

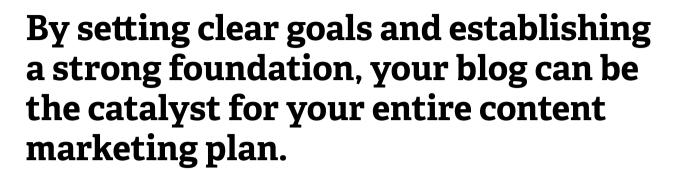
Ratchet Up Your Content Marketing

by Mikaela Cowles • Ryan Lonac

RWL Design, LTD. rwldesign.com



Ratchet Up Your Content Marketing



Content marketing offers your business a longterm sales funnel. It allows you to increase your digital presence, foster relationships with customers, and generate new leads. But it's not free.

Creating a strong content marketing plan is an investment. It takes time and resources to develop a foundation that's sustainable and functional. By using your blog as the focal point, you can generate platform specific content for your entire online presence.

We have outlined 11 action ready steps you can start taking today:

Table of Contents

- 1. Set Clear Goals
- 2. Identify the Need Your Product or Service Meets
- 3. Define Your Target Audience
- 4. Start Your Topics List
- 5. Develop an Editorial Calendar
- 6. Specify Your Content Developer(s)
- 7. Create Original Content
- 8. Transform Your Posts into Multiple Pieces
- 9. Rework Your Post Into Another Structure(s)
- 10. Evaluate Your Performance
- 11. Tweak and Grow Your Subject Matter







1. Set Clear Goals

What do you want to achieve through blogging? Be specific.

Don't just say, "More sales." What is going to help you achieve more sales? That's your goal. For example, you might say:

- Grow my email distribution list by 50%
- Increase my online inquiries by 25%
- Actively engage 100+ clients and prospects through comments

Each of these goals is a measurable Key Performance Indicator (KPI). They set the foundation for your content marketing and allow you to monitor your success.



S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting Technique

S.M.A.R.T. is a five-step process for identifying and defining the goals that are key to your business' success.

S – **Specific:** What do you want to accomplish?

M - Measurable: Can you measure your success?

A – Attainable: Is your goal attainable?

R - Relevant: Will your goal help you achieve your objectives?

T – Time Bound: What's your deadline?

Share On:







2. Identify the Need Your Product or Service Meets

Unless you are a supermodel, your customers aren't just going to give you money for looking pretty. They are only going to open their pocketbooks for a product or service that meets their needs.

What need does your business meet? What problem does your product or service solve?

Use these examples to generate ideas:

Busines Security Company

The Need: Keep employees and assets safe

The Solution: Highly trained, pro-active security guards

Bakery

The Need: Celebrate a milestone The Solution: Elaborate, tasty treats

Symphony

The Need: Cultural fulfillment

The Solution: Engaging performances of classical music





Web Design Company

The Need: Increase on-line sales and customer conversion

The Solution: Responsive web design optimised through

user-testing content and functionality, and tracking

goal completions and engagement.



The Need: A car that looks brand new

The Solution: Careful cleaning, buffing, and paint repair

3 Tips To Identifying Your Need and Solution

Poll Your Existing Customer Base

They are your best resource. Begin by leveraging your website and online presence to get insight from your customers. A variety of services, such as **Qualaroo.com** or **HotJar.com**, offer a simple way to conduct surveys and polls.

Take Advantage of Social Media

Engage your existing followers. Ask them specific questions about what challenges they are facing and how they use your product or service.

Look at Your Google Analytics

Do your customers visit your blog? Do they stay there long enough to read? Where are they coming from? What sites are they coming from?

All of these will help you narrow your focus to find the need your business fulfills.

But remember, you do not want to put every product and service in each pitch. It muddles the message for customers. Meet your customers' immediate need. Then, over time you can upsell the benefits of your other products and services.







Trade Secret

One of the best ways to improve your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is to focus on keyword search phrases that have lower competition vs. higher search volume. This means picking your battles and purposefully choosing to meet your customers where their needs are.

You'll be surprised how often your customers are using a term your competitors are not. Incorporating this term gives you a significant advantage.



Smart Ways to Research Keywords

Finding how people search is important knowledge that can significantly focus your content.

- Use Google's autocomlete search to see what other people have typed in
- Browse Google's related searches at the bottom of a Google search page
- Use Google Awords' Keyword Planning Tool to plan your budget and see search volumes and competition for specific search phrases.

