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# 11 Scrappy Content Tactics That \*Work\* (...For Now)

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Written by Alex Birkett,  
co-founder at Omniscient Digital

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Alright, let's get right to business:



**Content marketing is a game of strategy, but scrappy tactics will get you where you want to go faster.**

Let's say you've got your shit together with regards to strategy. You know how to build a [content growth model](#), you've [got a balanced portfolio of content plays](#) in your roadmap, and you're executing with consistency.

All is good, but let's inject a little scrappiness into your playbook. Let's get creative and find ways to build more links faster, acquire more customers from your content, and leverage the assets you've got to produce better content faster.

This book will walk through some of the most effective techniques I've used the last year or so that are working extremely well. They won't always work well, so try them out quickly.

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# Tactic 1: “Surround Sound” marketing

If you’re an SEO worth their salt, you can eventually snag a front page ranking for your product page. Easy enough with applied pressure, resources, and time.

But think for a minute about how people shop online. Do they search for something (“best running shoes”) and just buy after visiting the first site they click on?

Anecdotally, you know you don’t shop like that unless you’re searching for a specific brand. It’s more common to do some comparison shopping first.

The data backs this up. A recent [Google research study found](#) that simply being exposed more prevalently in the search journey led to increased product purchase intent.

Or [as a CXL article](#) (aptly titled, “People Comparison Shop, Stupid”) reported, “On average, consumers visit three websites before making a purchase. The more websites a consumer visits, the more money they are likely to spend.”

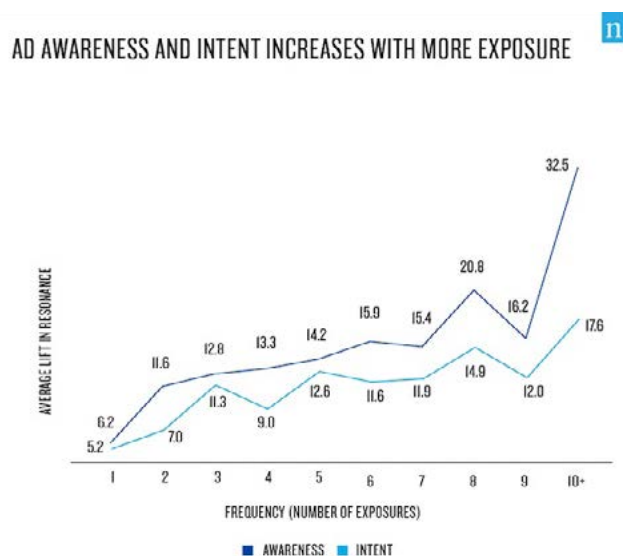
Being on multiple search results helps your odds of customer acquisition.

Or just imagine asking a group of friends at a party what book they recommend you read. One person says “Sapiens” and you might end up checking it out, but if 90% of the group recommends it I bet your curiosity gets provoked.

The placement of a message and its targeting is important (as is, of course, the message quality), but repetition is important, too.

This is common advertising wisdom, where ad planners optimize [Reach and Frequency](#).

It didn’t just work on radio ads, though. [Nielsen found in 2017](#) that frequency of messaging leads to higher levels of awareness and purchase intent. The more you hear or see an ad, the more likely it is to be effective.



Source: Nielsen Digital Brand Effect

“Surround Sound” marketing, then, is seeking to increase the frequency of your mentions on high intent search results pages.

If you’re selling live chat software, you don’t just want to rank your product page; you want every one of these listicles and review sites to include you, too.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "live chat software". The search bar is at the top, and the results are displayed below. On the left side, there is a sidebar with the "SEOquake" extension and various tools like "Parameters", "SERP report", and "Export CSV". The main content area shows the search results for "live chat software". The first result is from "blog.hubspot.com" with the title "2. The 24 Best Live Chat Software & Services of the Year". The second result is from "www.crazyegg.com" with the title "3. 15 Top Live Chat Software Solutions Reviewed - 2020". The third result is from "www.capterra.com" with the title "4. Best Live Chat Software 2020 | Reviews of the Most Popular ...". The fourth result is from "www.g2.com" with the title "5. Best Live Chat Software in 2020 | G2". Each result has a SEMrush data overlay showing metrics like Domain Score (DS), Traffic Score (TS), Visits, Pages/Visit, Avg. Visit, Bounce rate, Rank, Age, and more. The data overlays are in a light blue box with a semi-transparent background. The search results are in a standard Google font, and the page layout is clean and professional.

Google

live chat software

SEOquake

Parameters

SERP report

Export CSV

Sort this page

Locale

Best Live Chat Software · Pricing · Live Chat · Customer Service

DS: 0 TS: 0 Visits: 0 Pages/Visit: 0 Avg. Visit: 0 Bounce rate: 0

Get domain authority, visits and engagement data with a free SEMrush account - [Connect](#)

L: 1.13M LD: 11.8M I: 16.9K Rank: 7.92K Age: 2000|05|11 whois </> source

Rank: 10.9K Adv Disp Ads: 2 Pub Disp Ads: 0

blog.hubspot.com › sales › best-live-chat-software traffic (us): 250/mo - keywords: 119

2. The 24 Best Live Chat Software & Services of the Year

Best Live Chat Software. HubSpot Live Chat; Intercom; LiveChat; Pure Chat; LiveHelpNow; Acquire.io; Drift; SnapEngage; Olark; Bold360; LivePerson ...

L: 1.45K LD: 8.20M I: 91.2K Rank: 606 Age: 2007|11|03 whois </> source

Rank: 650 Adv Disp Ads: 5.89K Pub Disp Ads: 836

www.crazyegg.com › Blog › Reviews traffic (us): 550/mo - keywords: 370

3. 15 Top Live Chat Software Solutions Reviewed - 2020

5 days ago - The Best Live Chat Software Options to Consider: HubSpot Live Chat; Drift; Olark; Intercom; SnapEngage; Pure Chat; ClickDesk; Kayako; Velaro ...

HubSpot Live Chat · Drift · SnapEngage · Pure Chat

L: 1.30K LD: 740K I: 64.7K Rank: 24.2K Age: 2004|04|14 whois </> source

Rank: 19.2K Adv Disp Ads: 1.78K Pub Disp Ads: 5

www.capterra.com › live-chat-software traffic (us): 410/mo - keywords: 361

4. Best Live Chat Software 2020 | Reviews of the Most Popular ...

Live Chat Software · Find the best Live Chat Software for your business. Compare product reviews and features to build your list. · Too Many Choices? Talk to a ...

LiveChat · Chatra · Drift · Tawk.to

L: 417 LD: 6.46M I: 1.42M Rank: 5.12K Age: 2000|07|11 whois </> source

Rank: 2.11K Adv Disp Ads: 13.9K Pub Disp Ads: 11

www.g2.com › categories › live-chat traffic (us): 34/mo - keywords: 70

5. Best Live Chat Software in 2020 | G2

Live chat software allows companies to communicate with their website visitors in real time via chat windows. Customer service representatives can utilize live ...

L: 277 LD: 4.94M I: 638K Rank: 4.82K Age: 1999|11|28 whois </> source

Rank: 2.16K Adv Disp Ads: 1.02K Pub Disp Ads: 0



Ideal, yes? Hard to do, though.

There's no silver bullet way to get on all these lists. Minimum, you've got to have a decent product.

Past that, here are some quick hit tactics for getting on more lists:

- Create a valuable affiliate program. Tons of affiliates rank for high intent terms that tend to convert well.
- Partner with competitors or complementary companies to include each other on respective lists. Mutually beneficial.
- Embed review solicitation triggers for top NPS score customers. Trigger as many reviews for G2 and Capterra as possible.
- Pay to play. Lots of sites are paid sponsorship models (both content sites and review sites do this).
- Guest post on high domain authority websites. If you write a listicle for a blog like HubSpot or AppSumo, it has a high chance of ranking, and if it's super high quality, it's free traffic for the brand.
- Just ask. Good outreach gets responses.
- Write your own product listicles. Easy.



## Tactic 2: Behaviorally triggered lead capture forms

If you haven't ever implemented an exit-intent popup on your blog, go do that now. Basic first step, low hanging fruit. You'll grow your email list much faster.

[Optinmonster](#) is a good tool for that.

If, for you, the exit intent is old news, then read on.

