

Almost Time News

The 2022 Essays

[Handwritten text in cursive script, partially obscured by a pen and a cup of coffee.]

Christopher S. Penn

Introduction

Here we stand at the end of another year, and what a year it's been. Sometimes, I feel like we say that at the end of every year, but as each year's twists and turns grow larger and more complex, we earn that expression even more.

What. A. Year.

Before we dig into the year that was, a bit of housekeeping. **First, a content warning/trigger warning.** My newsletter is my letter to you, each week. As such, it's not always just about marketing or data or analytics. In 2022, we talked about relevant political issues like abortion, geo-politics like Ukraine, scientific issues like COVID, and socioeconomic issues like AI's impact on society. I tend to approach these issues from a data-driven, fact-driven perspective and a liberal social mindset, so if you're easily triggered by conflicting/differing points of view, this is probably not the book for you to read.

I've organized this book in chronological order from when the essays were published as opposed to topics, mainly because that's how I have the data stored. If you're reading this on the device of your choice, chances are you can hit the find function and find specific topics and keywords if there's one specific thing you're interested in reading about.

Finally, most of my newsletter essays are more why/what essays, as opposed to how, so if you've picked this up looking for very specific "how to" instructions, this is also not the book for you. My daily YouTube videos would probably be a better fit for that information.

Okay, so if you're still here, let's dig into the year that was, and accept my thanks for being a loyal reader, whether this is your first issue or you've been reading since the newsletter started in 2010.

Christopher Penn

18 December 2022

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2022-01-02 : Goal Setting for 2022

Wherever you are, whatever your belief system, I hope that you have a chance to rest this holiday season, gather together with people you care about, and refresh yourself for the year ahead. This past year was a blur, while 2020 felt like a slog, but there are some days when I still think it's March 657, 2020.

This week and next, the newsletter will be a little shorter. Actually, a lot shorter, because we all want to enjoy the holidays as best as we can. One interesting exercise I think worth considering is a non-work catalog of the year. We all do reviews of some kind, be it quarterly reviews, annual reviews, etc. and we have - or should have - a decent sense of where we are in our professional lives.

So... when was the last time you gave yourself a non-professional annual review?

Look at the things we ask on annual reviews, like the GOOD framework from Quantum Workplace:

- **Goals:** What goals did you set out for the year? Did you achieve them?
- **Obstacles:** What things stood in the way of your goals? Were you able to work around them?
- **Opportunities:** What did you pursue for learning and professional development to increase your skills?
- **Decisions:** What will you do more of next year? What will you do less of?

That framework is useful for the workplace, but also really useful for the rest of your life.

Where are you with your friendships and relationships? What goals, obstacles, opportunities, and decisions did you have this past year? For

example, I've doubled down on Slack and Discord and participating in some creative communities that have really nurtured my soul, something essential during the last two years.

Where are you with your personal finances? What goals, obstacles, opportunities, and decisions did you have this past year? For example, I set some saving goals this year that I managed to hit.

Where are you with your spiritual life? What goals, obstacles, opportunities, and decisions did you have this past year? For example, I set a goal to do more meditation, and missed that goal.

Where are you with your health? What goals, obstacles, opportunities, and decisions did you have this past year? I set a goal this past year to run a 5K. Not only did I do that, I managed to improve my fitness so much that I basically run a 5K every weekend.

Where are you with your self-expression? What goals, obstacles, opportunities, and decisions did you have this past year? For example, I started doing more creative writing in 2020 and wanted to continue in 2021, and I managed to do quite a bit more, exceeding my goal.

Before we can talk about our goals and plans for the next year, we need to look at the year that was. We need to do our performance review for the non-work parts of our life - and if it turns out that we got a bad review, that's okay. That's the place we start for building a better plan for the next year, and unlike a job where a bad review just gets us fired, a bad review in our personal lives is the blueprint for what's next for us.

Take the time if you can to do this review for yourself and see how 2021 went for you for everything outside your work.

2022-01-09 : Two Sets of Obstacles

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about giving yourself an annual review. Last week, we talked about setting goals. This week, let's talk about obstacles.

Obstacles are those things which get in the way of you achieving your goals, and they come in two flavors, external and internal. To achieve our goals, we have to overcome both sets.

External obstacles are pretty clear cut most of the time. They're conditions external to us that make it tougher to achieve our goals. If you've got a goal to make a million dollars in income this year and you're working at a wage of 7.25 an hour, your job is an external obstacle to achieving your goal. There simply aren't enough hours in the year for you to make a million dollars, so you can't achieve your goal that way.

The way I define an external obstacle is something you don't really have control over in any significant way. It's outside of you, in the external world. Yes, you can absolutely change jobs, in the example above, but you can't change the job itself. In business, if you have a goal of earning a million dollars in revenue for the year and your clients are paying you \$500 a month, and you have 5 clients, you're not going to achieve your goal. Yes, you can make changes but you can't fundamentally turn \$500/month clients into \$50,000/month clients in a reasonable timeframe.

Internal obstacles are different - these are things you do have control over. On a personal level, these are the attributes you possess which may be counterproductive to achieving your goal. If you want to make a million dollars but you don't want to work hard, that personality attribute is an obstacle. There may still be ways for you to achieve your goal, but you're swimming upstream against yourself. If you want rewarding interpersonal friendships and relationships but you have a

cargo plane's worth of unresolved trauma, that may be an internal obstacle to your goal.

On a business and professional level, if the fear you have of leaving your job outweighs the potential reward of finding a job better suited to you, that fear is an internal obstacle. If your company wants to generate a million dollars of revenue and you have unproductive workers, that's an internal obstacle. However, unlike external obstacles, you have more control over these internal obstacles.

Chances are, if your goal is big enough, bold enough, audacious enough, you will have both internal and external obstacles in your way. For example, if you want to improve your fitness levels, you need a way to do that - which may be constrained by resources - and you need the internal motivation to do that. External and internal obstacles exist in the way of your goal.

What makes obstacles especially challenging is their opacity. We may set out to achieve a goal and be discouraged along the way - but we may not know why, may not be able to see clearly why we fell short of our goal. So, what we need to do is list out in great detail what the internal and external obstacles are. Take the goal you set from last week's newsletter and make a bullet-point list of the external and internal obstacles which would stand in the way of achieving that goal.

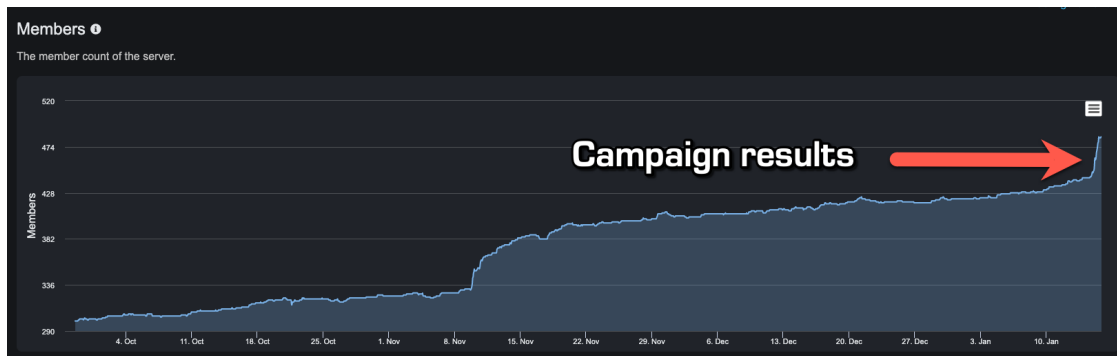
Then, start thinking about what strategies and tactics you could use to slowly dissolve those obstacles, make them less challenging. How could you deplete their power to stand in your way? By forcing transparency on your obstacles, you reduce their ability to hinder you and tame their size from mythical beasts to annoying pests.

2022-01-16 : When Social Media Works

For those of us who feel like social media marketing is like pushing a boulder uphill repeatedly, it can seriously call into question whether or not unpaid social media is worth it. Can anyone achieve any level of success with unpaid social media?

The answer is an unequivocal yes.

It's possible for social media channels to drive enormous amounts of traffic and conversions. I witnessed this firsthand on a volunteer campaign I was helping to operate this weekend; the goal was to drive 100 new members to a non-profit organization's Discord server in the next 12 months. With just basic content creation and outreach to influencers on the overall cause's hashtag, they achieved that result in 2 days:



Social media campaign results

How? How could such a thing be possible? It comes down to one thing: **passion.**

The crowd this organization was trying to reach didn't really have a home, a community, a place to gather online. Large groups of people simply shared content and connected with each other ad hoc using hashtags and popular personalities. Once this group of very passionate people found a place to call home, they flocked to it with abandon.

Now, is this pace sustainable? No. This campaign took advantage of a few concurrent factors:

- There wasn't a single strong community already, so this was an audience looking for a community. If there had been an existing strong community, this campaign would have done poorly.
- The fans of this cause are absolutely rabid, and thus will flock to nearly anything with a connection to their cause.
- Other than joining the community (which is free), there's no other substantial call to action, so the barrier to entry and resistance is already low.

That said, what could we learn from this, as marketers? If we're trying to create traction for something we're promoting, what does this teach us?

By far, **the most critical factor is that passion**, that emotional energy. With it, your marketing creative and your campaign has to work less hard to achieve the same results as something which lacks emotional investment. If what your brand and campaign doesn't have that kind of emotional energy, figure out some way to create it, to find purpose behind what you're doing that's bigger than just your company's success.

Second, **is there a community for what you do already out there?** If not, and there are people searching for a community, do your best to identify and reach out to them. That group of people seeking a focal point for their energy could be the jump start you need to build a community of your own.

Third, if your audience has passion and energy, **chances are you won't need budget** - at least, not very much of it. People who are emotionally motivated to seek out a collective, to find and meet up with others like them need little encouragement to take action. Other than building basic awareness, as a marketer you don't really need to do anything

else.

Unpaid social media can work extremely well if you're working with an audience that already cares deeply about what you do, and you're the rallying point around that emotional investment. If you can create that investment, that care, or nurture it if it's already there, unpaid social media can still be a powerful marketing tool.

2022-01-23 : Newsletter Format

I was wondering something... this week, as you remember, I published our quarterly ad as a video, and hundreds of you viewed it (thank you!). That got me thinking... would you also like this newsletter in multiple formats?

Let's take a quick poll. Just click on your preferred format below - and you can click more than one. There's no form to fill out or anything, this is literally the voting process.

- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in **text** format »](#)
- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in **audio** format »](#)
- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in **video** format »](#)

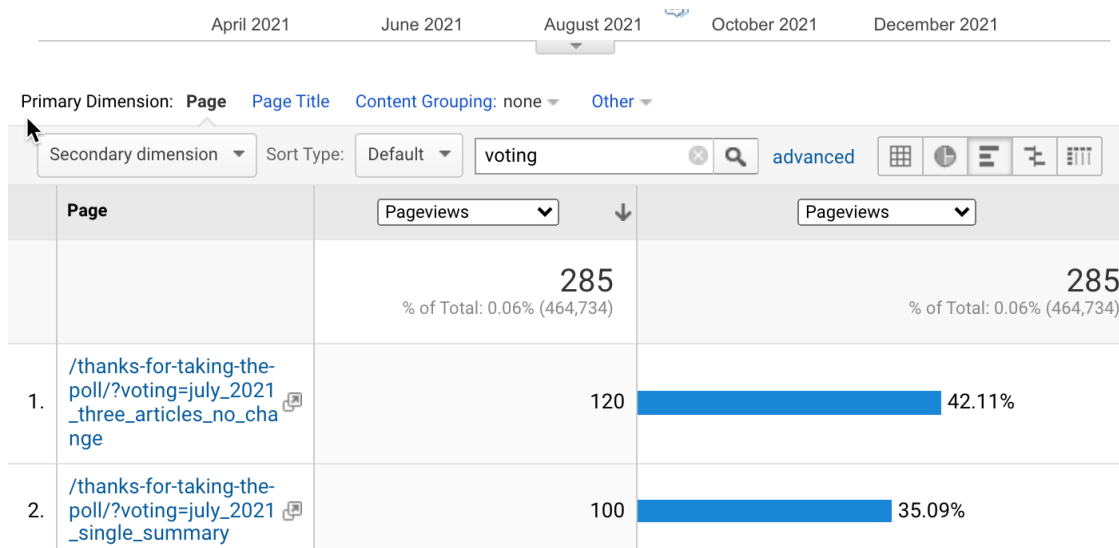
I'm curious to see what your answers are.

A little behind the scenes too: what I've done to make a super simple poll is send every option to the same landing page, but each option has a unique query parameter (that thing after the question mark in the URL):

```
- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in text format &raquo;]
(https://www.christopherspenn.com/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=text-newsletter)
- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in audio format &raquo;]
(https://www.christopherspenn.com/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=audio-newsletter)
- [Click/tap here to vote for this newsletter in video format &raquo;]
(https://www.christopherspenn.com/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=video-newsletter)
```

Voting options behind the scenes

Once you arrive on my website, Google Analytics reads the URL, ingests its tags (UTM tracking codes), and then records the rest of the information. That means anything I put on the URL also gets recorded. Here's an example from last year:



Voting example

You can see the results of the poll right in Google Analytics, which keeps things very easy and straightforward.

Why wouldn't I just rely on the click tracking in my email marketing software? Because we know that open and click tracking in email marketing are a little squishy. I can still do that tracking there, but Google Analytics filters out most bots and spiders if you've turned that setting on. That means that the data I get in Google Analytics should be a little more reliable and human.

Why is email marketing click tracking data squishy? Some folks have mail systems and servers that pre-fetch mail. Apple's Mail Privacy Protection does this, which badly skews open rates. In businesses, companies that use high-end firewalls and other cybersecurity protections often have servers that will open and click on every link in an incoming email to check it for malware and viruses. That means, as an email marketer, you may see higher click-through rates than are actually real.

So that's why I use this particular method for polls in my email newsletters. It's the least amount of work for you and my best effort at reliable data for me. Feel free to use this technique in your own email

marketing!

2022-01-30 : Newsletter Format Results

Well, this was a surprise. I was expecting the vast majority of you to vote for a text-only newsletter, and a handful to vote for rich media formats like audio and video. Instead, this happened:

Page		Pageviews	Pageviews
		10,520 % of Total: 18.52% (56,796)	10,520 % of Total: 18.52% (56,796)
1.	/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=text-newsletter	4,026	38.27%
2.	/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=audio-newsletter	3,332	31.67%
3.	/thanks-for-taking-the-poll/?voting=video-newsletter	3,162	30.06%

Newsletter poll results

While a text newsletter is still your preferred format, the other two formats weren't as far behind as I expected.

So, what happens next? Here's the trick with results like this. These results are statistically significant. There is a clear "winner", a clear choice you've made. If we were naive marketers, I'd declare text newsletters the winning format and carry on.

But we're not. We're experienced marketers, and when we see results like this, we have to stop and think. More than a third of you said text as a format. Almost a third said audio, and just under a third said video.

Which means that if I produced only a text newsletter format, I'd be disappointing two thirds of you. So, we'll give this a try and see what you think.

By the way, there's a really important lesson in here, especially if you're doing lots of testing. This is effectively an A/B test of sorts - well, A/B/C, I suppose, since the poll has three options. What would happen if I declared A the winner and ignored the preferences of B and C? I'd be focusing on pleasing a minority of you, at the expense of the majority.

Is that sound? Is that logical? No, of course not. No one would ever advise you to annoy 61.7% of your customer base, but if I chose only A and ignored B and C, I'd be doing exactly that.

And yet, we and our marketing software doing that every single day, aren't we? Every time we set up a website optimization test or an email test and we get a 55/45 or a 60/40 split and we declare a "winner", we are automatically saying the preferences of the minority don't matter - even when that minority is a sizable portion of our audience.

What if... there were more buyers in B than A? What if the people who chose A were terrible customers and the people who chose B were great customers?

The only time I'd feel comfortable declaring winners and ignoring the preferences of the non-winners is if there was an overwhelming majority, like a 95/5 split. And even then, I might want to dig into who's in the 5% to see what, if anything, makes that population behave differently.

In the meantime, we're going to try this experiment. For the next few issues, I'm going to see what it will take to make at least some of it available by video and audio (because making video implicitly means making audio) and see how you react to it. If the videos and audio downloads get no views and listens, then we'll just stick with text. On the other hand, if they take off wildly, I'll know to keep doing them. Either way, we'll use data to drive the decision-making process.

I hope you see how this process should inform your data-driven marketing as well.

2022-02-06 : Two Advancements in Applied AI

Let's talk about two recent advancements in AI that have impressed me greatly in recent days. First, let's talk about natural language generation. For about a year and a half, I've been using the GPT-J-6B model from Eleuthera AI for generating text. It's a powerful model that creates coherent, readable text given a prompt. This past week, Eleuthera released their newest model, GPT-NeoX-20B, a model that's more than 3 times the size and capability than the previous model. It does very well on a bunch of technical benchmarks, but the real question is, how well does it write compared to prior models?

The answer is - really well. Really, really well. It's still constrained by the text it's trained on, so it will never generate works that are above and beyond that training data, but it's getting much better at generating content similar to what's in the training dataset. Press releases? It has those down now. News articles? Corporate boilerplate? All these types of content are now well within its capabilities.

Let's look at a quick example, a press release prompt. I'm going to make up one entirely here and we'll see what the machines write.

Prompt:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Boston, MA, February 6, 2022— Trust Insights Inc., a management consulting and analytics firm based in Boston, is pleased to announce its newest product line, the Marketing Analysis Pack. The Marketing Analysis Pack provides forward-thinking companies with key analytics and insights about the top of their marketing funnel to more quickly make data-driven decisions.

Katie Robbert, CEO of Trust Insights, remarked, “We are

Here’s what the previous model, the J-6B model, came up with. I’ve trimmed it for space’s sake.

Katie Robbert, CEO of Trust Insights, remarked, “We are excited to launch the Marketing Analysis Pack because we are seeing an increase in demand for more actionable insights to make marketing decisions, especially in the context of big data.” She continued, “The Marketing Analysis Pack can help companies build an intelligent marketing strategy to more efficiently capture leads and improve conversion.”

Trust Insights’ Marketing Analysis Pack is comprised of four modules:

Lead Management Module

The Lead Management Module provides insight into your lead management strategies, how they are working, and how you can improve them. You will learn how to predict, quantify, and target your leads better, and this will allow you to optimize your marketing spend and cut costs while also improving lead generation and conversion.

That’s not bad, right?

Let’s see what the new NeoX-20B model came up with.

Katie Robbert, CEO of Trust Insights, remarked, “We are excited about the opportunity to provide marketing teams with a toolset that provides insights and information they need to be successful in this increasingly competitive market.”

According to a 2019 CMO survey, 86% of marketers plan to increase budgets on paid search and social media ads in 2020, but only 10% of marketing teams actually have the analytics necessary to make informed business decisions. In fact, only 19% of marketing departments use data to optimize their campaigns and budgets. As a result, marketers are making the wrong decisions about their marketing programs.

“The Marketing Analysis Pack provides the analytics needed for companies to make data-driven marketing and sales decisions,” explained Robbert. “The pack is designed with the needs of B2C marketers in mind, but it is adaptable enough to support the needs of B2B marketers.”

The Marketing Analysis Pack includes a dashboard that allows users to track and view data from Google, Facebook, and other platforms, including ad performance, brand lift, audience insights, and social media sentiment. Additionally, users can see the most active keywords, ads, and social media posts, and can view social media sentiment, and even create a list of influencers that are the most engaged on each social network.

Both models spit out usable content, especially for a press release. The 6B model is clearly cribbing from some other product or service, though I couldn't tell you what. The 20B model appears to be writing more original text (though it's still cribbing from somewhere, as evidenced by the incorrect dates), and really does a great job capturing the tone of a press release and the CEO quote.

Impressive, right? It's not good enough to write completely original content or start with a minimal prompt, but it's definitely good enough for saving you a lot of time on first drafts - especially the newer model. That said, neither entry is factually correct; if we were going to use this, we'd have to rewrite those portions for what the analysis pack actually is. But on balance, this is terrific writing for a machine.

That's the first tool of note. The second is a fully commercial, in-market

tool called DeepL. In my work and experimentation with newer social networks like Discord, one of the persistent issues I have is that there are a lot of people on the planet who don't speak my language, and I don't speak theirs. Over the years, tools like Google Translate have evolved our translation skills so that we can be understood by others in their language. However, there's always room for improvement - and that's what DeepL is, an improvement. It supports far fewer languages than Google does, but it does a better job of converting that language into something not only readable, but understandable.

Let's take this short passage of fiction in Danish by author Line Jensen:

Men du skal vide, at alt jeg sagde til dig, var det jeg mente. Jeg var altid ærlig overfor dig - måske endda mere, end jeg var overfor mig selv til tider. Og jeg ville bare ønske, at du havde indset, at du ikke kunne 'fikse' mig, fordi jeg var aldrig rigtig helt ødelagt. Men du kan heller ikke omgå mig, bare fordi, at du er bange for at være alene - det er ikke fair overfor hverken mig eller dig. Du fortjente ikke at kende mig, på den måde, som jeg tillod. Du fortjente ikke at kende mig overhovedet. Jeg er bare ked af, at jeg ikke opdagede tidligere, at jeg kun eksisterede i din verden, når du havde brug for noget. Måske, er det bare mig, som tænker for meget, og er for dum til at finde det rigtige svar, men... Hvorfor brugte du så meget tid på mig, og med mig, hvis ikke du havde intentioner om at blive i mit liv? Hvis din ide af 'farvel', var at ignorere mig, indtil jeg gav op, så tillykke. Du har vundet, fordi jeg kan ikke længere holde til at kæmpe for dig. Du ignorere mig, som om det ikke betyder noget, men når jeg så meget som forsøger at have en normal dag, uden at snakke med dig, så kan jeg aldrig holde op med at tænke på dig, og det er ret så frustrerende. Mine følelser raser lige for tiden mellem fortvivlelse, vrede, uretfærdighed, hævnlyst, men mest af alt; hjertesorg.

I chose fiction, and this passage in particular, because it's much more colloquial than more formal business writing. This character's speech is very much like how a regular person would speak or write. Let's see how the machines did.

Here's Google Translate:

But you must know that everything I said to you was what I meant. I was always honest with you - maybe even more than I was with myself at times. And I just wish you had realized that you could not 'fix' me because I was never really completely ruined. But you can not associate with me either, just because you're afraid of being alone - it's not fair to either me or you. You did not deserve to know me, in the way I allowed. You did not deserve to know me at all. I'm just sorry I did not discover earlier that I only existed in your world when you needed something. Maybe, it's just me who thinks too much, and is too stupid to find the right answer, but... Why did you spend so much time on me, and with me, if you had no intentions of staying in my life? If your idea of 'goodbye' was to ignore me until I gave up, then congratulations. You have won because I can no longer stand to fight for you. You ignore me as if it does not matter, but when I'm so much as trying to have a normal day, without talking to you, I can never stop thinking about you, and that's pretty frustrating. My emotions are currently raging between despair, anger, injustice, vengeance, but most of all; heartache.

And here's DeepL:

But I want you to know that everything I said to you was what I meant. I was always honest with you - perhaps even more than I was with myself at times. And I just wish you had realized that you couldn't 'fix' me, because I was never really all that broken. But you can't be around me either just because you're afraid to be alone - that's not fair to me or to you. You didn't deserve to know me the way I allowed you to. You didn't deserve to know me at all. I'm just sorry I didn't realize sooner that I only existed in your world when you needed something. Maybe, it's just me thinking too much, and being too stupid to find the right answer, but... Why did you spend so much time on me, and with me, if you had no intentions of staying in my life? If your idea of 'goodbye' was to ignore me until I gave up, then congratulations. You've won, because I can't stand fighting for you anymore. You ignore me like it doesn't matter, but when I so much as try to have a normal day without talking to you, I can never stop thinking about you, and it's pretty frustrating. My emotions are raging right now between despair, anger, injustice, vindictiveness, but most of all;

heartbreak.

We see that DeepL produces output which is less stilted, less overly-formal. It's more how the author's character meant to sound and probably did sound in the original.

So What's the Takeaway Here?

These two language tasks - language creation and language translation - are tasks we have to do often, depending on our line of work. In the past, both tasks had been attempted by AI with... well, not great results. A few years ago, advances in neural networks and deep learning brought those tasks from not great to mediocre to not bad, and now we're at a point where they're pretty good. You don't need to be a data scientist to realize the trajectory of improvement here is substantial - and in a relatively short period of time.

This means two things for you. First, you should be evaluating AI solutions for specific, narrow tasks in your organization and deploying it to fulfill those tasks as rapidly as possible. If, for example, you crank out press releases, AI should be doing all your first drafts now. If you make captions in videos for different language markets, AI should be doing all the translations of those captions. I did a video recently for a friend in French and they said the translation was spot on, helping me be more understandable in their language. For fun, I've put Spanish captions into this video as an example. Is the language translation perfect? No. Is it usable? Absolutely.

Second, these tools open doors. If you have friends you've met online or at in-person events and your language isn't their native language, you now have a way to communicate with them easily. It won't be via voice in real-time, but you can absolutely hold a chat conversation in many common languages without needing to speak it and still be understood.

If you're working on developing a product description and you have no idea what to write about your product, you now have tools to do the first draft. The Marketing Analysis Pack I talked about above does exist, but we haven't gotten around to building the marketing for it yet. Those fake press releases that AI generated have given me a good first draft, a good starting point for how we might want to actually talk about them.

AI is a superpower of sorts. With nothing more than apps on your phone or desktop computer, you can do more, create more, learn more, communicate more. You can exceed your own limits as a person. I can't read Danish, but AI can. I can't write an entire press release in 30 seconds, but AI can. With these powers, we can dramatically increase what we're capable of as people.

2022-02-13 : Google Analytics and Privacy Laws

This past week, we saw in the news that Google Analytics™ in its current form was ruled non-compliant with GDPR. [According to the International Association of Privacy Professionals](#):

Just weeks after the Austrian Data Protection Authority's ruling that Google Analytics use violates the EU General Data Protection Regulation, France's data protection authority, the Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés, has reached a similar decision.

In its decision, the CNIL said data collection and transfers to the United States using Google Analytics "are illegal," violating Article 44 of the GDPR. The CNIL ordered an unidentified French website manager to bring its processing into compliance with the GDPR within one month and stop using the service under current conditions, if necessary.

The CNIL said transfers to the United States "are currently not sufficiently regulated" and the absence of an EU-U.S. adequacy decision presents "a risk for French website users who use this service and whose data is exported." The authority noted additional measures taken by Google to regulate Google Analytics data transfers "are not sufficient to exclude the accessibility of this data for US intelligence services."

The CNIL said its investigation "also extends to other tools used by sites that result in the transfer of data of European Internet users to the United States," adding, "Corrective measures in this respect may be adopted in the near future."

What does this mean for us, given that increased privacy laws came into effect this year (such as California's CPRA, whose enforcement mechanisms take effect next year but the scope of data began January

1, 2022)? In short, it means several things.

The key paragraph in the story from IAPP is the final part of the excerpt above. **It's not just Google Analytics™ that's in question here.** It's every piece of MarTech software that transfers data across borders. If you use Hubspot, Salesforce, Google Analytics, Adobe Analytics... you name it, if data is crossing borders, it's likely at some point to run afoul of the law.

Companies need to be thinking about first-party analytics solutions.

First-party analytics solutions are software packages that you host yourself, on your own servers, collecting data and not transferring it to any other entity (even Google). Open source solutions such as Matomo may fit the bill, as they are entirely self-hosted; they are capable of meeting the strictest privacy requirements, including highly-regulated industries. Remember though, the key to compliance here is that you must host and maintain the servers in your own IT architecture so that the data you collect never leaves your possession.

In the longer term, we marketers must make the pivot away from collecting personal information and focusing on behavioral information. This is something I've been saying since 2017, when we all saw the final form GDPR would take. Do we need to know someone's age or gender or ethnicity or religion? Do we need to know their Spotify favorites or their sexual orientation or the last movie they watched on Netflix? No. What we need to know are the behavioral buying signals to look for. For example, if someone visits your products page, your about page, and engages with your chatbot, that could be a behavioral signal that the person - whoever they are - has buying intent. That in turn should trigger marketing technology solutions to engage them further.

Here's the real secret, the real key to making all this work. **The one thing that makes all privacy legislation and law moot is affirmative consent.** If a consumer knowingly and willingly gives us their information and consent to use it for marketing purposes, no law can

touch us as long as we have a paper trail that will stand up in a court of law. So, how do we earn that consent? The same way you earn any consent: by providing much more value than you take, so much that the consumer is eager and happy to give you their information. They WANT to hear from you. They look forward to your emails. They have conversations with you.

Pivoting to a marketing strategy which involves actually making customers happy is going to be more costly in the short term but will return multiples on your investment in the long term. You'll have very few issues with privacy laws. You'll have an easy time providing proof in a court of law. And most of all, you'll have happy prospects and customers, people who will willingly share your marketing with others and do part of your marketing for you. You need very few analytics services when customers are throwing information at you as fast and as fully as possible, eager and excited to hear from you.

That's the end state we should all be aiming for, and forward thinking companies and marketing leaders should be working towards that end state with as much investment as possible.

2022-02-20 : Vertical and Horizontal Skills

I was having a chat with my oldest child today as they're starting to think about higher education, postsecondary education. They asked what I thought they should study, and I suggested they think about which horizontal skills they enjoy the most.

For clarity, let's define these terms. When we think of verticals, we think of industries. Accounting. Human Resources. Marketing. Manufacturing. If you look at a data source like the NAICS code index, everything on that list is a vertical, from agriculture to zookeeping.

When we study in university or in professional development and training, very often we're learning vertical skills. How to be a better accountant. How to improve our carpentry skills. These vertical skills are important, parts of our trade skills. How proficient we are dictates to a fair degree how successful we are. Someone really bad at marketing probably won't be in the marketing profession for long. Vertical knowledge applies only in that particular vertical industry.

Horizontal skills, on the other hand, are skills that cross industries. Writing. Audio composition. Video. Management. Psychology. These skills are nearly universal, and are a substantial boost to our careers. Someone who's an excellent writer can do well in many, many verticals. In today's always on, always watching world, someone who can make great video will do well in tons of different industries. Someone with a strong understanding of mathematics and statistics can apply that knowledge in many different ways and situations. Horizontal knowledge applies broadly with relatively little change to the core essence across many industries.

I counsel my kid to think about studying horizontal skills for two reasons. First, they're obviously very transferable. Someone who's good at managing other people or managing projects can work in pretty much any industry and be successful, from industrial concrete

to artificial intelligence to adult entertainment. Everyone needs good managers to help make the workforce work better. Everyone needs good project management to ensure things get done on time and under budget.

But here's the real secret: horizontal skills are somewhat harder to build automation for, and really difficult for artificial intelligence to copy effectively. Why? Because horizontal skills are influenced by the vertical they're placed in, but the important knowledge isn't stored in the vertical. For example, let's take being a good writer. Machines are developing decent writing skills, as we talked about a couple of issues ago. That said, they still struggle with very specific writing tasks without a lot of training, and they can't really write anything original. Everything that a machine writes is synthesized from prior writing it's learned from.

Thus, if you want a machine to write great technical papers in, say, vacu-formed plastics, you will need to tune an existing model on that topic with lots of good content about that topic - and that may not exist. At least not enough in quantity to really train a machine well.