Share On:



<u>@rwldesign</u>





3. Define Your Target Audience

Who has the need you just identified? While some businesses will have one specific target audience, in most cases you'll have more than one. This is a great thing. But, you need to understand each target audience as though it is an individual person.

In today's social media driven world, people want to be spoken with – not talked to. Lumping everyone together is too big of a group. It is too broad. You want to look for the specifics. This will allow you to create content for each individual audience. At a bare minimum, you'll want to define:

- Age
- Current location
- Gender
- Income level
- Education level
- Marital status
- Orientation
- Kids
- Occupation
- Ethnic background

Share On:





- Religious affiliation
- Hobbies (camping, cooking, international travel, reading, etc.)
- Lifestyle
- Values
- Sports affiliations
- Political affiliations
- Personality traits
- Dislikes

Also consider your previous sales. Who has already purchased your product or service? Make a list and identify their demographics.

It might be you are not currently marketing towards your target audience. That's okay. This process can help to align your goals to reach them.

NOTE: Steps 1–3 are what is known as <u>Content Mapping.</u> This three-part planning process lays the groundwork for targeting your customers. If you ever feel unsure about what you're trying to achieve, review these three steps and refamiliarize yourself with your goals.



Facebook Insights

Facebook page insights is a free analytic tool. In the case of identifying your target audience, it can be especially helpful if your page has accumulated qualified likes (likes from potential customers).

Even if your page doesn't have a major following, it's incredibly powerful if those following you have a genuine interest. Under Insights > People you can see details about the gender, age, and location of your followers.

Share On:



<u>@rwldesign</u>





4. Start Your Topics List

A topics list is a fluid document. It's a collection of all the possible topics you could cover. It grows and changes, often daily. In essence — your topics list is the ordered chaos of your mind.

This is very different than your defined business goals, target audience(s) and points of value that are typically re-evaluated on a yearly or bi-yearly basis.

But here's the kicker, ordered chaos means sifting the wheat from the chaff. While no idea is a bad idea, not every idea is the right one. For your topics list to be an effective tool, every item on it must fit within the foundation defined by the work you did content mapping.

How Do You Create a Topics List?

Here at RWL Design, we're big <u>Google Doc</u> fans. It's an easy to use, affordable platform that makes sharing and collaborating a breeze. When it comes to creating a topics list this is exactly what you need.

By utilizing Google Doc spreadsheets, you'll have unlimited space, multiple tabs, and some fancy font and color options.

Begin by organizing your topics in columns. These columns should include:

- Topic
- Notes
- Resources

Share On:



<u>@rwldesign</u>



Start with what you actually do. What products or services does your business provide? Each is it's own topic. Add any notes and/or resources that are appropriate in the same row. If you have multiple different packages, each one goes on the list. If your company has employees with a wide range of skill sets, each employee and their skill set goes on the list.



Next, identify what result each of these products, services, employees, and skill sets provide your client. Each of these is a topic. Be specific.

For example, if you have a copywriter on staff who writes bios, your customers aren't just getting a bio. They are getting a clearly defined and shareable identity, one that captures their personality and allows them to put their best foot forward. (First impressions can't be repeated.)

Keep Collecting Topics

Everywhere you go, each new customer and employee interaction is a potential topic to add to your list. When questions arise, they go on your list. When new products or services are developed, they also go on your list. When you encounter a difficult business decision – yup, it goes on your list, too.

Filtering Your Topics List

Like we mentioned above, you need to identify which items do and which items do not fit within the foundation you outlined. If you add an item that doesn't speak to your target audience – give yourself a pat on the back for trying and then take it off.

Why? Because when the topics on your list are built on a strong foundation of content mapping, you ensure that each piece you write supports your overall business goals.







5. Develop an Editorial Calendar

Your editorial calendar is your virtual to do list. It's your brainstorming platform and your accountability tool. It is your road map.

Driven by the work you did content mapping, this living, breathing document provides a clear structure of what to do and when to do it.

Revel in the thought of this. Go on for a second. Soak it up. Your editorial calendar is your slam-dunk time machine. Why? Because while you can't pack more hours into a day, you can become more efficient. And, your editorial calendar will help you do just that.