You'll commonly find a few stock popup triggers in a given lead capture tool:

- Exit intent
- Scroll triggered
- Time based
- Instant popup (welcome mat)

These are cool, and I use them (particularly scroll triggered), but if you really want to squeeze additional returns from your content, think about behavioral intent.

Instead of the page they're on or the timing of the message, what behaviors do visitors exemplify that imply conversion intent?

I'll give you a few examples off the top of my head.

### **Copy paste or highlighting**

Is someone copying or highlighting text on the page? What text? Can you use that to trigger a popup offer of a content upgrade? Perhaps even personalize the message based on what text they're copying?

Lower level, you could trigger a prompt to share the article.

### **Scroll depth**

Classic. How far did they scroll? If you want to be gentler with your lead capture, someone who scrolls 75% is probably a good candidate for your email newsletter.

### **Image hover**

Hovering over an image? Saving an image? Could be a good trigger for an email list signup or ebook offer?

CXL

Institute

Revenue optimization services

Blog

Search

Start 7-day trial for \$1

Subscriptions

Minidegrees

Sprints

Online courses

Free courses

Resources

Login to Institute

How to Nail Your First 90 Days as a CX Director

Home > All Things Data-Driven Marketing >

By: **Katie Kelly** Published: Aug 4, 2020

STAY UPDATED

Your new boss read that customer experience (CX) improvements can deliver billions in additional **revenue**. So HR hot-footed it onto LinkedIn and recruited you to make this a reality.

As if expectations like that weren't enough, you might have based that

What's on my mind

Hi, I'm Peep Laja—founder of CXL.

I'm a former champion of optimization and experimentation turned business builder.

I do a lot of thinking, reading, and writing around business, strategy, and optimization. I send a weekly newsletter with what's on my mind on this stuff.

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## Click text

One of the most basic ways you can filter for high intent visitors is to drip text CTAs throughout your content. I've seen lots of content analytics reports, and text CTAs often outperform the more obtrusive welcome mats and exit intent popups in terms of conversion rates.

In a contextually relevant section of your article, just drop a quick text link that dynamically renders a lead form. For example, here's how Sumo does it:

We launched the world's biggest marketplace for small ecommerce brands

Sign Up Now!

SUMO

ABOUT

PLUGINS

PRICING

DEALS

BLOG

SUBSCRIBE

LOG IN

Sign Up

How Amazon Generates \$136 Billion In Sales

Bonus Material: Amazon's Marketing Playbook (PDF Version)

Chris Von Wilpert

Last Updated Apr 18, 2019

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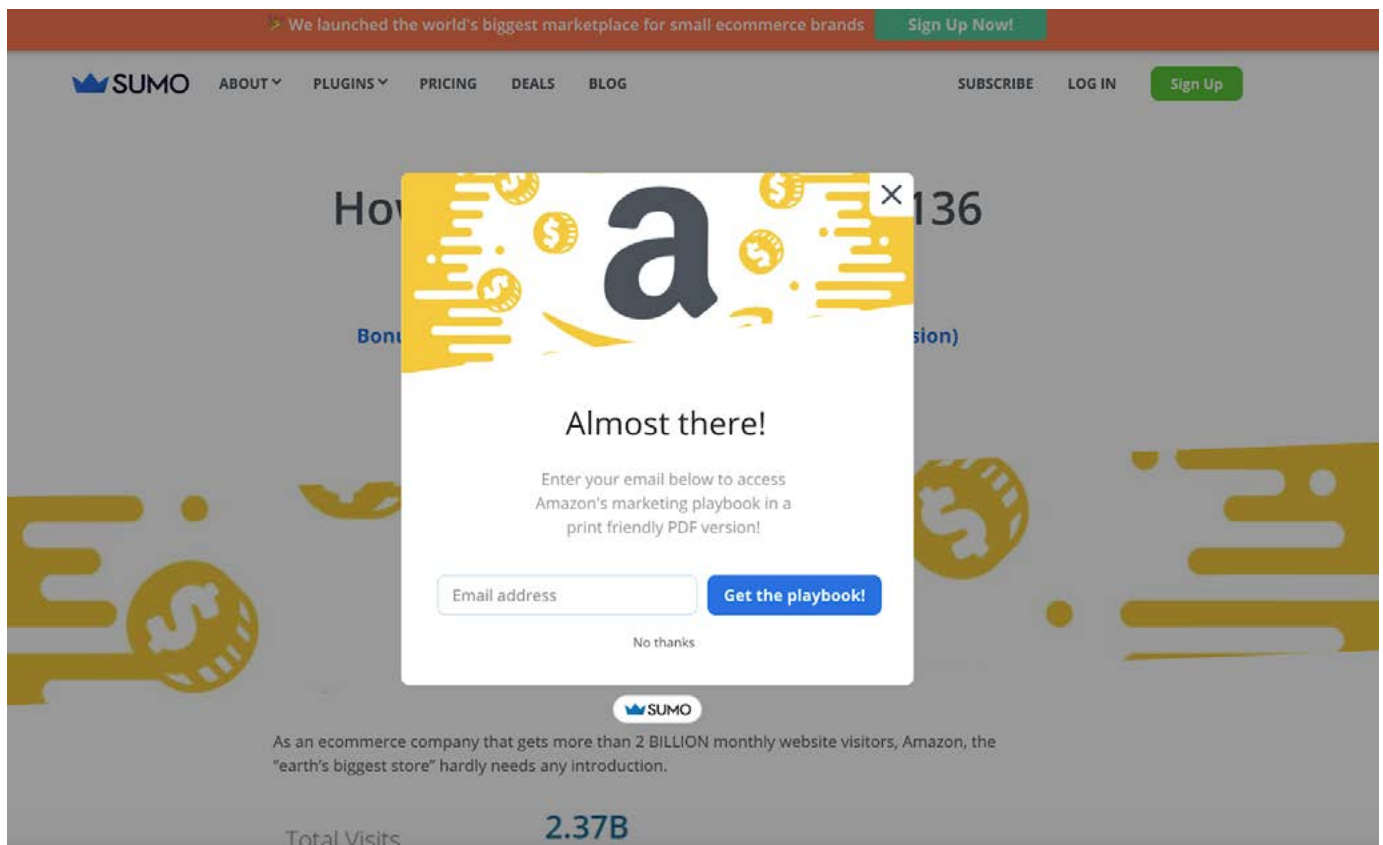
c

