



THE
ASCENDANCY ADVISOR

**10 KILLER
BLOG TOPICS**

**TO HELP YOU
SLAY YOUR**

COMPETITORS

**7 MARKETING
TOOLS YOU SHOULD
BE USING TO MARKET**

**YOUR LOCAL
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One of the best ways to make sure that your website ranks high on Google is to have an active blog. But coming up with topics is a challenge. It's especially tricky

for business owners who are juggling sales, marketing, accounting, and human resources responsibilities. We're here to help. We've come up with 10 killer blog ideas to help grow your business.

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Every small business owner struggles with figuring out how to allocate their resources. Even if you're profitable every year, you still need to balance your overhead

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Small business owners face some real challenges when it comes to marketing their business. Often they can't afford to hire a full-time (or even a part-time) marketing person.

Fortunately, online tools and apps can provide local business owners with the means to stay on top of their marketing efforts. Here are seven of our favorites.

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There's no question that local SEO is more important than ever before. 56% of all mobile searches are local, What does that mean for you as a local business owner? It

means you need to be hyper-focused on maximizing your local SEO. It's the only way to make sure that local customers don't miss you when they search for you. Here are the top ways to connect locally and grow your business.

Welcome To The ASCENDANCY ADVISOR

Thanks for checking out our 2nd issue of the Ascendancy Advisor, your online marketing resource guide for small business. Each month we will be covering topics that resonate with local businesses just like yours.

Our goal is simple. We want to enable you to do big things online, and it all starts by breaking down the complexities of marketing your business online.

It doesn't matter if you're just starting out, or an established business owner in your local community, you can always benefit from increasing your brand's online presence.

To your Success,

Tracey Barnes
Managing Director

THIS ISSUE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Ascendancy I.M. is the leading small business marketing service for over seven years. We help small businesses connect with more customers online.

If you want to build your business, you need to market, it's that simple. But you can lose thousands of dollars if you don't know what you are doing. So we urge you to take action with some of the strategies we recommend.

We offer affordable marketing solutions and deliver quality results. We hope you enjoy this issue of the Ascendancy Advisor and feel free to contact us anytime.

10 KILLER BLOG TOPICS TO HELP YOU SLAY YOUR COMPETITORS

Let's face it. No matter what industry you're in, the competition is fierce. The proliferation of small businesses in the United States means that nobody has a monopoly anymore. To succeed, you have to find a way to make your business stand out in a crowd. You have to be magnetic. You have to be *memorable*.

We're here to help. We've come up with 10 killer blog ideas – templates that you can use to create content that will:

- » Grab people's attention
- » Attract traffic to your site
- » Entertain, inform, and educate your target audience
- » Grow your business

You need to tap into people's natural curiosity and desire to learn. These ideas will help you do that.





LISTICLE

You can't go online today without seeing headlines for listicles. BuzzFeed has made an art form out of creating compelling lists with irresistible headlines.

People have a natural tendency to categorize ideas and topics. That's one reason why listicles are popular.

You can make a list of almost anything

- » Things to do
- » Things to avoid doing
- » Best options in a category
- » Worst options in a category

There are endless ways to make lists and spin them into blog content. The key is to make the listicles you write valuable to your target audience.

HOW-TO

Nowadays, if you want to know how to do something, you Google it. That's as true of your customers as it is of anybody else. And for that reason, how-to articles are one of the most popular kinds of web content.

Think about things that people who are interested in your niche or products want to know how to do. If you own a kitchen supply store, you might do a how-to article about a particular cooking technique. A home improvement store might post how-tos for a series of DIY projects.

Here again, the key is to put yourself in your customer's shoes and ask what they want to know how to do.

ULTIMATE GUIDES

You're an expert in your industry, and you have valuable knowledge to share. Why not create an ultimate guide for your readers? An ultimate guide is a comprehensive guide to a particular topic or skill.

If you own a clothing store, you might create an ultimate guide to accessorizing an outfit. The owner of an outdoor supply store might choose to do the ultimate guide to camping. The possibilities are endless. The benefit of doing this type of article is that you can update it regularly to keep the content current and it can be a traffic magnet.

MYTH DEBUNKING

Every industry and niche has its myths. Given how easy it is to find information these days, it's remarkable that myths can have the staying power they do.

The chances are good that you know several persistent myths that apply to what you do. Instead of being frustrated about them, write a series of blog posts explaining why they're not true. The content you create will be useful to your customers. If you choose your keywords wisely, it can bring in a steady stream of traffic to your blog.

TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDES

One of the cornerstones of marketing is showing customers that you understand their pain. What

better way to do that than to help them troubleshoot a common problem?

This is a variation on a how-to guide, but it's one that can help establish you as an authority in your industry. It's the kind of thing that provides instant value to your readers. If you do a good job of explaining a problem – and solving it – you'll attract new business and cement your relationship with existing customers.

HUMOR

Humorous blog entries won't work for every industry, but there's no denying the popularity of funny content. Many companies have made videos or written blogs that have gone viral simply because they made people laugh.

