CONTENT WRITING TIPS FOR BUSINESS

Equinet
MEASURED MARKETING

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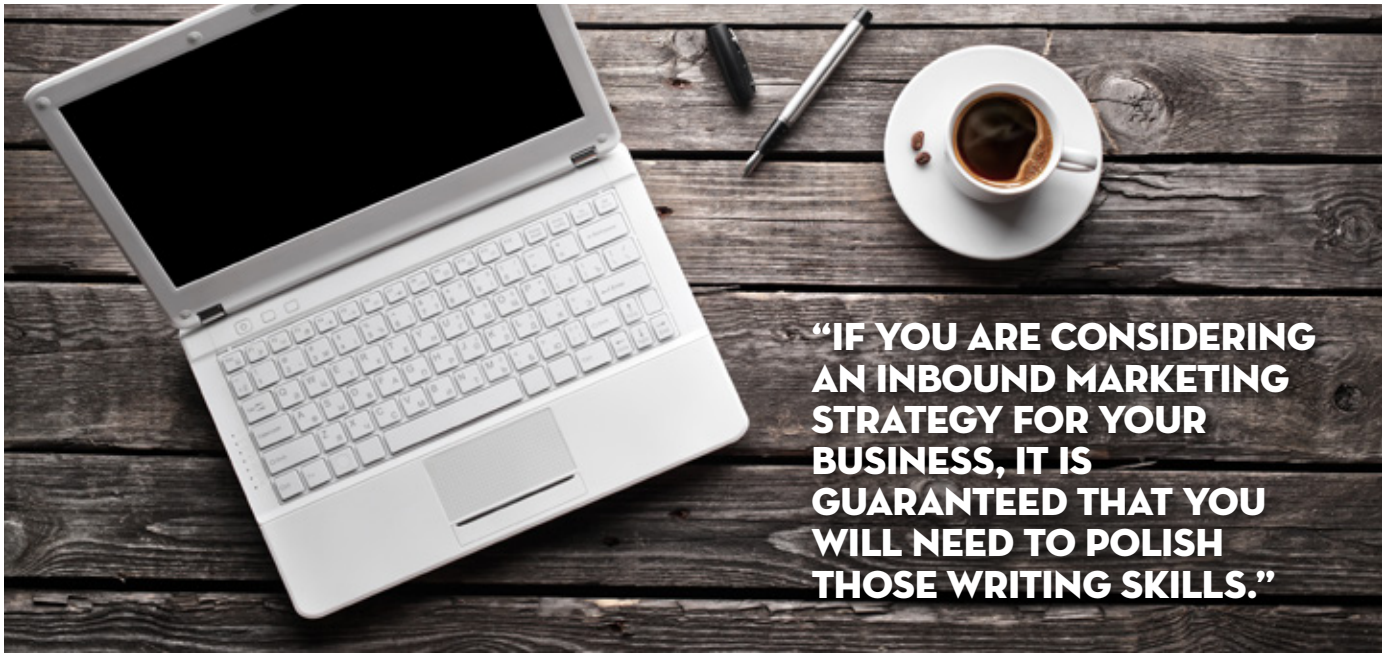
Up until recently, business people didn't need to write very much. We all learned the basic rules at school, but after that you really didn't have to do it any more. Once we entered the world of business we could pretty much leave the writing, well, up to the writers.

But with modern technology, and more nimble and streamlined businesses, even if you wear the manager's hat you probably have to wear the writer's cap every now and then as well. And if you are considering an inbound marketing strategy for your business, then it is guaranteed that you will need to polish those writing skills in order to showcase your business in the best possible light.

Inbound marketing is an approach that involves producing excellent content on a continual basis so that business customers who are looking for your product or service can find you easily, understand your proposition quickly, and recognise that you are best qualified to provide the solution they need. It is all about information and accessibility.