8 | Tactic 2: Behaviorally triggered lead capture forms

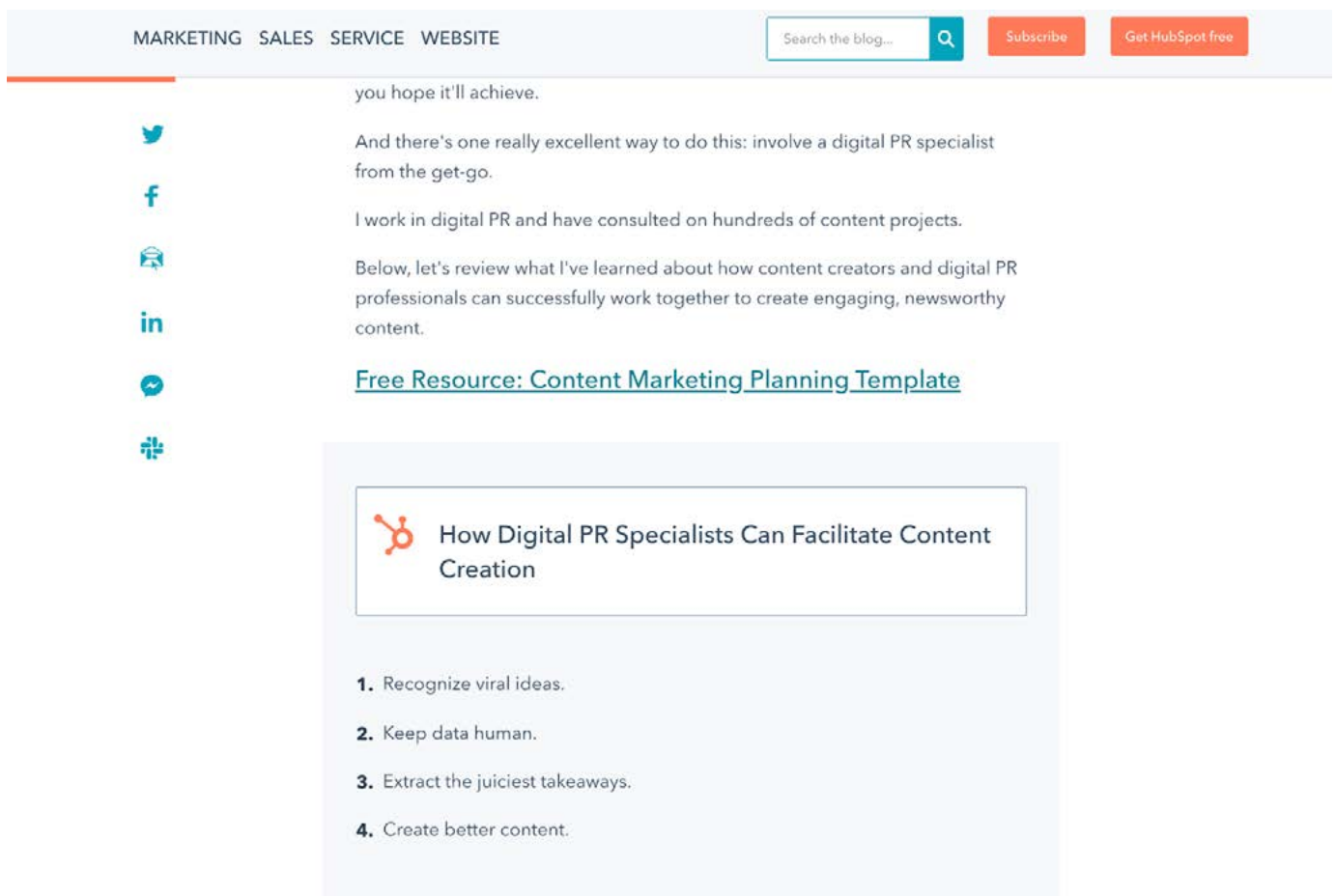
Omniscient Digital



And here's the form that pops up when you click the blue text:



HubSpot also puts a text CTA on every page:



## After viewing a piece of content

Sometimes the most predictive inputs come from past viewing behavior or a page path analysis.

There are ways you can model touchpoints with markov chains or even use predictive targeting technology like Intellimize, Conductrics, or Squark to figure out which page paths are predictive of signup intent.

Or you can just logically build out decision rules.

For instance, someone views a video on the topic, “how to build an email newsletter,” and then continues navigating the site. Log an event for that video view and trigger a subsequent offer for a pre-recorded but time-capped webinar on that same topic.

Or trigger an event if a visitor viewed a high intent listicle, like “best email marketing software,” and log that data to later fire a popup offering a buyer’s guide to ESPs, or just a CTA to try out your product for free. You can even use this event data to build high intent remarketing lists (more on that later).



## Tactic 3: The “Editorial Cabinet” Technique

Here’s the dream: with time and process improvement, the cost of creating content becomes lower and lower and the returns from each piece of content either stay the same or increase.

That’s [content economics](#) in a nutshell.

When you’re small, you have to create really expensive content to differentiate and build links. With scale and increased domain authority, you can [rank mediocre listicles](#), shallow content summaries, and even templated content.

A good hack for bridging the gap between early and expensive & scaled and cheap?

Expert contributor lists, or what I call the [“Editorial Cabinet” technique](#).

Here’s the gist:

Content-heavy companies like G2, Databox, and BigCommerce build lists of expert contributors, most of whom are qualified as “micro-influencers” with decent Twitter followings or their own blog presences.

Then, when these companies want to publish a piece of content, they send a call to action to their list of contributors: submit a quote for this article.

We have our next round of reports ready for you...

Want your insights included?

As always, we will include your quote as well as a link back to your website.

**We’re collecting contributions for the following articles:**

[What’s the best Zapier automation your company has set up and how is it helpful?](#)

[What is ONE important LinkedIn metric that you track and how is it helpful?](#)

[What’s ONE effective tip for improving the gross profit of your ecommerce store?](#)

[What’s ONE strategy for improving your company’s share of voice in search engines?](#)

**Still collecting:**

[What are the most important Shopify metrics to include in a dashboard?](#)

[What’s ONE Shopify integration that’s helped you increase sales? How?](#)

🕒 Surveys will be open only until **Thursday, 13th of August**.

Looking forward to reading your contributions!

The experts' quotes get included in the article, which is great for the contributors, of course, but it also drastically lowers the cost of producing content.

Think about it like this: you source 9 quotes at 120 words a piece. This gives you over a thousand words in a 2k word article. All the writer needs to do is fill in the gaps around the experts' quotes. Essentially, your article is written for you.

Now, on a subjective level, is this lazy? Totally. Often these quote roundups are poorly curated, giving the reader a negative experience. However, you can choose to curate better experts and better content curation.

The benefits for the blogs that do this go beyond cheap content production.

It also gives you a list of collaborators and potential content and link partners. Additionally, most of the contributors will share the article on their social or increase the engagement on the social promo that you send for the article. This helps give the article initial traction.

This is essentially a privatized HARO model.

And if you're the person giving the quotes, it's the easiest way to build links ever. So corollary to this tactic: join as many of these contributor lists as possible. I've built tons of links this way.

Fitzgerald continues: "For example, if a converted user visited the entire site 10 times, and the blog post was visited 2 one of those sessions, it gets 0.2 of a conversion attributed to it, and so on."

You can use this to define your own attribution model as Omniscient Digital's Alex Birkett explains: "I set up both first touch and last touch attribution models to explore users who first visited the site via a blog post and eventually converted (first touch) and users who, during the session that they converted, came in via a blog post (last touch)."

"Last touch is higher pressure for content, but the signal to noise ratio is better. First touch is wider in scope, but still way better at judging ROI than something as generic as traffic."

## Tactic 4: Roundup Real Estate link building

Reciprocity is the name of the game in link building. You **scratch my back** give me a link, I'll **scratch yours** give you a link.

What's in it for me?

Problem is the one-to-one model.

You can't scale link building by trading links on a one to one basis. It's also grey hat and you risk getting a manual penalty if it becomes obvious you're doing link trading at scale.

Sometimes you're working with a site with a lower domain authority than those you want links from. Then the trade becomes inequitable and you're fighting an uphill battle.

The solution? The "Roundup Real Estate" link building play.

Take a list of "content partners," preferably those you know well but you can even include target blogs you want to get links from. Pitch a guest post to a separate 3rd party blog. Include quotes and links from all of your content partners. Ask for links back in return from those you mention.

Now, you've written one guest post, included 9 partners' links, and hopefully you'll get 9 links back from unique websites (10 links total if you include a link in your guest post).

1 for 10. Much better ROI ratio.



## Tactic 5: Ghost posting

Guest posting is still a highly relevant content and SEO tactic, especially for newer startups and content programs and especially if you can do it at a relatively high scale.

Without links, your website authority will be too low to rank any content that you write on your site. Without a brand to lean on, it's hard to both garner natural links or even to reach out to do link building. Guest posting works.

One leg up, however, is what I call “ghost posting.” Instead of pitching a topic to the editor of a blog and hoping you get published, you partner with editors, writers, and content teams to ghost write a percentage of their content.

This can work on a company to company basis.

For instance, I could set up an agreement with an affiliate marketing website to ghost write an article per month for them, the benefit for them being free content and the benefit for me being I can get links that are decoupled from my own name and company, thus appearing more natural. I can also double up and add links from my content partners via the Roundup Real Estate technique above and get way more impact from a single post.

Even cooler, though, is if you partner with a freelance writer who writes for many different sites. You can ghost write a percentage of their content and get easy link distribution and guest post opportunities without doing any pitching at all.

This tactic is effective in the general sense, but it's even better if you're targeted with which keywords and content you want to rank for.

For example, let's return to the tactic of “Surround Sound” marketing.

You want to monopolize a search results page and make your brand appear everywhere, but there are challenges to that. Either you have to pitch and succeed to land placements on all the top 10 sites (difficult) or you have to write your own product listicles and hope they rank (also difficult). In the latter example, your byline will be on all the pages, reducing trust slightly for those who notice.

Or you could just partner with high domain authority sites to ghost write their content, creating the semblance of a totally organic and natural SERP domination.

You can further increase your odds of a perfect surround sound effect by working with freelance writers to regularly build links to your ghost written pieces.

## Tactic 6: Finding high intent keywords

Typical keyword research process: find keywords your competitors are ranking for or high traffic keywords related to your products or services and write them in order of traffic volume and difficulty.