Let's take audio engineering. A machine can learn some of the tactical basics of audio engineering, like how to remove noise or how to compress audio to a certain specification. Many commercial audio packages like Adobe Audition have these capabilities baked right in. But we are still far from the ability to take raw audio of any kind and have a machine spit out a polished product with no intervention because the rules change from vertical to vertical, application to application. What is great audio engineering for a spoken word podcast would horrifically mangle a musical piece. What sounds great for engineering on classical music is going to sound downright peculiar for jazz. And yet every company that's trying out a podcast needs some help, and that requires the horizontal skill of audio engineering.

Horizontal skills have a ton of variation because they change from industry to industry, from application to application. We humans are

really good at adapting to different generalizations, and our machine counterparts are still a long way off from being able to transfer skills so easily. So when I tell my child about what they might want to think about studying, I'm suggesting horizontal skills as a way to future-proof their career as best as possible for the years to come.

So here's my question to you. What vertical skills do you have? What horizontal skills do you have? **And how much of your professional development and training efforts do you invest in each?** They're both important, but horizontal skills are a little more future-proof, so make sure your investment in yourself reflects that.

2022-02-27 : Special Ukraine Edition

No marketing talk this week.

Let's start with the calls to action first, because these are the most important.

If you want to help Ukraine militarily, [the National Bank of Ukraine has a special fund set up. Instructions for donations are here](#); you will need some background in how to do SWIFT transfers. It doesn't take long, but it does take a wire transfer service. This is the program I chose to donate to, mainly because it's one of the few institutions I was able to easily verify was legit.

If you want to help Ukraine non-militarily, [the Red Cross and Red Crescent of Ukraine is in urgent need of donations for helping the injured](#).

What else can you do to help Ukraine? If you live in a nation where your government officials are elected and listen to the people, contact your elected officials and urge the strongest financial sanctions against the Putin government, including the removal of Russia from the SWIFT financial system. Keep doing this regularly.

If you have friends or colleagues who are affected by the invasion, be sure to check in on them and offer your support.

And if you have a platform of any size - from 50 followers on Twitter to millions on YouTube, please help spread the word about the ways we can help.

Go do these things first.

The rest of this newsletter is political in nature, so feel free to skip

this week if that's not your thing.

Where Do You Get Reliable Information About the Invasion?

The top account on Twitter I've been following for vetted, fact checked, reliable information is the [UK Ministry of Defence](#). They've been publishing regular updates since the start of the invasion, and it's been a great source of information that someone with expertise has validated.

Other accounts worth following include [ELINTnews](#), former US intelligence officer [Bob Gourley's Twitter list](#), and Ukraine [President Zelenskyy's personal Twitter](#).

Why Do I Care?

The reason I care about Ukraine and the invasion by the Putin government is more than just because it's morally repugnant, though that's reason enough.

It all started with one of my guiltless pleasures, watching the international singing competition show The Voice. I enjoy seeing variants of this show from all around the world and you can even get a hint of a nation's character from the contestants and judges. One of the versions that always caught my ear for both talent and character was [Ukraine's edition](#), and I started following the various, very entertaining judges and contestants.

Over the years, that made me more and more curious about Ukraine as a nation and its people and culture. The power of AI and translation software meant that previously inaccessible content and culture was understandable to me. Then I learned that a fair number of people in our field - marketing - have strong Ukrainian roots as well. AHREFS, the SEO tool, started in Ukraine. OWOX, the business intelligence tool, is Ukrainian. Grammarly is Ukrainian. I've gotten to know and become friends with people from Ukraine at these companies and in general; one of my neighbors is from Cherkasy, on the Dneiper River.

For me, Ukraine isn't an abstract concept or a place on a map. It's represented by real people I know, interact with, and value in my life. When the invasion began, I found myself messaging Ukrainian friends and colleagues on LinkedIn and Instagram. Some replied they were safe. Some, I haven't heard from yet. I hope I do.

Again, one shouldn't need that level of personal involvement to care about Putin's blatant violation of international law any more than we should need to know the victim of a mugging in order to be outraged that a criminal committed a crime. But that's what makes me more emotionally involved in this particular instance, and why I'm so avidly in support of Ukraine's fight to defend itself.

Why Should You Care?

Two reasons. First, left unchecked, Putin won't stop at Ukraine. He's made no secret of the fact that he wants to restore the borders of the Soviet Union. That's bad for Europe and the global economy. Also, the last time we heard about a tyrant demanding "buffer space", it was called *lebensraum* and it was 1938. We didn't step in soon enough then, either, as a global coalition. We need to not make the same mistake again. Those whose motto has been "never again" - that is now. Putin must be stopped by any means necessary.

Second, Putin and his government has been responsible for and had a hand in destabilizing many nations over the past two decades, from [Brexit](#) to [COVID and vaccine disinformation \(which was basically biological warfare against nations like my own\)](#) to [Cambridge Analytica and election interference](#) to [funding hacking groups attacking businesses and governments around the world](#). Senator Mitt Romney famously and correctly said that [Putin's government remains the greatest geopolitical threat of modern times](#); containing Putin and his regime should be a global priority.

Please join me in taking action to support Ukraine through the links at

the top of this email, and for spreading the word about the ways people can help.

A Word About Russia

An important distinction in this conflict is that 100% of the blame, fault, anger, and punishment should be directed at the government of Vladimir Putin and the man himself, including his oligarch buddies. The Putin government is not freely elected, and does not represent or speak for a substantial number of Russian citizens, as evidenced by the mass protests this week in major Russian cities.

Do not confuse the two. Many, many Russian people - including some of our colleagues and friends - vehemently oppose the invasion of Ukraine and if they had the ability to force their government to withdraw, they would. Many have tried in protest this week only to be arrested; we have no idea what's become of them under the fascist regime. Be clear when you're talking about the invasion that it's the Russian government or the Putin government at fault, not the Russian people as a whole.

2022-03-06 : Power

One of the most common sentiments during the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the people on the outside goes a bit like this:



Feeling powerless

Is this accurate? Are we really powerless? In one sense, perhaps. Very few people have the ability to mobilize a nation's military beyond national leaders, so our ability to directly intervene is low. A few folks with prior military experience are headed over to Ukraine to fight against the Russian military.

So, is that it? Are we really so powerless?

Of course not. But we're led to believe so, in part because we've forgotten what power is. Power is like energy. It comes in two flavors -

potential and kinetic. Potential energy is energy stored up. It's potential not yet realized. Kinetic is energy in motion, unleashed, put to work. The same is true of our power as individuals. Most of the time, we're not using ours. We're not expressing ourselves, sharing our voice, doing, creating. Most of the time we're more passive. We're receiving, listening, consuming.

Think about your relationship with content. How much content do you create versus how much content you consume? We spend the vast majority of time consuming, of giving our attention - which is power itself - to someone else, instead of focusing our power on our own creations and inspiring other people with our creations. The act of creation is an act of expressing your power, of turning potential into action. Even just writing a single tweet is an act of expression, putting your power to work.

If you were suffering, and someone posted a message in support of you, how would that make you feel? Even if you didn't know the person, even if you didn't have a relationship with that person, just being seen, feeling seen can help. Don't believe that? Imagine the same suffering, but feeling alone and abandoned.

The irony is that as marketers, we need people to express their power and yet we do such a poor job of encouraging it. What does every social media newsfeed algorithm weight heavily? Engagement. Likes. Shares. COMMENTS. When someone comments, they express themselves, they express their power at least a tiny little bit. We need that for our social media channels to work. We need people to switch from being passive consumers to active creators, even if the act of creation is little more than "LOL OK" on a post.

When you feel powerless in a situation - any situation - and you want that feeling to go away, create. Create something. Create anything. Write a song. Paint a canvas. Sing. Write a paragraph. Draw. Dance. Speak. Express yourself. Bring what's inside your head out into the world in a tangible form so that other people can benefit from it, be it 5

people or 5 billion people. For people who are suffering, showing them that you see them, that you acknowledge them, that you fight for them in the best way you know how will help them at least a little. And as you become a better creator, you'll attract an audience. Your self-expression will earn you the power of attention, of awareness, perhaps even some fans. And then you use that power to do even more good in the world.

All power begins with creation and self-expression. Take the time while you can to sharpen your skills and unleash that power within you.

2022-03-13 : Influencer Relevance

As I was putting together my newest paper, [How to Identify TikTok Influencers](#), something leapt out at me around influencer identification.

Very often, influencer tools will look for prominent creators who achieve high levels of reach and engagement, and for the most part, most tools do an adequate job of this. However, what tends to happen is that prominent creators get highlighted most, even if the specific topic isn't their area of specialty.

For example, in the paper, I was looking at floral influencers on TikTok. Plenty of big names to be found, but these were folks who had made one or two pieces of content about the subject - and the rest of their content had nothing to do with floral stuff.

Now, that influencer's audience may engage with that specific content, but if the influencer in question is, say, a gaming influencer who happened to receive a floral bouquet for their birthday, then all things flowers are not something that audience is deeply interested in. It'd be like me - known mainly for analytics and data stuff - sharing content about flowers. It might be of curiosity, but it's not my primary value to you.

That alignment - or lack thereof - is the challenge with most influencer identification tools. Why? Because determining alignment takes more time and processing power for a lot of software, as well as some level of human intervention. Here's an example from the code I wrote to do influencer identification.

First, on a given topic, I talked to my friend [Manon Plas](#), a florist in Southern France, to understand what words and phrases people would associate with all things floral - bouquets, arrangements, specific names of flowers, etc. especially on TikTok. From there, I washed that

through an SEO tool to rank all the terms and find associated terms that we might have missed. Once I assembled that list, I built it into the topical relevance scoring. That counts up the total number of posts that an account has about the set of keywords and jargon and expresses it as a percentage.

What percentage of posts does a given account have about all things floral? If it's only a few percentage points, then you know that even though their content about flowers did well, that's probably not what their audience cares about. When it's much larger - 50%, 60%, 70% - then you know the audience of that influencer is there for the topic in question.

Because so many tools on the market can't do this, you'll need to do topical relevance on your own. The simplest, but least scalable way, is to use a tool to draw up a list of influencers for your topic of choice and manually check out each of their profiles to see how relevant their last 10-20 pieces of content are to your area of focus.

If you only do influencer campaigns sparingly, this approach will consume time and effort but probably not be too burdensome. If you do influencer campaigns frequently, or are an influencer marketing agency, then you'll want to automate this process to deliver better, more relevant results.

2022-03-20 : Sleeping on GA4

This past week, [Google let everyone know that as of July 1, 2023, the older Google Analytics 3/Universal Analytics would be retired and stop collecting data](#). This announcement, with a due date more than 15 months into the future, seemed to catch people by surprise, and I'm not sure why.

Two reasons that I can think of come to mind. **First, we've had the "new" Google Analytics 4 in some form for 3 years now.** It was Web + App for about 18 months, and then officially rolled out in October 2020 as Google Analytics 4. Granted, at the time it went into production, it still had many, many rough edges. But over time, many of those have been smoothed down. However, pandemic time being what it was, it's not surprising we lost sight of how long ago the product was rolled out. Sometimes it still feels like March, 2020, right?

Second, **Google Analytics 4 is a major head shift for people.**

Previously, Google Analytics was more or less one-stop shopping. It did a lot of things, but not necessarily any one thing especially well. You set up everything in it, rolled it out, and then reported on things from it. Google made clear from the very beginning that the best practice now is to use a combination of three tools that aim to be best at their specializations. Configuration and control is handled substantially by Google Tag Manager. Data ingestion, processing, and analysis - true analysis - is handled by Google Analytics 4. Reporting is handled in Google Data Studio.

None of this was a secret; Google has made clear their design intent for some years now. But because it's a major change, a lot of people slept on it. This is partially compounded by the fact that for the last 18 months, there was no compelling external motivation to move off Google Analytics 3. It was still working as well as ever.

So, we slept on it because there was no compelling reason to switch

and we lost track of the time. Understandable. Now what?

Now it's time to begin migrating. It's time to wake up and realize that in 2 years, our legacy Google Analytics data may not even be available, so the sooner we make the switch, the better. The sooner we have data in Google Analytics 4, the sooner we'll be able to do year over year reporting and analysis - because when you switch to GA 4, your existing data doesn't switch with you. Some folks will be especially fortunate, if you got Google Analytics 4 up and running beforehand - you've got back data from the day you turned it on.

I've got a short list of steps you should take to begin preparing for migration; [go follow the general outline and get started today](#). I would add this: the day you get GA 4 on your website and collecting data is the first day of year over year reporting you'll be able to do in a year's time. You may have slept on Google Analytics 4, but this is your wake up call.

And [if you need help with your migration, hit us up](#).

2022-03-27 : Do You Know Your Regulars?

How well do you know your regulars?

In marketing, we love to make things unnecessarily fancy. We talk about communities, influencers, marketing automation, lead scoring, purchase propensity - whole mouthfuls of corporate jargon that sanitize and dehumanize ordinary experiences. And yet, if we want to be successful as marketers, we have to understand ordinary experiences.

I was talking with my martial arts teacher, Mark Davis of the [Boston Martial Arts Center](#) the other week about businesses that survived the pandemic and businesses that did not. Two factors differentiated the survivors: **resilience** and **agility**. Businesses that had healthy margins and a war chest had **resilience**. They survived the first few weeks or months when everything was completely shut down. However, if their business models were predicated on the way the world used to be, eventually they ran out of money. Only those businesses which had **agility**, the ability to adapt to changing conditions, were able to continue on.

None of this is news, right? We've all read countless articles and case studies about business models that have been successful in the pandemic. But one of the most overlooked factors in these studies and articles is... our customers. In this case, one very specific kind of customer.

We have all sorts of fancy names for finding these customers and doing data analysis on them, techniques like RFM analysis - recency, frequency, and monetary value - but at the end of the day, we all know this customer by heart.

The regular.

When the regular walks into the restaurant, the staff greets us by name. “Hey Chris, your usual table?” and “Hey Chris, the usual?” when the server wanders over. They recognize us, they know us, and as long as we’re decent humans, they like us as much as we like them. We may not be the biggest spenders on a per-transaction basis but we have insane lifetime value because we’re there every week. Maybe even more than once a week.

We are loyal to these businesses as consumers, and in return, we get a level of personalization that other customers do not. These businesses - diners, restaurants, yoga studios, whatever - don’t have or need any special software or marketing technology to know who their regulars are or how to treat them. They know us because of our loyalty to them and what’s ultimately a very human experience.

Why does this matter? As I said, I was talking to my teacher and he said the reason our martial arts school survived when something like 70% of the competing schools in the area didn’t is because of the regulars. Longtime, loyal students who kept paying even as the services changed, as lessons went online for months at a time - that’s what kept the business afloat.

This is the key: not only does the business need agility, so does the customer. And **a customer’s agility is directly proportional to their loyalty**, to how much of a regular they are. Ask any restaurant that pivoted to online food delivery and takeout during the pandemic what kept them afloat. It wasn’t just changing business models - it was also that their regulars still wanted their food and were willing to change how they got it.

So here’s the question for you: **how well do you know your regulars?** We all have regulars, even if we don’t have a place like a martial arts school or a restaurant. I have regulars - you’re probably one of them! If you read this newsletter every week, or every other week, you’re a regular. If you listen to my podcasts repeatedly, you’re a regular. If you check out my YouTube channel when I post a new video, you’re a

regular - and I thank you for that.

You have regulars. And you as a marketer have the tools to recognize your regulars - marketing automation and CRM software tells us who our regulars are at every stage of the customer journey. The next question we have to ask ourselves is, how do we treat our regulars? You don't have to do anything fancy - a restaurant simply greets you by name once they get to know you. Maybe every so often you get a free appetizer or something, but it's just that comfort of being known, being recognized, being appreciated that is most common for businesses who know the value of regulars.

Take a look in your marketing automation and CRM software for who your regulars are - and then start thinking about what you can do to encourage more people to become regulars.

2022-04-03 : What's the Purpose of Analytics?

What's the purpose of analytics?

I'll wait.

Got an answer? Here are a few from Twitter:

- “The purpose of analytics is to unlock something useful from data.”
- “The purpose of analytics is to turn data into information and information into insight.”
- “The purpose of analytics is to find your way to the right product and market before the money runs out.”
- “The purpose of analytics is to get something out of it in order to make useful.”
- “The purpose of analytics is to catch something not intuitive.”

Here's my room-temperature take, because it's not a hot take at all: **the purpose of analytics is to help you make better decisions**. That's it. Analytics tells us what happened; insights tells us why, and then it's on us to use that information to make better decisions going forward.

So why is the answer to this question often so convoluted and complicated? I suppose you could argue that some of it is consultants needing to sound expensive, but it's really because people don't know what to do with data.

Let's take Google Analytics, for example - especially the new Google Analytics 4. What is its purpose? To provide you with data as a raw ingredient to make better digital marketing decisions. Now, we can debate how well it does that, but that's its functional purpose.

Which means that Google Analytics purpose isn't to make decisions for you. It isn't even to tell you why customers did what they did. As an

analytics tool, its purpose is to tell you what happened. When you look at the interface, at all the buttons and widgets and everything, that's what it's designed to do.

You, as the user, are expected to take that data and do something with it to improve your decision-making. It's like a kitchen pantry. Google Analytics provides the ingredients. It's now up to you, the chef, to turn those ingredients into a final dish that's edible, because no one wants a plate of uncooked wheat flour for dinner.

Where we run into trouble as marketers, decision-makers, and stakeholders is when we expect tools to do more than they're designed to do. Google Analytics - and EVERY true analytics tool on the market - will not make decisions for you, any more than the bag of flour in your kitchen is going to do the cooking for you. Every analytics vendor in the world tells you that their tools will help you make better decisions, and they're all lying.

Well, they're all lying in the same way that every kitchen appliance vendor tells you their appliance will make you a better chef. They may do some things better or make some tasks easier, but if you're an idiot in the kitchen, there's no difference between a 50 dollar blender and a 500 dollar blender. You're still going to make inedible garbage.

When it comes to choosing an analytics strategy (and subsequently analytics vendors), the question isn't what tool to use. The question is, what decisions are you trying to improve or inform? And if your decision-making process is immune to improvement - like when you have an executive who simply wings it - then it doesn't matter what tool you use at all.

Why bother learning analytics tools or becoming skilled in analytics, then? Because if you're lucky enough to work for an organization that understands how to use them properly, you will make a lot of impact - and that usually translates into personal as well as organizational success. When you become really skilled at analytics, you understand

the limitations of what tools can and can't do. You learn what's present and what's missing in data. You learn where the blind spots are in every decision and you mitigate those as much as possible.

And most of all, you learn to tell the difference about which decisions do need analytics support and which don't. Values and moral decisions rarely need analytics support, for example. "Should we make a product that's intentionally harmful to our customers?" or "Should we make a product that is incredibly destructive to the environment for nominal benefit to our customers?" don't need a ton of data or analysis, just a functional sense of empathy and compassion.

When you're making decisions about your analytics strategy, tactics, and tools, think first about how you use data and analytics now, what decisions need improving, and only then make choices like vendors and data sources. Decide on your menu and recipes before you go appliance and ingredient shopping, rather than buy a bunch of stuff and have no idea what to cook.

2022-04-10 : What Do You Own?

This past week, I had a chance to [interview Christy Hiler](#), president of the Cornett ad agency and co-founder of the [Own It movement](#), a platform for encouraging more women-owned agencies in the marketing space.

After the interview - as is usually the case - I thought up something else we should have talked about, so I'll talk about it with you instead. Here's the big question:

What do you own?

Whether you have a company, whether you're just starting out in your career, the question I - we - need to ask ourselves on a regular and frequent basis is what do we own? What is ours, uniquely ours?

Why does this matter? My friend and former employer Todd Defren once quipped quite correctly that only owners make money. In any situation, in any business or industry, the owners are the ones who make money. Employees by and large do not receive large earn-outs when the company gets sold. At best, you have an employee stock ownership program that will give you a meaningful sum of money should the company be purchased, but those are relatively rare.

If you own something, you have the ability to make money with it, by selling it in some capacity to others. Obviously, this is contingent on others seeing value in it, but ownership is the first step in that process.

So, what do you own?

Now, your first inclination, your first knee-jerk response to that question is that in a professional context, you probably own nothing. (unless, like Christy, you own the company) But that's not true, strictly speaking. Even if you've only been in your role for a year, even if you've

never put any serious effort into building your own platform, it still exists.

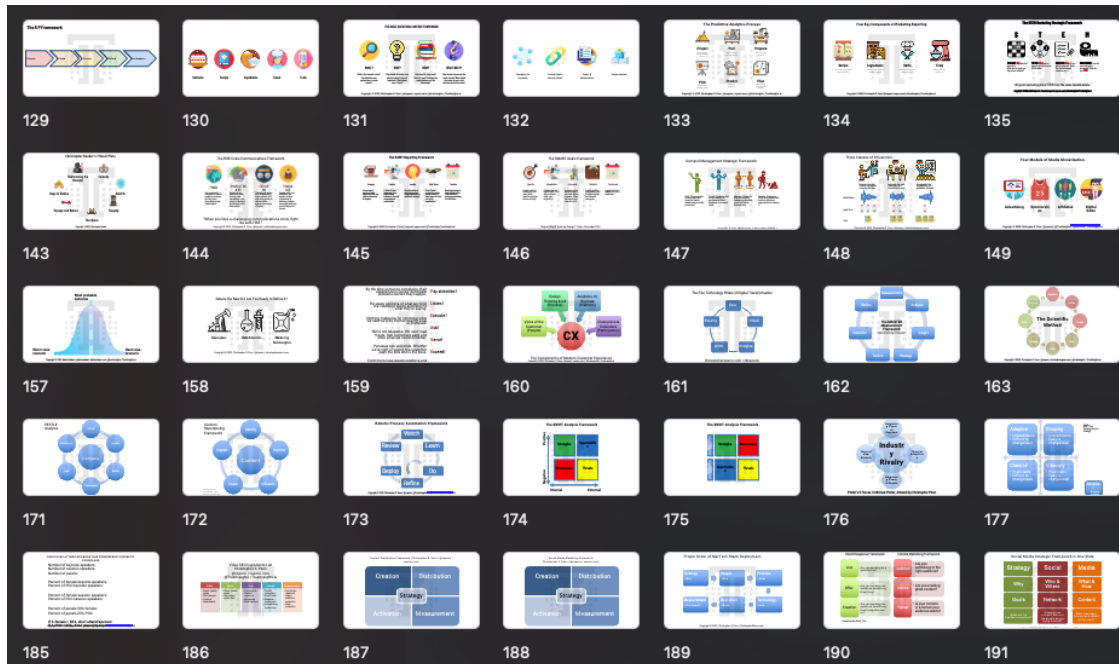
Let's look at a few examples.

Do you have a **blog**? You own that content. It's yours, irrelevant of whether it has one reader or one million. The same is true for a podcast and other media.

Do you have a **newsletter**? You own the content for your newsletter and access to your audience. I own this newsletter and for brands who want to advertise to you, I own this particular channel. (note that I do not own you, obviously, just a tiny sliver of your very valuable attention, for which I am thankful)

Do you have a **process**? Again, even if you've been in a job for not too long, you've probably made a few tweaks here and there that help you do your job better. Those little fixes add up over time, until you have a unique way of doing what you do that makes you more valuable than other employees doing the same job.

One of my favorite examples of this is a marketing cookbook. What recipes do you know in marketing and business? What processes have you memorized and documented so that you do your job better? Here's an example, a snapshot of a slide deck I keep called a golden cookbook. It's got hundreds of frameworks, ideas, and processes that I've come up with in my career, and it's something totally unique to me, something I own.



Golden Cookbook snapshot

Do you have **knowledge**? You own what's in your head - what to do, why you do something, how you do it - and that knowledge is valuable. Ask anyone who's ever had a valued employee quit how much it hurts to replace that employee. Not only are their skills and processes gone, but so is their institutional knowledge.

Do you have a **personal brand**? Personal brands have appropriately gotten a bit of a bad rap because many of the folks promoting “personal branding initiatives” come across as used car salesmen encouraging you to be just like them. The reality is a personal brand is little more than your reputation - and you own your reputation.

Do you have **intellectual property**? This is anything you create, really. If you write, draw, compose, video, dance, sculpt, carve... anything that becomes manifest in the world as a result of your creativity is intellectual property. As long as it's outside of work, you own that. It's yours.

When we take a step back from our day to day lives and think about

ownership, we realize we own a lot more than we think we do. The process of ownership begins with the realization that you already own things, possibly things of value. We can and should talk in a future newsletter about how you turn what you own into tangible value, but the first step in that process is, forgive the pun, taking ownership of being an owner.

2022-04-17 : The Future of Digital Marketing

My friend Ramon Ray asked a question the other day about the future of digital marketing and listed out a long list of things like Web3, NFTs, cookieless futures, etc. and wanted to know what we all thought the future of digital marketing looked like. I'm hesitant to use individual technologies when thinking about the future. Instead, I tend to think about what we as people want, what we as people are going to experience, and what makes companies money.

Let's start with some obvious macro trends. People have become accustomed to, and expect universally, access to the Internet through a supercomputer they carry around on their person. 15 years ago, Apple introduced the iPhone. It had a 412 Mhz ARM 11 processor, up to 16 GB of internal memory, a single 2 MP camera, and GSM connectivity. Today, Apple's iPhone 13 Pro Max offers a 6 core CPU at 3.23 Ghz, a 5 core GPU, multiple 12 MP cameras, and 5G connectivity.

To give you a sense of scale, today's iPhone is more than 15x faster, and the Internet speeds are 15,625 times as fast. These absurd advances are why we say the world is mobile-first now in marketing and user experience - not because marketing wants it to be, but because our customers are literally carrying around supercomputers every day - and expect every digital experience to match the power of the hardware they operate.

Rather than retreat inside a virtual world, we are transforming the real world around us into a computing environment. Our phones are our hybrid interfaces to both worlds; Google Lens can look at a leaf or flower and tell you what kind of plant it is, or translate a sign or a conversation in real-time.

Second, all this ubiquitous, always-on power means we expect absolutely frictionless experiences. Again, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. Mega-merchants like Amazon now make it so

easy and frictionless to shop that you can yell out loud in your home without ever leaving your couch and order a crate of toilet paper or Ukrainian pickles.

Our tolerance for friction in transactions of any kind has dramatically decreased. Customers perceive wait times for anything as intolerable, and convenience beats loyalty. When the competition is one tap of an app away, you have to bring your A-game every moment of every day. Search engines like Google return knowledge to us in the blink of an eye - and that's the standard we all have to meet.

Third, artificial intelligence is rewiring our brains. The most powerful, barely-seen technology shaping everything in our heads is the recommendation engine. From movies and shows to social media posts to merchandise, AI is governing how we experience the world. Every time you see a recommendation given to you by something non-human, there's a good chance that AI is involved in the process. That power can be used for good and evil alike; the power of recommendation engines has killed millions of people by showcasing fake news and disinformation about things like masks and COVID-19 vaccines, causing people to believe incorrect information and not accept life-saving medicine. (to be clear, masks work and COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective) AI is a hidden intermediary that works through our pocket supercomputers and governs our behaviors.

Thus, we prioritize several key things as consumers, as a population. We like cheap, but we really like and expect fast. We expect frictionless experiences. We display a shocking acceptance of whatever machines recommend to us because artificial intelligence is ultimately helping us think less and still get what we want.

Now, through those lenses, evaluate all the major technologies and trends people are promoting. Let's take NFTs for example. Are they a fast, mobile-first experience? Sort of. A lot of the app ecosystems around NFTs are still very immature. Are they frictionless? Good heavens no. They're the opposite of frictionless. They're a pain to buy

because you have to buy a cryptocurrency first and then find an exchange and jump through hoops to acquire them. Do they help you think less? Also most definitely not. Thus, as it stands right now, NFTs are a curiosity and not something to bake into your marketing plans.

What about the cookieless future? Will that impact mobility? No, not really. What about frictionless transactions? It will slow them down for a period of time, but first-party cookies will largely remain unaffected for a while. What will take time for marketers to adjust to is working with less personal data and more with behavioral data - but the savviest marketing organizations will race to adopt behavior-based AI to mitigate these problems - and that in turn will help us create those recommendations consumers love.

Look at every proposed trend and technology through the lenses of mobility, frictionless interactions, and making consumers think less. Machines and technologies are advancing at incredible rates, developing powerful new capabilities, but the flesh and blood humans at the end of the value chain haven't changed much at all. Align yourself with the things that the humans want, and evaluating up and coming trends and technologies becomes much easier.

2022-04-24 : Set Up For Success

One of the cliches I've heard most in business, especially the last decade, is the expression "set someone up for success". My old boss at the agency I used to work at said this about nearly every new hire, about how we all had to help set the new person up for success.

What does this actually MEAN, though? How do you set someone up for success? I asked around on social media and here were a couple of responses:

"Give them whatever resources you have... tools or knowledge... so that they're going into the situation as prepared as possible." - [Aaron Hockley](#)

"Give them the tools to do a good job themselves." - [Andi Robinson](#)

While I don't disagree that giving someone resources, tools, and knowledge is a critical part of helping them succeed, there's a different angle we should consider.

In my martial arts class today, we were working on the opposite of setting someone up for success. Using positioning, timing, and knowledge of psychology, we performed techniques designed to set someone - an aggressor - up to fail. No matter what your antagonist does, they dig themselves into a deeper and deeper hole until victory is impossible for them.

How? By taking away their options. Position yourself on one side of their body so they're inclined to punch a certain way, ruling out other kinds of strikes. Place your hand in a guarding position at an angle where they have to work around it, making their next move predictable. Time your defense so that each attack they throw puts them off balance and vulnerable to counterattack.

Think about it for a second. If you just stand square on in front of someone, they have limitless ways to attack you - any angle of their choosing, any target of their choosing. When you position yourself properly with distance and timing, you take away their options. You're at the wrong distance to be kicked. You're at a strange angle for them to jab, so they have to step through and punch or throw a cross.

By taking away their options, their choices, you set them up to fail because you know what's probably going to happen and the fight occurs on your terms, not theirs. You lead them to the inevitable conclusion - their defeat, their inability to cause you serious harm.

So... what if we flipped that around? Instead of leading someone to failure, we lead them to success. How would we do that?

By taking away options. Instead of taking away avenues of success, we provide ONLY avenues of success. We take away the things that are likely to cause them to fail.

What would that look like? You've seen it already in action. If you've ever been at or seen a little kids' bowling party at a bowling alley (or even not-little kids), what do bowling alleys do? They put up the rails or inflatable bumpers so that the kids cannot throw a gutter ball. You take away their ability to fail by taking away options, taking away choices.

Suppose you have a novice chef on the line. How do you help them succeed? You take away options. You focus them on one thing. Chop these carrots in quarter-inch slices on a bias using a 6-inch chef knife. To what Aaron and Andi said, you give them a decent knife, a good cutting board, and show them an example of how you want it done - but then you take away every other distraction so they only do what's asked of them and success is as simple as possible.

Suppose you're talking marketing analytics. When we do Google Analytics implementations for clients, a lot of the time it's about taking options away, just doing stuff for them rather than having them do it

themselves. Taking away those choices - with appropriate subject matter expertise - is how to help someone succeed by removing likely avenues of failure.

If you want to set someone up for success, what can you take away so that they only have one path to follow, one way to go - the way to success? What options can you reduce? What focus can you give them?

Perhaps setting someone up for success is just as much about what you take away as what you give. Perhaps it's even more about what you take away so that things don't get in the way of success.

Something to think about.

Are you looking to get up to speed with Google Analytics 4? Look no further than the Trust Insights Google Analytics 4 For Marketers Course! This comprehensive training solution is designed for marketers specifically, with more than 5 hours of content across 17 lessons, plus templates, spreadsheets, transcripts, and certificates of completion.