If you have embraced an inbound marketing strategy, you have already committed to producing a constant stream of content that crosses all manner of media: website pages, blogs, newsletters, white papers, eBooks, podcasts and social media posts. It is a staggering variety of tools and styles and locations that you need to keep on top of, not only in terms of how you write for each of them but also monitoring them so you know what your customers and the competition are saying.

Each of these 'routes to conversation' has subtle (and some not so subtle) differences in the way they are written, and indeed, read. We will look at some of the most popular a bit later in this book. However, there are a few tips to remember that intersect all of your writing, be it the old fashioned pen and paper kind, or today's digital approach.



HOW TO WRITE WELL

Good writing, particularly in business, is easy to identify. It's informative, clear and entertaining. And it ensures that you, the reader, know exactly what the message is, in a language that you understand. So how do you go about achieving that? By keeping in mind some basic rules.

- **Keep it simple:** Write in a way that your audience will understand. If they happen to be brain surgeons or physicists you can write to that level. But for the most part, use simple, conversational language that reflects your brand. Don't use four words if you can use only one. There's no need to "undertake a thorough examination of" something when you can "investigate" it.
- **Know (and love) your subject:** Good writing is probably 80% about the writing and 20% about you. That may seem a small fraction, but good writing can't happen without that 20 percent. If you write about things you know and are truly enthusiastic about, that passion will shine through in your writing. If you are excited about your business or product, and about how it can help your customers, your readers become excited about it too.
- **Know your audience:** Are you writing for similar-minded business people in your sector? Or are you aiming to inform a wider group of readers? Will this be something people listen to, or watch, rather than read? Does your audience do a lot of travelling and get its information on the go? All of these situations would require a slightly different tone, format and style. Be sure you give your audience what they want in the way they need to receive it.
- **Be entertaining:** Don't be afraid to let your personality shine through in your writing; particularly in places like blogs and websites. Use examples and stories to help you illustrate ideas. For some formats, for example white papers, you have to be more formal. But that doesn't mean you need to blunt your enthusiasm for what you do.
- **Be picky:** Punctuation, spelling and grammar are important. Everything you publish reflects you and your business. You must take the time to double check that everything is correct. If you don't appear to care enough to get the details right in your own work, why should customers think you would pay attention to the details of their business?

THERE'S NO NEED TO "UNDERTAKE A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF" SOMETHING WHEN YOU CAN "INVESTIGATE" IT.

Specific points to remember for B2B writing

Beyond these all-encompassing points to remember, there are a few other things to consider when you are writing for a B2B audience and there is one factor that should always be uppermost in your mind when you write for B2B:

Everyone will tell you that business owners and managers are tight on cash, and they are. But if your product or service is good enough, and their need is great enough, they will pay what is required.

Actually, the biggest factor to consider is that they are tight on time. And no one can give them more of that. But you can help by using the time they give you wisely and making sure you always, always give them something to walk away with that adds value to their lives.