It's likely you already have some sort of editorial calendar. Perhaps it's the mass of sticky notes on the wall above your desk or a large pile of dinner napkins. Don't worry. We're not recommending you throw those ideas to the curb. In fact, those ideas are a gold mine. Keep them. We just suggest you put them into a more secure location.

Utilize Google Doc Spreadsheets

As we said in Chapter 4, we're big <u>Google Docs</u> fans. To keep all of your information in one central location, you might want to create your editorial calendar in the same spreadsheet as your topics list. To do so, simply add another tab.

Share On:





By utilizing Google Doc spreadsheets, you'll have unlimited space, multiple tabs, and some fancy font and color options.

Begin by organizing your editorial calendar in columns. In it's most barebones form, these columns should include:

- Publishing Date
- Author
- Title
- Notes

Additionally, you might want to include:

- Status
- Category
- Keywords

Fill that Baby In

Remember those sticky notes and napkins? Use them to start filling in your editorial calendar.

What happens if some of them don't fit with your upcoming marketing plans? Don't worry. Create a new tab in your spreadsheet titled "Backlog Ideas." Create two columns:

- Titles
- Notes

Add your extra ideas there. You never know when they'll come in handy or spark new inspiration.

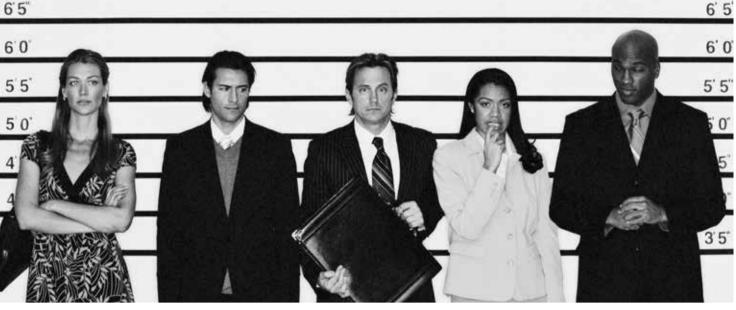
Remember to be Flexible

As you fill in your editorial calendar, remember to be flexible. Just because a title lands on a specific date, doesn't mean you have to post that content right then or even at all.

As we previously stated, your editorial calendar is a living, breathing document. It can change and adapt to suit your needs. If important news comes up that your audience will find valuable, take advantage of it. Push your publishing date for the content you have drafted.







6. Specify Your Content Developer(s)

It can be daunting to find content. We understand this dilemma completely. But as you begin creating your content strategy, this is an important piece to identify.

Without a clear understanding of where you are sourcing your shareworthy information and who is creating it, your content strategy will fall flat.

Content can come from one of three places. Let's explore the pros and cons of each choice.

From Within

Selecting a member of your staff to create content is a great way to share first hand experiences about your subject matter. Your staff's exposure to the ins and outs of your business allows them a complete understanding of what makes you unique and successful. Unfortunately, what makes them a good employee doesn't always make them a good writer or communicator. Additionally, if their job does not allow them enough dedicated time to produce content, their other responsibilities may suffer or they may fail to create content in a timely manner.

Share On:



<u>@rwldesign</u>



First hand experience



14

Cons:

- Requires staff member's time
- Staff member potentially doesn't have the necessary skills to communicate effectively

Externally

Hiring someone externally is a great way to delegate. It allows you and your staff to concentrate on your daily tasks while providing valuable, share-worthy content. Additionally an external person can bring a fresh perspective to your business. Their lack of hands on experience can be an asset when you want to translate industry jargon into laymen's terms.

While an external content producer does allow you to delegate, it does not completely eliminate work on your end. To ensure high quality, accurate content, you will need to set aside time to answer questions, provide facts, and review content to ensure it aligns with your company.

Pros:

- Delegating tasks
- Fresh perspective

Cons:

· Lack of hands on experience

Content Curation

Becoming a content curator sounds like the easiest option. You find relevant pieces from outside sources and share them. In reality, it is the hardest. Successful content curation doesn't just copy and paste an article. That's called content scrapping. Not only does this practice not give your audience added value, it hurts your Google ranking. Rather, successful content curation builds upon each relevant piece, providing things such as a short synopsis or opinion. It provides a diverse range of content your audience wouldn't otherwise have seen.





To be a good content curator, you have to understand your business, be an exceptional researcher, and a strong writer. More often than not, content curation takes longer than creating an original piece.



