



# AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON  
*Relationship Building  
within the International  
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## Combatting the Zombification of Legal Content Marketing with a Plan

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JANUARY 24, 2017



In keeping with our theme of zombies (this is the last post on this for a while, I swear), when last we saw our intrepid band of beloved Walking Dead characters, they were coming up with a plan to fight Negan and the Survivors. Without a plan, they spent much of the previous season just reacting to a bad situation – they thought they had all the information they needed on Negan, and took out one of his outposts, only to learn it was a small segment of his followers, and **\*\*spoiler alert\*\*** people died.

While no one is going to die without a content marketing plan, a rigorous, strategic plan can turn what is haphazard actions taken with fingers crossed into an efficient formula for building your online reputation into something that works for you. A plan combats the two issues we addressed with hit-or-miss content marketing last week,

1. You're a busy person who needs efficient marketing that works for you.
2. Your audience is comprised of busy people who won't hunt through tons of content to find the gems.

Despite these two great reasons for having a plan, plenty of people still push out content without one. Shane Snow tells us in his piece for Contently that the Content Marketing Institute's annual Benchmark Report confirms:

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**More than 60 percent of marketers still don't have a documented content strategy heading into 2017.**

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**The amount of money spent producing branded content has continued to skyrocket. 73.6 percent of content marketers plan on spending more next year.”**

These statistics are even more striking in the legal industry. Greentarget's most recent State of Digital & Content Marketing Survey, released early last year, showed that:

- 87 percent of law firms still don't have a documented content strategy (that's up almost **30 percent** over industry standards!)
- Like the rest of the world, the amount of money spent on content marketing is expected to increase, with **87 percent** of firms producing more content in the coming year than in the previous one. That's another increase over the rest of the industry.

Snow points out a pretty obvious point here:



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**More money, same lack of plan is not a good formula for success. It's like giving a 16-year-old an Audi after he dents the Oldsmobile.**

**This is perhaps the biggest problem with the content marketing industry right now—and the biggest opportunity for the future.”**

We've got 13% of firms in the industry creating content with a documented plan. Another 45% have an undocumented strategy, but with the clear zombieification of content marketing that we've laid out over the last two posts, it seems obvious that perhaps the disconnect is in the planning. Snow points out that content publishers (that's us – lawyers and marketers) already have access to tools that will help us to be better storytellers and the technology to mine and leverage the data to create relevant, pointed content.

But he suggests that we're still living in Kevin Costner's Field of Dreams – and having spent so much time with lawyers, this sounds very, very familiar to me:

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**(If you haven't seen it, the film is about Kevin Costner building a baseball field in the middle of nowhere after hearing a voice saying 'If you build it, they will come.' In the end, a bunch of old baseball players, including his father, show up to the field to play. Turns out they're all ghosts.)**

**Those marketers aren't wrong. *Field of Dreams* is exactly what happens. We get some crazy content idea in our head, we build it, and no one with a pulse actually shows up.”**

If you're still not sure whether this sounds like you, listen to what Adrian Lurssen says in his post:

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**Another *signal v. noise* issue and put another way: you thought they'd read you because you are you. Those days are over, even with your clients. Today, professionals who take the time to understand who they are trying to reach—who profile timely reader concerns and needs—and then write in response to what they've learned ... *they* are the people who are being read.”**

We have to get past the idea that someone is going to read our content because of the name on the door. There are two reasons that they will read it/watch it:

- You've written or produced something that is relevant to them, composed in a way that is easily understood and digested that quickly gets to the heart of the matter and tells them why they should care about what you're saying and gives them some concrete action steps to take.
- Your content is regularly relevant and thoughtful, and you've built trust with your audience over time, and so they return to you because they know they'll get the above from you without having to look too hard elsewhere.

So here's the main point – Snow says:

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**How we get people to see our stories is such a crucial part of creating them, but we tend to spend a lot less thought on it. This may be because content strategy is counterintuitive. You have to connect with the audience *after* you have content to give them. But you shouldn't create the content until you've figured out who you're creating that content for, and how you're going to reach them.”**

In our first post in this series, we pointed out that content marketing is about taking the word of mouth marketing that has been driving the legal industry for decades and translating it into online storytelling for a wider audience. But not just any audience – similar to good word of mouth marketing, you need to tell the right people your story, and you need to tell them the right story, or they just tune you out. How do you do this? With a little bit of strategy.

Strategy is going to be different for each person, and it's something you can develop on your own, in conjunction with your firm's marketing department, or with the assistance of a professional consultant. The idea is to determine the goals for what you want to achieve with your content – do you want to be known as a thought leader? Are you trying to build business in a new niche area? Do you want to increase your speaking opportunities in your practice area? Do you want to have more media mentions? These goals should be specific and measurable.

Once you know what your goals are, you can identify the audience or audiences that you want to reach, and develop a sample persona – in doing so, it's helpful to talk to someone who is representative of the type of person you want to reach with your content and ask them what they want from it. What's most helpful in the message you deliver and the way you deliver it? Do they prefer blogs, tweets, curated content from other sources, video, etc.?

Each stage helps you to drill down a bit further so that you can ultimately get to some action steps to be taking – you’ll know where to focus your content in terms of platforms, because you’ll know where your audience hangs out and consumes their content. Remember: you want to go to THEM, not make them come to YOU. You’ll know what types of content to produce because you’ve asked them. You’ll have an idea of how often they want to read or watch your content, what issues are most pressing to them. And then tracking and reviewing the data on a regular and ongoing basis will help you to consistently refine and deliver the strongest content to your audience so that they return to you again and again.

These days, it may feel like everyone is doing content marketing (and almost everyone is). And that may make it seem like a futile effort, to just add more noise to the pile. But with strategy, data, technology, and strong storytelling, you can be that signal that Lurssen talks about to rise above the noise and stand out.