



Creating Winning Content

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Introduction

Winning content for content marketers targeting the modern developer and IT professional is content that interests them and delivers value. Creating winning content encompasses more than putting out an interesting blog post or white paper every once in a while. It is a commitment that requires a strong content marketing strategy connected to business goals.

Well-constructed content marketing strategies include clear KPIs that are used before, during, and after a campaign. It requires a content strategy for developers and IT professionals that includes different forms of content with specific purposes including raising awareness of a technical problem, education about the characteristics of a satisfying solution, and specific details that can drive a decision about the adoption of a specific product, tool, or service.

The judicious use of authors from outside your company can improve the credibility of the brand and it offers the authenticity of a practitioner that is closer to the customer than you are. Practitioner content marketing offers a chance to build brand recognition and authority by borrowing a believable, technical



voice. It also takes the burden off your own team and the product engineers, so you can commit to a blog frequency that will build your audience. For the same reason, practitioners are the ideal source of public documentation, which is most effective when it is included in the content marketing strategy.

After identifying the channels for your content that make it easiest for customers to find, building a robust promotion strategy increases the likelihood your audience will find and interact with your content.

At the core of your strategy lies the content itself. It should be technical and about something that interests your audience, where you can offer something unique. The secrets of writing winning content may be only part of the recipe for successful content marketing campaigns, but they are critical. Read on to learn more about how you can take your content marketing strategy to the next level and win the hearts and minds of your skeptical technical audience.



Commit to a Blog Frequency

Content marketing may be king, but it sure doesn't feel good to be the king, particularly when you are asked to justify the performance of your blog. Any marketing team can struggle with keeping their blog traffic high and the market-qualified leads flowing, but it is an inestimable challenge when that blog is for the modern developer.



Challenges

Perhaps the most daunting part of creating a relevant, compelling blog that satisfies the modern developer or modern IT audience is that it must be technical. On the surface, this seems easy to solve—after all, you are responsible for marketing a technical product created by a technical team. Time to get them to churn out a few posts, right?

The reality is that the product team's time is fully taken up with creating product specifications and, well, the product. Most of their communication is geared for an internal, product-knowledgeable audience, not the great unwashed masses. And their time is understandably spoken for. If you rely on them for content, you might find yourself struggling to keep your blog timely and relevant to an audience that includes prospects, as well as customers.

The other challenge is building an audience and satisfying it. The cornerstone of audience building is providing content that satisfies either a need or an itch. For developers, the content should be technical, it should be timely, and it should generate discussion—content commonly classified as technical thought leadership.

However, provide that content too infrequently, and your audience will forget about you. How often do you need to publish a blog post to whet your audience's appetite for more? Twice a week.

You heard me.



Twice. A. Week.

And that, my friends, brings us to the third challenge: hitting that frequency that you know will get you the attention your company deserves from the right audience.

Why commit?

Having a regular blog rhythm builds anticipation and expectation for your audience. Miss a week, and they forget about you. If you are marketing to developers, just having product pitches or support articles isn't enough. Include thought leadership and tactical pieces that speak to the problems your audience has, but don't mention your product. This lets you speak to an audience that consists of prospects, not just existing customers.

Why twice a week?

Once a week still gets you forgotten. For an audience of prospects, not just customers, you need to get their attention more frequently.

Why not a product pitch?

Serving up content that has a wider appeal than a pure product sell makes your blog something of an industry resource, rather than just another long-form advertisement. It is more likely to get shared and gain traffic because it delivers value. Provide value, not product information. Your audience's time is



very limited, so they focus their attention on what is interesting, what helps them in their work, what helps them in their dev career journey, or what is entertaining. Posting a product pitch on your blog isn't just missing a chance to be a resource: It's the kiss of death.

Who should write these magical blog posts?

Practitioners outside of your company; they are closer to your customer and have more credibility.

What kind of content?

Thought leadership surfaces problems. Education pieces describe what a solution might look like. Both should be deeply technical, written by a subject matter expert for someone who needs to consume real technical expertise. Encourage practitioners to take a technical position. Even an opinion that is controversial is worth airing, if it is supported and gets people involved in a constructive conversation.

What should I measure?

Measure organic growth in traffic, views, referrals, downloads, social/other share and share of conversation. All should grow, albeit gradually. Expect to see increases quarterly. If you don't, consider changing the topics you are featuring or your promotion strategy. Remember, while you want to increase earned traffic, you may have to seed that with paid traffic.



That's a Wrap

Blog frequency can seem too tactical, but when you commit to something that is so easy to measure, it drives other good behaviors. To hit this frequency, you need a content strategy that includes identifying the target audience, topics, authors, and deadlines. It requires people and process management. It is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART). Make this the year you commit to blog frequency and end up with an audience that is just as committed.