This is boring, mostly outdated, and ineffective for newer players. Big sites with high DA can just swoop in and crush you on high traffic/high competition keywords.

Therefore, the name of the game is finding the pieces that will convert, not just attract traffic.

I call this, in general, Product Led Content. It's content centered around and about your product, with the explicit aim to convert high intent searchers.

Problem: how do you find these high intent keyword opportunities? After all, if it were easy, everyone would do it.

First off, it's impossible to predict with 100% accuracy which keywords will convert well and which won't. I'm constantly shocked at how well some pieces of mine convert that I thought were low value almost throwaway pieces. So leave yourself open to learning and surprise.

Second, knowledge comes with experience as well as common sense. I know that, on average, keywords that contain "best," "alternatives," "templates," or "vs." typically convert much better than 1-3 word generic phrases like "content marketing strategy" or "ab testing." Much better would be:

- "Best ab testing tools"
- "Optimizely alternatives"
- "Ab testing checklist"
- "Optimizely vs VWO"

These queries imply a high intent on the searcher, past the level of a beginner just looking to define terms or learn the industry.

Finally, you can and should partner with your paid team to understand which CPC keywords are the highest converting and which are a waste of time. This, more than volume or difficulty, should be the prioritization key that is used to figure out what to write first, second, and third. High CPC with low difficulty is a great opportunity, regardless of the search volume (higher = better, but not always)

Bonus: want high intent, high value keywords? Steal them from affiliate websites. These sites are fully incentivized to convert the offers on their page, so they're typically not building out a wide net just for brand exposure. These are modern direct response advertisers, and what they write about generally reflects high intent keywords that sell.

Do a content gap analysis of the affiliate or review sites (G2, Capterra) in your space and go for those keywords.

## Tactic 7: Original research

Build links, write great content. Outside of your strategy at the outset, that's the name of the game in content marketing.

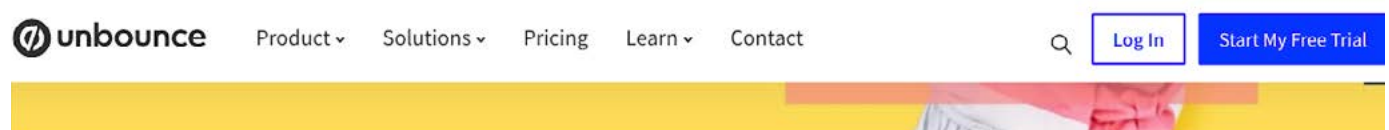
Easy to say, hard to do. Best way to build links in most industries? Original research.

Why? Bloggers like quoting statistics. So do journalists. Best chance of getting organic links. Also, it's way easier to do outreach if you have actual new information to offer (not just BS skyscraper technique canned email template).

Original research is overlooked because it's typically "expensive," but it doesn't need to be.

Have aggregated/anonymized product usage data you can use to build benchmarking and best practice reports?

[Unbounce does this well](#) with their conversion benchmark reports (despite "average conversion rates" being the dumbest possible thing you could care about if you're an optimizer):



# "What's a good conversion rate for my landing page?" [New AI-Backed Research]

By [Colin Loughran](#) on May 29th, 2020 in [Conversion Optimization](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Imagine you're an ecommerce business using landing pages to sell sweaters for miniature pigs. Recently, you've done a round of A/B testing—adding a little more *oink* to your calls to action, let's say—and tweaked your social ad targeting to reach the hardcore [piggy people on Instagram](#).


After all your optimization efforts, your landing pages now convert at **3.57%**.

But actually...even if it's a big improvement against your personal baseline, how do you know you should stop there? How do you know that your hard-earned conversion rate is worth celebrating? Heck, how would you even know if a *30% conversion rate* is any good for pages in your industry? (Maybe everyone's getting a fat return off of pig sweaters *but you*.)

Can you partner with a similar company in your space to do a user response survey and analyze the answers for interesting trends and correlations? Especially year after year, as you can then pitch the differences as interesting (despite the fact that most of these studies are just finding a whole lotta noise YoY).


I did this [with Formisimo and HubSpot](#). Was super easy to conduct the research and analysis and got tons of links:

MARKETING SALES SERVICE WEBSITE

Search the blog... 

Subscribe


Get HubSpot free




Software ▾ Pricing Resources ▾ Partners ▾ About ▾







MARKETING | 13 MIN READ

## Forms Aren't Dead: The State of Email Lead Capture in 2020



Written by Alex Birkett  
[@iamalexbirkett](#)





Email **lead capture** is the process marketers use to collect information from their website visitors. Typically, this is done through a traditional **web form**, although you can also capture leads through **popups**, **chatbots**, **live chat**, **quizzes**, surveys, and more.

Despite the process being fairly straightforward, our strategies often fluctuate in how we accomplish lead capture. Similarly, the results we achieve can vary quite a bit, too.

Unfortunately, the diversity of lead capture strategies, tools, and results can make it difficult to know precisely which process *you* should follow with your own marketing team -- which is why we decided to conduct a survey.

This stuff crushes it when it comes to links, shares, and even conversions to your email list. Plus, you can gate the whole report and use it as highly qualified lead generation.

## Tactic 8: Create a framework

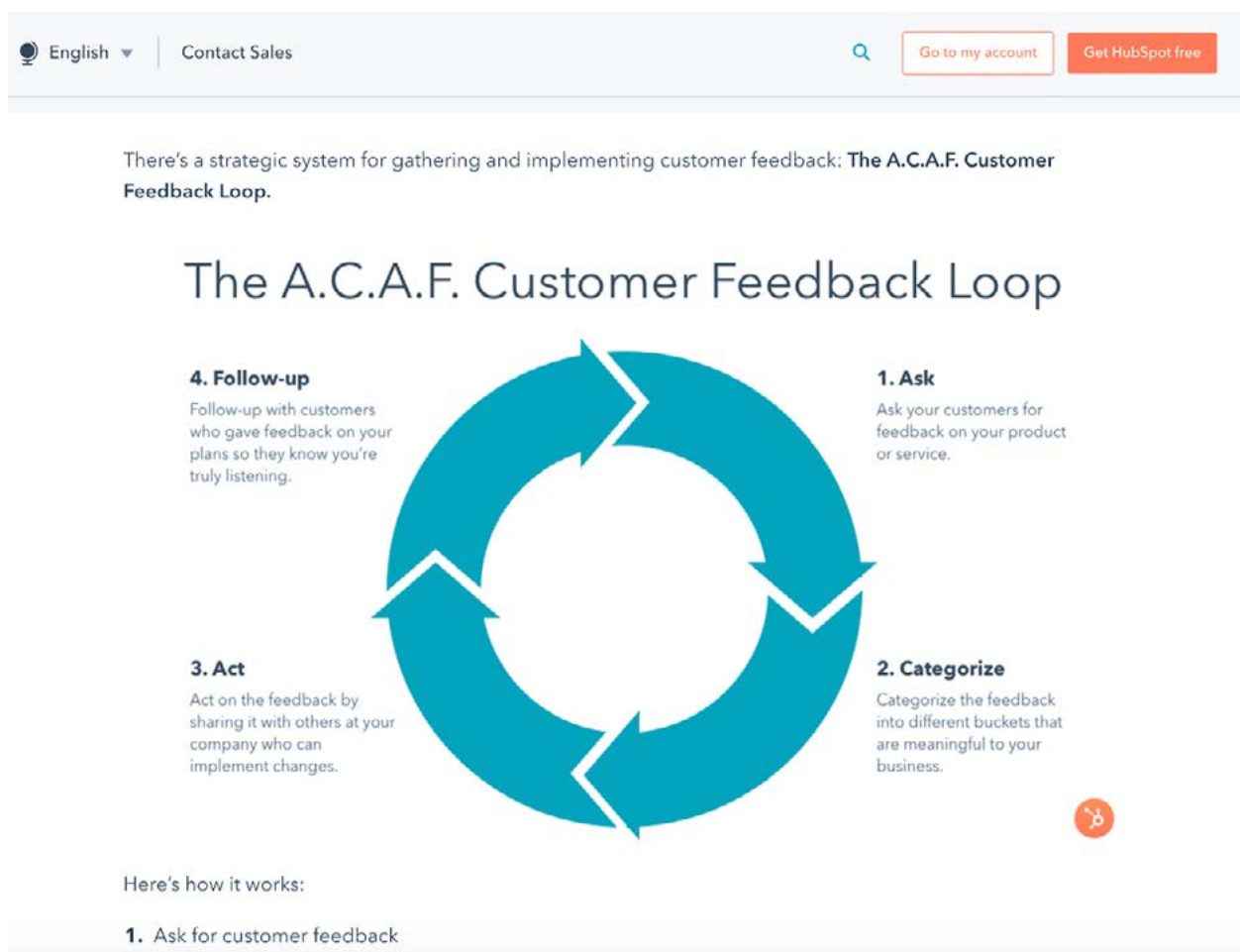
This one's not necessarily new, but it's still underutilized. Got a cool way of doing things, an interesting process you've developed? Name it, promote it, win.

