



Content Marketing for MSPs

Or any “boring” business!

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Introduction

The inspiration for this book came from an interview I did with Pascal Fintoni and Leon Howe, the hosts of “The Content Marketing Studio”.

This is a show for busy professionals, where the hosts interview experts about content marketing and ways to make businesses run more smoothly.

I talked about content marketing for “serious or boring” businesses and the problems people have around creating content, and how to get over the idea that nobody is interested in what they have to say.

I’ve added to the advice I shared originally and included case studies from a range of successful content creators I know. They don’t feel like they work in glamorous, exciting jobs, but their content has helped them grow their business, and you can do the same.

Richard



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Foreword by Pascal Fintoni

I have had the immense pleasure of witnessing the impact of Richard Tubb talking about his approach to content marketing on many occasions, whether at international conferences or on specialist podcasts. The transformation in the audience was palpable every single time as Richard took them through his personal journey that in turn would become their journey as he deftly describes the path ahead combining practical advice and good-humoured stories.

Richard has a central and clear message: there is no such thing as a boring business and by extension boring content does not exist either; on the condition that you make an essential shift-change to your mindset and language.

This ebook is designed to help you do just that, the result of your investment in time and efforts when going through the various chapters and case studies will be a renewed interest in the discipline of content marketing and newly found motivation to take action as you realise that your ordinary is someone else's extraordinary!

You will have come across the expression 'Content Is King' with all the many connotations that it might conjure up. This ebook goes beyond that mantra and demonstrates that 'Content Is The Key' – the key to unlocking the true potential of your marketing and sales activities, the key to rediscovering your talent as a speaker and presenter and perhaps most importantly the key to better understanding your customers' desires and wishes when it comes to their working relationship with you.

I know that Richard will want to go beyond re-igniting an interest in content creation, taking action is what really matters. As you read on, first capture and organise your ideas, then plan your next (and may be your first) content meeting using the generous advice from Richard and his guests to structure your agenda and discussions. Only then will your journey of transformation from content avoiders to content marketers truly begin.



Pascal Fintoni Senior Content Strategist

Pascal Fintoni is the Managing Director of Arclight Marketing & Media Ltd, a consultancy specialising in digital and content creation skills development, from government initiatives to in-house training programmes. Since 2003 Pascal has shared his time between speaking

at conferences and delivering interactive sessions on website experience, reputation management, digital customer service and content marketing to drive business results.



Chapter 1

Content Marketing for Your "Boring" Business

Those in the IT and finance industries often have no idea about the kind of content they should create. From my own experience, this is why barriers about content marketing exists in these industries.

I think it's true for all industries, whether you create theme parks for a living, which would be very exciting, or work in finance or IT, that you live with the fear that if you were to create content, nobody's interested in listening to what you have to say. I know people who work in what I would consider exceptionally interesting industries, and they don't think that anyone wants to hear from them.

My first piece of advice is: it doesn't matter whether people are reading, listening to or watching what you produce; the satisfaction you get as the creator is that it allows you to clarify your thoughts and help people better understand the work that you do. If you continue to put content out consistently, people will start to read it and pay attention to it.

To get started, it's not about whether or not people are looking at your content. This isn't an exercise where you put something out and become an overnight sensation, bringing you to the attention of people who immediately want to do business with you. It doesn't work like that.

For some background context, I've been blogging, podcasting and vlogging for a number of years, and blogging regularly in the IT industry for over 10 years. In my industry, you'd think that people would be blogging all the time, sharing content on all the wonderful technology platforms available to them, but to this day, they're not. I think the reason that people don't do it is because they just don't believe that people would be interested in what they have to say.

I felt the same when I started blogging, but I wrote those posts for my own benefit, as a form of journaling. I was able to get out all of the thoughts that were trapped in my head and onto paper. Once I stopped worrying about who was reading my blog, I became a much better business owner, particularly when networking – because I'd written about what I did and clarified my thoughts, it was easier to answer the question *"What do you do?"*

It even made me more interesting at parties! We've all been in the position when someone asks, *"What have you been working on lately?"* and your mind goes blank, even though you've been busy doing cool stuff. It was easier to answer that question by thinking about recent blogs. I believe that's a fundamental reason for content marketing.

At the time, it wasn't even called content marketing, and while I'd love to say I had a grand plan for everything I did, I was just writing for the fun of it. It did lead to some interesting situations – when I'd been consistently blogging for some years I'd Google (or Alta Vista as it was then!) a solution to a problem I was having, and the top result was a blog I'd written and completely forgotten about!

Having a collection of blogs acted as a knowledge base and a reminder of the journey I'd been on. If you're thinking, *"I can't podcast or blog because nobody is interested in what I've got to say,"* there is at least one person who will be – you! Think of it as a form of journaling for your own benefit.

There's a perception that blogging has been spoiled by marketers because they use it as a device to sell products and services. But that's not really the case.

I mentioned that I was writing as if I was creating a journal entry. I started blogging for my own benefit with no idea that anyone else was reading it. But, because I was sharing openly and honestly about my experiences as an IT business owner, other people started paying attention.

What was interesting about that was that they weren't the type of people I'd sell to at the time, but I soon noticed I had two distinct groups of readers: other IT companies, who were interested in my story and how it paralleled with their own, and those who were interested in what went on behind the scenes of a business and how the work gets done.

People want to know how the baker makes the bread, or the photographer gets the best photo, or the IT person solves their problems. There was a lot of interest in the day to day

detail, and I found that people would recognise me from my blog when I was networking, and ask me how I was getting on or how I'd solved a recent problem.

If stage one is writing for yourself, stage two is when others are reading what you put out, so don't be surprised when that happens. You won't be immediately aware of this new interest, because most people consume online content passively and don't comment or thank you for what you've put out. This isn't selfish, it's just because we're all consuming content all the time.

There is a tipping point though, where slowly but surely people put their hand up and tell you they've read your blog or listened to your podcast and become customers. Don't be surprised when the stuff you've put out there that you don't expect people to read, suddenly starts getting read.

If you're thinking,

"I can't podcast or blog because nobody is interested in what I've got to say," there

is at least one person who will be – **you!**

As a consultant helping IT businesses, I hear a lot of reasons from people about their hesitation in engaging with content creation.

The main one is this belief that nobody wants to read their content, which I think should be put to bed. The world is a very small place now, and while we might think something is boring to read about, there's going to be somebody else in the world who will be interested in the topic.

Everybody knows I'm a massive geek, and a huge fan of Star Wars. There was perhaps a time when you wouldn't talk about Star Wars online, because you'd assume no one else would be interested.

Looking around now, I can barely walk down the street in my adopted town of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne without bumping into someone dressed as a Stormtrooper! It's commonplace these days. While that may seem like an extreme example, it applies in the everyday world too.

If you run a company that provides wedding photography, you might think that nobody else is interested. But it's a big world, with a lot of people interested in that niche topic you've got. That's who you're creating content for.

For instance, the industry I'm in is known as managed services, and is a niche part of the wider IT industry. I thought by writing about it, nobody else would be interested, but I regularly get 30,000 people worldwide reading my blog every month now.

Some of the other challenges that people have are that they're not a good writer, videographer or content producer. The most successful pieces of content that I've produced could best be described as "down and dirty", and my English teacher from school probably wouldn't be pleased to read some of my blog posts and spot the grammar and punctuation mistakes that are in there!

But people read it and understand the ideas that I'm trying to convey, and they get value from it. If you're recording a video, don't worry about making it television quality; work on the message that you want to share and what you want to talk about, and work on the technique after that.

If you're reading this and thinking, "I'm not a good writer or videographer" – just get on and do it! If you do it long enough, you will become good at it. More people will be bothered about your message, and they'll say things like, "I love your videos and what you're saying, but have you ever thought about buying a better microphone?" or "Have you seen the latest video camera?"

What they're saying is they're interested in the message and would like to see that with even greater value, but it doesn't stop them watching, reading or listening in the first place.

You CAN overcome these barriers and create great content.

Tiana Wilson-Buys Case Study

Tiana is a founding director of Talking Business Limited, specialising in creating and implementing systematic, strategic and goal-driven development plans. As the "Get Stuff Done" Business Coach and Productivity Strategist, she's ideally placed to assist and advise creative solopreneurs in achieving their goals.

Result-orientated, driven and focused, Tiana's no-nonsense approach means these attributes are also downloaded to her clients' psyche. If you'd like to find out more about how she works, Tiana welcomes connections via LinkedIn.

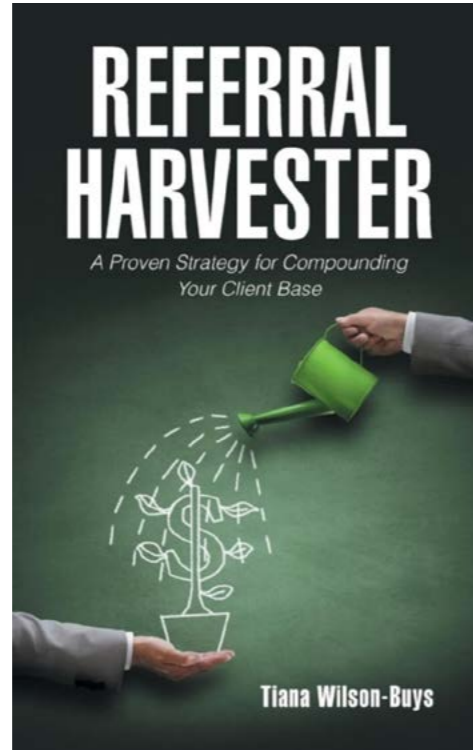
Most of Tiana's clients and her audience are solopreneurs in the creative industries. She says that one of her main roles is to help create order out of chaos and bring focus to a business: being creative often means focus is lacking as people try to chase too many ideas



at the same time. She gives additional value by acting as a sounding board to give guidance for the 'business' aspects of running a business.