With this course, you'll learn how Google Tag Manager and Google Data Studio form the essential companion pieces to Google Analytics 4, how to use them all together, how to determine if a migration was done correctly, and how to rearrange Google Analytics 4's menus to be more sensible. So don't hesitate - master Google Analytics 4 in ways no other course can teach you with the Trust Insights Google Analytics 4 For Marketers Course today!

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Or visit <https://www.trustinsights.ai/ga4course>

2022-05-01 : Minimums

As I was packing for a short trip to my folks, I looked at the motley assortment of electronics and other things I brought along. What stood out for me was what I considered the bare minimum I needed to get my job done while mobile. My laptop and my phone are the bare minimums I need to get things done. Take away any one of those, and I'd be in a boatload of trouble. (it goes without saying that reliable Internet access and reliable electricity are part of this, but I don't pack those)

That's not to say those are the tools I need to be optimal, to get the most done. Those are the bare basics, the essentials, the showstoppers. Certainly, things like a desk, a good mouse, a large external monitor, a solid keyboard, etc. are all tools that help me to get stuff done faster and better. But if I had to go without, I could go without all those things and still be mostly effective.

You probably have a similar list. You've got things that you **MUST** have to do your work, and things that are nice-to-haves.

So here's the thought exercise, the question: when it comes to your marketing, what are the essentials you cannot do without, and what are the nice-to-haves?

For me, it's you via this email list. Without my email marketing, I'd be in a world of hurt. I couldn't have even started [Trust Insights](#) a few years ago without your assistance, without you being part of my email community.

Certainly, things like organic search and social media are nice and deliver some results, but email is the name of the game for me. If I were starting over, growing a loyal email audience would be my first, highest priority. Nothing else comes close in terms of effectiveness, both short

and long term.

My second choice, and a relatively new entrant to the field for me, is my private social media community. If you haven't already joined, join the free Slack group over at [Analytics for Marketers](#). Private social media communities are incredibly impactful - a chance to get to know your favorite people and your biggest fans without being moderated or mediated by big tech social media algorithms. Services like Slack, Discord, and Mattermost would be the technologies which enable these sorts of communities; the conversations that occur in them are largely invisible to search engines and other ways for people to programmatically monitor them.

While private social media communities may not have hundreds of thousands or millions of followers to offer that mainstream social networks do, they offer a level of interconnectedness not found in those networks. It's easier to develop real friendships, real professional and personal relationships in private social media communities. Of all the different technology options facing marketers now, private social media communities are one of the best choices for building a strong, loyal audience.

Those are my marketing must-haves, the minimums that I would consider doing marketing with. Without them, my ability to execute well on marketing would be severely constrained.

So, what are your minimums? Want to share?

Pop on over to [Analytics for Marketers](#) and let me know.

2022-05-08 : AI and Inequality

This week, I was talking with the [Trust Insights](#) team about our marketing strategy, looking at our April results. I said something kind of funny: **let's just jettison our SEO focus**. Now, on the surface, that seems kind of silly, doesn't it? Ignoring a channel you don't pay for seems like a poor idea. But let me dig into the reasoning behind this.

When I started doing what we now call SEO, back in the 90s, there were no artificial intelligence algorithms at work. There were no deep neural networks, no fancy recommendation engines, and during that time, small companies had a real shot at being found as often and as prominently as big companies.

When deep neural networks really started becoming the backbone of search engines (around 2015), the game changed. What happened? Big web properties became bigger, ranked better, accrued more traffic and attention. Small web properties got squeezed out for top volume searches.

Why? It has nothing to do with SEO. It's not a global conspiracy to let big corporations win. It's much simpler than that.

Inequality is built into AI with a bias towards letting bigger entities win.

Here's the simple explanation. To build an AI model - which is fancy for machine-written software - you need data. You need a LOT of data. There's a reason Google gives away so many services like Google Photos, Google Voice, Google Search, etc. Their AI models need material to train on, so the more they collect - and the more we volunteer - the better the models perform.

Well, when you're ranking content, who can create better content at scale? Brands that have the budget and resources to do so. It's that

simple. A company that has 5 employees on its content marketing team will inherently create less content than a company that has 500 employees on its content marketing team.

And when you're building an AI to return search results and you crawl the web, weeding out the obvious crap, you're left with what? A pile of good content where by simple mathematics, more of that content was created by larger organizations that had the resources to build it.

Add in features like Google's reliance on "Expertise/Authority/Trustworthiness" (as documented in their Search Quality Ratings Guidelines), and you have an even bigger bias towards larger brands with larger budgets. Why? Who do you trust? You trust entities you've had positive experiences with, and you trust brands that deliver consistent experiences - as well as investing heavily in brandbuilding.

Thus, by definition again, a brand that can put a million Euros into brand building is going to have more recognition, authority, and trust than a brand that doesn't invest in brand building.

Here's a simple thought exercise:

- Name a coffee shop brand.
- Name a fast food brand.
- Name a store brand you shop in.
- Name a mobile phone manufacturer.

Did any of the choices you mentally summoned just now spend nothing and no effort on brand building? Probably not. Chances are you thought of brands that invest incredible amounts of money and effort in brand building.

Because of its nature of needing a lot of data to build models, AI will always favor the larger data sources. And larger data sources will correlate strongly with larger brands and larger budgets, because that's

who can afford to create the data that AI needs to train on.

So what are you supposed to do if you don't have big budgets? How do you survive in a world where the deck is firmly stacked against you by big budget competitors and artificial intelligence algorithms working against you?

Wind back the clock 50 years. How did small businesses stay alive in a world where all media was controlled by large corporations and they had absolutely no voice? Three simple things worked for challenger brands.

1. **Create a product/service that is substantially better.** This is table minimum. If your product or service isn't noticeably better to your customers, your marketing efforts will be in vain. Get this right first.
2. **Create a community.** Whether it's something modern like a Discord server or something old school like a mailing list, have a way for people to interact with you - especially your most loyal, ardent fans. This is your insurance policy against AI - when customers spread news of your brand by word of mouth through communications channels that aren't mediated by algorithms - like chat groups, SMS, direct messages, emails, etc. - AI can't interfere with the spread of your brand.
3. **Create a memorable brand.** At the end of the day, search engines can't interfere with customers if customers don't have to search for you. If you are top of mind in your customers' heads, they will turn to you directly instead of needing an intermediary. There's no way for an AI algorithm to intercept you typing in my company's URL directly in your browser.

So how will I be putting this to work? Have I given up on SEO? Sort of. As we discussed in our team meeting this week, we're pivoting towards a strategy of SEO as a nice-to-have, rather than a core marketing channel. We'll still create great content, but our intent and our focus is

to create content that real people - you - actually ask for, because we know at least one person will read it!

We've been saying since 2006 on [Marketing Over Coffee](#) that the most sound SEO strategy in the world is to operate as though there were no search engines at all, that Google didn't exist. That strategy is more true now than ever. How would you market if search didn't exist at all? How would you stay in front of customers, remind them that you exist in ways that still provide them value? Whatever that strategy is, do it.

2022-05-15 : Solution-Oriented Mindset

If you trawl through LinkedIn profiles for a while, you'll see a very common phrase on a lot of people's descriptions. Solution-oriented. Solution-focused. Solution-driven.

What does that mean, anyway? Here's my take: when presented with a problem, you start at the solution and reverse-engineer your way back. You figure out how to get to the solution by any legitimate means necessary.

Why do we value this skill? Because a lot of people aren't solution-oriented. Let's look at a few examples. Right now in my country, there's a shortage of baby formula. It's causing quite a bit of panic, and panic that's largely unnecessary. Suppose you had a child, a newborn. You know the solution is to feed the child, but the normal path to the solution - formula - is unavailable.

What are a lot of people doing? Yelling at manufacturers, yelling at politicians, yelling at each other. None of those activities solves the problem, which is that you have a newborn that is hungry and your primary solution is offline.

Disclaimer: I am not a medical professional and the following is not medical advice.

What does the solution-oriented mindset look like? You'd start by looking at the existing solution and then determining what the next closest solution is. If you were to Google for the ingredients of your standard baby formula, which is intended to replace human breast milk, you'd see a long list:

Skim milk, lactose, high oleic sunflower oil, soy oil, coconut oil, whey protein concentrate, potassium citrate, whey protein hydrolysate, calcium carbonate, soy lecithin, ascorbic acid, choline bitartrate, magnesium chloride, sodium

chloride, potassium chloride, ferrous sulphate, taurine, L-tryptophan, m-inositol, cytidine 5'-monophosphate, ascorbyl palmitate, disodium guanosine 5'-monophosphate, disodium uridine 5'-monophosphate, zinc sulphate, adenosine 5'-monophosphate, d- α -tocopheryl acetate, mixed tocopherols, niacinamide, L-carnitine, d-calcium pantothenate, vitamin A palmitate, cupric sulphate, thiamine hydrochloride, pyridoxine hydrochloride, riboflavin, manganese sulphate, β -carotene, folic acid, potassium iodide, phylloquinone, biotin, sodium selenate, vitamin D3, cyanocobalamin.

You'd also see that it contains 68 kcal of energy per 100 mL, 1.3g protein, 3.5g fat, and 7.6g of carbohydrates.

Your next logical step would be to look at human breast milk itself. Again, [a quick Googling turns up](#):

Human milk consists of 87% water, 1% protein, 4% lipid, and 7% carbohydrate (including 1 to 2.4% oligosaccharides) Compared to cow's milk, human milk contains less protein (3.5% in cow's milk), and especially a proportion of casein (on total protein) lower, max 50% (80% in milk of cow). There is no β -lactoglobulin; some minor proteins are more abundant in human milk (lysozyme, lactoferrin,...) and the same goes for the non-protein nitrogen fraction (urea, free amino acids, including taurine). The protein content of human milk is therefore low (10 g/L), probably the lowest among all mammalian milks, and we can relate this observation with a very low growth rate of the newborn (for comparison, rat milk has a protein content 10 times higher for a growth rate of the pups also higher).

There's our actual solution, what we're trying to replicate. The next logical step? Googling for other kinds of milk to see how they compare to those target ratios. We already have cow's milk ratios in the above research - per 100g, cow milk has 3.2g of protein, 3.9g fat, and 4.8g carbohydrates.

Goat milk, for example, is 87g of water per 100g, 3.56g protein, 4.14g fat, and 4.45g carbohydrate.

Sheep milk is 83g water, 5.4g protein, 7g fat, and 5.1g carbohydrate per 100g.

Of these - cows, goats, and sheep - cow milk chemically is closest to human milk. There are still differences, but it's fairly close. Which means that if you have to choose between not having a solution (no formula) and finding a reasonably close, perfectly safe alternative (regular whole milk from cows), you've arrived at a solution that gets the job done. If I had to feed a newborn, based on available data, this is the logical choice until the supply chain issues are resolved.

This is the solution-oriented mindset. You know what you need to solve - so how do you solve it in the best way possible?

Let's look at another example, one closer to home for many folks. In Google Analytics 3 / Universal Analytics, we had a feature, an option called Filters that allowed us to change and remove bad, junk data from entering our Google Analytics accounts. Many of us had filters set up to knock out particularly egregious spambots, etc.

In Google Analytics 4, that feature is gone. Poof. Doesn't exist. So, a lot of folks complained to Google about it. Many more folks just complained out loud on social media, forums, etc. None of these approaches are solution-oriented though, right?

What does the solution-oriented marketing analytics professional do? You look at your available tools and see what you can do. The answer becomes clear when you start thinking backwards from the solution. Google set up filters in GA3 to keep bad data out of Google Analytics. In GA4, Google's design intent is for configuration to be handled in Google Tag Manager.

Thus, the solution-oriented marketing professional instead designs trigger conditions in Google Tag Manager as an exception for your Google Analytics 4 Base Configuration Tag. You say, "I don't want GA to even track visits with these characteristics" and you prevent Google

Analytics tracking at all when those conditions are met. You have engineered a solution with the tools you have.

We've had other terms for solution-oriented folks - hackers (in the truest sense), MacGyvers, etc., but the personality trait remains constant. Folks who are truly solution-oriented are tinkerers, analysts, endlessly curious. When you go to a restaurant with them, they're chewing slowly to deconstruct the flavors in their food, trying to figure out how it was made. When you listen to music with them, they're separating out the different tracks, trying to see how many layers went into composing in a DAW. When you view art with them at a museum, they try to figure out how many layers an artist used to create a painting.

It's human nature to complain, but it's human genius to solve. How do you solve problems, and what lessons could you take from solution-oriented role models (fictional and real) to be even more capable, even more clever?

2022-05-22 : Training for Reality

One of the expressions I love from the martial art that I practice is that “training should be harder than fighting, so that fighting is easier than training”. The idea is that you go through so much in learning the martial art that if you ever have to actually use it, it feels almost rudimentary.

I’ve had this experience a few times. Early on in our training, we practiced a lot of different breakfalls, ways of falling to the ground safely when you get thrown or otherwise put in precarious positions. I’ve intentionally fallen and rolled up and down stairs, rolled out of moving vehicles, etc. It all seems fairly silly and risky, but I once got hit straight on by a driver pulling out of a parking lot at decent speed, probably 25 MPH / 40 KPH. I managed to roll over and off the hood of the vehicle and sustained only some scrapes, so the “fight” was easier than a lot of the training.

This mindset should extend to everything we do, to all the challenges we’re likely to face in our work, in our personal lives, etc. If you know what problems you’re probably going to face, it’s the height of wisdom to practice for those problems so that when they do arrive, they’re almost trivial.

And yet...

When you look at the state of most professional development and training, a lot of it doesn’t seem to have strong applicability to real life, to situations you face every day. I was talking to a friend the other night about a marketing certification exam and she said she scored badly when she answered questions on the exam with how you’d actually solve a client’s problems. When she thought about it from the company’s perspective, from what’s the “best practice” instead reality, she passed with flying colors.

You can see how problematic that is. What's best for the company issuing the certification may not be best for us, may not be best for our customers. But that's what people are being trained towards.

I just finished recording the upcoming Trust Insights Google Analytics 4 course (rest assured you will get an email about it when it launches), and throughout the process, I kept hearing my business partner and CEO Katie's voice in my head with each lesson. "So what? Why does the customer care? How does this help them with real life?" Keeping that perspective is essential for creating useful training, because without it, you create purely theoretical stuff that your students may not be able to apply immediately, if ever.

The same is true for my hobby coding projects. I pick data sets and challenges that are interesting to me, that solve real problems I want to know the answers to. In the process I learn a ton, and by the time a work-related problem comes around, chances are I've faced a more challenging problem in my hobbyist coding.

For example, I was writing a topic modeling and text comparison algorithm to programmatically compare multiple bodies of text together for a fanfiction project. It took me a few weeks to get it working, and sure enough, the next month a client had a very similar need for doing competitive analysis and I was able to reuse what I'd learned for that client with great effectiveness.

If you've fallen behind on professional development and training, chances are you did so because the investment of time and effort wasn't worth the return. For us to get value out of our training and development, we have to see how it's immediately useful. Our training should prepare us for "fighting", for application of the training in such a way that it makes our lives easier, not harder. When challenging situations come up, our training should prepare us for them and even make those challenges a little easier for us.

If your current training experiences don't make life easier for you, it's

time to start looking around for better professional development opportunities. That way, when the car of life plows into you, you just keep on rolling.

2022-05-29 : Marketing Intent

Here's a question for you: what's the intent of your marketing?

When we talk about things like SEO, we talk about search intent - what is the intent of the searcher? What information are they trying to find for which our content would be a good fit?

This is fairly straightforward, right? We understand generally where in the buying cycle a potential customer is based on their intent, on what needs they need to fulfill. We know the difference between someone searching for "coffee shop" and "coffee shop near me".

That brings me back to the original question: what's the intent of your marketing content when you're making it?

Intent is everything. We as ordinary people are generally pretty good about detecting intent. We know, we feel when someone's a little suspicious, when someone is behaving in a way that is more self serving than not. To be sure, things like bias can cloud our awareness but generally, you're decent at knowing if someone rubs you the wrong way, aren't you?

Have you ever been to a social function and talked to someone and something just felt off? Or that person made you uncomfortable even if you weren't sure why? Maybe it was the words they were using or where their eyes were looking or the distance they maintained (or didn't) between you? And later on you found out their intent wasn't great, was too self centered?

That same intent, that same feeling can come through in any form of communication. Of course, in person where you have verbal and non verbal language, you have a lot more data to perceive, but even in regular written copy, there's enough to start sensing intent - and when

what's being said doesn't match the intent of the sender.

Consider the average sales message. So many sales messages come across and shady and disconcerting because we perceive that the salesperson on the other end is trying to mask their intent - but their intent is clear. "Hey Chris, just touching base..." and "Hey Chris, wanted to see if there was any interest in..."

We know what the actual intent is, right? It really should say, "Hey Chris, I'd like to sell you something..." but it doesn't. And so we learn very quickly to distrust any of this kind of content, any of this kind of outreach. We know it's a trap.

Every quarter or so when I send out my blatant sales pitch email to you, I get a ton of feedback from you. Lots of it is people thanking me for being honest with you, that the email is a sales pitch. There's no guessing intent - my intent is clear and upfront, I want to sell you something. In turn, that means you don't have to waste time or mental energy trying to figure out if it's a sales pitch or not - and you can focus on whether or not you need what's being pitched.

So how do you improve your marketing intent? How do you make your marketing better? The short answer is, where and when practical, separate out marketing and sales content. Sales content is and should be about selling. Buy this thing, enroll in this, request a demo, etc. There's no ambiguity about it. Marketing content should be more about building awareness, engagement, and brand affinity - and that means less selling and a lot more helping, educating, and entertaining.

What about the inevitable protestations of stakeholders saying that marketing isn't doing enough to promote sales? When you do incorporate sales content, be clear about it. Be obvious about it. Again, don't make your audience think. In this newsletter, you'll see things that are clearly and obviously advertisements, or things I want to promote. You don't have to guess - I tell you quite boldly that I'm trying to sell you something. When you have to provide sales support in your

marketing messaging, do the same. Make it clear to everyone what's going on.

Treat sales content and marketing content like soda and beer. Each has its place. Each has its purpose. Each is good on its own. Don't mix them together, because then no one is happy.

2022-06-05 : Audience-Based Communication

In every communication, we have two basic modes, two basic models: audience-centered and self-centered. I had the opportunity to watch a number of talks this week at the Spark.me conference and this really, really stood out a couple of times.

If you want to get a sense of how audience-centric any communication is, do a quick count of how many references are to the sender and how many references are to the audience.

For example, there was one talk where the speaker talked about themselves almost exclusively for the first five minutes. Tons of “I” and “me” and “my”. Very little for the audience, few references to “you”, “yours”, or even “we” or “us”. “I did this thing” and “this was my project”, etc. were the dominant points made.

A certain amount of self-centered communication is necessary, but not a ton. You need enough to establish basic identity, but then the rest of your content should prove the value of your communication, not you telling people about yourself. And this applies to both individuals and brands.

A long time ago, I had a sales manager (hi Tony!) who quipped quite correctly that the buyer’s mind is permanently tuned to one radio station, WII-FM - What’s In It For Me? When you’re talking about the audience, when you’re focused on the audience, you’re providing them value. When you’re talking about yourself? Not so much.

In general - there are exceptions - the more you talk about yourself, the less value you provide to your audience.

So here’s a quick test, something you can do easily with any and all communication you send. Using whatever counting or highlighting mechanism that suits you best - highlighter, sticky note, word count -

count up self-centered references and audience-centered references in a recent communication. It could be an email you sent, a piece of marketing collateral, a talk you give, a podcast you produce - anything where you're supposed to be providing value to someone else.

At a bare minimum, your communication should be 50/50 in balance. You should at a bare minimum be talking about your customer as much as you talk about yourself. Ideally? Crank that ratio of audience:self as high as it will go. This section of the newsletter is 31:3, so more than 10:1.

This is audience-based communication - ABC. Use this simple counting tip to make your communications even more powerful and impactful by staying laser-focused on your audience.

2022-06-12 : The Questions Are The Answer

This past week, I had the pleasure and honor of [speaking at the Spark.me conference in Montenegro about AI in marketing](#). What was especially revelatory to me was what happened after I finished speaking. Thanks to a lot of caffeine, I had about 20 minutes for Q&A, and it's in the Q&A that an audience reveals itself, reveals where they are.

The questions people ask show you where they are in any journey, in any profession. If you're in a session about email marketing and people are asking about whether the word "Free" in a subject line is bad, that shows you where people are in terms of understanding email deliverability. In this example, the question shows their knowledge is about a decade out of date. If you were in the same session and a question came up around the BIMBI protocol, you'd know the audience was current in their knowledge.

Or, for example, if you're in an SEO session, and someone's asking about bold keywords in page text influencing rankings, you'd know their knowledge was stuck somewhere around 2005-2006. And that's not a bad thing, not something to be ashamed of. People are where they are in their journeys, and if they're at a conference session to learn, that shows at least they know they need to acquire more knowledge and are taking steps to do it. That's laudable, especially today when an awful lot of people seem to enjoy celebrating willful ignorance. Never mock someone for their lack of knowledge if they're actively taking steps to improve it.

So, what were some of the questions the Spark.me audience asked, and what does that say about them? Here are a few:

"We come from a region with a lot of fragmented markets, small markets, with not enough data to be able to draw conclusions (or use AI). Are we doomed?"

“You’ve mentioned the attribution modeling is one of the key challenges. What we are seeing now is a trend with the demise of third party cookies, as many of the models are reverting to classical statistical models and moving away from AI. Do you see this trend reverting? And how do you see this developing in the future?”

“How do biases in AI happen, and is there any way to safeguard against them?”

“As more and more companies use statistics and machine learning, marketing is likely to become more homogenous. Do you see people going more offline, more guerrilla to compensate?”

What do those questions tell you about the audience, knowing what you know about AI and machine learning?

As someone who does a lot of this stuff - machine learning and AI - those questions are fairly sophisticated questions. They demonstrate current or reasonably current knowledge, the application of knowledge (particularly the question about third party data), and a bias towards action - they’re not theoretical questions.

The questions also dictate the answers. A sophisticated question means you can give a more nuanced answer because it’s clear from the level of question what level of answer a person is likely to benefit from.

So here’s my question to you. In the questions you receive - not just on stage if you’re a speaker, but every day, in your customer service inboxes, on social media, in emails - what level of sophistication are they? And more important, are the questions becoming more sophisticated over time from your audience? I would maintain that if the questions aren’t evolving, we aren’t doing a good enough job educating our audiences and helping them grow - and that means the value we’re providing them isn’t enough.

Second, beware any speaker that doesn’t want to do Q&A. It’s there that speakers show you how much they do or don’t know. And an event that

doesn't permit Q&A? Find a different event to attend. They're suppressing the most valuable part of the conference.

[If you'd like to watch the talk in full, you can find it here.](#)

2022-06-19 : Revisiting Thought Leadership

Thought leadership has been on my mind lately because of the sheer volume of PR pitches in my inbox asking if I want to interview so-and-so, a thought leader in whatever space or industry the PR person is pitching. Most of the time, I just straight up delete those pitches because they're usually hilariously off target for what I create content about. The other day, someone pitched me on a thought leader in the cleaning products industry because they wanted to get in front of my high income female audience to persuade them to try this brand's cleaning products.

Let's recall my definition of a thought leader: a thought leader is someone whose thinking changes how you lead. Tons of people are in leadership positions - not necessarily the C-Suite, either. If you manage even one person, or if you manage a group of people who don't work for you, like in a volunteer organization or your community, you are a leader. You are leading people, guiding them, directing them.

Thus, if someone else's thinking changes how you lead (hopefully for the better), then that content is thought leadership content.

Here's a clarifying filter on thought leadership content. Leadership inherently involves people. If a piece of content or a specific thinker is changing how you do things with technology, that's not leadership. That's perhaps tactical or strategic change, but it's not leadership.

Think of leadership like parenting or pet ownership. You can change a lot of things about how you live or what you buy or which brand of food you serve, but how you interact with your children or pet is parenting. Someone sharing information about how to save money at the grocery store is essential and useful, but they're not sharing information about the act of parenting itself.

If someone is claiming to be a thought leader but they're not sharing

ideas for how you interact with people, then they're not sharing leadership ideas. They may still be good or great ideas, but that's not thought leadership.

So let's run through a couple of examples. All names have been changed to protect the guilty. "Bob has been able to reinvent the workplace mindset and offer innovative, out-of-the-box thinking that has created the foundation to his and other entrepreneurs' success." Okay, so far, so good. Bob passes the first test, which is that his pitch is about people. Let's go to Bob's signature post on LinkedIn which details his innovative 5 secrets to success.

1. Know yourself.
2. Be humble.
3. Hire the right people.
4. Sell more stuff.
5. Don't rely on others.

So... does this change how you would lead? Does this thinking change how you're going to work with people, how you'll approach people?

Okay, let's move onto another pitch, this one about... uh, Bob. "Bob is incredibly experienced in transforming the marketing strategies of startup organizations, fast-growing pharmaceutical companies and thriving corporations alike. She would be able to provide incredible insight and share her expertise on marketing in the healthcare and pharmaceutical space."

Okay, I'll bite. Let's go read Bob's flagship article on Medium. An interviewer asked her what her blueprint for marketing success looks like. "Successful marketing must be omnichannel with a true north focus on the customer experience and the customer journey, not the product. Your channel strategy has to provide a seamless customer experience at every touchpoint."

Does this change how you would lead? Does this thinking change how you're going to work with people, how you'll approach people?

Thought leadership, despite its (over)use in our current marketing and business world, is shockingly rare. Very few things will legitimately change how we lead, how we make decisions that affect the people around us, the people who work from us, the people who buy from us.

What are some legitimate examples of thought leadership? Correct or not, Malcolm Gladwell's piece in the Tipping Point about 10,000 hours of time needed to master something changed our expectations of how long it takes to become skilled. It gave us a concrete number and helped reset expectations about how long we should expect people who work for us to become proficient at something.

Brené Brown has coached an entire generation of leaders to be more vulnerable, open, and honest in their interactions in the workplace, encouraging people to live more complete lives. They don't have to rigidly separate professional from personal, and that's a big cultural change.

Bozoma Saint John, CMO of Netflix, focuses heavily on radical transparency in leadership roles, letting customers in to see the good and the bad, helping customers understand why we make the decisions we do. If you embrace radical transparency, you're definitely going to change how you lead.

Thought leadership is rare. When you find it, when you discover it, grab a hold of it and don't let go until you've changed how you lead.

2022-06-26 : Politics and Abortion

This week's newsletter is going to be intensely political, very USA-centric, and leaning on the liberal side. No marketing content. Feel free to skip if that's not your thing, or even [unsubscribe](#).

Again, no marketing content in here, but lots of liberal political content that's very America-centric, with apologies to you if you're not focused on the USA.

Last chance to skip and come back next week!

OK.

Let's talk about habits and change.

When was the last time you went to the gym once, got fit, and didn't need to work out ever again?

When was the last time you changed what you ate for a day, lost X kilograms, and never had to do that again?

Yeah, me neither. That doesn't happen. Big sustainable changes don't come from one-time events. They come from applied diligence, from making a little bit of progress all the time, bit by bit, day by day.

Back at the height of the pandemic, I took up running. In the beginning, I sucked at it. REALLY sucked at it. I could barely run a kilometer, much less a mile. (1 kilometer is about 2/3 of a mile) But I kept at it, and 6 months after I started, I ran my first 5K road race - virtually, because pandemic.

6 months after that, I was able to run 5k a week.

Since the start of 2022, I've been running 5K or more every Sunday,

3-4K on Wednesdays. Last weekend, I managed 9K for the first time. As a guy in his mid-forties who has never, ever been athletic in my adult life, that was a big deal and a huge moment. I'm on my way to 10K, and I'm healthier than I've ever been in my adult life.

How did I make such a big change? With habits over time. Once I figured out how to run without injuring myself (which happened all the previous times in my life I'd tried to take up running), I started running as a habit. Rain or shine, I ran on Sundays in 2020 and half of 2021. Rain or shine, I've run on Sundays and Wednesdays for the last year. Almost no days off - I've taken off 4 Sundays in 2 years, mostly due to holiday travel.

When friends ask me how I maintain such discipline, the answer is easy: it's habit. It's routine. It's so regular that I don't have to think about whether or not I should run, I just run because it's what I do. It's part of who I am. It feels weird when I do have to miss a run, like something's very wrong with the day.

Good habits lead to great change.

What does this have to do with politics? I'm glad I asked.

How did the neo-conservatives in America manage to overturn a 50-year old court ruling and make abortion illegal in about half the US states?

With good habits. They had a message they repeated endlessly, true or not. They applied consistent discipline, consistent effort, consistent resources, consistent focus over a very long period of time to get local, state, and federal officials elected, until they had enough people in power to influence the highest court in the land, and they placed their candidates on it in lifetime positions.

And those habits paid off. They achieved a decades-long goal of federally de-recognizing people's sovereignty over their own bodies,

women (well, anyone with a uterus) especially. In the opinion of the court, one of the Justices, Justice Thomas, also made clear the court needs to re-examine and reverse similar decisions about same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, and the availability of contraception. [You can read that opinion on page 119 of the official ruling.](#)

I happen to disagree with this decision in almost every possible way. I'm a big fan of freedom, of liberty, of self-determination and autonomy. So long as you're not hurting me, you should be allowed to do whatever you want with your body. (this, by the way, is why I'm also in favor of mandating things like masks and vaccines as a last resort, because what you do with your body - or don't do - WILL hurt me) You want a baby in it? That's your business. You don't want a baby in it? That's your business too. You want to cover it in tattoos or pierce it with iron bolts? That's your business too.

For people like me, and maybe you, who vehemently oppose this decision, what should we do?

I'll tell you what we should NOT do: *Make a lot of noise for a brief time and then forget about it and move onto the next piece of news that crosses our smartphones.*

That's the equivalent of going to the gym once, working out real hard, and then never going back.

Great change requires effort and resources over a long period of time. It requires good habits.

What we should be thinking about is our own habits for creating change. We have a clear goal: to enact into law broad bodily autonomy, that **the government should have no say over what we do with our bodies save when it causes harm to other people without their consent, starting with restoring the federal right to abortion.** That's the goal: more freedom and more liberty for all of us. How do we get

there?

The blueprint that American neo-conservatives used to achieve their agenda isn't unique to them. It's not special, it's not magic. It is eminently practical and can be used by anyone:

Work with like-minded individuals to get people with our point of view elected to local offices.

Then state offices.

Then federal offices.

Then to the highest courts in the land.

What habits do we need to enact to make these changes happen?

1. **Finance:** There are lots of organizations that work towards changes we want. Don't donate once. Set up a recurring donation so that you're in the habit of providing resources. Given a choice between a \$12 one time donation and a \$1 monthly recurring donation, almost every organization prefers the latter because it allows for budgeting and resource allocation. Make donating a habit.
 - [If you want to donate specifically to abortion support, AbortionFunds.org is a good place to start.](https://abortionfunds.org)
 - [For civil liberties in general, the ACLU is a good place to start.](https://aclu.org)
2. **Elect:** Vote. In every single election you're eligible to vote in, even if it's just for the dog catcher. Just as in running when there are no days off from your workout, if you want political change, there are no off-year elections to skip. Make voting a habit.
3. **Communicate:** In the USA, every major elected representative has some way to receive feedback. Don't give feedback once, or when a hot button issue comes up. If you want representatives to know something's a big deal, give feedback regularly and

frequently. For example, ask your Senator or Representative to introduce federal legislation legalizing abortion - but put it on your calendar and do it every single weekday. You just copy and paste, but you keep up that habit. Make communicating with your officials a habit.

