knowledge is light to moderate, and I'm just thinking about, could you ... because there is user information, even if you don't know who it is in there, and connect sessions that would kinda tell you, "Oh yeah, here's the ..."

Ian: There's some very spooky stuff you can do with mobile devices that we avoid. Let's just put it that way.

Chris: Okay. I'm sure a lot of people appreciate that.

Ian: Yeah.

Chris: Another interesting thing you said, and I think this is relevant ... and I don't know how you wanna talk about it, but whatever you wanna say ... is, "Use what you have, not what you wish you had." Talk about that a little bit.

Ian: As a writer myself, I often wish I had a huge design team. I often wish I had a giant development team, and even as the executive vice president ... which is

my other title, by the way ... at Clearlink, I only have access to so many things. What I do know I have is a certain set of tools and skills of my own, and instead of holding up content production because I don't have that other resources, I'm gonna target what I do to what I know how to do, and what I talked about in the session was using markdown to create my content, which makes it easier to create the HTML. Using Canva to create my graphics, things like that.

Chris: Yeah, Canva's huge. I know there's a few people in this organization who are advocates of it. I enjoy it when I need it. That's the thing I struggle with the most, honestly, is image searching. So being able to create your own little banners, if you just had a ... for me, often a photo of a guest, for example, would be sufficient, and then I could put something around it. Which I haven't done yet, but it's on my list. So you mentioned markdown. I think this is a helpful thing for people to understand. Explain what that is.

Ian: Markdown is this very simple text-based syntax that, for example, you use a single pound sign before a phrase to make it a level-one heading. You use two pound signs to make a level-two heading. You use asterisks to create a bulleted list, and it turns all that into whatever format you want it to be, so you can convert that to Microsoft Word format. You can convert it to HTML, which is what most people do, and it just makes it easier because you don't need to learn HTML, and you can single-source your content, write it in a text editor, any text editor you want, and convert it to anything else you want. It'll be something you can read 20 years from now and open in any piece of software. It's just highly portable. It's very robust because of the technology, and it's very easy to learn. The learning curve is very, very brief.

Chris: I like that, because I was thinking about how to put it into Word and PDFs and webpages, and then presumably, the style sheets, for example, in a webpage, would know what the H1 and H2 styles and make all that happen for you, and maybe if you're using outsourced writers, a really good way to save their time and your money, have them send you that and you lay it in and it pops up beautifully.

Ian: Really good example for us is, we have all of our learning, all of our corporate knowledge in this one wiki for Portent, and now we're moving it all to Clearlink. It was all written originally in markdown, so instead of having to copy everything out of that one wiki and then restyle it, we're just taking the

markdown and dropping it directly into their wiki, and there's no additional formatting required.

Chris: Also great for companies who are merging.

Ian: Yes, exactly.

Chris: Save a lot of effort on the re-brand. Fantastic. You talked about being graphics-independent with Canva and not using stock photos for brand safety reasons, which I think people in this industry relate to. When I worked at Varian, let's just say that there was a stock photo of a woman scientist who showed up on other people's brochures, the same person we were using, so that was a great little tidbit there. Then, this of course is the most important thing. You talked about repurposing and being efficient with your content creation, and you had data on the actual monetary benefit of that. Talk about that.

Ian: Just by being efficient, and I will admit this was not scientific research, this was very kind of informal talking to clients and things, but we figured out, very conservatively, they're saving 20 to 25% on the cost of content production, or they're increasing their output 20 to 25%, which I think is the better way to look at it. I'll tell you it was actually higher than that, but I'm trying to ...

Chris: Be safe.

Ian: Be safe, yes. Exactly.

Chris: I thought that was great. I mean, you think about what that means. It's the same thing as, you're getting all your content done by Thursday and everybody goes home on Friday. Of course, they're not, but on Friday they're making the content they would have made on Saturday.

Ian: Yeah. I actually did research on that for myself, and I save about 12 hours a month using this little workflow.

Chris: Nice. So talk about the workflow. What exactly are you doing, or your clients doing, to save that 20%?