<u>Dave Pell</u> is just about the best example you could follow for content curation.

15

Pros:

- Building upon other's ideas
- Giving your consumers added value through relevant information

Cons:

· Additional time and skills required

Where to Go Next

Regardless of where you choose to source your content, whether it's strictly one of these three or a combination of them, it's important your content is always in line with your content strategy. To ensure this, one person needs to manage the entire process. Throwing two or three people into the content creation mix without a clear calendar and set of objectives, leads to mayhem. Make sure you allocate someone to guide the ship and maintain consistency.



Voice Matters

No matter who your content developer is, the ability to capture your brand's voice is key. Those best suited to do so are individuals willing to listen to your wants and needs from the beginning and then take feedback moving forward.

Share On:







7. Create Original Content

Writing's not easy. Even the best of the best work hard creating well-structured articles that are both educational and entertaining.

And while it may seem like researching, drafting, and editing feels similar to slogging through mud, the payoff is worth it. Publishing original content improves your site's search engine optimization and helps you form a better relationship with your clients.

Google Hates Duplicate Content

Google is the search engine task master. Their super-secret algorithms hold the keys to your prospect's attention. These algorithms determine how and where your website appears in search results.

While only a select few people in the world know exactly how these algorithms work, we do know some very definite truths about them. Namely, we know that the algorithms consider duplicate content to be spam.

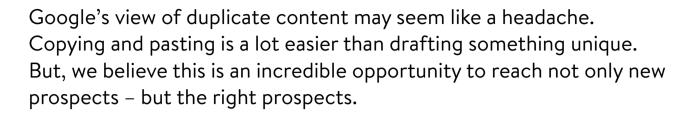
Why? Because Google's prime goal is to deliver an exceptional user experience. This is accomplished by providing useful answers to search queries. Because Google considers duplicate content to be spam, its value is automatically diminished. Thus, websites with original content receive a significant advantage.

Share On:





Sharing Original Content Lets You Meet New Prospects



Why? Because the nature of high quality search results is that your website appears to those who are interested in your product or service.

Publishing Original Content Positions You as an Expert

Consumers want to work with experts. Think about how you decide where to spend your money. When you're copying and pasting content from another site, you're showing off what that expert knows. You're not displaying your expertise.

Publishing original content allows you to present your own, unique insights.

Exception: Content Curation

Like most rules, there is an exception to duplicate content being valuable - content curation.

Content curation is a process of identifying high quality articles. When done well, content curators share a synopsis, link, and personal insight of the articles they value. Typically, they'll share a snippet or two of the article. It's rare they'll present the article in its entirety.

Are they publishing duplicate content? Sort of. But the case can also certainly be made that their content is original.





Exception: Social Shares

When it comes to social media, sharing others content isn't just okay, it's expected. Sharing only your own work can often come off as self-centered. Remember, social media is intended to be social. It's about starting conversations.



18

You certainly want to share links and snippets from your own content. But, you also want to share articles you found to be valuable. In this way, you are adding to the conversation rather than just saying, "Look at me!" (Learn more about Twitter etiquette.)



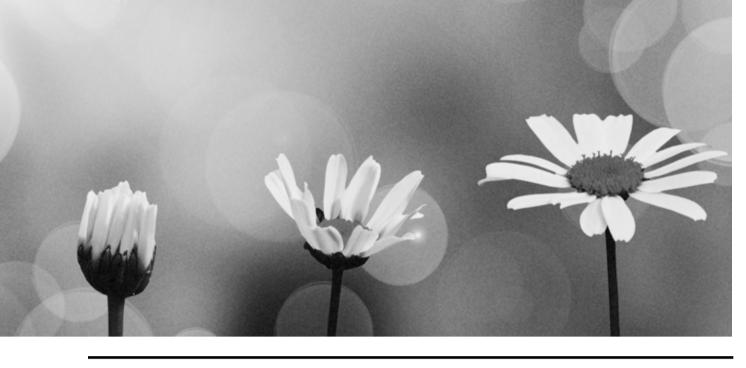
Insightful Newsletters Inspire

Your time is precious. Don't waste it slogging through emails that are little more than a marketing ploy. But, when you come across an email newsletter that shares helpful ideas with a dose of wit, sign up. They're an inspirational resource for new ideas.