4. **Advocate:** These habits don't mean much if you're the only one doing them. Buddy up. Join groups. Just like having a workout buddy makes it easier to hold each other accountable, and a class at your local fitness center makes it even easier, your political habits need like minds. Ask your political workout buddies if they sent their daily messages to their elected reps, or made their monthly donations to the cause. Make building and growing your personal network a habit.
5. **Investigate:** The reality is that the American political system runs, like so much else in the country, on money. Spend time regularly seeing who funds politicians that made this happen. Then don't do business with those companies, let them know why publicly, and spread the word in your buddy system to do the same. Make research a habit.

Neo-conservatives won a 50-year battle because they had better habits than liberals. They weren't smarter or better educated or wealthier or more clever. They were focused and they were zealous about their habits. If we want to win back what they took, we have to be more focused and more dedicated to our habits than them over the same period of time or longer.

Good habits lead to great changes - but only if you stick by them.

I hope you'll join me, if it's appropriate and relevant to you, in establishing good habits to create great, necessary change for the better.

2022-07-03 : You Are The One You've Been Waiting For

The reactions I got to [last week's newsletter](#) have been all over the spectrum, from seething rage - one person wrote, "I thought you were smart but you are so," followed by quite a string of profanity - to outright praise that belongs in a place of worship. But there was a common theme in many of the responses: thanks for sharing ways we can help. This week, I want to dig into that a bit more, inspired by your responses.

Every organization, every cause - no matter where you are on the political spectrum or what you believe in - needs help of some kind. And every person - like you - who is able to earn money from your skills can donate those skills to an organization. Even if it seems at first that there's no obvious connection, if someone else is willing to pay you for it, a cause-based organization desperately needs it.

This is what [Beau of the Fifth Column refers to as the rest of the spear](#). The "tip of the spear" refers to the people most visible in a military, but behind them is a massive apparatus that makes their efforts possible. An army can't fight without food, without cooks, without logistics or supplies or construction or the many, many things that let warriors wage war. The same is true of any cause. The people who are visible, on the front lines of protesting and such, need a support mechanism of some kind if the cause is to be sustainable.

And that's probably where you and I come in. Let's look at a couple of mundane examples. I'm headed over to a friend's house in a little while to help her with her email newsletter. Not the content, but the infrastructure powering it. She didn't set up the deliverability protocols necessary to make her email marketing work as best as possible, and it's hurting her open rates. The fixes for this are fairly straightforward but arcane if you're not an IT person with knowledge of how DNS works and how deliverability works. The difference can be a 2x increase in

email marketing performance overnight.

So I'll go make those changes. Could anyone do this? Yes. Though you'd want to be careful because if you screw it up, you might accidentally remove yourself from the Internet entirely, which happened not too long ago to Facebook. Now, how many causes and non-profits rely on email to get their message out and solicit donations? Based on the contents of my inbox, literally every single cause and non-profit uses email heavily. How many of them have done this arcane little bit of housekeeping?

Here's the key point, as someone who has worked in non-profits before: **the smaller the organization is, the more desperate the need is.** A gigantic non-profit like The Red Cross should have its ducks in a row and its infrastructure together. (though like corporations, it's amazing how badly some are run) But the smaller an organization is, the less help it typically has, and the more your help is needed. Feeding America probably is all set. Your local food pantry? They're probably lucky to even have a functioning website, much less email deliverability protocols in place.

And that means that for all their efforts, they're not earning as much as they could be without your help. With our help, these organizations are more effective. An improvement in email deliverability directly translates into more money and more support for the cause, so even if you're not on the front lines, you're enabling the front lines. You're helping make their work possible.

What do you have to bring to the table? Are you a designer? A musician? A writer? A Wordpress expert? An accountant? A cook? Whatever your skills are, you have something to offer.

Here's another example. I manage the Google Analytics accounts of dozens of organizations, including several *pro bono* organizations and people. Many of them have no budget for marketing at all, but because I believe in what they do, I'm happy to help out by keeping their

analytics instances running smoothly. In turn, they make better decisions about their marketing and where they spend the very limited budget they have. Again, running someone's Google Analytics account doesn't look like the person in a parade marching with a sign, but it helps enable those marches and those activists.

A third example: I volunteer with the [Mautic organization](#), the folks who make the open source marketing automation software that powers this newsletter, among other things. They just had their annual conference and put out a call for folks to help process all the session videos. While I'm no Hollywood pro, I know my way around Adobe Premiere and Adobe Audition well enough that I can produce coherent, clean session videos from their raw footage, and I processed probably two dozen of them last month. Why? Because I believe in their software and I had the ability to help. This example is really important, because it illustrates that you don't have to be awesome to help out. You just have to be better than the alternative, which for many organizations is nothing.

The point of all this can be summarized by a line from the movie Frozen 2: **you are the one you've been waiting for**. The power to create change, to advance the things you believe in, is in your hands. If someone pays you money for it, it's valuable - and that skill can be donated to the causes you care about most. Don't think that just because you can't be on the front lines doesn't mean you can't play a vital role.

2022-07-10 : Real Talk About Google Analytics 4

A quick followup from last week's newsletter, Mai wrote back with a suggestion for marketers who want to donate their time to causes - [Catchafire](#). It looks very interesting - you look for non-profits who need specific skills (like marketing, analytics, etc.) and then apply for either consultations or projects. I haven't personally used it yet, but I'm going to give it a try.

Now, onto this week's main item: some brutally honest real talk about Google Analytics.

First, so we're clear, **Google Analytics 3/Universal Analytics will stop working on July 1, 2023**. That's less than a year away. If you haven't already installed it and configured it, you will be missing data for year-over-year comparison - 10 days worth, as of the day I send out this newsletter.

Crass, commercial plug: [my company, Trust Insights, helps with these migrations](#).

Now, here's the real talk: it might be better for you to abandon Google Analytics entirely.

(boy, that sure is awkward after pimping a service for migration, huh)

I don't say this lightly. I've been an ardent fan of Google Analytics since 2005, when Google first acquired it by buying Urchin, the company that made the original version. I've promoted it relentlessly for the last 17 years. [I sell a course about it](#). It's as old as one of my children. It's safe to say I'm fairly invested in it and the Google Marketing Platform.

So why would I even suggest this, this heresy? Because what Google Analytics has become is not for everyone now. The product up until now has been appropriate for almost every company from the mom

and pop coffee shop to the Fortune 10. I run a Google Analytics instance for my martial arts teacher, a little sole proprietor. I run a Google Analytics instance for one of the most well-known brands in America, AAA. The tool as it was flexed nicely to serve both needs.

But Google Analytics 4 is a different beast entirely. Instead of one Swiss army knife that sort of does a lot of things okay, it's evolved to be a powerful analytics point solution, and it's a true analytics tool. It's a business intelligence tool. It's very, very powerful.

And that's not what most people use it for. Most people use Google Analytics as a reporting tool, and Google has moved that functionality largely into Google Data Studio which is a very capable tool, but it doesn't have anything out of the box that you can just use as easily as the built-in reports in Google Analytics 3. And a LOT of people have become accustomed to those reports, for good or ill.

Google Analytics has evolved from a little pocketknife into a beautiful sword... but along the way lost its saw, can opener, mini-scissors, tweezers, and all the little utilities people have used it for in the last 17 years. And the learning curve for Google Analytics 4 has literally tripled, because to maximize its capabilities, you need to be fluent in the new interface, plus Google Data Studio, plus Google Tag Manager.

Which means it's still a fine match for the large brands, the large enterprise, and those smaller companies with marketing technologists who are savvy and adaptable to what is effectively an entirely new piece of software.

It's no longer a fine match for my martial arts teacher. For the mom and pop coffee shop. For the understaffed marketing team. For the non-technical marketer. It's now a poor fit. Can you learn it? Yes, of course. I wouldn't be selling a course about it if it were unlearnable. But do you have the time, the resources, and the aptitude to learn an entirely new way of doing things?

It didn't have to be this way. I really don't love the change management Google has - or rather, has not done with Google Analytics 4. Not having an option to import your previous data was a gigantic miss. Not having an interface that at least preserved the features people were used to was an even bigger miss. I understand and wholly agree with their choices to modernize the infrastructure and the underlying object model, but in terms of making a change smooth and seamless... this wasn't it. This is pretty much how not to do it, and I suspect it will cost Google Analytics a fair bit of market share, which will make the analytics landscape even more complicated.

So, what are your options? Learn GA 4, yes - especially if you're going to be in the job market, because for good or ill a lot of companies will simply adopt GA 4, even if they set it up horribly. There will be quite a cottage industry for the next two years in fixing other people's horrendous implementations. [Crass plug again, we do that, too](#). But also give yourself some amnesty if learning it is hard, because it's not an upgrade. It's a totally different product. It's like trading in your 2022 car and suddenly your dealership has given you an airplane. Don't beat yourself up because you don't get the new version right away.

For a company? Take a strong look at other options if Google Analytics 4 simply isn't a good fit for you any more because you're going to have to learn a new system and start over anyway, so take the opportunity to find the best fit for you. The one I recommend most is [Matomo](#), the open-source product. There's a version you can install on your own servers. If you run Wordpress, there's even a version that's a seamless Wordpress plugin that requires almost no technical skill to install. And as a bonus, it can import all your old Google Analytics data. Because it's open-source, if you install it on your own hardware/virtual servers, you have total control over your data, over how often you update it, and it's always, always yours in perpetuity. No one will ever be able to take it away from you.

Function-wise, it's where Google Analytics 3 was about 3-4 years ago. It doesn't have any of the fancy machine-learning features like multi-

touch attribution built in. But if you need something that's straightforward, that behaves a lot like today's Google Analytics, that works in highly-regulated industries, and that won't cost you an arm and a leg, give it a hard look.

I'm running Matomo alongside Google Analytics 4. For me, as a very, very technical marketer, it's not as sufficient as I'd like it to be. Google Analytics 4 is a better fit for me as a highly technical marketer. But if my martial arts teacher or another small business or resource-strapped team came to me today and asked what they should use, I would say they should install Matomo as their system of record and have Google Analytics 4 as the backup, not the other way around.

Anyway, if you want to talk about this, hop on over to the free Slack group I help run, [Analytics for Marketers](#). Bring your own beverage.

2022-07-17 : Behind the Scenes

Every so often, folks ask what sort of gear and processes I use to create this newsletter and the other content I produce during the week, both for [my blog](#) and [Trust Insights](#). Let's take a tour behind the scenes. Where and when things are clickable, they are affiliate links, probably to Amazon.

Hardware

- [MacBook Pro M1, 2021](#) - the workhorse. This machine does it all, and it's a good thing because I need it to do a lot of things, from intensive video editing to machine learning models.
- [Rodecaster Pro First Edition](#) - the soundboard. A good soundboard and mixer makes life easier, especially for live streaming. If you want to sound consistently good, a soundboard is a necessity. The second edition isn't as good a piece of hardware! It's missing - bizarrely - a TRRS jack which you need if you want to hardware a phone into it. I don't know why Rode did that, but it was dumb.
- [Shure SM7B microphone](#) - yes, it's that mic. But the sound is unbeatable and very, very distinct, and it works well with my voice.
- [Logitech Brio](#) - the only 4K webcam that works reliably on a Mac.
- [Razer Basilisk X Hyperspeed](#) - a Bluetooth mouse that just fits so nicely in my hand.
- [Bose QC earbuds](#) - especially for livestreaming, these are great when you want to hear what your cohosts are saying but not be wearing a big headset.
- Das Keyboard Mac - when you want that super clicky, super loud, oh so satisfying clicky keyboard, this is the one to get.
- [iPhone](#) - there's no better portable multimedia studio, honestly.
- [iPad](#) - there's no better platform for drawing, painting, and illustrating. The Magic Pencil especially lives up to its name.
- [Linode](#) - the hosting company that provides hardware for me to run my marketing automation software on. Special disclosure:

client of my company.

- [WP Engine](#) - the service that hosts my blog, where the “read with your browser” link goes.

Software

- [Mautic](#) - The backbone of this newsletter, free, open-source marketing automation software that sends this newsletter to you.
- [Joplin](#) - Free, open-source app that is based on the markup language Markdown. It’s a sanity-saver. Everything is written in what’s effectively plain text, and then some special codes to handle formatting. Markdown is an incredibly flexible language that exports to PDF, ePub, HTML, etc. with ease, especially if you have pandoc and Calibre.
- [Adobe Creative Cloud](#) - the workhorse of multimedia. This suite has everything for roughly 50 dollars US per month if you get it on sale during Black Friday each year and buy the annual package. Within it, I use Adobe Premiere for all my video, Adobe Audition for my audio, Photoshop and Illustrator for graphics, and a ton of the Adobe mobile apps. Adobe Fresco on the iPad is mindblowing.
- [YouTube](#) - to host the videos.
- [Libsyn](#) - to host the audio MP3 files.
- [Wordpress](#) - the software that runs my blog.
- [Thunderbird](#) - no mail client is better for storing email messages and making them accessible - and Thunderbird is free and open-source as well. There’s a plugin called Better Import Export that lets you export an entire mailbox of messages as a CSV, which means you can do intensive data analysis on it.
- [Million Verifier](#) - the email verification software I use to clean my email list. There’s no better - and no better priced. It’s so good I wrote my own software to integrate with it.
- [Amazon SES](#) - pay as you go service from Amazon that sends large amounts of email. Mautic pours all its email into Amazon SES, which then delivers it.
- [Gmail Postmaster Tools](#) - a free service from Google that tells me about my reputation to Gmail addresses, which are like 50% of

you.

- [MXToolbox](#) - email marketing infrastructure software that tells you all kinds of technical details about your email marketing, like whether you're on blacklists, whether your domain is set up correctly, etc.

The Process

Each week, this newsletter starts with this section. Usually on Friday nights, I'm mulling over what I want to write and looking in my inboxes to see if you've asked any questions that I need to answer either here or in daily video blog posts. If there's something that's timely and relevant, it goes in. This week's content comes from a conversation I had with Dennis Shiao earlier in the week about counterintuitive email marketing techniques, and part of it is how I run my newsletter infrastructure.

Once I've got the idea, I write it down in Joplin. I keep a folder of half baked ideas and usually pull from that; this column was two sentences as a reminder of what I was going to write.

After that, I extract the rest of the newsletter from various [Trust Insights systems](#) - we have content curation software I wrote that puts together pretty much the rest of the newsletter, with supervision.

Once the content is fully baked, I record the video for it, then edit it in Adobe Premiere and Adobe Audition. After that, I export the video, export the audio, load the video to YouTube, load the audio to Libsyn, and copy/paste this Markdown right into Wordpress. I use a special editor in Wordpress that can directly accept Markdown without converting it, so putting this newsletter up as a blog post takes literally seconds. It's so convenient.

Next, I handle and process new subscribers, unsubscribes, and bounces from the previous week, washing new subscribers through

Million Verifier and exporting all my bounces from Thunderbird. I do this by hand with some code I wrote because I honestly don't trust the bounce handling of any software. Those who know the detailed technical aspects of email marketing know that mail servers can be configured a bazillion different ways and don't always send back the right error codes. I prefer to do it myself so that I know it's being handled correctly. I do not advise that anyone else do this unless you love, love, love technical email marketing.

After that, the newsletter gets loaded into Mautic, I update the subscriber lists and unsubscribes, and it goes out the door. These days, it takes about 6 hours to send one issue of the newsletter to about 230,000 folks, which is why I usually start sending it around 9 PM on a Saturday night. That way it's in most people's inboxes no later than 9 AM the next day in most timezones.

So that's the behind-the-scenes for the Almost Timely newsletter. I freely admit that it's counterintuitive and overly technical in some spots. Sometimes that's because I'd rather do things the hard way on purpose so I can see what's really going on under the hood, and sometimes that's because I'm cheap and would prefer to run my email marketing as inexpensively as possible. I literally could not afford to send this newsletter any other way with what other email service providers charge.

Hopefully, this gave you some ideas about how you manage your own newsletter and email marketing, and maybe introduced you to some new tools, too.

2022-07-24 : The Vital Importance of Community

Let's talk community for a second, and not just in the context of marketing (though marketing also). What is community, and why do we care?

The standard definition and etymology is “a group of people associated together by fact of residence in the same locality”, from the Latin *communis* (which is the root word for common, community, and communism). More broadly, it's a group of people associated together by something in common.

These days, community really is about that second aspect, about the association together by something in common. When you look at communities, especially online, we see common interests, interests that bring people together and keep them together. Go into a directory like Disboard or Reddit and you'll find more communities than you could ever possibly join on virtually any topic.

So why should we care about community? **Community is an insurance policy**, as both a concept and as something you should actively be participating in.

What kind of insurance policy? Like any group of people working together, a strong community comes to the aid of its individual members when one of them needs help. For example, the community that belongs to Beau of the Fifth Column's YouTube channel was able to muster large quantities of PPE gear at the start of the pandemic for local hospitals in his area that couldn't get hold of any. Similar things happened all over; I had a small amount of excess stock of N95 masks in early 2020 and a friend's sister (who was an ICU nurse) desperately needed some for their COVID ward that I was able to provide.

Even in a commercial sense, a community can help its individual members. Our Slack community, [Analytics for Marketers](#) has folks

helping each other out every day, answering questions, sharing ideas. For something like bringing attention to a particular initiative, communities can act faster and more effectively than large organizations, and can bypass traditional gatekeepers.

The benefits of communities don't stop there. Beyond organizationally, communities can be a huge benefit to individual people. As a species, we evolved to depend on our community, on our local pooled resources. Since the earliest days of hiding together in caves, we have been social animals to survive. We derive pleasure from being around others, especially when we are mutually supported. Those folks who tended to fare worse during the lockdowns of 2020 from a mental health perspective were those who didn't have communities of some kind they could participate in digitally.

The analogy of community to an insurance policy is especially apt because it explains why companies rarely succeed with communities to the extent that they might wish, especially from a marketing standpoint. For insurance to work, you have to have a lot of people invest in it over a long period of time with relatively few withdrawals to make the business of insurance financially viable.

The same is true of community; individuals have to invest a lot into it to gain benefit from it. We cannot simply put a group of people together and expect magic instantly. Moreover, our community from the beginning needs to have that clear sense of common ground, that focal point which binds them together. Sometimes it can be a person, like the legions of fans surrounding a public personality like Taylor Swift. Sometimes it's a franchise, like people who are fans of Star Trek. Sometimes it's a concept, like voting rights, but in every case, the common ground is the root of community in both literal and figurative senses.

Here's another catch that companies often screw up. Common ground, common interest is almost always rooted in emotion. Sustainable, long-term community success is rooted in emotion. People have to feel

something to believe in its importance. They have to have a literal passion for the common ground. If you're trying to figure out why some communities work and others don't, examine the emotions first. What kinds of emotions are common to successful communities? Why?

If you want to know your prospects for success in building a community (professionally or personally), answer a few straightforward questions. How emotionally invested in you are your audience? Do you know? Have you talked to them? Do they proactively talk to you? If so, what do they say, and how do they say it to you?

Here's a second test. Tally up the number of actual, real, human audience members you talk to every week, whether it's by email, social media, private community, in person, etc. If you can count the answer on one hand, you need to invest more time in speaking with the people already in your sphere, in your existing communities - followers on social media, subscribers to your newsletter, etc. Once you get past fingers and have to start counting on toes, you're starting to talk to enough people to accurately assess your prospects for successful community building.

2022-07-31 : Old School Podcast Marketing

On Twitter this morning, my friend [Jason Falls](#) called out a [list put together of podcasting personalities that had omitted me](#) (which was very kind of him) and that got into a brief discussion about who's who in podcasting. Putting aside lists in general, one of the things that separates the original wave of podcasters from the generations since is some marketing practices of podcasts from the early days that have all but vanished.

For context, I started my first podcast in 2005, the Financial Aid Podcast. It ran every weekday from 2005-2010, topping out at 940 episodes and showing up in places like US News and World Report, CNN, and the Wall Street Journal. My second podcast, [Marketing Over Coffee](#), which I co-host with John Wall, started in 2007 and is still going 733 episodes later. I believe it's the second oldest marketing podcast behind the Duct Tape Marketing podcast. My third podcast, [In-Ear Insights](#), started in 2018 with the founding of [Trust Insights](#). It's the baby of the group. Along the way, I co-founded the [PodCamp unconference](#) with [Chris Brogan](#) in 2006; Podcamps do still occur though I haven't been involved since about 2012.

So, let's take a walk down memory lane and see what worked in the old days - and we're talking 2005-2010 here, the first age of podcasting - and see what still sticks.

101

Your podcast has to be worth consuming. Figure that out first. You're asking people to put you in their ears and eyes for anywhere from minutes to hours - it had better be worth their time. Simple question to ask: if you didn't make your show, would you willingly tune into it? Would you subscribe if it weren't your show?

Use a Good Hosting Service

Podcast hosting services can automate a LOT of distribution. I've been

a loyal fan of Libsyn since the earliest days of podcasting because their pricing model makes sense. You pay a monthly fee and an unlimited number of people can download your episodes. Part of their services includes distribution of your show to networks like Spotify, iHeartRadio, etc. Every time you publish an episode, it pushes to those places, which saves you time.

Publish Everywhere But Focus on Somewhere

The flip side to distribution is that your audience could be everywhere, but you don't necessarily have time to optimize for every network. Do some market research about the channel people tune in on most, and then focus your efforts on marketing your show on that channel. Maybe it's Spotify. Maybe it's YouTube. Wherever your audience is most, that's where your time, effort, and maybe some ad dollars should go to grow your audience.

Promos

By far the tactic that worked best for new shows in the first age of podcasting was the promo swap. These are nothing more than 30-60 second promotional spots you swap with other non-competitive podcasts that you might want to trade audiences with. Think of these as simple audio ads, but audio ads that you exchange with another show voluntarily, rather than pay. Your best bet is to find similarly sized podcasts; two shows with 5,000 listeners each will benefit each other equally; a show with 500,000 listeners swapping with a show that has 500 listeners isn't going to receive equal benefit unless those 500 listeners are super high value.

By the way, this works for all channels, not just podcasting.

Guest Hosting

Popular especially during the holiday season, guest hosting is a way to attract a new audience, especially if you know your audience well and you know who else they listen to. Find out through market research and then approach other podcasting personalities about guest hosting

a show, where they play your role on your show and you play their role on their show.

Show Notes Are Everything

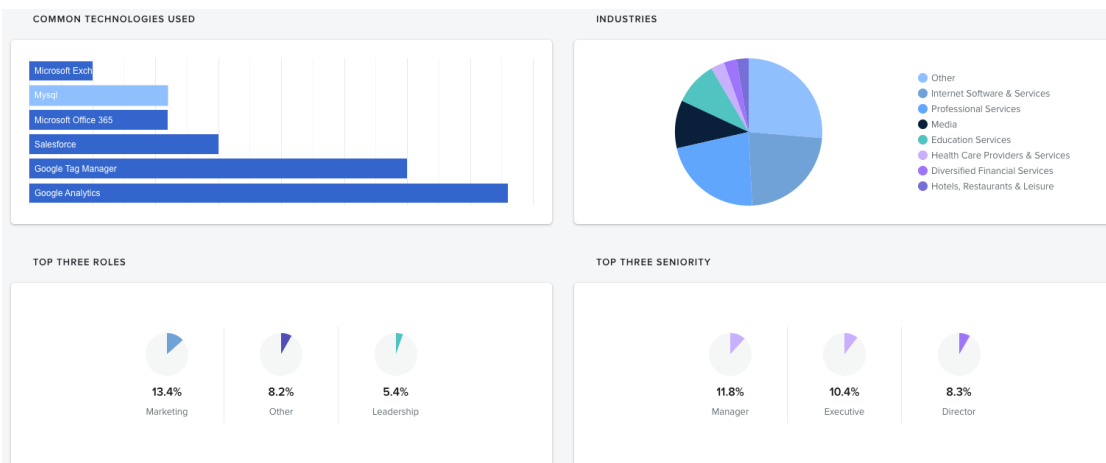
A podcast without show notes is just a waste of material. Show notes - hosted on your own website, thank you very much - help listeners find and recommend episodes of your show to others. They also help search engines find you and index your show, especially if you're linking to your media from your show notes. It seems obvious, but back in the day, there were a number of shows that never built a digital home for themselves, instead relying on a podcast network. That was fine until the network went belly up and then the show went with it.

And also, what happens when you put up a website and you include web analytics like Google Analytics? You get audience insights about your listeners. Super valuable, especially if you want sponsorships.

Want to double down on accessibility? Make sure your podcast has transcripts, too. They help those with hearing disabilities as well as those folks who just plain prefer to read rather than listen or watch. I recommend [Otter.ai](https://otter.ai) for this - while it's not perfect, it's really good and it speeds up the process enormously.

Your Newsletter Is Your Podcast, Too

A great podcast has an accompanying newsletter that summarizes each episode or a series of episodes, helping remind audiences who might have forgotten to tune in that you're still making valuable content. Critically, newsletters provide something a lot of social networks don't: an easy way to distill down your audience's demographics when you use a data appending service. Here's an example, using my newsletter mailing list:



Example list diagnostic

This tells you in detail who's listening, who's in your audience, which helps you tailor your content better.

Your Audio Should Be Video

YouTube isn't exactly new. It came about in 2005 at the same time podcasting did. Yet an astonishing number of podcasts are available in audio format only. Record your podcast as both audio and video - even if you don't want to be on camera, you can generate audiograms that are animations synced to your audio. [Services like Headliner can do this for you and are worth trying out for free.](#)

Why? Because YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, that's why. If you're doing a good job of entertaining and educating in your show, YouTube is a platform that caters to those two objectives.

Your Podcast is a Product

At the end of the day, your podcast is a product. That means you have to market it like any other product or service. You may not be asking for money, but you are asking for time and attention and arguably, those are harder to come by today than money is. Treat your podcast like a product, develop a marketing plan for it, and market it as hard as you'd market any product or service if you want it to succeed.

Of the many tools in the Google Marketing Platform, none is more overlooked than Google Search Console. Marketers assume it's just for SEO, but the information contained within benefits search, social media, public relations, advertising, and so much more. In my new Google Search Console for Marketers course, you'll learn what Google Search Console is, why it matters to all marketers, and then dig deep into each of the features of the platform.



When you're done, you'll have working knowledge of the entire platform and what it can do – and you'll be ready to start making the most of this valuable marketing tool.

 [Click/tap here to register](#)

Or visit:

<https://www.trustinsights.ai/searchconsole>

2022-08-07 : The SEA Change in Marketing

This past week, I had the pleasure of talking with folks about how AI is impacting marketing at the annual MAICON (Marketing AI Conference) event in Cleveland, and one of the points I made is worth digging into here: the SEA change in marketing.

SEA is a silly acronym I made up that stands for **Someone Else's AI**. It's the single biggest obstacle to our marketing, assuming we have a product or service that doesn't suck.

Take a moment to think about this. How much of your daily life is mediated by **Someone Else's AI**?

If you shop on big sites like Amazon or eBay, **Someone Else's AI** is nudging you strongly with product suggestions.

If you search on a search engine like Google, Bing, or DuckDuckGo, **Someone Else's AI** is controlling what you do and don't find. There may be entire corners of the web that you will never see or experience because **Someone Else's AI** has deemed them inappropriate or irrelevant to you.

If you listen to music on Spotify, **Someone Else's AI** is determining what songs to recommend to you, especially if you're doing things like putting together playlists.

If you watch shows on platforms like Netflix, **Someone Else's AI** is suggesting to you all the time what else you should watch.

If you consume news, especially through news apps like Apple News, Google News, or a social network, **Someone Else's AI** is determining what news to show you and what news you shouldn't see.

If you participate in mainstream social media like Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram, TikTok, etc. **Someone Else's AI** is telling you what to watch, who to listen to, even which friends are important to you.

As consumers, many of these recommendations aren't bad. Spotify can recommend new songs or music to us that we might not otherwise find. Netflix can surface shows we might never think to watch. We can debate the merits of recommendation engines - the AI technology behind all these methods of filtering content - another time, but the reality is that much of our reality as consumers is a mediated experience.

As marketers? This can really, really suck. I don't have control over whether Facebook shows my post or not. I don't have control over whether Google lists my website for a relevant term on page 1 or page 175 of its results - despite what Google says in their Webmaster chats and public materials. I don't have control over whether YouTube recommends my video or Instagram shows my Reel to my friends or TikTok puts my video in the For You page. **Someone Else's AI** is in charge of all that and it's out of my control. I can follow all the best practices and still gain no ground.

In fact, in the last few years, **Someone Else's AI** has made things extremely difficult for marketers. It used to be that the risk of content performing poorly due to **Someone Else's AI** was fairly low. We publish a tweet and it goes nowhere, so what? No big deal, we try again. Then images became the preferred format. That requires more effort, more resources. Then audio. Then video. Now we're at a point where, just to satisfy **Someone Else's AI**, we may have to invest substantially in content creation abilities that are very expensive - and when our efforts fall flat, we've burned a lot more resources than a text tweet that no one liked. And as we see companies like Facebook push harder and harder for more complex media formats like their Metaverse, we should see the writing on the wall: only those willing to pay a lot of money and invest a lot of time will do well with **Someone Else's AI**.

So, as a marketer, what do I do to escape this rat race? I need two

insurance policies against **Someone Else's AI**. If I invest suitably in both these insurance policies - and these are substantial investments over a long period of time - I will circumvent and mitigate the worst effects of **Someone Else's AI**.

Insurance policy #1 is my brand, the brand of my company, my products and services, even me as a person. When you think of getting help with analytics or marketing operations and the first thing you think about is my company, [Trust Insights](#), then instead of looking for help generally, you'll probably Google my company or perhaps even type my company's domain name in directly to your browser. My brand's strength dramatically reduces the chances **Someone Else's AI** recommends someone else.

Remember that brand is reputation + recall. We want people to remember us for good things, and we accomplish that by investing heavily in the relationships we have with our audience, plus having products and services that don't suck.

Insurance policy #2 is my community, the people I've built good relationships with over time. Ideally, I have a mechanism of communication with my community that doesn't have **Someone Else's AI** involved at all, like this newsletter (thank you for reading and subscribing), or something like a [Slack group](#) or a Discord server where no algorithm, no recommendation engine is competing against me - it's just a direct line from me to you. It could even be an old school BBS or forum - heck, even a print magazine plus a PO Box. Whatever it is, as long as I have a direct line to you and you have a direct line to me, I've got an insurance policy against **Someone Else's AI**.

Why am I spending so much time on this, and why, as someone who talks a lot about AI and its benefits, am I seemingly railing against AI? It's not AI in general. It's **Someone Else's AI**. All AI is optimized for specific outcomes, and unless we're the engineers building the software models, we don't necessarily know what those outcomes are, but we can all make some fairly decent guesses. What is Facebook's AI

optimized for? Making Facebook money. What is TikTok's AI optimized for? How about LinkedIn? Twitter? Netflix?

You guessed it. Every instance of **Someone Else's AI** is optimized for them. Not for us, not marketers. As marketers, we're in many cases the enemy of **Someone Else's AI** because we're taking away potential money the parent company's AI could be diverting to them. It's one of the reasons we've seen influencers steadily losing ground on mainstream social networks over time - because those dollars that go to an Instagram influencer are dollars not going to Instagram, and of course their AI will optimize against that.

So it's critical to understand that **Someone Else's AI** is not our friend, not our ally. At best, they're a temporary help to us, but our priority should always be to evacuate our audience and customers from **Someone Else's AI** as quickly as we possibly can into a channel where there's nothing between us and our customers.

2022-08-14 : Where's the Conversation?

Two things came together in my head this week. The first was a friend on Facebook lamenting that the good old days - when people had real conversations and communities on public social media - seemed to be a thing of the past. They were hearkening back to the early days of Twitter when it was more like a large bar, and you could just strike up or join conversations with anyone.

The second thing was looking at the data around all things pumpkin spice for a [Trust Insights](#) blog post I'm working on. One of the things that came up was a pumpkin spice squishmallow, and the category of squishmallows in general. I dug around to find what this thing was - a stuffed animal made with a specific type of memory foam - and where you could get one. The primary vendor, Target, has been sold out of them since their announcement. Yet when I searched public social media using [Talkwalker](#), I found only a few thousand conversations over the last 13 months.

As a benchmark, generally speaking a few thousand conversations is not nearly enough volume to cause a retail store to be sold out of the item. So I jumped into a few Discord communities I'm a member of and started looking around and asking around. Yes, they're a thing. One conversation thread said they're basically the new Beanie Babies. Another thread talked about how they're good for folks with anxiety. A third thread was a long, long listing of what people had, wanted, and were willing to trade.

The trend is happening on social media. It's just on social media we can't see.

We've talked for a while - probably close to a decade now - about dark social media. This is social media that occurs in private conversations. In the early days of dark social, these were group chats in Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, etc. - conversations that were happening

behind closed doors. But now, with the rise of insanely popular services like Slack and Discord, millions of conversations are occurring out of the public eye among thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people.

What's more, because of the way Slack and Discord earn revenue - per user fees and/or server fees - there's no advertising, no adtech, no way for marketers to even know what's going on inside these communities except to join them and have a look for themselves.

This is the new dark social - rich, vibrant conversations that are out of the public eye, out of reach to marketers at scale, out of the ability for us to monetize them and for anyone to effectively monitor them without expending massive resources to do so. Whether it's a group chat on Snapchat, a Telegram channel, an OnlyFans community... the reality is that our audiences (and us, if we're honest) are tired of every conversational space being invaded by marketing. On every Discord community I'm a member of, there's almost always a rule against spamming - which Discord folks interpret as ANY FORM OF MARKETING - that can result in your account being kicked and banned on the first offense. I help moderate one community, and that exact definition - any marketing at all - is the precondition for giving someone the boot.

Even in our Slack community, [Analytics for Marketers](#), we prohibit self promotion except in the designated self promotion channel (hey, we know we're all marketers). Think about that for a second. Even the marketers don't want marketing invading their community without constraints.

Step back and look at the big picture. Governments around the world are enforcing stronger and stronger privacy initiatives. Public social media has become all about performance, not conversation - it's no surprise that channels like TikTok have taken off. We love the performances, the entertainment, etc. but we don't have conversations there. In fact, we - as people, not marketers - generally go out of our

way to NOT read the comments in public forums. And private social media is where the conversations are, where marketers aren't allowed to be marketers except under limited circumstances.

Communities behind closed doors - I call them velvet rope communities - are where influence happens now, because it's where conversation and persuasion happens now. So what should you do as a marketer if you want to keep generating results? Two things. First, join relevant communities for your own personal interests - NOT WORK RELATED - and lurk. Watch, observe, study, and learn how velvet rope communities work. Then, once you've got the hang of it, start to participate as a person, not a marketer. After you've spent a few months learning how to be a valued member of a community, you're ready to start your own.

It has become cliché in marketing to talk about "being more human", but the reality is that very few marketers do so. Take these steps to join private social media communities, velvet rope communities, around the interests you have as a person, as a human, and you may well unlock the secrets you need to know to make your marketing actually more human.

2022-08-21 : PIGS In Your Marketing Strategy

One of the most useful frameworks for marketing strategies and marketing campaigns is something I call PIGS. It's a derivation of several works over the years, all the way from E. St. Elmo Louis' AIDA framework in 1898, but PIGS is my variant mainly because it's more fun to say. If you've sat through any of my talks on the topic, you know how much delight I take in it.

So, what is PIGS? PIGS stands for problem, impact, general solution, specific solution. Let's talk through each of these phases and what they mean for our marketing capabilities.

The first challenge is the problem. What is the problem the customer has? More important, does the customer understand that they have the problem? Problem awareness is one of the biggest blind spots for self-centered marketers because we assume that everyone knows what the problem is. Implicit in the declaration that "everyone needs our company's products/services" is the assumption that everyone has the problem we solve. We know rationally that's not true for almost everyone except industries like the funeral industry - death is a problem everyone eventually has.

If the top of your funnel is empty or thinner than it should be, then you haven't done a good job marketing the problem.

The second challenge is the impact. This is an area that I and [my company](#) struggle with a lot. The customer understands the problem but doesn't understand the impact of the problem. My partner Katie Robbert talks about this quite a bit, especially with scenario planning - what's the impact if you do nothing? In our marketing communications, we absolutely have to make the case that not only is there a problem, but there's an impact if you don't solve the problem, or you choose the wrong partner to solve the problem. You'll hear this in dry boardroom lingo like "presenting the business case" for a

project - that's just an overcomplicated way of saying what the problem's impact is. If you can't communicate the impact, the need to solve the problem, then your marketing is going to fail. I run into this a lot with analytics - a lot of people understand they have an analytics problem, but the impact isn't clear until the problem is really big, and then it's too late to fix it.

If the number one reason for lost business deals or customers is "no decision", then you haven't done a good job marketing the impact.

The third challenge is the general solution. This is education, educating the customer that the problem and the impact are solvable. There is a way out of the pain you're in, and the general solution is X. You're hungry - that's the problem. You know you get hangry - that's the impact. The general solution is to eat something. Now, in some cases, the solution itself may not be known and therefore customers need education that the solution even exists. Ever hear those ads on late night TV (or in memes about late night TV) that start with that overexaggerated, "ARE YOU TIRED OF MOWING YOUR LAWN IN STRAIGHT LINES?" That's marketing the general solution. The problem and impact are clear, but the customer may not know that the general solution exists.

If the middle of your funnel is thinner than it should be, then that may be a sign that you're not educating about the solution in general. People can't pick you until they understand what they're picking in general.

The final challenge is the specific solution - us. Our company. Our products, our services, our people. This is where marketers are most comfortable, because we love to talk about ourselves. But you can see that talking about ourselves is only appropriate once someone has made it through the first three steps. If someone doesn't know they have a problem, or they don't know the impact of the problem, or they don't know a solution category exists, then our marketing is going to fall on deaf ears. We may as well market to our customers' pets for all the good it will do. Now, that said, if you can't convey the benefits of

your products and services as the specific solution which provides clarity on the general solution, then that's where you need to tune up your messaging.

If the bottom of your funnel is thinner than it should be, then you need to work on the marketing around your specific solution. It's a sign that you haven't figured that out if you're losing to named competitors all the time - the customer understands the problem, the impact, and the general solution but they didn't pick you as the specific solution.

That's PIGS. Problem, impact, general solution, specific solution. Here's where marketers fall down: they don't understand where in the PIGS framework their biggest issues are. If you go through the framework and you find that your customers are getting lost at impact, but all your marketing campaigns are focused on your specific solution, then you're going to see terrible results.

Your marketing campaigns should always have elements of each of the PIGS stages in market. You should be educating about the problem. You should be explaining the impact. You should be walking through the general solution. And for people who make it that far, your efforts to help them, to provide them value, should make you the obvious choice as the specific solution unless your product or service is a wildly bad fit.

Even better, if you know where your customers are in the PIGS framework, you can tailor marketing and communications messages to them. How can you learn this? Well, the easiest way is to ask them and listen carefully to their answers while NOT pushing your products and services. Remember, you can't skip to you as the specific solution if the customer hasn't gone through the previous stages, any more than you can skip to being happily married for 20 years without actually living through those two decades.

That's PIGS. Bring it into your own marketing as a diagnostic to

understand where you're falling down and how you could do better.

2022-08-28 : Flywheels

Let's have ourselves a super nerd moment and talk about flywheels, because I have some issues with them. You've doubtlessly heard or seen mention of the concept as it relates to marketing. Many companies have incorporated the marketing flywheel into their overall strategy.

Here's the catch: Most of what's been written about it is conceptually wrong.

Why? A flywheel is an energy storage device. It's usually something big and heavy on an axle, like a big chunk of stone or iron. Energy goes into the system from some other source, and the wheel turns - slowly at first and then faster as you add more energy to it. It's basically a mechanical battery.

When you need power later, the flywheel's stored energy turns magnets attached to the same axle which produce electricity. Flywheels have a ton of real world applications, but you see them most with unstable power sources like wind and solar because what flywheels do best is smooth out irregularities.

For example, suppose you have a windmill. At any given time, that windmill could be generating a little bit of power or a whole lot of power. If the windmill's power generation is put into a flywheel, then instead of fits and starts of energy generation, it smoothes out the power into a much more consistent flow. Sometimes it gets a lot of extra momentum from a strong wind, and other times it's spinning - and slowing down over time - but still spinning when the wind isn't blowing as strong. With something like solar power, the application is even more obvious - solar power makes energy during the day and not at night, so the flywheel stores excess energy from the day and slowly returns that energy at night when you need it and the sun isn't out.

Some enterprising marketer got it into their heads that this was the perfect analogy for marketing, that it explains modern marketing really well. One prominent vendor promotes it heavily because it helps them sell more of their suite of software products that are otherwise somewhat disconnected.

In the context in which most marketers use it, I don't think it's a particularly good model. They have this belief that if you do a bunch of marketing to a customer, that builds the customer relationship and then that relationship powers sales.

I suppose in the abstract that could be true; the more you put into a relationship, the more you get out of it is generally true unless the person on the other end of the relationship doesn't see it as reciprocal. But where all these flywheel analogies go off the rails is that they all presume the flywheel analogy means that the relationship is generating energy in excess of what's put into it. "Invest in marketing and you'll make tons of money in sales" is the general pitch.

And with actual flywheels, that's never, ever true. No flywheel system ever generates more energy than you put into it. In fact, every system returns LESS energy than you put in, due to basic physics. The function of a flywheel is to smooth out irregularities in inputs.

The analogy breaks down in other ways, too. In a mechanical system, if you put in a negative input, the system draws energy to deal with it, but generally a short shock won't bring the system to a screeching halt. In a customer relationship, if you screw up just once and perhaps not even that badly, you can permanently wreck the relationship. Relationships break much faster than they're made, because it's hard to gain trust and easy to lose it. Flywheels presume linear inputs and outputs, and relationships just don't work that way.

Finally, the flywheel analogy in marketing really breaks down most when it's self-centered. If you operate under the belief that doing a bunch of marketing is building a relationship that creates a social debt,

an expectation of sales, you're in for a bad time. In general - and it's a broad generalization because there are a decent number of examples to the contrary - the way most people do marketing is they create content that serves them. If the customer gets any value, it's incidental, like every whitepaper ever which professes to examine an industry but inevitably concludes that the vendor who produced the paper is the only rational choice for the industry's problems.

The flywheel analogy is still useful in a couple of ways. First, it's a warning, a case study that you probably shouldn't borrow concepts from other disciplines if you don't fully understand them, because you tend to look foolish to anyone who has domain knowledge of that discipline.

Second, the concept of having some kind of buffer, something that you invest in that gives smaller returns over time is still a good idea. Investing in people, investing in relationships, investing in providing more value than you take - those are still generally good ideas.

Here's an easy test to see if you, personally, do this. Look back on your career and the friendships you have. How many friends do you still have today from past customers? If you've ever really gotten to know a customer and built a true friendship with them, one that outlasted the commercial relationship, then you understand what the flywheel is really all about - giving more than taking, and being present for your professional relationships.

2022-09-04 : Understanding the Implications of Stable Diffusion

This past week, you may have seen an explosion in the amount of AI-produced artwork. Why, and why is everyone talking about it all the sudden?

The oversimplified version is that Stable Diffusion is a new model for generating visual creative using AI. What makes it different than other models is a simple fact: its creators open-sourced it.

To understand the implications of this, we have to understand the landscape a bit and clear up some definitions. When someone says the words “AI model”, what they’re really saying is a piece of software written by AI. All machine learning and AI operates off models. Models are made by taking huge amounts of data and having machines recognize the patterns within them and then be able to replicate those patterns. An AI model is a piece of software for AI to use, in the same way Microsoft Word is a piece of software for you and me to use.

Up until this point, many of the best models for AI image generation have been created by corporations who have a strong vested interest in keeping those models behind closed doors. Google has some. Almost certainly other big tech companies do. The models you’ve heard most about in the news include a model called DALL-E 2, by OpenAI - which, despite the company’s name, is not open or free.

What that has meant thus far is that professionals and amateurs have been able to dabble in the use of AI image generation, but haven’t been able to fully leverage the technology because of the costs involved.

This week, Hugging Face, in partnership with Stability.AI and Eleuther.AI, released Stable Diffusion. Unlike DALL-E 2 and Midjourney (two other popular image generation models), Hugging Face released not only access to their state of the art model, but the entire model itself. This is a huge step, because it means that anyone can download

their model and if you have the technical know-how, run it on your computer.

This has, in turn, created an explosion of innovation. People who were previously laboring to create apps and software using paid services like DALL-E 2 suddenly had access to a state of the art model that cost only the compute time to operate it. Overnight, we saw people applying the model to tons of different tasks, and the Internet was swamped by new creations.

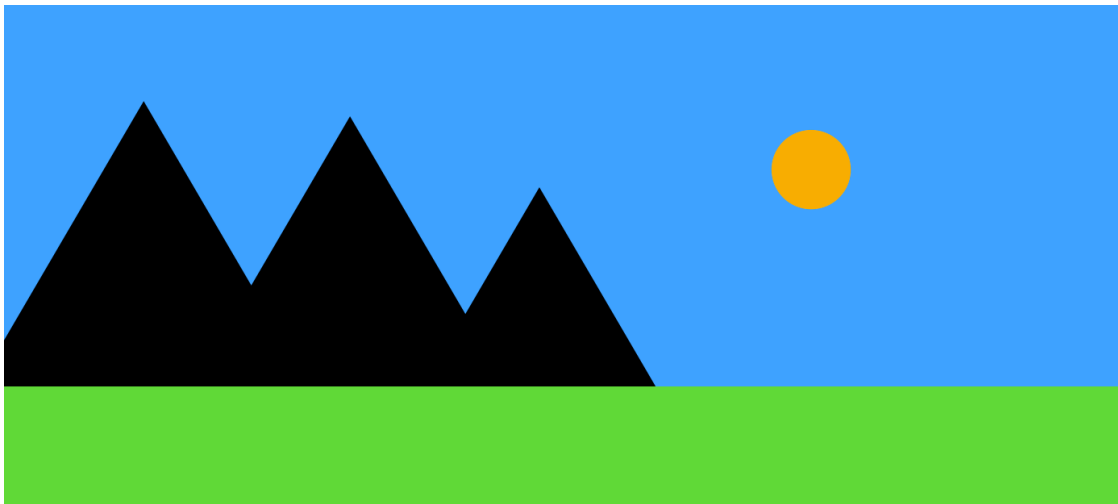
What do these models do? In short, Stable Diffusion performs two fascinating tasks: text to image, and image to image. Let's walk through each of these. Text to image is exactly what it sounds like: given a text prompt, the model attempts to create an image from the prompt. It draws from the huge number of images it learned from to synthesize something new.

Let's say I provide a prompt like this: *"A man sitting behind a desk, talking into a microphone, 4K resolution, photograph"*. What does Stable Diffusion spit out? Something like this:



Stable Diffusion output

Image to image does something similar, but instead of just words as the starting point, you provide an image of some kind and the model uses that, plus your text description, to manufacture a new image. Suppose I provide a prompt like this, which I made in Powerpoint:



Stable Diffusion prompt

I think it's fair to say I'm not going to be winning any prizes in art

contests, right?

But that's enough for an AI to work with, along with a prompt like this:
“A mountainous countryside with green fields and a fast-moving river at sunrise, 4K resolution, trending on Artstation, oil painting in the style of Rembrandt”

What did that yield? A bunch of examples, but one that looks like this:



Stable Diffusion image output

You can clearly see the starting point reflected, particularly in the colors. My inept, grade-school art was transformed into something much more artistic by the Stable Diffusion model. That's what makes them so powerful, so amazing - it's why everyone's been talking about them all week long.

What does it take to use the model? There are already tons of prepackaged web services that require no technical skill and have nominal costs. [You can try a free demo here.](#) I've been using the model on Google's Colab machine learning environment; for \$9.99 a month, I

get access to an absurdly powerful computing environment and then with Stable Diffusion, instead of paying per image, I get to generate as many images as I want.

What would you use this software for? Any kind of image generation, honestly. For example, I wrote a blog post recently about student loans and I told Stable Diffusion to make me an image of a pig in a library, rolling around in money, and it came up with this:



Stable Diffusion pig

At a bare minimum, using it to generate blog headers is one application, though that's a bit like flying an F-35 fighter plane to the grocery store for your weekly groceries.

Think about any place where you need some kind of image - blog posts, eBooks, etc. Instead of resorting to the same old clip art, you might now turn to a model like Stable Diffusion to create something custom, something unique. And this applies to all images, anywhere. Remember the stock painting of the seashell or the sailboat or the random garden that's in literally every hotel room ever? Those could be

replaced with unique, custom art now.

So, with that in mind, what are the implications? First, as we've seen with deep fakes, any time you release a powerful model, there will absolutely be misuse of it. We've seen some already; if you download the Stable Diffusion model, it can create racist or pornographic imagery with the same ease it creates any other image. It's a tool, a piece of software that has no moral compass of any kind; we as the users of the tool must be the ones to guide it. You'll note there are also biases in the model; look at the rendering above for the prompt "a man". The model was trained on data where white men with beards were most commonly tagged as men, so that's what the model thinks a man is, without further qualifiers and descriptors.

Second, there are clear economic implications. As we've seen with AI-generated writing, the bar of minimum quality has been raised. Four years ago, machines basically spit out word salad. Today, they can write competently. What they generate isn't amazing, but it's just slightly better than mediocre - which means if you're a mediocre writer, machines can do your job better than you can now. The onus is on you to skill up. What AI did for writing, it's now doing for art.

You can tell based on the starting prompt above that I'm not a particularly talented artist. The machines did a far better job of turning my prompt into real art than I ever could have - which means that if you're a professional artist with average or below average skills, your livelihood is now in peril from AI that can do your job better than you at substantially lower cost.

Third, as a marketer, you no longer have any excuse for bad visuals in any of your marketing content. At a bare minimum, your visuals should always be at least machine-made mediocre, if not better. Tools like Stable Diffusion have set the bar for all of us in terms of the minimum level of quality expected by users.

Fourth, Stable Diffusion itself is and will continue to be responsible for

a massive flood of new art. This is great news if you love to consume art. This is really bad news if your job is selling art. Either way, tools like Stable Diffusion pave the way for an enormous glut of new imagery.

Finally, and what I think is most important in the long run, tools like Stable Diffusion unlock our potential as artists. I'm not an artist, as I said. But I have artistic ideas, and Stable Diffusion [allows me to be an artist by proxy](#). I am no longer limited by my hilariously bad skills - I can provide a bad prompt to the software and still get good results out of it.

One last philosophical note: a lot of people have asked whether or not AI-created art is art. This question implies a lack of understanding about what art is. Art is expression, and the value of art is in the eye of the beholder. If it moves you, if it speaks to you, if it evokes something inside you, it is art, regardless of who made it. There's some art I just don't get, but to others it speaks to them, so it's art - just not art for me. Banish the concept of art/not art from your vocabulary. There's art that's for you and art that's not for you, but it's all art - no matter who or what made it.

2022-09-11 : How To Determine High-Value Topics

Let's say you're getting ready to write a book or put together a big presentation. Lots of people have excellent guides about the process itself, such as my friend [Tamsen Webster's Find the Red Thread process](#). But relatively few tackle figuring out what the topic should be in the first place. So I thought I'd share a few different things I do to figure out topics and ideas; hopefully they'll be helpful to you, especially if you've been asked to come up with a topic for a book or a conference talk.

The first step is a bit of self-awareness. What are the topics and areas where you have actual expertise of some kind to share? You can't build with materials you don't have, so that part comes first. The best place to figure this out? Your inbox. What are the topics and discussions you're giving advice or perspective on all the time? What do people need your help with most frequently? At work, what do people stop by your desk to ask about all the time?

Here's a good one: what are you really tired of answering?

The second step is to listen. A lot. Go listen to conversations in hallways at conferences. Go listen to questions and answers from others on the topic, if there are any. Go hang out on Reddit, in Discord or Slack, anywhere people can have real conversations, and listen to the questions being asked and the answers being given.

What questions do you have a better answer for?

Here's one of my favorite secret questions I ask myself: what answers do I disagree with most, perhaps even vigorously? The more I have an emotional reaction to something, the more I know there's something there worth exploring.

If you already do a lot of writing, check your analytics! What are the

topics that have captured the attention of your audience already?

Page title and screen class ▾		+	↓ Views	Users
Totals			6,235 100% of total	5,467 100% of total
1	Almost Timely News, 21 August 2022: PayPal PSA, PIGS In Your Marketing Strategy - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		743	758
2	Transforming People, Process, and Technology - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		674	551
3	Almost Timely News, 28 August 2022: Why Flywheels Are a Bad Marketing Analogy - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		568	554
4	On Student Loan Cancellation - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		513	464
5	Almost Timely News, 4 September 2022: Understanding the Implications of Stable Diffusion - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		501	479
6	Almost Timely News, 14 August 2022: Velvet Rope Communities and Dark Social - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		390	382
7	What's the Difference Between Social Media and New Media? - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		291	231
8	Can Causation Exist Without Correlation? Yes! - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		243	203
9	How To Set Your Consulting Billing Rates and Fees - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		233	204
10	Vision, Mission, Strategy, Tactics, and Execution - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		185	161
11	Why you're probably wrong about lighter fluid - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		158	143
12	Mind Readings: AI Enables Creative by Proxy - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		117	113
13	Marketing Keynote Speaker Chris Penn - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		114	95
14	How To Determine Whether Something is a Trend - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		102	95
15	What is Ethics in Marketing? - Christopher S. Penn - Marketing Data Science Keynote Speaker		102	60

Google Analytics 4 screenshot

If you don't have any of that, take a look at your favorite SEO tool to see what people are Googling for, and use that as a jumping off point, especially Google's "people also ask" questions.

The third step is to extend your idea. Adjacency is one of the most power idea-growing tools we have, and it's based on your subject matter expertise. When someone's talking about problems they're having, do they really have just those problems, or is there an underlying root problem? At lunch this week, a colleague asked why I thought companies had so many heterogenous data problems and I said the real problem is the people using the systems. The systems and data complexity is just a symptom of a much bigger problem.

With your topic, what's the next logical step, the next logical magnification of the problem? How big does the impact get if you don't address it? For example, the EU essentially ruled that [the use of Google Analytics 3 within the EU is flat out illegal, and several nations have litigated cases against it, such as France's CNIL](#). What are the logical consequences of this? If Google Analytics, and the fundamental technologies it is based on are illegal, what else is illegal? Your SaaS marketing automation software, if it has a similar technical architecture, probably is. So is your CRM. We're still waiting to see if the EU agrees that Google Analytics 4 solves the problems found in Google Analytics 3 or not.

From there, you could expand the topic to compliant technologies or privacy-friendly analytics alternatives like marketing mix modeling - but the point is that adjacency is what helps you showcase your knowledge.

The fourth step is to experiment with low-risk content. Before you sacrifice 18 months of your sanity writing a book or hundreds of hours building a course, write a newsletter article. Put up a YouTube video. Conduct a webinar. Publish a short whitepaper. If your idea in a smaller form doesn't get any traction, you can be fairly certain making it bigger won't make it better. My friend [Jay Baer](#) does talks on a topic for a year and collects audience reactions from it - then he writes the book if there's enough interest.

[Last week I started promoting the paper on private social media](#)

[communities](#). I had initially set out to write a book about it, but I wasn't sure it was worth it, so I made a paper instead. And you downloaded it like crazy and replied, commented, and asked questions so... looks like a book is on the horizon for it after all.

Of course, **the fifth and final step is to do it**, to make the idea real. To write the book, to deliver the talk, to build the course - and then use the feedback you get to make an even better version 2.

But as with any process, skipping straight to the end probably isn't the best idea, so take the process I've outlined above to identify a topic and then see how viable it is for a big project. This method will save you a lot of time and heartache!

2022-09-18 : Room Temperature Takes From Content Marketing World 2022

One of my favorite events of the year, Content Marketing World, has come and gone. Let's do some room temperature takes on the big themes and my reactions to them.

Why room temperature takes? Because "hot takes" implies rapid and vigorous reactions, and these are neither.

[Robert Rose](#): *"Even search is inefficient now. TikTok has conditioned us and our audiences that good content will be delivered to us automatically."*

Robert's TikTok example is amplified by so many trends in marketing right now. Google's One Box search results, featured snippets, and other delivery mechanisms causing zero click search results. Facebook and Instagram mimicking the TikTok method of content delivery. Even the venerable newsletter - everything's about reducing friction. And nothing reduces friction between the creator and the consumer like giving the consumer what they want before they have to ask for it.

[Drew Davis](#): *"Here the simple strategy of just answering obvious questions is badly outdated because it's low value commodity content. Instead answer rarely asked questions."*

Drew's premise for content marketing is to create content for specific, narrow personas at the top of the org chart instead of broad content that's a commodity like frequently asked questions for junior practitioners. The content he's proposing has little to no SEO value because only a handful of people are searching for something, but it can have enormous impact if you can get it to them. In some aspects, it's reminiscent of category design, where you try to identify very niche ideas and blow them out into something big.

[Joe Pulizzi](#): *"Lease space. Add new content to existing feeds and audiences*

instead of creating new properties. Almost like advertorial.”

This is a common sense tactic that we see channels like First We Feast enact with great success. Instead of starting up new properties and new audiences from scratch, using existing inventory and audiences. For example, in my YouTube feed, you’ll see several different shows that serve one audience - You Ask, I Answer, Mind Readings, So What?, and travel related stuff. If I were to split them out, I’d end up fragmenting my audience. Joe’s suggestion is to do the reverse - and even consider incorporating related content from others (with their permission) in your feed if it’s relevant.

[Ann Handley](#): *“Brand voice test: if you cover up the logo, can someone tell it’s your content?”*

This is the [classic white label test that we’ve been talking about for over a decade](#) - and yet, so few brands do this well. Ask yourself this - if you didn’t know your company’s newsletter or blog came from your company, could it just as easily be a competitor’s?

One thing I suggested to Ann after her talk, and that I do with my newsletter, is to literally read it aloud on video. I tend to find little things when I’m recording that I’ve forgotten about, or ways I say certain things in speech - in my literal voice - that I don’t write. By incorporating that into your writing, your voice will be that much stronger and distinct.

[Mike Allton](#): *“The key to high volume content creation: idea capture on any device at any time. Never let an idea get away.”*

These days, with the advent of smart watches, smart phones, smart speakers, etc. there’s literally no excuse at all to let an idea vanish on you. Capture it somehow; I’m a big fan of the free [Joplin app](#) because it syncs across all my devices and I can faceroll my ideas into a central repository anywhere.

[Mark Harrison](#): *“A vision statement is a vision: you can see it, you chase it, but you never catch it.”*

I loved Mark’s description of what a vision really is.

[Ashley Zeckman](#): *“RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT CAMPAIGNS. Stop treating influencer programs as one off initiatives.”*

This point grinds on me for more than just influence. There’s a conference that sets up new communities before every single major event - and then promptly abandons those communities the moment the closing keynote is done. Why? Because the organizers no longer see the conference community as something they can harvest for revenue, and their primary push is to force everyone into their paid community instead.

It’s fine to ask for money. But don’t bait and switch people - ask for money up front so people know what they’re getting into.

[Andy Crestodina](#): *“Specificity correlates with conversion.”*

Andy’s talk as usual was filled with practical advice, but I thought this aphorism was especially useful. How many things do we have on our websites and marketing collateral that are generic? Harkening back to Ann’s talk, if you covered up the context on a page, could an audience member tell what the value was? “Contact us” really doesn’t say anything - and it’s self-centered. “Get help with your marketing analytics today” says a lot more, and it’s not something that, say, Home Depot would have on their site.

My talk: Content attribution is about what content works. Channel attribution is about where content works. Content is the ingredient, channel is the cooking method - and you need good ingredients and good methods to deliver.

I’ll be blunt, I felt like my talk went poorly. Despite rehearsal, it was

shorter than I wanted it to be and I feel like the key points were muddled, so that talk goes back into the shop for reworking.

One final observation from the event as a whole and from evidence in my session specifically. I feel like we've rebooted marketing, and not in a good way. Listening to questions, listening to conversations, I felt like the overall audience had lost a lot of institutional knowledge, that the audience wasn't as advanced in their marketing journey as they were prior to the pandemic.

For example, I asked at one point how many people were familiar with Google Analytics' UTM parameters. Almost every hand went up. That was great. Then I asked how many people use them consistently and regularly - and I lost 95% of the hands. Using UTM tracking codes dates back to 2005 - this is in no way a new concept, and yet the audience wasn't following through on even the most basic of marketing attribution tasks.

This is bad news for marketing, especially marketing operations. Marketing isn't getting easier or less complex - but if our ability to work in challenging, complex environments has diminished, then we're poorly set up for success.

2022-09-25 : Non Obvious Content Creation

One of the things I hear people complain about, especially in social media content, is that “lessons learned from x” posts or “what you can learn from x” posts are both trite and not especially helpful. Why is this the case?

Very often, these pieces of content don’t offer any insight because their conclusions are very surface, very obvious. For example, there was a piece floating around on LinkedIn back in April about the sinking of the Titanic and lessons businesses could learn.

For folks who have been around for a while, what could we have gotten from that piece? What conclusions might we have reached that are not obvious? And how do we get to those conclusions, those insights?

The answer to this, to building content that’s a little more interesting, is to understand what’s wrong in the first place. Most of these content pieces simply describe what’s observable, and that’s why they’re so trite. Want to get a sense of what’s already obvious? Use one of the many writing AIs and ask it to generate a piece. Because they’ve been trained on the most common content - and the most common content is obvious - you’ll get a sense for what’s been done already. Here’s an example:

I gave the prompt, “Write six paragraphs about lessons marketers could learn from the sinking of the Titanic:”

Here’s what one of the machines came up with.

1. Always have a backup plan: The Titanic was sunk by an iceberg, but if the ship had had a backup plan (like a second set of engines), it might have been able to avoid the iceberg altogether.

2. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket: The Titanic was designed to be

unsinkable, but of course, it sank. Marketers should never put all their eggs in one basket and should always have a contingency plan.

3. Things can go wrong even when you're prepared: The Titanic was as prepared as possible for sinking, but things still went wrong. Marketers should always be prepared for the worst and hope for the best.

4. Don't underestimate your competition: The Titanic was the biggest and best ship of its time, but it still lost to an iceberg. Marketers should never underestimate their competition, no matter how big or small they may be.

5. Always test your products: The Titanic was tested extensively before it set sail, but it still sunk. Marketers should always test their products thoroughly before releasing them to the public.

6. Don't get complacent: The Titanic was the pinnacle of maritime technology, but it still failed. Marketers should always be on the lookout for new and innovative ways to stay ahead of the competition.

Obvious, right? This content reads like pretty much every common piece you've read in blogs and online.

So what's the remedy to this? There's a three step process I use to try finding stuff that people haven't already covered, or at least covered less frequently: **frame, parallel, oppose**. (unfortunately, I haven't come up with a catchy acronym just yet)

How does this work? Let's start with frame. **What's the underlying framework of a series of events or something you're trying to explain?** Suppose you're looking at something like Chernobyl or Titanic. The underlying framework is a series of compounding errors that people made which caused or worsened the natural disasters. Once you distill down a seemingly random collection of facts to a coherent framework, you're ready to start finding the non-obvious. This, by the way, is usually the point that most content stops at.

