

How to Scale Your Content Marketing: Tips from Our Journey to 100,000 Words a Month

In the fall of 2018 our CEO had a simple yet head-exploding request of the JotForm marketing and growth teams: Produce 100,000 words of high-quality written content in a single month.

All types of content would count toward the goal, including posts on our own blog, help guides, template descriptions, and guest posts and sponsored articles on other sites.

In case you don't think that sounds like a lot, 100,000 words is the length of a 400-page book. Produced in a single month. By a group of JotFormers who then numbered fewer than eight.

Why would on Earth would he want us to do all that?

My colleague and I trying to calculate how many blog posts it would take to reach 100,000 words.

It's important to understand intent here. Our CEO, Aytekin, isn't a crazy man. He didn't send us on a mission just to keep us busy.

You see, for many months we'd dabbled with content, and it was working. Aytekin's contributed posts in Entrepreneur magazine and on Medium were big hits. Our redesigned blog was picking up a lot of traction with the content we already had, and we were starting to understand SEO a lot better.

Still. Why would any software company need to produce that much content?

The answer is simple: infrastructure. If we could build a

content engine that produces a high volume of quality content, then we could learn what works well and double down on creating great content. But in order to sustain success in content, we needed to have the pieces in place.

He allocated a sufficient budget and gave us the freedom to hire the staff we needed to make it happen. We were going to need it.

A full year later, I'm very proud to say we've officially crossed over the 100,000-word count in a single month [hold for applause].

However, it didn't come without some painful learnings and mistakes.

Here's what I figured out about scaling content through this process.

Develop a system early

Our old editorial calendar was a Google sheet. I started it back when JotForm was publishing one or two blogs per week and needed a way to keep it organized. It worked.

Back then, the only people who needed to view the editorial calendar were three people on the marketing staff and a couple of designers.

However, no spreadsheet on earth will be functional when you're loading up 100,000 words. It's too complicated. We discovered this right away.

After much discussion, we migrated our editorial workflow into Asana, which seemed like the closest thing to what we needed. It has a nice calendar view, the tagging functionality helped keep things orderly, and the board view gives a great overview of everyone's projects.

This is where our marketing team lives.

Counterintuitively, we also use Trello, since it's what our growth team had already been using to manage projects. Once the marketing team finishes writing a post, we send a request to our growth team designers to create banners for them using a form that integrates with their Trello board.

The system is intricate, but it works. We'd be lost if we hadn't spent time creating it.

Style guides are your friends

Speaking of things to develop before you can really grow your content machine. Style guides are paramount to maintaining consistency, which becomes trickier and trickier the more writers you enlist to help you reach your content goals.

We consider our style guide to be a sort of living, ever-changing document. We add to it all the time.

It's also the first thing that any legitimate writer will want to see when they're about to contribute something to your site, whether they're submitting a guest post, doing paid freelance work, or they're your own in-house content writer.

Things to include in a basic style guide: an overview of writing style and tone, grammar and mechanics, punctuation particulars, product wording clarifications, and formatting.

Cheap writing will cost you, dearly

If you want cheap writing, you can find it. It's everywhere – Upwork, Express Writers, WriterAccess. You name it, we tried it. And for less than \$60 a blog post, what self-respecting marketing manager wouldn't at least try it?

I'm here to tell you it's a mistake.

I was thrilled when the drafts started rolling in. But our editor had other thoughts. It was taking too much time to make them good – nay, readable.

That was an oversight on my end, and it created a big bottleneck. We created such a backlog of cheap content (because it was cheap and I could purchase LOTS of it at a time) that it halted our progress on publishing content in a timely manner.

Instead, treat your freelance and content agencies as partners, and take the time to find good ones. Talk to them on the phone, exhaustively review their writing portfolio, and see if they really understand what you're trying to accomplish. It'll cost more money in the short term, but the returns are significant.

But good writing won't mask subject ignorance

One thing to check with any content agency or freelancer you work with is their research process. The good ones will lean on subject matter experts (SMEs) to actually become authorities on the subjects they write about. It's a tedious

step, for both you and the writer, but it's an important one.

The not-so-good ones? They'll wing it and try to find what they can online. Sometimes they can get away with it, and sometimes someone will read your article and have this to say:

That was harsh.

But they had a point. While the article in question was well-written, it wasn't written by someone who knew much about the subject at hand, which in this case was photography. Lesson learned. Make sure whoever you hire to write will take the time to know what they're talking about.

