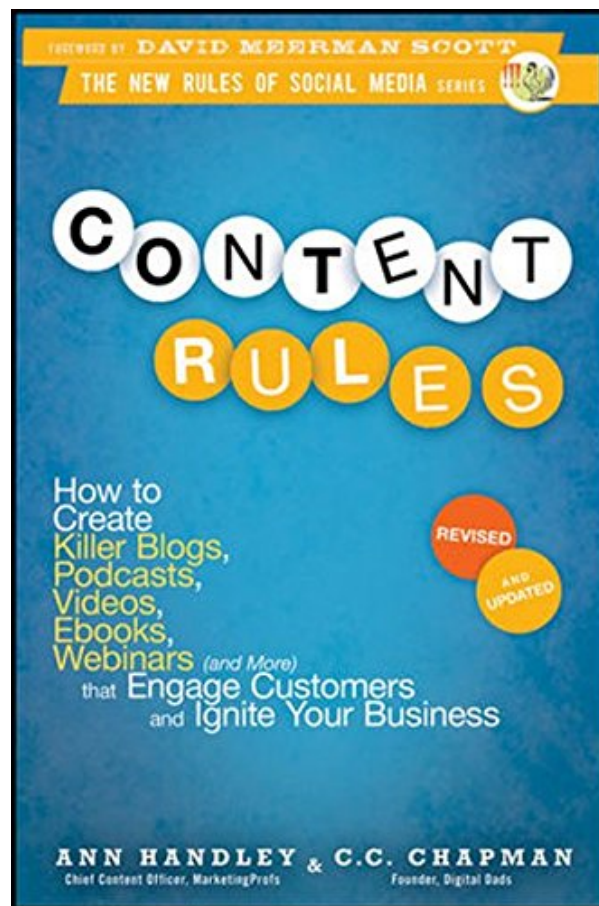
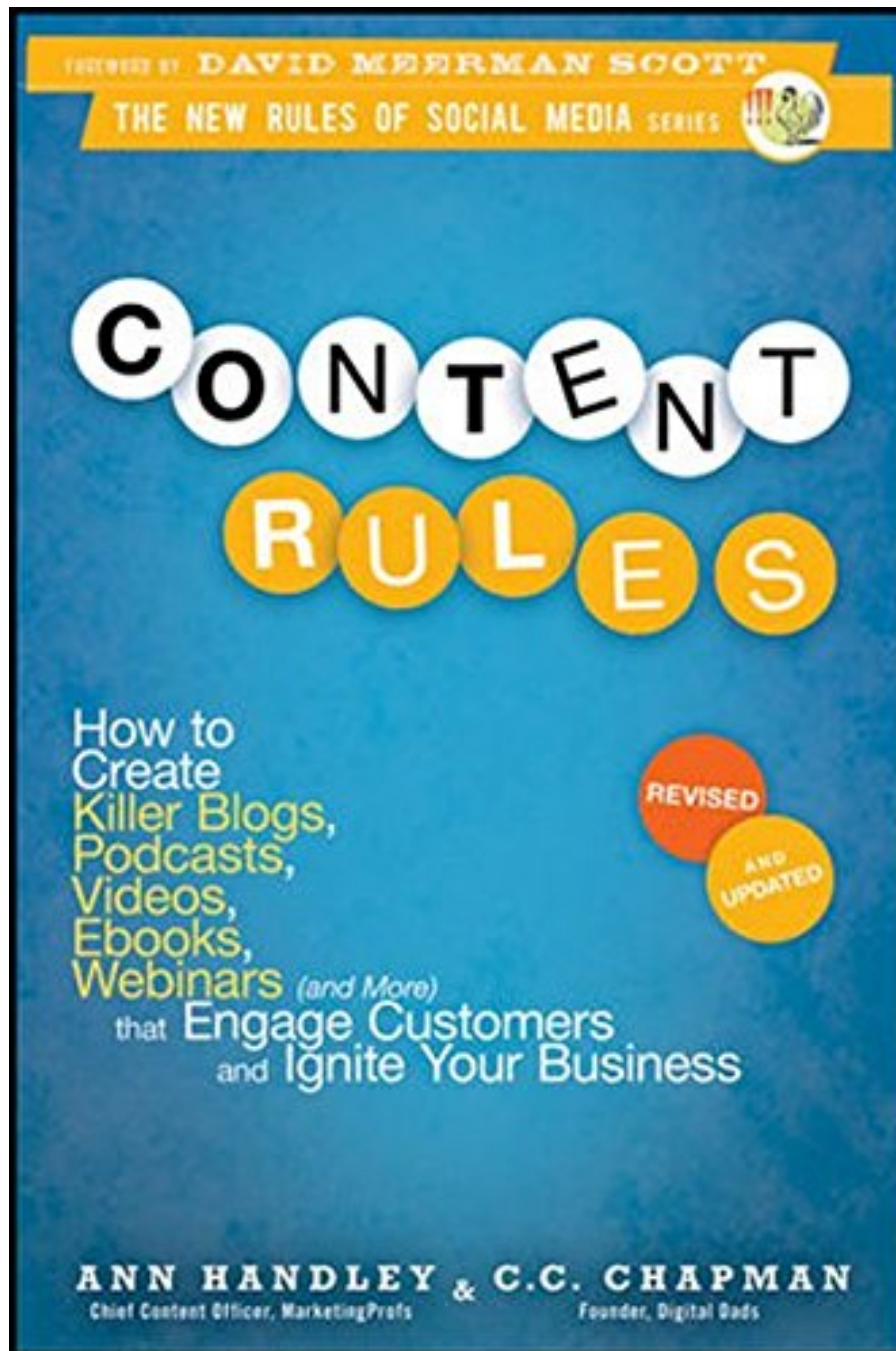


