

The little book of...



Content  
Strategy



## This guide covers:

- Achieving 3x coverage is really hard...
- ...made harder when you lack brand awareness
- The Content Framework
- Approaching content from a sales perspective
- Leads: start building your pipeline
- MQLs: time to nurture that prospect
- SQLs: overcome those last-minute nerves
- Client: now the hard work really begins
- Advocate: get your clients to sell you
- The Content Framework in action
- Re-spinning content: use me to make your content tailored and specific
- Repurposing content: use me to make your content fit a different channel
- Reforming content: use me to pull other content together into something bigger
- Republishing content: use me to share someone else's content
- A bit about me...

# Hello!

So, you're interested in learning about content strategy?

Excellent news!

But before we get started, I want to make sure we're on the same page, otherwise things could get very confusing, very quickly.

## Question: what is marketing responsible for?

**Answer:** in your business marketing is responsible for 2 things:

1. Pipeline
2. Brand awareness

So often I see pipeline pushed into the realm of sales, and brand awareness brushed under the carpet as something fluffy that's not really necessary. If you're serious about growing your business you need to hand over the reins of responsibility to your marketer and trust them to get on with their job...

But if you're a bit like me, and find it hard to relinquish control, this is where *The Little Book of...Content Strategy* is designed to help.

A tried and tested framework, it gives you a clear structure to execute your marketing tactics within so you know exactly what you're doing and why, and everything is trackable to help you understand the return on your investment.

So, grab a coffee and a piece of cake, and if you have any questions as you go through, my inbox is always open:

[hello@alicehollis.co.uk](mailto:hello@alicehollis.co.uk)

Achieving 3x coverage  
is really hard...

Maintaining a healthy pipeline seems like the 'Holy Grail' of most businesses because we all need a steady stream of opportunities and revenue coming into the business – regardless of whether you're looking to scale your business to new heights, or stay small and replace clients you've lost through organic churn.

58% of business leaders say that lead generation is the key challenge they face<sup>[1]</sup>. In fact, only about a fifth (22%) of businesses are happy with their conversion rate<sup>[2]</sup>. So why is it so hard to build a pipeline?

## No process

68% of companies have not identified a sales process<sup>[3]</sup>. By better managing your sales pipeline, you can instantly give your sales revenues a 15% boost<sup>[4]</sup>. And it doesn't have to be scary big changes, it's about getting something down on paper to then tweak, test and refine over time.

## Lack of alignment between sales and marketing

The two business functions that should sit hand in hand and yet so often they're sworn enemies. Marketing is responsible for lead generation, and yet a quarter of sales leaders admit to never meeting with marketing, while 58% will only meet to discuss pipeline on a quarterly basis<sup>[5]</sup>.

## Too old-school

Over 40% of business leaders describe their current sales and marketing efforts as '*outdated*', with a third relying on cold calling<sup>[1]</sup>. Thankfully in the age of GDPR, it's becoming much harder to employ such horrible lead generation practices.



# ...made harder when you lack brand awareness

Considering that we don't wake up every morning and instinctively know about every brand in the world, it makes sense that companies need to work hard to make themselves known.

According to Gartner, 58% of marketing leaders believe brand is a critical driver of buyer behaviour<sup>[6]</sup>. But many struggle with the same 10 key challenges, including<sup>[6]</sup>:

- How to keep the brand relevant (35%).
- How to integrate it effectively into all communications (29%).
- How to treat brand as an asset rather than a campaign or programme (23%).

So why is it so hard to build a strong brand?

## Nothing's 'unique' anymore

Unless you have registered IP there's very little that can't be copied, so finding a 'unique selling point (USP)' is virtually impossible. I believe, and experience has taught me, that there is really only one thing that's 'unique' to your brand – your people.

## Fearing the limelight

It amazes me how many aspiring 'thought leaders' fear saying anything publicly. There are many tried and tested techniques for sharing your story without having to get up on stage and/or retaining tight control over what's published.

## Lack something new

I've worked with some companies that believe they have nothing of value to add to the conversation – usually when they're reselling a vendor's technology. But what about the skills, knowledge and experience of your consultants? What about the client stories? What about the 'lessons learned'?

What's stopping you?

## 38% of small businesses claim they don't have sufficient time, money or staff to generate leads<sup>[7]</sup>.

As a small business, you must be really smart about how you use marketing because you don't have the same resources at your disposal that larger competitors might.

My top 5 tips...

1. Lead generation is as much about qualifying out as it is qualifying in – just because your product/service COULD be used by anyone, doesn't mean you SHOULD target them all.
2. Build a strong brand around your people – it's the one thing you possess that nobody else can copy, it's the reason people trust you and ultimately buy from you.
3. Establish the mechanisms that ensure a steady drip feed of leads into your sales funnel – this '*inbound*' marketing cost 62% less per lead than '*outbound*' marketing, like cold calling<sup>[8]</sup>.

4. Use thought leadership content, like white papers, guides and reports, to demonstrate your subject matter experts' skills, knowledge and experience in action.
5. Use freelancers – these are highly skilled professionals offering agency-grade work at more affordable prices – and without the HR headache.

**And because everyone loves a bonus...**

# The Content Framework

Despite being a marketer for nearly a decade before turning freelance, it was only once I became a copywriter that I realised that content and sales are so intertwined they are essentially the same thing – and that means you can use content as the newest member of your sales force.

I think of content as the person sitting before the business development executive – the one getting you noticed, popping initial leads into the top of the sales funnel and compelling the audience to click and convert to the next stage of the pipeline.

Take a moment to think about your sales pipeline and the different stages a lead passes through before it converts to a client:

- **Lead:** they've become AWARE of your existence.
- **Marketing qualified lead (MQL):** they've shown some INTEREST in what you have to offer.
- **Sales qualified lead (SQL):** they have budget, authority, need and timeframe, and have hit the point of DESIRE where they want you.
- **Client:** they've taken ACTION, signing on the dotted line and primed to become your next advocate
- **Advocate:** your client loves you so much, they actively want to shout about you at every opportune moment.

At each stage, you can map different types of content to the funnel, for example:

- **Leads:** email marketing or SEO-rich blogs make people AWARE of your existence.
- **MQLs:** case studies or white papers generate INTEREST through thought leadership.
- **SQLs:** FAQs or webinars overcome objections and create DESIRE for you.
- **Client:** user groups or webinars compel people to take ACTION and share their experience.
- **Advocate:** your clients get involved with your marketing efforts, helping you to 'sell' yourself.