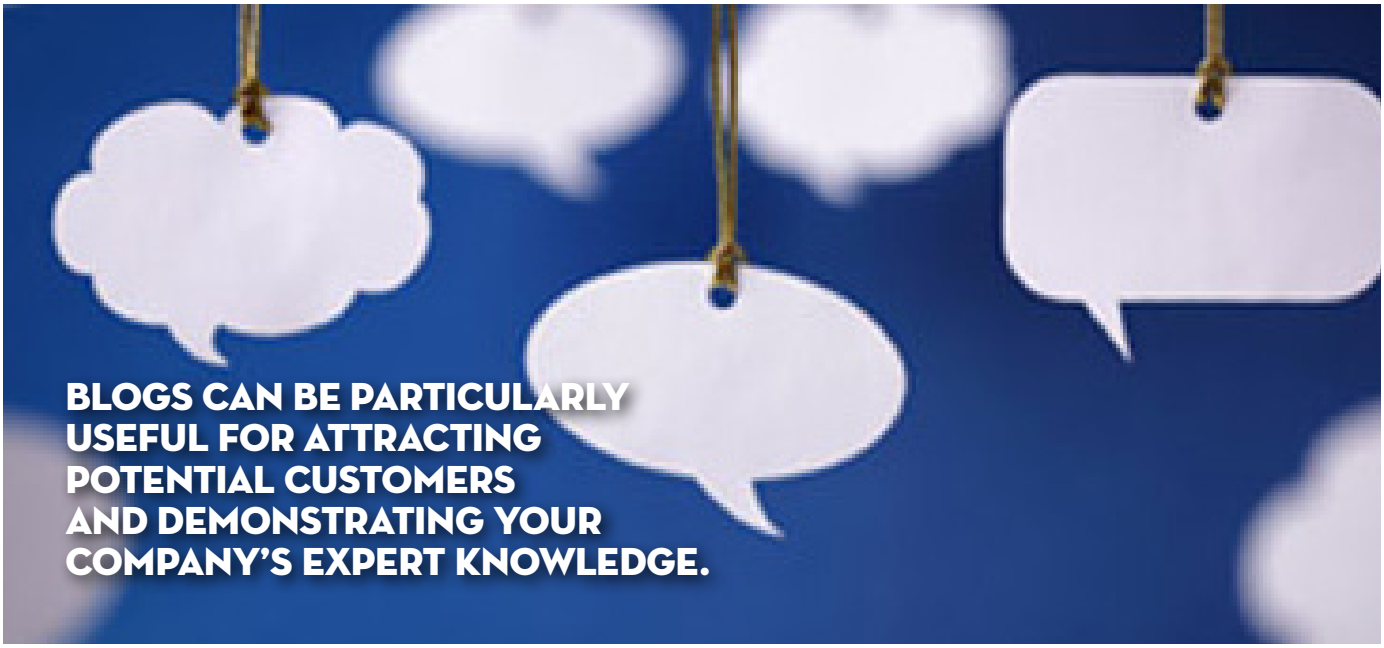
Be clear, concise, and get to the point. Don't try to be something you're not or try to solve problems that you can't. Be a solution – by educating, explaining and entertaining - not another frustration.

"BE CLEAR, CONCISE, AND GET TO THE POINT. DON'T TRY TO BE SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT OR TRY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS THAT YOU CAN'T."

Writing content for a B2B audience is distinct from writing for a B2C audience in a number of ways:

- B2B customers are usually more informed. They already know the issues in the sector and indeed are running businesses and providing solutions of their own.
- There is no 'impulse buying' or an extra bit of 'pocket money' in B2B. You won't be able to induce them to buy simply by coming up with a catchy phrase. You have to be in it for the long haul in order to demonstrate your expertise to a knowledgeable and niche base.
- B2B audiences need to know you are credible and an expert, so it's imperative to produce content that positions you as a thought leader in your field.
- You need to communicate with your audience with valuable enough content that they will spread the word on your behalf. The more you communicate industry leadership the stronger your reputation becomes.

In short, your content needs to be excellent, consistent, and continuous. The goal of a successful content marketing strategy is to create something that is useful and interesting that educates and influences your target audience.



Here are some ways to achieve this:

1. **Use examples.** Case studies are a particularly powerful form of communicating expertise because they give a strong endorsement of your product or service without any kind of sales pitch. The best ones answer all the questions a potential customer might have:

- Are other businesses having this or similar issues?
- What is the process I have to go through if I choose this company?
- How does their solution solve my problem?
- How long will it take to fix the problem?
- Do they have a track record of reliability and success in my field?

Examples of how you have helped other businesses solve their problems demonstrate that you understand the variety and complexity of issues in your sector and have the experience and expertise to be a solution.

2. **Use facts and figures to demonstrate your credibility.** SME managers need to know specifics, either to make decisions themselves or in order to get someone else to make them. Use information that shows how your business can help theirs – percentages, statistics, whatever is relevant. These don't have to be written. Charts, graphs or any other illustration that powerfully conveys a message can and should be used.

