

Sean Kavanaugh WOWs Crowd at NY Digital Footprint Event

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Content Marketing Pro Sean Kavanaugh

Ken Courtright and Incomestore.com's recent event featured marketing advice from successful site operators. Content Marketing from the Trenches by Kavanaugh was a standout.

(Newswire.net -- April 21, 2015) New York, NY -- I just returned from Ken Courtright's NY Digital Footprint event at the beautiful and historic Roosevelt hotel. The event was an amazing compilation of information and entertainment. One of the standouts in the "must-have-info" department

was a presentation by Sean Kavanaugh about content marketing.

What really impressed me about Sean was his no-nonsense, hands on approach to a common business problem; how to create content that will be found and read on the Web. Sean's experience and expertise is as real as it gets. Sean transitioned a career as a card-carrying plumber to the owner and operator of the most successful plumbing site on the web. With Sean's permission, what follows is his actual text for this outstanding presentation:

Content Marketing from the Trenches

If you haven't explored how a content marketing campaign can change and sustain your business you are being left behind. Content marketing is a funny thing because you can as a business owner take part in its development and implementation however; you can also be its biggest obstacle as well. I feel it's my cause in life to help small businesses achieve their on-line goals because I've seen it's dramatic results. Writing, video and creating social media buzz may make you feel uncomfortable but if you don't expose yourself and your business by creating dynamic content on a weekly basis you are destined to fail.

So what is Content Marketing? As defined by Wikipedia it is "[any marketing that involves the creation and sharing of media and publishing content in order to acquire and retain customers.](#)"

My definition of content marketing is "any form of digital media created to teach or inform a target market. This digital media may incidentally promote a web property, brick and mortar business, product or service or even an individual person."

There is a key word in the above paragraph that drives business owners nuts. Do you know what it is? Incidentally? It isn't concrete enough and this is where the discomfort begins to manifest itself. Most of us want to hear how their content marketing is going to immediately impact sales of their product or service.

I think before we get deeper into content marketing I should give you some background on myself because it may give you some perspective. I'm from Chicago and like a lot of us I grew up in a union house. My father was a union plumber for 40 years. So I grew up in the business. My father moved up the ranks to become the president of a fairly large mechanical firm out of downtown Chicago. After I finished school with an English degree I began working for my father after a year or so I became the purchasing agent in charge of buying between 12 and 17 million dollars worth of plumbing stuff.

Several years later my father quit his job after years of failed attempts to buy the company he was president of. Kavanaugh Plumbing was born in 1996 and I immediately began working for the company. Because I never wanted any of our plumbers to think I didn't do what they did, I enrolled in the apprentice program for Local 130 UA and 5 years later I became a card carrying licensed union plumber. I still carry my Illinois plumbers license today.

During our 16 year in business I worked in all aspects of the business, field work, estimating, accounting, vice president, you name it I did it. This is nothing new to any of you. In 2008 plumbing stopped in Chicago and I knew I had to do something else. It's funny how fate works because that is when I became involved with TGC. Ken talked to me about authority websites, we took a look at the analytics and competition and theplumbinginfo.com was born.

Lots of things have happened since then, my father and I closed the business, which was painful. I took two 6-month sabbaticals from writing to take care of loose ends. In the end the site has grown. There are so many positives that have come from developing the site I could do another presentation about those so we can talk later about that. Today theplumbinginfo.com is the most read plumbing only website in the US. We get about 22K uniques and 30K page views per month. We rank on the first two pages of Google for 1200 plumbing related keywords and if you bought my traffic it would cost about 10K per month. 85% of the site's content is written by me and about 15% is from other professional contributors. 18 months ago I became a full time employee of TGC. Helping our site partners develop their own content. It's been a wild and funny ride. I call it the greatest resume ever written. If you ever want to know about what I know about plumbing all you would have to do is read the site.

I want no one to misunderstand this isn't a quick fix. There are certain types of content that yield greater and faster results but most times it is in direct proportion to the amount of time and creativity put into the content.

Let me say this again: The speed of acquisition and the amount of traffic captured from a piece of content is in direct proportion to the amount of work you put into a piece of content.

I am not saying that a funny controversial piece of content cannot or will not earn you instant traffic but today we are focusing on sustained and long term growth.

There are businesses across the country that wish they could bring back the results they achieved with the Yellow Pages/Yellow Book it was so easy. Those were the days when you knew the Yellow Pages and Yellow Book were over-charging (I'm sure most of you felt like putting on a cow costume so you could let the salesperson milk you till you were dry) but you also knew for a fact that if you spent the money for the double truck or "Tipon" on the front cover you would cover the cost of the advertising and make a decent profit. For the last decade traditional marketing has become less and less effective.