Av. software sales cycle: 69 days<sup>[1]</sup>

**Lead**

**Marketing  
qualified lead  
(MQL)**

**Sales  
qualified lead  
(SQL)**

**Client**

**Advocate**



Av. conversion: 5%<sup>[10]</sup>



Av. conversion: 20%<sup>[10]</sup>



Av. conversion: 44%<sup>[10]</sup>



Av. conversion: 60%<sup>[11]</sup>

For example...

- Social updates
- Email marketing
- Event delegates

For example...

- Blogs
- Case studies
- White papers
- Guides
- Reports
- LinkedIn articles

For example...

- FAQs
- Webinar

For example...

- Welcome pack
- Onboarding
- documentation
- User groups

Involving your clients in...

- Case studies
- Roundtables
- Webinars
- Podcasts

**Awareness**

**Interest**

**Desire**

**Action**

In using The Content Framework, you're:

- **Recognising that your prospects are smart:** a lot of the time they know they have a problem and are searching for a specific answer.
- **Respecting their time:** we're all 'busy' and through creating carefully crafted content, you're delivering the precise information they need without any periphery fluff.
- **Really giving them something valuable:** imagine a company that gave you everything you needed without ever pitching their product/service – wouldn't that be refreshing?

Through carefully crafted content that maps to your sales funnel, you build a simple and repeatable framework that delivers the right message, to the right people, through the right channel, at the right time...

Which produces a reliable and predictable pipeline, gives you confidence in your coverage and easily scales up/down in line with the needs of your business.

And (again!) because everyone loves a bonus...

Because everything is born from one central piece, it means the messaging is consistent, the positioning is consistent, the purpose is consistent – and it's this consistency that will help you build a strong brand in your industry.

Approaching content from  
a sales perspective

Before we explore each stage in The Content Framework, I want to take a moment to place ourselves in the right mindset so we know what the *'right message'* is, who the *'right people'* are, what the *'right channels'* are, and when the *'right time'* is...

## The right message...

If you take a moment to consider the mindset of an individual in each of these stages, already you start to see how you need to adapt your message accordingly.

There's a simple and effective marketing model for this, AIDA:

- **Awareness:** making your brand/product/services known.
- **Interest:** engaging the audience and encouraging them to research further.
- **Desire:** making the audience feel like they need your product/service.
- **Action:** getting the audience to actually do something.

I've seen many IT and tech companies make the same mistake by jumping in with the big scary call-to-action:

## Book a demo

Imagine you've only just become aware of a company, are you really feeling brave enough to commit to something so big, knowing that you'll immediately be contacted and relentlessly followed up until the sales team has qualified you as an opportunity?

Applying the AIDA model, you can start to understand why people don't click that button – first you need to make them aware of your offering, be interested in it, and actually want it. Then, and only then, will they think about booking that demo.

Through The Content Framework, you start to build that trust and reassurance by guiding the user through the journey and only asking them to take smaller steps like:

- Watch a video.
- Read a blog.
- Follow us on [*social platform*].
- Take a poll.
- Download a white paper.
- Register for a webinar.

As these micro-commitments build, your prospect is becoming more familiar with taking action with you, which means when they finally get asked to '*Book a demo*', it's no longer scary.

## To the right people...

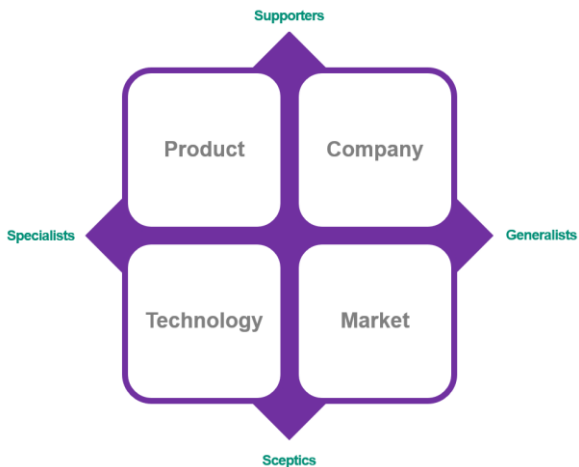
As a copywriter, you know to speak to an individual, rather than this vast 'audience' who is supposed to think/feel/act the same.

But often there's more than one person involved in the sales cycle.

Yes, there will probably be one person who ultimately signs on the dotted line, but you'll have several influencers who are asked for their opinion. Depending on what you're selling, this could scale up the hierarchy to more senior managers, directors or up into the C-suite, or across the organisation from finance to operations and beyond.

Your content can't ignore these people. If you don't get the influencers onboard, you'll never get that signature.

There's another wonderful communications model called the Technology Message Matrix:



It helps you to determine the right sort of message to lead with in your communications, depending on whether people are aware of your brand (*supporters*) or never heard of you (*sceptics*). And their interests, either technical (*specialists*) or business leaders (*generalists*).

When you plot them on the matrix, you can start to plan what you need to focus your content around.



For example:

If I have a prospect in the MQL stage, I might:

- Create a high-level case study to excite the C-suite, which talks about how the technology helped support an organisation that was chasing the latest industry trend.
- Engage a technical audience with a white paper that goes into detail about the technology, and how it compares to others in the market.
- Share an infographic with finance that details the company credentials alongside a use case with calculated return-on-investment.

## Through the right channel...

*"Publish it and they will come."*

Nope. Unless you have some weird and wonderful psychological powers, it's unlikely that a member of your target audience is going to wake up one day, knowing your web address and feeling compelled to read your latest blog post about the delights of cloud technology or software-as-a-service.

No, you need to get it in front of them so they see it and they can't ignore it.

Content should never be produced in isolation. To be effective and command the greatest ROI it needs a broader campaign to support it.

For example:

You might have blogs on your website, but to ensure they're found they need to be rich in SEO keywords and phrases – if someone's searching for '*the best data analytics platform for GDPR compliance*' you want your entry to be there in the search results.

Then consider your social channels. Only concentrate on the platforms that your customers are actually present on, and then filter your blog content through them to drive traffic back to your website.

Now look at your current customers. If the topic is something they might be interested in, don't miss out on an upsell opportunity. Create an email communication to tell them about it, including a link to information about the product/service that relates to it.

The list goes on, but you get the picture...

Think – where are my customers? And how do I best get my content in front of them through that channel?

## At the right time...

If the prospect doesn't have a reason to sign on that dotted line, guess what, they're not going to sign. Without a compelling event, your services will only ever be seen as a *'nice to have'*.