Tiana explains that she is very focused on action in business, but realised that solopreneurs often struggle to know what action to take and how – the doing bit is a challenge.

Seeing her clients struggle with "the basic techniques and systems that they can use to make their businesses fly, and which they lack," Tiana was inspired to create content as a way to share knowledge, techniques and ideas, to inspire solopreneurs with case studies and help them to level up.



Tiana has experimented with a range of content for a variety of platforms, from blogs and infographics to podcasts and Facebook Lives, although she is currently concentrating on video and blogs.

She says that everybody's audiences are different and consume content in various forms, so it's the responsibility of the content creator to cater for those individual preferences.

To help solopreneurs be more effective, impactful and better at running their business, Tiana shares hints and techniques as actionable takeaways. She doesn't hold anything back and shares her content freely, which she believes allows her to stand out: "Many people share content, but keep "the best bits" only for paying clients. I don't follow that philosophy. I share everything I know."

Content creation brings all kinds of benefits to business owners, some of which are unexpected, and Tiana is no exception. She says that the benefits are almost immeasurable, and range from building trusting relationships with her audience and winning new, high-paying clients.

However, she says that the biggest benefit is professional satisfaction, and describes an email from a stranger who'd been following her content. By implementing some of Tiana's ideas, she moved out of a stressed, overwhelmed situation to a place of calm and control, making a massive impact on her life. Tiana says: "That is why I create content!"

"Content creation brings all kinds of benefits to business owners, some of which are unexpected."

Chapter 2

Overcoming Barriers and Getting Started with Content Marketing

Let's now talk about how to overcome your barriers and start creating some content to help your business stand out and get noticed. There is a solution, no matter what your objections.

In my line of work, I share advice and talk about the issues I've had, as well as provide solutions. However, it's fair to say that in certain sectors, one of the barriers is that people don't want to talk about problems.

This is still a huge issue, especially in the IT industry. There's a feeling that if you answer people's questions, they'll no longer need

you on a professional basis. Let me give you a couple of examples of this.

Some time ago, I wrote a blog sharing my experiences as an IT business owner and answering my customers' questions. There were two fears there, and while I didn't fall prey to them at the time, there are lots of people in this position now who might be worried that they're educating their competitors on how they do business (and giving away trade secrets) and educating their customers on how to solve or avoid problems.

You may think that by doing this people then won't need you to fix their problems and won't do business with you, so it seems crazy to give

them that knowledge. But, it isn't as counter-productive as it sounds. Let me explain.

I sold my IT business in 2011, and had no plans on what to do next. A number of my competitors (both in my locality and further afield from where I'd been working) started ringing me and saying, "Now that you're no longer a competitor, could you come into our office to talk about some of the things you write about on your blog?"

So, rather than giving all my trade secrets away, it actually led to another business, which is what I do today – working with business owners to help them understand technology and make a profit from it.

While this might not be the case for everybody, there are enough customers out there for all of us, so don't worry about educating your competitors. Remember, the secret sauce in your business is you – you're the only one who can do the thing that you

do really well, and the only person your customers want to do business with.

The second point relates to my experience with Googling solutions to a problem and coming up with my own blog post. I wanted to educate my customers so they weren't phoning me or my team to ask how to do something in Word or Excel, or how to set up their internet connection.

That's boring to me, and if I could create a knowledge base to educate people on how to do those things, so much the better. Those people wouldn't stop calling me, but they'd call with more interesting questions, such as, "How can I make more money for my business with a CRM package?" or "How can we do better SEO for our website?"

I don't want to be at the bottom of the pile, doing the bread and butter things that most people could work out themselves. I want to be the consultant who's doing really

interesting projects, which are a lot more lucrative as well, further up the field. Something tells me you want that too.

A key point to remember is: whether what you create is educating your competitors or your customers, at the end of the day, the old adage that, "People want to do business with people they know, like and trust" holds true. I've said it to many of my IT business owners – "You can be the best IT business in the world, but if nobody knows about you, you're not going to pick up any customers."

By putting content out there for your chosen industry, you're putting your hand up and saying, "I know about this stuff, and I'm willing to share it openly and honestly with other people. I understand the challenges that you're going through."

Rather than answering those people's questions and then they go away forever, you answer them, build trust in your expertise, who you are and the voice that you speak in, and people approach you for more work.

I want you to be reassured that there are countless examples out there, across many industries, of people who've shared information and gained success. However, one problem that comes up for those in legal or financial services is that they're not allowed to engage online.

If that's you, remember that while there may be some things you can't talk about, there should still be enough options left to create information. Sometimes there's a perception that there's a legal obligation that prevents you from talking about things, but if you looked more closely, there are other avenues for expression.

One of the ways that I dealt with this problem when I started out blogging was to not blog about things immediately as they happened, but to blog about them some time later, and to anonymise them.

One blog that still gets a lot of traffic now was around a very delicate situation I dealt with more than 10 years ago. I spoke to a business in the West Midlands who said, "We've looked at how much it's going to cost us to buy Microsoft Office licences, and we've chosen not to, because it's going to be a lot cheaper to pirate the software."

Everybody knows that's wrong, but as the owner of an IT business, how could I deal with that? My team worked in an open and honest way, and it made for a fantastic story, but one that we didn't want to share straight away. Some months down the line, we did share it, and it continues to be read all the time.

It's a good way of dealing with something that could be embarrassing for the subjects involved, but still has an interesting story to tell if you do it the right way and once some time has elapsed.

Once you've overcome barriers and objections, you're ready to start creating content. You might begin by writing some blogs, as that's often easier. Here are some pointers to get started and some steps you can follow.

If you're somebody who procrastinates a lot, the first thing I would recommend is to start producing bite-size pieces of content. Instead of trying to write your magnum opus as a blog post, set yourself a goal of sitting down when the mood strikes you, and write a 250 word blog post, or even just 100 words, and share what you're doing.

A lot of people like to use Twitter, because it's a social media platform which is essentially a micro-blogging site. You have a 280-character limit, but images and hyperlinks aren't included in that count. This is enough to convey a story and a great way to get started. There are a lot of people using Twitter!

Don't worry about production values either. Everybody's got a smartphone, so grab your phone and record a 90-second video of what you're doing. Publish it and be damned – the main thing is to get it out there. Once you start publishing and get more comfortable with the process of doing it, you'll do it more often.

If you wanted to be more methodical about it, you can follow the advice one of my mentors gave me: if you want something to get done, you schedule it. If you've got ideas for blog posts and so on, sit down and put some time in your diary as a meeting with yourself, and make it sacrosanct.

None of us would ever make a meeting with a client and then five minutes beforehand have something else come up and decide not to meet with them, but we do that with our own time constantly. Make space to sit down and explore the content you want to create.

As a procrastinator, I use the Pomodoro Technique, which is a famous time management and productivity strategy. If I'm really struggling to get started, I'll put the time in the diary, grab an egg timer and set it for 25 minutes.

I'll write whatever comes into my head, and I often find that by the end of those 25 minutes I'm in the flow and can keep writing anyway, but it's the initial getting started that becomes an issue.

If you're a procrastinator, create small chunks of content. If you're not, schedule time for your content. Either way, the common theme is to just get started with it, and you'll keep going with it.

Here's an easy way to begin:

If you're thinking, "I've got no idea what I'd write about," here's a simple question for you: if you've got clients, what are the questions they've asked you over the last few days? These can be big or small.

For example, in my business I've been asked, "What tools should I use in my IT business?" and "How do I deal with an engineer who's not performing?" or "I've got a problem with my business partner – what should I do?" These are all ideal pieces of content to create.

If your customers ask you questions, there are other potential clients or customers out there who will have the same queries, so write about the answers you would give them. There are two reasons for this: first of all, it builds trust and the relationship between you.

Secondly, if you're lazy, it's a great way to build your knowledge base, because the next time a customer asks you that question, rather than answering it in detail, you can send them the blog post instead.

There is a ton of stuff I have in my own knowledge base, and I get asked the same things even now. So when that happens, whether on Twitter, at an event or a networking session, it's a great way for you to follow up with them, by sending them an article you promised them.

Not only are you giving them the answer, it's actually documented, because you've been asked before. It goes towards building greater credibility for you. Think about questions you're asked, and if you're struggling with it, take a blank piece of paper and write freeform. Think about something that's on your mind as a business owner, and go from there, jotting down thoughts or creating a mind map.

Sitting down for five minutes and thinking about questions you've been asked recently will help you come up with lots of things, and these become a big collection of blog posts, videos or other kinds of content.

Pete Matthew Case Study

Pete Matthew is a 21-year veteran financial planner and managing director of Jacksons Wealth Management in Penzance, Cornwall. In 2010 he began uploading educational videos about personal finance to YouTube, but it was when he switched to podcasting two years later that things got interesting.

Now, his MeaningfulMoney Podcast is the most-downloaded independent finance podcast in the UK, achieving 100,000 downloads per month and over two million downloads in total. It is a major source of new business to Jacksons, and Pete currently has a three-month waiting list of clients looking to work with him. He's a contented husband to Joanne, has two teenage daughters and a Jack Russell called Maisy.



Jacksons is a Chartered Financial Planner firm, advising people of moderately high net worth about how to optimise their finances to achieve their stated aims. They coach their clients through the whole process of building and implementing a financial plan.

He started out creating videos before switching to audio podcasts. He now produces a combination of the two, with some written content too, for an audience of anyone who's interested in moving forward with their finances.



Pete was inspired to create content as a way to reach more people than he could ever hope to help in a one-to-one environment: "I believe that financial planning is a game-changer when adopted wholeheartedly; it can help a person realise their life-goals, provide for themselves and their family and bring incredible peace of mind."

