

5 first steps to optimized engagement

Suzanne McDonald | Chief Content Strategist



Often forgotten in the quest for rankings and traffic is engaging with the people who are more likely to buy. Ideally, as the algorithms evolve, this quandary will sort itself out. But if you need to get results now, perhaps site owners and optimizers should think beyond search rankings.

Thank you Mark Zuckerberg – oh and Twitter, can't forget those guys. As any blogger will tell you, if you don't have eyeballs, you've got nothin'. Isn't Google facing this problem as well?

And what about Bing? As Designated Editor reported from a SEMPO presentation last year, Bing generates Facebook data in its search results (when you're logged in to Facebook). Clearly, Bing is taking social seriously.

How do search marketers optimize content for better search results?

Let's take a step back, because making zigs and zags whenever Google does doesn't necessarily achieve desired results. We really need to consider search engines' higher power and desire to serve their customers. Customers being not anyone – but someone who's looking for something: This excludes those in the know, e.g. people making their living off the web.

As the old saying goes you forget what you didn't know, so back to basics.

- 1 -



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Let's get ahead of search engines

Step 1. Audience identification

1. Who are your best clients? The ones you wish there were 100 of because they want exactly what you offer.
2. What area of the business are you trying to grow?
3. Is there a hot, emerging market out there you could tap into, ahead of your competitors?
4. What are their defining characteristics?
5. When they interact with you, what are they looking for?
6. What could you provide to an existing group, if only you changed how you call it to what they refer to it as?

For each of the above questions, you should have more answers than you know what to do with.

If not, save yourself some agony: Hire someone who can do this work in one-tenth of the time, saving you 1,000 times the aggravation. While it may take you forever, it may not cost a lot.

And if you're avoiding it: Hire someone to get it done! Don't just consider sales when it comes to ROI, weigh lost sales.

The benefits you'll reap from the sales you missed in that year will offset the expense.

- 2 -



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Step 2: Research and refinement

Refine your target audience groups until you can select 1 or 2, or 3 *at the most*.



- 3 -

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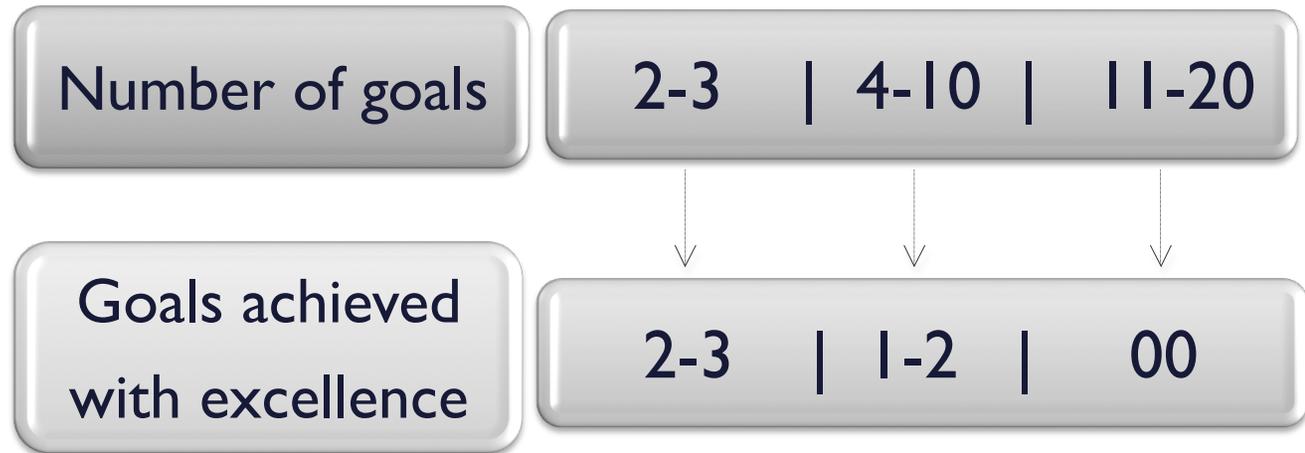


This is all really basic right? But where we all get tripped up, is not being able to focus, and focus specifically on business decisions – search rankings not so much, for now.

Seriously, this is FranklinCovey stuff:

The 4 Disciplines of Execution

demonstrate the diminishing returns when we can't focus and try to get too much done. The more goals you set, the less likely you'll do well.



Same principle applies here; as marketers are fond of saying, “if you're speaking to everyone, no one is listening.”

http://www.franklincovey.com/4dfiv/4D_2Vid.html

Now that you've narrowed it down, let's find out where to find these valuable prospects.

- 4 -



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Step 3. Audience presence

Where are these folks to be found? Where do they interact? Where are they looking for what you offer? Think beyond direct interactions and consider influencers, which could include:

- ✦ Mainstream media via Twitter.
- ✦ Bloggers who post regularly about what you sell or something your prospects are interested in
- ✦ Don't forget micro-communities that exist on the web.

Does your target audience congregate on a professional community site like [PrintJunkie](#), where folks in the printing industry gather and share information.