Timing is everything, but it can be one of the hardest elements to get right, because there are several factors to balance...

Firstly, your prospect is working to their own internal timelines, which could be dictated by a whole host of things, including board meetings, holidays, partners, their own clients...

And then you'll be working to a specific timeline, such as wanting to get certain sales closed within the quarter, or needing to balance your closed sales with the bandwidth within the implementations team...

Plus, there will be external factors to take into account, such as vendor deadlines for funding, dates that events/conferences are taking place, new competition entering the market...

Balancing these compelling events and prioritising them in terms of their importance and urgency is essential to keep momentum within the sales funnel. And once you've identified them, you can use them to your advantage.

Whether personally or professionally, we've all been there – you ask for a quote and the salesperson starts to bug you until you've signed on that dotted line. So, you start screening their calls, deleting their emails...

In the end you get so fed up that even if you want what they're offering, you're going to buy it elsewhere out of principle.

But if you know the compelling events to speak to, you now gain the ability to add value with every communication you send.

For example:

Imagine you're waiting to close a deal on implementing your new SaaS platform. You could chase with an email saying:

*"Just wondering if you'd had a chance to review my quote yet?"*

Or you could send an email saying:

*"I've just published a case study on my website about how we helped ABC Company to achieve X, Y, Z results after implementing our platform. Given we've been talking about a similar project, I thought it might be of interest. You can **read it here...**"*

Or what about:

*"There's a lot of stories in the media at the moment about X. Since we've been discussing Y, which would help protect you against X, should we look to fast-track your project and mitigate that risk?"*

## Time to dive in!

We're in the right frame of mind. We've got some good ideas. It's time to start building our content strategy so that it adds value, converts your prospects into clients, grows your business and differentiates you in the market...

Leads: start building  
your pipeline

## Getting to know you

At the beginning of your funnel all those lovely leads start to make themselves known and begin the journey that will hopefully see them to convert to clients.

According to Capterra, the conversion rate average for lead generation in the software industry hovers between 5% to 10%<sup>[12]</sup>.

To give your leads the best possible chance of converting, you need to nurture them throughout every stage of the funnel. And that requires providing them with the information that's relevant to their current state of mind, as well as disqualifying leads quickly so you have more time to spend on those who are genuinely looking to use your services.

### **A quick side-note about disqualifying leads...**

As every good marketer knows, lead generation is as much about qualifying leads out as well as in.

Saying 'no' isn't easy, especially when you have a lead in front of you saying they're really interested and wanting to buy.



But if these people are tyre-kickers, they are never going to buy from you, so they were never a lead in the first place.

And according to Hubspot, tyre-kickers are easy to identify<sup>[13]</sup>:

- They don't match your target persona.
- They haven't done their research.
- Their need isn't urgent.
- They don't have the budget.
- They waste your time.

## Knowing who to qualify in

Who is your target audience?

*“Well everyone can use our service, so we sell to anyone.”*

Do you? Really?

Because there's a difference between who COULD use your product/service, and who the right people are for you to target and dedicate precious resource to.

So, indulge me...

- Take out a crisp sheet of blank paper and write down a list of all the clients you've ever worked with.
- For each one, write down the name of the person you were dealing with and their job title.
- Then write down the value of the project.
- Write down how long it took you to close the deal.
- Note how easy/difficult they are to work with.
- Say whether you actually enjoy working with them.
- What is your gut telling you about each one?

I bet when the answers are written down in black and white in front of you, you'll start to see that you aren't out to target just anyone.

No, you're out to target Anna, who's a senior marketer with about 20 years' experience. For Anna, it's not about the money or the career progression, she works because she loves her job and she's completely invested in what the company is trying to achieve. And that company is a small, ambitious IT company located not far away from the Kennet and Avon canal. She doesn't have a marketing budget, but then she doesn't need one, because as long as she can prove the ROI,

she can prove that anything is worth investing in. And she has exciting ideas about building a quirky brand that isn't like every other boring blue SaaS company...

No wait, that's my target audience.

But you get the idea. When you take a moment to profile the people you currently serve – the people who have actually paid for what you have to offer – you can start to refine that audience down to identify what the right person looks like for your business.

## **And if you don't have a great customer list at the moment?**

Think about who you aspire to work with. Who is your Anna? What would that client look like to make you feel excited when you see their email ping into your inbox, or to get butterflies when you're meeting them for a coffee and a catch-up?

Sure, it might be all to do with £ signs. But I suspect it's more to do with doing business with someone you get on with, where you can have those difficult conversations and reach a better outcome. It's someone who's going to challenge you to do your best work – and then give you that lovely case study and shout about your amazing-ness to everyone in their network.

We all have an Anna, and she's not the IT Director of an SME with 250 seats, located anywhere south of Birmingham with an IT budget exceeding £500k. She's an individual, so profile her and bring her to life.

Of course, the really great thing about getting to know Anna, is that she has lots of friends and connections who are just like her. Given the chance, she'd be more than happy to make those introductions, which means that you'll end up reaching more of the right audience without ever needing to pick up the phone and making a dreaded cold call.

## How to start the conversation

Right now, selling should be the last thing on your mind. You wouldn't walk into a networking event and start shouting your sales pitch at everyone. So why do we think it's acceptable to start every communication with a sales message?

All you need to do is hook people in. So, think about how you would approach a stranger. What would you say?

*“Hello.”*

It's a good starting point – certainly better than:

*“ABC Company is a globally recognised, award-winning...blah, blah, blah.”*

You might ask them a question:

*“Why are you here?”*

*“How's business?”*

*“What are you working on at the moment?”*

Then you'd stand back and listen.

It's a conversation, so put yourself in their shoes. Think about what they might be thinking/feeling. Think about the questions they might be asking themselves about you. Think about why they might be out and about searching for answers at the moment...

Write your content so it speaks to these needs, and you can be sure that you're sharing the right messages.

## Finding the right people to talk to

*“We need a new website and an Instagram account, and then we need to attend all the same conferences we did last year – plus a few more I’ve heard good things about, and...”*

It’s a mistake I’ve seen a lot of small, growing businesses make, where they feel they need to be present everywhere. In reality, you only need to be wherever ‘Anna’ is looking.

The problem with trying to be everywhere is that you spread yourself too thin. Which means you’re not doing a great job, and you’re haemorrhaging money because nothing’s really delivering a return.

