

Episode #65 - Transcript

Michael Gass on Fueling New Business With Content Marketing

ANDY BALDACCI

Michael, thanks so much for coming on the show today.

MICHAEL GASS

Good to be with you, Andy.

ANDY BALDACCI

Let's just jump right into things. Why is content such a valuable strategy to help agencies drum up new business?

MICHAEL GASS

What I found that prospective clients, they're looking for expertise. The average Fortune 500 company has 17 agency relationships. The agency of record is pretty much dissipated, because what they're really looking for is expertise. Full service just doesn't mean what it used to.

ANDY BALDACCI

When it comes to content, do you see that as a way for them to establish that expertise?

MICHAEL GASS

It is, because the commonality among experts is that experts write. It's very conducive for a lot of importance being placed now on content marketing. We had so many that jumped on the content marketing bandwagon in 2015. It's almost a glut of content. So much of it is nonspecific. It doesn't have a particular target audience, so it's very, very generic. This is a way to establish a positioning of expertise to a particular target group and to be able to do that quickly.

ANDY BALDACCI

I think you hit on something there when you said a lot of the content out there is generic. Not only does it speak to nobody, it's just something out there, like "five marketing tips for business owners." Who cares? But the other part of it is that a lot of the content is written by people without expertise in the field. Even if it is specific, it's not giving insights that truly show expertise because the people writing it aren't experts. Have you found that to be the case as well?

MICHAEL GASS

I found that to be the case, but you can pick a particular focus and get up to speed by developing a very strong reading program, and then in the execution in developing the content. I had an agency. One of their niches is millennial marketing. They actually own millennialmarketing.com. Jeff Fromme, who's does business development for the agency and whose father started the agency, said, "I don't know anything about millennial marketing other than I have three of my own." Three millennials in his family. It was amazing how quickly Jeff got up to speed, because it's almost like it's your personalized professional enrichment tool.

I've got two master level degrees. When I went at this, I viewed it like a grant program. When I get up every morning, I know exactly what I need to read. I've got my assignments. It just does so much to get you to where you need to be.

ANDY BALDACCI

I'm fully on board with this movement and with doing content marketing right, especially as a way to drum up new business for agencies. I know a lot of people still are getting it wrong. How do you think agencies need to think about content marketing to do it right and see results?

MICHAEL GASS

Most agencies really didn't get involved in social media until about 2010. When they jumped in, they literally jumped in. It was almost like a checklist. We now have an agency blog, check. We've got an agency Twitter account. We've got a Facebook fan page. We've got a LinkedIn company account. Then they wonder why they're not generating any business.

They forget that social media is about people connecting with people. They're trying to lead with brick and mortar. When they create an agency blog, they do a team blog approach, because nobody likes to write. If I don't have to write a post but every two or three months, I'll do that. Few commit the time, and it's fruitless. A lot of agencies let the blog go away because they're not generating much from it. Again, they're either creating content about themselves, promotional content, or content that is not specific to a particular target and their marketing challenges.

ANDY BALDACCI

Yeah, it was funny, I was talking with someone who is a solo consultant right now, but they previously were a developer at an agency. We were talking about content marketing. They were saying that when they were at the agency, they had to write one blog post a quarter. Everyone on their team did, and when they split it up that way, it would be one blog post a week. They were like, "All right, this system's going to be great." But he said even when it was that infrequent, he just couldn't find the time to do it. He hated writing, he hated doing all of that. You see that a lot in agencies when they try to spread out the responsibility amongst the entire team. A lot of the team members don't see it as their job. This isn't something they want to do. It's so hard to overcome. But the agency owners often feel like they don't have time to do it all themselves. How do you find that balance, having someone take ownership of this while balancing their other responsibilities?

MICHAEL GASS

You have to show them the benefits. For me, I've been in business development my whole ad career. I'm a cold caller from way back. I did 45 to 75 cold calls a day. I've been in consulting now for 10 years. I've been able to build an international consulting group without a single cold call, so that's my benefit. Over those 10 years, I have never made any kind of cold call for new business. The business comes, and the magnet that creates the appeal is the content. Spending time to do things that enrich me and help me to understand my prospect's challenges,

and then to clearly articulate not only the challenges but coming up with the solutions, it does so much for me that it's worth the time. The fuel for new business is absolutely incredible.

ANDY BALDACCI

I think you hit it right on the head. So many agency owners, business owners, people in general who are getting into content marketing view it as a checklist and they view it as a cost center. They say, "All right, if we want to stay with the times, we need to have a blog. We need to have an active social presence. We need to do this, we need to do that." They're not looking at the why. They're not trying to understand why those things are important. They're just trying to check the boxes to say that they've done it.

When you have that attitude about it, it is hard to find the time. When you actually understand the power of content, the power of social media to amplify that content to build relationships, and how that can bring new business back to your agency, then it's not even really a question of how you find the time. You're going to make the time, because this is what drives the agency.

MICHAEL GASS

When I conduct these workshops, and I've done over 260, most agency owners tell me, "Please don't ask me to do anything else. My plate is full." I tell them, "It's not a question of adding something to your plate. It's just changing the way you've done this in the past." There has been a paradigm shift in the way we generate new business. Instead of chasing new business, it's about being found. A strong strategy helps your prospects develop awareness about you quickly.

I only worked in two markets my whole ad career. When I got in consulting, I knew that that was going to be a problem. How am I going to build awareness beyond those two markets? When I start creating content, I started developing my blog fuel lines, feeling out new business. I'm in a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama, called Alabaster. I was so afraid of even putting Alabaster, Alabama on a business card. I didn't think anybody would even take me seriously. But my fourth client was on the West Coast, in Costa Mesa, California.

I thought, "What would it have taken using traditional marketing methods to generate this kind of opportunity?" That's when I was all in. It's just cause and effect. You create that content, and you start building your online community. I preach community development comes before business development. You build that online community. If you do those things right and you have the right calls to action, then you start generating leads. It's consistent.

ANDY BALDACCI

When you say community development comes before business development, what do you mean?

MICHAEL GASS

You've got to be very proactive in building an online community of prospects. You can utilize a number of tactics. Like Twitter. Between two Twitter accounts, @fuel lines, and @Michaelgass,

we've got 104,000 Twitter followers. That generates a significant amount of traffic to the site. As people click on those links, reading my content that I'm sharing, that just accelerates my SEO. I own the number one position for ad agency new business and organic search, and I've been able to maintain that for 10 years. It's just building that online community and fueling that. Even with LinkedIn. LinkedIn's got a feature called people you may know. Some of them you don't even know, but they might be part of your target market. If they're a part of your target, there's a built-in algorithm in LinkedIn that makes that stronger and stronger. You see more of your target popping up in those suggestions. Just take the time on a daily basis to click those. A good percentage of those are going to connect with you, whether they know you or not. You can use a tool. Like with Twitter, I recommend ManageFlitter. I can build a Twitter following based on maybe a Twitter account of an association that my prospective clients are affiliated with, like RSW, Catapult, New Business, some of those. You can even build a Twitter following off of your competitors using the tool.

ANDY BALDACCI

Wow. I can see the power with that. I like when you said that when you first got that West Coast client, you were thinking to yourself, how can I have possibly replicated this with more traditional techniques? If you were cold calling, I can't imagine the process to work your way over that far and get them to listen to you. That makes me think of another question. How is that relationship different when prospects are coming to you rather than when you're reaching out to them? When they find you online, when they see the content you're putting out there, when they decide, hey, I want to work with this guy, how does that change your relationship?

MICHAEL GASS

You skip the dating process and move right to the altar. It's amazing. It's one of the other additional benefits of using social media for new business. When a prospective client initiates the call, they're ready for business. They don't have to get to know me, they know me. They talk to me as if this is our 30th conversation when it's our initial conversation. They know my pets, my hobbies, my family, my travels, my business. There is a strong emotional connection.

It goes back to my premise, even when getting into social media back in 2007. People want to work with other people that they know, trust, and like. Social is a tremendous way to build that, and you can do it from any place. We love to spend time on our boat. We've got a houseboat and go there a lot of times on weekends. Sometimes I'll spend weeks at a time there. Because anywhere that I've got an Internet connection, I can do business development. It's just so much easier. You have to help them to understand the efficiencies and the effectiveness of it, and that it makes new business easier, not harder. This is what new business heaven looks like. The right prospect at the right time initiates the call, and it's a right fit because you've already been vetted. Chemistry is a big part of business development. Looking back over the years, I have never had a bad client relationship.

ANDY BALDACCI

Wow.

MICHAEL GASS

I think the reason for that is the chemistry that's involved. Those that I don't resonate with, and it's hard for us to take. Some people just aren't going to like you. They don't ever call. I don't waste time with the wrong prospects and I'm developing relationships with the right prospects that we have some points of appeal. We share some same value or some similar culture, or even a hobby or something. We've got more of a personal connection. That conversation is so far down the road, I preach this to my clients. Don't make that initial contact. If you do this program right, your prospective client is going to call you when they're ready. Don't pick that too green. I really, the dynamic of that relationship is so different when they initiate the call. If you make the call, you're chasing business. If they're calling you, they're chasing you. That's the position you want to be in.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right. When you talk to most agency owners who have been in the business for a while, hopefully a lot of them have figured out processes, whether it's qualification, whether it's whatever that help eliminate a lot of the problem clients. I like when you said that if you show them who you are through your content, if they understand your personality, understand you, they might not all like you, but those ones that don't like you and who you might not like, they're not going to be reaching out. The ones that have decided, hey, this is someone I want to work with. This is someone I want to partner with.

They are far and away going to be good fits who, one, they know you, who you are, what you stand for, and they agree with it. Two, they're going to see you as an expert. They're going to defer to you on many things rather than have that typical adversarial relationship between agency and client where the client is trying to push everyone around and the agency is trying to do its best, and it doesn't work out. This seems like a great way to avoid all of that. Once you have that buy-in from your clients, from people in your workshops, from all of that, once an agency owner has raised their hand and said, "All right, I'm ready to do this." What is the process you take them through to actually get a content marketing system up and running?

MICHAEL GASS

When I work with clients, we do a workshop at the agency. I give them an around-the-ranch view of the strategies, tactics, and tools that we're going to utilize so that everybody's on the same page. Then in the afternoon, we'll do a positioning exercise. They take away everything needed to create what I call a niche blog and a blog that lives off-site that's built around the agency owner or owners. because in practicality, they're the least likely persons to leave. The agency, it's their value, their culture that's an extension of them. Over time as I started doing this, I found most agencies are in a perpetual state of rebranding. They can never get over that hump. They're perpetually redesigning the website. This was so problematic in the beginning

that we started to create this niche blog off-site for practical reasons, but then we found it's so much more effective because we get away from the agency.

We're not leading with the agency. We're not hiding the connection, but it's deeper in the profile page. Then the agency website is all about the agency. It's their online brochure. It's the place for credentials, capabilities, and case studies. It's all about you. The focus on the niche blog living off-site, it's all about the prospect. None of that self-promotional content should be there. It should be good, helpful information, even when you're writing information for your calls to action. It should be the kind of calls to action that speak to the takeaway from the prospect and how it's going to benefit them. The emphasis is so different. I like the clear distinction, and that you can have it live off-site. I use a fishing analogy. We're going to fish for specific fish with a particular bait. We're going to get the bait away from the boat so we don't scare off the fish. Because it's a fishing expedition, you don't have to have buy in with the whole agency.

Agencies, they have no positioning. They look and sound alike. Even though they think they're different, they're not. They're afraid of positioning because all they can think about is missed opportunities. When we do this positioning exercise in the afternoon, they start sweating bullets. How in two to two and a half hours can we resolve the positioning when we've never been able to do that before? They've battled with it years and still aren't willing to do what's necessary, to make the hard business decisions. Then I carry them through this outline for creating the niche blog. It's never failed. Seriously. In doing this over 260 times, we have never failed to get positioning where it needed to be. Then they're amazed. How could we do this? I tell them, "You have no risk. This thing could be a total flop and you could have no risk." It doesn't impact anything on the website. It creates no confusion because it doesn't live there. It lives apart. It's its own focus group. It helps me to help them to drill down to a more specific target than they've ever dreamed possible.

ANDY BALDACCI

When I heard you talk about that concept of having the niche blog live off-site, I was like, "All right, I need to reach out and talk to Michael about this." So many agency owners, freelancers, whatever, anyone in the creative space, they hate the idea of niching down. While they might intellectually understand it, it's a hard pill to swallow. Like you said, they're worried about what they have to turn away and they're worried about, "All right, what if I want to change it down the road?" There's so many fears that are well-founded, and I understand them. But having the niche blog live off-site is the magic pill in my opinion because it really just makes all of those go away.

MICHAEL GASS

For this particular target market that we address, that blog is the gateway. When they go to the website, after they learn more of who you are, they want to look under the hood. They do their due diligence. They'll make that connection. Then they see the credentials, capabilities, and case studies when they're ready to view those things. When they look deeper to see if their

perception of who you are matches up with reality.

ANDY BALDACCI

How narrow do you suggest agencies go when they're setting up this niche blog?

MICHAEL GASS

If you can't go to a list broker and easily create a list, you're not niched enough. You've got to have a very specific target. I've got an agency in Norfolk, Virginia, Artillery Marketing. The agency owner is a VMI graduate. His father was a general in the Army. We get through this positioning exercise. He's in the back door of Washington DC. He's done a lot of work with defense contractors. It's like, "Duh. Artillery Marketing. You ought to be focused on defense contractors."

His first thought was, "What about the community bank? What about our local college?" He's thinking about missed opportunities. When I explain how to do this, then he starts creating this niche blog addressing defense contractors. There was no content specific to them when we started, but now he's known globally in that niche. He's not missing any opportunities because it's not reflected in the website.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right, the website isn't turning away people outside of that. If you just go to the website, you don't even realize the other side exists. But if you find the niche first, you're going to go to the website and see it through those colored glasses knowing, "All right, these guys have this expertise."

MICHAEL GASS

This allows small to midsized agencies go after some really big fish. I've got an agency in Louisville, Kentucky that is primarily a media agency. About 43 people in the media department, only three in creative. They've got an 800-pound gorilla client that they've had for 20+ years. If that client goes away, it is a severe detriment to the agency. They're in a precarious position, as many agencies are. How do we develop this niche blog based on that kind of background?

We found it working with their primary media client, Kroger. They helped Kroger start a lot of stores. That came out in our discussion. We came up with The Store Starters, and the tag was, "Marketing resources for great grand openings." We built it around the agency owners, the president, Scott Kuhn, and Dave Carter who serves as the creative director. They had been bottom feeding for any kind of project to help build their portfolio. Through that positioning of expertise, that these are the two store starting gurus, Burlington Coat Factory, a national brand, calls. Without an RFP and that as a pitch, Burlington asks them to help start 22 new stores.

ANDY BALDACCI

That's huge.

MICHAEL GASS

That's the way it works when it done correctly. It's amazing in how little time you can establish that expertise when it's that focused.

ANDY BALDACCI

When you're working in the workshop, you're working directly with clients and helping them set this up and getting them to come to terms with their positioning, getting them to set up the blog separately, all of that, what happens next? How quickly are they able to plant their flag and say that they're an expert? Do they start blogging on day one? What do you do with them from there?

MICHAEL GASS

We follow the outline to get all the necessary information to be able to create the niche blog. We start out with a clearly identified target audience. Then we come up with a tagline. In the exercise, we do some wordsmithing. What are the words we know need to be in that tag? Then we start wordsmithing around that. It's got to be plainspoken, very direct, with the purpose and intent of the blog. Then we come up with something more clever.

I had my very first client, the only female creative director at the time in Birmingham. Then we found that 97% of all creative directors in the country are male. Only 3% female. She worked primarily with male advertisers because she didn't like working with women. We were trying to come up with a niche, and we came up with She-conomy, a guy's guide to marketing to women. We learned that women made most of the brand purchases. They made more purchases at Home Depot and Lowe's than men did. They bought more consumer electronics from places like RadioShack than men. Women even bought more NFL and NBA apparel over men, because they're the purchasing agent for the family. This put the small agency on the map. In a short period of time, Porsche hires the agency president to come in and help develop a marketing campaign to women. They've never had those opportunities until they created a positioning of expertise.

Writing is the hardest part. Once you nail down the target, the tag, the title, keywords to incorporate in every post title which connect the audience to the content and then the categories, you have a blog that's very, very focused. The hardest part in the implementation is creating content. You have to help each agency develop their own customized content creation program. I had them write 30 posts in 30 days. I really press to get it done in that period of time, because anything and everything is going to come up. It's an agency. We work through those things. When we find ourselves at a point where we're not consistent, we find solutions. If we need to add a member to the writing team, if we need to get an outside source, what have you. Once we're through those 30 posts, we have a system of content creation.

ANDY BALDACCI

It's a most like a stress test. Right off the bat, you're going to push whatever system or lack of a system they have to the limit, see where it breaks, and fix it. When you come out of that, you know you're going to be able to handle whatever comes down to the road.

MICHAEL GASS

Right. There is a way to write content. Copywriters struggle to write online content. They forget about the searchability. They're more accustomed to writing for print. They don't understand that most people online don't read the way they read offline. Readers don't read word for word. They scan. The post has to be scannable. You've got to get to the point quickly. I had writers develop a subtitle that answers the question, "What is my benefit or takeaway as a reader if I commit the time to read your post?" Answer that in a single sentence. I can't tell you the number of times that I've taken the last sentence in the post and moved it up to the top. That gives direction and clarity to the reader. It's more like a way a reporter would write for a newspaper, an inverted pyramid style of writing. The most important content is at the top. They're learning that process, as well as getting everybody in place that can help with this effort. Maybe the face of the blog, that agency owner is not writing all of the content, but they are adding their tonality. We structure it, even in the editing process, to simplify creating content. Because most agencies need new business now. They can't wait.

So once we're done, we've got the 30 posts. We've developed our calls to action. Then I would add consulting as a service line. What is the first step you take with a new client that you're probably not getting paid for? Let's carve that out and make it an initial step a prospect pays for.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right, like an audit.

MICHAEL GASS

Right. A market audit, brand audit, whatever is going to help you get your head around their challenges. My feeling is agencies give their thinking away too much for free. Any time you give a prescription for a problem to a prospect, it ought to be a paid engagement. I even added "pick my brain" as one of my services just for phone calls.

ANDY BALDACCI

How many emails do you get asking where people just ask to pick your brain? When you put that up as a service, you're making it clear. If you want to pick my brain, there's value in that, so I'm going to charge.

MICHAEL GASS

Yeah. I'll point them to that page if they ask that question, like in an email or what have you. Just

prior to this interview, I have received another pick my brain session request. It's amazing how they value the time when they're paying for it. They are more conscientious of the clock than I am. They're very respectful of the time. You get so much more accomplished. They value that. If they're not willing to pay for even the "pick my brain" session, they're not a viable prospect. Because so many prospective clients will meet with you. They're like a sponge. They want to get all they can for free. They have no intentions of working with you. That's so disrespectful.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right. Most agencies don't have a process set up to discourage that or make it not an option. It's funny because I recently talked with Blair Enns whose entire manifesto, entire almost purpose of existence in terms of business is about discouraging agencies from giving away their most valuable assets, their strategy, for free. I think you hit the nail on the head.

Having one of these initial audits, having a roadmapping session, whatever you want to call it, sets up barriers and sets the tone, but at the same time, it gives prospects a way to test the waters when working with you. That's a much smaller price point than a large engagement. They get to see what it's like to work with you. They get to make the decision. "Is this who I want to partner with?" That's a much easier decision to make when it's in the hundreds to maybe a few thousand dollars rather than the tens of thousands of dollars for a full project.

MICHAEL GASS

Think about the efficiencies of it. Again, you're not chasing business. They're pursuing you, so the dynamic again has changed. That's why you can add "pick my brain" or "consulting" as initial steps with a prospective client. A lot of times they don't want to be all in initially. They want to take some smaller steps. That's fine as long as you're getting paid for your time. I want that first face-to-face meeting with a prospect to be a paid engagement for my clients.