Share On:







8. Transform Your Posts into Multiple Pieces

In a lot of ways, blogs are wonderful. Constructed and written correctly, they can be the foundation for your business' social media and advertising platform.

But, blogs are also just blogs. Without the help of platforms like Twitter, Facebook and email, they can act more like a stagnant pond than a blossoming fruit tree.

Why? Because the goal of marketing is to engage your audience, make sales, and ultimately increase revenues. If all you do is blog and no one ever sees your posts, it's like a tree falling in the woods when no one is around – no one cares. However, if used properly, each blog post becomes the catalyst for multiple pieces of share worthy content.

Folks, this is good news. This is the kind of news you should be shouting about.

Sure, you can create a unique topic for every single tweet, status, and eblast. But, just typing that sounds daunting and time consuming. Luckily, when you develop a high quality post, you can use it to create share worth snippets (small, single thought comments) to send to your audience.

Life suddenly sounds a whole lot more pleasant if you ask us. Lets break it down.

Share On:





A valuable blog post shares information with your audience that they find either helpful or interesting. For example, you might share:

20

- A how-to article
- · An insider tip
- A witty anecdote
- A personal story
- A shout-out to a friend or colleague

Keep in mind, each post should center on topics pertinent to your business.

Identify Your Additional Platforms

At RWL Design, we focus primarily on Twitter, Facebook, and eblasts. You might also include:

- Google+
- LinedIn
- Pinterest
- Instagram

If you want to shout about your business to everyone under the sun on every single platform possible, that's great. Just be aware of the resources required to maintain an active presence on each platform. Sharing is a wonderful thing. But, you need to be able to respond and engage with your audience. Sometimes, less really is more.

Develop Platform Specific Copy

Each platform has its own ideal format for the length and type of text, image sizing and orientation, and link sharing. For our purposes, we're going to focus on the three formats we primarily use.

Twitter

Though your status can include up to 140 characters, it's best to keep it between 80–100. The top performing tweets start with a short question or statement, followed by a link and then by 1 -3 hashtags. Just remember, be conservative on hashtag use - too many too often feels like spam.

Share On:





Example:

How can your blog be the foundation for your marketing campaign? http://bit.ly/1MFQI2x #ShareWorthyCopy



Additionally, tweets with images significantly outperform tweets without. While you don't want to share an image every time, it's a great way to draw attention to an important topic. However, picture attachments take away from your overall character count. You'll need to cut down on your copy.

Example:

Turn one post into multiple share worthy bites: http://bit.ly/1MFQI2x
#Marketing

Facebook

While Facebook allows you to share a seemingly endless number of characters, shorter statuses perform better. The best statuses are 1–2 short sentences that sum up what you're sharing. They include a call-to-action and a link with a link preview.

Example:

Spend less time and engage a bigger audience. Learn to turn one blog post into multiple share worthy tidbits: http://bit.ly/1MFQI2x



Size Images Correctly

Each platform displays images differently in their newsfeeds. The most effective images are cropped for each platform's dimensions.

- Facebook Timeline Photo: 504px × 504px
- Facebook Shared Link Thumbnail: 484px × 252px
- Twitter In-Stream: 1024px × 512px

To be safe, you can usually just share an image 1024px × 512px across platforms.

Share On:





Email

Email blasts are great. Unlike Twitter and Facebook that require your audience to not only be online, but the platform to add it to their newsfeed—emails go to your entire list. Transform a valuable blog post into an eblast by summarizing it into an engaging synopsis with a link encouraging your audience to learn more.



Example:

Dear Ladies & Gents -

Creating multiple, unique pieces to share on all of your different marketing platforms can be a time consuming headache. But, you can avoid this by concentrating on creating valuable blog posts. These can become the catalyst for your entire marketing platform. Learn how here.

Have additional questions about blogging? Contact us today,

The RWL Design Team

Added Share Worthy Bonus!

Don't let your content crawl into a cave of obscurity. Great content can be shared again and again. The following week you might pull a quote from the post and share it again. At the end of the month you might send a "Blog Post Roundup" eblast. Down the line you might share a Throw Back Thursday post (use the Twitter hashtag #tbt).



Added, Added Bonus — 3 Ready To Share Tweets You Can Use Today!