Why do I know this? Because I've had the privilege of working with companies that meticulously tracked their advertising costs and effectiveness. I've poured over the reports showing their cost per call going up month after month.

Most Internet marketing campaigns fail because they lack the patience to execute and follow through with the plan. You see, most Internet marketing campaigns need the customer to provide some regular content to their website, whether it be in written form, pictures or videos. The majority of failed Internet marketing plans see a sharp drop off in customer participation after 4 to 6 months because the results are not immediate. We are so used to the causality between traditional advertising and the phone ringing that the commitment to Internet marketing is foreign. If the business is not seeing growth similar to what traditional advertising would bring, the plan is discarded and a new marketer is brought in or worse the company reverts back to traditional advertising, which is a recipe for disaster.

If you're reading this to find the magic bullet of content marketing stop reading now. You can go to Bed, Bath and Beyond and pick up a Magic Bullet. You can press it one time, two times, three times to make a chicken salad.

My job is to give you a bunch of bullets to load up the gun and when we're done you can hit the target.

We will start off with the obvious ones just in case someone is just starting off with content marketing.

Content is King

We've been hearing it for almost a decade now. "Content is King" and that hasn't change a bit in fact it's become more

important. You can hire writers to write articles for 20, 30 or maybe 50 dollars per article but most times those articles do not and will not take the place of an expert writing about a topic. Most of the time outsourced content reads like a writer trying to write about something they don't really know about. I can sniff out this content like a bloodhound. I've had 20 or 30 "plumbing companies" reach to do guest posts on theplumbinginfo.com and every single one was a content company writing on behalf of a plumbing contractor and every one of the pieces sucked. The only way to accumulate real organic traffic in your field is to write it yourself, have guest writers in your field write or pay an expert to write. I will say that you don't have to be a perfect writer to gain traffic in your field but you must know what you're talking about.

Authorship

Regardless of whether or not Google has announced the demise of G+, authorship rank is still alive. For those of you late to the dance Google had been using Google+ to identify and keep track of authors. I am paraphrasing here but basically if you had a G+ account and you wrote for a blog or other websites Google kept track of authors and their impact. The more you wrote the greater your authorship rank became, that in turn gave your articles more impact to your site and any others you wrote for. By using a bit of code your picture came up in search and triangulated all of your content. Google was trying to weed out the real authors from the content mills. They figured if you put your name and face to a piece of content it was better and more relevant than content without. However, because of low adoption rate Google dropped G+ from search results in late August of 2014. However, we suspected that although Google dropped the G+ search results they would continue to weigh authors higher that actively tried to improve their reach using Google+. There have been quite a few articles echoing our beliefs and we are continuing to recommend using G+ to connect an author to his or her content. Here is something to think about since they have dropped G+ and authorship from search, none of our established authors have dropped in search traffic in fact they have all grown since August. Stay the course; it makes sense that Google wants the best information and content. Google Plus will eventually go away however; Google will spin it off in some way to keep its adopters connected.



Length

Everyone has opinion on how long an article has to be or what kind of content is best to build steady long-term organic traffic. There was a great study written by Noah Kagan at Huffington. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/noah-kagan/why-content-goes-viral-wh_b_5492767.html These types of studies are great because most times they reaffirm what we already know and some they shed light on some things that surprise the heck out of us.

We tell people that their content should be between 500 and 750 words and that is sound advice because Google doesn't like content less than 500 words however would it surprise you if I said that the longer the content the more shares it gets?

We've been told people like to absorb content in chunks, that we are an ADD society but content between 3000 and 10,000 words gets the most average shares.

Here is a cool stat there is 16 times more content with less than 1000 words. Remember what I wrote about the correlation between the amount of time and effort you put in a piece? There is a ton of opportunity to create in-depth pieces because there are a lot less people willing to do it. I know this for a fact because my biggest reason for success on theplumbinginfo.com is my willingness to write in depth pieces. I call them my magnum opuses. I try to write one per quarter and they are powerful. So aim for content with 2000 words or more there is less competition.

Rich Media Content

Having at least one picture in your post leads to twice as many Facebook and twitter shares.

Invoking Awe, laughter and amusement are the key emotions to hit with shared content.

Don't Sell

The “call to action” marketing has to be toned down greatly. I know it's natural to want to write about sump pumps in the spring when people need sump pumps replaced or about your massage parlor during tax season but people get fatigued from reading a continual sales pitch.