Instead, commit to doing a few channels really well, and then expand them over time.

For example...

## Social media

The best place to start is to look for 'Anna' online:

Take the time to see what social channels she's present on. You'll quickly see where she's communicating in a business capacity because her profile will include a reference to how she's the marketing manager at ABC Company.

Then scroll through her feed to see the sorts of updates she's posting about her company and her role (therefore identifying her pain points and the opportunities the company is seeking). This important insight becomes crucial in the MQL stage when you start generating content that aligns to these pains/opportunities.

Look at the sources she's linking to (therefore identifying where she gets her information from and the channels you need to be present in).

Is she participating in any networking events, such as Twitter chats or Facebook groups? (therefore, identifying where she's open to speaking directly with new people). These are a great opportunity for you to say '*hello*' and start building trust with the audience.

## Email marketing

When used properly, email marketing is a very powerful tool. According to research from Hubspot, it is one of the most effective channels for reaching customers<sup>[14]</sup>, because:

- 99% of consumers check their email every day.
- 80% of business professionals believe email marketing increases customer retention.
- It delivers 3,800% ROI.

When you commit to following a strategy based on The Content Framework, you know that you're going to be producing regular, interesting and useful content, and email is a great way of getting this directly into your subscribers' inboxes.

Question: which is better?

**A:** 1,000 subscribers who do nothing when they receive your email.

**B:** 10 subscribers who share, like, comment and take action.

Extreme examples, but my point is that when it comes to email marketing it's easy to get caught up in the numbers – often people attribute the number of subscribers to a measure of success. But if those subscribers never do anything, is it worth it?



When it comes to email marketing, you want to put your effort into encouraging subscribers to take action, rather than focus on getting more people signed up. If your content is good, it will be shared, and you'll naturally acquire quality subscribers through word-of-mouth.

## Event delegates

The thing I dislike about events is that they're seen as an easy way to get leads simply because you're put in a room with hundreds, potentially thousands, of people who fit within your target audience.

But you still need to put the effort in.

Again, it's not about returning with 101 names to follow up (or most likely forget about) after the event. It's about:

- Marketing yourself before that event.
- Crafting a compelling proposition specifically for that event – something the audience hasn't seen/heard before.
- Qualifying in AND OUT at that event.
- Following up after the event and having that person happy/excited to hear from you, rather than question “*Who?*”

Events are really hard work. And they're really expensive – particularly when you factor in the people cost of having your subject matter experts work at the stand rather than in your business for the duration of the event.

At a minimum, your event content checklist should include:

- PR – before, during and after the event.
- Sales literature that makes your value proposition clear.
- Case studies to prove you can do what you say you can do.
- Thought leadership asset, like a white paper, report or guide – something about what you're offering at the event and why.

### **Top tips!**

1. Piggyback off the event #hashtags prior to and during the event to elevate your awareness for free.
2. Book sales appointments at the stand with people you know will be attending.
3. Measure your brand awareness by asking people a simple question – *“Had you heard of us before this event?”* – and track this over time.

## The beauty of 'always on' lead generation

The great thing about content is that it works for you 24/7. And once you publish that blog, white paper, case study...it's there for as long as you want it to be there, producing a return.

Carefully crafted content with rich SEO gets you found online at the point people are actively searching for you.

Posting social updates regularly means you're there in the moment when your people are ready to have a conversation.

Making a name for yourself through the interesting, useful and relevant content you produce means that when your people spot someone in their network who is in need, that content will be shared – and that content will sell your business and what you have to offer.

MQLs: time to nurture  
that prospect

## Congratulations! You're on the radar

Now, some companies would jump straight in and bombard the prospect with 101 messages – just imagine those websites that hit you with countless pop-ups...

The video immediately starts playing with overly dramatic music.

Live chat pops up to say, *“How can I help you?”*

2-seconds later, a splash screen interrupts you to shout, *“Download our new white paper now!”*

5-seconds later, another pop-up appears – *“Before you leave, what brought you to our site today?”*

NO!

Take a moment to think about where your prospect actually is...

## How to use content to create interest

At the MQL stage, you need to continue the story. Something you've said has caught their attention, but now you need to really pique their interest and make them want to find out more.

Look back to the initial content you used in the '*lead*' stage and consider what questions the prospect may now have. Really put yourself in their shoes and place yourself front and centre in their mind...

Your lead content hit a nerve – whether through the promise of something amazing, or through empathising with a particular challenge they may face.

Let's imagine they read a blog post about the challenges of regulatory compliance. They might now be thinking:

- What is the scale of the challenge?
- How much can I do myself?
- Is it really that big an issue?
- What's this going to cost?
- Where do I start?

So, write content that answers these questions.

## But before you put pen to paper...

The likelihood is they, your audience, will start to diversify here too. Yes, there will be one person who ultimately signs on the dotted line, but they may be influenced by a number of people – the board, finance, operations, sales... Fail to get these people on board and getting that signature becomes significantly tougher.

At this stage it's unlikely that you will speak directly to the influencers. However, the questions they might ask will be in the back of your prospect's mind. Therefore, as you start to create this MQL content, think about how you can help your prospect to answer these questions and overcome common objections from across the business.

Here, you will need to write in a greater level of detail and think about structure. But you don't yet have permission to share your opinion, because you haven't earned your prospect's trust. Instead, you need to ground everything in evidence to demonstrate your credibility.

Thought leadership content, like white papers, guides or reports, and case studies all provide the opportunity for you to show that credibility. Using these types of content, you're no longer talking about yourself, you have a third-party to back you up and help do the 'selling'.



## What MQL content should look like

Tactics like blogging are great for pulling people into the top of your sales funnel, while thought leadership assets are the big-ticket items that are going to convert them by demonstrating what value you have to offer.

Packed within those pages you can tell a story that's interesting/relevant/useful to your audience, injecting it with your brand values and the things that make you different from the competition. Through your words you can let your brand personality shine and make an emotional connection with the reader.

And should you wish (and there are good arguments both for and against), thought leadership content, like reports, guides and white papers, can be gated. Because the content is more valuable, people are more likely to give you their contact details in exchange for them being allowed to view the content.

Ultimately, these content assets exist as evidence, backing up the opinions you shared at the top of the funnel, building the trust since you've evidenced that you can actually do what you claim to be able to do.

There are several types of MQL content, including:

- Blogging.
- Case studies.
- Thought leadership white papers, guides and reports.
- LinkedIn articles.