3. **Write a blog.** Blogs can be particularly useful for the B2B community, both for attracting potential customers and demonstrating your company's expert knowledge. Blogs are a powerful tool:

- They are a brilliant way to draw potential customers to your website
- They demonstrate your expertise and the passion your have for your business.
- They help your readers to spread the word for you because they are interactive, easily allowing comments, link-backs and shares.

4. **Use whatever format is necessary to demonstrate to your B2B audience how your product and service works, who it benefits and why your organisation is the right one to supply it.** Video works particularly well for B2B demonstrations, but there are endless types and combinations of content you can create, including text, graphics, illustrations and photographs. However you best visualise and explain your business or product is what will work best to communicate it to others.

IT'S THE MESSAGE, NOT THE MEDIUM

One of the amazing things about inbound marketing is that you truly become a publisher in your own right. You don't have to ask permission or change your style to suit someone else's needs.

You can decide when you publish, where you do it, how often your content appears and exactly what you say and how you say it. It's truly liberating. With that freedom, however, comes responsibility and the burden is on you to make sure you get it right.

There are a huge number of different ways to reach your audience - web pages, blogs, social sites, video – and it's easy to get carried away with the process that these different channels require. But if your content is going to be successful, it needs to be consistent and useful, so worry less about the medium, and focus on the message. For every piece of content you write you should:

Know your audience and what it needs

You must clearly define your target audience and keep them uppermost in your mind every time you write. You should constantly be thinking, what is in it for them? Of course, different pieces of content may be for different segments of your target audience. Each one needs to pass the 'so what' test: why will your audience care? It's crucial that you understand what their questions are and what they are concerned about so you can provide a solution. The best writers are those who can put themselves in their customers' shoes and write as if they are having a one-to-one conversation with each customer. Ensure your content is for information, rather than promotion, and your audience will return again and again.

Only write about things that you are excited about

It seems obvious that you should be excited about what you do and the business you are a part of. Let that passion show through in your writing and much of the work is done for you. Sticking to the things you love helps in a number of ways:

1. It's easier to write in an entertaining way about what interests and excites you
2. Your enthusiasm can help play a big part in demonstrating your knowledge and expertise
3. Content marketing involves a lot of writing and you are more likely to keep to your schedule and write as often as is needed, when you are writing about things you are constantly thinking about.

"YOU MUST CLEARLY DEFINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AND KEEP THEM UPPERMOST IN YOUR MIND EVERY TIME YOU WRITE. "

Know what you want to achieve with each thing you write

Have a plan for every piece of content you create and know how it ties back to your overall marketing strategy. Make sure you know before you start writing what you want to happen as a result of that content. Is it a middle of the funnel offer for prospects already quite far down the sales funnel? Are you reaching out to new prospects who may not understand your product or aren't yet ready to buy? Everything you create needs to fit into the bigger picture of your brand and the goals of your business.

This is where an editorial calendar comes in handy. It helps you keep track of the areas you have focused on and those audiences you haven't yet engaged with, ensuring a holistic approach to your inbound marketing.

Optimise your writing to make it accessible and encourage conversation

After you have created all your wonderful content, don't let it go to waste. Figure out ways to repurpose it to give it a longer life and a better return for you. If you've written a white paper about an industry issue, make sure you include some of the key findings (and a link to the white paper) in your next newsletter. If you've had a conversation about your brand on a social site, you could blog about any insights you received, or make a video answering some of the questions that came up. In every case, include calls to action that compel your customers to engage further. These interactions serve a number of roles: they give you feedback on your content, they allow you to hear what readers are concerned about, they encourage followers to spread the word and they allow you to engage in active conversation with your target audience..

WRITING FOR DIFFERENT FORMATS

It's clear that the best inbound marketing strategies use a wide variety of formats for getting content seen, passed around and discussed. Here are some tips for some of the most popular.