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Make Public Documentation Part of Content Marketing

Whether you are speaking to the modern developer, modern IT, or the DevOps engineer, public documentation may be the first content they consume. As the first face of your product or company a developer prospect sees, it needs to be a good one. That's why your public documentation deserves to be part of your content marketing strategy. It also deserves to be written by a practitioner from outside your company.



Public Documentation is Practitioner Content Marketing

Undoubtedly you have documentation already written by your product team. However, it was probably written for another member of the product team. They already know the product, so a lot can be left out. Not so for the new user evaluating your product.

That's why recruiting practitioner authors from outside your company to write your public-facing documentation produces the best public documentation. Developer empathy is baked right in.

Who better than the outsider who just learned how to use your product to structure the documentation so a newb can find the documentation they need for the use case they need it for?

The practitioner sitting outside your company's firewall is more likely to be able to articulate documentation within the context of typical use cases. Unlike your product team member, she won't make assumptions because she isn't a product creator. And she is more likely to pick the use cases that peers are curious about, giving your documentation the blessing of market pull, rather than product push.

Oh So Clickable

Developers [Marc Clifton](#), [Peter Kvis](#), and [Mahsa Hassankashi](#) all reference documentation as an important part of the research they do before trying or buying a product. [Evans Data Corporation's](#)



2018 Developer Marketing Survey indicates 47.8% of respondents were very likely to click on links on newsletters that lead to product information. When that information includes product documentation, it just gets that much spicier!

Make Your CTA a CTC

Did you want developer engagement? Were you looking for developer buzz? Perhaps the odd application on your API or the ringing endorsement in an article written for a D2D community? For that, your call-to-action (CTA) needs to look a lot like a call-to-code (CTC). And nothing makes coding look more appealing than clear guidelines on just how to use your product, tool, or API.

That's a Wrap

Be the hero of your company's product team and take public documentation off their shoulders. Getting product out is a full-time job, so don't ask your product engineers to moonlight as your marketing team. Practitioner-written public documentation can satisfy the requirements of your prospects and developer community because it is essentially written by them. Tap into the practitioner perspective, and own public marketing like a boss. Everyone will thank you for it.

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Tie Your Content Marketing Strategy to a Promotion Strategy

You are trying to drive **modern developer** engagement, correct? If you are looking for ads or content marketing alone to inspire this development (*snicker*), then you'll be disappointed. The best way to engage the modern developer is with compelling content. But, without a promotion strategy, those developers may never know your content exists.



Content + Promotion: A Winning Combination

According to Evans Data Corporation's Developer Marketing 2017 survey results, we know that the modern developer clicks through links to content advertised on newsletters from D2D communities.

When we interviewed developers, we learned that they are lifelong learners who are extremely interested in new technology like AI, machine learning, and the Internet of Things. They are always seeking new information, and they are excited to engage with it when they find it.

Serve the Right Practitioner Content Mix

The exact content mix you offer will vary depending on your goal. It will undoubtedly include thought leadership pieces to introduce the customer to the problem that your tool is uniquely equipped to solve, education content that informs the customer about the nature of the "best" solution, and product-specific content that will drive the customer to a decision.

Thought leadership and education content is particularly effective when it is written by practitioners outside your organization. Practitioner authors are closer to the customer, and their writing has the ring of authenticity and credibility. Practitioner content should make an appearance in a content mix that includes:



- **Blogs.** Vendor blogs are crazy influential among the developer audience. Establish a blog publication cadence that leaves your audience coming back for more.
- **Documentation.** It's not just about getting developers to “Hello, World” quickly. Before they even agree to use your product, they want to see how well your documentation supports their use case. Public documentation is a content marketing function.
- **White Papers/eBooks.** Longer-form content can be about building your brand through thought leadership or educating your customer about the available solutions. Provide both.
- **Tutorials.** 87% of developers will share tutorials with their peers. Enough said.

Use Multiple Content Promotion Channels

It's tempting to search for the “right” promotion channel. In reality, the answer is almost always “and,” not “or.” Yeah, that's right. All the channels.

Maybe “all” exceeds your budget, but putting several channels in your promotion arsenal is both realistic and necessary. Typical promotion channels include:

- **Direct Email.** The best types of direct email are permission-based, like newsletters to which recipients have subscribed. Banner ads and other ad sizes are routinely included in these newsletters. The audience should include your



target segment. Most developers **subscribe to industry newsletters**, so this is a great way to drive customers to your content.

- **D2D Communities. Developer-to-developer communities**, typically websites or blogs, include content written by developers for developers, and are often supported with display or other advertising. Many times, they include forums and offer an opt-in mailing list. These communities offer a high-trust environment that lends your brand, content, and promotions **authenticity and credibility**. “Context is everything” according to developer **Mark Downie**. That’s why advertising developer-oriented content in a developer community is so effective.
- **Search.** Whether paid or organic, this offers your content up to customers when they are looking for it.
- **Native.** If it looks like an article, it must be an article. Many media outlets offer placement of paid content that looks very similar to the journalist- or user-contributed content they display.
- **Social Media.** There are many creative ways to use social media, some more interactive than others. Investigate the channels your audience is most likely to use and promote your content there. Regardless of the type of content you are promoting, always include an image or a short, captioned video as part of your post.