ANDY BALDACCI

From the content on the niche site, how do you get people to pay for the audit? Is it a call to action that says, "Want to learn more, click here, give me your information and we'll set something up," like a payment form. How does that work?

MICHAEL GASS

It's more, again, leading with benefits. I like the process because it helps us to start thinking more like the prospect instead of like the agency. We're so accustomed to our credentials and selling ourselves. We need to step back. What does engagement look like from the perspective of the prospect? What's their takeaway going to be? What's their benefit? To make this program better, I encourage a one-page new business report done at the end of each month. Even a stand up meeting with the team to review. Information in that one pager will help you review and revise.

Based on our interactions with prospects, we get better at creating that kind of content. Those

stronger calls to action. I find if it's written from their perspective, that's so much stronger than you simply presenting, again, your credentials. Because you've already established the positioning of expertise. You don't need that any longer. You just need to tell them how this benefits them. What's their benefit going to be if you conduct a workshop as an initial step? What's the deliverable? How is a market audit going to make their challenges better? Just doing it in that way.

ANDY BALDACCI

Do those first 30 posts have a call to action that leads to an audit?

MICHAEL GASS

No, we don't put the call to action on the post. Let it reside on the blog site as separate pages. They're smart people. When they want to go a little further, they'll do that. Studies have been done on promotional content. When I'm working with agencies, I have to help them purge this out of their system because they can't help it. At the end of the post, it's, like, "If you have a need, call me." It's like, no, no. Or they'll want to write the initial post as "How to choose an ad agency." I tell them, "That's just veiled promotion. Your audience is smarter than that."

ANDY BALDACCI

Right. When they get to the end of the article, even if they've been nodding their head in agreement the entire time they've been reading it, once they see that pitch directly in the article, they're going to immediately discredit everything you've said because they're like, "Oh, okay, this guy is just trying to sell me."

MICHAEL GASS

What I would do is include the author profile. It's amazing. One study that I read a couple weeks ago says something like readers can't connect 85% of the content that's read online with a particular author. A lot of people like Mashable. I'll say, "All right, identify a single author. Name me a single author from the content you've read from Mashable." They can't do it. We want to reinforce the authorship of the post. We'll include an author box at the bottom to be sure that there's that connection being made, but it's not promotional content.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right, interesting. Once they have the idea of the structure. They understand all of it that goes into it. They've got those 30 blog posts written. Do those 30 posts go up immediately? Is it one a day for those 30 days as they're written?

MICHAEL GASS

They go up as soon as they're written. If we have two in a day, we'll spread those out. We want it to start being indexed by Google and search. Nobody's going to get to the site unless they have the link, because it's new. We go through the content creation phase. Then the second phase is we up the traffic. There's two ways to up the traffic. Again, we've been doing the community building as they've been creating content. We have a larger following that's more

targeted in Twitter and across LinkedIn. These are personal accounts too. They're not the agency accounts. I get some pushback on using Facebook. That is such a strong emotional connector with an audience that you don't want to negate any of those. You've got to go through some community building tactics so that you're ready.

We'll use Twitter, we'll use LinkedIn. There's tools that we'll use to propagate those posts at a frequency that is acceptable to each platform. One post an hour in Twitter is not overload for most audiences. Doing that in Facebook will get you killed. You've got to learn the right frequency across those. Then we start promoting that content by sharing the post title in that URL. We'll also send out an email newsletter that's reflective of the blog template that's not coming from the agency, it's coming from the person. It's, again, very personal. It'll have their photo, their image, but most of the time we'll purchase a list. Resources like the list out of Atlanta that a lot of agencies use. There are other sources for doing that. We'll even purchase a list because we've got a strong target.

