

Photography Content Marketing 101

How to succeed as a modern photographer: master marketing. The type of marketing I am a master at is 'content marketing'— and in this article, I will share with you everything I personally know. My hope is that you can use this information to “get your name out there”, to build more followers, and also how to build your platform.

What is content marketing?

Let me be the first to say that I hate the term 'content'— it is like putting all of our creative and artistic work, and squeezing it into a grey paste, to be consumed by the masses.

In a marketing sense, 'content' is what you wrap around the advertisements. 'Content' is the candy that makes the bitter medicine of advertising more palatable.

For example, let's say that I want to sell you a La Morzocco espresso machine. In order to market my espresso machine to get you to buy it, I might do 'content marketing' by writing articles such as:

- 5 Reasons Why Drinking Espresso Everyday is Good For Your Brain, Creativity, and Productivity
- The Secret Behind Pulling a Perfect Shot of Espresso

- The Benefits of Drinking Espresso and Intermittent Fasting

And at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the post, the La Morzocco espresso machine is mentioned. It is kind of like product placements in movies – Will Smith wearing a pair of All Star Converse in 'I Am Legend', James Bond driving an Aston Martin, or ET eating Reese's Pieces.

Anyways, the benefit of 'content marketing' over traditional forms of marketing and advertising (like billboards, banner ads, etc) is that the educational 'content' can help inform, educate, or convince *why* your customer needs a certain product.

'Content' can mean:

- Articles
- Blog posts
- Social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc)
- Pictures
- Videos (Youtube)
- Any media that can be created or consumed digitally (on a phone, laptop, tablet, etc).

How I do content marketing

For myself, I started this blog in 2011, with the hope of sharing information on street photography.

I remember when I started shooting street photography, I couldn't find any practical or instructional information on *how* to shoot street photography, how to conquer

my fears of shooting street photography, the 'best' technical settings for street photography, how to know what makes a good street photograph, or information about the history of street photography.

Therefore, first principle:

Make content that you would like to consume.

I saw a need for information on how to shoot street photography, and therefore I started to fill the gap in my personal curiosity. I started to write blog posts, make free ebooks on street photography, giving out free Lightroom presets, and making YouTube videos on how to shoot street photography. I was very dedicated from 2011-2017, and in that time period, rose to #1 on Google for 'street photography' and wrote over 3,000 blog posts.

When one teaches, two learn

I originally intended to start blogging as a way for me to share everything I was learning (in the hope that others would also find it useful). Also I found that **as I wrote and explained what I was learning, I retained and understood it better.**

For example, I never went to art or photography school. I had no idea who the masters of photography were.

Whenever I went to an art exhibition, I felt frustrated when all these other snobby photographers would 'name drop' the names of these famous photographers, like William Eggleston, Martin Parr, Stephen Shore, etc. I started to Google around, and couldn't find any practical information from these photographers. My main intention of learning from the master photographers was to learn practical lessons to apply to

my own photography. So once again like the first principle, I started to research and write in-depth articles on these master photographers.

Be generous

I found a hidden benefit of writing and blogging – as I started to expand my personal wisdom on photography and sharing that knowledge with others, I became more famous and well-known.

Principle 2:

The more I gave, the more I received in return.

I started to write free ebooks, and kept all my information ‘open source’—meaning, anyone could download, translate, remix, share, or access any of the information I created (words, articles, pictures, videos, etc).

As I built my popularity, I was able to benefit by:

- Selling out more workshops
- Selling products (Henri Neck Strap and Henri Wrist Strap, via HAPTICINDUSTRIES)
- Selling print and ebooks (via HAPTICPRESS)

That’s a brief intro on me, my blog, and how I have personally benefited. Now, let’s talk about you.

Do I need to start my own photography blog?

First of all, you gotta ask yourself,

What are my personal goals in photography?

For example, do you wanna make your photography a full-time living? Do you want to become 'discovered' by a publisher and get a book deal? Do you want to become 'famous', travel the world, and hold solo exhibitions?

What do you really want? There's no good or bad or right or wrong answer. Just be brutally honest for yourself.

If your goal is to build a name for yourself, having a photography blog is the best way you can market yourself on the Internet.

The benefits of having a photography blog

In content marketing, having a blog is the best platform to get your name out there.

Let me just freestyle some of my ideas with you:

1. If you upload pictures on Facebook or on Instagram, you should have a photography blog as well. Why? With a photography blog, you have more control over your content – in terms of how to display, order, and arrange your pictures, words, and videos.