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Ann Handley is the Chief Content Officer of MarketingProfs, a training and education company with the largest community of marketers in its category, and co-founded ClickZ.com. She is a monthly columnist for Entrepreneur magazine, a contributor to LinkedIn's Influencer program, and Amex's OPEN Forum. There's nothing more fun than following her on Twitter, where she has 170,000 followers, or subscribing to her own site at [AnnHandley.com](http://AnnHandley.com).

C.C. Chapman is a media creator, entrepreneur, keynote speaker, and online marketing consultant. He is the founder of [DigitalDads.com](http://DigitalDads.com) and the host of [PassionHit.tv](http://PassionHit.tv). For more information, please visit [cc-chapman.com](http://cc-chapman.com).

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Insanely Great Look at Creating Content

By Whitney S. Hoffman

I should preface this review by saying I have been podcasting and creating content for the web for over five years now, and that I regularly help clients do the same. This said, I was expecting Content Rules to be a good book on the subject, but perhaps one of those that did not speak to me, because of my experience. I was wrong- Content Rules speaks to everyone- even seasoned content creators, by providing the metrics we may know around content creation, but haven't yet articulated, and helps make the case for content for everyone from people getting their feet wet on the Web for the first time, to those who are looking to raise their game and up their level of engagement with others online.

Content Rules is compelling and honest from the introduction on. It is a book I can hand my clients, friends, teachers- almost anyone who wonders why people need to or bother creating content for the web- to help not only explain why compelling content is important, but how to create it. It helps people break down the barriers that often get in the way of creating compelling content, and instead gives them some parameters on how to make sure your authentic and compelling voice shine through. In addition, the examples and case studies in the book bring the rules to life, in a way that will help folks understand how to find their human voice, and why that is so important to success in contrast to another paragraph of over-polished, sanitized, personality-free "safe" messaging.

