

Content Marketing

The key to building long-term, trusting relationships with your ideal coaching clients

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When you write helpful articles and post them online, they become free advertising that brands you as an expert in your niche. But content marketing is so much more than that.

Coaching is an intimate, personal service, so it's important for prospective clients to feel like they know, like and trust you before they even consider hiring you as a coach. Content marketing is a key strategy that will help you in any stage of this relationship-building process.

Stage 1: Attraction

Wow, you've managed to get someone's attention in this busy, fast-paced world. As long you hold their interest long enough, you can create a means for staying in touch and building on this initial attraction, provided that you have a mechanism in place to do this.

How do you hold their interest? Write well and creatively about how to solve a major problem they are facing or another topic they are interested in. Then, invite them to visit your blog or website to find similar information.

How do you create the means to stay in touch? Ask website visitors to submit their name and email address so they can join your list. Since people are understandably cautious (and in some cases downright cynical) about signing up for a mailing list, it helps if you have a free sample of the knowledge and expertise that you have to share, and your style of expressing it. Consider a downloadable special report or an e-course that's sent over five to 10 days.

What mechanism do you need to have in place? Use a web form from an email broadcast system such as AWeber or MailChimp to manage your mailing list so that people can join or leave your list automatically, and so that you can broadcast messages to that entire list with one click.

Stage 2: Identification

Your free sample begins the second stage of your relationship-building process, because as your prospective client interacts with the material you've sent, they start to get a sense of whether or not the two of you are on the same "wavelength."

And as you follow up with additional messages and samples of your expertise and style, they will gain an even deeper understanding of who you are and how you work, and hopefully they will identify with what you write – either as a member of your target market, as someone like you (who happens to be a few steps behind you on the journey) or simply as a fan/follower/admirer. Whichever the subtle form, they identify themselves as belonging to you, of wanting to be where you are, of wanting to hear what's next.

Stage 3: Mobilization

Over time, your prospective client will become more and more comfortable with you. They will also feel appreciative of the guidance and expertise you are so generously sharing. As they deepen their trust of that guidance, they will start to try out some of your suggestions.

Three Must-Do Writing Activities

Unlike traditional ads, people are actively looking for articles, information and solutions. Just like ads, though, your articles have to be in the right place at the right time.

Here are three key activities that will get your articles in front of the right people

1. BLOGGING. Blogging will get your content published quickly so that it is immediately available to people (prospective clients) who are online and searching for information about your areas of expertise and the topics you care about. You can also use blog posts

as a place to develop your ideas and get feedback on them before expanding them into full articles.

2. SHARING. Link to your blog posts in your social media updates to engage your audience in conversation and help them spread the word about your great work. Expand your blog posts into articles, video presentations, audio broadcasts or other formats, and post them to social sharing sites such as Scribd, YouTube or iTunes. Submit articles to targeted article directories such as Coach Spotlight, where people are specifically looking for coaching solutions. All of this will

attract new prospective clients to your blog and website, where they learn more about you. Most importantly, this is where they can join your mailing list so that you can keep in touch with them and build that relationship.

3. KEEPING IN TOUCH. Weekly (at best) or monthly (at least) emails to your contact list will help you follow up with people who have visited your site and are already interested in you. You can include entire articles and/or links to posts on your blog, as well as a personal note and an invitation to take action on ONE special offer (per broadcast).

If they are truly the right fit for your services, your approach will work for them and they will start to see some movement and success with their issues. That gives them the impetus to do even more.

They are mobilized. They are in action. And here is where they may start to wonder, “If [your name] has been this helpful in his or her free articles and newsletter, I wonder how much more I could be achieving with personal attention!”

At any given time, your readers will be at a different phase of the relationship-building process, reaching the mobilization phase at their own pace. That’s why it is vitally important that every broadcast you send includes clear instructions about how to move forward to work with you.

When you start to hear back from your readers that, “I’ve been on your list for about a year now, and I finally decided to get in touch with you,” or “Your article about grief really helped me through a hard time; can we have a conversation next week?” you will realize that articles are the most valuable marketing materials you can have.

Articles allow you to help more people – including those who may never be in a position to hire you – while building long-term, trusting relationships with those you are destined to work with.

Five Steps to Content Marketing Success

1. PLAN MINDFULLY – A simple way to start planning your content is to choose five to 10 blog post categories – themes that represent the key concerns of your prospective clients. That initial structure will help keep your blog balanced and ensure that you’re staying focused on the topics your ideal client cares about.

2. WRITE ARTFULLY – Writing is a skill like any other, and you’re bound to get better with practice. Try some of the most commonly used structures and templates (such as the “Top 10” list), and then give yourself permission to find your own voice and writing style.

3. EDIT SKILLFULLY – Whether you’re writing brief blog posts, full-length articles or 140-character tweets, quality counts! Take the time to read everything out loud before you publish or send it. You’ll be amazed at how many little mistakes you’ll catch this way.

4. PUBLISH CONSISTENTLY – Content marketing only works if you keep doing it. Committing to a regular publication schedule makes it easier for you to plan your work time, and gives your readers a sense of reliability and anticipation.

5. SHARE WIDELY – Use social media integration tools to publish your content in multiple forums and at various times. You’ll be more likely to catch someone the minute they’re online looking for the solution only YOU provide.