Pete believes that the process of financial planning is not as complex as the industry makes out, and advisers make it that way

for their own advantage. His aim is to help everyone, no matter what their financial position, to benefit from being informed and able to plan properly.

Through his content, Pete gives his audience the tools they need to overcome inertia and move forward in making their financial situation better. They're able to build a plan to identify the right insurance for their circumstances, get started with investing for their future and pay down their debt.

"With knowledge comes power, and I give people what they need to KNOW and what they need to DO to secure their financial future."

Financial services is a regulated industry, so Pete stands out from his peers because he's prepared to create helpful content, instead of doing what everyone else does and needlessly worrying (in his opinion) about falling foul of compliance rules.

Pete even suggests to his audience that the majority of them don't need a financial adviser, and with careful research and planning can do everything themselves. This is an unusual approach, he says, as it's "about as far removed as possible from the self-serving industry out to overcharge for little value." By giving valuable information for free, prospective clients can overcome their innate mistrust of financial advisers.

Pete is a brilliant example of how consistent content creation over time can be beneficial to a business. In five years, turnover has doubled at Jacksons, and, by using his content as a filter, they're able to refine the types of prospects who get in touch for help.

On top of this, Pete's first book was published last year, he has secured numerous speaking engagements and his standing amongst his peers has improved immeasurably too.

He adds that he's been able to refine his thinking on key issues that affect his clients, and therefore his business, by creating so much content. The increased visibility has allowed him to build better relationships with a range of product and service manufacturers and suppliers, giving him a nice extra perk – trying their offerings before they're available on general release.

Cara Mackay Case Study

Cara Mackay, also known as NattyShedGirl (search for her on Twitter), is the managing director of Gillies and Mackay (G&M), who make the best sheds in the world! Their audience are consumers interested in buying garden buildings. The company manufactures, sells and assembles garden rooms, garages, summerhouses and sheds.

Cara explains that her content marketing journey began in 2015, when she started a content marketing masterclass. The six-month course was aimed at business owners who wanted to learn and implement the principles of content marketing.

She says that: "Within that time I was able to understand the importance of ZMOT (zero moment of truth) to my audience and how best G&M could become the leaders within our industry.



"By answering the questions that my audience need answered in order to move through their buying process I quickly established returns on my efforts with producing content relevant to my industry, product and service."

Creating content specifically for her audience means that Cara enables them to feel confident in making their buying decision – they can educate themselves on the technicalities surrounding a garden building and what they should expect when buying one.



"The content produced by G&M is mainly video and blogs, and designed to give customers the information they need on an honest and transparent platform for them creating a lasting loyalty with myself and my company."

Cara structures her content based on what she has learned from her membership of the CMA (Content Marketing Academy). Much of this is based on author and speaker Marcus Sheridan's advice of 'They Ask, You Answer' and the Big 5 topics guaranteed to get engagement: cost, problems, comparisons, 'best of' lists and reviews.

She explains that in her industry, nobody else practises content marketing, and in fact few

even have an operational website. Cara says that most don't see their online presence as a contributing factor to the success of the business.

She goes on to say, "Secondly, my industry is steeped in misconception and undermining the customer. There are very few who take part in disclosing important information or facts about how their product performs or what kind of service they provide."

Garden building companies are usually owned and run by joiners to trade, who don't understand marketing and aren't interested in the operational side of the business. As G&M "not only have a woman as their MD but one who is qualified and has delivered exceptional content marketing for over four years, this definitely puts us in the 'stand out' zone."

Cara says that: "Overall G&M have experienced monumental shifts in how the business performs and operates - although not all directly related to content marketing, it's fair to say the overall influence of being a CMA Member has accounted for a number of positive changes."



Structure: G&M is traditionally a seasonal business, but no longer experiences a three-month downturn and is profitable 12 months of the year.

Profitability: The company doesn't pay for advertising, and all marketing is via online activities. Being consistent with content marketing produces a significant revenue change within 18 months to three years.

Growth: G&M has been able to grow and develop at a rate they never thought possible. Both the founding directors have come out of their operational roles to fulfil a retirement they deserve

Product Development: G&M has been able to dedicate time and effort into R&D for all their products. Content marketing has allowed them to talk to their customers to identify the best areas for improvement.

Online Sales: Over 50% of sales are dealt with online as a direct result of content produced. Traditionally G&M made under 15% of sales online before content marketing and relied heavily on word of mouth for people to find them.

Enquiries: In January 2019 alone, they increased enquiries through to fruition by over 300%.

Buyer's Journey: The difference between a bad customer and a good customer is how educated they are on your product or service before they make first contact. The buyer makes 70% of their decision online before coming to G&M, so content that answers every single possible question they could have, equips them with the expectation the company can deliver and pre-qualifies customers.

Brand: Content marketing touches on so much more than marketing, creating a business culture that influences every aspect. Customers identify with G&M and see it as something to aspire to.

Industry Reputation: Cara says: "G&M is without a shadow of doubt the best manufacturing example of content marketing today and we're just getting started."



Chapter 3

Podcasting and Vlogging to Market your “Boring” Business

We’ve already looked at how to get started in content marketing, and how blogging can help, so we’ll now look at other types of content you can create, specifically podcasts and vlogs.

When you start creating your content, whatever the format, imagine it as your FAQ section, which is what all websites used to have.

Today, the FREQUENTLY asked questions tend to be things like how much does an item cost, can it be returned, the terms of sale. Instead, try to think about the INFREQUENTLY asked questions.

Some things I’ve only been asked about once over the last decade, but I’ve blogged about

the answers, and from the statistics on my blog and videos I can see that hundreds, if not thousands, of people have viewed that content.

This shows that, although it’s not been frequently asked of me, it’s something that’s on a lot of people’s minds. Consider how they’ll react the next time they have a similar question or around the same part of the industry – who will they turn to to find that answer?

If you provided a helpful answer last time, they’re more likely to come back to you with their latest question. You’ll find that it’s like a rolling stone once you start on the content journey. You start to build an audience and people start turning to you and asking for more of the same.

You can find inspiration in recent conversations, by attending networking events (and not necessarily just those for your industry), by talking to clients and by asking your colleagues.

If your business has employees, you can get them involved with the process too. I blogged as an IT business owner when I was a one-man band, and continued to do so until there were 10 people in the team.

However, if I hadn't allowed those other people to feed back ideas, write blogs and create videos, we would have missed out on a really valuable source of information. The further removed you become from the coalface, the less likely you are to have those conversations. It's so important that everyone involved in the business contributes to the content being produced.

Next, let's look at another form of content: podcasting. Here's my approach, and I'll let you in on my secret.

I create podcasts for the same reason I write blogs – for selfish reasons. Podcasting is a way for me to sit down with the most successful, enthusiastic people, the smartest in the industry, and to pick their brains and learn from them.

I was chatting to the CEO of an £80m software business over a glass of wine and the guy was sharing real nuggets of valuable information. It hit me like a thunderbolt: "If this is valuable to me, how many other people would love to hear this?" My podcast was born from that, as a way of allowing people to eavesdrop on my conversations with some of the smartest people in the IT industry and further afield.

My podcast is about me and how I can get great value from it. It just so happens that there's an audience of people who also get value out of listening in on my discussions. I don't complicate things: if there's someone I meet who I find interesting, I think if I get value from them, then others will too.

Sometimes, I'll just switch on the recorder to capture the conversation and we treat it like an ordinary chat between people. Don't worry about who's listening or watching, just start talking, and the value will come from it.

If you're interested in the gear, this is what I use in terms of mics, recording and editing equipment.

I carry my equipment around with me all the time, and the bag is always close at hand. I have a Zoom H5 digital audio recorder, which is a bit more advanced and costs around £150. It's fantastic. I used it recently in the Tate Modern on a busy day, and with the recorder between me and the CEO I was chatting to, was able to get great audio despite all the noise around us.

I started with the Zoom H1, which is a cut-down version of this (cost is around £60) and that worked a treat, particularly in quieter environments. But at the end of the day, everybody has one piece of equipment they can use for video and audio, and that's their smartphone. At the basic level, don't worry so much about the quality, but about the content and the value that you're trying to deliver.

I've put out some awful-quality podcasts and videos, which are still available on my YouTube channel! Interestingly, to this day they still get views and listens. What's being talked about on those interviews is useful, so it shows that people will put up with poorer production qualities if they'll gain value from what you're talking about.

Once the interview is in an audio file, this is what I do next:

I'm a big fan of not doing a great deal of editing, so if I used the original recordings of my interviews, I often notice that I stumbled on a few words and repeated myself here and there. That's just like a conversation we'd have any other time, as human beings do, so I tend not to edit things very much.

If I did, I'd use free pieces of software to do any edits. Audacity for the PC is open source and allows you to grab the MP3 from your phone or other audio recorder, chop and change things around and gives you an MP3 file at the end.

Don't underestimate the value that people get from listening to a "warts and all" interview. In terms of then sharing it, I use a platform called Libsyn, which costs around \$7 a month for a hosting platform. Once I put the audio on there, it's syndicated to iTunes, Stitcher Radio and so on, and people listen to it in whichever format they choose.

This is cheap and cheerful, and the key to podcasting, like everything else, is not so much the tools, it's just getting on and doing the work and producing the content.

So, what about vlogging?

To be completely honest and open, I'm totally comfortable doing the kind of discussion that I did in the interview which inspired this book (a live-streamed video between Pascal, Leon and me) where I'm being interviewed or doing the interviewing. I'm a poor man's version of Michael Parkinson, but I'm happy in that kind of situation.

If, however, you pointed a camera at me on my own, or I tried to do a selfie or something, I'd freeze. I'm sure lots of others feel the same way, so my advice to myself and everyone else is to just get on and do it. The more you do it, the more comfortable you get.