The Skyscraper Technique, Inbound Marketing, Conversational Marketing, the PIE framework, ICE framework, PXL model, and the ResearchXL model are all examples of this.

I was reading Cal Newport's "Deep Work" the other day and was struck that, while none of the information was at all new, he did a great job at naming and organizing frameworks.

Sentences from the book include, "Knuth deploys what I call the monastic philosophy of deep work scheduling," and "Jung's approach is what I call the bimodal philosophy of deep work." The book is littered with the phrase, "What I call [X]"

Scott Tousley did this with a [customer feedback guide at HubSpot](#):



The framework is made up, but it both helps communicate the idea better and gives bloggers something to latch onto, a name, when they want to link to your content. Frameworks supercharge communication virality and the ability to build links.



## Tactic 9: Fuel your remarketing

One of the perks of building high intent content (and more generally, content as a whole) is that you can use browsing behavior as an intent signal and remarketing target list.

The most obvious remarketing is when someone visits a product page or landing page and doesn't convert. Send 'em remarketing ads and abandonment emails from that. Low hanging fruit.

Next step is using your content as a basis of "pre-heating the oven," and gauging which stage of the buyer's journey they're at and therefore which offer to send them to push them closer to purchase.

Got a guide "how to create a content marketing strategy?" Throw a content upgrade on that page, to be sure. But also, build a remarketing list of the people who visited that page but didn't convert and send them a follow up guide or offer. Could be a webinar interview with a well known content strategist. Test the offer, but the targeting here lets you know your audience better than interest based or other targeting.

Best case is you have a whole library of bottom funnel content. Examples for a form builder could be:

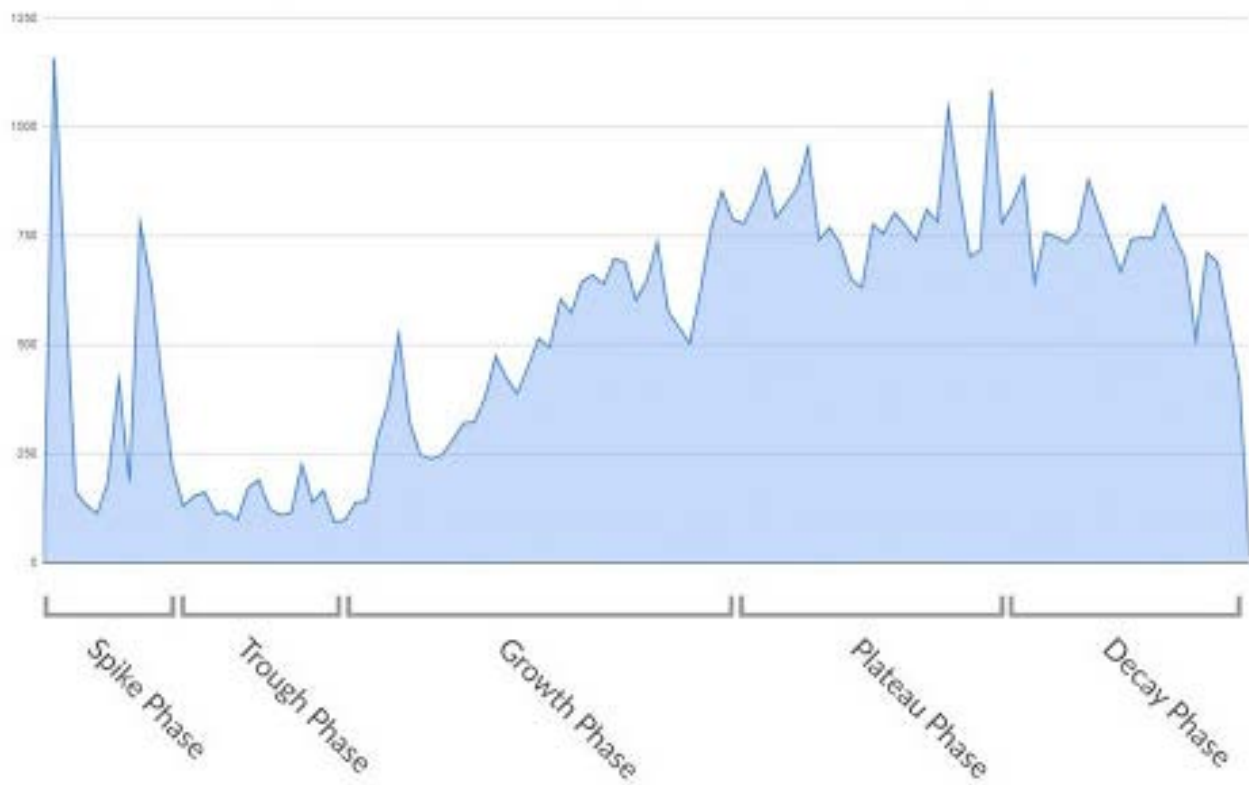
- A listicle of "best form builders"
- A comparison page of "your product vs typeform"
- A blog post of "typeform alternatives"

You can safely assume that those landing on these pages are in the market for a form builder, so you've already done the hard part of targeting the right people in your ads. Now just build a creative offer and write great copy to attract them back to close.

# Tactic 10: Prevent content decay

If you're not going back and revisiting and updating old content, you're missing out on a lot of money.

Traffic to a new piece of content often looks like this over time:



**animalz**

## [Image Source](#)

In other words, your well-ranked content that consistently brings in traffic will likely, at some point, begin to diminish in value. This can be due to many things - new competitors, changing search intent, changing click through rates, or algorithm changes. But you're not helpless to the whims of external factors. You can be proactive with content updates.

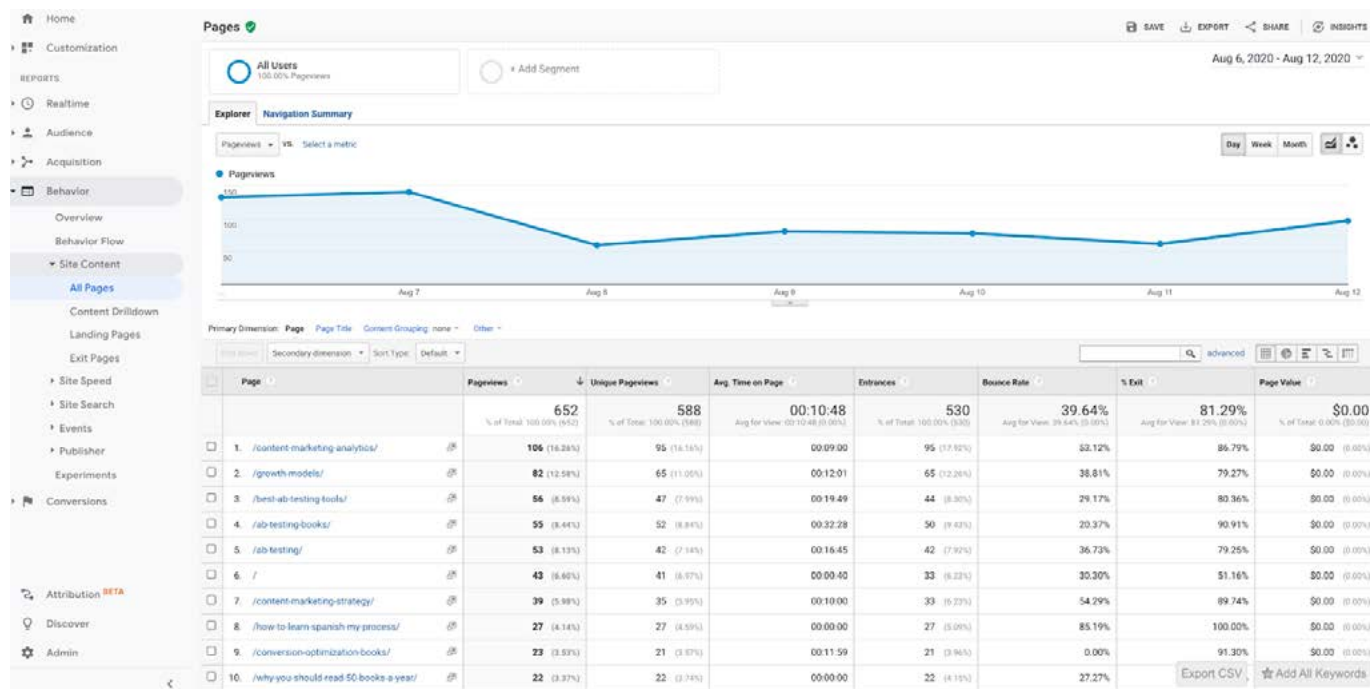
My process: I look at historical content once per quarter and audit for update opportunities.

