

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 106

How to Use Data to Produce a Profitable Content Strategy

With Aaron Agius

Welcome to the Real Fast Results podcast! This episode is one that contains lots of useful information. By reviewing this material, you'll learn how to use content to market whatever it is that you're are trying to. All of us can probably agree that "Content is King," but it's really all about the decisive use of that content. So, it's not content for content's sake, but the use of content for a specific, desired purpose.

Aaron Agius is today's special guest. He is a one of the world's leading digital marketing gurus, according to Forbes. He's also the CEO of Louder.Online, which is one of the world's top digital agencies. [Louder.Online](#) is, in fact, an inbound marketing agency working globally with clients such as Sales Force, IBM, Coca Cola, Intel, and scores of other leading brands as well as smaller business owners. They show businesses how to technically optimize their sites, perform influencer outreach and link acquisition, and distribute content that drives significant lead generation. Please welcome Aaron to the show...

Promise: How to a Successful Content Strategy

First, thank you for having me. My big promise is... A lot of what we do in an agency is use data to make sure that we are directing our clients marketing strategies. **If you use data to build out a solid content strategy and map that out completely before you bother to jump in and start creating the content, you're going to be wildly successful compared to creating**

content for the sake of having content. So, the promise is that I'll teach you how to build a great content strategy that will get the desired result and make the marketing of that content successful.

So many people rely on what's known as "post-click data," or analytics to see what people have done on your site, such as where they have gone, what pages they have liked, how long they stayed, and so on. That means waiting for all that information. There's so much information out there that's free which is pre-click data. This can show you things like search volume, questions people are asking, the language they are using, and competitive data that's available. **If you use all of that information, you can really build out a great strategy to begin with and then add on the post-click data, or the analytics data, afterwards.**

The Process

We build out really detailed strategies for some big clients like the ones mentioned, but we also do the same for small and medium-sized businesses. The content strategies cover in detail everything from tone, and style, and voice as well as things like content length and structure. **If you're jotting these things down in advance, you need to know how you're going to be communicating with your audience, and the way that you want yourself, your brand, and your company to be seen, and heard, and understood.** This also involves the language that you want to use and whether you are comfortable being casual, or if you want it to be formal, or corporate, or whatever it is.

Knowing these things in advance and having it all written down in a document, such as words that we will and won't use, all of this means that when you get to the writing, you have a reference point. If you have multiple writers that work for you or your organization, for instance, everyone can align according to this strategy that you've put into place. This is really key, and it's the first thing that we do.

Then, we also look at the business objectives that you have. Are you simply trying to grow a brand, or are you trying to drive leads? Are you trying to drive sales? What are the metrics that are going to matter to the business or to you and your brand? If you know those and you understand those goals, it's going to help you to align all of your content. So, that's really key, to understand the purpose of content before bothering to create it.

We also have a competitive analysis. So what you want to do is think... If I wanted to come up at the top of Google for certain keywords, what are a handful of those keywords? Then, who is it that's showing for those keywords currently? Have a look at some of the websites that are coming up for them. What you need to understand is that competitive analysis, when doing content marketing, are not necessarily your real-world business competitors. They are the people that are owning the space online for the things that you want to be found for. That's a key differentiation that so many people don't think of.

People do competitive analysis, and they think, "My business competitor is another plumber in the area, so he's the one that I need to compete against." That's not the case. Whoever is

coming up for relevant keywords for the content that you ideally want to be creating are your competitors, and it could be anyone.

So, part of that analysis is:

1. identifying them
2. working out the type of content they're creating, including the frequency, length, and all of the detail that goes in around it
3. understanding what the gaps are and opportunities are amongst all of those competitors.

That way, you can find your voice and really fill that gap. That's really key, and so is understanding the primary and secondary messages that you want to come through in all of your content.

You need to understand the key message that you're trying to put through. That may be, "We drive leads," or "We do XYZ," or "We are the best at this," and then all of the sub messages that come underneath that. Again, having this documented is a reference point for everyone to go back to.

There's the competitive analysis aspect, and then what we do is outline user journeys and buyer personas. These things are really key. It's understanding at what stage of a user's journey they are actually going to be hitting your content, or what types of journeys people are on when they hit your content. Are they in the type of funnel where they are just reading about informational stuff about your business, your brand, your product, your service, or whatever it might be? Are they just interested, or did they simply see the content on social media and thought, "That's interesting. I'm going to click through and read more information on it."

You have to understand how to appeal to those people and how to have calls to action that are going to drive those people from the top of the funnel further down. Also, understand that people are also coming in mid-funnel, and they are coming in ready to buy. We need to understand the sort of calls to action that we should have for those people as well as the information that's going to really resonate with them. So, mapping out the journeys that people have when they hit your site is imperative too.