I was having a conversation with a friend of mine, Anne Johnston, who's a photographer in Scotland, and she was talking about her fear of public speaking. I do a lot of it, and I'm still terrified of it, but I've done enough of it so that I can swallow the terror down and get on stage and do it.

If you share that fear, do a video interview where there are two of you talking to the camera. Reach out to somebody in your industry or who you admire, and ask them if you can interview them on camera. Make it about them, and you produce a brilliant, valuable piece of content.

The secret sauce comes from you sitting there and asking a question now and again, and you get the rub from the other person. If you let them talk, you get the kudos from being seen on camera with them.

At the end of the day, video is the future, so getting comfortable with recording a piece to camera is a great way of getting content out there. If you're not sure what to talk about, it's the same thing as with blogs and podcasts – think about the questions you've been asked.

The great thing about videos is that you don't have to do any prep for them. You've got the device in your pocket, so you could come out of a customer site with a couple of questions buzzing in your head and record the answers straight away. Don't worry about what it looks like, just do the piece to the camera. That's a piece of content done instantly and you can publish it and be damned.

**At the end of the day,
video is the future,
so getting comfortable
with recording a piece to
camera is a great way of
getting content out there.**

You may decide to use a mixture of blogging, podcasting and vlogging, or choose to focus on just one.

The medium I'm most comfortable with is blogging. I can sit behind my keyboard and compose my thoughts and get them out there. Over the long term, I think that's the one that produces the most evergreen content. I have blogs from 10 or 12 years ago which are still read today and generate queries.

It's really close to my heart, and there's a 90-second video out there that shows a conversation between Tom Peters and Seth Godin, who are both well-respected, talking about the value of blogging and touching on some of the points that I have, such as just getting it out there to see the benefits.

However, for the modern generation, I would say video is by far the most important. I was out walking recently with my stepsons (9 and 12) and they were vlogging as they went. They have no fear of it – they have YouTube channels and followers, and people who interact with them, and I've just told the entire world that I'm a little bit scared about vlogging. If I was starting again today as a younger man, video is where I'd start.

John Espirian Case Study

John Espirian, the relentlessly helpful technical copywriter, started out as a Microsoft Mac MVP and served as a director of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders. He now creates in-depth B2B web content to help his clients explain how their products, services and processes work. You can find his writing tips, branding guidance and LinkedIn advice on his blog at espirian.co.uk.

John works with both large and small B2B companies, often in engineering or IT, and usually 'techies'. These companies hire him to write or edit their content, because they don't have "the time, energy or language skills to explain how their products and services work." The content may be used for case studies, websites or blogs.



John produces a great deal of content for his own business, and in a range of mediums. Despite being a writer, he knows that just text-based content doesn't engage his audience, so he also creates videos. He says: "Video in particular has been a good way for me to convey my personality and bridge the gap between me and my audience."

He uses videos and screenshots to further enhance his written content, and is careful to make sure all visuals are on-brand and consistent. John has been blogging since 2014, having made the switch to technical copywriting five years earlier. He says creating his own content was a natural progression from his work in quality assurance:



"I was the guy who explained how things worked to people outside the software-testing department, combining the right level of technical information with a more human approach, so people understood the subject."

These days, John's content is how-to, explainer style, helping people stand out on LinkedIn, improve their website or just get started with writing content. He aims to provide something practical for his audience without a sales message. He appreciates good content that's fluff-free and gets straight to the point, so offers the same himself.

John believes his content has raised awareness of what he does, and helps him stand out from the competition. Too often with technical writing, the customers and the writers themselves strive to use a professional tone.

In contrast, John has a "naturally relaxed and fun tone of voice", which he thinks sets him apart from others. He reminds his clients that the writing is aimed at people rather than robots, and it needs to be clear, concise and understood, not boring.

Focusing on blogging and sharing content on LinkedIn have increased John's visibility and led to more work offers. However, John has been careful to develop a long-term plan for his content, so it has brought the types of well-paying work he wanted, rather than having to search jobs boards.

He says: "People find me online or are referred to me by clients and colleagues. That means I don't have to advertise, sell or make cold calls: the business comes to me. And I can't put a price on how valuable that is."



Chapter 4

Useful Apps and Ways of Sharing Content

Here are some tips on tools, and how to get your content shared as widely as possible.

Once you start creating content, you may feel pressure to create content in every possible medium. Instead, you should find the one thing that you thoroughly enjoy and will make the others more palatable.

Even if your industry subject matter is a little dry, you CAN still find your voice and make it interesting. However, you might feel there's some pressure when you create the content, and that you need to work harder.

This is something I hear repeatedly from IT business owners. I think it's the greatest industry in the world, because I'm a geek and a technologist and I love all this stuff. However, the rest of the world probably doesn't feel quite the same, so when I talk to other IT businesses, they think that talking about websites and so on is boring. I can understand that, and the same can often apply to solicitors or accountants.

But as I've already said, it really isn't. Usually, we think about broadcast television, which is "broad". What we need to focus on now is "narrowcasting". Star Wars used to be part of a narrow niche, and although that's not quite the case now, there were always people who were interested in the films.

The first thing to do is put the idea of being boring to one side. If, however, you do think that nobody will listen to discussions on your topic and you're steadfast in that belief, why not talk about how you do the work instead? Talk about your team, and what happens in your business on a day to day basis.

Lots of people will be interested in a peek behind the curtain. I can't tell you how many blog posts I've written or videos I've made about visiting data centres or a client's communications room, which is essentially a broom cupboard with flashing lights! Whenever I talk about what goes on behind the team, people will pay attention.

Everybody is interested in how the baker makes the bread, so if you think that bread is a boring subject, why not talk about how you get up at 5 in the morning to knead the dough and create the bread? Talk about the people you do business with, the apprentice you've got on board who's learning how to make bread too.

There's no business so boring that people won't want to learn more if you give them a peek into how it's done. I'd challenge you

to find any business at all where they say, "Content marketing is not a fit for what we do" and I bet I'd be able to find an angle where people would be interested. People want to do business with people they know, like and trust, and content marketing enables you to build that trust with people.

I like to give tool recommendations whenever I can, although it can be difficult when technology is constantly changing. Here are a couple of my favourites, though, which you can find easily.

There are a couple of apps that I couldn't live without. I've talked about producing content, but I'd also like to touch on the idea of curating content, which is also hugely important. My favourite subject, not surprisingly, is me, in the same way that everybody else likes talking about themselves.



But if I just talked about myself and my business all the time, people would turn off. So it's really important to shine a light on the people you admire, those who are doing interesting things in your industry or the latest developments.

You need to share content that's produced by other people, and this is referred to as curated content. I do this daily – I might read an article from someone which I find interesting and decide to share it with my audience.

One of the tools I use to do this is called Buffer. It's free, although there is a paid version with some extra features, and it simply installs an app on your web browser. Every time you read an interesting article that you think your audience would like to read, you can click the icon and it's drip-fed to your social media accounts.

There's also a tool called Agorapulse, which allows you to grab all the content you've created yourself, and regularly drip feed it to your audience. This is important because if you're putting together content which

you share to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or whatever, then it appears there once.

But we know that the nature of those things is that the person who might be interested in it isn't using the platform at the time. With Agorapulse, you feed it a blog post once, and tell it to share it every month or six weeks, but at a different time and in a different place.

The third tool I couldn't live without is useful when you've created your own content or curated others' and people want to talk to you about it. I use Agorapulse, which is the paid version of the software, and enables me to keep the conversations going with people in a timely fashion, whether that's replying to tweets or Facebook messages, and brings it together in one place.

If you're left to your own devices, you could easily spend all day, every day, on social media. It's like a black hole, where you jump in with the intention of replying to a message, and an hour later you've been looking at cat videos. Agorapulse allows me (and you) to batch that process, by allowing me to reply to all of my messages in one place at one time.

I've never had a client say,
"Now's not a good time to talk"
if I've turned up with doughnuts!

If you're going to ask your colleagues or employees for input into your content creation, you need to motivate them and help them to feel that they are active participants in the process.

The answer is really simple and sounds obvious, but few of us do it – have conversations with people more often. When I talk about team meetings with clients, it doesn't have to be the traditional type where everyone sits around and talks. I'm a great fan of a book by Verne Harnish, "Mastering the Rockefeller Habits", where he talks about the idea of "huddles".

What difference would it make if you huddled together for five minutes at the start of the day to find out how people are and what they're working on, ask about what's been difficult for them and what successes they've had? If you did that every day, you'd have an infinite supply of content, because people would share different things.

If you're a business owner with a team, make sure you're involved in those huddles. But if you're a solopreneur, go out and meet with clients and talk to them about their business rather than yours. Take them for coffee or drop in on them with a box of doughnuts. I've never had a client say, "Now's not a good time to talk" if I've turned up with doughnuts!

Chat with them about what's happening, and they will give you a stream of ideas you can use for content. It comes down to having conversations with each other, because everything you need for content marketing is out there. You just have to listen.

You need to communicate properly with people. Consider having a coffee break where people get together and share ideas. Or, what I used to do with my team was to get a pizza delivered and we'd sit down and I'd ask them to tell me what had been happening. It wasn't a formal meeting, it was just a chat around a pizza. Sit quietly with a notebook and pen, and the ideas will come to you as you listen.

Facebook Live for “boring” industries

You might think that your industry is too boring for Facebook Live (live broadcasting to your audience from your Facebook page). Let’s put this to bed once and for all! What’s boring to one person is gold dust to somebody else.