The second step is to parallel. What other frameworks do you know that operate in parallel with the framework you're working with? For example, let's take the Titanic framework - a series of poor decisions and mistakes that compounded the problem, like poor/broken communication, bad decisions, and lack of situation awareness. Next, let's select a parallel framework, like hacking into a company's systems. Penetration testing has a clear set of operational standards - project scoping, reconnaissance, identification of weaknesses, determining vectors of exploitation, performing the exploits, reporting the findings, and remediating the weaknesses.

How do you apply a penetration testing framework to the timeline and decisions of the Titanic? Suppose instead of the Titanic accidentally sinking, you wanted to sink it on purpose. What steps from the penetration testing framework would you apply to the Titanic framework of events? Reconnaissance and weakness identification would be your keys to making it happen - from the arrogance of the builders to the crew to the guests themselves. From the perspective of a hacker, everything that went wrong with Titanic is something you could engineer into pretty much any major project, but the root cause of it all is human arrogance. That's the real, not as obvious theme that weaves through the entire narrative of the Titanic.

The third step in the framework is to oppose. Flip the script now - knowing the root cause of the Titanic's sinking was arrogance ("unsinkable!"), where are the vulnerabilities in your company's marketing operations? What are the arrogant blind spots that a competitor could engineer in your operations? What are the system safeties that could fail to work correctly?

For example, in your sales scripts, how self-centered are they, knowing that selfish messaging is a symptom of arrogance?

In your C-Suite, what decisions are your executives making that run contrary to literally every known piece of data available to you?

In your marketing automation system, how many safeties are built in? For example, GDPR compliance requires that audiences opt-in for the use of their data and you face substantial civil and even criminal penalties for violations of it. Yet there's an increasing threat of bots and spammers leveraging real people's data in click farms - how prepared are you to counter that threat? Were you even aware that was a threat?

By taking a parallel framework and changing our thinking to how we might make an accident like the Titanic happen on purpose, we reveal more to the story that's useful from a content perspective and create content that isn't blatantly obvious (and therefore adds little to no value). This meta-framework - frame, parallel, oppose - will help you unlock more value for the content you want to create.

Here's an exercise. [Go onto Twitter and search for “what marketers can learn from”](#). Choose any one of the many pieces that pop up and ask yourself - or do as an exercise with your colleagues - how you'd reframe the piece to be much more useful using frame, parallel, and oppose.

2022-10-02 : The Great Marketing Reboot

I was having a chat with a few professional friends recently about our shared experiences at conferences, at the way audiences were reacting to our content as professional speakers. Something really stood out that I thought I'd share and get your take on, see if you're seeing the same thing.

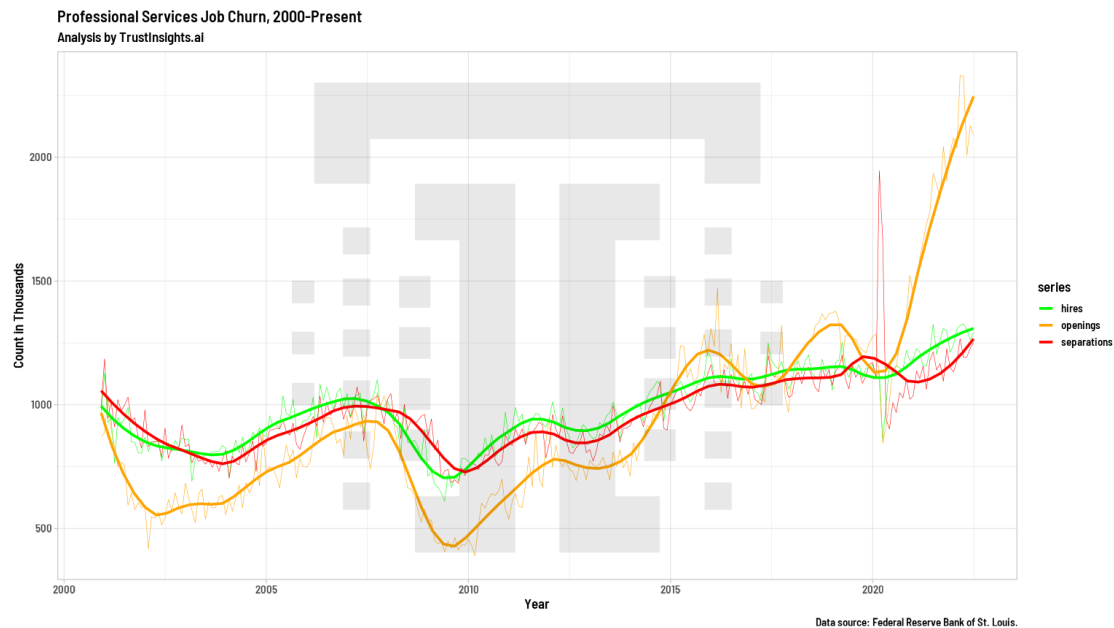
The headline: it feels like marketing has rebooted.

I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago after Content Marketing World and since then I've caught up with even more friends from events like Inbound, B2B exchange, and many others. We're all seeing the same thing - the profession of marketing seems to have hit a hard reboot.

What does that mean? It means, in short, that a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge has just vaporized. There's been so much churn, so much turnover these last two and a half years that the people sitting in the room with us as we're onstage is a completely different crowd.

Part of that, undoubtedly, is a function of time. When you go to the same event year after year, you see some change but you see people year after year, so the change isn't as abrupt. With some of these current in-person conferences, we haven't gotten together in the same physical space in 3 years now, so of course there would be some change.

But I had a feeling it was bigger than that. Naturally, I turned to data to see if we could get a feel for just how much things have changed, and found it in the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), published by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Now, this is obviously USA only, but I suspect it holds true for many places since we all experienced the same pandemic together:



JOLTS Data

Yeah. When you look at 2020 and beyond for professional services job churn, the train leaps off the rails. We've hired more in the last 2 1/2 years than ever before. We've separated more (quits + fires) in the last 2 1/2 years than ever before.

But the really telling line is that orange line - that's the number of job openings. You can see that the pandemic utterly decimated the professional services workforce in March/April 2020 - and the pace of hiring has not kept up with the number of openings. Even with layoffs and a recession, there are still over 2 million professional services jobs left unfilled - and there's a tremendous amount of churn. How do we know? The green line is hires. The red line is separations. We see they're marching together, which means as fast as we're hiring, people are leaving one way or another, too.

Now, that's all professional services jobs, not just marketing. But it speaks to just how big a dislocation the early months of the pandemic was in its impact on marketing as well.

Which brings me back to the Great Rebooting of Marketing. What

happens when there's a big jobs dislocation? A bunch of very senior folks punch out and take retirement if they're offered a good package. Those senior folks carry a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge. Then the hiring freezes come, so any attrition that occurs isn't replaced - and when it is replaced, headcount tends to be more junior because junior folks cost less. By the time a company is ready to start hiring, they've lost their biggest reservoirs of knowledge and restaffed with new, fresh people. Those new, fresh people will bring new perspectives and new ideas, to be sure - but they will not have the benefit of large institutional knowledge reservoirs to draw on.

Which means that marketing in a company that's done that is effectively starting over. You hire new content creators and SEO folks and they've got to skill up on your environment and probably the profession itself, especially if they're fresh off the graduation stage. You have to inoculate them with your culture and dust off the knowledge repositories of the people whose positions they've filled, hoping against hope that someone left any kind of documentation behind. (and they usually haven't, so you're literally going to reinvent the wheel)

All this translates into who we're meeting at conferences and events. We're meeting the new crew, the new team at nearly every company. We're meeting folks who are back to square one, back to the basics, back to needing to know how to do something before they can even consider what it is they're doing or why they're doing it.

In turn, if we're running marketing, we're restarting. Maybe you're lucky and you're a long-timer at your company - you can get the new folks up to speed more quickly. But if you're one of the new folks, you're probably experiencing less than optimal conditions for getting up to speed.

So here's my unsolicited advice. If you're a marketing manager, there's never been a better time to start documenting what you do, why you do it, and how to do it at your company. As you can tell by the chart above,

the level of instability in the job market isn't going away soon - we have millions of unfilled jobs, which creates a lot of churn on its own as candidates can basically name their price and hop from job to job until they find what they like. And if you're at a company that announces a hiring freeze, do anything and everything you possibly can to retain your people. Hiring freezes are arguably worse than layoffs because you slowly bleed to death as the remaining people inherit the remaining workload and burnout ramps up like crazy. Fire customers, beg, borrow, and borrow quietly any resources you can to keep your people around.

If you're a marketing executor, a do-er of marketing, there's also never been a better time to start writing your own marketing cookbook. Catalog your knowledge, what you know how to do, the systems you work with, all your capabilities so that as opportunities arise, you know deeply what you can bring to the table. The more detailed your personal cookbook of marketing, the faster you can get up to speed in any position by adapting your processes and procedures to your new company. And when instability hits that company, you just take your accrued knowledge and your cookbook and move to the next place that values what you're capable of.

Finally, for those of us who market to marketers and serve marketers... as my friend, partner, and CEO Katie Robbert has been urging, it's back to basics. Dust off the 101 and freshen it up. Help people with the how, so that you can better sell the what and the why - people who are too frazzled just trying to get things done have no interest in anything other than getting out of survival mode. The faster you help people out of survival mode, the faster you can start selling the big picture again.

2022-10-09 : Why I Don't Like Networking and What I Did To Fix It

Let's spend a few minutes this week talking about what used to be one of my least favorite parts of conferences and events:

Networking.

When I say that term, what springs to mind? Perhaps images of mandatory fun come to mind, activities that force you into close proximity with others that you're not particularly interested in.

Perhaps it's a feeling, one of mild claustrophobia in the old days and outright germophobia now. People much too close too you, of varying degrees of hygiene, breathing all over you. As an aside, I can't begin to tell you how delighted I am that it's socially acceptable to wear a tactical respirator to parties now. You don't even have to pretend to smile.

Perhaps it's a person or archetype. There's always that guy (and statistically most of the time it's a guy) who fancies himself the conference ninja, flinging his business cards at any stationary target like throwing stars. And he's always looking over his shoulder or yours to find someone else more important to talk to.

There's also the miserable sales exec, the one who has to come back to the office with a certain number of contacts, setting up meeting after meeting, even if they'd rather be quietly having a whiskey at the bar.

Boy, that sure makes networking sound appealing, doesn't it? And why is that?

It's because the way we've come to know and do networking is corrupt. Not in a criminal sense, but in a purpose or intent sense. When we talk about networking, we're framing it entirely in the mindset of meeting people so that we can take something from them (usually their money).

Even the way we start those conversations - “so tell me what you do” - has that unmistakeable odor of “what can you do for me” implicit in it.

It feels kind of gross, doesn't it? You can feel like a second rate pickup artist at a bar trying to woo someone just long enough to go home with them that night - not a role many of us are eager to play. And that intent seeps into our conversations, into what we talk about, into how we speak, how we look at another person, how we think of them.

When you're talking with someone else who's super gung ho about networking, you feel like a piece of meat, a walking wallet. They're really interested in what you can do for them.

So what's the cure for this ailment? It's not even zanier activities or better food (though better food is always welcome). It's reframing what we're doing, what our intent is.

When you go out with your friends, when you hang out with your friends, do you ask yourself, “what can my friends do for me tonight”? I sure hope not. Ideally, you ask, “what can we all do together”? When you talk to your friends, are you contemplating all the different ways they can help you, or do you have a healthy give and take, helping each other in turn? When you think about your friends, do you think about how they benefit you, or do you think about how you benefit each other?

Mentally, I rebranded networking in my head as building professional friendships. That's what I'm after - and in some cases, those professional friendships become personal friendships, too. (they don't have to be; if you want to keep work and personal life separate, by all means honor those boundaries. You can still be friends in just a work sense.)

That changes everything for me. There have been, in the distant past, people I've worked with or had as clients who were valuable clients for the companies I was working for at the time but were not exactly

people I'd want to be friends with, not people I'd go out to a meal with willingly. No amount of revenue is worth more toxic people in your life.

And when we think of people we meet as potential friendships, we value those people for who they are and not what they can do for us. If we are truly friends, there may come a time when we can provide value to each other professionally, but that's not an expectation or precondition of the friendship. We don't do that in our personal lives, so why would we do that in our professional lives?

This makes companies unhappy. You won't be extracting revenue from your contacts in the short term, in time to make the quarterly board review or the earnings call. But it creates value over the long term if you're patient and unselfish. I met one friend in 2007 and we've been friends for years. They briefly became a customer of my company in 2019 - and then they weren't a customer, but they're still a friend today. Imagine trying to fit that in an attribution model.

I had a call with a friend yesterday that was somber as they said they were departing their current position. The tone and the way they spoke seemed to indicate they were afraid our friendship would come to an end now that they were leaving their role, and I strongly contradicted them. They're a friend, period. I want to hear about their new house, the pets they're getting, the projects they're working on. Is there a loss for me professionally because they're no longer in that role? A little bit, but not much, not really. There would be a much greater loss if I lost our friendship as people.

Here's the thing about friendships. People move around. Today someone might not be important to you if all you're after is money, but if you put money aside, they'd be a good friend. In a year, five years, ten years? Who knows what the future holds, but you might be in a position to help each other. And that makes your professional friendships valuable to you as a person - they move with you. If you only value someone for the role they're in, then when they leave that role, you're screwed. If you value people for who they are and you maintain real

friendships with them, then as time goes on your personal network gets stronger and stronger.

When you hear someone talk about being more human in marketing, this is what it means. It's not finding more or clever ways to write copy, or do little marketing stunts. It means treating the people you meet as real humans, not walking contracts or wallets. If you do that, if you build real professional friendships, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish together with a little help from your friends.

2022-10-16 : My Takeaways from MarketingProfs B2B Forum 2022

One of my favorite events of the year, MarketingProfs B2B Forum, has come and gone. After almost 3 years of virtual only, this year's event was a hybrid of online and in-person, and I made it in person.

Wednesday started off an 8-hour workshop with my partner and CEO, Katie Robbert, on measurement strategy. Thursday, I delivered [a talk on private social media communities](#), and Friday Katie and I did a fireside chat about management and leadership in marketing.

But those weren't the highlights of B2B Forum for me. The highlights were, and always are, the little bits and pieces I picked up along the way that were useful and that I'm incorporating into my own marketing. Let's dig into a few.

[Michael Barber's](#) session on email marketing analytics was riveting. Algorithmically, I was aware that things like "mark as spam" were substantially damaging to your sender reputation. That's been the case for years. And lots of folks know that Apple's Mail Privacy Protection and Gmail's pre-fetch routines have basically ruined open rate as a useful metric. That leaves clickthrough rate as one of the more useful metrics.

However, Michael introduced a new concept to me that he says is profoundly powerful for email reputation - reply rate. The number of people who reply to an email can dramatically improve your sender reputation. This makes logical sense; there's no real way to determine if an email is an interpersonal communication or a transactional message. But real emails from real people - we reply to those. Thus it stands to reason that if a user replies to our email marketing, that behavior is detectable and could improve our reputation.

How do we increase our reply rate? By asking our audiences to reply to our emails, of course - and then actually checking those replies and doing something with them. You'll see a small change in this newsletter

as a result - and a reminder that yes, you can reply to this and I'll answer if it's needed.

[Ashley Faus](#)' session on thought leadership presented a useful framework for determining how strong someone is as a thought leader. Her four components are credibility/authority, profile/recognition, prolific, and depth of ideas. For credibility, how often you're asked to cite sources versus how often you're cited as a source indicates your level of credibility - that was a useful measurement for that pillar of thought leadership.

The one that I thought encapsulated most of the problems with "thought leadership" today is depth of ideas. Most people who are positioning themselves as thought leaders aren't bringing any new, deep ideas to the table. They're bringing recycled tropes at best, hoping that people will be distracted or gullible enough to believe that basic truisms are deep thoughts. Anyone can buy a social media following. Anyone can publish a lot of crap. But having deep thoughts and being recognized for them? That's difficult and a good way to evaluate whether someone is a real thought leader or not.

My definition of thought leader remains unchanged: **your thinking (your ideas) should change how I lead.**

[Tony Gnau's](#) B2B video production on a shoestring budget was a fun session, but one question near the end has me rethinking how I'm going to make videos entirely. An audience member asked his take on intros and outros, and he said he strongly dislikes intros. We have seconds to make an impression when it comes to video, and even a short intro gives a viewer a chance to be bored and click away.

That blew my mind. I've never put video intros on the Almost Timely videos, but I have intros on You Ask, I Answer as well as Mind Readings. Yet many of my favorite YouTube channels have zero intros on their content. I'm thinking about simply not using them any more on those videos, to jump right into the content as Tony recommended. What do

you think? Should I chop the leading 10-15 seconds and just jump right in?

Finally, I sat down at one of the early morning breakfast roundtables with [Andy Crestodina](#). There'd been a mystery I didn't understand in my Google Search Console data - my impressions (appearances in search) keep going up (yay!) but my clicks are either flat or slightly declining. Andy took one look and said, "almost certainly Google is just keeping more your clicks for itself". Well, that was the answer I'd been trying to find for a couple of months now. Then we got onto the topic of "striking distance" pages - pages that are ALMOST on page 1 of search results (pages with position 11+) and how to identify them for optimization purposes.

After a couple of minutes of discussion, I popped my laptop open, fired up R Studio, and started to write code for the concept he was discussing and that he does manually. It turns out that automating at least part of the process is fairly straightforward, but there are some additional tweaks we can add to make it more powerful, like prioritizing those pages based on the total potential audience or identifying semantic search terms for those pages to help beef up the content. I have no idea if the code will go anywhere, but I love the concept and I'm going to develop it further.

MarketingProfs B2B Forum is one of those events that's business-focused but yet feels like a homecoming that you'd actually want to attend. I'm sad that this year's event is over and already looking forward to next year.

What event do you attend that has the same feel? Hit reply and let me know.

2022-10-23 : The Future of AI and Regular Life

Content warning/trigger warning: this newsletter isn't going to be positive, cheerful, or uplifting. If you're already stressed, I urge you to skip this issue. Go [read the Trust Insights newsletter issue on self care](#) or listen to [Malinda's new song](#) or something besides read this. We're going to be talking AI, economics, inevitably a bit of politics, and social issues.



Ok, now that everyone else is gone, let's get started. This past week, a colleague asked me what I thought the future of AI is in the next few years, where I thought things like content generation are going.

First, on the optimistic side, the same technologies that power the ability for an AI model to take a text prompt like “dog wearing a pink tutu riding on a skateboard” and transforming that into art are capable of so, so much more. Without getting into the guts of these kinds of models, the underlying technology is agnostic as to the kind of content it's working with.

Thus, with enough data, it's equally possible for a prompt like this to eventually work: “make a short animated film about a penguin with poor eyesight.”

But again, that's not thinking big enough. Content type is irrelevant to the underlying technology. This is also realistically possible:

“Here is a new virus' RNA we haven't seen before, create a candidate vaccine.”

Or,

“Here is the genetic code of an individual with a rare disease. Create 5

candidate drugs to treat it.”

Or,

“Create a genetically modified algae that consumes atmospheric CO₂ at twice the rate of naturally occurring organisms and dies quickly.”

This is the upside of the latest generation of AI models. If we use them properly, we could engineer civilization-changing solutions for the better. What’s required are massive amounts of data to train on, domain expertise wedded to AI engineering skills, and a focus on desirable outcomes counterbalanced by an understanding of what could go wrong.

That’s the upside, and if we do it right, it’s a pretty big upside.

So let’s talk about the downside. You might want a beverage in hand.

The current generation of AI models and the immediate next generation, absent regulation and government interference, are going to cost millions of jobs. Yep. It’s going to be like that. There’s no gentle way to put it.

Here’s why. No AI software right now can do an entire job, because jobs are composed of a myriad of tasks. But some of those tasks are substantial investments of time, and individual tasks absolutely can be done by machines. For example, writing a blog post can be done by a machine with reasonable quality. Certainly, machines can create excellent first drafts.

Now suppose you have a team of 10 writers, a content creation team. Writing blog posts occupies about 40% of the team’s time in aggregate. If machines can create capable first drafts that only require minor editing, then suddenly your team has about 30-40% excess capacity.

What happens next? Well, one of two things. Either you find other tasks

to fill that empty 40% capacity, or you can safely downsize the team by 40%. Instead of a team of 10, you can get the same amount of work done by a team of 6.

But not everyone writes blog posts, so most of us are safe, right?

No. Anything that's repetitively creative, machines can create okayish to good versions of. Machine-led art has already won art contests (and forced contests to specify that future entries must be human-led or human-only submissions).

So why do I think this will lead to millions of lost jobs? First, because the kinds of jobs that AI will impact are becoming far more numerous. Chunks of data science - my profession - are becoming more and more automated. Now creative jobs are on the line in every part of creativity - writing, photos, art, music composition. We've already seen the impacts of automation in manufacturing jobs.

And while it's true that new jobs will be created, the scale factor isn't in humanity's favor. For example, I could probably paint one very mediocre painting in about a day. A tool like Stable Diffusion? I can write the necessary code and provide mechanistic prompts for it to generate 3,000 - 4,000 pieces of artwork overnight. Yes, someone like me in the role of a prompt engineer is still needed to operate the machinery, but I've replaced the raw output of 3,000 mediocre human artists (me) with 1 machine instance that can achieve the same levels of productivity.

Add to that the level of competence for machine-generated content continues to rise. Five years ago, machines could only work in templates, a bit like boring mad-libs. Today, they create coherent, readable text as well as amazing artwork, passable musical compositions, and other forms of creative output. Every year, the bar of competence rises higher for what machines can do versus humans.

This brings us to the second major point: our current economic systems in many different nations tend to reward efficiency and our

main measure of success in free market economies is net profits.

If you, as a margin-minded executive or stakeholder, hear about 40% inefficiencies in your organization, what are you going to do? Wait the 6, 9, 12 months or more for people to reskill and upskill? Or are you going to make cuts to improve those margins and right-size the business? If you report to Wall Street or other similar investor mechanisms, you are being asked to optimize for net profits before the next quarterly earnings call.

Any publicly traded company is going to choose the latter for sure; most for-profit companies will choose the latter. It's the rational choice if your goal is to maximize net profits. Why? People are expensive. Above and beyond the salary, you have other aspects of people - compensation in the form of benefits, healthcare, payroll taxes, etc. Obviously this varies from region to region, but there are no civil places where people are a most cost-effective option than machines for the same task. The only places where people are cheaper than machines are places where massive human rights violations are occurring.

Here's what we've seen over the last two centuries as a general rule: once a task becomes the domain of machines at scale, it never goes back to being a human task at scale. No farm that produces at scale plows with a farmer and a mule. Instead, GPS-guided massive equipment does that, and the farmer is more a machine supervisor - and the hundreds of field workers that task might have employed in the past are no longer needed. No mass-manufactured automobile is assembled by hand; assembly lines today are more automated than ever. These industries are safer and more productive, but they employ far fewer people - and the same thing will happen to every task and industry AI touches.

Who will be affected first? Any job that's made of largely repetitive tasks that AI can perform, for which there would be substantial cost savings - especially if your level of skill is below that of a machine's. If a machine can generate 1,000 pay per click ads an hour and you can

create 2, unless your 2 ads are brilliant, a machine is going to be doing that task very shortly - and you might not be.

What jobs will be affected least? Jobs where the tasks are so complex that it's not worth automating them because the complexity is too high. Cleaning a hotel room has enough weird variability (hey, who glued the furniture to the ceiling?) that humans are better at it and will be for a while. Yes, you could teach an automaton like Boston Dynamics' Atlas robot to do the job - but those are a quarter million dollars just for the hardware, not to mention the time to train it and their 20 minute runtime currently.

Jobs where human to human relationships are primary, like massage therapy, are jobs that customers probably will not want machines doing even if the machines are cheaper.

What should you be doing to protect yourself? First, if you are in a profession where your tasks are highly repetitive and creative in nature, like art, design, writing, etc. you should be constantly upskilling, constantly improving your craft to the point where machines struggle to match your unique style.

Second, your personal brand - your reputation and how you market yourself - must be a priority. Being known for something, being good at something, being distinct in your field will offer an added layer of protection that the average worker will not have. When people ask for you by name, you've got a strong personal brand. And that doesn't have to be one kind of profession. We've all been to restaurants or coffee shops where there's that one person we'd prefer to deal with - that person has built a personal brand that others value.

Third, on a societal level, every free market society needs to figure out safety mechanisms like universal basic income really, really soon. Like climate change, it's got to be a priority now before it becomes an intractable problem later. Having thousands or millions of newly unemployed people in the workforce while a few leaders of business

keep getting richer is a recipe for social unrest at the very least, and outright civil war at the worst. I'd give us a decade at the most to figure out UBI or some similar safety mechanism to allow people to live on the basics. Without that, it's not going to be a pretty future.

AI is an incredibly powerful set of tools. Like all tools, it's agnostic and amoral. In the right hands, we will do great things with it. In the wrong hands, we will do incredible harm with it. And given the penchants and propensities of the people we tend to elect to office (in many nations) and the people we elevate in public society like business oligarchs (again, in many nations), the latter outcome is probably more likely than the former.

What do you think? Am I being too pessimistic? Am I missing the boat on something obvious? Hit reply and tell me why.

2022-10-30 : The End of the Public Watercooler

A lot of folks spilled a lot of digital ink this week about the change of management at Twitter. While that's certainly a discussion topic, there's a bigger picture angle here: the demise of the watercooler.

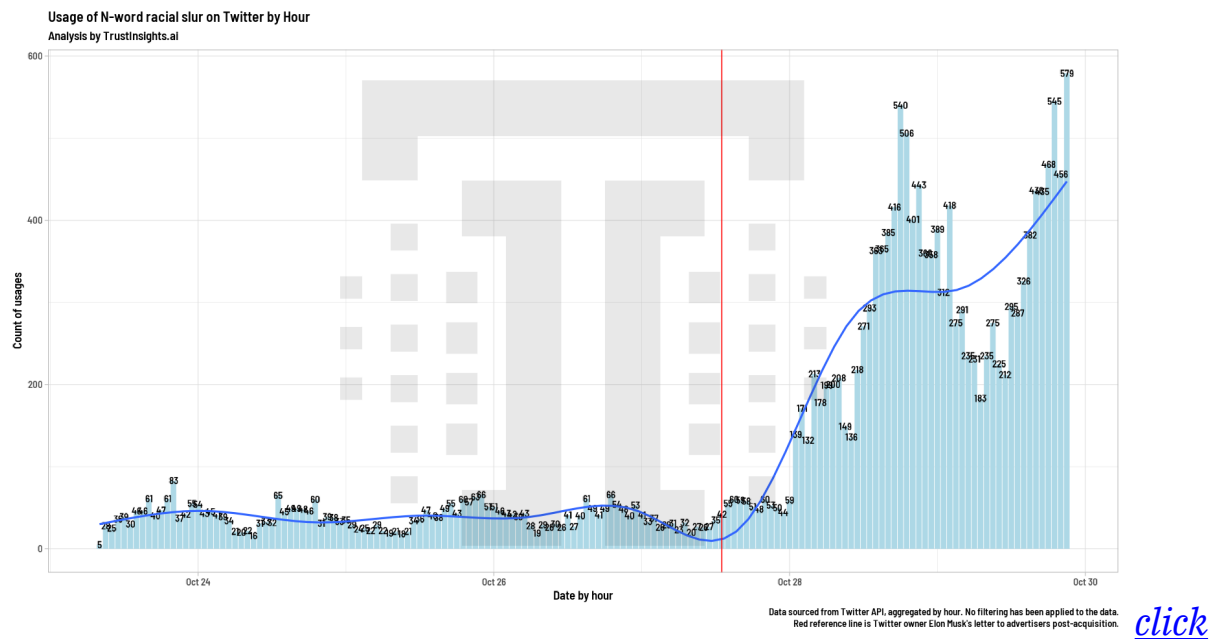
As media continues to fragment, there are fewer and fewer places that serve as central points of cultural synchronicity. By that, I mean media and culture we all have in common. In the questionable old days, there were very few media outlets - your local newspaper, the local radio station or two, and three TV channels. For good or ill, almost everyone had the same mass-produced cultural point of view, even when it was horribly repressive, racist, and sexist.

As time has gone by, we've added more and more media. Cable TV brought us dozens of choices, and then the Internet made those choices effectively infinite - and bidirectional. We weren't just media consumers; many of us became media producers. The moment you post on a blog, a video hosting site, a podcast, or on social media, you're a media producer (quality irrelevant).

In the early days, public social media - like MySpace, Twitter, Friendster, etc. - became cultural watercoolers where people could gather. They were loud, confusing, rowdy, and contentious. Like BBSes and forums before them, fights were frequent and could get ugly, but those spaces still allowed for a lot of serendipity, a lot of meeting new folks that you otherwise would not.

Mired by scandals like Cambridge Analytica, politicians behaving badly, hostile foreign powers co-opting systems to undermine adversaries, and many other issues, public social media channels have become less and less like watercoolers over time, and that trend is accelerating with the changes in public social media. For example, after recent management changes at Twitter, usage of racial slurs

accelerated by 10x:



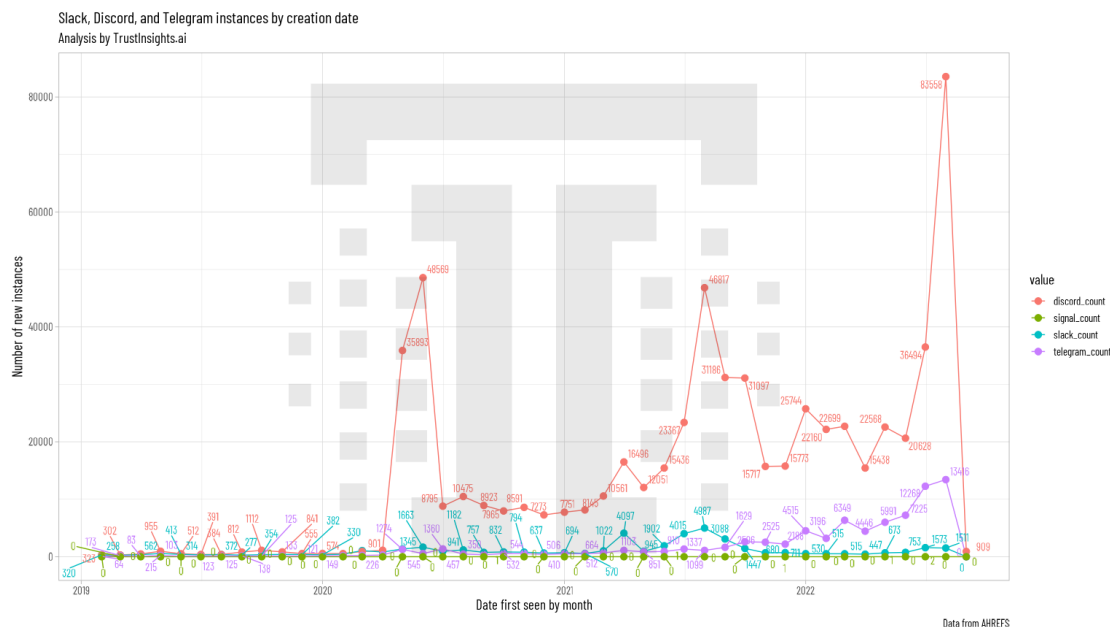
[for full size version](#)

That sort of thing causes people to leave public spaces for greener pastures. Those pastures are private communities like group chats, Slack, Discord, and other private social media communities have fulfilled that role for many people. Now, instead of dealing with random, hostile people in public spaces, you can hang out with like-minded people in private spaces. [This phenomenon is something I talked about in the Members Only paper I shared a few months ago.](#)

The consequence of an increasingly fragmented media space, where people (and their attention) is more diffuse than ever, is that lack of a cultural touchstone. As groups become more insular and polarized, we have fewer and fewer ways to bridge those differences. Should you choose to, you could set up your life easily today to never see, hear, or think about anything you don't agree with, surrounded by like-minded people all the time.