## Blogging

Blogging is a really flexible form of content because it can be:

- Short form or long form.
- Share an opinion or be based in fact.
- Give a high-level overview or perform a deep dive.
- Be by-lined to individuals, the company or a third-party.
- Strategic to support a business objective or tactical to help you rank organically for SEO.
- Promotional or educational.

In essence, blogging can be anything you need it to be, but in my experience, some of the best ways to use blogging for your business are:

- Creating a powerful FAQ section by answering the questions your prospects/customers actually ask – no matter how difficult they may feel or how much you want to ignore them.
- SEO-rich blogs that qualify out quickly and reduce your website bounce rate by concentrating on the longtail keywords, which generate 5% higher click-through rates<sup>[15]</sup>.

- Repurposing a thought leadership asset by expanding on the key themes through a series of blogs.
- Creating a new thought leadership asset by wrapping up a series of blogs into a single, rich piece of insightful content.
- Quick commentary on something topical that's happening in the industry at the moment, which you want to draw attention to or align your brand with.

## Case studies

Case studies are one of the most powerful pieces of content you can produce because they're a third-party endorsement. So instead of saying *"Look at us, aren't we so great!"*, it's one of your customers saying, *"Company ABC did this for us and it had XYZ impact."*

Case studies are wonderful because they put your service into context, showing the real benefits people experience as a result of using you.

In storytelling technique, it's known as the relatable middle ground – where your prospect can look at your client and think *'they're just like me – and if Company ABC helped them, they can help me too'*.

However...

A case study needs to be written well – otherwise it won't be read.

Case studies don't need to be mammoth documents. I've written many case studies that are no longer than 500 words and have been really effective at producing results.

And even if you choose to write a much longer piece, it's best-practice to include a catchy title and a 150-word summary upfront so that if the reader only reads one thing, they've taken in the key points.

### **Top tip!**

If you choose to go down the PR route, case studies are the most effective way of gaining traction in the media.

## Thought leadership white papers, guides and reports

If you're looking to position yourself, or your organisation, as an authority figure, thought leadership content, such as white papers, guides and reports, are a great way to back your position. Use them to produce a 'deep dive' on specific topics and demonstrate why you're a leader in your field.

One of the attributes that makes thought leadership content stand out, is that it's the perfect opportunity to showcase your differentiators and position you clearly in the market – where tactics like blogging are great for pulling people into the top of your sales funnel, thought leadership is the big-ticket item that's going to convert them by demonstrating what value you have to offer.

Detailed, original content, it shows you have something new/different to say, based on your skills, knowledge and experience. It also affords you the opportunity to conduct your own primary research and prove you're invested in the industry or understand more about a particular issue that affects your industry.

You see many organisations simply regurgitating the same old information based on the research that others have performed.

But imagine...

What if you had written that research report? Now everyone would be citing you and linking to your research, which instantly boosts your credentials.

When you come to write up your thought leadership content, think about the narrative you want to tell. You could simply state the facts and add a few pie charts or bar graphs to add graphical interest.

Or...

You could think about what everyone else is saying and see if there's a different, interesting or controversial angle to present.



## LinkedIn articles

It's cliché, but people really do buy from people. You can have the best tech in the world, but a lot of the time you don't secure the technical win until you wheel out your subject matter experts into those pre-sales conversations.

Sales may have an unfair reputation for being slippery, but subject matter experts are known for their no BS approach, which is why you need to by-line your content to them and build the bonds of trust with your audience from that initial point of contact.

A great way to showcase that expertise is through LinkedIn articles.

Published on a personal profile, rather than a company page, it affords the author to share their skills, knowledge and experience in a more informal and conversational tone of voice to hook the audience in.

The great thing about LinkedIn is that you're publishing to an audience of people who know you, and are therefore more likely to engage with the piece to start a conversation. This then gains you exposure to their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree connections who are likely to be in similar roles, companies and situations and therefore needing your help.

## It's all about permission

At the MQL stage of your sales pipeline, the goal is all about obtaining permission to have a conversation.

DO NOT mistake this as permission to sell to someone.

In this new world of content marketing you shouldn't actually ever need to 'sell' again. In the new world, you're simply helping your prospects to make an informed decision based on what's best for them. And the most effective way to determine what's 'best' for them is to have a conversation.

Gaining permission to have this conversation could come in many forms:

- Website enquiry.
- Giving their details in exchange for a white paper.
- Personal connection made after reading your thought leadership article on LinkedIn.
- Requesting to find out more about your services after reading a case study.
- Engaging with you during a Twitter chat or in a Facebook group.

Once you have that permission, your prospect transitions to the next stage in the sales funnel...

SQLs: overcome those  
last-minute nerves

## Remember: not every opportunity is worth pursuing

Your prospect may now be aware of you and be interested in what you have to offer. They've even accepted your invitation to talk – but you're a way off getting them to sign on the dotted line.

At the SQL stage of your funnel, it's all about helping your prospect to determine whether you're the right fit for them. But also, it's about you qualifying whether the opportunity is a good fit for you – remember, not every opportunity is worth pursuing.

There are many ways to qualify prospects. The most common of these is BANT qualification:

- Budget.
- Authority.
- Need.
- Timeframe.

But there are other methods to qualify, such as lead scoring them depending on their level of engagement, CHAMP (challenges, authority, money and prioritisation) and GPCTBA/C&I (goals, plans, challenges, timeline, budget, authority, negative consequences and positive implications) to name a few.

How you choose to qualify opportunities is often determined by the complexity of your offering and the level of investment involved.

Chances are, you already have a way of qualifying leads within your organisation. But it's worth documenting this and following it to ensure your qualification is performed consistently. The benefit of doing this is that if something bad happens in the project – for example, scope creep, running over budget or the relationship sours – you can 'evidence' the process you took that prospect through to convert them to a client. This means you can identify potential areas where 'red flags' entered the relationship and do something about it to stop it happening again.

## How content helps with sales qualification

At this stage in the pipeline, you need to start igniting a fire under that prospect so they feel like they want you, and (ideally) only you.

As an SQL, your prospect has decided they're interested in what you have to say, and potentially added you to their shortlist – now you need to get your way to that top spot.

How?

Well it's not about showing them a world of fluffy clouds and rainbows, where you promise them the earth at heavily discounted prices, or where you've chucked everything possible into the deal in order to 'seal the deal' but left no room to grow the account in the future.

At the SQL stage it's all about producing practical content to give your prospect confidence in purchasing from you.

SQL content is about answering all the unasked questions to show you've thought of everything, giving the prospect confidence that the love doesn't end as soon as they've signed on the dotted line. It's about demonstrating that you look beyond your bottom line to deliver what you promised, but you're actually going to make them feel really good personally about making that decision. And it's about being mindful that you're still talking to multiple stakeholders, so you're going to help your prospect gain buy-in from the entire business in order to choose you.

There are 2 effective ways to do this:

1. FAQs
2. Webinars



## FAQs

I know what you're thinking...

*"FAQs are rubbish!"*

*"No-one actually reads FAQs."*

*"They're not actually 'FAQs', rather questions you wish people would ask you."*

And I completely agree.

What I'm talking about is producing a real FAQ section on your website where you answer the real questions that your customers/prospects actually ask.

There's a wonderful book called '*They Ask You Answer*'. The basic premise of the book is to answer every question asked openly and honestly with valuable content. No question is off-limits, and you shouldn't use it as an opportunity to shoehorn your brand in at every opportunity. It's about recognising that you're not always going to be the right fit or have the best technology to meet that prospect's needs. But that's ok because you're TEACHING rather than selling to people.

I instantly fell in love with the idea and committed under the #Write52 initiative to answer a new question every week for a year. Within 1 week of employing the initiative I'd secured 3 quality opportunities – 2 became clients and 1 I determined wasn't the best fit for me, so I

made introductions to someone I felt would be better suited.

By committing to answer the questions you're actually being asked (and there will be many!), you create valuable content that ultimately converts. And you're demonstrating honesty and showing that prospect that they can trust you.

Think – which proposition is more desirable:

- A. Saying '*We're a trusted partner*' on your about page.
- B. Answering the question '*If we don't choose you, who should we choose?*'

### **Top tip!**

Start compiling your list by going back through past emails, meeting notes or thinking back through past conversations. You'll quickly start building a list and can then prioritise them based on which are asked most frequently.

## Webinars

If you're following The Content Framework, webinars are incredibly simple to host because all your content already exists. Because you've created a thought leadership asset, like a white paper, guide or report, use the webinar as an opportunity to present the same information in a new way.

Webinars are a powerful marketing tactic because:

- They enable the audience to get to know you on a more personal level, but without placing themselves into a sales conversation.
- You can involve your customers/partners, therefore providing that all-important third-party endorsement.
- It enables you to place your subject matter experts in the spotlight without forcing them to go on stage.
- Usually, people register to attend, so you end up with a lovely list of interested companies to follow up with.
- After presenting your content, you can show a quick demonstration of how your technology helps to get the audience excited about what you have to offer.

## **Top tip!**

Plan your follow up move ahead of the webinar and tell people about it during the session. Slides are boring and expected. Think about whether there's a new piece of content you could share, a promotion you're offering, or a sneak preview of the next release.

## When to share SQL content

FAQ content is best placed on your website within a central, searchable hub of information that's available 24/7. This way you make it easy for people to find the information they're searching for, when they're searching for it.

Also, it's a useful resource for your sales team to link to when they're engaging in conversations. Now, rather than typing out the same information time and time again in follow-up emails, they can simply insert a link...

Of course, the added bonus being that if you have analytics enabled, you can see what pages are most frequently visited and determine where you perhaps need to refine your messaging/proposition to make things clearer.

Depending on the topic covered, you can also link to this content through your social efforts back in the 'lead' stage of The Content Framework. I do this within my own business and it's always the content that's read the most. I've also found that since investing in creating an FAQ, those initial sales conversations have changed because I've answered a lot of the prospects questions upfront – now when they get in touch, the biggest

question is generally “*What’s your availability at the moment?*”

Webinars are great as a secondary, softer call-to-action on your website. If you’re constantly asking people to ‘*Book a demo*’ and they’re not ready, you’re going to lose them forever. But if you ask them to register for your webinar, it’s a less scary option and therefore an action they’re more likely to perform.

And webinars are a great way to make a noise about what you’re up to. Think of it as a stealth sales tactic – you’re not shouting about how wonderful your product/service is, you’re telling people about what they’re going to learn from you, which is going to make them far more receptive to your message.

And again, it’s a great resource for sales to have in their back pocket when they’re talking to people. Perhaps they’re at a networking event, working a stand at a conference, talking to a new prospect who’s sitting on the fence...

Telling people they can register for a webinar keeps them close and builds the trust in the relationship because they’re seen as helping rather than selling.

## The power of a micro commitment

Annoyingly I can't remember the name of the book where I first came across this phrase. I love it though because it changes the mindset and dynamic within the relationship.

As a marketer you're always pushing the 'call-to-action' and trying to get someone to do something you want. And yet in sales, you're told that the best way to receive is to give a little something first.

Through your SQL content, the idea is that you're always giving away little nuggets of wisdom that don't cost you anything (therefore keeping your implementation's team happy!) while making the prospect feel indebted to you and like they want to give you something in return.

Also, the fact that the prospect is getting used to taking these micro commitments with you, means that when you do ask them to do something big – like '*book a demo*' – they just do it without a moment's hesitation because it's the next natural step.

Client: now the hard  
work really begins



## The label means nothing

So often we get caught up with getting people to '*book a demo*', as if we do this and our job is done because we're so confident that the product will sell itself. And yet the reality is that 40% - 60% of free trial users will use a product once and never come back<sup>[16]</sup>.

But let's assume for a moment that you get that elusive signed contract...

It means nothing because more than two-thirds of SaaS companies experience churn rates greater than 5%<sup>[16]</sup>.

The top 2 reasons that customers churn are:

1. They don't understand the product.
2. They don't see the value from it.

You may think that once the contract is signed that the responsibility for that client experience falls into the hands of an account manager or the implementations team. Yes, they may manage the relationship day-to-day, but content still has a huge part to play in whether that customer churns.

## Content requirements for clients

One of the most valuable things your client content does is to set clear expectations for the relationship. You want to leave your new client with no doubt about what they're getting and who they can call if they have questions.

Imagine you just made a new friend...

You wouldn't just disappear on them. You'd share your contact details and arrange to meet up or call them. This is no different. Client content is all about showing them love and making them feel like they made the right decision in choosing you.

2 great ways to do this are through:

1. Welcome pack and onboarding documentation.
2. User groups.

## Welcome pack and onboarding documentation

You can make this as simple or elaborate as you like – I've seen beautiful examples of simple, concise letters that clearly set expectations for what the client will receive, when and who their account manager is, and I've seen wonderfully quirky packages with thoughtful merchandise shared on social media.

There is no right or wrong answer – only what fits best with your brand.

The important thing is to keep communicating and give, give, GIVE:

- Think back to your FAQ content and consider what questions your new client may be asking themselves now – answer those questions.
- Can you put them in touch with current clients to help grow their network and relay any fears they may have over the implementation's process?
- Make sure they know when you're going to invoice and what for – money is one of the main reasons relationships sour so tackle it upfront and head on.

Then think about how you're going to get your client up and running.

Whether you offer a simple app, a more comprehensive platform or a bespoke project, you're going to need some sort of documentation. At some point, your project sponsor is going to start inviting people to start using your technology, and the likelihood is that these people won't know what to do, or even understand why they need '*another piece of technology*' to get their heads around.

Think about how you can help them with your documentation – whether that's short (1-minute) videos, step-by-step guides, online tutorials, user discussion boards, wikis...

The less friction your users encounter, the more likely they are to adopt and use your technology.

## User groups

One of the biggest challenges for SaaS companies is keeping the user front of mind. We all get excited when we imagine the realm of the possible, and it's so easy to get carried away and do everything you can do...

But just because you CAN do something, doesn't mean you SHOULD do something.

I've trialled numerous marketing technologies myself where the interface is cluttered, I have no idea where to start, I can't find what I'm looking for because someone's been 'clever' with their naming conventions...

Needless to say, I wasn't using those platforms for long.

The best way to keep your users front of mind is to establish a feedback mechanism, like a user group.

In behavioural psychology we have the idea of social proof and wanting to belong. So, ask your clients to join your user group and get involved with shaping the future of the product. Not only do you get a better product, you get a loyal client and ultimately that client has a better experience.

And your user group could take numerous shapes:

- A face-to-face group meeting.
- A face-to-face personal talk.
- Surveys and polls.
- In-platform questionnaires and feedback.
- Asking users to record their screens while they perform various actions.
- A private online group where users can liaise.

## And the fun times start...

If you can increase your client retention by just 5%, it can increase your profitability by as much as 25% - 95%<sup>[17]</sup>.

Wow!

But happy customers aren't just good for your bottom line, they're amazing for your content...

Advocates: get your  
clients to sell you

## What sounds better?

**A:** *“I specialise in IT and tech and offer weekly turnaround on copy.”*

**B:** *“A thorough, accurate and creatively driven copywriter who always delivers work before the deadline,”* Megan Charles, Swingate Design.

Both these statements are on my website and are perfectly valid ways of sharing what I do. But option B is always going to resonate more because it comes from the experience of a third-party rather than me telling you what you want to hear.

The reality is that 84% of people trust reviews as much as a friend's recommendation<sup>[18]</sup>.

Therefore, one of the best decisions you can make with your content marketing efforts is to involve your clients whenever possible. When it comes to 'selling' the value that you offer, there's no-one who's better placed than the person that's already purchased from you.



## How to involve your clients in content marketing

There are so many ways to get your clients selling your business:

- Sharing your social content.
- Forwarding on email newsletters to their network.
- Joining you on your event stand.
- Online review sites, like Capterra.
- Blog interview.
- Testimonials.
- Case studies.
- Roundtable discussions.
- Co-present a webinar.
- Podcast discussion.

### **Top tip!**

If you don't ask, you don't get. If your client is genuinely happy with what you've done, they'll want to tell other people about it – chances are, they just don't know what to do, so tell them how they can help.

# The Content Framework in action

## Feeling a little overwhelmed?

Don't be, please – I haven't got to the best bit yet...

The really smart way to use The Content Framework within your business is to re-spin, repurpose, reform and republish your content.

In essence, it's all about taking existing content and turning it into something different to give it a new lease of life. But while re-spinning, repurposing, reforming, republishing content may all sound like the same thing, there are subtle differences that when employed correctly can have a big impact on your marketing efforts.

To help explain so you can get your head around the ideas, let's imagine that you have just written a white paper...

## Re-spinning content: use me to make your content tailored and specific

Even though your technology may appeal and be useful to everyone, there will naturally be certain sectors you target, or specific types of companies that prove more lucrative. To re-spin your white paper, think about tailoring it to each of these audiences.

While the core messages remain the same, and a lot of the copy will remain 'as-is' there are subtle tweaks that will make all the difference. For example:

- **Your target sector:** do you refer to them as customers, clients, beneficiaries, donors, members, end users?
- **Their target audience:** what are the specific pains that your customers' customers are feeling?
- **The reader:** are they an executive looking for a high-level overview, or someone more technical wanting to get down in the detail?
- **The market drivers:** what specific legislation or regulatory changes are pushing the agenda?

By tailoring your copy to each sector you're demonstrating that you really understand your market, which is naturally going to resonate more.

For example:

A white paper that discusses how not-for-profits embark on a cloud migration strategy, talking about member expectations, needing to account for every penny spent and constraints laid down by the Charity Commission, is going to be a far more compelling and relatable read than a generic white paper just about cloud migration.

## Repurposing content: use me to make your content fit a different channel

Now imagine that you've published your white paper on your website, but you want to reach a wider audience. By repurposing it for a different channel(s) you're making it easier for new members of your audience to acquire that information.

For example:

You could pull out compelling ideas and re-write them as updates for your social channels. Or you could take the key takeaway message and elaborate on it from the point of view of one of your subject matter experts, which they can then publish on LinkedIn. Or you could pull out the key themes/messages from your white paper and elaborate on them more through deep-dive blogs that are rich in SEO and therefore going to help you be found online.

Repurposed content is more likely to sit at the top of your sales funnel, helping to hook prospective leads in. Therefore, the call-to-action at the end should be a link where the reader can find your white paper to learn more.

## Reforming content: use me to pull other content together into something bigger

In this scenario, let's imagine that you haven't written your white paper...yet.

White papers are one of the most valuable forms of content you can produce. But they do require a lot of time and effort to create – unless you're reforming content from pieces that already exist.

If you have a content strategy in place, everything you produce will be focused around key topics, industry trends, or specific products/services your business is trying to push. That means you already have a lot of amazing content – the hard work is done! All you need to do is pull it together into a compelling piece.

When you're reforming content, think of it as more of an editing job, taking all those rich lovely assets and cutting, tweaking and reframing sections to make them something new.

For example:

'The Little Book of...B2B Blogging' started life as a series of blog posts on my website.



## Republishing content: use me to share someone else's content

This is perhaps the simplest of all the content strategies shared here, and yet it's very effective at helping to reinforce your positioning and establish your credentials.

With this example, let's imagine that you've read someone else's white paper – perhaps something written by one of the big vendors – and you think it might be of use to your audience. So, do you:

- a) Just share the link?
- b) Share the link with a simple sentence like *"Great white paper from Microsoft on remote working!"*
- c) Share the link and introduce it with the reason you found it interesting, the lesson you learned, or the important thing your audience will learn from reading it – for example *"The pitfalls that Microsoft has shared in this white paper around remote working reflect what we've seen with our customers in recent months, where end users are struggling to perform all of their tasks while working from home. But interestingly..."*

While you're likely to be reading content every day that you want to share in the moment, this is also the sort of

content that you can create in advance and schedule to automate the process of republishing.

For example:

Spending a couple of hours researching a topic, seeing what the media, analysts and vendors are saying, will leave you with a pile of interesting/useful/relevant information that your audience will appreciate. Plus, in sharing content from strategically important organisations with strong brands – like Gartner, Forrester, IDC, Harvard Business Review, Government statistics – your audience starts to associate the two brands, which strengthens your positioning in their minds.

# How to use content to produce reliable pipeline

## It all starts with the 'big idea'

Think...

- What's the key message you want to be associated with?
- What's the product/service you want to push?
- What's the biggest problem you help to solve?

Then contrary to the flow of the sales pipeline, jump straight into the MQL stage and work backwards.

As MQL content, think about creating a central, high-value piece, like a white paper, report or guide. It needs to be something that performs a deep dive on your big idea, giving the reader practical advice on how to overcome a challenge or take advantage of a new opportunity.

## Then take a step back...

How will your audience know this content exists?

- They could search online – so repurpose it into an SEO-rich series of blogs.
- They might be connected with a member of your team on LinkedIn – so repurpose it as an article that's by-lined to one of your subject matter experts.
- They might consume their content on Twitter – so repurpose it into a series of Tweets that include a link to the piece.
- They might live in their inbox – so repurpose it as part of an email newsletter (*with appropriate consent, of course!*).

The possibilities are limitless but hopefully you get the idea – write one central piece and then repurpose it into 'lead' content.

When you create content within a framework, each piece in isolation is valuable to your audience, but the flow starts to build the momentum that pulls your audience through the all-important user journey.

For example:

- Someone sees a Tweet you've published, linking to a blog on your website.
- They read the blog and decide to find out more by clicking the call-to-action (CTA) to read a related case study.
- They read the case study and click the CTA to download a white paper, which provides a deep dive on the issues this client faced.
- They decide to find out more about the author, search on LinkedIn, see this person has published regular articles sharing their expertise so is clearly an authority on the subject.
- Now they feel confident enough to establish contact, either connecting with the author on LinkedIn, contacting you through your website, or booking a demo.

Taking your initial white paper, and then repurposing it into other formats means that you now have everything you need to ensure you're delivering the right message, to the right person, through the right channel, at the right time.

## A white paper is never *'just'* a white paper

Every piece of content can be repurposed, so look beyond the format to see the words and messages within. Once you know the essence of what you have to say, it's just a case of re-spinning it to engage your audience in a new way.

The beauty of The Content Framework is that once you have it in place, you know exactly what content you need to produce and can plan the required resource. For example, within my own business I plan on a quarterly basis, so I know that I'll need:

- 1x eBook
- 12x SEO-rich blogs for my website
- 3x infographic-based blogs for LinkedIn
- 60x social updates for Twitter

Then all you need to do is decide what your focus will be, for example:

- Are you looking to push a specific product/service?
- Are you trying to target a new sector?
- Are you wanting to 'piggyback' off a current market trend?

Then think about who else you need to involve, for example:

- What subject matter experts do you need to talk to in your business?
- Will your clients agree to help with case studies, webinars, events or PR opportunities?
- Could you ask an analyst for independent commentary?

And then when your pipeline is starting to look a little sparse, simply ramp up the activity, for example:

- Execute 2 frameworks simultaneously to push 2 products/services or target 2 sectors.
- Add lead dumping activities, like attending a conference.
- Try something new to better qualify leads, like gating content.

*A bit about me...*



# IT companies that want to be more than their tech need copy that's more than words

I work with small IT and tech businesses who have achieved a certain level of success organically and are now looking to scale to get 'to the next level', but who don't necessarily have a dedicated marketing person or go-to-market strategy in place yet.

I believe that in establishing a schedule of regular, interesting and engaging content to clearly position and differentiate you in the market, we can start to create the tribe that ensures a constant drip feed of leads into the top of your sales funnel.

## Services

Top of the funnel content:

- Blogging
- Thought leadership, such as white papers, guides, reports.
- Case studies.

## Choose me because...

**IT sector specialism:** with 14 years' sector experience, I am familiar with a lot of the technical jargon, and understand the differences in talking to a CEO, CTO or end user.

**Weekly content turnaround:** you need to move quickly to take advantage of new opportunities, so I turn projects around within the week, with amends returned within 3 days.

**Dedicated to learning:** if I'm not writing client copy, I'm reading/learning/studying copy and testing the lessons learned through the content I write for my own business.

## Say hello!

**Web:** [www.alicehollis.co.uk](http://www.alicehollis.co.uk)

**Email:** [hello@alicehollis.co.uk](mailto:hello@alicehollis.co.uk)

**Phone:** 07853 351 280

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/in/alicehollis/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/alicehollis/)

**Twitter:** @AliceKHollis

Psst...I forgot to mention  
The Cupcake Promise

I promise to take freshly baked cakes to every client meeting, because frankly, who doesn't love cake?!

I am not a professional baker (so please don't be expecting beautifully polished creations), but baking is something I really enjoy. And with two little ones to look after, it is a bit of escapism, where I can spend an hour in the kitchen mixing various ingredients together to create some yummy treats.

If there's something you fancy, I'm more than happy to take requests...

[hello@alicehollis.co.uk](mailto:hello@alicehollis.co.uk)

By the way...

Last thing I promise – if you've enjoyed *The Little Book of...Content Strategy* you can sign up to receive more than words via email. To get your name on the list, visit:

[www.alicehollis.co.uk/  
receive-more-than-words-via-email](http://www.alicehollis.co.uk/receive-more-than-words-via-email)

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- [18] Source: <https://www.inc.com/craig-bloem/84-percent-of-people-trust-online-reviews-as-much.html>



# More than words

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