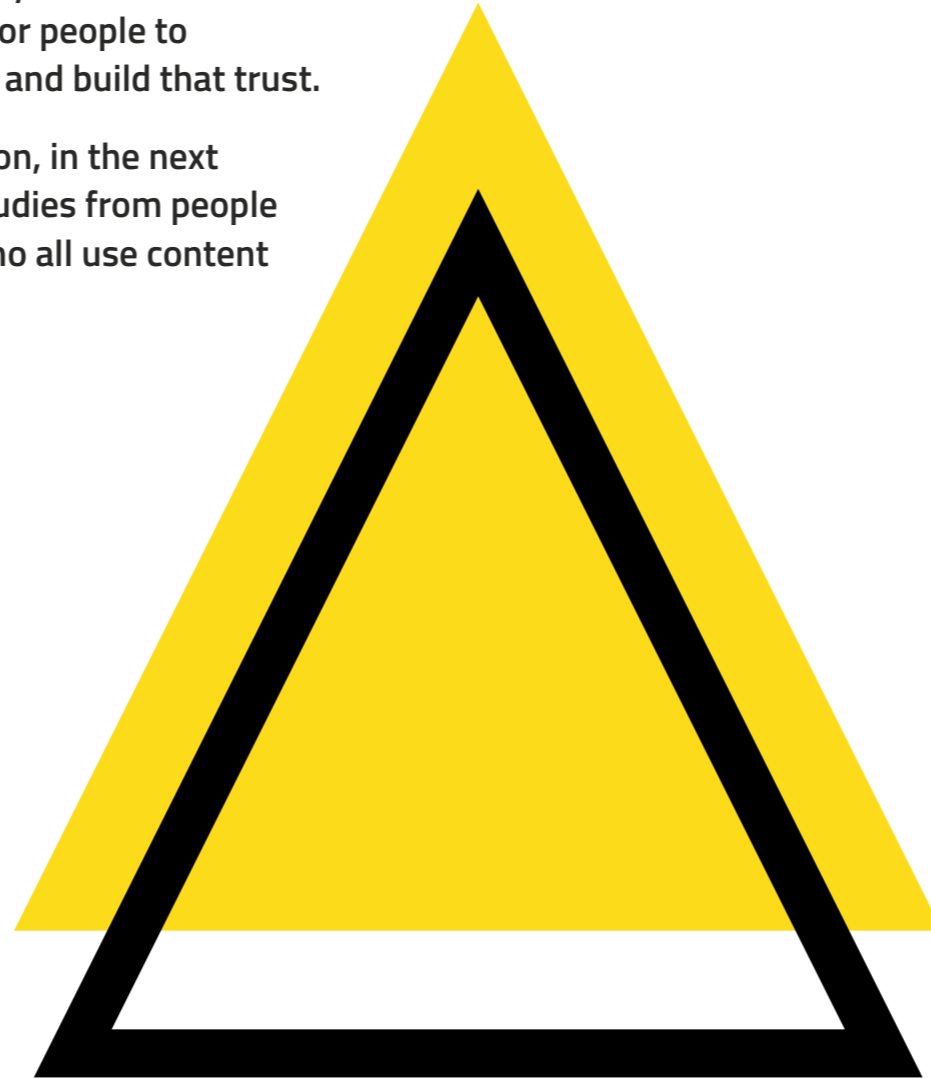
I attended the UK Podcasting Awards a couple of years ago, and the winner was a podcaster whose show was about knitting. I can’t think of anything more boring, but the lady involved had built an audience and was clearly as passionate as her audience was about the topic.

Facebook Live is great for niche businesses because it lets people peek behind the curtain and see what happens day to day. Use it as a way to have a walk around the office and chat to people. Flip it over and say,

“I’m just visiting a client and this is what we’re talking about,” because people are interested in what you’re doing.

As I’ve said before, people do business with people they know, like and trust. That’s always been true and always will be. Content marketing is a great way for people to passively get to know you and build that trust.

To give you more inspiration, in the next chapter you’ll find case studies from people in a range of industries who all use content marketing to great effect.



Alasdair McGill Case Study

Alasdair McGill is managing director of Ashton McGill, a Dundee-based accounting and consulting business that helps ambitious entrepreneurs grow their business using a design-led approach.

After qualifying as an accountant with EY, Alasdair has spent 25 years starting, growing and running businesses in a variety of industries. He is currently the Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Dundee, and was recently named as one of Scotland’s top ten digital disruptors.

Ashton McGill’s audience are business owners and entrepreneurs. Alasdair says: “They’re typically tech-savvy, forward-thinking types, who challenge the status quo and believe in better.”



While at the basic level Ashton McGill serves as their accountant, in reality they do so much more: acting as strategic coaches, advisors, mentors and sometimes providing a shoulder to cry on.

“We help them understand finance so that they feel in control of their business, and our mission is to make a visit to your accountant as enjoyable as a meal in your favourite restaurant!”



Alasdair's content journey started quite some time ago, when he set up a blog to share his thoughts and ideas back in the early 2000s, a time when 'content' wasn't even a term.

He explains that now, his business creates content designed to engage with existing and prospective clients as well as future staff members. Its aims are to help people get to know Ashton McGill and answer their questions – "it's all thoughtfully designed as part of our overall brand strategy."

The company creates a range of content types, and publishes it both on their own site and on social media platforms. Perhaps surprisingly for an accountancy firm, their Instagram images and stories get great engagement. The feed is thoughtfully curated to ensure the brand stays on point, and they have a loyal and growing following.

The blog posts on their website are usually about bookkeeping and running your own business, with the intention of taking away the mystique of accounting so people easily understand what it actually involves.

As well as this, they've produced several eBooks, which are beautifully designed and reflect the brand, and they're in the process of planning more. They also enthusiastically use Twitter to clearly show their personality, a tactic which brings them the most engagement of all the media they use.

On top of the publicly-available content, Ashton McGill also produces a lot which is only available to their clients, including webinars, videos and a monthly newsletter. Offering so much content is clearly valuable to their audience, and Alasdair explains that it's designed to help people feel better about money and their business finances. He adds:

"I'd like to think that our content both educates, informs and entertains our audience. It's also beautifully designed, another thing that we know our ideal persona appreciates!"

Most accountancy firms don't create content, and those that do usually have horrible websites, written for themselves rather than the layperson – no normal human wants to read blogs full of technical jargon.

Ashton McGill's content helps them stand out from their competitors, but another advantage they have is that: "We also look super-cool, which again appeals to our ideal persona. We just won a Golden Globe Award in the British

Accountancy Marketing Awards for creating the 'most authentic content'"

Of course, it's important that all this well-presented, helpful content also brings benefits to the business. Alasdair says that it's led to them winning business across the country.

He explains that from the beginning, as designers as well as accountants, the business used design thinking to re-imagine what an accounting service might look like. They interviewed over 100 business owners in Spring of 2017, before launching the business later that year:

"We listen to our clients, to what business owners are looking for. We use our design skills to then create a service offering, and of course a content and brand strategy, that solves their needs and problems.

The exciting thing is that we've only just begun..."

Bonus Chapter

The Original Interview

In conversation with Pascal Fintoni and Leon Howe

Pascal and Leon are the hosts of “The Content Marketing Studio”, a show for busy professionals where they interview experts about content marketing and ways to make their businesses run more smoothly.

I talked about content marketing for “boring” businesses and the problems people have around creating content and getting over the idea that nobody is interested in what they have to say. The original interview was broadcast live for an hour. We touch on a lot of different things, so I thought it was worth creating a series of longer, more detailed posts so you can get the full value of what we discussed.

Leon Howe (LH): Pascal and I often come across clients in certain sectors, such as IT and finance, who don't have any idea about the kind of content they should create. From your own experience, why do you think those barriers about content marketing exist for these industries?

It's an interesting question. I think it goes for all industries, whether you create theme parks for a living, which would be very exciting, or work in finance or IT, that you live with the fear that if you were to create

content, nobody's interested in listening to what you have to say. I know people who work in what I would consider exceptionally interesting industries, and they don't think that anyone wants to hear from them.

My first piece of advice is it doesn't matter whether people are reading, listening to or watching what you produce; the satisfaction you get as the creator is that it allows you to clarify your thoughts and help people understand better the work that you do. If you continue to put content out consistently, people will start to read it and pay attention to it.

To get started, it's not about whether or not people are looking at your content. This isn't an exercise where you put something out and become an overnight sensation, bringing you to the attention of people who immediately want to do business with you. It doesn't work like that.

For some background context, I've been blogging, podcasting and vlogging for a number of years, and blogging regularly in the IT industry for over 10 years.

In my industry, you'd think that people would be blogging all the time, sharing content on all the wonderful technology platforms available to them, but to this day, they're not. I think the reason that people don't do it is because they just don't believe that people would be interested in what they have to say.

I felt the same when I started blogging, but I wrote those posts for my own benefit, as a form of journaling. I was able to get out all of the thoughts that were trapped in my head and onto paper. Once I stopped worrying about who was reading my blog, I became a much better business owner, particularly when networking – because I'd written about what I did and clarified my thoughts, it was easier to answer the question *“What do you do?”*

It even made me more interesting at parties! We've all been in the position when someone asks, *“What have you working on lately?”* and your mind goes blank, even though you've been busy doing cool stuff. It was easier to answer that question by thinking about recent blogs. I believe that's a fundamental reason for content marketing.

At the time, it wasn't even called content marketing, and while I'd love to say I had a grand plan for everything I did, I was just writing for the fun of it. It did lead to some interesting situations – when I'd been consistently blogging for some years I'd Google (or Alta Vista as it was then!) a solution to a problem I was having, and the top result was a blog I'd written and completely forgotten about!

Having a collection of blogs acted as a knowledge base and a reminder of the journey I'd been on. If you're thinking, *“I can't podcast or blog because nobody is interested in what I've got to say”*, there is at least one person who will be – you! Think of it as a form of journaling for your own benefit.

Pascal Fintoni (PF) : I was recently challenged by one of our trainees on what blogging was, as they'd never come across the term before.