None of this should be news. We have been talking about the fragmented media landscape for a quarter of a century now. But the

pace of fragmentation is accelerating. For example, every Discord server is its own community, a closed group of people interacting with each other in ways that are not visible to the outside world unless you're a member of the group. Take a look at how many Discord servers have been created in the last couple of years:



[for full size version](#)

That's thousands or even tens of thousands of new communities every month.

Every time a new private social media community is stood up, public social media takes a hit. Why? Because the time we spend in these private communities, these velvet rope communities, is time we're not spending at the public watercoolers. It's time we spend with people we have affinity towards - and away from the prying eyes of advertising technology.

The watercooler is gone.

What does this mean for us marketers? The short version is that in a fragmented media landscape, we can't be everywhere. We can't even

be most places. So we have to find the places where our best users are and invest in those places. That requires market research, requires asking our existing best customers where they spend their time online, and figuring out how to integrate those places and cultures into our marketing.

It means embracing the current new media model, which is creator-led. The creator economy is booming; MrBeast on YouTube earns \$54 million on content alone, according to Fortune Magazine. As the media landscape fragments, we can't rely on a channel - Twitter, Facebook, etc. - for our marketing opportunities. People aren't tuning into a channel. They're tuning into creators, into people, into individual media properties. We've seen this trend for the last 10 years, highlighted by folks like Tom Webster at Sounds Profitable who has said people don't listen to podcasts, they listen to specific individual shows. This holds true across the new media landscape.

If we are to advertise, we advertise on public channels that lead to creator communities. For example, a creator has a public broadcast outlet of some kind - YouTube, Twitch, Tiktok, etc. - and then motivates people to private communities like Discord, Slack, Patreon, OnlyFans, etc. If we know specific creators have our audience, we can market to their public audience in their creator spaces. However, it might be more productive to simply sponsor specific creators, rather than target entire media properties as a whole.

One key, undiscussed aspect of these changes is that today's influencer marketing identification tools are woefully underpowered for detecting this kind of influence. It's harder than ever to effectively measure influencers, and that's only going to get worse before it gets better.

Media fragmentation inherently means more polarization and insulation, which are societally detrimental. However, they also mean more focused groups of people, and for the purposes of reaching very specific groups of folks, this is a silver lining. The absence of cultural touchstones also means we can no longer bank on generic, general

content and creative; what we create as marketing has to be as specific as our audiences are becoming.

The big public watercooler is gone, and in its place are a million new ones, smaller ones, located all over the place. Our job as marketers is to show up respectfully at the right ones, listen carefully, and participate when we have something of value to contribute to the conversation. If we do this right, we embrace the new media landscape and continue to be effective. If we do this wrong, we will be exiled and lose access to our audiences, perhaps permanently.

2022-11-06 : A Simple Way To Test Your Design

I just got back from [delivering the opening keynote at Heapcon, a developer conference in Belgrade, Serbia](#). I enjoy traveling (well, to be clear, I enjoy visiting new places. I don't love the actual traveling portion a ton) and I leapt at the chance to visit a new nation I hadn't been to before. As much as I love machines and technology, it's people who power marketing, and the best way to learn about people is... to be with people and observe them.

Serbia, if you're unfamiliar, is a country in the Balkans. If you're looking at a map of Europe, go to the right of Italy, across the Adriatic Sea, and you'll run into Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo. If you slept through social studies in the 1990s, this collection of nations used to be called Yugoslavia.

What's unique about Serbia is that unlike its neighbors, it retained the use of Cyrillic as the primary alphabet for normal usage. Most of its neighbors use the Latin alphabet (aka what you're reading right now). Thus, Serbians write their country name as Србија, while in transliterated Latin characters, the same characters are written Srbija.

So what? I'm not especially good at reading Cyrillic. I'm better than I used to be, because I've consumed a lot of news this year about Ukraine and much of it from the source - Ukrainians - which means having to struggle through reading Cyrillic characters to at least sound out the words I'm seeing, especially on media that doesn't have translation. What that means is that when I visited Serbia, reading all the signs and content was not second nature. When I visited Montenegro earlier this year, I could tell that a shop labeled Apoteka was a pharmacy. Seeing the same sign written апотека was an additional hurdle.

This gave me a rare opportunity, an opportunity to rely on design cues

for navigation rather than literal words. Take a look at this city street:



City street in Serbia

Without a word of the language understood, can you understand the basics? You can see the speed. What direction traffic is supposed to go. Where there's parking. What to look out for. There are so many cues embedded in the context of daily life that are the same in many nations that if you were dropped onto this street with no translation software, you could still figure out what's what for the most part. You might not be able to communicate with people, but you could navigate.

Here's the interior of a store. Do you understand the general idea of the store? What it sells? How much Serbian do you need to know to understand what you're looking at?

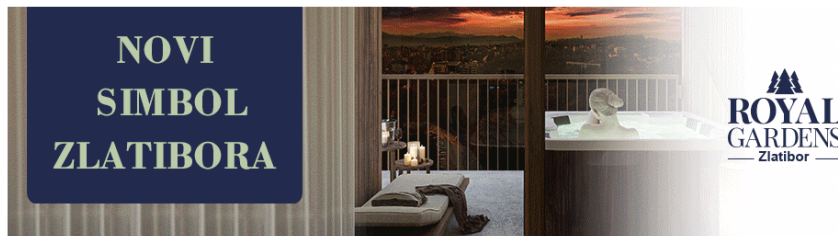


Women's Secret Store in Usce Shopping Center

I would assume not. It's fairly apparent what the store is, what they sell, and that lots of stuff is on a 30% off sale. You could probably shop there, successfully buy something, and not have to speak at all.

There are only so many ways to do things like commerce, navigation, etc. in daily life that are rational and will help people accomplish the tasks in front of them. Even with language as a barrier, those commonalities make life easier to navigate. (and create shared cultural connections, too!)

Next, take a look at this:



СКАНДАЛОЗНА ПРЕСУДА АПЕЛАЦИОНОГ СУДА: "Новостима" казна, јер су

АПЕЛАЦИОНИ суд у Београду пресудио је недавно против нашег листа, а у корист Саше Јанковића,



НОВАК УЋУТКАО НЕПРИСТОЈНУ ПУБЛИКУ: Ђоковић након драме

НОВАК Ђоковић је против Стефаноса Циципаса дошао до новог финала мастерса у Паризу. Србин је по

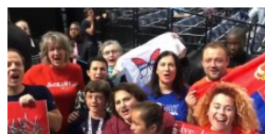


"НОВОСТИ" У КОСОВСКОЈ МИТРОВИЦИ: Вијоре се српске заставе, постављена

ЕКИПА "Вечерњих новости" налази се у Косовској Митровици где је све спремно за велики народни скуп који је заказан за сутра у подне.

ВУЧИЋ СЕ ОБРАЋА НАЦИЈИ: Председник сутра у 21 час о сулудим

ПРЕДСЕДНИК Србије Александар Вучић биће гост Верице Брадић у новом издању емисије Хит Твит у недељу у 21 час.

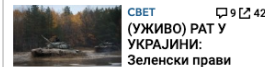


НАЈНОВИЈЕ НАЈЧИТАНИЈЕ



НОВА СЕЗОНА СЕРИЈАЛА "ЂОРКИРАНИ У

СКОТ Кембел и Луси Бејкер су британски путници ухапшени у Мексику. Сандра Грегори је лишена



СВЕТ (УЖИВО) РАТ У УКРАЈИНИ: Зеленски прави



СВЕТ КРАЈ ВОЈНЕ ВЕЖБЕ КОЈА ЈЕ УЗДРМАЛА



ФУДБАЛ ЛАЛАТОВИЋ ИМАО СВОЈ ШОУ: Играчи

Све најновије вести

Novosti website homepage

What kind of website is this? Without understanding a word of the language, can you tell? It is, of course, a news site, Novosti. How did you know what it was, if you don't read Cyrillic characters or the Serbian language? Because there are enough design and layout cues you've seen from other news sites that makes determining what the site is apparent.

That's the power of good design. Good design is fresh and unique but also invokes enough cues and commonalities that someone with little to no idea of the context of language at least knows what they're

looking at.

So here's the big question when it comes to your marketing: how good is your marketing if it was in another language, a language you didn't speak? Could someone still navigate the important parts? Do you have enough familiar design cues that make your marketing content intuitive?

Suppose my newsletter looked like this:

Скоро правовремене вести: Крај јавног хлађења воде (2022-10-30)

од Цхристофхер С Пенн | 29. окт. 2022. | Скоро благовремено, е-маил маркетинг, маркетинг, билтен, друштвени медији | 0 коментара

Скоро правовремене вести: Крај јавног хлађења воде (2022-10-30) :: Погледај у уређивачу



🔊 Пропустите мој разговор на МаркетингПрофс Б2Б форуму о иривајним заједницама друштвених медија? Рејризу иолегајте овде »

Гледајте овај билтен на ИоуТубе-у 📺



Погледајте овај видео на ИоуТубе-у .

Кликните овде за видео 📺 верзију овог билтена на ИоуТубе-у »

Кликните овде за МП3 аудио верзију само 🎧 »

Шта ми је на уму: Крај јавног хлађења воде

Много људи је ове недеље просуло много дигиталног мастила о промени менаџмента на Твитеру . Иако је то свакако тема за дискусију, овде постоји шири угао слике: нестанак хлађења воде.

Како медији настављају да се фрагментирају, све је мање места која служе као централне тачке културног синхронитета. Под тим мислим на медије и културу која нам је свима заједничка. У сумњива стара времена било је врло мало медија – ваше локалне новине, локална радио станица или две и три ТВ канала. У добру или у злу, скоро сви су имали исто масовно произведено културно гледиште, чак и када је било ужасно репресивно, расистичко и сексистичко.

Како је време пролазило, додавали смо све више медија. Кабловска телевизија нам је донела

Almost Timely in Serbian

Without being able to read Cyrillic (or Serbian), can you tell in general what you're supposed to do? You can see the YouTube video in the middle. You can see the yellow calls to action. And what really stands out to me?

Требате консултације?

Потребна вам је помоћ у вези са аналитиком и вашим подацима?

Да, бавим се
консалтингом.
Кликните овде

Резервишите ме да говорим на вашем догађају

Хоћеш да говорим на вашем догађају?

Кликните овде
да сазнате
више "

АИ фор Маркетерс Боок

📖 Књига АИ за трговце

У овом потпуно новом, потпуно преписаном трећем издању АИ за маркетиншке стручњаке, научите:

Шта АИ јесте, а шта није

5 практичних примена АИ у маркетингу

Кључна питања која треба поставити у вези са тврдњама произвођача о АИ

Како припремити своју компанију и каријеру за АИ

Набавите свој примерак одмах!

Недавне поруке од мене

Питате, ја одговарам:
Застарела маркетиншка тактика затвореног садржаја?

The emoji. The emoji are symbols, miniature images that convey meaning without language needed. There's a little TV in the YouTube link. There's a pair of headphones in the MP3 link. It's apparent what those are.

Try this test on your own content, on your own website. Google Translate allows you to put in any URL and have it translated. Translate to a language you don't understand at all, and see how much your design still helps someone navigate and get a sense of what the site is, what it's about, and what they could do. Is it apparent what business you're in, what's for sale, what someone should do just from the design?

By the way, this isn't just important for international audiences. This also helps anyone who's neurodivergent, dyslexic, or just not a strong processor of language. If you have the right design cues, you will help them do business with you more easily without overreliance on text alone.

2022-11-13 : The Incredible Power of Brand

Let's talk about the power of brand for a bit. How powerful is brand? To hear some marketers talk about it, it's this ephemeral, confusing, intangible mystery that's unmeasurable and therefore not worth paying attention to. To other marketers, it's the root of their marketing, the heart and soul of marketing itself.

Twenty years ago, when I was a much more junior marketing professional, I fell in the first camp. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, and I was held accountable for very tangible numbers - leads generated, policies sold, ad inventory filled. If there wasn't a direct response on the other end of my marketing, I paid no attention to it.

Over time, I realized how short-sighted that approach is. Yes, of course, you still have to make your numbers - that's essential. But the force which powers those numbers, which reduces costs, which makes transactions easier? That's brand.

What is a brand? The origin of brand is literally that - a piece of hot iron that you branded your livestock with so you knew which livestock were yours. It was an identity literally burned into flesh. Thankfully, marketing has changed and evolved a bit since then. There are two definitions I like for brand, a strategic definition and a tactical definition.

The tactical definition is from comedian Ze Frank in 2006: **a brand is the emotional aftertaste of a series of experiences**. In his words, the brand of "grandma" has an emotional aftertaste, which is why you can sell "Grandma's cookies" but not "old people's cookies". Different emotional aftertaste.

The strategic definition of a brand is much simpler: **a brand is a promise built on trust**. It's a promise of identity, of emotion, of

consistency, of stability. Wherever you go around the world, when you see those golden arches, you know pretty much what you're going to get. Take a look at this McDonald's in Belgrade, Serbia:



McDonalds Serbia

Take a look at this McDonald's in Munich, Germany:



McDonald's Munich

Or look at this McDonald's in Seoul, Korea:



McDonald's Seoul

There's little to no doubt what you're going to get inside. Sure, there are regional variations and stuff but it's not like you're going to walk in McDonald's and get something other than the fare that's served there all around the world. That's the brand, that's the promise behind the brand. You know what you're going to get.

Now, what does this have to do with the power of brand? This week, we saw the startling power of brand and what happens when a brand breaks a promise.

What brand is this, and what's the promise behind this brand?



Blue checkmark

That's the Twitter blue checkmark indicating a verified account. Prior to October 26, 2022, it meant that the account in question had established itself as the owner of a significant copyright and had gone through a verification process to prove that the account holder had the rights to whatever brand they were using. After October 26, 2022, that brand - and the Twitter blue checkmark is very much a brand - meant something different: the account holder was a paying subscriber of Twitter.

The brand's promise fundamentally changed. It means something different now, has a different context. And yet, the enduring power of brand means that to many people, that little checkmark still signifies the "official" or the "real" account of a brand, because brand is an emotional aftertaste as well as a promise, and it takes time for tastes to change in our memory.

So what? That doesn't demonstrate the power of brand, does it? It sure

does if you're Eli Lilly and Company, the multi-national, multi-billion dollar pharmaceutical company. On Friday, this tweet went out:



Fake Eli Lilly Tweet

Everything looks official - if you think the blue checkmark still indicates an official, vetted account. In reality, this is a fake account. It's not the Twitter account of Eli Lilly and Company. Their Twitter handle, confusingly, is @LillyPad.

What were the consequences?

Eli Lilly And Co

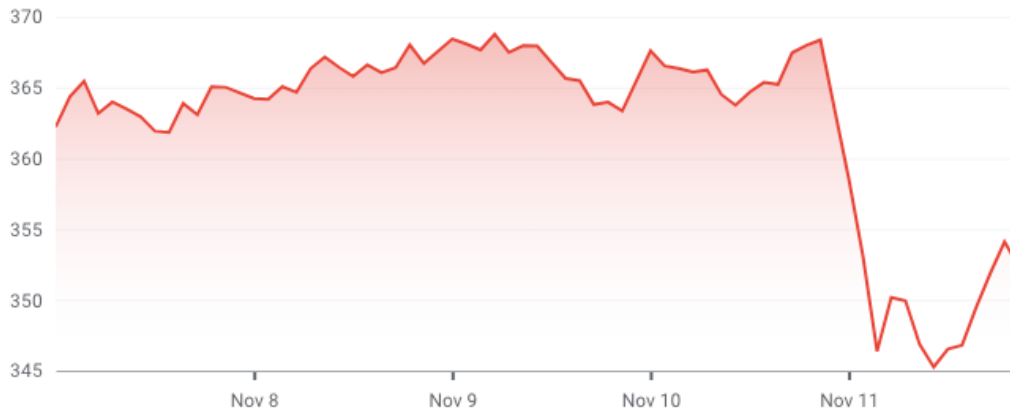
\$352.30 ↓2.74% -9.93 5D

After Hours: \$353.50 (↑0.34%) +1.20

Closed: Nov 11, 6:40:57 PM UTC-5 · USD · NYSE · Disclaimer

1D 5D 1M 6M YTD 1Y 5Y MAX

Key events >



Compare to

Tesla Inc

\$195.97

TSLA ↓6.14%

Merck & Co Inc

\$97.94

MRK ↓0.80%

Apple Inc

\$149.63

AAPL ↑9.08%

Coca-Cola Co

\$61.32

KO ↑3.04%

In the news

Investor's Business Daily • 23 hours ago

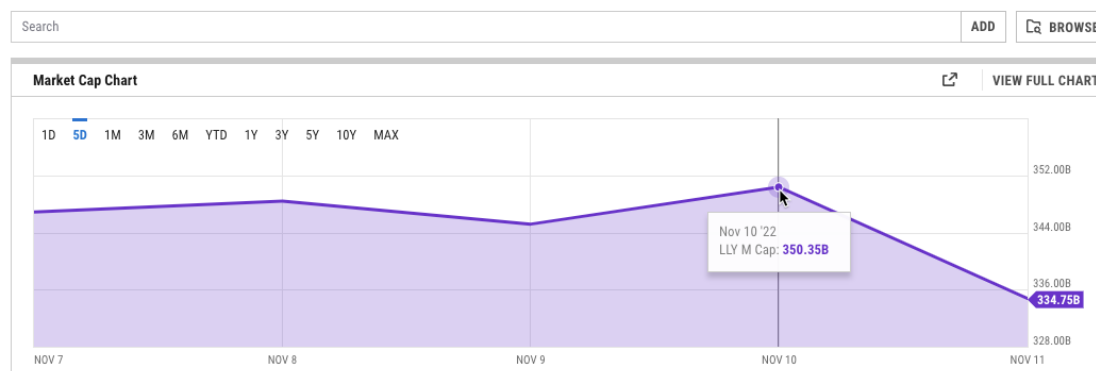
LLY Stock Dives — Taking Novo, Sanofi With It — After Fake Twitter Account Promises Free Insulin | Investor's ...

*Eli Lilly stock decline*

The stock price dived from \$368 per share to a low of \$345 per share. How much money does that represent?

Eli Lilly Market Cap: 334.75B for Nov. 11, 2022

VIEW 4,000+ FINANCIAL DATA TYPES:



Eli Lilly market cap

The market capitalization of Eli Lilly went from \$350 billion to \$335 billion in a day. That little blue checkmark brand - and the power of its now-broken promise - was still enough to temporarily destroy \$15 billion.

FIFTEEN BILLION DOLLARS VANISHED BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF BRAND.

Now, this is actually two brands, isn't it? The broken promise of Twitter's blue checkmark brand and the unauthorized use of the Eli Lilly brand. Still, that's an incredible amount of money destroyed just because of the power of brand.

If brand didn't matter, if brand had no value, if brand wasn't a thing, then you could have a dozen fake Eli Lilly accounts on Twitter and no one would care. No one would notice. The stock price wouldn't move. But it most certainly did, and investors in that brand - Eli Lilly - were punished for the broken promise of Twitter's brand.

(I have absolutely no doubt that Eli Lilly's lawyers are on their way to San Francisco right now to have a word with Twitter's management. You don't just make \$15 billion vanish without consequences.)

This is the power of brand. Brand is the promise we make to our audiences, to our customers, that the experiences they've had will more or less be the experiences they continue to have. **Brand is a promise built on trust.** And like all things related to trust, it takes a long time to build trust and it takes almost nothing to break it.

This is the question every marketer must ask of every stakeholder when they want to make substantial changes to a company: **are we breaking the promises we've made?** If so, there will be repercussions, and those repercussions will take a long time to mitigate. It takes even longer to rebuild trust than it does to establish it in the first place.

The next time someone questions the value of a brand, show them this example. Show them what happens when a brand breaks its promise, when a brand is misused, when a brand leaves a bad emotional aftertaste. Then commit to building your brand, growing your brand, investing in it as much as you can. You now have a clear, tangible example of what a brand is worth. Isn't it time you invested more in yours?

2022-11-20 : The Data-Driven Marketer

Let's unpack what I think is the biggest misperception about the data-driven marketer:

You don't have to be good at data to be a data-driven marketer.

This is 100% true. Why? Because it's what you do with the data that matters.

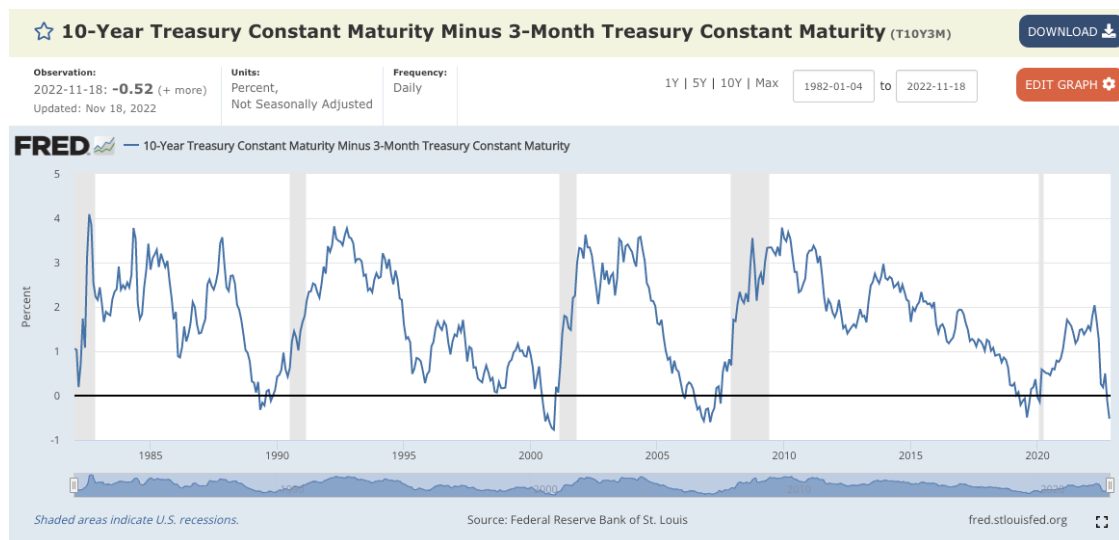
You don't have to be good at artificial intelligence or spatial mathematics to use Google Maps, do you? No. You fire up the app, get behind the wheel, and you drive the car to your destination using the guidance of the app. You are literally data-driven, but you didn't do any of the data part.

Why would your marketing be any different?

What you have to be good at is using data to make decisions. What you have to be good at is putting experience and emotion and intuition and all those other factors that go into decision-making to the side for a bit so you can focus on making decisions using the data you have.

Someone else - a team member, an agency, a partner - can provide you with the data. As long as it's good, as long as it's correct, you can and should use it to make decisions - if you know what the data is telling you, what it means.

For example, take this data set from the Federal Reserve Bank.



FRED T10Y3M chart

This is the 10-Year Treasury Constant Maturity Minus 3-Month Treasury Constant Maturity. What this shows is the average yield of 10-year Treasury securities versus the average yield of 3-month Treasury securities. (A Treasury security is something like a savings bond)

What do you have to know about this data to make decisions from it? What it means, to be sure. Where the data comes from, whether it's correct and quality, definitely. But do you need to be able to perform mathematics on it? No.

What it says is straightforward: people buy Treasury securities from the US Treasury department at varying yields and durations. It's a way to save money and earn a little interest on it. When the economy is good, people will buy long-term Treasury securities - like 10-year bonds - because they feel confident they won't need access to that money before the security matures in a decade. When the economy is bad, people will buy short-term Treasury securities - like 3-month bonds - because they feel they might need that money again sooner rather than later.

When people buy up Treasury securities, the government pays them back when the security matures. In effect, when we buy Treasuries, we

are lending the government money at an interest rate - what's called the yield. Treasuries like these are sold at auctions by the government; the government sells a \$1,000 security for, say, \$950. Companies bid on securities at that price until the government says, okay, we're all done with the \$950 lot, next up for auction is the \$960 lot, and so on and so forth. The yield is the difference between what you bought it at (\$960) versus what you can redeem it for in 3 months or 10 years.

The maturity spread, then, shows the difference between the short-term and long-term auctions. When the economy is good, the long-term rates will outpace the short-term rates because people want bigger returns on their investment and they can afford to have their money locked up for longer periods of time. The government will sell out of those auctions faster, but they tend to have larger starting yields to compensate people for locking up their money for longer.

This means the difference between short and long term will be positive.

When the economy isn't good, investors will buy the short-term Treasuries much more than the long-term ones - and this means that the difference between short and long term will be negative.

That's what the data says. We know where it comes from - the US government. And this data is quite reliable and open, so we don't have concerns there. And now we come to the final part of being data-driven: **understanding what the data means**. This is the part where most data-driven efforts fall apart - not because we don't have the data, but because we don't know what to do with it. We don't know what decisions to make from it.

The 10-year/3-month maturity spread is a leading economic indicator. Over the last 50 years, it has been one of the best predictors of a recession among publicly available data. When the spread is positive, confidence in the economy is high, things are good. When the spread is negative, confidence in the economy is lower, and a recession is on the

way.

What the data tells us right now, at the tail end of 2022, is that a recession is underway. The rate is in the red, negative, and that means we need to make some decisions. What sorts of decisions? Decisions around budgets - like how much to spend on marketing. Decisions around strategies and tactics, especially if we have reduced staffing to contend with and no prospects for hiring more folks in the near term due to things like hiring freezes. Decisions around market research, to see how our customers are being impacted, and what we might need to do to retain existing ones and win new ones. After all, people buy for different reasons, and the reasons change in changing economic circumstances.

But the critical part of this entire example is that you had to do no mathematics at all, did you? You didn't have to do anything other than look at the data, as long as you know what it said and more important, what it meant. You are now in a place to make decisions with your data: how to run your marketing and your business in a very probable recessionary environment.

Conduct this exercise whenever you're dealing with any metric or KPI, with any data that's important to you. What does it say? What does it mean? What will you do about it? That's what it means to be data-driven - and everyone can be data-driven, not just the math aficionados. As long as you're making decisions based on data, you are data-driven.

2022-11-27 : Gratitude, Thanks, and Contrast

A little something different this week for the USA Thanksgiving holiday weekend. While everyone else is out binge shopping or dealing with turkey hangovers, let's talk about gratitude and giving thanks. I'm sure you've waded through the emails from every company you've ever had contact with, and the piles of insincere thanks from them. I'll start by being a curmudgeon: corporations cannot give thanks.

What? How can I say that? It's simple. Corporations cannot give thanks any more than robots can, because gratitude is an emotion, and emotions are the domain of the living. Your dog has emotions. Your fish has emotions. You have emotions. But a corporation isn't a living entity. Anything without a central nervous system cannot have emotions, and corporations don't have those.

Gratitude, in our context as marketers and business folks, can only come from other living beings. So your company's CEO can express gratitude, but the institution cannot, not in a real, meaningful way. You, as a marketer, can be thankful. I am personally thankful to you, that you're paying even the slightest bit of attention to me at all.

Okay, now that we've gotten the curmudgeonly part out of the way, let's talk about gratitude some more. For years, I had trouble with the concept of gratitude. It was too abstract. Be thankful and grateful for what you have? Sure, that makes sense. But how do you bring that to life? Writing it down in a journal? Talking about it with friends? Those activities felt... performative. They felt like they were being done to showcase or highlight what I had, and didn't feel like thankfulness or gratitude.

When I think about thankfulness, about gratitude, I think about feeling relieved. Someone does something truly nice for you - how do you feel? If it's something I needed help with, something I wanted respite from, I feel relief. Whew. Thank goodness someone helped me. Stranded on

the side of the road and someone helps me change a tire? Relief. Thanks. Gratitude. Someone gives you a gift that's heartfelt? Joy. Eagerness. Wow, look at this - this actually means something. When you give your dog a treat? Relief. Happiness. Eagerness. Maybe a little greed - hey, got any more of that?

But the emotions are real, acute, heartfelt. You FEEL something in that thanks, in that gratitude.

Thinking abstractly about your life and being grateful? I don't know about you, but that exercise never made me FEEL anything. It was like reviewing lines in a spreadsheet.

So here's the hack that I found, the thing that makes me feel something. I think about the contrast. I think about whatever aspect of my life, and I think about the time when I didn't have that, or when I nearly lost it.

For example, I spent the last week caring for my elderly parents who were COVID positive. Watching how hard the disease hit them, sapping them of their strength and energy, sending my father to the hospital for a few days (he's almost fully recovered, thankfully) - that highlights in sharp contrast my own health. I am thankful and grateful for my health because I see a living, sharp example of what the absence of health looks like, feels like in people I care about.

When I think about prosperity, I think of the time four short years ago when I didn't have any. When I started Trust Insights with Katie, I cashed out a healthy chunk of a retirement fund to pay the bills for the year, and I was living far below my means to make it through the year, to make ends meet without my family being heavily impacted. Those days are in the rear view mirror, but they are a sharp contrast to today, when the company is doing much better, when I don't HAVE to calculate how much to spend at the grocery store.

When I think about friendships, I think of the friendships I've lost, the

people along the way that I've parted ways with, amicably and not so amicably. I think about what went wrong, and how much I valued those friends, and I feel that sense of appreciation, of relief, that the friends I have today are still with me.

When I think about even the basics, I think of my friend Ann. She lives in Kyiv, Ukraine, and for the last 3 days, she's had no electricity at all. Russians bombed the power stations in her part of the city, and there's no way to know when they'll get electricity back. And it's literally freezing there. That I have heat and light, and she doesn't - gratitude even for the basics. (donate to Ukraine 🇺🇦 through [United24](#) if you'd like to help)

Gratitude requires contrast, requires the opposite of what you have so that you understand its value and importance. When you have contrast, you feel so much more than a rote recitation of the things that are present in your life because you know, remember, or feel what their absence is like.

2022-12-04 : It Works If You Use It Correctly

Even before the management change, there were a bounty of people on Twitter making bold, mostly false claims that masks don't work to stop disease like COVID. They'd cite all kinds of reasons and explanations (almost all of which were totally unfounded in basic science) about why filtering the air you breathe was ineffective at stopping disease and why we shouldn't bother.

Now, lest you think this is a mistaken copy-paste from my pandemic newsletter, it's not. Bear with me for a minute.

Last week, when I was taking care of my COVID-positive parents, I was resolute in my belief that wearing a heavy-duty respirator in a hostile environment was scientifically sound, and I'm pleased to say that I was completely correct. I have been testing myself since I came back and have tested negative every time. What I did to stay safe worked.

The thing is, the bad science crowd isn't ENTIRELY wrong. There are conditions in which masks don't work.

When you wear a mask, if it does not form a good seal over your nose and mouth, it doesn't work as well. It's like having a screen door on your porch that you leave partway open and then wonder why there are mosquitos in your house. There's nothing wrong with the screen door itself, but your implementation of it was less than effective.

When you buckle a seatbelt so that it's entirely underneath you and not over your body, and then crash your car and get flung through the windshield, the seatbelt didn't work, right? Well, it didn't stop you from going face first through the glass, but that's because you used it entirely incorrectly.