Build outreach into your process

Let's be real here. For 99.9 percent of you, content marketing is SEO marketing. That's mostly the case with us as well. We do publish thought leadership and product-education posts with little SEO value, but a lot of what we write is published with the hope that it pleases The Google. Praise be.

But just publishing your content is never enough. You need links, lots of them.

Before I go any further, understand that there's a right and a wrong way to get links back to your content.

Three guidelines for getting links to your content:

1. Create good content.
2. Find a list of reputable, high-ranking sites that are

authorities on the subject you wrote about.

3. Ask them about linking or guest posting on their site in a respectful way that also conveys value to their organization.

That's it. Don't waste your time on crappy sites or link scams. Don't spam people's inboxes with requests. Don't be shady or deal with shady people.

Create good content, find high-quality sites to partner with, and offer them value.

Successful content is a numbers game

One benefit to creating as much content as we have is that we can really see what's worked and what hasn't. And it's not as easy to predict as you might think.

One of our most successful posts, How to Start and Run a Summer Camp, wasn't an especially popular one among JotFormers in the planning stage, primarily because the topic didn't have a ton of monthly searches for the targeted keywords we were chasing. But just a few months after it went live, it became one of our top-performing posts in terms of monthly searches, and our best in terms of converting readers to JotForm users.

Point being, you don't really know what will work for you until you try a bunch of options.

You'll need to hire the right people in-house

In a perfect world JotForm employees would be able to produce every bit of content we need. But that's not realistic for a company of our size. Still, there were some roles we absolutely needed to bring in-house to really kick our content

into high gear.

A few of our content hires from the past 12 months.
Here are some hires we made to build our content infrastructure:

Content writer

This was the first dedicated content hire we ever made. It marked our first real plunge into the world of content marketing. Having someone in-house who can write means you can be flexible. When last-minute or deeply product-focused writing projects come up, you need someone in-house to deliver.

Editor

Our full-time editor created JotForm's style guide from scratch, which she uses to edit every single piece of content that we produce. She's equal parts editor and project manager, since she effectively owns the flow of the Asana board.

Copywriters (x2)

Our smaller writing projects didn't disappear just because we wanted to load up on long-form blog posts. Quite the contrary. Our copywriters tackle template descriptions that help count toward our goal, while also writing landing page text, email marketing messages, video scripts, and social media posts.

Content strategist

One of the most difficult components of creating regular content is coming up with ideas. I made an early assumption that writers would come up with things to write; I was way off base. Writers have a very specialized skill that actually has little overlap with identifying and researching topics based on SEO value, relevance to our audience, and what will generate clicks from social media. So we have a strategist.

Content operations specialist

When you aim for tens of thousands of words of published content over the course of a month, the very act of coordinating the publishing of a post becomes a full-time job. At JotForm, most of our posts also need a custom graphic designed by our design team. Our content operations specialist coordinates design assets and makes sure everything looks good in WordPress before scheduling posts.

SEO manager

Our SEO manager had already been doing work on JotForm's other pages, but he redirected much of his attention to our content goals once we began scaling. He works with our content strategist on the strategy and monitors and reports on the performance of the articles we publish.

The payoff

JotForm's blog wasn't starting from scratch when Aytekin posed the 100,000-word challenge. It was already receiving about 120,000 organic site visitors a month from the posts we'd steadily written over the years.

A year later we receive about 230,000 monthly organic searches, and that's no accident.

The past year also marked our foray into the world of pillar pages.

For the uninitiated, pillar pages are (very) long-form, authoritative pieces that cover all aspects of a specific topic in the hopes that search engines will regard them as a

resource.

These are incredibly time-consuming to write, but they drive buckets full of visitors to your page.

We're getting more than 30,000 visitors a month – all from pillar pages we've published within the last year.

To date, our focus on content marketing has improved our organic search to the tune of about 150,000 additional site visitors per month, give or take.

Conclusion

Content isn't easy. That was the biggest revelation for me, even though it shouldn't have been. It takes a large team of people with very specialized skills to see measurable success. Doing it at large scale requires a prodigious commitment in both money and time, even if you aren't tasked with writing 100,000 words a month.

But that doesn't mean you can't find a way to make it work for you, on whatever scale that makes the most sense.

There really aren't any secrets to growing your content engine. No magic recipe. It's just a matter of putting the resources you have into making it happen.

Best of all, this post just gave us about 2,000 words toward this month's word count goal.

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