Ian: The biggest thing is, again, instead of having the huge brainstorming session, you go find what your audience is asking. That's generally much more

efficient for a whole bunch of reasons. One is that it's just you. Two, it's easier, because someone's already done the brainstorming for you, right? Your audience. So start with that. Then move directly into writing in markdown. Don't use the content calendar. Use the structure, black diamond, blue square, green circle, and lightly/moderately/heavily branded, so you know those general guidelines of what you wanna produce, so there's less time involved in figuring out what you're gonna do.

Then use all these little touches and tweaks that mean there's fewer round trips to other people, and also just in your own brain. So having the editorial workflow I talked about, using Grammarly, using Hemingway, that saves a little bit of time. And then I just talked about round trips. Reducing round trips because of mistakes, because of conversion issues. If you're using markdown, you don't have to go back and tweak the way things lay out 15 times. And then finally, if you have something that's working, you repurpose it. It's a lot quicker to take a SlideShare you created and turn it into a blog post or an e-book than it is to start from scratch, come up with the idea, structure it, and then by the way, also go through approvals again, because you have to get approvals on this stuff. Compliance is a major issue, whereas if you take the slide deck that someone already approved and you write something based on it, it still has to go through approval but it's gonna be a lot easier to process.

Chris: Right, and the whole thing with repurposing ... First of all, I love the workflow and the round trip reduction, because every time somebody has to open something, that's a significant amount of wasted time, just opening, saving, whatever. And then on the repurposing part, not only are you getting more content, but of course the purpose of that is you're reaching people in different places, because not everybody looks for content in the same place, so everybody listening to this knows that we're big advocates of that.

You gave the example of these Moz videos, where they do nice transcripts. We also talk about transcripts here, but the way those guys are doing it is really nice. If anybody hasn't gone to Moz to watch Whiteboard Fridays, they're always helpful. Rand Fishkin does a great job on those, and then, Ian described how they take the transcript and make it really nice. They put images of the whiteboard inside that polished transcript, because transcripts honestly are kind of hard to read, right?

Ian: Yes.

Chris: I put them up on my website, there might be some search benefit to that, but really the transcript's a starting point for the next step.

Ian: That's right, and I actually did a Whiteboard Friday on markdown, so you can go watch that.

Chris: Is that right?

Ian: Yes.

Chris: How do you do a Whiteboard Friday on ... Oh, about markdown, gotcha.

Ian: About markdown, yeah. About markdown.

Chris: And that's on your site?

Ian: No, it's on Moz's site. Yeah.

Chris: Oh, nice. We'll put a link to that in the show notes, so everybody can find that.

Ian: Awesome.

Chris: And then, let's talk about analytics, last couple minutes here. Tracking behavior to conversion. You did this with a lead magnet to see ... This came up in a couple sessions at the ACP-LS meeting, about looking back through your analytics to see where the people who convert, where did they come from?

Ian: With content, what I did is, I start with the lead magnet, the conversion point, and I work backwards to see what content is sending people to that conversion point, and actually, that conversion point doesn't have to be content. It could be anything, and then I work back and say, "Alright, these pages on my site led people to that conversion point, so I know that they are leading to a desired action." We'll actually get even more sophisticated, and I didn't talk about this, but we'll look at, "people who spend more than five minutes on this are 50% more likely to convert the way we want them to," and then we look at everything on the site that leads to that kind of behavior. Then we look past the conversion point and we look into our CRM or whatever else, because the conversion point is generally just a lead. We wanna see if they turn into money, so we will go into our CRM and say, "Alright, everybody who hit this conversion point, how many of them actually

became customers?" Then we take that and we actually work the math backwards and figure out the value of a conversion, the value of a page view, and the value of a visit, and that tells us how much we should spend acquiring those visits.

Chris: Nice. That is a nice little end-to-end story on creating content, turning it into money or business. Ian Lurie from Portent, thank you for taking the time to talk to us today.

Ian: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Chris: Alright.

The Next Golden Age of Audio

There is no better way to grow an engaged audience of loyal brand advocates than through a podcast. But getting started might seem a bit daunting. I know how you feel. There's a lot to learn.

The good news is you don't have to do it alone. I've been creating podcasts and audio stories since 2014 and I'm ready to help you set up for recording and handle all of the editing and post production. It's easy.

1. [Schedule a call.](#)
2. We'll develop a clear strategy.
3. Start growing your audience.