The crowd of folks who boldly claim that masks don't work - how well do you suppose they use them? Do you suppose they use the best mask

available to them and ensure each time they put it on that it's sealed correctly, or do you suppose they wear it haphazardly, perhaps not even covering their nose or mouth? I'd wager large sums of money it's mostly the latter.

Okay, so what does this have to do with marketing and business? Substitute masks for the marketing strategy, tactic, or channel of your choice. Does the statement sound familiar?

- "Email is dead."
- "Social media doesn't work."
- "SEO is a waste of time."
- "Direct mail is a waste of money."

I'll take a moment to snark that anyone who claims something is dead is usually trying to sell us something, and the moment we detect a conflict of interest, it's safe to almost completely ignore the person.

These statements should absolutely sound familiar. People have been making bold claims about every possible marketing method, that nothing works, that everything is dead. And yet the global economy seems to be chugging along and businesses are still making record profits, so something's got to be working.

Here's the reality: like masks, marketing strategies and tactics don't work if you use them incorrectly. Like masks, if you don't know what you're doing, you're better off asking for help than simply giving up, especially if something important - like your job or your bonus - is on the line.

But was it the case that the tool failed? Or did we fail to use it properly? Let's take the example of saying that SEO is a waste of time. Is that actually true? It is true that Google keeps more clicks for itself than it ever has before, a trend spotted by Rand Fishkin as early as 2018. And yet when I look at the client reports I process every month, on an

unpaid basis Google is almost always the single largest unpaid traffic driver.

What about social media? Gary Vaynerchuk frequently and correctly says that you cannot claim social media is undermining democracy in one sentence and then say you can't sell widgets in the next. If a tool isn't working for us, chances are we're not using it correctly.

Sometimes it's because we don't know how to use the tool properly. Other times, even if we know how to operate the tool well, it's the wrong tool for the job. A frying pan is an effective tool, but not for making soup. A blender is an effective tool, but not for making steak.

This is the time of year when we start to look back at the year that was, start to examine what we've done, and make our best attempt to look at the year ahead for planning. The temptation will be strong to declare that certain strategies, tactics, and methods did or did not work - so a critical part of that declaration is determining whether or not something didn't work because we failed to use it correctly.

Here's the critical part: once you're free to admit that perhaps you didn't use a tool correctly, that opens the door to learning how to use it better. It frees us to say, "okay, we still have a lot to learn, so let's dig in" - rather than defending something that didn't work.

2022-12-11 : Practical Use Case and Examples of Generative AI

We've all been abuzz this year about the power and potential of generative AI - AI that creates stuff for us. From DALL-E and Stable Diffusion creating award-winning artwork to ChatGPT answering questions and building content, we've seen no shortage of mind-blowing demonstrations about the capabilities of AI.

And yet... at the end of the day, an awful lot of people see these, think they're amazing party tricks... and don't know what to do with the technology. Therein lies the great challenge of AI. It's so powerful and so new that people are having a hard time wrapping their brains around what the technology makes possible in practical, sensible ways. So today, let's look at a couple of very practical use cases that you can implement immediately at very low or no cost. The tools I'll be using are [OpenAI's GPT-3 Playground](#), and [GoCharlie.ai](#).

Use Case 1: A/B Testing

Here's a snapshot of my Public Speaking page, where I try to convince people to hire me as a public speaker. Almost all of us feel... well, a little awkward writing sales copy to convince others to hire us.

Marketing Keynote Speaker Chris Penn

“If you need a marketing keynote speaker, you better call Christopher Penn.” – Jerry Acuff, CEO & Sales Leader

Conference audiences demand more value than ever. Big ideas are great, but what really energizes a crowd, what really awakens them is when they leave the room saying, “I can’t wait to try that out as soon as I get back!”

As your keynote speaker, that’s where I help you. Your audience will walk away with brains full of practical, pragmatic, immediately usable advice, ideas, and information. Your event will leave a lasting impression on attendees, powering great word of mouth and helping *make your event a part of everyone’s short list* of must-attend shows.



Download my speaking kit here for full details about what you get when you book me to speak at your event.

Where I’ve Spoken

Original speaking page

Wouldn’t it be great to get someone or something else to do that? Enter AI. Using the OpenAI GPT-3 Playground, I gave the AI some parameters as a prompt:

Write a public speaking landing page designed to convince the reader to hire Christopher Penn as a keynote speaker at their event. Incorporate the following facts:

- Christopher Penn is a 5-year, 5-time IBM Champion with expertise in data and artificial intelligence*
- Christopher Penn is an internationally sought after marketing keynote speaker*
- Christopher Penn is a Google Certified Professional in Google Analytics 4 and other Google Marketing Platform technologies*
- Christopher Penn is a bestselling author of “AI for Marketers”, “Leading Innovation”, and a dozen other books.*
- Include a testimonial from sales leader Jerry Acuff: “If you need a*

marketing keynote speaker, you better call Christopher Penn”

- *Focus on Christopher Penn’s ability to teach audiences practical takeaways and proven strategies in marketing, AI, data science, and analytics*
- *Focus on Christopher Penn’s ability to help event planners get rave reviews for their events from attendees*

Write the landing page copy in 750 words in a warm, professional tone in the first person from Christopher Penn:

This is a fairly straightforward prompt that gives the software a lot to work with, a lot of details it can incorporate. Let’s see what it spits out:

Welcome! My name is Christopher Penn, and I’m an internationally sought-after marketing keynote speaker.

I’m a 5-year, 5-time IBM Champion with expertise in data and artificial intelligence. I’m also a Google Certified Professional in Google Analytics 4 and other Google Marketing Platform technologies. I’ve written bestselling books like “AI for Marketers”, “Leading Innovation”, and a dozen other books.

If you’re looking for a keynote speaker for your next event, you’ve come to the right place. As a professional speaker, I specialize in helping event planners get rave reviews from attendees. I’m passionate about teaching audiences practical takeaways and proven strategies in marketing, AI, data science, and analytics.

I have a proven track record of helping my clients succeed. In fact, sales leader Jerry Acuff recently said, “If you need a marketing keynote speaker, you better call Christopher Penn.” I’m confident that I can bring the same success to your next event.

If you hire me as a keynote speaker, I will help you make your event a success. I’ll provide attendees with a valuable experience that they’ll remember and

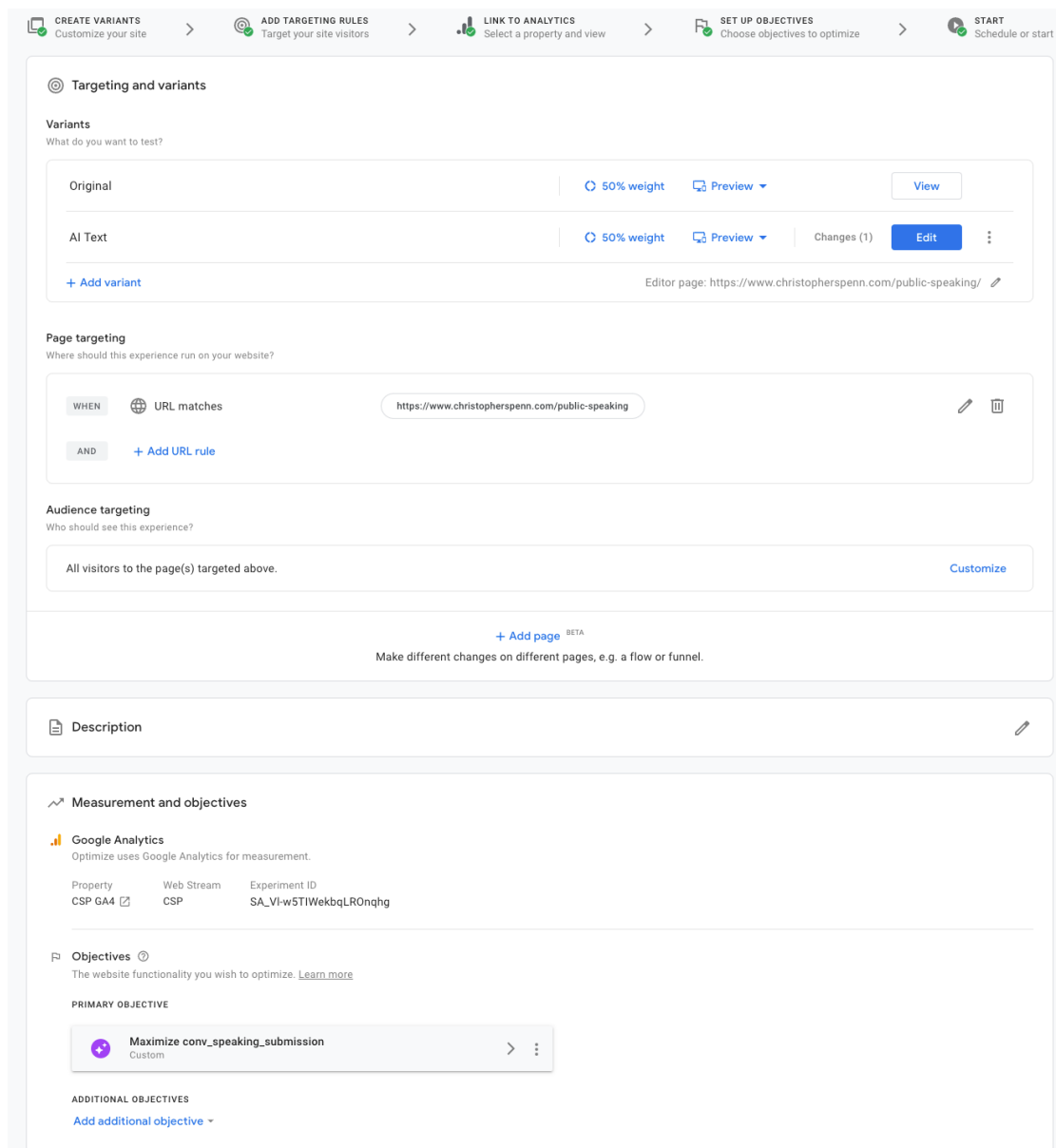
talk about for years to come. My message will be tailored to fit your audience's interests and needs.

I'm experienced in speaking at conferences, conventions, seminars, and other events. I'm comfortable speaking to both large and small audiences. I'm also available to do virtual speaking engagements.

My goal is to make sure your event is a success. I will work with you to ensure that you get the results you're looking for. I'm committed to providing valuable insights and strategies that your audience can use to improve their business and personal lives.

If you're looking for a keynote speaker who can provide a memorable and powerful experience, I'm your person. Please contact me today to discuss how I can help make your event a success.

I can tell you for a fact I would not have written the copy for the page like this. But you know what? My opinion doesn't matter. What matters is whether this delivers results. After fact-checking and final human approval, it's ready for use. Now what? Now in a tool like Google Optimize, I add this landing page copy as the variant, as the test condition, with the existing copy as the control.



Google Optimize

That's a practical, useful application of the technology - to write copy we might not otherwise write, and then test it to see how it performs versus our own copy.

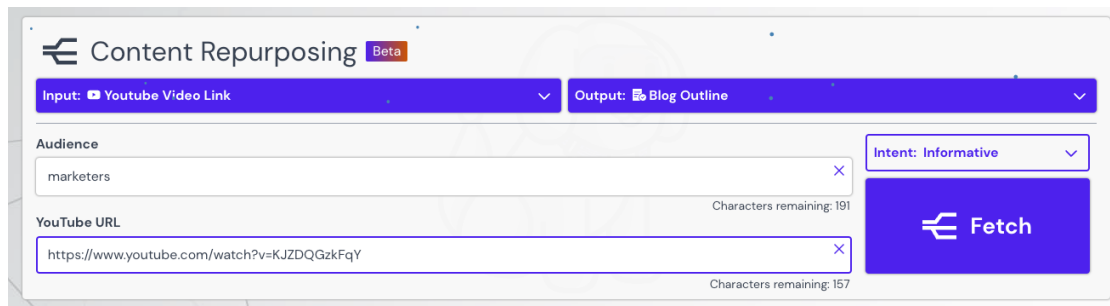
Use Case #2: Transformation

We've spent the last 5 years pivoting our content creation to other formats, especially video. I've argued for the use of video since smartphones became affordable primary video cameras, capable of

shooting “good enough” video; there’s no excuse any longer for marketers not to be creating video.

However, just because something starts out as video doesn’t mean it should stay as video. Now, with AI tools, we can transform our video back into text. [Take this fireside chat I did with my friend Jay Baer](#). It’s a terrific video; Jay had a lot to share, a lot of useful information. However, that information is locked in video format.

So let’s take it and stuff the video into [GoCharlie.ai](#)’s content repurposing engine:



The screenshot shows the GoCharlie.ai Content Repurposing interface. At the top, it says "Content Repurposing" with a "Beta" badge. Below this, there are two dropdown menus: "Input: Youtube V'ideo Link" and "Output: Blog Outline". Under the "Input" section, there is a text box for "Audience" containing the word "marketers" and a "YouTube URL" box containing the link "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJZDQGzkFqY". To the right of the "Audience" box, it says "Characters remaining: 191". To the right of the "YouTube URL" box, it says "Characters remaining: 157". There is also a dropdown menu for "Intent: Informative". A large blue button labeled "Fetch" is positioned to the right of the input fields.

GoCharlie Engine

What does it spit out?

"Time To Win: A Study On Patience In The Digital Age"

- I recently interviewed Jay Bear, an author, expert and researcher in marketing and customer experience who began a new research project on consumer patience called the Time to Win Study.
 - The methodology behind the study included almost 2000 respondents from ages 16
 - 65, weighted according to census data for age but not gender.
 - The study revealed that people wanted everything "right now", showing how our relationship with time has changed due to the pandemic going online.
 - It also acknowledged that self-identifying outside of traditional male and female identities was taken into account and surveyed through cross tabs.
- =====

"Speedy Service: A Valuable Asset Across Borders"

- Speed is the single most important factor in customer experience.
 - Time is the only resource we all share universally and value more highly with modern expectations.
 - Customers can become frustrated when businesses waste their time.
 - The survey results were calibrated on the USA and it's unknown how other cultural differences will affect similar findings in different countries around the world.
- =====

"The Race For Speed: Striking A Balance Between Response Time And Quality"

- Technology is driving the need for faster response times, with examples such as cashless payments and all-in-one mobile apps.
 - The attitude towards responsiveness depends on each individual's level of technology adoption.
 - We may have more free time than other countries, but we're also less patient because of this.
 - Using timing data in marketing mix models has become increasingly important to stay competitive and respond faster than customers expect.
 - However, it is dangerous to be too fast
 - there is a balance between speed and quality that must be kept in mind.
- =====

"Speedy Service: Beat Customer Expectations Without Making Them Doubtful"

- The right speed for customer service should be faster than customers expect, but not so fast that it creates distrust.
 - Companies should look into marketing and customer churn models to determine the ideal speed of response time per journey step.
 - Most customers expect a response within 24 hours to contact us forms.
 - If businesses fail to answer quickly or adequately enough, customers resort to spraying and praying by reaching out through multiple channels at once.
 - Social media is often the last resort after failing to get help from other channels like email or phone calls.
- =====

"Expectations In The Age Of Covid: The Race To Keep Up"

- Customers expect businesses to be as fast or faster than before Covid, even with fewer staff and bigger supply chain issues.
 - Customer experience is the difference between what customers think will occur and then what actually happens.
 - It's important for businesses to manage expectations by proactively communicating.
 - Men tend to have higher expectations of businesses replying faster than women, which may be a cultural phenomenon.
- =====

The Urgency Of Time: A Global Exploration Of Patience.

- I believe there is a cultural imperative in the U.S. to be less patient than other countries, and it would be very interesting to study this difference across societies and continents to better understand why this could be true.
- Research suggests that customers are willing to pay up to 50% more for services with no waiting times
- Indicating how much people value their time over money in these situations.
- Despite the potential benefits of taking vacation days, many Americans still don't take all their allotted time off due to a fear of wasting time or falling behind on work duties
- which speaks volumes about our culture's mentality toward productivity versus leisure time activities and breaks from work stressors.
- Consumers may respond differently depending on whether they receive an automated response compared to one from a human being when dealt with any customer service inquiry
- suggesting that personalized responses are often seen as more trustworthy even if they come with longer wait times attached

GoCharlie Summary

Look at that beauty. A bulleted list of key points from the video, automatically split into different logical sections. I can take that, pair it with the transcription, and I've got fantastic content for a landing page. Or I can rewrite it into different formats.

Think about that for a second. Have you been on a podcast or a livestream, and that content is just sitting locked away in a rich media format? Use a tool like this to extract that and get the content back on your website in a more accessible way.

These two use cases are practical, doable today with relatively low cost tools.

FTC Disclosure: My company, Trust Insights, is an affiliate of GoCharlie, and thus I indirectly benefit financially if you do business with them.

Conclusion

What. A. Year.

Thank you for being here, for reading, whether this is your first Almost Timely newsletter or you've been here all 12 years. I appreciate you, I appreciate your attention, and I appreciate your feedback.

Please feel free to share this with anyone and everyone you like. There's no forms to fill out, no price to pay - just pass it along. The only thing I ask is that it not be modified in any way.

Got feedback on any part of the book? Pop on over to my free Slack community, Analytics for Marketers. It's a discussion forum with almost 3,000 members as of the time of this writing, and I hang out there probably more than is healthy.

<https://www.trustinsights.ai/analyticsformarketers>

Happy holidays, and I wish you a safe, happy, healthy 2023.

Disclosures:

The cover artwork was generated by Stable Diffusion, running on the Trust Insights Google Colab instance, using the DeForum Jupyter notebook. Except where indicated in the text, all other content in this book was generated by a human, namely me.

How to Stay in Touch

Let's make sure we're connected in the places it suits you best. Here's where you can find different content:

- [My blog](#) - daily videos, blog posts, and podcast episodes
- [My YouTube channel](#) - daily videos, conference talks, and all things video
- [My company, Trust Insights](#) - marketing analytics help
- [My podcast, Marketing over Coffee](#) - weekly episodes of what's worth noting in marketing
- [My second podcast, In-Ear Insights](#) - the Trust Insights weekly podcast focused on data and analytics
- [On Twitter](#) - multiple daily updates of marketing news
- [On LinkedIn](#) - daily videos and news
- [On Instagram](#) - personal photos and travels
- [My free Slack discussion forum, Analytics for Marketers](#) - open conversations about marketing and analytics

If you've enjoyed this book, sign up for the weekly newsletter that it's made from. The Almost Timely newsletter more or less comes out on Sundays (depending on your time zone) and every issue has one of these essays, plus other content I've created that week, news from around the web, open job positions I've heard about, and upcoming events.

You can subscribe here for free:

<https://www.christopherspenn.com/newsletter>

If you've enjoyed these thoughts, get complementary thoughts in the free weekly newsletter INBOX INSIGHTS from Trust Insights. Each Wednesday, my CEO and co-founder Katie Robbert offers her insights into marketing, organizational behavior, and psychology, accompanied by unique data and analysis of marketing you won't find anywhere else.

You can subscribe here for free:

<https://www.trustinsights.ai/newsletter>

At the PRSA Boston annual meeting, I delivered a talk on four macro trends that will impact business, marketing, and life in the next decade or two. I'm including this in this book for two reasons. First, I don't think I've ever discussed these topics together like this, so it's a unique talk that I may or may not turn into a larger talk, but you get the sneak peek. Second, I included it because I wanted this book to be over 50,000 words, and I was at 47,500 when I finished pasting in the newsletters. This put it over the top.

Here's what I had to say.

Prepared Remarks

The first and most obvious thing we are currently seeing is unusually high levels of armed conflict. Last February, Russia invaded Ukraine, which has caused disruptions in energy and supply chains. There have also been real business consequences to this conflict, as the Russian Federation has spent a lot of money in our industry and on lobbying, public relations, and other endeavors through proxy companies and shell companies. Sanctions have also changed the market economics. As the conflict is likely to drag on for at least another year, Ukraine is likely to win, as they have better technology. For example, Lithuania recently bought them three naval drones, so a country that formerly had no navy now kind of does have a navy, just not with people on their boats.

The second thing I wanted to discuss is the ongoing presence of COVID-19. We've seen Boston's MWRA's COVID wastewater biobot, which measures the amount of viral RNA in our wastewater. The data is showing that we're still at high levels. This is a serious concern for employers, as it means that absences, diminished productivity, and a weakened labor pool are all possible outcomes.

The virus is having a deeper impact than what we initially thought, as it has been found to cause a condition called T cell exhaustion, which is functionally similar to HIV. This means that individuals who contract the virus and then recover, may still have a weakened immune system that makes them more susceptible to other diseases, such as the flu or RSV. As a result, we've seen an additional 1.2 million people added to the permanently disabled roles.

Unfortunately, this situation is likely to get worse. As there are many people around the world who haven't been vaccinated, this increases the chances of new variants forming. And given the virus's transmission method, it's unlikely to become less severe over time. In fact, in the UK, there have already been cases of children dying from strep throat, which is an indication of how bad the consequences can be.

It's essential for employers to be aware of these risks and take them into account when planning a return to the workplace. It's important to understand that for those who have been exposed to the virus multiple times, their immune systems may be severely compromised. As such, employers should ensure that adequate accommodations are in place for those who may be ill and unable to work.

We've seen a number of interesting things happen, and some of these events have been caused by climate change. For example, the Danube River is so low that Nazi warships scuttled during World War Two are now above the waterline. Similarly, the Mississippi River is so low that you can actually walk across it, which is quite remarkable.

In Europe, the Danube River is so low that cargo ships are no longer able to travel up it due to their weight, resulting in increased costs and shipping times. This is a direct result of climate change, as the diminishing polar ice means that the oceans heat up faster as there is less ice to reflect sunlight. We're seeing more and bigger and faster climate disasters, and this is causing significant problems for businesses and their supply chains.

For example, there is currently a shortage of children's medicines and

antibiotics, which can be damaging to retailers' reputations. As climate change worsens, these issues are only going to become more challenging. So, it is important that we all take action and do our part to mitigate the effects of climate change.

This year has seen a great advance in what is called generative AI. Generative AI is AI that can create things – from language to images. You may have seen examples of this on social media, such as MyHeritage selfies that show you as someone from a bygone era. Three years ago, these technologies were far from perfect, but now they are incredibly advanced. For example, the OpenAI GPT-3 model can generate a press release quickly and with high quality.

Let's consider how this technology will impact the world of work. As AI becomes more advanced, machines will increasingly take on the task of creating things. This means that our role as people will be to supervise and guide the machines and inspect their output. This shift will affect every profession, including those that we don't usually associate with AI.

For example, AI can be used to write a Python script that scans the PRSA website and extracts email addresses. While the script may need some fine-tuning, it provides a great starting point. The same holds true for most tasks – machines can do them quickly and well.

This shift will have a particularly strong impact on junior staff. For example, many PR firms have 100 account coordinators and account executives. But with AI, you may need only 40% of these people. In the short term, this can be good for profitability and efficiency, but in the long term it could lead to a management and leadership crunch.

This shift also raises a larger societal question: how do we ensure that people who lose their jobs due to AI are taken care of? One potential solution is universal basic income, a system in which everyone receives a set amount of money from the government. This could help to alleviate the economic impact of job losses due to AI.

Economically, the most pressing question is whether or not we're

heading for a recession. Fortunately, there's an economic indicator that can help us answer this question. The Treasury 10-year three-month maturity rate is the difference in interest rates between two treasuries, and when it drops below zero, a recession is likely. This indicator is currently in the red, suggesting that a recession is on the horizon. While this reality is being masked in some cases due to labor shortages, it's important to remember that the broader economy is not necessarily on solid ground.

Q&A

It's a fair statement to say that COVID-19 has been the flu of our generation, but I would say it's worse than that. The flu kills about 60,000 people a year, whereas COVID-19 kills about 200,000. More importantly, the flu does not leave you permanently disabled, whereas COVID-19 can. I have been following this virus for three years now and I was actually publishing my first COVID-19 newsletter in January of 2020, months before the lockdowns started. I remember reaching out to events I was speaking at and saying, "Hey, this looks like it might be a thing," though it wasn't called COVID-19 back then, it was called NCOV 2019. Everyone at the events I was speaking at looked at me like, "What are you talking about? Nothing's going to happen." And then, of course, it did.

So, how about that? For my session at the events I was attending, I was talking about how we don't fully understand this virus and it will take decades to really comprehend it. It wasn't until the summer of 2021 that we discovered that mononucleosis, the number one trigger of multiple sclerosis, is 35 times more likely to occur in people who have had mononucleosis compared to those who have not. This just goes to show that a virus can have some form of interaction with people's genetics and we don't yet know what COVID-19 will do.

Now, for the second question Lauren had in the chat, people unfamiliar

with the technology: Do the training of the tech systems for early entry staff know as these tools get better and better, do they require less and less training? I was showing you the raw interface, but there is an entire industry of companies that are springing up now and doing really good, easy-to-use technologies that require almost no work. You could have your 12-year-old operate the software and it would create really good content. Let's do an example - public relations trends.

Oh, I should probably share my screen. Let me do this. Public relations trends - I want a persuasive tone, targeting audience is marketers and public relations; PR trends. And in about 60 seconds, this will come up with a 1500 word blog post that I can then take with. Now, it will be a first draft and not publication ready, although I'm going to be doing an experiment later next year, creating a blog entirely machine generated just to see if and how it does.

So, what are the course names to look for in colleges through which these skills are taught - the skills to do AI and use the machine learning models themselves? That is called Computer Science, though industry is far ahead of academia in terms of accepting cutting edge technology. For anyone with kids thinking about college, I would actually suggest a liberal arts education. Machines so far have proven to be very bad at thinking across disciplines; they are very good at specific tasks but cannot think laterally and see how a cooking analogy applies to public relations, for example.

Let's take a look at what we got here. We have a 1000-word blog post on public relations trends. It includes earned media, influencer marketing, and visual content. Now, this is as good as you would get from an account executive or a mid to mid-premium management person.

The interesting thing here is that these tools are dirt cheap. This one, I think is about 200 bucks a month. With the APIs, like OpenAI's API, which is the way you can connect to the service programmatically, you could legitimately have it create 1000 blog posts in about a second and a half. Put that up on the internet and suddenly you've got tens of

thousands of pieces of content, far beyond what people can create.

So, if you think getting attention is difficult now, just imagine swimming in a sea of content that is being generated at massive scale.

Eric had another question - is the AI plagiarizing content that exists? These models are all trained on very large datasets, some of which is copyrighted. However, what it does is it takes, say, all the pages from the library about a specific topic, puts them in a blender, and then pulls from that blend on that topic. It looks at the probabilities of words being next to each other. So, it doesn't directly copy and paste from any one site, but it will make very familiar sounding content.

For example, I was working with a college student earlier today who was trying to write a paper about one of Raphael's paintings. The AI spit out enough factual stuff in a coherent format that they were able to take that and draft from it. Even things like writing a cover letter for a position of managing director at Padilla Public Relations can be done by the AI and you would not normally think to have an AI do. Of course, this will have to be factually checked, but if you think about any kind of written content, you can have the machines do first drafts and have them be pretty good.

These models are capable of so much more than we have scratched the surface of. For example, imagine putting in a person's medical condition and getting out therapies for a rare condition that is not worth a pharmaceutical company investing a billion dollars in. Or put in the genome of a novel new virus we've never seen before and generate a vaccine using the spike proteins, the mRNA platform. If we use this technology correctly, it could revolutionize our society. We could be looking at light years of advancement in medicine and beyond, faster and cheaper than ever before and treating more conditions than ever before. There is potential here, but it must be used responsibly and with caution.

One of the most common applications of AI in public relations is the use of natural language processing to generate content. For example, a PR firm might use AI to generate press releases or other content for

their clients. AI programs are able to take prompts from a client, such as the position of managing director and the type of public relations firm, and use natural language processing to generate a press release that is tailored to the client's needs. AI can also be used to generate content from existing sources, such as news articles and blog posts. By blending existing content with new prompts, AI can generate content that is both accurate and engaging.

Another application of AI in public relations is the use of machine learning to identify trends and classify data. For example, a PR firm might use AI to analyze data from job postings and recruiter interviews to identify trends in the types of language used in job postings. By analyzing the data, the PR firm can identify the language that is most effective in attracting job applicants, and use that language in their job postings to maximize the number of qualified candidates.

Finally, AI can be used to measure the impact of public relations campaigns. Uplift modeling is a technique used in biostatistics to measure the impact of a campaign by comparing a treatment period (the period when the campaign was active) to similar periods in the past. This technique can be used to measure the impact of a PR campaign by looking at the difference between the "treatment period" (when the campaign was active) and "control periods" (similar periods in the past). By comparing the difference between the two periods, the impact of the PR campaign can be accurately measured.

As marketers and practitioners, we need to get better at utilizing data that does not include private information from individuals. We are facing upcoming regulations that will restrict what data we can collect and how we can use it. This is similar to the data privacy regulations that exist in the European Union, known as GDPR. One technique that can be used to help us better understand and process data is marketing mix modeling. This involves taking a known outcome, such as sales, and putting it into a spreadsheet by day for the past year. The rest of the spreadsheet should include columns with data on the number of tweets sent, number of pitches, budget for pay per click ads, and other relevant information. We can then use a machine learning

model to determine which variables in combination lead to the outcome we care about and assign a percentage value to it.

The biggest upcoming regulation is CPRA, which is taking effect in California on January 1, 2023. This law is stronger than its predecessor, CCPA, as it requires consent from the user for both companies if a lead generation campaign is being conducted with a partner company. Other states that are strengthening their laws include Virginia, Colorado, Utah, and Connecticut. California has also joined Europe in saying that consumers may opt out of AI use with their data, presenting a big challenge for companies such as Facebook.

CPRA also requires that companies can confirm how their data is being used, allow users to opt out of sale, and provide users with the ability to correct their data. This will require companies to have a Chief Data Officer in order to comply with the regulations. Violators of the law can face substantial monetary penalties, but in China, executives can also face jail time for violating PIPL.

In order to process data without consumer data, companies must use marketing automation software such as HubSpot, Marketo, or Pardot. These will help us build awareness, trust, and allow people to share information that can be analyzed and modeled. Major technology vendors such as Salesforce and Google Analytics have already incorporated AI into their systems, and this trend is likely to continue.

One of the things that I think is imperative for PRSA is to get people minimally skilled in using the new version of Google Analytics. This version is completely different from the old version, and it is not as user-friendly or intuitive. It can be a challenge to configure, and Google is known for moving things around without telling anyone, which can be annoying. Despite this, it is a powerful system that advertisers must use in order to get the most out of their campaigns.

We have actually created a self-paced training course that is five and a half hours long. It is broken up into 15-minute chunks, so people don't have to do it all at once. We cover everything from marketing mix modeling to uplift modeling, and then attribution modeling which is

probably the most accessible to most people. It is important to have good tagging and governance when it comes to Google Analytics, so that the data can be analyzed when it comes out the other end.

When looking at the data, it is possible to see which channels are driving the outcomes that we care about. Email is often the number one channel, but any channel that is being worked on should show up in the models, if the tagging and governance are done properly. It is also possible to see that there may be more of a transactional relationship with the audience than a longer-term relationship, which could mean that more effort needs to be put into building awareness.

Private social media communities are something that PR should have a role in, but it is a blind spot for the industry as a whole. These communities are growing rapidly, with 1.2 million new Discord servers set up this year. They are not something that is typically monitored, and yet they can be a great source of market research, focus groups, and sales channels. PR people should be the ones leading community management and nurturing the relationship with the audience.

We just published a paper about this not too long ago, and we would be happy to send it around to everyone. Thank you again for having me on your show, and I wish everyone the best of luck with their PR efforts.