

Menu

[TradeOnlyToday](#) > [Columns & Blogs](#) > [Marketing Insight](#) > A promising route to Google supremacy 'Content marketing' can deliver a listings breakout

## A promising route to Google supremacy 'Content marketing' can deliver a listings breakout

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Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



When you want an answer to something, who are you gonna call? Ghostbusters?

All joking aside, depending on the topic, maybe you'll turn to a trusted colleague, friend or family member.

However, I'd bet most of us take the fast route. We frame our question, strike the keys, hit search and voila: instant gratification! A remarkable list with links appears like magic.

We are a world obsessed with information.

As part of my research for this column I wanted to know how many searches Google processes each day. To find out, I did what gazillions of us do every minute — I asked the Google gods. In a flash, the answer catapulted itself to the top of the search results.

Would you be surprised to learn that, on average, Google claims to process more than 40,000 queries a second? That equates to 3.5 billion searches a day and 1.2 trillion a year.

Amazing.

Marketers generally are the people responsible for navigating a company's course to a position at or near the top of the search charts. We rely on a variety of marketing strategies to do this.

A few short years ago our primary strategies included creating and executing a comprehensive keyword initiative and investing in a targeted PPC (pay-per-click) campaign. Today, however, new tactics are evolving.

According to a March 2016 post in Search Engine Watch by Christopher Ratcliff, an interview with a Google information officer revealed that two of the top 200-plus Google signals include "content and links," plus Google's breakthrough "artificial intelligence system," dubbed RankBrain. This latter technology is part of Google's overall Hummingbird algorithm. It purportedly applies "machine learning" to process search queries.

RankBrain is no doubt getting a cerebral workout. Besides the grinding churn of repeated questions, Google reports that brand-new queries (new unasked questions) now comprise as much as 15 percent of all new daily searches. In addition, a May 2016 Search Engine Land article noted that between 20 percent and 25 percent of all Google mobile app and Android device queries are now voice searches, representing yet another notable trend in this complex and ultra-competitive space.

Interesting facts, but you don't read this column simply to brush up on trivia. You're here to get a tip or two for your business. Let's shift gears and apply these findings to the boating business and, more specifically, drive it down to your own granular marketing activities.

Let's dive in by considering this question: When prospects ask questions on Google about your niche, does your brand rise to the top? Or are you buried somewhere in the heap?

If you don't know, test it. Ask the questions your prospect most wants to know about your product or service. If you don't know what your prospects want to know, call your sales team. They know. They deal with the same questions every day. Just as an exercise, here are a few questions your prospect might ask:

What are the best (name your niche category, i.e., sportboats, center consoles, life jackets, water skis, wakeboards, etc.)?

Stern-drive or outboard? (Check it out: a great example of content produced by NauticStar Boats: [www.nauticstarboats.com/why-buy-a-four-stroke-outboard-vs-inboard-outboard-stern-drive/](http://www.nauticstarboats.com/why-buy-a-four-stroke-outboard-vs-inboard-outboard-stern-drive/))

What's a (your product) cost?

Knowing the most frequent questions your prospects will ask and then producing content that directly answers those questions lies at the heart of content marketing. Content marketing is a major driver that can help push your company and brand up the ranking ladder. If your marketing team is not consistently producing and regularly uploading solid content, you are missing the boat.

I recently posed this question to several friends and marketing colleagues: "What is your content marketing plan, and what resources have you dedicated to this important effort?"

Two in my personal focus group had content marketing strategies, but most did not. In fact, the majority didn't even understand the term. Only one had a "content producer" among the marketing staff.

Here's a sampling of some of the responses I received:

"When you say content marketing, what do you mean exactly?"

"We're updating our website and refreshing the content every

month. Is that what you're referring to regarding content?"

"Are you asking about our advertising messaging?"

"Can you be a little more specific about what you're asking?"

"We are active on Facebook."

This handful of responses, though admittedly unscientific and not applicable to the industry as a whole, prompted this column.

Here's the message: Content marketing is a major SEO (search engine optimization) and significant marketing strategy. If your company isn't in active content development and deployment mode, it's time to engage.