2. Also, by having a photography blog/website, you will rank higher in Google. I still think that ranking high in Google is the #1 secret to success in digital marketing in photography, instead of Facebook or Instagram (which are the same company). Why? Facebook/Instagram are 'closed' platforms – which means you can't really interact with the platform without having a specific app. Whereas Google is 'open' – anyone with any device, or web browser, can search and find you.
3. Building your marketing on a social media platform is like building your own kingdom on quicksand. Social media platforms come and go (remember MySpace?) but websites will remain. Even today, young people don't use Facebook anymore (that is only for "old people"). A lot of those young people started to use Instagram instead. But funny story – even younger kids now don't use Instagram, they prefer Snapchat. And of course, the next generation will use some new new app after Snapchat.
4. If you own your own photography website/blog – you will always own the content to your pictures and posts – Facebook/Instagram or any social media platform retains the right to delete or remove your content at any time. For example, in the past, I got some pictures on Instagram removed because they didn't follow 'community guidelines'. The picture in question was an image of a KKK member with a Nazi Swastika illustrated on top, as a social-political critique I made. Anyways, it got removed.
5. In summary, you don't have 'freedom of speech' on social media. Social media companies (Facebook/Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat) are corporations, not governments, entities. They have the legal right to delete any of your pictures or profiles at any time).

How to start your own photography blog

To start your own photography blog, you need:

1. **Website Host:** They host your website. I recommend 1and1.com or bluehost.com.
2. **Blogging CMS 'content management system':** Wordpress.org is what I prefer, because it is open-source, and is the dominant platform used – most free plugins, and free online resources on how to use it.
3. **Domain name:** www.yourfirstnamelastname.com is what I recommend (like erickim.com) or www.yourfirstnamelastnamephotography.com (like erickimphotography.com). Having a “dot com”(.com) domain name makes you look more legitimate and trustworthy.

Why not a free blog?

Now, there are other free options like wordpress.com or medium.com. They are good too, for an easy 'turn-key' start. They are like Apple– very easy to start, setup, and everything “just works”.

The downside is that they are usually subsidized by advertisements, and you need to pay money for your own unique '.com' domain name. Also, you don't have much customization or flexibility.

However you can start with a free account, then upgrade to a 'paid-premium' version, which allows you to create your own custom domain name, and also customize more options on your blog.

Another benefit of using a platform like Wordpress.com or medium.com: they are less prone to crashing, and you can stress less about backing up data, etc.

Own your own website and blog

The benefit of using your own website and host, allows for more long-term flexibility and control (the Android approach). The downside is that initial setup is more complicated, and you require to maintain your website.

If you want to succeed long-term as a photographer utilizing content marketing, my recommendation is to build your own photography blog with your own host, with Wordpress.org.

Photography content marketing strategies

If you're new to photography blogging, or need some creative ideas, here are some personal strategies and tactics I've employed, with good success:

1. Focus on educational 'how to' information: Write blog posts which are practical, like my guide on 'How to zone focus in street photography', or 'How to shoot film photography'
2. Focus on writing practical and *actionable* information: Information that encourages people to DO SOMETHING. For example, my '15 Tips and Techniques in Street Photography' article which include practical **assignments** –assignments are good because they concretize the next 'action steps' (a lot of this information is distilled in our book: STREET NOTES)
3. Fulfill your personal curiosities in photography: What information or advice do you wish someone gave you (either today, or in the past?). For example, I'm personally curious about what makes a good photography composition, and therefore I started a 'Photography Composition 101' series sharing principles I discovered on dynamic photography, on the Golden Triangle, on figure-to-Ground, and color theory.

How to motivate yourself to make content

Also, it is hard to motivate yourself to blog or make content.

Practical advice:

1. **Don't force yourself to blog or create information that you don't have passion for:** For example, I only write and make videos about things which genuinely interest myself on a personal level. Marketing, branding, and entrepreneurship is a personal fascination and passion for myself, therefore I started this epic 'Photography Content Marketing 101' guide.
2. Coffee and good music: I prefer espresso, no cream or sugar. Also, I like having good upbeat music which gets me in the zone. Nowadays, I like Kanye West, JAY Z, and 'trap' music. Also, I find that I write and produce information/content the best when I am in a 'fasting' state (meaning, I'm most productive producing information when I haven't eaten anything yet). Nowadays, I only eat one meal a day (massive dinner) and only drink water and black coffee during the day to stay productive.
3. Physical fitness: When I need a break, I walk around the block, take some pictures, do chin-ups at the park, or hit the gym and do squats/deadlifts.

How to find inspiration to blog about

To find inspiration, I recommend to 'cross pollinate' your interests. My best blogging and photography insights have come from a mix of:

- Philosophy (Zen, Taoism, Stoicism)
- Architecture (Zaha Hadid, suprematism)
- Painting (Renaissance, Pop art, Bauhaus)
- Biology
- Physics
- Computer science
- Sociology

Therefore, pursue anything that you're curious about. You will come up with unique ideas to blog about, and you will never run out of inspiration.

Other fields I'm currently studying (for fun):

- Neural networks
- Evolution (the origin of species)
- Physiology

How often should I blog or publish content?

In my experience, the best time to publish your content for 'maximum engagement' is 12pm (Pacific time) during weekdays (Monday-Friday).