I gave a history of how it all began, and I'm sure many listeners will remember that it began as a journal – a web log (blog). People used it as a way to track their journey, either to solve a problem or document a transformation.

Interestingly, the trainee's response was, *“But that's not what people do”*. She felt that marketers have spoiled it because it's become a device to sell products or services. I think journaling has gone away and now it's started to come back. I started blogging so I didn't forget important things for my digital marketing business, such as useful tools and software I wanted to remember. My audience was just me and my colleagues.

That's a great point, Pascal. Going back to the journaling aspect of it, I started blogging for my own benefit with

no idea that anyone else was reading it. But, because I was sharing openly and honestly about my experiences as an IT business owner, other people started paying attention.

What was interesting was that they weren't the type of people I'd sell to at the time, but I soon noticed I had two distinct groups of readers: other IT companies, who were interested in my story and how it paralleled with their own, and those who were interested in what went on behind the scenes of a business and how the work gets done. People want to know how the baker makes the bread, or the photographer gets the best photo, or the IT person solves their problems.

There was a lot of interest in the day to day detail, and I found that people would recognise me from my blog when I was networking, and ask me how I was getting on or how I'd solved a recent problem. If stage one is writing for yourself, stage two is when others are reading what you put out, so don't be surprised when that happens.

You won't be immediately aware of this new interest, because most people consume online content passively and don't comment or thank you for what you've put out. This isn't selfish, it's just because we're all consuming content all the time. There is a tipping point though, where slowly but surely people put their hand up and tell you've they've read your blog or listened to your podcast and become customers. Don't be surprised when the stuff you've put out there that you don't expect people to read, suddenly starts getting read.

PF: Can I ask about your experiences as a consultant helping other IT businesses? What reasons have you heard people share with you about their hesitation around engaging with content creation?

We've already touched on the main one, which is that nobody would want to read their content, so let's put that one to bed. The world is a very small place now, and what we might think is boring, there's going to be somebody else in the world who will be interested in the topic.

Just before we started the live interview, Pascal, Leon and I were talking about Star Wars, and it's fair to say we're all geeks when it comes to that franchise. There was perhaps a time when you wouldn't talk about Star Wars online, because you'd assume no-one else would be interested.

Looking around now, I can barely walk down the street in Newcastle without bumping into someone dressed as a Storm Trooper! It's commonplace, and while it may seem like an extreme example, if you run a company that provides wedding photography, you might think that nobody else is interested. But it's a big world, with a lot of people interested in that niche topic you've got.

The industry I'm in is known as managed services, and is a niche part of the wider IT industry. I thought by writing about it, nobody else would be interested, but I regularly get 30,000 people worldwide reading my blog every month now.

Some of the other challenges that people have are that they're not a good writer, videographer or content producer. The most successful pieces of content that I've produced could best be described as "down and dirty", and my English teacher from school probably wouldn't be pleased to read some of my blog posts and spot the grammar and punctuation mistakes that are in there! But, people read it and understand the ideas that you're trying to convey, and so they get value from it. If you're recording a video, don't worry about making it television quality, work on the message that you want to share and what you want to talk about, and work on the technique after that.

If you're reading this and thinking, *"I'm not a good writer or videographer" – just get on and do it!* If you do it long enough, you will become good at it. More people will be bothered about your message, and they'll say things like: *"I love your videos and what you're saying, but have you ever thought about buying a better microphone?"* or *"Have you seen the latest video camera?"*

What they're saying is, they're interested in the message and would like to see that with even greater value, but it doesn't stop them watching, reading or listening in the first place.

LH: In your line of work, you're sharing advice and talking about issues you've had and providing solutions. I've found that in certain sectors, one of the barriers is that people don't want to talk about problems. Would you agree with that?

Yes, hugely. There's a still a lot of that now, especially in the IT industry. There's a feeling that if you answer people's questions, they'll no longer need you on a professional basis. I'll give you a couple of examples of this.

Some time ago, I wrote a blog sharing my experiences as an IT business owner and answering my customers' questions. There were two fears there, and while I didn't fall prey to them at the time, there are lots of people in this position now who might be worried that they're educating their competitors on how they do business (and giving away trade secrets) and educating their customers on how to solve or avoid problems.

You may think that by doing this people then won't need you to fix their problems and won't do business with you, so it seems crazy to give them that knowledge. But, it isn't as counter-productive as it sounds. Let me explain.

You may worry that sharing your most valuable advice means that people don't need you to fix their problems, but that's not the case. [Tweetable]

I sold my IT business about six years ago, and had no plans on what to do next. A number of my competitors (both in the West Midlands and further afield from where I'd been working) started ringing me and saying, *"Now that you're no longer a competitor, could you come into our office to talk about some of the things you write about on your blog?"*

"I know about this stuff, and I'm willing to share it openly and honestly with other people."

So, rather than giving all of the trade secrets away, it actually led to another business, which is what I do today – working with business owners, to help them understand technology and make a profit from it. While this might not be the case for everybody, there are enough customers out there for all of us, so don't worry about educating your competitors.

Remember, the secret sauce in your business is you – you're the only one who can do the thing that you do really well, and the only person your customers want to do business with.

The second point relates to my experience with Googling solutions to a problem and coming up with my own blog post. I wanted to educate my customers so they weren't phoning me or my team to ask how to do something in Word or Excel, or how set up their internet connection.

That's boring to me, and if I could create a knowledge base to educate people on how to do those things, so much the better. Those people wouldn't stop calling me, but they'd call with more interesting questions, such as, "How can I make more money for my business with a CRM package?" or "How can we do better SEO for our website?"

I don't want to be at the bottom of the pile, doing the bread and butter things that most people could work out themselves. I want to be the consultant who's doing really interesting projects, which are lot more lucrative as well as further up the field.

One big point I'd like to make, whether it's educating your competitors or your customers, at the end of the day, the old adage that "People want to do business with people they know, like and trust" holds true. I've said it to many of my IT business owners – you can be the best IT business in the world, but if nobody knows about you, you're not going to pick up any customers.

By putting content out there for your chosen industry, you're putting your hand up and saying, "I know about this stuff, and I'm willing to share it openly and honestly with other people. I understand the challenges that you're going through."

Rather than answering those people's questions and then they go away forever, you answer them, build trust in your expertise, who you are and the voice that you speak in, and people approach you for more work.

It sounds counter-productive to give away answers and knowledge, but it means you'll get more interesting questions coming down the line. [Tweetable]

PF: There are countless examples out there, across many industries, of that very fact – where people shared information and gained success. The final thing that occurs to me in relation to my own work is when we have workshop attendees who work in legal or financial services. They'll say, "In our industry, there are rules which tell us we can't engage online."

We discuss that with them, and reply that while there may be some things they can't talk about, there should

still be enough options left to create information. Sometimes there's a perception that there's a legal obligation that prevents you from talking about things, but if you looked more closely, there are other avenues for expression.

Absolutely. One of the ways that I dealt with that at the time was to not blog about things immediately as they happened, but to blog about them some time later, and to anonymise them.

One blog that still gets a lot of traffic now was around a very delicate situation I dealt with about 10 years ago. I spoke to a business in the West Midlands who said, "We've looked at how much it's going to cost us to buy Microsoft Office licences, and we've chosen not to, because it's going to be a lot cheaper to pirate the software."

We all know that was wrong, but as the IT business, how could we deal with that? We dealt in an open and honest way, and made for a fantastic story, but one that we didn't want to share straight away. Some months down the line, we did share it, and it continues to be read all the time.

It's a good way of dealing with something that could be embarrassing for the subjects involved, but still has an interesting story to tell if you do it the right way and once some time has elapsed.

PF: So, we've looked at some of the problems that people have around content marketing, let's now move onto

process. We'll imagine a scenario where you've done some amazing work with a client and they're now ready to begin their journey as content marketers. They'll start off with writing content, which is a bit easier. How would you advise they get started and what are the steps they can go through?

There are two ways to look at this. If you're somebody who procrastinates a lot, the first thing I would say is start producing bite-size pieces of content. Instead of trying to write your magnum opus as a blog post, set yourself a goal of sitting down when the mood strikes you and write a 250 word blog post, or even just 100 words, and share what you're doing.

A lot of people like to use Twitter, because it's a social media platform which is essentially a micro-blogging site. You have a 140 character limit, but images and hyperlinks aren't included in that count now. This is enough to convey a story and a great way to get started. There are a lot of people using Twitter!

Don't worry about production values either. Everybody's got a smartphone, so grab your phone and record a 90-second video of what you're doing. Publish it and be damned – the main thing is to get it out there. Once you start publishing and get more comfortable with the process of doing it, you'll do it more often.

If you wanted to be more methodical about it, you can follow the advice one of my mentors gave me: if you want something to get done, you schedule it. If you've got ideas for blog posts and so on, sit down and put

some time in your diary as a meeting with yourself, and make it sacrosanct.

None of us would ever make a meeting with a client and then five minutes beforehand have something else come up and decide not to meet with them, but we do that with our own time constantly. Make space to sit down and explore the content you want to create.

As a procrastinator, I use the Pomodoro Technique, which is a famous time management and productivity technique. If I'm really struggling to get started, I'll put the time in the diary, grab an egg timer and set it for 25 minutes. I'll write whatever comes into my head, and I often find that by the end of those 25 minutes I'm in the flow and can keep writing anyway, but it's the initial getting started that becomes an issue.

Either way, the common theme is to just get started with it, and you'll keep going with it.

PF: How do you support your clients to come up with ideas? Do you have techniques or systems? How do you help them begin?

For anyone reading this post and thinking, "I've got no idea what I'd write about", here's a simple question for you: if you've got clients, what are the questions they've asked you over the last few days? These can be big or small.