Or perhaps you're consumer-facing and recognize that women hold enormous buying power, estimated at 85% of all purchasing decisions. And maybe Moms are your target group: [Check out Designated Editor's post from OMMA Social that describes the breakdown of BabyCenter's personas.](#) And it's not just Baby Boomers who are the fastest-growing segment of Facebook users – specifically, it's women age 55 and older.

Baby Boomers are the fastest-growing demographic on Facebook. How else can they keep up with their children and grandchildren?



80 percent of journalists believe bloggers have become "important opinion shapers" in recent years. [Society for New Communications Research](#) found.



[According to Society for New Communications Research,](#) 48 percent of journalists use Twitter – up 25 percent from 2008.



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Step 4: Give 'em what they want

So the trick is to find out what – other than what you sell – your prospects want to know more about. If you followed Google’s much-talked-about Panda Update in February, you know Google aims to serve searchers and will reward the sites that do so.

If you’re B2B

Adapt our case study (next page) to investigate what each trade group that interests your target audience is discussing.

If you’re B2C

Apply keywords to Twitter trends, Google Alerts, follow bloggers.

As my husband likes to say: “No idea is unique.”

Of course, I’m not suggesting you plagiarize or scrape or spin ideas and web copy, lest you get caught up, once again, in the Panda Update, which I just presented at the Boston SEO Meetup – slides available on SlideShare.



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Or – or more likely AND – as Peter Shankman, founder of Help a Reporter Out (HARO), recommends: Just ask!

Who better to help guide desires and preferences than your client or prospect.

Simply ask what they'd like to know more about.

Easily and effectively query audiences

- ✦ Embed a SurveyMonkey survey
- ✦ Email short questionnaires
- ✦ Facebook now offers polling
- ✦ Mine your Google Analytics
- ✦ Include a search bar on your site
- ✦ Further refine your keywords

Designated Editor Case Study

Is there a trade group or association your prospects belong to? What are they talking about or interested in?

Designated Editor produces a quarterly newsletter that targets health care workers, specifically case managers and occupational and physical therapists. How do I know what they're interested in? I don't, but I researched which associations they belong to and via the web learned what was of interest to them.

In this case, the last thing we wanted to do was push what the client sells. That's a sales brochure, not a valuable resource that prospects would send to colleagues. We even included wording to suggest you'd score bonus points with a colleague by forwarding it – because the information we included was so helpful!

- 7 -



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Step 5: Allow self-selection

As we've already explored, prospects and influencers are everywhere it seems. But your research will tell you where to maximize your limited resources.

Remember FranklinCovey's principle: pick 3 locations on which you'll engage. You'll have to decide whether it's a microcommunity vs. Facebook vs. bloggers vs. Twitter vs. LinkedIn.

Each engagement point should harmonize with your brand and marketing goals, but will be customized since each platform has particular nuances and preferences. Hubspot's Dan Zarrella has turned social media tweaking into a science.

Naturally, content creation will tax your resources; a wise investment may be an experienced content and social media specialist who can also advise on where to find time-savings.

How do you initiate and maintain conversations with your customers and prospects – fans and followers?



Now that you know

Step 1 Who you should invest time in?

Step 2 Which three (max) audiences to engage with now and ones for later?

Step 3 Where to find those who will buy from you and their influencers?

Step 4 What to talk about?

Step 5 How do you initiate and maintain conversation?



– 8 –



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Wisely and carefully and filled with “meaningful exchanges,” according to [Razorfish’s Social Influence Marketing Report](#) (right sidebar).

Whether you consider yourself or business a “brand” or not, in today’s world, you are.

So think about it ...

Every point of interaction is like going to the prom

- ✦ You can’t just ask anyone
- ✦ You can’t *not* show up with flowers
- ✦ You can’t dismiss the doting moms
- ✦ You’d better behave lest you’re “asked to leave” by an authority or influencer.

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Brands must socialize with consumers. It won’t be enough for brands to craft powerful messages and push them through different media channels.

They will need to participate directly in conversations with consumers and provide more meaningful value exchanges.

And they will need to do so in ways that increase their relevance and value in the eyes of their consumers – or the brands will be completely ignored.” – [Social Influence Marketing Report](#)

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– 9 –



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So you'd best deliver

- ✦ Value to you Facebook fans: discounts and specials, fun events, and invites.
- ✦ Quality information to Twitter followers: Tweets that will enhance their status.
- ✦ Leads and insights to LinkedIn connections: Recommendations, sales prospects.
- ✦ Explanations on your blog: Who you are, why they should do business with you.
- ✦ Information in your newsletter: How can you improve their day, their life?
- ✦ Quick answers on your website: Get visitors to the information they seek ASAP.

Thanks for downloading Suzanne McDonald's whitepaper. Designated Editor specializes in helping brands & organizations effectively connect with underutilized audiences.

Let Designated Editor find yours



Contact us now

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Former Boston Globe journalist Suzanne McDonald integrates content strategy and social media.

Designated Editor designs and implements engaging editorial packages across new media: blogs, websites, multimedia, communities, social media, search marketing, mobile.

Suzanne holds a Master's degree in Mass Communications and Journalism from the University of South Carolina, and founded Newport Interactive Marketers, and also co-founded the WordPress Providence Meetup.

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