Blogs

Business blogs are becoming more popular - and more widely read – every day. Quite simply blogging is good business. A good blog can be instrumental for:

- Communicating with your customers
- Finding new leads
- Raising your profile and establishing you as a leader in your field
- Influencing purchasing decisions
- Driving traffic to your website
- Improving your search engine rankings
- Shaping the conversation about your business or your sector

Writing a blog can be one of the purest expressions of your expertise and enthusiasm for your business. A blog is at the centre of inbound marketing because it allows your customers and prospects to see into the heart of your business and get expert insight about the things they care about.

For this reason, it is crucial that the words and the tone are an absolute representation of you, but also of your brand. Write from the heart, and write about things you know and care deeply about. But this isn't just a soapbox. Be sure you are giving your readers information they want or need.

In addition, there are a few technical points to consider:

- The headline is crucial for attracting an audience
- A blog should be long enough to give some good nuggets of information, but short enough to read in one sitting
- Use lists to make your points and break up the page. A reader's eye will always jump to a list
- Don't introduce too many ideas in one post. You can always use those ideas for tomorrow's blog!
- Don't force in keywords that don't belong. If you keep to your point and use consistent language you should end up with enough keywords to count

Use as many resources as possible to come up with topics for your blogs: track questions from your customers and prospects; follow conversations in your field, on social media forums and other blogs; think of topics that allow you to answer questions with a solution that your business provides.

And don't just write your blog. Write on and about other people's blogs, too. Make comments directly or link back to things you've seen that are interesting or might be useful to your audience. Interact with your community and contribute to other people's discussions. Again, this is about starting a conversation and keeping it going in a way that benefits both your customers and your business. Keep these conversations professional, to the point and positive. This isn't a place to settle scores or criticise the competition. Keep the interactions about the issues and your industry and you won't get too personal.

Newsletters

Putting out a newsletter is the closest thing to being your own publisher because you have absolute control over everything to do with this mini magazine. You get to decide the content and how it is written, who will receive it and in which format. This allows you to create a highly targeted product; your articles can answer the questions and solve the problems that you already know your customers have.

As with all your writing, articles in your newsletters need to be focused on the primary goal of your content marketing strategy: to educate and influence your readers. The writing needs to be clear and informative, based on fact, and of direct interest to the people you are targeting with the publication.

This is a great place to include articles that demonstrate your expertise and thought leadership and provide concrete examples of solutions you can offer. You could include:

- Interviews with respected people in your industry or in related fields
- Unique insight or perspective on current events
- Commentary on issues facing your industry
- Positive developments within your business
- Outstanding work by your employees

Whatever you write, keep the audience in mind. You must write compellingly about what they are interested in or they won't read it.

White Papers

White papers are detailed documents that use facts and logical arguments to influence readers about a product or service. They might set out an argument for a specific position or solution to a problem, or they could present research findings or list a set of questions or tips about a certain business issue. White papers tend to be aimed at high level executives and are effective marketing tools because the content can be extremely influential.

In order to be successful, the white paper needs to be written by a person who understands the sector, the industry and the specific product being discussed. The writing in white papers is more formal than for a blog or an eBook; it is expected that a white paper would be longer than your average article (10 pages or more) and full of quality, well-researched and well-documented content, especially statistics and figures that reinforce the central argument.

"WHATEVER YOU WRITE, KEEP THE AUDIENCE IN MIND. YOU MUST WRITE COMPELLINGLY ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN OR THEY WON'T READ IT. "

A white paper can be a powerful tool because it speaks to the decision makers and budget controllers of an organisation. It gives them the information they need to make a decision and, it is hoped, choose the solution that your business provides. The large amount of facts and figures in the document demonstrates your knowledge and expertise in the area and the analysis displays your thought leadership on the topic.

Before you start writing a white paper, you must do the research. Look at a variety of sources for information about the topic, including industry publications, the internet (tools like Google Scholar and other search engines) and interviewing experts in the field. Don't forget to consider social and government input and local opinion where relevant. Make sure you hear from all sides of the issue and that you can make your arguments clearly and forcefully.