For example, in my business I've been asked, "What tools should I use in my IT business?" and "How do I deal with an engineer who's not performing?" or "I've got a problem with my business partner – what should I do?" These are all ideal pieces of content to create.

If your customers ask you questions, there are other potential clients or customers out there who will have the same queries, so write about the answers you would give them. There are two reasons for this: first of all, it builds trust and the relationship between you. Secondly, if you're lazy, it's a great way to build your knowledge base, because the next time a customer asks you that question, rather than answering it in detail, you can send them the blog post instead.

There is a ton of stuff I have in my own knowledge base, and I get asked the same things even now. So when that happens, whether on Twitter, at an event or a networking session, it's a great way for you to follow up with them, by sending them an article you promised them.

Not only are you giving them the answer, it's actually documented, because you've been asked before. It goes towards building greater credibility for you. Think about questions you're asked, and if you're struggling with it, take a blank piece of paper and write freeform. Think about something that's on your mind as a business owner, and go from there, jotting down thoughts or creating a mind map.

"If you're a procrastinator, create small chunks of content. If you're not, schedule time for your content."

Sitting down for five minutes and thinking about questions you've been asked recently will help you come up lots of things, and these become a big collection of blog posts, videos or other kinds of content.

LH: In the early days, websites used to have FAQ sections, and I think this is what you're recommending – listing your own is a good starting off point for clients.

Absolutely. And today, the FREQUENTLY asked questions tend to be things like how much does an item cost, can it be returned, the terms of sale. Instead, try to think about the INFREQUENTLY asked questions. Some things I've only been asked about once over the last decade, but I've blogged about the answers, and from the statistics on my blog and videos I can see that hundreds, if not thousands of people have viewed that content.

This shows that, although it's not been frequently asked of me, it's something that's on a lot of people's minds. Consider how they'll react the next time they have a similar question or around the same part of the industry – who will they turn to to find that answer? If you provided a helpful answer last time, they're more likely to come back to you with their latest question.

You'll find that it's like a rolling stone once you start on the content journey. You start to build an audience and people start turning to you and asking for more of the same.

PF: I like your idea of thinking back to recent conversations and using these as inspiration. This is music to our ears,

because it's the same advice that we try to give. For some businesses, they'll realise they've been negligent in their networking and confess that they've done less of it.

They also find that when their business grows, customer interaction reduces, particularly for the senior management. We suggest they network or talk to colleagues and clients more, and find ways to create situations where they get that valuable information about what customers want to know.

That could be an editorial meeting, shadowing team members or simply calling the customers to find out what they need. We believe that conversations are the best place to start.

It's true. And looking at any business with employees, you can get them involved with the process too. I blogged as an IT business owner when it was a one-man band, and continued to do so until there were 10 people in the team.

However, if I hadn't allowed those other people to feed back ideas, write blogs and create videos, we would have missed out on a really valuable source of information. The further removed you become from the coalface, the less likely you are to have those conversations. It's so important that everyone involved in the business contributes to the content being produced.

PF: Can you share your system and approach to podcasting, please?

I'll let you in on my secret: I create podcasts for the same reason I write blogs – for selfish reasons. Podcasting is a way for me to sit down with the most successful, enthusiastic people, the smartest in the industry, and to pick their brains and learn from them.

I was chatting to the CEO of an £80m software business, and over a glass of wine the guy was sharing real nuggets of valuable information. It hit me like a thunderbolt: "If this is valuable to me, how many other people would love to hear this?" My podcast was born from that, as way of allowing people to eavesdrop on my conversations with some of the smartest people in the IT industry and further afield.

In answer to your question, it's about me, and getting great value from it. It just so happens that there's an audience of people who also get value out of listening in on my discussions. I don't complicate things: if there's someone I meet who I find interesting, I think if I get value from them, then others will too.

Sometimes, I'll just switch on the recorder to capture the conversation and we treat it like an ordinary chat between people. Don't worry about who's listening or

"Podcasting is a way for me to sit down with the most successful, enthusiastic people, the smartest in the industry, and to pick their brains and learn from them."

watching, just start talking, and the value will come from it.

PF: For those of us who like gear, can you share with us the equipment you use in terms of mics, recording and editing equipment?

I carry my equipment around with me all the time, and the bag is always close at hand. I have a Zoom H5 digital audio recorder, which is a bit more advanced and costs around £150. It's fantastic. I used it recently in the Tate Modern on a busy day, and with the recorder between me and the CEO I was chatting to, was able to get great audio despite all the noise around us.

I started with the Zoom H1, which is a cut-down version of this (cost is around £60) and that worked a treat, particularly in quieter environments. But at the end of the day, everybody has one piece of equipment they can use for video and audio, and that's their smartphone. At the basic level, don't worry so much about the quality, but about the content and the value that you're trying to deliver.

I've put out some awful-quality podcasts and videos, which are still available on my YouTube channel! Interestingly, to this day they still get views and listens. What's being talked about on those interviews is useful, so it shows that people will put up with poorer production qualities if they'll gain value from what you're talking about.

PF: So now you've got the interview in an audio file. What do you do with it? What is the workflow?

I'm a big fan of not doing a great deal of editing, so if I used the original recording of this interview, I notice that I stumbled on a few words and repeated myself here and there. That's just like a conversation we'd have any other time, as human beings do, so I tend not to edit things very much.

If I did, I'd use free pieces of software to do any edits. Audacity for the PC is open source and allows you to grab the MP3 from your phone or other audio recorder, chop and change things around and gives you an MP3 file at the end.

Don't underestimate the value that people get from listening to a "warts and all" interview. In terms of then sharing it, I use a platform called Libsyn, which costs around \$7 a month for a hosting platform. Once I put the audio on there, it's syndicated to iTunes, Stitcher Radio and so on, and people listen to it in whichever format they choose.

This is cheap and cheerful, and the key to podcasting, like everything else, is not so much the tools, it's just getting on and doing the work and producing the content.

LH: We've touched on blogging and podcasting, so now we'd like you to give some tips and advice on vlogging if you can, and the process to get started.

To be completely honest and open, I'm totally comfortable to do the kind of discussion we're having (a live-streamed video between Pascal, Leon and I) where I'm being interviewed or doing the interviewing. I'm a poor man's version of Michael Parkinson, but I'm happy in this situation.

If, however, you pointed a camera at me on my own, or I tried to do a selfie or something, I freeze. I'm sure lots of others feel the same way, so my advice to myself and everyone else is to just get on and do it. The more you do it, the more comfortable you get.

I was having a conversation with a friend of mine, Anne Johnson, who's a photographer in Scotland, and she was talking about her fear of public speaking. I do a lot of it, and I'm still terrified of it, but I've done enough of it so that I can swallow the terror down and get on stage and do it.

If you share that fear, do a video interview where there are two of you talking to the camera. Reach out to somebody in your industry or who you admire, and ask them if you can interview them on camera. Make it about them, and you produce a brilliant, valuable piece of content.

The secret sauce comes from you sitting there and asking a question now and again, and you get the rub from the other person. If you let them talk, you get the kudos from being seen on camera with them.

At the end of the day, video is the future, so getting

comfortable with recording a piece to camera is a great way of getting content out there. If you're not sure what to talk about, it's the same thing as with blogs and podcasts – think about the questions you've been asked.

The great thing about videos is that you don't have to do any prep for them. You've got the device in your pocket, so you could come out of a customer site with a couple of questions buzzing in your head and record the answers straight away. Don't worry about what it looks like, just do the piece to the camera. That's a piece of content done instantly and you can publish it and be damned.

LH: Between blogging, podcasting and vlogging, if you could only use one of these, which would it be?

The one I'm most comfortable with is blogging. I can sit behind my keyboard and compose my thoughts and get them out there. Over the long term, I think that's the one that produces the most evergreen content. I have blogs from 10 or 12 years ago which are still read today and generate queries.

It's really close to my heart, and there's a 90-second video out there which shows a conversation between Tom Peters and Seth Godin, who are both well-respected, talking about the value of blogging and touching on some of the points that I have, such as just getting it out there to see the benefits.

However, for the modern generation, I would say video is by far the most important. I was out walking

recently with my stepsons (nine and 12) and they were vlogging as they went. They have no fear of it – they have YouTube channels and followers, and people who interact with them, and I've just told the entire world that I'm a little bit scared about vlogging. If I was starting again today as a younger man, video is where I'd start.

PF: I think it's important, as content creators, to be aware that there can be pressure to produce content on many fronts. I always say to my clients, find the one thing that you thoroughly enjoy and will make the others more palatable. It's like Christmas dinner – if you don't like Brussels sprouts, there's still something else on the plate you'll eat!

It is a fact of life that some people are operating in industries where the subject matter is a little drier than others. Within that, you can still find a voice and make it interesting. But would you agree that it does put some pressure on the execution of the content? Is it fair to say that you have to work harder when it's a drier subject?

This is a conversation I have repeatedly with IT business owners. I think it's the greatest industry in the world, because I'm a geek and a technologist and I love all this stuff. However, the rest of the world probably doesn't feel quite the same, so when I talk to other IT businesses, they think that talking about websites and so on is boring. I can understand that, and the same can often apply to solicitors or accountants.

But as we've already said, it really isn't. We talk about broadcast television, which is "broad". What we need

to focus on now is “narrowcasting”. Star Wars used to be part of a narrow niche, and although that’s not quite the case now, there were always people who were interested in the films.

The first thing to do is put the idea of being boring to one side. If, however, you do think that nobody will listen to discussions on your topic and you’re steadfast in that belief, why not talk about how you do the work instead? Talk about your team, and what happens in your business on a day to day basis.

Lots of people will be interested in a peek behind the curtain. I can’t tell you how many blog posts and I’ve written or videos I’ve about visiting data centres or a client’s communications room, which is essentially a broom cupboard with flashing lights! Whenever I talk about what goes on behind the team, people will pay attention.