- The magic of value: it keeps on giving and giving. http://bit.ly/1MFQI2x
- Is organic Facebook engagement giving you a headache?
 @AmyPorterfield has tips to help: <u>bit.ly/1nHC3pS</u>
- Homemade is beautiful, wouldn't you say? #Seattle #PNW <u>pic.</u> <u>twitter.com/xiRfDp9pZE</u>

Share On:







9. Rework Your Post Into Another Structure(s)

Reworking posts into another structure takes advantage of those homerun topics. Blogging isn't a one-and-done kind of deal. If you've written about the topic before, it doesn't mean you can't write about it again. For Example:

On LinkedIn

LinkedIn lets you share the link of a post in the same way as Facebook. But, it also lets you publish articles directly on LinkedIn. These articles are much longer than a simple status update, but shorter than a blog post. Typically, they are 60-70% of your original post.

Follow Up Post

Follow up posts allow you to answer questions or expand on ideas that your original post brought up. Additionally, as your industry changes, a follow up post lets you address what's new and what is no longer relevant.

Press Release

Blog posts lend themselves particularly well to press releases when they are announcements such as your business reaching a major milestone, making a new hire or introducing a new product. While your press release may contain much of the same information as your blog post, it should take a less conversational tone.

Share On:







10. Evaluate Your Performance

We hear a lot of chatter about analytics and how they are important. Honestly — we're frequently part of the chatter. What we don't hear often is why they are important. It's wonderful to shout about tracking results and measuring success. We love charts and facts as much as the next business.

Why? Because numbers are something we can easily wrap our heads around. But at the end of the day, we need to know why those figures matter. Why did we spend time, energy, and money to collect them? In particular, website analytics are a great way to start tracking and see results.

Website Analytics Show You What's Working AND What Isn't

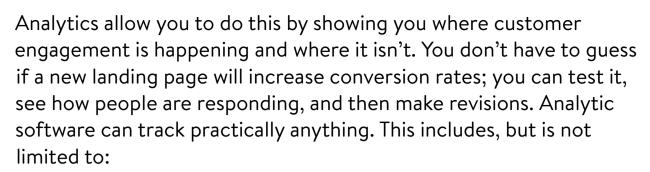
Successful businesses are not stagnant. They are constantly reevaluating what is working and what is not. This is what analytics allow you to do. They are insight. They help your business identify where adjustments can be made to improve your business' <u>return on</u> <u>investment (ROI)</u>.

This is especially true when it comes to your website. Just as no two businesses are exactly alike, no two websites are exactly alike either. Different strategies and implementations work for different businesses. The trick is finding what works for your customer base by tweaking and upgrading your site as necessary to meet their needs.

Share On:







- Unique Visitors: Number of new people who visit your site.
- Return Visitors: Number of people who come back to your site.
- Sales: Number of people making a purchase, size of purchase, frequency of purchase, etc.
- **Bounce Rate:** Number of people who visit your site and leave without viewing other pages.
- Click Throughs: Number of people who navigate to another page.
- **Leads:** Number of people who opt in to a service of some kind, such as an e-mail distribution list.

Don't Get Bogged Down In Analytics — Set Goals

With all the facts and figures you can track, it is easy to drown in data. But, getting consumed by your analytics can decrease your productivity and reduce your ability to make progress. The ultimate key to successfully utilizing analytics is to set clear goals. These might include:

- · Increase leads through email distribution list signups
- Increase the number of people who call your business
- Increase local search rankings
- Drive discussion through your blog
- Increase the amount of time people spend on your site.

Each of these goals correlate to specific analytics. This allows you to not only track and measure what is working, but adjust your website to improve results.







11. Tweak and Grow Your Subject Matter

Which blog posts are getting the most attention? Which blog posts are getting the least amount of attention? Keep doing what is working and tweak what isn't.

This might simply be the subject matter. Perhaps your audience is more interested in one topic than another. Sometimes it's your visuals. Great images have a tendency to hook your reader, especially where social shares are concerned. If your posts with strong imagery are outperforming those without, images should become a point of emphasis.

Are certain channels bringing you more visitors than others? If Facebook is sending you double the traffic compared to Twitter, then you know Facebook is a place where you should focus your attention. Additionally, take a look at your tweets. Are they being shared at the best time of day for your audience? Are they clear and engaging?

The key to tweaking and growing your subject matter is educated experimentation. While you don't want to waste time on an obvious flop, you don't know what's going to work until you've given it a shot. So go for it!

Share On:



