



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON

*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

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An Uncomfortable Conversation About Content Marketing

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 2, 2016



There are some days when I struggle with writing another post about content marketing – while it’s still a topic of great importance, especially in the legal industry, it can feel overdone. I don’t want to keep repeating what I’ve said before (though there’s a lot of value in repetition in content marketing, because you have new people in your audience, or people suddenly reading your words with fresh eyes). I also don’t

want to come off as a clickbait lecturer – “do these 5 things and you’ll be the best content marketer there ever was!” Uh, no.

But I think it’s important enough to continue having conversations around it, and I read two things today that really resonated with me that I’d like to share with you.

The first is actually a post that offers [The 5 Best Content Marketing Tools You Aren’t Using](#) (and maybe they are, and maybe they aren’t, read the post and see what you think!). What strikes me as being really important about this piece isn’t the tools themselves; it’s what the author says right in the early part of the post:

“

When content marketing works, it’s an incredible way to build relationships and share knowledge without pitching your services or products. But here’s the thing: too many businesses are still equating content production with hard sales, especially the content that’s on their business blogs. When I advise startups and small businesses on content marketing, I always come back to this essential truth: successful content is content that empowers, excites and educates. It connects and builds relationships. It tells a story.”

For law firms and lawyers, this is KEY.

We read a lot of articles and posts about content marketing, which can offer really great advice and tools. But they can also get stuck in a lot of marketing-speak and salesy stuff, and that is a) a turnoff to lawyers (admit it, I know it’s true) and b) not what’s great about content marketing.

The thing that I’ve always loved about content marketing for lawyers is that it’s really about putting a name to things that you’ve done all along, and using new technology and tools to amplify those things to a larger audience, to make your marketing more efficient.

[Kevin O’Keefe](#) of [LexBlog](#) always says:

“

A lawyer’s best work comes via relationships and word-of-mouth.”

I agree with him. He's right.

Content marketing is a way to build those relationships online by providing value to your audience.

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'Publishing a few blog posts is great, but that's not the same as a full-fledged content marketing program,' says Brian Sutter, Director of Marketing at [System ID Barcode Solutions](#). 'Brands need to think big picture. Instead of asking, "How can I make more sales?" ask, "What does my audience need?" Audience growth and influencer reach will naturally follow.'

The important piece of Sutter's quote here is the question "What does my audience need?"

And that brings me to the second article I read today that really resonated with me – [Do You Ask Enough Questions?](#) The author talks about her attempt to find patience over her two year old's incessant "wha'dis?" questions and realizes:

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We espouse that it's important to ask questions and that no question is stupid. But in reality, we show impatience subtly or overtly, occasionally or every hour. Over time, we send the message, 'You'd better be careful what you ask and when,' leaving children confused for life.

We instill in them an insidious habit—they begin assuming instead of asking. 'I assume that animal over there is a horse, but I better not ask because Mom is driving right now.' Today, it's horses. Tomorrow, it's product features. 'I assume customers will want this gadget because I like it. Since our stock is down, I'd better not ask my boss for money to do market research.'

Those of us providing content are really guilty of this too. In the first article, the author talks about content marketing as storytelling to connect, empower, excite and educate. When it's done well, that's exactly what it is. But how can we do it well if we're not asking the right questions, or asking any questions at all? When was the last time you checked in with your audience?

In the second article, the author poses two important questions to the readers, and they're questions I want you to consider as part of your own content marketing strategy – and that means with every piece of content you produce:

1. Do you tend to ask or assume?
2. What holds you back from asking questions?

Do You Ask or Assume?

This first question is a tough one – it's easy to answer, of course, but it requires taking a hard look at yourself. Do you ask your audience what they want...or do you assume?

First, we're assuming (I know, I know), that you've come up with your ideal audience persona – that means that you've identified the type of person that you're trying to reach with your content. If you're still struggling with that, check out [HubSpot's suggestions](#) on how to do just that.

Have you then asked someone who is representative of that persona to tell you what kind of content they'd like to receive, and how? For example, if you're trying to reach your clients, have you called a trusted client of yours on the phone and asked them what kinds of questions they have, whether they'd rather see your responses in a blog post, a client alert, a quick video, a newsletter, or some other format?

Alternately, as a substitute for asking directly, you can also use the data you're collecting. You may love writing about one thing, when another area of the law that you write on is actually getting much more attention from your audience. While you are the advocate for your clients and often know what's best for them, they will be the ones to tell you what they care about and want to know about. Are you properly serving them by providing the information that they want, or are you trying to provide them with what you *think* they want? Be brutally honest here – it's the difference between being successful at content marketing and not.

What Holds You Back From Asking Questions?

If your answer to the previous question is that you assume, the next thing you need to do is find out why. What's holding you back from asking your audience what they really want from you? The article's author says something very poignant:

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Instilling the assumption habit is only a fraction of our parental crimes. We also teach fear of asking questions—and pride that feeds the fear.”

Well, that's uncomfortable.

I'm guilty of this myself, or I wouldn't address it here. But asking questions, and letting others see our vulnerability (even professionally), can be extraordinarily valuable. I'll share with you a story – picture 16-year-old Lindsay, in her first job as a kennel assistant at a pet store (that's really a fancy name for the girl who cleaned up after all of the puppies). After doing that for a few months, I graduated to being allowed to work the register and make sales. One of my first sales was for a woman who was paying by check, and I knew that we needed to take her driver's license number in order to process the check. At 16, in the state of NJ at that time, I didn't yet have my driver's license, so I had no clue what the license number was.

My first instinct was to fake it. I wanted to just write down all the numbers on her license and hope one of them was the right one. But ultimately, I decided to ask. I said to her, "This may be a stupid question, but..." And she was really kind about pointing out the correct number, which I then remembered from then on.

That moment (and many following it) taught me that adulthood is mostly about pretending to have it all together, and that when I made myself vulnerable by asking questions about the things I didn't know, rather than appearing foolish or less intelligent, they turned into opportunities to connect with other people. I let people in, made them a little bit invested in helping me, learned something new, and often learned too that plenty of other people didn't have all the answers either.

What does this have to do with content marketing?

Despite those lessons, I still let fear and pride get in the way of asking questions, particularly when it comes to things I *should* know the answers to. But to add genuine value to my audience, I have to make myself vulnerable, and ask them questions about what it is they really want, rather than assuming I know what that is.

To be clear, I'm not saying that you won't know the answers to their questions – as an experienced lawyer with clients in your area of expertise, you will have the substantive content to provide to your audience. You can be confident that you will either know what to tell them, or be able to bring in the right team of experts to share the stage and build your reputation as a thought leader.

But what you may NOT know is *how* they want to receive that information, or exactly *which* questions are for them, most pressing. You can ask them, or you can use the data that you are tracking to tell you.

Even better, when you ask them for their input, you're also investing them in your success. It's human nature. When someone asks me for my advice, and then makes a change in their strategy based on what I've

suggested, they're on my radar screen. I'm going to read what they write, watch what they produce, and then share it (incidentally, that's why you invite guest bloggers too). You're creating loyalty among your audience by asking them what you can do to be more valuable, and then doing it. And who is a better brand ambassador, you, or one of your clients?

So this week, we need to get back to basics. Forget all of the hoopla surrounding content marketing and remember one thing – it's about building relationships with your target audience by giving them something of value. And how do you find out what's valuable to them? No matter how uncomfortable it is, ask them.

Bearing that in mind, I ask you then, readers, what would YOU find valuable here at Zen and how would you prefer to see that information?

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