Share Socially

How many of you continually see companies give FB updates or tweets directly related to a product or service they sell? Most of the time right? If that is your strategy I suggest you alter it. Before you post a piece of content/media and that includes social media, long form, graphical, podcast or video ask yourself this “Is what I'm writing about benefitting society in some way?” Are you adding something to it or are you writing about something for your own benefit? If your posts only contain information on product or services you plan to sell you're gonna lose this game,

Differentiate Yourself

People want to know who you are as a company and as a company owner, especially if you're in the service business. You can no longer be the owner, estimator and boss: you must also be the face. If you don't want to be, hire someone willing to take on that role. Post things interest you even if at times it's outside your industry. Heck, I do playlists for my readers because you know what, I have other interests outside of plumbing and content creating and management and I think getting to know me is better than not and your customers will feel the same way about you. I told a contractor recently to have their service technicians take selfies (75% of all Americans take at least one selfie per week) of all the work they complete whether it's a small pipe repair or a complete furnace and AC replacement. It does two things, one it places your service techs out front and center, there is no hiding what they do or who they are and two, each picture will be geo-tagged for the town in which the work is completed.

Repurpose old content.

If you've been at the content game for a while you are bound to have old content that is still relevant. What I mean by that is you can take some in depth content and turn them into Slide Share presentations. SlideShare is one of the top 120 most visited websites in the world and gets about 60 million unique visitors per month and 215 page views. You can also turn older content into dynamic info graphics that can be shared as well.

Write for sites in your field bigger than you own .

I realize that writing can be a daunting task for some individuals and keeping up with content on your own site is tough but finding sites willing to share your thoughts in your field is key to growing your authorship and following. Build relationships with trade organizations or journalists who cover your industry. Write an editorial for a trade magazine. Be a guest on an industry podcast or start one of your own. (Example of our Podcast growth.)

Collaborate

Reach out to people you respect in your industry and ask them to write a post once a month. It's tough to write all the content all the time, most people familiar with how content works are willing to branch out to other sites as well.

Be Real

Write about your life sometimes, let people know about the charity you love or about what you love to do with your kids or grandkids. If your son plays football put up a picture with the family at a football game. Put up a picture or article about a company picnic. You need to connect with customers on a personal level.

List Building

Build your own email list with the interactions you have with customers, online acquaintances and tradeshow. It is your key to back into a customers buying cycle or to gain a customer. Never let your technicians leave a customers home without an email address.

Share the “Secrets”

I know that in some industries especially the trades, owners feel like they are giving away secrets if they post a piece of

content showing a potential customer how to do something for themselves. This is flat out not true, most times if a potential buyer watches or reads something on your website they are more likely to buy a product or service from you. We like to call it “internet good will”. If you want to gain some traction with readers via social media, find Facebook groups or Twitter feeds or Pinterest Boards in your industry and join them. Be active in those groups, offer advice and be friendly and don’t let them know about anything you have to sell or direct them to a website property you own for at least a month. The longer you pull back the bowstring before you self promote the better.

Take the Long View

We all know this for sure; the Internet isn’t going away. It is evolving to do more and more wondrous things, and with that evolution comes more opportunity to succeed but also to fail. Just because a company or on-line property was great does not mean it will continue to be. If you plan on embarking on a large scale, long-term content marketing plan, stick to the plan. Use the same tenacity, work ethic and dogged determination it took to get where you are, or where you were when things were great.

Discouragement cannot be an option. Do you know how many times I’ve put up a piece of content I was sure would go viral only to see it die? It is no different than the amount of times a potential customer or banker or potential investor says no. The winners look at it, learn that their readership didn’t connect and move on to the next idea.

You must reframe the way you look at content creation and the value you put on its development. The huge corporations have content creation teams that do nothing but create. The small to medium size business must also devote significant resources to its creation as well.

I will end my piece with a quote from a Gary Vaynerchuk article because in telling us what not to do, it lights the way for your future “There are too many people who are preoccupied with *“what will the time I spend writing this article or filing this video get for me, TODAY?”* The answer is probably nothing. Today. But I am a living testament to the fact that over the long haul, the work that you put in today will pay off in a bright future.

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About Digital Foot-print

Ken Courtright is a master “Growth” strategist who helps entrepreneurs and small businesses make more money by creating multiple streams of income teaching people how to start a business, find a market that is ripe for exploring, pick a product that can dominate a market, and grow a small business into a large one.

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