Each of these channels, with the exception of native advertising (which is always paid), offers you the opportunity to create an audience for your content that is either paid or earned. Your strategy should include steps to build both. Owned channels are under your control. If you have user groups, a developer community, or a customer newsletter, you should absolutely promote your content through those channels.

That's a Wrap

A content marketing strategy without a promotion strategy is simply incomplete. The reverse is often true as well. Without content that becomes a call-to-code, many ads just fall flat, even if they are promoted in context, in the right audience. Wed the two and watch your content marketing ROI soar.

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From the Winner's Circle: Writing Secrets of a Content Contest Winner

Modern developers such as Oana Mancu love to incorporate play into their professional life. That's why entering challenges like the CodeProject [AI TensorFlow Challenge](#) held from Oct. 18–Dec. 31, 2018, was a no-brainer. Who wouldn't want to learn something new, as Oana did, and get a chance to prove that knowledge? Especially with an attention-getting \$5,000 in prizes being offered.



The Challenge

Actually, the challenges. The mission, if you chose to accept it, was to complete as many of three challenges as you cared to complete.



Challenge 1: 30-Second Survey: How Would You Train Your Evil AI?

You could take this quick, just-for-kicks survey and tell CodeProject how you would use AI to attempt world domination.

Estimated time to complete:
30 seconds.



Challenge 2: TensorFlow Tutorial

Want to explore the world of machine learning? Learn how to install TensorFlow and build a neural net in this simple five-step tutorial. The first 100 participants to complete all five steps successfully received a \$25 gift card from Amazon!

Estimated time to complete:
Approximately 15–20 minutes per step.



Challenge 3: Demonstrate your Knowledge—Write an Article

Choose a topic, any topic, on AI and share your knowledge and perspectives with us.

Estimated time to complete:
Depends on the topic.

The Winning Article

In the end, three articles won:

First Prize: Oana Mancu - \$1,000

Tides of Time Bot and Game: Application of Minimax

Second Prize: Andrew Kirillov - \$500

ANNT: Convolutional Neural Networks

Third Prize: Phil Hopley - \$250

Adding Object Detection with TensorFlow to a Robotics Project

The [complete list of winners](#) can be found online.



Words from the Winner's Circle

We got a chance to catch up with first-prize winner Oana Mancu, who wrote "[Tides of Time and Bot Game—Application of Minimax.](#)" Here's what we learned about Oana and her approach to the challenges, her article, and her advice for writing winning content.

Tell me about yourself. Where did you grow up, where do you live now, what do you do?

I grew up in and still live in Bucharest, Romania. I went to the University of Bucharest for my bachelor's degree in computer science and a master's degree in applied mathematics.

During my studies, I volunteered my time as a math tutor for foster kids, and also I worked with kids in the hospital. I've had several internships, including with Unicredit Business Solutions, where I worked on an internal web application that generates reports about eligible loans, improving my Java and DB skills. I also completed an internship with Orange, a telecommunications company (ITE Department, Orange France and South Africa). During this period of time, I worked along with a mentor using a Java-based tool, sharpening my skills in J2EE, JSF, Jonas, SQL, DB2, JPA, CSS, HTML, database design, and database development, being involved in all stages of the project, from designing the tool to development and implementation.



Currently, I do the programming for my family's business, and I also work as a freelancer. I mostly work in C# and ASP.NET. Now that I have finished my studies, I continue to explore the wonderful world of IT by not just doing a job, but by being open to new challenges and opportunities like the AI TensorFlow challenge.

In my free time, I like to travel.

How did you get interested in programming?

I started programming in the ninth grade during high school. I simply liked it. I was inspired to learn more so I could create more complex projects, because in the beginning you just do simple functions, not real projects. I think the most wonderful part of IT is that there is IT everywhere. You can choose to code for any industry you like.

How did you get interested in writing about programming?

Actually, this was my first article! Quite a success—I didn't expect that! Well, I had surfed the Internet, and I found an article on what I was looking for on CodeProject.com. There, I saw the AI challenge. After reading it, I thought of becoming an active user. The idea of giving something back to the community felt good. I had read a lot of articles on CodeProject, but I never gave something back. So my journey has begun.



Why did you participate in the AI TensorFlow challenge?

I had never written an article before, so it was really a challenge for me. It wasn't just the challenge of the competition. It was a challenge to do something new, try something new. And I actually enjoyed it. It's really nice to try new things and to find new things that you actually like. Because if you don't try, you don't know if you will like it.

