



INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

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Combatting the Zombification of Legal Content Marketing with Data

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JANUARY 19, 2017



On all The Walking Dead quizzes I've taken, the results always show that I'm a Carol (TWD fans, you know what I mean).

But we're not fighting actual walkers (or Savivors) – just the zombification of legal content marketing that's been happening over the last couple of years as the patina wears off on our shiny new toy of content. Who's

with me?

This week, we're looking at the second tactic that Shane Snow of The Content Strategist outlines in [his piece for combatting content zombies](#), and that's data – YAY DATA!

Tech-enabled and data-optimized content

Now I'm really worried that I'm losing some of you, as this will be well-outside of your comfort zones. But really, we're talking about a lot of the same things we've always talked about – producing more of the content that your audience wants.

Doing that means looking at data, which sounds like a terribly boring thing. Snow keeps with his television theme for us, and injects it with some interest, illustrating how to do this in a way that's concrete and purposeful. He walks us through Netflix's decision to move from offering streaming of other companies' television shows and movies to purchasing their own show for the first time – House of Cards.

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Through its data, Netflix knew three things: People who watch Kevin Spacey movies tend to watch all the way to the end. People who watch David Fincher movies tend to watch *lots* of David Fincher movies. And people who watch the British *House of Cards* tend to watch it all at once and all the way through.”

With that data, giving House of Cards the greenlight seemed like a no-brainer. And Snow confirmed “Based on the number of new subscribers Netflix picked up because of the show, the company's \$100 million bet paid off in under three months, according to [analysis by The Atlantic](#).”

Netflix isn't making predictions with a crystal ball. They're using lots of data, that they have access to based on their existing customers, to predict future consumption behavior. And entertainment isn't the only place where this makes sense. Snow says:

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A relatively small number of super loyal subscribers paying Netflix \$8 a month is more profitable than a huge number of viewers tuning in to a commercial on CBS. In the same way, a relatively small number of loyal readers or viewers can be worth much more to a brand than a bunch of one-off ad impressions.

This is the way the future will work in every content medium, not just television. The creators and companies that make smart use of data and tech will have a huge advantage over the rest.”

This is what we alluded to in the last post – you want to create sustainable readership among the right audience with your content, people who are the purchasers of the legal services in your particular practice area who will need your expertise and can also recommend your expertise to others. That is much more effective than getting thousands of hits that may be hit or miss with the right people – 10 of the right people reading your content is more valuable than 100 people who will glance at it and move on.

So how can YOU be doing this?

Exactly what you use and how you use it is what we'll look at in the next post on rigorous content strategy, but let's dive a little deeper into the data discussion as it applies to the legal industry.

Last week, we talked about Adrian Lurssen's post from 2015, [5 Reasons Why No One Reads Your Content](#) – and not using data is a big part of those reasons. We get caught up in the excitement around the shiny, new thing – and that can be okay, for a little while. But at some point (this point, actually), you have to begin to develop some reasons for busy people to pause in what they need to be doing to execute their daily tasks and to read or consume the information that you're providing them. A lot of times, people want to guess. "This is what I like thinking or writing about, so this is what I'm going to focus on." Sometimes that piece of content is a hit; other times it's not.

You may wonder what's wrong with that type of hit-or-miss content marketing, and the answer is, well, three-fold. The short, first response is "nothing" – there's nothing wrong with it. If you really want to keep writing about what you want to write about, that's fine. It's unlikely you're going to be efficient in your production or results, but as long as that's not what you want – if your goal is simply the writing because you enjoy it, then the ends are in the means, and that's great. But, if that's not the end goal here, then there are two things wrong with it:

1. You're a busy person. There's no point in spending time as a billing lawyer developing content that isn't going to absolutely maximize every ounce out of that content, right?
2. If you don't give people what they want even most of the time, they won't bother to look at your content at all. It's harsh, but it's the truth. Most of your content has to be valuable to your audience, or they're not going to do the work of finding the gems – they're also busy people, with a tidal wave of information coming at them daily. So it's to your advantage to be as efficient as possible in delivering what they want to them, consistently.

How do you do that? With data.

Lurssen makes two key points that I'd like to emphasize:

- **Focus more on the message than the technology:** “Signs that you have fallen into this trap: you spent more time thinking about important but tactical details (domain name, branding, ‘look and feel,’ whether your blog should be standalone or part of the firm’s website, etc) and not enough time first answering the vital, strategic questions: **Why are we doing this?** Who are we trying to reach? How can we reach them? What concerns these people (and how can I help with those concerns)? etc.”

Don’t do this asking in a vacuum either – while you can (and should) use data that you’ve gathered over the years from clients to inform your content, don’t be afraid to ask them what it is they want to hear from you about. Reach out to a few key clients and say “what kinds of topics would you be interested in reading about?” “What content is valuable to you in your business, and how do you want to receive it?” You can also refer back to your years of experience to answer the questions that you get most often from clients in a post or series of posts.

- **Measure AND repeat your successes:** “Don’t write what you *hope* interests people. Write what you *know* interests people. Your most popular past content is one of the best measures of reader interest and you should use it as such. In other words, monitor and make use of your analytics. (And per #1, that’s not just a matter of looking at traffic—a fairly useless measure by itself. Really, it’s about building a picture of reader interest and acting on it.)

In this noisy landscape (see #2), one post on a topic is seldom enough. To sustain the readers you have earned, revisit your most popular articles and offer the next angle.”

What Adrian says here is SO important, because it’s about looking at what your readers actually care about. It may surprise you (like the popularity of my Instagram posts last year). I don’t like analytics from an ego-boosting perspective, but when you put them into context, they’re incredibly valuable. How does one set of titles do over another? Are people interested in the posts you wrote about start-ups over all other authorship? If you write another post, does it do equally well, or better? Are people engaging with, and sharing, that content too? Are there follow-up questions being asked of that content that you can address in additional posts? Engage with the data to see what people WANT and then to maximize the efforts that you’re putting in. Rather than insisting that your audience consume what you think they should want, give them more of what you’ve seen that they actually do want.

The goal here is more than just creating a popular post. It’s creating sustainable, long-term, loyal readers who return to your content again and again. You’re developing your position as a thought-leader, which makes you the “go-to” lawyer for your niche area of practice. Then, when your readers (who are preferably consumers of your legal services or at least influencers) need a lawyer with your skills, they immediately think of you. Alternatively, when an in-house friend asks them for a recommendation with your skills, you’re top of mind. Equally important, when someone recommends you, and someone does a google search for your name, all of your thought-leadership

Combating the Zombification of Legal Content Marketing with Data - Zen and the Art of Legal Networking pieces, with the same theme, consistent strategy, and engaged stewardship, are all right there for them, reinforcing their decision to hire you.

This doesn't mean that you don't try out new topics and ideas (and you can use data and keywords to see what topics are trending in a general sense as well, not just within your own content, so that you're not just silo-ing yourself). But the idea is to build on what's successful, what your audience wants over what you **think** they **might** want, to make the most efficient use of your time and theirs.

If it's good enough for Netflix, shouldn't it be good enough for you?

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