Video

Video is an underused but increasingly popular format for communicating with prospective customers. It is effective because it is simple to use. All viewers need to do is click play to watch you demonstrate a product or highlight a case study or weigh in on a relevant topic in your video blog.

Recent research indicates that most people would prefer to view something than read about it. But they won't watch for long. Attention spans are short so keeping things brief and to the point will ensure your videos are successful. Make it clear how you can solve the viewer's problem. Talk less about your company or product and more about what your company or product can do for them. And always end on a strong call to action.

One of the primary benefits of using video in your marketing mix is that it is the one format that can tell a complex story in a brief, informative and user friendly way. But key to bringing all this together is the writing. It's very important to write in the way people speak and in the way they hear:

- Use short words that are easy to understand when said out loud
- Use strong, simple sentences
- Ensure sentences flow in a clear and logical progression
- Use active voice ("we discovered the process" rather than "a process was discovered")

In a B2B context, in particular, make sure you are creating videos that appeal to prospects at every stage of the sales funnel:

1. **Top of funnel:** informative and educational content. Demonstrate expertise and authority in a non-sales-y manner.
2. **Mid-funnel:** demonstrate how your product or service solves a problem in your market.
3. **Bottom of funnel:** engage the viewer into action. For example, provide demonstrations about how to get started and give a link to a free trial.

Press Releases

Occasionally, you will have to write something that you don't necessarily have publishing control over. A good example is a press release for a newspaper or trade magazine.

A press release is your opportunity to sell your story to a journalist and get it covered. It should tell them, quickly and clearly, what your story is, why it matters and how to contact the people involved.

As with everything you write, the story has to be newsworthy and it has to be of interest - to both the journalist and their readers. A human interest angle will always work better than a technical one. A page is best, no more than two unless absolutely necessary.

Journalists are extremely busy and often cover a lot of different sectors, so you need to make it easy for them.

- Don't make them hunt through the press release for the information they need. Write it as a news story and put it in a standard press release format.
- Do give them plenty of notice and, if appropriate, an exclusive.
- Don't hold back important facts. Give them all the information to write the story.
- Don't lie or try to make your news a bigger deal than it is. If you don't think it will be covered as it is, don't send out the press release.
- Do make it clear how and where they can contact you for more information.
- Don't call them when they are on deadline.

Print publications have a limited number of pages and so can be difficult to get coverage in. However, most publications today will also have an online edition, which constantly needs content, so target your press release at the websites when possible.

STRUCTURAL TOOLS TO INCREASE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR WRITING

These simple but effective elements can make your great content even better by maximising the impact of your writing:

- The headline can make or break a page. It's the first thing your target audience will see and the one thing that will make them click on your page to keep reading, so it has to grab them.
- The sub headline is what visitors scan before they read so give information about the benefits of the article that will entice them to keep reading.
- Use images to draw the reader's eye to different sections of your article and to help illustrate concepts. They are a powerful way to get attention and spur readers to action.
- Provide lists, bullet points or numbers. Lists make content easier to digest and will draw the eye down the page.
- Include calls to action to let people know what they need to do next.

SOME FINAL QUESTIONS

After you've written your content, go back to it one more time and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is it relevant, and will it appeal, to my target audience?
2. Does it address at least one of my target audience's problems?
3. Does it provoke them to take the next step with calls to action?
4. Does it fit into my overall content marketing strategy?
5. Is it consistent (in tone, style, branding) with other things I have written?
6. Is it clear? Does it have short sentences and paragraphs and not too much jargon?

If you answer yes to all of those, you are well on your way to successful content marketing. The last thing you need to do is to give your content to someone else who can double check there are no typos and confirm that what you have written is clear and makes sense.

MANAGING THE VOLUME

If you're reading all this and thinking, "Great tips. But there's still no way I have the time or the resources to do that", then you might want to consider hiring freelance writers to do it for you.