There are two methods I use to find update opportunities:

- Diagnostic
- Predictive

In the diagnostic approach, I'm looking to find content that has already lost traffic over time and teasing out the factors that may have led to that.

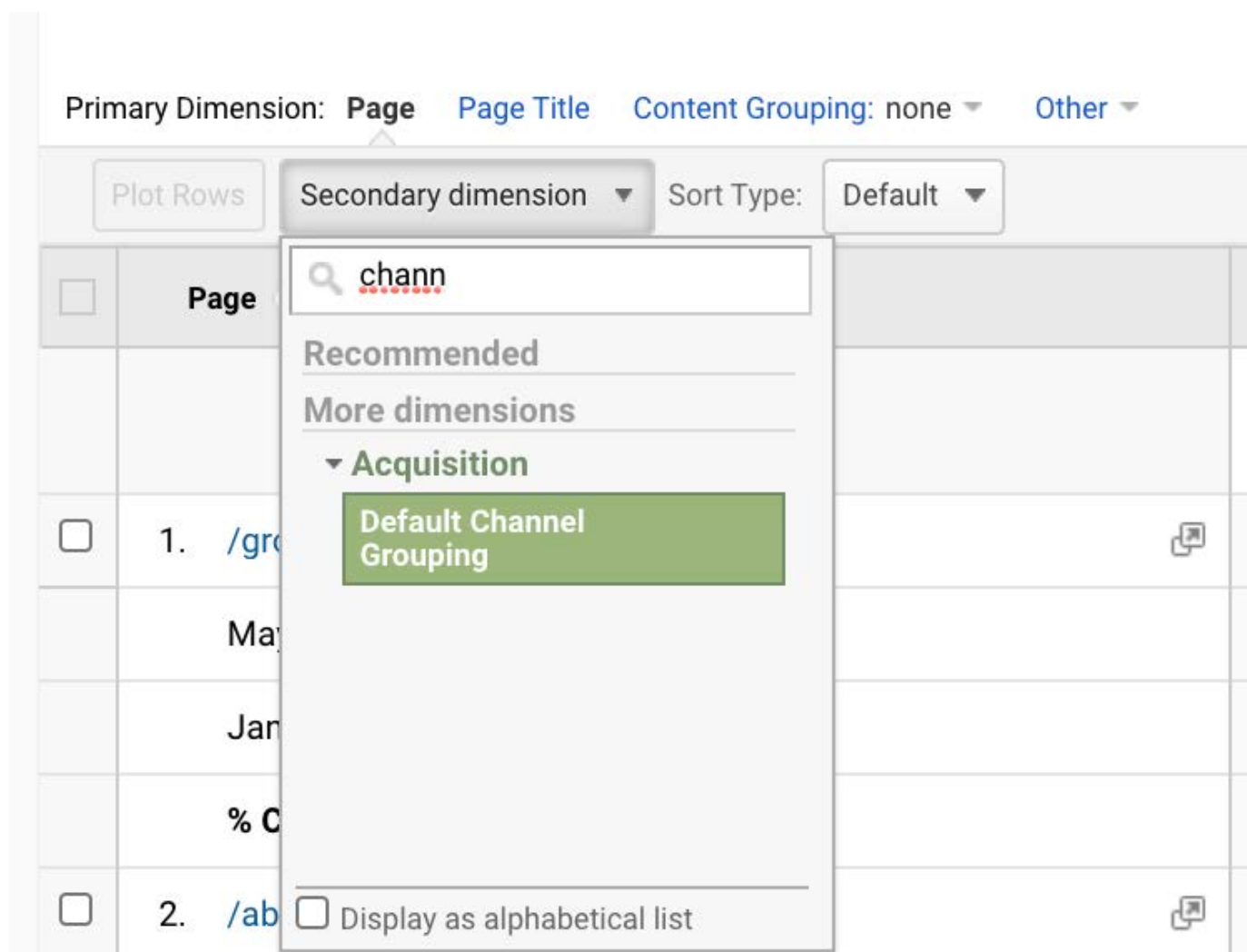
To find content that is failing in traffic, you can pull up your Google Analytics and get this data quickly. Go to behavior > site content > all pages. If you have a custom dimension for a blog post's publish date, use that as a filter (I look at content published over a year ago).



Now pick your time parameters. I'll use the last three months as an example. Choose that date range and then also check "compare to the previous period."

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics date range selector. The date range is set to 'Aug 6, 2020 - Aug 12, 2020'. The 'Date Range' dropdown is set to 'Custom'. The 'Compare to' dropdown is set to 'Previous period'. The 'Date Range' field shows 'May 1, 2020 - Aug 1, 2020'. The 'Compare to' field shows 'Jan 29, 2020 - Apr 30, 2020'. The 'Apply' button is highlighted.

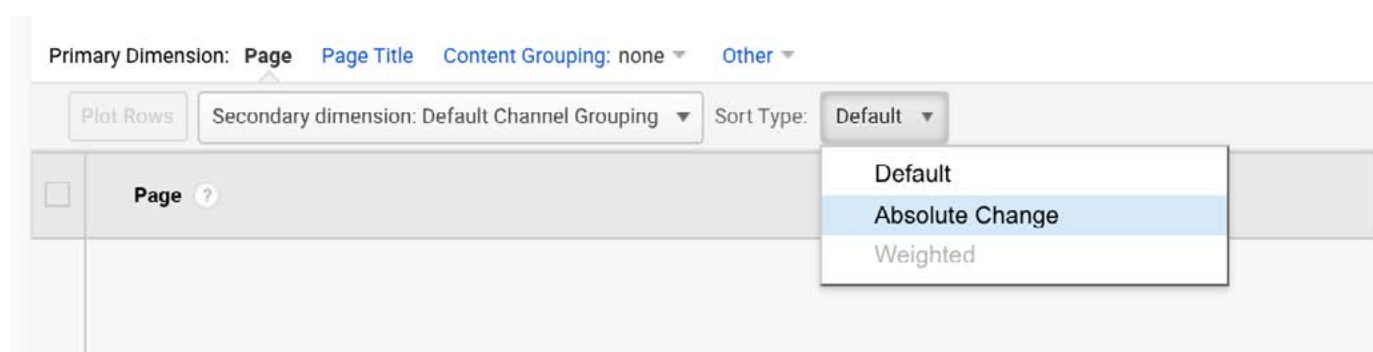
Now set up a secondary dimension for channel grouping:



Then filter for only organic search:



Export your data to a CSV file and open up in Excel or just sort by “absolute change”



If you're in Excel, pivot on page and organic by date columns. Create a new column for the difference in values between the two dates and organize by lowest value. This will show you the pages that have lost the most traffic over the last quarter compared to the previous quarter:

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Page	Jan 29, 2020 - Apr 30, 2020	May 1, 2020 - Aug 1, 2020	Difference	
2	/three-days-in-austin-itinerary/	1195	171	-1024	
3	/conversion-optimization-books/	118	67	-51	
4	/landing-page-builders/	41	19	-22	
5	/content-marketing-strategy/	43	31	-12	
6	/blog/page/2/	20	11	-9	
7	/editorial-cabinet/	12	5	-7	
8	/travel-tips/	10	3	-7	
9	/2019-recap-and-2020-goals/	10	4	-6	
10	/2017-goals/	3	0	-3	
11	?p=1041&preview=true	1	0	-1	
12	/ab-testing-books/experimentation-framework	1	0	-1	
13	/about/speaking/	5	4	-1	
14	/category/conversion-optimization/	3	2	-1	
15	/category/growth/	1	0	-1	
16	/category/personal-growth/	1	0	-1	
17	/conference-feedback/	1	0	-1	
18	/drink-more-beer/	1	1	0	
19	?customize_changeset_uid=223f806b-0025-4bc6-bcc7-85a7e54f2e05&customize_theme=optimizer_pro&customize_messenger_channel=preview-0	0	1	1	
20	?customize_changeset_uid=223f806b-0025-4bc6-bcc7-85a7e54f2e05&customize_theme=optimizer_pro&customize_messenger_channel=preview-1&customize_autosaved-on	0	1	1	
21	?p=1106&preview=true	0	1	1	
22	?p=1115&preview=true	0	1	1	
23	?p=1139&preview=true	0	1	1	
24	/2018-goals/	2	3	1	
25	/2019-goals/	1	2	1	
26	/author/jamalexbirkett@gmail-com/page/3/	0	1	1	
27	/author/jamalexbirkett@gmail-com/page/4/	0	1	1	
28	/best-content-marketing-tools/	19	20	1	

Then you can analyze what went wrong. This is exploratory:

- How did the SERPs change in that time?
- New competitors? Do they have more links?
- Run your piece through [Clearscope](#) - can the content use a refresh?