From there, the buyer perception ties in as well, but we create a handful of fictional personas for potential people that will be hitting your site. We try to consider all of the data that would go into who they are, like how old they are, if they are male or female, where in the world they are, and what sort of education they have had. Largely, we are basing it all on who we know the business and the content would appeal to. Being able to map that out means that whenever you're writing, you can refer back to that and ask, "Okay, is that piece going to resonate with that person," or, "Does that person care in any way, shape, or form about what I'm writing?" I've written a big piece on user journeys, and buyer personas, and content marketing. I go into a lot of depth on that, so feel free to find that.

After that, there's a key piece that people really love, involving content strategies. We come across so many people who say that they have run out of ideas. They say that they don't know

what to write about, and that always blows me away because typically when this happens they are focused on only writing about their product or service, and their business, and themselves. They forget about writing for other people. What's in it for them should underpin everything that's being written about.

There are tools out there that can pull data into spreadsheets, such as questions being asked on forums and problems that people are having. There are places like Quora, Yahoo Answers, Stack Exchange, if it's a more sort of technical type of topic. There are loads of places that you can go to start to understand what people are asking, and there are sets of questions that people are typically asking within any given industry. You can use these to start building out ads and content for your industry, to answer questions and help solve those problems.

If you are answering questions and solving problems, and you know because of the data that there's a hungry audience behind the content being created, that feeds into the distribution side. You know that you're going to be able to distribute it successfully. That's using data in advance as opposed to using it afterwards.

One of the things that is important to highlight is that if you're using these question and answer sites, you should use the words, the terminology, and the phrasing that these people are using to ask their questions. The linguistics is vital because if you're speaking their language in the piece of content that you're writing, you're going to appeal to them and make them feel like you understand exactly what they need and are talking about, so the piece of content will resonate, and again, the distribution will be a lot more successful.

When it comes to idea generation, there are endless amounts of things to write about. Write about your industry, write about topical subjects, or do news jacking, where you see something happening in the news that's relevant and ties back into your industry. Answer questions, solve problems, and you'll have as much content as you could ever imagine.

After that, there's editorial planning. We created our content strategies with the idea, as I've said, that multiple writers may be writing at any one time for the website, for the brand, etc. If that's the case, an editorial plan should be devised showing what pieces are coming up, what should and shouldn't be included, referenced articles, things to avoid saying, and things to highlight as well as good links, bad links, and all sorts of stuff. This all should be built out in some sort of spreadsheet. That way, there's a clear oversight of what's going on and when.

Then, the final piece that we put into a content strategy is the editorial calendar, where you are building in holidays, and seasonal things, and whatever content is going live on which days. That way you have a reference point as well, and you know, "Okay, we have the holiday season coming up, so we need to make sure that we are focusing our content around that and really writing that way."

Looking at the results of all of that, it seems like loads of work, and it is, but it's a friction-free process for distribution. The links come because you're getting good links from good sites, and you're actually providing valuable content. I'm so sick of seeing people producing 500-word

pieces of content online and thinking that they're doing content marketing, and they've done none of the upfront work to make sure it's going to be successful.

Countering Competition on Google

Yes. Again, most of the time they aren't your typical business competitor, and in many cases, it will be a big editorial publications like Entrepreneur, Forbes, or Huffington Post. Websites like that will often show up because they cover such a broad range of general topics, and they have the authority to be ranking well in a search. **So, often you have to analyze what they are doing and compete with them.**

Aside from Writing, Are There Other Forms of Content I Should be Using?

Any media type will work with this sort of strategy. **No matter what type of content you publish, it still comes down to gathering data and identifying what others are doing.** I would say that you can use any media type you like, but ideally, you'll be seeing what media type people are using and what's most successful. What's coming up at the top of the search, and what's showing in social?

Then, you have a couple of choices. You can say, "I'm going to do that, but I'm going to do it better. I'm going to do it longer, include more detail, and have more data. It'll have more links, and I'll have a better design," or whatever it is. Or, you can sit there and say, "No one is showing up in Google (or whatever it is) for videos related to this topic, and I love Google, Facebook, (or whatever it is), loves videos, so I'm going to build out a piece for video and watch the results of that." We've seen that work really successfully as well.

Can You Describe How to Identify Those Gaps You Spoke of?

The gaps that I look at are going to be things like, maybe your competitors are only publishing once a month, and yet, when they publish they are doing fairly well for related keywords. But, you could publish weekly or every two weeks and see how it goes. Maybe you have three competitors that keep showing up, and they are doing alright, but they are writing 500-word pieces, so they can't cover that much detail. So, they don't have very valuable pieces, and you might knock out a 2,000 word piece on the topics at hand regularly.