Some are apprehensive about doing that. If it's done the right way, it is not in violation of the CAN-SPAM Act. We send it out not saying, "This is the first newsletter." Everything has the appearance of age. The blog looks like it's been there for a long time. Nothing to indicate that it's only a month old. We'll do the newsletter the same way. This is a practice that even all of the email service providers do. Because I've kept track, all of the email major email service providers have sent me a newsletter at some point. I've never signed up for any of it. They're going to ask you not once, twice, but three times usually. Is this an opt-in list? You should treat it as such. I've got an article written by Dave Curry that goes into detail about that. The size of that list is going to help determine the initial traffic to the site. You can't wait 9 or 12 months to do all of these things to build your opt-in. You've to be able to hit the ground running and get that initial traffic there. As that traffic clicks on those links, the searchability of your content greatly accelerates.

It's amazing to me. I even work with SEO agencies. I remember the first one in Boston, they've been doing SEO since 1998. All I know about searchability is I believe Google wants you to be able to find what you're searching for. The blog is themed to that. The way that we use keywords in the post title works as well for Twitter as it does for search. I put "ad agency new business" in almost every post title to the point that I'll get called out on it by a copywriter every month or so. Again, they forget the tactic and how well it's used. When I did that initial workshop for the SEO agency, they were dumbfounded. It's like, "How could we have missed the impact that social is having on search?" I'll even have agencies use Google Plus. Everybody's written Google Plus off. Who owns Google Plus? It's for the searchability. They'll enhance the searchability of your post if it's posted in Google Plus. I've seen that through experience.

ANDY BALDACCI

Hearing you talk about the depth of launching to the list and working all those different angles is

really impressive to me. I think one of the major complaints people have when it comes to content marketing is the length of time it takes to start getting results. I think when you compare that to marketing to a narrowly targeted and well defined list, you're able to get some of those benefits of more immediate traffic while you wait for Google to catch up, and also at the same time that immediate traffic will help get them there a little quicker.

MICHAEL GASS

You're in a position really in 30 days to start developing leads.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right, and that's something that almost no one is saying when it comes to content marketing. Once things are out there, once you've had this big push in the very beginning, what does it look like going forward for these agencies to keep this blog going?

MICHAEL GASS

I used the KISS principle when I developed the program. Understanding the agency cultures, I view everything as, "What can we sustain when we're at our busiest?" Once we do the 30 posts in 30 days, I get them on a more realistic writing schedule of a post a week. That's doable no matter how busy you are. They know it's doable because they now have a system in place. It's a breeze to knock out one post when they've been knocking out seven a week. It helps them learn these efficiencies and time management skills so the person who leads the process, who takes my place when I'm no longer in the picture, it takes them an hour to an hour and a half per day to get the program running. You've got to have somebody to be the rudder of the ship.

An hour and a half of a business development director's time is not too much to ask when it's this focused. I'm not saying don't do outbound. I'm just saying 90% of what we're doing right now in most agencies is outbound-related and only maybe 10% inbound. That needs to be reversed. When people zig, you ought to zag. Still do some outbound, but the greater emphasis is on inbound. You're in a position to make that transition very quickly from one emphasis to the next when you've got this program in place.

ANDY BALDACCI

Yeah. I can see the power of it the way you've laid it out. Hearing you talk about it before and seeing the pieces, it was like, "All right, I can understand how this works," but talking to you today where you spelled it all out, it's such a powerful program. I am excited to see what some listeners are able to do with it. I'm excited to see what some of your clients have done with that. Once they have this in place, once they've dealt with it, once they've switched away from the 30 posts in 30 days and once they're on a more sustainable schedule, is this something that they typically do sustain indefinitely?

MICHAEL GASS

Yeah, you want to do community building tactics on a daily basis. That can be assigned to even an intern. I go through certain tools like ManageFlitter, SocialOomph, Hootsuite Pro, and show them why we're using this tool in this specific way. Some of the tools have some of the same

features, but not done the same way. Going through those tutorials, you can teach those to anybody. It takes 20 minutes to get somebody up and going in ManageFlitter. If you've got turnover, it's easy to replace those who are doing some of the grunt work of the program. You don't want your business development director doing all of those tactics. You can even have it outsourced, somebody doing it remotely.

You want it to be consistent. If you're not doing community building tactics using the various tools on a daily basis, you're missing out. You want to continue to grow that online audience. Consistently putting out the newsletter every other week, reviewing your analytics, it's going to tell you so much. What content is most appealing? What content is the least appealing? And it'll help your writing team focus more and more on the content that creates appeal.