In my example, you see the top traffic loss was from a piece on a “three days in austin itinerary” - I’m guessing this lost traffic because I ran this report in the middle of a pandemic, and there are less people searching for this type of keyword.

Next way to find update opportunities is tougher: instead of finding content that already lost traffic, you’ll use SEO data to predict which content is likely to lose traffic in the future if left unchecked.

For this purpose, my colleague [Braden Becker](#) and I built what we call the “At Risk Content” tool at HubSpot. We used ranking and traffic data from SEMRush to figure out which posts were potentially at risk to lose traffic.

The way the At Risk Tool works is actually simple. We chunked it out into three parts:

- Where do we get our input data?
- How do we clean it?
- What are the outputs of that data that allow us to make better decisions when optimizing content?



First, where do we get the data?

## 1. Keyword Data from SEMRush

What we wanted was keyword research data on a property level. So we want to see all of the keywords that our website, [hubspot.com](https://blog.hubspot.com) ranks for, particularly [blog.hubspot.com](https://blog.hubspot.com), and all associated data that corresponds to those keywords.

Some fields that are valuable to us are our current search engine ranking, our past search engine ranking, the monthly search volume of that keyword, and, potentially, the value (estimated with keyword difficulty, or CPC) of that keyword.

To get this data, we used the [SEMrush API](#) (specifically, we use their “Domain Organic Search Keywords” report):

The screenshot shows the SEMrush API documentation for the 'DOMAIN ORGANIC SEARCH KEYWORDS' report. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: SUMMARY, TERMS OF USE, ANALYTICS API (selected), OVERVIEW REPORTS, DOMAIN REPORTS, KEYWORD REPORTS, URL REPORTS, BACKLINKS, DISPLAY ADVERTISING REPORTS, TRAFFIC ANALYTICS REPORTS (with a 'beta' badge), COLUMNS, SORTINGS, DATABASES, SERP FEATURES, FILTERS, ERROR MESSAGES, PROJECTS API, and ACCOUNTS API. Below the sidebar is a green 'Get API' button. The main content area has a blue header with the report title and a back arrow. Below the header, it shows pricing: 'Price: 10 API units per line' and 'Historical Price: 50 API units per line'. A descriptive paragraph states: 'This report lists keywords that bring users to a domain via Google's top 100 organic search results.' It then lists the 'Endpoint' as 'https://api.semrush.com/' and provides a table of 'Request parameters'.

Name	Value	Description
type*	domain_organic	The report type.
key*	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	An identification key assigned to a user after subscribing to SEMrush. The key is available on the Profile page.
domain*	example.com	A unique name of a website you'd like to investigate.
database*	database	A regional database (one value from the list).
display_limit	integer	The number of results returned to a request; if this parameter is not specified or equal to 0, the default value will be 10,000 lines.
display_offset	integer	This parameter allows you to skip a specified number of results before sending a report. Please keep in mind that if you use the option display_offset, display_limit, the value should be increased by value display_offset.
export_escape	1	If this parameter uses the value "1", the report's columns will be wrapped in double quotation marks ("").
export_decode	1 or 0	If this parameter uses the value "0", the response will be sent as a URL-encoded string; if "1", the response will not be converted.
display_date	date in format "YYYYMM15"	A date on which a report will be shown. You can roll back to the past or choose an actual date.
display_daily	1	This parameter allows you to get daily updates on position changes that occurred in the last 30 days or more. If the parameter is not specified, your report will show monthly results for the current month and for previous months. This option is applied only when display_date is specified.

At the bottom right of the main content area is a red button that says 'Have a Suggestion?' with a close icon.

Using R, a popular programming language for statisticians and analytics as well as marketers (specifically, we use the [‘httr’ library](#) to work with APIs), we then pulled the top 10,000 keywords that drive traffic to [blog.hubspot.com](https://blog.hubspot.com) (as well as our Spanish, German, French, and Portuguese properties). We do this once per quarter.

This is a lot of raw data, which is useless by itself. So we have to clean the data and warp it into a format that is useful for us.

## 2. Cleaning the Data and Building the Formulas

We do most of the data cleaning in our R script as well. So before our data ever hits another data storage source (whether that be Sheets or a database data table), our data is, for the most part, cleaned and formatted how we want it to.

We do this with a few short lines of code:



```
31 database="es", display_limit=5000)
32
33 request <- GET(base_url, query = query_params)
34
35 current_date <- Sys.Date()
36 c_date <- data.frame("updated" = c(".ES", as.character(current_date)), stringsAsFactors = FALSE)
37
38 domain <- strsplit(content(request, as = "text"), "\n")
39 domain <- as.data.frame(domain, col.names = "position", stringsAsFactors = FALSE)
40 domain <- str_split_fixed(domain$position, ";", Inf)
41 domain <- as.data.frame(domain, stringsAsFactors = FALSE)
42 domain <- domain[-1,]
43 colnames(domain) <- c("keyword", "position", "hist_position", "diff_position", "msv", "cpc", "url", "traff_percent",
44 "traff_cost", "competition", "n_results", "trends")
45
46
47 domain$diff_position <- as.numeric(domain$diff_position)
48 domain$position <- as.numeric(domain$position)
49
50 domain <- dplyr::filter(domain, diff_position < 0)
51 domain <- dplyr::filter(domain, hist_position != 0)
52 #domain <- dplyr::filter(domain, position > 8)
53
54 #domain_sheet <- write.csv(domain, file = "domain.csv")
55
```

What we're doing in the code above, after pulling 10,000 rows of keyword data, is parsing it from the API so it's readable and then building it into a data table. We then subtract the current ranking from the past ranking to get the difference in ranking (so if we used to rank in position 4, and we now rank 9, the difference in ranking is -5).

We further filtered so we only surface those with a difference in ranking of negative value (so only keywords that we've lost rankings for, not those that we gained or that remained the same).

We then send this cleaned and filtered data table to Google Sheets where we apply tons of custom formulas and conditional formatting.

## 3. At Risk Content Tool Outputs: How We Make Decisions

Given the input columns (keyword, current position, historical position, the difference in position, and the monthly search volume), and the formulas above, we compute a categorical variable for an output.