Maybe they are covering things lightly, or maybe they are publishing on certain set days. There are so many different takes that you can have on it, and maybe they are writing about a specific topic, but they are taking it from a completely different point of view than you would write about it. So, you might say, "Everyone is coming from that angle, and I'm going to come at it from

this angle. Judging from what my audience is saying, I know that I can add a whole lot more value presenting it from this perspective.” There are so many different takes, but I guess the key thing there would be to find your point of differentiation. Find your unique selling point, and make sure that you’re using that.

What Should I Do After the Competitive Analysis?

You should still be building out your user journeys and buyer personas. You might call these avatars. However you want to refer to it, but the point is to make people up that you think would be your ideal client or customer. Essentially, make up the type of character that represents the type of people you want to attract to your business.

You might not necessarily want the people you are attracting to buy from you. Maybe you want them to broadcast your message or something. You might want them to share your content socially because they are influencers, or you might want to get a speaking gig, so you might want specific people to see that content. That’s key to those business objectives that we said we need to align with. What are the goals, overall, for your content? What are your secondary goals? Your top goals may be lead generation, and your secondary might be speaking gigs. Some of them might be just brand awareness and social distribution, or traffic, or whatever it is. You need to understand that upfront.

So, By Doing This I Increase My Likelihood of Success?

That’s 100% right, and you’re also increasing the speed at which you can create content by aligning with all of this moving forward. You know how things should be written, and you know who you’re talking to. You know what you’re trying to achieve. And, you’ve got all of these ideas at your fingertips that you can easily write about, so you’re not stumped for ideas or staring at a blank page wondering, “What now?” This eliminates a whole lot of the writer’s block and everything else that goes along with it.

You have the editorial plan mapped out as well, so you have an idea of your title and your headline, and you know that those are affective. You know what should be included and what shouldn’t be included. You’ve got all of this stuff mapped out. So, literally, it’s just going to that page and saying, “Alright. I know exactly what I’m writing about now,” and you can knock it on out. That happens so much faster because you did all of that work upfront, and then your probability of success is a whole lot higher.

Especially, remember that key bit where you see people asking again and again throughout the Web, “How do I do this,” or, “Why is this happening,” or about other key problems in your industry. Solve that problem. Go to that site, where they were asking it, and give them a bit of a

teaser by saying, “This is how I’d solve it. I’ve also written a great blog post over here. Come and check it out.” Then, give them the whole answer over there.

Can You Tell Me More About Using Linguistics?

Mirroring is a psychological term, and that’s what you’re doing. **If you want to build rapport with people, then you’d want to look at their body language and the words that they are using.** What happens is you start getting in sync with that person, and that rapport is being built, and that trust is built from there. So, you have a way in.

You could go deep into neuro-linguistic programming and all sorts of things with content, but just basic mirroring is to use the language that they use, and make sure that you understand the pain that they are in and the problem they are trying to solve. You can do this quite effectively simply by using the same wording that they do in their questions and so forth.

Is the Next Step Creating the Content?

You’ve got the idea generation process, and you have the editorial planning and scheduling, but those are pretty straightforward. But yeah, the actual content creation is the next key part. I guess, after doing all of this, the major thing is to make sure you create a valuable piece of content. For me, one of the most basic things is, would people link to it naturally from their own website and would they want to share it socially because it’s that good?

If we are achieving those two things, especially for us, for our clients, and for the agency... If we are getting people to naturally link to it, then they are going to improve in their trackings, which is great because they are going to get all of the free traffic through it. It also means that without even doing any distribution work, or marketing on that content, it’s already successful, so when we do start that, it’s going to be highly successful. It’s the same with social. If people are sharing it socially, it’s free social traffic coming in. So, indicators of natural success happening because of great content mean that when we do our work, we can have much greater success, over the top.

Can You Give Me Some Tips on Things That Would Make My Content More Sharable?

Here’s a little bit of backstory. Part of what we do when we pick out big clients is a content order to their existing content, and we do things like pull in data from their analytics, from social data, from links data, and we do a bit of web scraping on their website. We combine all of this data so that what we are able to come out with is really good information, and we know things like, “Content of this link performs better, based on the number of links, shares, comments, time

on the site, and lower bounce rates,” and, “Content on these topics with this tone and style perform better,” and, “Content published on these days perform better.”

We can pull out some really great information, and we do, but the key bit that I wanted to mention is that one of the things that we find, 99% of the time, is that long-form written copy performs better than short for by time on site, links, and social data. I can tell you that on every single site that we’ve looked at it is the same. The only exception that ever exists are news-related sites, where they have all of the authority in the world, so they can throw out a 200-word piece and it’s going to do well because it’s “newsworthy”.

On every other site, long-form performs better, and what I’m talking about is 1,500-2,000 words, on average, or more. Those perform better by social and links, and as I said, with organic traffic, social traffic, and everything else that people desire from that. A big part of the reason for that is... A lot of people still don’t read that whole piece of content, but they want to be seen as smart, so they go ahead and link to it and share it because it looks like the best piece of content out there around that topic. So, it still achieves what people want it to achieve.