Everybody is interested in how the baker makes the bread, so if you think that bread is a boring subject, why not talk about how you get up at 5 in the morning to knead the dough and create the bread? Talk about the people you do business with, the apprentice you’ve got on board who’s learning how to make bread too.

There is no business too boring that if you give a peek into how it’s done that people won’t want to learn more. I’d challenge you to find any business at all where they say, “Content marketing is not a fit for what we do” and I bet I’d be able to find an angle where people would be interested.

People want to business with people they know, like and trust, and content marketing enables you to build that trust with people.

PF: Moving on now to digital products. We know you have a man-bag so you can carry equipment with you. Do you have favourite tools for mobile apps, laptop applications and so on?

There are a couple of apps that I couldn’t live without. We’ve talked about producing content, but I’d also like to touch on the idea of curating content, which is also hugely important. My favourite subject, not surprisingly, is me, in the same way that everybody else likes talking about themselves.

But if I just talked about myself and my business all the time, people would turn off. So it’s really important to shine a light on the people you admire, those who are doing interesting things in your industry or the latest developments.

You need to share content that’s produced by other people, and this is referred to as curated content. I do this daily – I might read an article from Leon or Pascal which I find interesting and decide to share it with my audience. One of the tools I use to do this is called Buffer. It’s free, although there is a paid version with some extra features, and it simply installs an app on your web browser.

Every time you read an interesting article that you think your audience would like to read, you can click the icon

and it’s drip-fed to your audience on social media. There’s also a tool called Smarter Queue, which allows you to grab all the content you’ve created yourself, and regularly drip feed it to your audience. This is important because if you’re putting together content which you share to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or whatever, then it appears there once.

But we know that the nature of those things is that the person who might be interested in it isn’t using the platform at the time. With Smarter Queue, you feed it a blog post once, and tell it to share it every month or six weeks, but at a different time and in a different place.

The third tool I couldn’t live without is useful when you’ve created your own content or curated others’ and people want to talk to you about it. I use Hootsuite Pro, which is the paid version of the software, and enables me to keep the conversations going with people in a timely fashion, whether that’s replying to tweets or Facebook messages, and brings it together in one place.

If you’re left to your own devices, you could easily spend all day, every day, on social media. It’s like a black hole, where you jump in with the intention of replying to a message, and an hour later you’ve been looking at cat videos. Hootsuite allows me (and you) to batch that process, by allowing me to reply to all of my messages in one place at one time.

“It’s really important to shine a light on the people you admire, those who are doing interesting things in your industry or the latest developments.”

PF: Our audience have submitted some questions: How would you recommend someone gets their colleagues motivated to bring up news and updates to fuel the content marketing machine? How can you make them active participants?

This is really simple and sounds obvious, but few of us do it – have conversations with people more often.

When I talk about team meetings with clients, it doesn’t have to be the traditional type where everyone sits around and talks. I’m a great fan of a book by Verne Harnish, “Mastering the Rockefeller Habits”,

where he talks about the idea of “huddles”.

What difference would it make if you huddled together for five minutes at the start of the day to find out how people are and what they’re working on, ask about what’s been difficult for them and what successes they’ve had. If you did that every day, you’d have an infinite supply of content, because people would share different things.

If you’re a business owner with a team, make sure you’re involved in those huddles. But if you’re a solopreneur, go out and meet with clients and talk to them about their business rather than yours. Take them for coffee or drop in on them with a box of doughnuts. I’ve never had a client say, “Now’s not a good time to talk” if I’ve turned up with doughnuts!

Chat with them about what's happening, and they will give you a stream of ideas you can use for content. It comes down to having conversations with each other, because everything you need for content marketing is out there. You just have to listen.

Everything you need to succeed with content marketing for your business is out there. You just have to listen. [Tweetable]

PF: It's interesting, because the clients that I've spoken to about this issue have tried to create an intranet for people to add ideas, or introduce a piece of software or an app, and are using machinery to coerce people, rather than communicating properly with people and suggest a coffee break where people get together and share ideas.

That's a great idea. I used to do something similar with my team – I'd get a pizza delivered and we'd sit down and I'd ask them to tell me what had been happening. It wasn't a formal meeting, it was just a chat around a pizza. Sit quietly with a notebook and pen, and the ideas will come to you as you listen.

“Content marketing is a great way for people to passively get to know you and build that trust.”

PF: Can Facebook Live be used by “boring” industries?

Let's put this to bed once and for all! What's boring to one person is gold dust to somebody else. I attended the UK Podcasting Awards a couple of years ago, and the winner was a podcaster whose show was about knitting. I can't think of anything more boring, but the lady involved had built an audience and was clearly as passionate as her audience was about the topic.

Facebook Live is great for niche businesses because it lets people peek behind the curtain and see what happens day to day. Use it as a way to have a walk around the office and chat to people. Flip it over and say, “I'm just visiting a client and this is what we're talking about”, because people are interested in what you're doing.

As I've said before, people do business with people they know, like and trust. That's always been true and always will be.

Final Words

As we reach the end of this comprehensive guide to content marketing for MSPs and other “boring” businesses, I want to leave you with a few final thoughts.

Throughout this ebook, we've explored the power of content to transform your marketing efforts and drive real business growth. From the inspiring interviews with industry leaders to the practical, actionable advice, I hope you've gained a newfound appreciation for the impact that a well-executed content strategy can have on your MSP business, and your clients of course.

Remember, your activities may not be the most exciting in the world, but that doesn't mean your story can't captivate your audience. By tapping into the unique insights and experiences of your team, you can create content that resonates and positions your MSP as a trusted authority in your field.

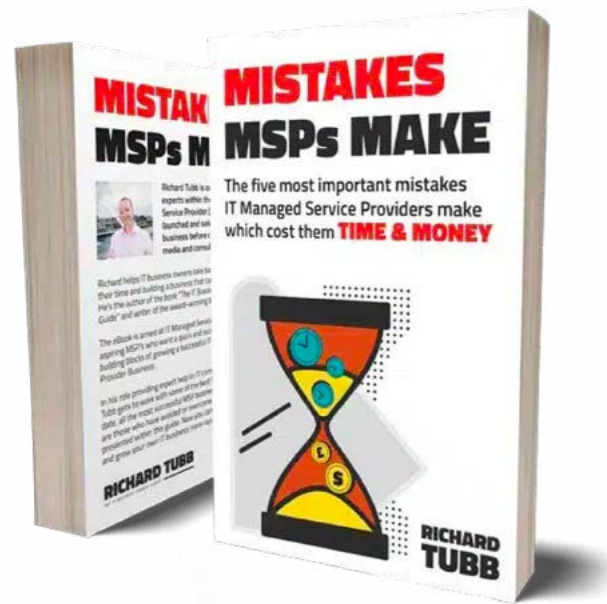
As you continue on your content marketing journey, I encourage you to stay curious, experiment, and most importantly, share your own success stories with me. I'd love to hear how you've implemented the strategies outlined in this ebook and the impact it's had on your business.

And of course, as the world of marketing continues to evolve, keep a close eye on the role of AI and how it may shape the future of content creation and distribution. The possibilities are endless, and I'm excited to see how you'll harness these emerging technologies to take your content to new heights.

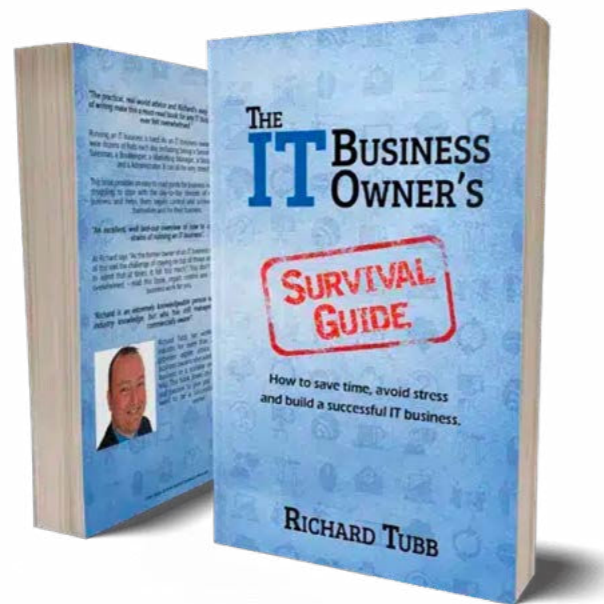
Thank you for joining me on this exploration of content marketing for MSPs and beyond. Here's to your continued success!

Richard

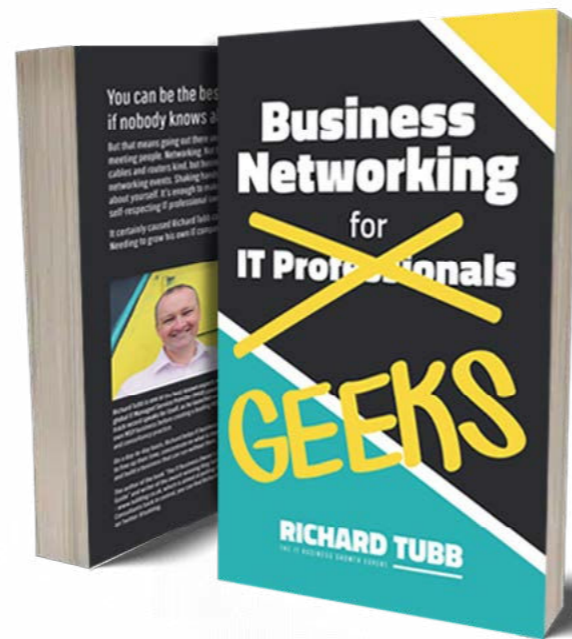
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