At this point, I just publish whenever. Another entrepreneurial principle: **realize your potential audience is global – therefore it is technically 12pm somewhere in the world.**

What social media should I use?

I also think that social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are helpful and useful, but also kind of a waste of time.

Too many digital marketers and photographers get too distracted from 'social media'.

80% of the traffic to my blog comes from Google. Less than 5% from social media.

I like following the 'Pareto principle' (also known as the 80/20 principle). The basic idea:

Focus on what is most effective for you.

For example, 80% of my profits come from 20% of my workshops. Therefore I've been focusing on teaching fewer workshops, but only focusing on the most profitable workshop locations (NYC, London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Tokyo).

Also, considering that 80% of my traffic comes from Google, and less than 20% from Facebook and social media – it makes sense to *NOT* waste my time on building my social media traffic. It makes sense for me to continue to focus on photography blogging and building my Google search ranking. This is also known as 'SEO' (search engine optimization)—see my 'SEO For Photographers' guide for more information.

Focus on what you're good at

Also In a practical sense, do less. But do more of what is effective for you.

Build up and strengthen what you're really good at. Don't waste time what you're not good at.

Focus on your small niche, and work upwards

If you're starting on content marketing, my suggestion is to **focus on dominating a small niche, and building your way up.**

For example, when I started photography blogging in 2011, it would be futile and a waste of time for me to build a name for myself and a following for myself under general 'photography'— it is too big of a market, and too broad and general.

I focused on the small niche I was interested in, a smaller pond of 'street photography'.

When you're starting off, become a big fish in a small pond, instead of a small fish in a big ocean.

So if you want to write blog posts or do content, instead of:

10 Photography Tips

You might do better by writing:

10 Street Photography Tips

Or to make it more specific and niche:

10 Black and White Street Photography Tips

And even more niche:

10 Black and White Film Street Photography Tips

You can see by adding more 'keywords' or specific terms, you will be able to specialize, and focus on a smaller idea and concept. This is the best way to succeed as a photography internet p marketer, and entrepreneur.

YouTube Content Marketing Strategies For Photography

I also think in addition to your photography blog, start a photography YouTube channel.

In your YouTube channel, you can build a following that will benefit you because,

People trust faces and voices more than text.

For example, whenever I am 'spotted on the streets', people always tell me, "Eric, I love your YouTube channel/videos!" Generally people don't even mention my blog.

The reason: people can see my personality and soul better through my videos, rather than just my writing.

Video production strategies

My principle for content creation:

Keep it simple.

For my videos, I do very little editing.

I usually just record videos on my laptop webcam, shoot selfie video 'vlogs' (video blogs), GoPro, or just record videos on my digital camera.

I will usually upload the raw video to YouTube. For basic edits, I just use iMovie.

Also a big thing that will help you as a content marketer:

Just make it 80% 'good enough' and hit 'PUBLISH'.

Too many content creators and marketers focus on 'perfection' and therefore end up doing nothing. Psychologically, I know I used to fall victim to 'paralysis by analysis'—too many options means I don't do anything.

So just use the simplest video recording tool and software.

Video photography lectures

Also, I like to use 'Camtasia' to record my screen, and explain photography concepts with my laptop. Often shooting video and doing 'screen capture' is a good way to create content, which is easier to explain instead of just text.

How long should by videos be?

Just follow your own gut.

For example, when I interview other photographers, I like to go in-depth and ask them questions I'd like the answer to. Therefore, my interviews are usually at least 20 minutes long.

Or when I do a video lecture, I like to go in-depth, so some of my most popular video photography lectures like on 'Street Photography Composition 101' are around an hour long.

Another tip:

When you're making a video and you start to feel bored, stop recording.

How to market yourself

Generally to build a following, it will take you at least 1-2 years. So be persistent, be consistent, and don't die. When I say 'don't die' – it means **never give up**.

If you want to be an effective content marketer, or to survive as a modern photographer (assuming you want to make a living from your photography) **you can never stop marketing yourself**.

A superior product requires superior marketing (Apple makes the best products, yet still invest millions into marketing).

Steve Jobs made marketing an art. You must rid this false notion that somehow marketing is evil. **The best artists are also the best marketers**. Andy Warhol and Pablo Picasso were master marketers.

Create timeless information

Another principle in content marketing is to create timeless or 'evergreen' content. For example, blog posts and videos that will benefit people as much today as 50 years from now.

That means, avoid doing content marketing with trends, fads, or technological things.

This is why I don't do many camera or gear reviews, because every camera or equipment will get outdated 6 months from now.

Therefore try to create information that will empower others, indefinitely.

Never stop creating

Ultimately, strive to keep learning, to constantly be in a state of flux, and to keep evolving as a visual artist.

Use content marketing as a way to share your insights and knowledge in photography, and the more you share and empower others, the more you will benefit, and the more the rest of society will benefit.

BE STRONG,

ERIC