



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

BY: LINDSAY GRIFFITHS OF THE ILN

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
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Two Ways Content Marketing is Like Running

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON MARCH 23, 2016



If you've been spending any time with me lately, you know that I've been running. A lot.

I'm training for my first half marathon, which is in two and a half weeks, and yes, I'm nervous about it. I've never run that far ("that far" being 13.1 miles if you're not familiar with the half marathon distance). I've done several 5ks, and one rather dubious 10k in the rain, where I ended up walking a lot due to a lack of training, but this time, I'm serious.

I've been serious about my training, my rest time, my nutrition, the whole kit and kaboodle.

When you're training for any kind of distance run, it sort of takes over your life, whether you intend for it to, or not. So it's only natural for me to seek correlations between my training and content marketing. Yes, really, they exist.

I've found two that I want to talk about today, which would have served as yesterday's Two for Tuesdays post, but in light of everything happening in Brussels, I decided to take the afternoon off from publishing about business. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the people of Belgium, and all of those touched

Tip One: You Need a Plan

While there seem to be some people who are natural runners and can head out and get ten miles under their belt without any issues or injury, for the rest of us, a plan is essential. There seem to be as many plans for running a half marathon as there are half marathons, but with a little research, you can find one that works for you, and will give you a good solid training base in the time that you allot to it (and you do need to allot some time).

For me, I had restarted my running last year with the couch-to-5k program, which got me back to my 3.1 mile distance, and then tacked on the 5k to 10k plan to get up to 6.2. I gave myself a few weeks' grace period to run with no plan in place (sometimes that's great) and because I knew I would be settling in for a 12-week serious half marathon training program. I use an app on my phone that keeps me accountable, increases my distance a little bit each week safely, and switches up my workouts so that I'm not just heading out and doing the same run, at the same pace, every time. It's truly to get me ready for 13.1 miles.

Although I have that end goal in mind, training isn't just about the finish line – it's also about the steps along the way. It's about logging the individual workouts, staying accountable, resting appropriately so that I can be in top shape for each new step (at 9 1/2 weeks though, I am feeling it, I'll admit), and enjoying each run as it happens.

What does that have to do with content marketing?

Well, similarly, you need a plan. While you may have some success with your content if you just throw things at the wall and hope something sticks, you'll be much more likely to have success if you start out with goals and a strategy in place. With specific, measurable goals, each piece of content that you produce will have a purpose and will move you one step further towards your goal and therefore, won't be a waste of your time. With a strong strategy in place, you'll never wonder how you're going to achieve your goals, because you'll always have the steps in front of you to point you in the right direction.

One easy way to see this play out is to create an editorial calendar for yourself. While you don't have to produce content every day (and for many audiences, it's better if you don't), you can set up a visual reminder for yourself of what your goals are (say 2 posts a week, on the topic that you're focused on) and what your strategy is to achieve them. Schedule posts on certain days, include story ideas that you have, your method of social media distribution and any other types of distribution you may be undertaking, the data on views and interactions with the posts, etc. Taken individually, as with any one workout, it doesn't mean much. But when you look at your calendar over time, you'll get a sense of what works for you – are there certain times of the year that you're not meeting your goals (why?), certain types of posts that are more popular than others, certain themes emerging, etc. – and what doesn't.

Tip Two: It's a [Half-]Marathon, Not a Sprint

For me, at least, this is true. For some runners, it is all about the short distance. But for me, I'm in it for the long haul – and not just with this race as my end goal, but with making running a part of my life as the end goal. Each run I undertake is a building block. There are set-backs – I've had to readjust at times, like this week, when I'm recognizing that my training app's idea of continuing with a fairly brutal distance for the next two and a half weeks might do me more harm than good in the lead-up to my race. And there are lots of triumphs – when I first started running, I struggled to get faster than a 10:30 pace (and that was for a 5k), and now I'm under a 10 minute pace for over 10 miles. Sure, it's not as fast as some people run, but it's fast for me – and more importantly, it's progress.

I wanted results immediately. I spent a lot of time kicking myself for not sticking with running from when I first started (seven years ago), and wishing that results would come faster. But slowly and surely, with the right plan, and trusting my body, my instincts, other runners, and what I've read, I'm seeing results. And I'm looking forward to not only the finish of my first half-marathon, but a lifelong love of running. Well, maybe a lifelong love/hate relationship with running, if I'm honest.

Content marketing is like this, too.

So many people will post a blog entry, or stick up an infographic or a video and get a couple of views or likes, and no comments and declare “THIS. DOESN'T. WORK.”

If I'd quit running the first time I went out because I could only manage thirty seconds at a time (seriously), I'd never be able to run more than ten miles...which is what I ran on Saturday.

It's a marathon, not a sprint. You have to commit to it, because you believe it's the right tactic. Is it the right tactic for everyone? No – same with running, which isn't for everyone either (though you may surprise yourself!). As with any marketing tactic, you've got to first determine where your audience is, what your goals are, and how you want to reach them, and if it makes sense, then use it. But if you've made those calculations, and you believe that your audience is consuming content that you may be able to provide to them, then you need to be in it for the long haul. Create a plan with goals and a strategy, continue to refine that plan with data to ensure that you're delivering what your audience really wants, and over time, you'll find that you're reaching the right people and seeing results for your hard work.

There are, of course, other parallels between distance running and content marketing – what connections do you see? And are there any other Zen readers out there who are running the Philadelphia Love Half-Marathon with me on April 10th? Let me know in the comments, and I will see you there!