I'm really excited by Content Rules as a book I can enthusiastically pass on to friends, colleagues, clients and more. If it's between a more generic book on social media or online marketing and this one, you need Content Rules because it will help you understand the fundamental approach you need to take regardless of the tool, platform, network or marketing plan- you need to concentrate on your Content first. 133 of 147 people found the following review helpful.

Effective Content Marketing: Easier Said Than Done

By David H. Deans

The forward of this book states that "Marketing is about creating great content" - but that the art and science of producing that superior material has been a mystery to many. David Meerman Scott, the author of the book's forward section, suggests that the answer to the question "what exactly, should I do?" is to tell stories. Granted, that's one important aspect of a forward-looking plan of action.

However, perhaps it's essential to fully understand why most businesses tend to create poor content. In fact, much of the business communication that's being produced today clearly doesn't meet the needs of its intended target customer. To the vast majority of marketers, the task of creating content is still centered upon explaining what their product or service does.

In contrast, great content -- from the customer's point of view -- should provide meaningful and substantive insight or guidance about what products and service will do for them. As I concluded reading this book, it

occurred to me that the authors had not made this point in the most compelling way. I was somewhat disappointed.

That said, Ann Hadley and C.C. Chapman have written a very comprehensive guide about how to develop a content marketing strategy and construct interesting information for your intended recipient -- utilizing a variety of digital media in the process.

Chapter 6, "Share or Solve; Don't Shill" is -- by far -- the most useful section of this helpful guide. It shares the six characteristics of a good idea or a story. What's missing, in my opinion, are examples of how companies typically fail to incorporate these basic principles.

Why is this explanation needed? Because this is a crucial concept and it should not be open to interpretation -- meaning, many marketers must essentially unlearn the common practices of legacy corporate marketing communications organizations.

Content Rules includes ten case studies -- what the author's refer to as success stories. I found some of these examples to be very insightful. In summary, the authors have tackled a subject that is very problematic, since knowing what to change is only part of the equation. Executing on that required behavioral transformation, having the will to discard bad habits, has proven to be very challenging.

Moreover, for those marketers who find it difficult to adopt these new practices themselves, the likelihood of being able to outsource this task is not promising. Finding an appropriately skilled consultant, a practitioner with proven results, will be equally challenging.42 of 45 people found the following review helpful.

Content Rules is Almost Perfect

By STEVE OKEEFE

I teach online public relations at Tulane University, so I constantly keep watch for new books in the field. Along with my own mammoth how-to book, Complete Guide to Internet Publicity (now out of print) or the stiff but good British book, Online Public Relations, by David Phillips and Philip Young, I like to assign one book that is fresh, hip, current, and relevant.

This year, I picked Content Rules even before reading it, because I love the title concept and I know one of the authors, Ann Handley, from when I used to write articles for ClickZ (back in the day, as they say).

Content Rules is a relentlessly upbeat guide to developing content for the Internet. The authors not only stress that "content is king" online; it's also queen, jack, ace, and most of the rest of the deck. Content Rules will show you how to find content in every corner of your organization, package it in every conceivable format, and syndicate it throughout the universe. Pretty impressive.

The Theory

The authors begin by laying out 11 "content rules," then expanding those in the following nine chapters. This is the "theory" portion of the book; as theory goes, it's very easily digested. The authors stick to the conversational tone they advocate in Rule #4: Speak Human:

"It's not just about getting more traffic; it's about getting more traffic that gives a s\*\*t." The authors quote social media consultant Jay Baer. That's human enough for me.

Highlights in the theory section of the book include:

- 1) Creating a content publishing schedule, especially the checklist for things to do each month on page 60. It's a good template by itself for an online marketing game plan.
- 2) Six characteristics of a good case history, signature article, or customer success story (pages 72-73).
- 3) What to look for when hiring a writer (pages 85-88). Here's one paragraph that pertains to our approach at SixEstate:

"Hiring someone trained as a print or broadcast journalist is a good option, because journalists are trained in how to tell a story using words, images, or audio, and they understand how to create content that draws an audience in. Their innate understanding of the audience also gives journalists a critical outsider's perspective -- a nuance that marketers can sometimes miss. They might be on your payroll, but they are better at expressing neutrality, which is a distinct advantage in creating marketing copy."