It might seem like an easy answer but you still need to manage them and be sure they are giving you exactly what you want, in the format and style that you need. You need to be sure the writers you hire understand your strategy, your business and your target audience as well as how to write properly and well.

Here are a few things to look out for:

- Do they understand general marketing principles and how to create articles that can be used across your website, social media, and public relations strategies? When you've got great writing you want to use it in as many places as possible.
- Do they have SEO knowledge and experience of maximising search opportunities?
- Do they understand your brand and what it means to your customers? Any writing that comes from your business needs to convey your brand messages and create a positive impression about your business.
- Do they understand your customer base? Can they write in a way that speaks to your target audience: answers their questions and considers their priorities?
- Can they deliver great writing? Finding a technically proficient writer who gets all the grammar and punctuation right is good. Finding one who does all that and understands your business is better. But for writing to be truly effective, your copywriter needs to be able to get creative. Can they deliver something new and powerful that gets across the messages you need and motivates your readers to act?

Using an external source to find writers can give you access to a wider and more tested pool of talent that you could find on your own. There are websites and agencies that use writers all the time. They can recommend those that they have seen in action and know can deliver. Going this route can also be helpful as they can advise on things like experience, technique and personal chemistry – all of which are important to consider.

"YOU NEED TO BE SURE THE WRITERS YOU HIRE UNDERSTAND YOUR STRATEGY, YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AS WELL AS HOW TO WRITE PROPERLY AND WELL."

CONCLUSION

Businesses that utilise inbound marketing strategies must commit to content on a scale that can seem overwhelming, particularly for small to medium sized organisations. The requirement to be constantly communicating with your customers and the wider community can make you feel as if you are spending more time communicating than actually providing the products and services that your customers want. But these strategies create a virtuous circle of brand recognition, goodwill and customer loyalty that are absolutely beneficial to your bottom line.

So the solution is writing. And while this eBook has given you tips and ideas for a number of different formats, the key to good writing never changes: educate and entertain. Tell your readers something they didn't know, solve their problem or answer a question, in a way that is engaging and interesting. At the very least, they will be happy you did it, which is no bad result. But with perseverance and consistency, and by continuing to be relevant, you just might convince them that you are a business solution to consider, they may tell their friends and peers about you, and eventually they could become a loyal customer.

The key is excellent writing that you can use in different formats to get your business messages across in a way that your customers and prospects need and appreciate.

A free inbound consultation

At Equinet we deliver carefully developed, perfectly formed, and accountable inbound marketing services using the four core offerings: Attract, convert, close and delight. As a first step, we offer a free consultation to help both of us understand if inbound marketing is right for your business. Request a consultation by clicking or visiting the URL below:

http://www.equinetmedia.com/inbound-marketing-consultation

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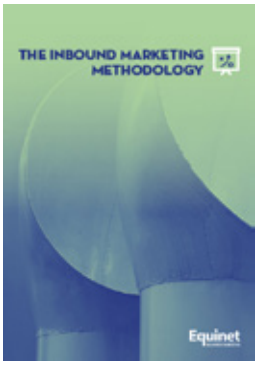

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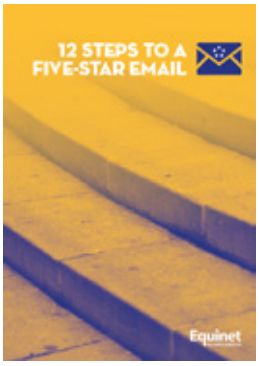

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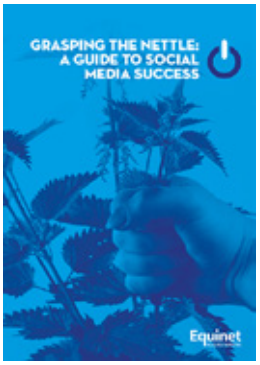

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