Let me briefly explain the term "content marketing" and then share some ideas about why you should have a defined content marketing strategy.

First: "a type of marketing that involves the creation and sharing of online material such as videos, blogs and social media posts that does not explicitly promote a brand but is intended to stimulate interest in its products or services."

Second: "Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Successful content marketing requires a strategy. It is not simply the production and distribution of content, such as you might schedule via Hubspot or Hootsuite for social media. Having a strategy requires an intelligent, well-crafted approach to provide just the right type of information to the right people at the right time while harnessing a wide berth of marketing platforms that your prospects prefer.

Now that (hopefully) you grasp what content marketing is, why is it important?

As the Google statistics I shared with you reveal, hundreds of thousands of people are actively searching for answers to questions. Guess what? A percentage of those folks are, in fact, interested in the product and service niche you represent. From a sales perspective, no matter where these prospects fall within the funnel, your content marketing strategy provides a tremendous opportunity for your company or brand to enhance visibility and to become a trusted resource your prospect can turn to for information.

However, you must show up when they are in the hunt. You must proactively provide answers to their questions via multiple content marketing channels.

To scale the peak of Google search rankings, you must 1) know the questions your prospects want answers to and 2) answer them in a straightforward, thorough and credible manner.

To illustrate, let me provide a personal example from my own business. My colleagues and I know that many prospects want to better understand the boat club model. They often confuse boat clubs with yacht clubs, boat rentals and other sharing economy models.

Because I know this is a common question our prospects have, I type in: What is a boat club?

Of the 14.9 million results that Google cites (yes nearly 15 million), the content I wrote on the Freedom Boat Club consumer website with the headline: What is a boat club? appears at the top of the Google results.

Many people confuse a boat club with other recreational boating enterprises and don't really understand the differences among a club, rental operator, a new or used boat dealership, fractional ownership or even the newer peer-to-peer organizations.

What is a Boat Club? — Freedom Boat Club ([freedomboatclub.com/what-is-a-boat-club/](http://freedomboatclub.com/what-is-a-boat-club/)): The article was part of a Q&A designed to educate consumers about boat clubs and how they compare to other boating platforms. The copy was not written in an advertising voice, but in a straightforward and factual manner.

There are many additional questions our boat club prospects want to ask. We have worked with our sales team to brainstorm and identify the most common of them. As a result, we are focused to regularly produce content across multiple platforms to address the answers.

Content is manifest in a variety of forms. Depending on the question, we sometimes produce a more lengthy, detailed "white paper" for download as part of an online advertising campaign. For "What is a Boat Club?" we provide a video that was uploaded to our YouTube channel. No surprise, it happens to command our highest page views on the entire [freedomboatclub.com](http://freedomboatclub.com) website. We also share the link on social media networks, in our PPC and in digital campaigns. For other questions, we may create PR content, archive a related news story, write a blog, send an e-blast or create a special header with content on the website FAQ. Yet another hot trend — we may choose to search, identify and work with either key or regional micro-influencers who wield a proven measure of power and trust among audiences in our space.

To summarize, our job as marketers is to clearly know the questions our prospects have and then to strategize a plan to create content and distribute our answers across marketing platforms.

If this is all Greek to you, or perhaps you simply need some inspiration or great ideas to motivate and beef up your content marketing initiatives, I recommend a leisurely cruise to <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/> This organization offers lots of content about content.

My final parting thought: For your content to do its job, it must be relevant, timely and of genuine value to those searching. It should be credible, and wherever possible take an objective approach, serving to educate or assist people in the market for your goods or services. Don't produce content that smacks of self-serving advertising because today that's a formula destined for failure.

Whether applied to your PPC campaign, website or PR initiatives, social media networks or specific SEO strategies, content marketing has earned a much envied seat at today's marketing table. I predict that demand for content will continue to explode exponentially, and that's a very good thing for those companies and brands with marketers who are masters of feeding prospects plenty of the content they are ravenous to consume.

Wanda Kenton Smith is chairwoman of the RBLC New Markets Task Force, chief marketing officer of Freedom Boat Club and president of Marine Marketers of America. Email: [wanda@kentonsmithmarketing.com](mailto:wanda@kentonsmithmarketing.com)

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