- 4) A terrific business-to-business (B2B) chapter with an emphasis on listening to and analyzing your target audiences and building customer personas. Contains a concise list of questions to ask about your customers on pages 125-126, along with a table used to analyze the results on page 128.

### The How-To

The second section of the book is labelled "How-To," but in one of the few weak spots, it starts off very badly with the Blogging chapter. How can you get through a blogging how-to without mentioning WordPress once? Or Blogger/Blogspot, for that matter?

The advice on headlines, tagging, use of artwork, and other topics is threadbare. The advice on scheduling is wrong (posting "twice a week is optimal"), as is the advice to "Never edit any comment that is posted to your blog." What about profanity filters, or formatting issues?

But the authors immediately rescue the how-to section with a great chapter on Webinars. It's full of details, software recommendations, examples, and sage advice. I love the tip, for example, that putting a video on the registration page for a seminar increases conversion five-fold.

Most of the rest of the how-to section is good, especially areas where the authors shine: ebooks and case studies. Even the video chapter -- the most complex and potentially expensive way to generate content -- is well done. I really like HubSpot's Rebecca Corliss' top 10 tips for producing a Web TV show (pages 203-205).

### The Case Histories

At first, I was disappointed that the case studies were segregated from the text. However, the authors do not skimp on examples, case histories, and outside experts throughout the book. There are plenty of examples to go around.

One benefit of segregating case histories is that it really drives home how companies use a variety of tools -- blogs, newsletters, video, ebooks, white papers, apps, images, etc. -- to get their messages out. This blended approach, with a unique blend for each company, would be lost if we saw only how they made their blogs, or only their video operation. The section gives a good gestalt.

The best case history, in my opinion, comes from Ask Patty, a site that aims to make automobile marketing



more female-friendly. The company puts a lot of effort into syndicating content (not just making it) through partnerships with top sites and media outlets, such as AutoTrader and the Chicago Tribune. "It's not all about driving traffic back to your site," says CEO Jody DeVere, "It's about meeting your consumers where they are."

### One Big Caveat

I started by saying that this book is almost perfect. The biggest oversight is the mainstream media. Almost all the content is aimed at consumers, yet many of the best results the campaigns pull are when they get picked up by the major media.

Page 20 lists four objectives for an online marketing campaign. It needs a fifth: to engage in dialogue with the mainstream media in your field. How to attract and dazzle the media should be considered in all the content programs covered in the book.

This omission is brought home in the very first case history, for the Reynolds Golf Academy. The owner uses video (and other tools) to reach his target audiences. But his first video was created by Golf magazine, which is where he got the idea (and 1.8 million views). And his biggest media hit was a write-up in The Wall Street Journal -- again, over a million viewers.

The major media still has major impact. For our clients, the most important result from a blog is not the loyal following it builds, but how that following gives the blog the voice of authority with the major media, leading to major media coverage, which supercharges results. So it's important to take the mainstream media into account when designing your content.

### Conclusion

With that one exception, Content Rules is excellent. Hopefully, this book will convince many senior executives that online PR is about content, not traffic tricks or SEO gimmicks. Hopefully, readers will invest in a long-term strategy of accumulating a wide variety of compelling content rather than using stunts to briefly spike their numbers. I'm delighted to see how well the book is selling and how many positive reviews it has garnered. Congratulations to Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman on a significant contribution to the canon of online marketing.

###

Steve O'Keefe is co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of SixEstate Communications. He has taught Internet PR at Tulane University since 2001, as well as courses for Stanford University, UCLA Extension and PRSA, among others. Steve wrote the bestselling book "Publicity on the Internet" in 1996. See all 150 customer reviews...

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