Now that you took the AI challenge, will you do more work in AI and machine learning?

Yes. I actually was thinking about what I should do with the money I won. The TensorFlow prize total was really nice. It got my attention. I was thinking of taking some courses or online courses and getting a certificate in AI. After I saw that I won, I thought again about what I should do with the money. And I am buying myself an artificial intelligence course!

How did you approach your writing submission part of the challenge?

In the beginning, I was hesitant. It took me over a week to choose the topic, and I asked myself the question, "Why should someone choose my article on this subject instead of another?" A simple game that could be played seemed like a good idea, but then again, this same question. Using this thinking, I chose a game that I liked. I searched for



something I was interested in and looked to see if there was something people were interested in, and not already a lot of content. I structured my article into the project specs because that is what I actually did. I thought it would be easy to follow along.

Describe your writing process.

It's hard to say. I think the expression is, "I went with the flow." It's really hard to start writing, but once you start, you can't stop! I did research to come up with ideas, I asked myself what project was unique where I could say something people would want to read, and then I gave myself project specifications and wrote the article to follow along with how I structured the project.

How long did it take you?

It took me one week each to complete the project and the writing process. I was lucky, because I could do it over the Christmas holiday. I had more time since I was off work. In fact, I submitted it on December 31 right before leaving for a New Year's party, just before 10 p.m.!

What did you do that you think was most important to writing a winning entry?

I think that working with kids really helped me. I tried to write about a complicated subject the way I would explain it to a child, with pictures and simple, logical explanations.



I notice you used a combination of text, code, and images in your winning article. How did you decide what media to use to communicate your idea?

In the articles I like, I discovered I learned things from them because they have pictures and examples. So I tried to explain as much as possible with pictures and examples. And CodeProject, well, it's about code, so I included code.

When trying to explain something live, you can get feedback, and if that person didn't understand you, you can try to explain it in another way. But in an article, you have only one shot to make yourself understood. So, in the article, for every idea I tried to come up with a picture, an example, and the code to make it as clear as possible.

How do you inspire yourself to complete projects, whether writing or coding?

I think that inspiration comes from everywhere. I just close my eyes and ask myself questions, and imagine things. I try and put things together, and imagine how they will work.

Is there anything I didn't ask that you think our readers should know about you, your experience, or your process?

Welllll, I think that there are enough words already; it's time for action. You cannot wait and see the articles and see the community growing sitting on the sidelines.



That's a Wrap

It's encouraging to hear from a winner who succeeded on her first try! Oana has drawn upon her life experience, particularly her work teaching children, to create a winning approach. First, she put herself in the position of the readers to ensure she picked a project that would be unique and interesting to them. Then, she considered the difficulty readers might have with only her words to guide them. She wrote her explanation in the same way she would explain a complex topic to a child: She used pictures, simple logical explanations, an example, and the code. Wondering what to write? Consider this process and remember Oana's parting advice: "...there are enough words already; it's time for action. You cannot wait..."

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Conclusion

It's always tempting to search for the one pivotal element that can guarantee success. Seeking the “one thing” you need to supercharge your content marketing campaign will often lead you off course. Save your energy for building good habits instead.

We learned through research and interviews that paying attention to a company blog pays off. So does offering many types of content, including blog posts, documentation, white papers, and tutorials. Maximize that content's exposure by selecting the channels where developers and IT professionals expect to see technical content, and promote it.

Of course, at the core of the successful content marketing strategy is the content itself. To deliver content developers and IT professionals perceive as valuable, instead of marketing hyperbole, lean on other developers and IT professionals—those sitting outside your company walls. These practitioners have the perspective of your customer and the technical knowledge and insight to communicate with them about the things that matter.

Building a robust practitioner marketing pool can be



tedious. From recruiting to managing, it can be a drain. Relying on practitioner content delivered as a product by a content marketing company can improve your ROI.

How do you judge the content quality? Rely on the advice of Oana Mancu—demand content that is easy to understand and includes simple, logical explanations, an example, an image, and code.



About ContentLab.IO

ContentLab.IO, part of Developer Media, is a content marketing as a service company devoted to producing high quality, technical thought leadership and education content for companies selling tools to developers, DevOps and engineering-minded professionals. We have built a network of expert and influential authors writing blog posts, white papers, public documentation, and tutorials drawing on their expertise, including aspects of DevOps, artificial intelligence/machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, data algorithms, and more.

ContentLab's mission is to be part of both the advertising and software development communities, acting as a bridge between advertisers, brand marketers, and developers. We strive to help companies deliver the most effective and influential messages to software developers and IT professionals and to connect them with software and hardware vendors through a positive, informative, and respectful conversation.

We offer an accomplished group of creative and technical minds, focused on building excellence in



technical content marketing, creativity, and technology to ultimately deliver excellence in the technical content marketing experience.

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