A URL/row can be one of the following:

- "AT RISK"
- "VOLATILE"
- Blank (no value)

At Risk Content									
File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was on March 18									
msv									
	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	P	R
1	keyword	position	hist_position	diff_position	msv	url	traff_percent	STATUS	
2	motivational quotes	10 9		-1	673000	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/18-motivational-quotes-to-start-you	0.39	AT RISK	
3	cover letter examples	9 7		-2	450000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-write-cover-letter-temp	0.26	AT RISK	
4	google docs	20 19		-1	2040000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/google-docs	0.23		
5	twitter search	9 7		-2	1500000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-use-twitter-advanced-s	0.17	AT RISK	
6	crm	5 4		-1	165000	https://www.hubspot.com/growth-stack/what-is-crm	0.16		
7	team building activities	3 2		-1	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/creative-team-outing-ideas	0.10		
8	white screen	10 9		-1	135000	https://blog.hubspot.com/website/wordpress-white-screen-of-death	0.07	VOLATILE	
9	how to delete facebook page	3 1		-2	40500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/delete-facebook	0.07		
10	ssl	3 2		-1	40500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/what-is-ssl	0.07		
11	instagram followers	11 10		-1	74000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/instagram-followers	0.06		
12	google easter eggs	5 4		-1	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-internet-easter-eggs-list	0.05		
13	quotes	18 16		-2	1000000	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/famous-quotes	0.05		
14	free email account	3 2		-1	33100	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/free-email-accounts	0.05		
15	business plan template	11 10		-1	60500	https://offers.hubspot.com/business-plan-template	0.05		
16	instagram quotes	11 10		-1	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/instagram-captions	0.05		
17	hashtag	5 4		-1	49500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/hashtags-twitter-facebook-ins	0.04		
18	ie	7 5		-2	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/ie-vs-eg	0.04		
19	management styles	2 1		-1	18100	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/management-styles	0.04		
20	google sheets	16 15		-1	2240000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/google-sheets	0.04		
21	microsoft excel	9 7		-2	74000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/microsoft-excel	0.04	VOLATILE	
22	customer service	12 11		-1	165000	https://blog.hubspot.com/service/importance-customer-service	0.04		
23	free website builder	11 8		-3	40500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/free-website-builders	0.03		
24	funny questions to ask	11 10		-1	40500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/funny-weird-interview-questions	0.03		
25	what meme	11 5		-6	40500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/meme-examples	0.03		
26	call center	4 3		-1	27100	https://blog.hubspot.com/service/working-call-center	0.03		
27	keyword	9 8		-1	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-do-keyword-research-	0.03	AT RISK	
28	logical fallacies	8 7		-1	60500	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/common-logical-fallacies	0.03	AT RISK	
29	medium	11 10		-1	165000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-use-medium	0.03		
30	messenger	15 14		-1	1500000	https://github.hubspot.com/messenger/	0.02		
31	smart goals examples	5 2		-3	27100	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/smart-goal-examples	0.02		
32	resume template	18 17		-1	450000	https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/resume-templates-word	0.02		
33	best quotes of all time	3 2		-1	14800	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/famous-quotes	0.02		
34	ie	7 5		-2	33100	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/ie-vs-eg	0.02		
35	daily quotes	11 9		-2	27100	https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/18-motivational-quotes-to-start-you	0.02		

Blank outputs, or those rows with no value, mean that we can essentially ignore those URLs for now. They haven't lost a significant amount of ranking, or they were already on page 2 of Google.

"Volatile" means the page is dropping in rank, but isn't an old-enough blog post to warrant any action yet. New web pages jump around in rankings all the time as they get older. At a certain point, they generate enough "topic authority" to stay put for a while, generally speaking. For content supporting a product launch, or an otherwise critical marketing campaign, we might give these posts some TLC as they're still maturing, so it is worth flagging them.

"At Risk" is mainly what we're after — blog posts that were published more than six months ago, dropped in ranking, and are now ranking between positions 8 and 10 for a high-volume keyword. We see this as the "red zone" for failing content, where it's fewer than 3 positions away from dropping from page 1 to page 2 of Google.

The spreadsheet formula for these three tags is below — basically a compound IF statement to find page-1 rankings, a negative ranking difference, and the publish date's distance from the current day.

AT RISK									
=IF(AND(B5<11,B5>7,D5<0,O5>5), "AT RISK", IF(AND(B5<11,B5>7,D5<0),"VOLATILE",""))									

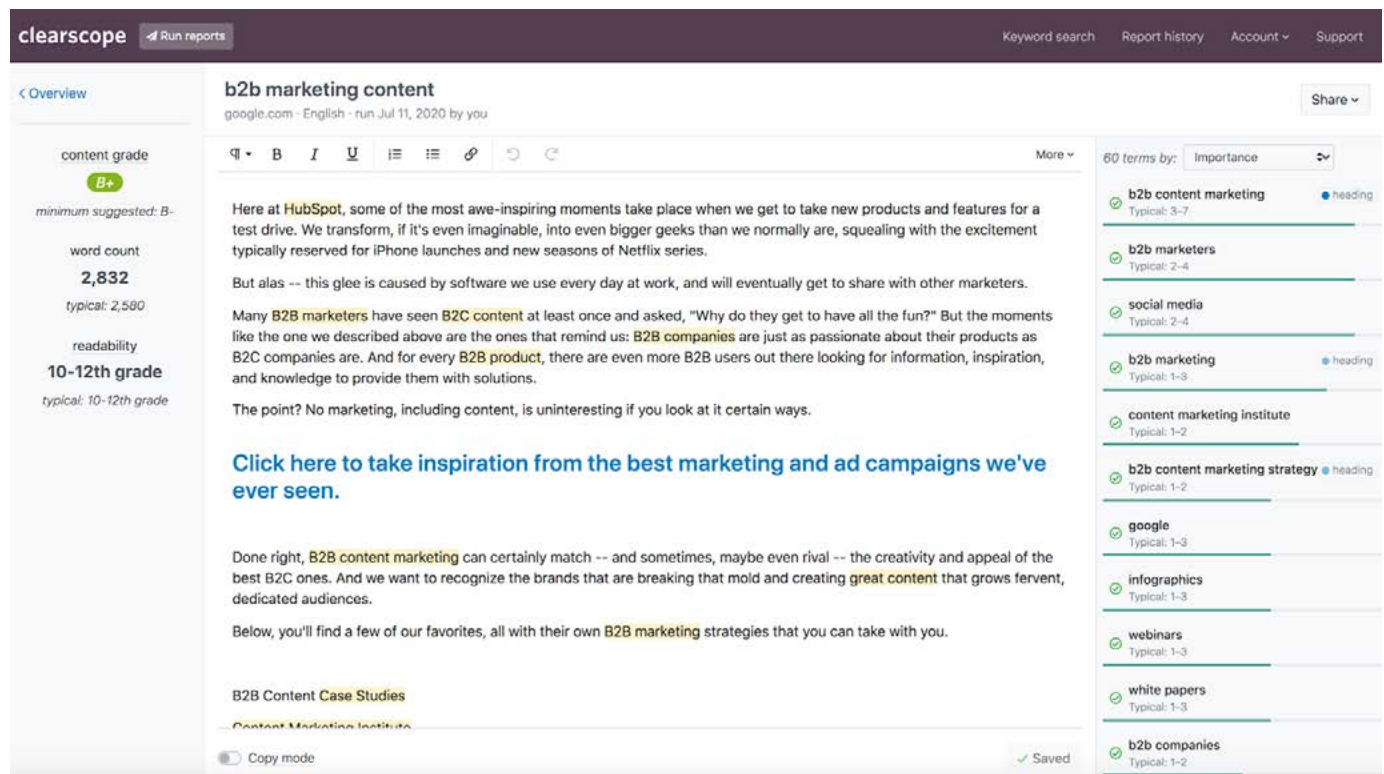
# Tactic 11: Reverse engineer on page SEO

Last tactic is an easy one, but who knows what the lifecycle of this one will look like once everyone is doing it.

Simple hack: use software like [MarketMuse](#), [Clearscope](#), or [SEMRush's SEO Writing Assistant](#) to audit and optimize your blog posts.

Every content agency and in-house team worth their salt are doing this.

You don't need to lead fully with keywords and stuff them in the article. But if you've already written a piece, say on "B2B content marketing," then give it a run through Clearscope and see how you're graded:



The screenshot displays the Clearscope web interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'clearscope', 'Run reports', and links for 'Keyword search', 'Report history', 'Account', and 'Support'. The main content area is titled 'b2b marketing content' and shows a snippet from a HubSpot article. On the left sidebar, under 'content grade', it shows a 'B+' grade, a word count of 2,832 (typical: 2,580), and a readability score of '10-12th grade' (typical: 10-12th grade). On the right sidebar, a list of 60 terms is shown, including 'b2b content marketing', 'b2b marketers', 'social media', 'b2b marketing', 'content marketing institute', 'b2b content marketing strategy', 'google', 'infographics', 'webinars', 'white papers', and 'b2b companies'. Each term has a 'Typical' range and a 'Importance' score.

Then the tool gives you additional keywords and phrases to add as well as other suggestions for increasing your rankings. It reverse engineers the content that already appears on the top 2-3 pages of Google, so you can then add those features and phrases in.

Of course it's not foolproof. You still need to write awesome stuff, promote it well, and build links.

But when it comes to content optimization, I just think, "why not?" The marginal returns more than pay for the process adjustment and the cost of the software.



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