ANDY BALDACCI

Right. This is an iterative process. You're feeling around, getting results, seeing what works, and then doing more of what works. It's clear from talking to you that this system on the whole has gone to the process itself, and what you've laid out does work and has a lot of power. I want to thank you, Michael, so much for sharing that. Before we wrap up, I like to ask all of our guests a few quick rapid fire questions. You don't need to think too much. I'm not going to try to trick you or anything like that. The first one is what do you spend too much time doing?

MICHAEL GASS

If you don't have a focus, you'll waste a ton of time trying to come up with the ideas for creating content. Reading fuels the writing. One of the best time management tools to help the writer is a RSS reader called Feedly.com. You want all of that content coming to one location so you can read it without having to go to all of these different sites. One thing I've learned online, everybody has ADD. When you start a search, how many times has an hour, hour and a half gone by, and you can't even remember what you first wanted to search for? There's so many shiny objects out there. If you'll have the discipline to add industry publications, competitor content, thought leaders, have them all coming into that one location, it really does help fuel the writing. You want to share content that's not just yours. You want to round out what you're sharing, say, via Twitter. It should be a mixture of your content, content resources, and be sure to add the personal to make that emotional connection. Just as you had already seen. I sent out a tweet out about our interview and then took a snapshot and included that as well. That shows that he's busy, and then it facilitates other opportunities.

ANDY BALDACCI

I think that's brilliant. Honestly, I need to take a few pages out of your book on social marketing, because that's something that I struggle with. I appreciate those tips. In general, in your business, what are you hoping to accomplish in the next quarter?

MICHAEL GASS

We're moving more and more to online training. We've already got our first course up on a site

called Teachable. We're having good success with that. I really enjoy that. It's amazing how we've turned written content into courses. I had a videographer from Nashville come down, and we spent a day and a half. I think we shot 37 videos for the course. Looking forward to doing a lot of that, doing more webinars this year. Just did a webinar yesterday. We've done some regional workshops. We did a two-day conference in Nashville that we're going to replicate. I just enjoy the training aspects. It's amazing for a Boomer, working with a class of 20-year-olds, teaching them how to use Twitter for new business. I'm relevant.

ANDY BALDACCI

That's pretty cool. What do you see as the potential biggest obstacle that you've had to overcome to go all in on online training? What has been a challenge in moving from primarily in-person workshops to digital?

MICHAEL GASS

Getting people to assist in doing the technical stuff has always been the biggest challenge. I just don't like to do that. I had a videographer that encouraged me to use a teleprompter, and I didn't want to do that. He said, "I'm telling you, it just turns out so much better. The content is smoother." We took blog posts and revised those for their speakability. The amount of content we were able to use for that course and putting the dots together and laying out the program was incredible.

ANDY BALDACCI

That's really interesting. When you can repurpose content like that and find different ways to use it, you're really building up a library of content that you can then access throughout different projects that you're working on. Michael, before we say goodbye, where can listeners go if they're curious to hear more about setting up niche blogs or if they're curious just to hear more in general from you? Where's the best place for them to go?

MICHAEL GASS

Everything's on my website. It's the center hub of my new business strategy. It would be for any agency that I work with, creating that niche blog. Mine is FuelingNewBusiness.com. Or they can get there through MichaelGass.com.

ANDY BALDACCI

I remember you had mentioned before, something about seven steps guide to putting it all together. Is that something that listeners will be able to find online?

MICHAEL GASS

It's not available online, but they can email me at MichaelGass.com, and I'll be glad to send a PDF. It'll include links to a number of examples that helps get more of an understanding of how it all comes together and works.

ANDY BALDACCI

Awesome. I'm going to make sure to get all that linked up in the show notes. If you've been listening and would like a little bit more help on this and want to see something in front of you to

walk through the steps, check out the show notes. Also, send Michael an email to get that guide, because I know that will be a big help. I know that these things will have a huge impact on your agency. Michael, thank you so much for the time today. It was a lot of fun chatting with you.

MICHAEL GASS

Good to talk with you, Andy, thanks for having me.