On top of that, longer pieces cover a lot more data, and there are a lot more keywords that help Google find your website with. You typically are able to put a greater amount of high-quality content in one of those pieces, so it is going to be more successful and people are going to resonate with it more. **The #1 tip there is to focus on getting the content length and detail up because every time we see it, it performs well.**

Also, with things like internal or external links, make sure you’re linking a lot to external authority sources as backup for data, statistics, and facts that you’re stating. Make sure that you’re linking out to good sources. Make sure that you’re doing a lot of linking from your piece of content to other relevant pieces that you’ve written on your site. Make sure that you use a lot of images. Use a lot of images, screenshots, and things showing how to do what you’re explaining. All of that stuff makes a difference. Make sure that you have strong calls to action saying, “If you love this piece, I’d love for you to share it with your audience.”

So often people ignore the “ask”. If you have some sort of “ask” in there, there’s much more of a chance that you’re going to receive what you want. People forget that. You’ve got to throw that in there. And, if you know who your user journeys and buyer personas are, you know what call to action to be making at that particular point as well. In other words, whatever call to action you use is going to differ according to what specific buyer persona you are going by for that particular piece of content.

You might have five different personas, or the person might be coming in at a different stage of the funnel. So, maybe you’re talking directly about your product or service, or maybe you’re just talking about your industry, and whoever you’re talking to, and wherever they are, is going to require a different call to action. So, you need to be aware of that when you make a call to action in your piece of content.

It could just be that you want social shares, or you want links, or you want people to comment on it because you want some feedback. So many people don’t enable comments, but if you use it to

generate content, that's free content. You can use it to add more content length to your piece, for instance.

Do You Have Any Tips for Building an Email List?

Yes, the money is in the list. You'll want to build an email list as soon as you can. It comes down to that "ask" as well as that call to action. You know, there are all sorts of technical things that you can do with plug-ins, like making sure a pop-up comes up and that you have a good giveaway, or a good bribe to subscribe, or whatever you want to call it.

On the technical side, it's not hard to work out, but making sure that you're providing a sort of value where someone... It comes back down to those two key things, what they share socially and what they want to link to it naturally on their own website. If that's the case, then you can assume that people would want to opt-in to read more of that content as it come out.

So, it comes back to the value that you're providing. Is the pain that you're solving, the problem that you're solving, have you agitated it enough? Have you answered it enough and really got people to buy into what you're writing about? If so, make the transition and tell them that they are going to receive even better stuff, or stuff right in their inbox as soon as it comes out, and get them to subscribe.

Top 3 Tips for Distribution

The bow on it is really a teaser in content marketing. Don't forget the marketing in content marketing. All we've spoken about so far is the strategy, the prewriting, and some of the writing, but you can't just publish and pray. There's so much work, and 80% of your time needs to be done on the distribution of content. Get those eyeballs on this amazing piece that you've done, and watch as the results come in. Distribution is another whole topic in itself.

My top three tips for distribution are:

- 1) Social Distribution.** Understand relevant groups for your topic, your industry, and so on. Make sure to find LinkedIn groups, and fan pages, and Facebook groups, and so on that you can share your content with. Don't just dump content; engage and share other people's content first. Then go and share some of your own if it's relevant.
- 2) Influencer outreach always works really well.** Within that piece of content that you're writing, make sure that you're mentioning influencers in your space. Write something nice about them, and link to stuff that they've written about that's really good. Once you publish reach out to them. Ping them socially, or email them, or whatever it is, to let them know, "Hey, I wrote about you over here. I think you're doing a great job. Keep up the good work." Most of the

time, they are going to share that socially with their audience. People love sharing content about people writing nice stuff about them and appreciating them.

3) Link outreach. The links matter. In fact, links matter a huge amount. Know other sites within your industry that are worth reaching out to. Not just the influencers, but also, if people are writing about similar topics on general sites, reach out and say, “Look, I saw you covering and writing about this sort of topic. I’ve written a really detailed piece over here. It might be worth linking through and giving that to your audience.” Encourage the actual linking side of things. Links matter. Links are a big part of everything.

So, they might include an editorial update to their piece that says something like, “Hey, if you like this, you might find this other piece valuable too.” I guess you might think, “Well, how successful am I going to be at that?” The success comes down to building relationships, not just for the sake of not getting the result that you want right then and having an “ask”.

Build relationships because they are in the industry writing good stuff about your topic. Add value to them, go comment on their stuff, connect with them socially, share their content, and that way, eventually, if you do have an “ask,” it’s nothing because you’ve done 100x more for them. Add value to people’s lives, and don’t just go asking for things everywhere.

Connecting with Aaron

You can find me on LinkedIn or search for me online. I am omnipresent; I’m everywhere, so come and find me.

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