If you see an opportunity to find the funny in what you do, go for it. You may find yourself with a viral hit on your hands.

GIFT GUIDES

Gift guides are especially popular around the holidays, but you can make them for other key gift-giving occasions too. Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Father's Day are all holidays that include a gift-giving tradition.

People are often stumped about what to give as a gift. You can provide them with an easy guide, and include handy links to your online store if you have one.



RESPOND TO READER QUESTIONS

If you find that you're getting the same questions from readers over and over again in the comments, you can use those questions to create a blog entry. The benefit of answering reader questions is that it gives you an opportunity to connect with your readers. It also allows you demonstrate to new readers that you care about your customers.

LOCAL EVENTS AND CHARITIES

As a local business owner, it's important to show that you care about your community. One way to do that is to blog about local events and charities. Charitable giving is a key to marketing to Millennials.

This generation wields enormous buying power, and they are far more likely to patronize companies that give to charity than those who don't. Sponsor a local charity, participate in a fundraiser, or help with a local event. People in your area want to know what's happening, and they'll respond when they see that you're involved.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a good choice for blog entries because they practically write themselves. If you can connect with an influencer in your industry, ask if they'll do a phone interview with you.

During the interview, ask questions that are relevant to your customers. They'll be grateful for the information.

CONCLUSION

Coming up with blog ideas isn't easy, but these ten templates are ones you can use to create content that will engage your audience – and help you grow your business.



How Much Should I Budget for PPC?



Every small business owner struggles with figuring out how to allocate their resources. Even if you're profitable every year, you still need to balance your overhead against your desired profits.

With content marketing and social media use on the rise, it can be especially tricky to determine where your paid advertising budget should be. You want to make sure

to spend enough to grow your business, but not so much that it ends up putting you in a financial hole.

We're here to help. We'll walk you through the process of determining the proper advertising budget for your business based on your sales and profit margins. The resulting number might end up surprising you.



Budget Calculation Basics

The first thing you need to do is figure out your total paid advertising budget. A lot of companies underspend or overspend on advertising. They may also be making unwise choices in terms of where to spend their budget, but that's a separate topic.

The key to determining the amount of your budget is to factor your profit margins and mark-up into the calculation. Here's a formula you can use to figure out your minimum and maximum allowable advertising budget.

1. Calculate 10% and 12% of your gross annual sales. A company with a million dollars in sales would start with figures of \$100,000 and \$120,000.
2. Divide your gross profits by the cost of the goods you sold to determine your mark-up. For example, if you paid \$480,000 for products and made \$520,000 in gross

profit, you'd divide to figure out that mark-up is 93.7%.

3. Multiply your two earlier figures (10% and 12% of gross annual sales) by 93.7% to determine your minimum and maximum budget for exposure. In this case, it would be \$93,700 on the low end and \$112,440 on the high end.
4. From those two figures, subtract your annual rent. For example, say that your rent was \$2,000 per month, or \$24,000 per year. You'd end up with a low budget of \$69,700 and a high budget of \$88,440 on the high end.

These numbers can help you form the framework of your budget. You may decide that you want to stick to the low end of the budget, especially if it's more than you've been spending. On the other hand, if you've been spending more than you should, it may be a challenge just to bring your spending down to the high end.

Return on Investment vs. Customer Acquisition Cost

It's not enough just to set the proper amount for your paid advertising budget. You also need to crunch the number to ensure that the money you spend is getting the results you need.

Many small business owners focus on ROI (return on investment) as the number that determines whether an advertising campaign is a success. They figure if they end up making more than they spend, then they're doing just fine.

We like to recommend a different strategy. Customer Acquisition Cost, or CAC, is an important number to keep in mind as you finalize your marketing budget.

You can determine the cost of acquiring a new customer by looking at your website's conversion rate. Let's use a simple example to illustrate the point.

Imagine a company that spends \$50 for each visitor to its website. They might be paying for pay-per-click ads on Google or Bing, or even using Facebook advertising.

Once visitors land on their site, they're converting 50% of those visitors to paying customers. That means that for every two customers who visit their site, they're making a sale to one.

In this example, the CAC is \$100. They spend \$50 for each customer and convert one of every two. You can see why looking solely at the PPC rate is a mistake. This company is spending twice as much on CAC as they are on PPC. That's a big difference.

Look at your current advertising budget and figure out what you're actually spending to acquire a new customer. That can help you going forward.



Lifetime Customer Value



The last statistic you need to know to make the most of your advertising budget is the lifetime value of a customer.

Why does this number matter? Simply put, you need to make sure that the average customer's lifetime value (LTV) is greater than the CAC. If it isn't, you're in big trouble.

Let's continue with the example we provided in the previous section. If a company has a CAC of \$100, they would need to have an LTV higher than that to justify the money they are spending on their PPC ad.

If their average sale is only \$20, it means that a customer would have to make more than five purchases at that price to exceed the CAC.

To determine your average LTV, you'll need to track customer behavior and figure out how many of your customers are buying from you more than once. You'll also need to know how much they're spending on your products or services over the course of their relationship with you.

Let's say that the company in our example had an LTV of \$150. Based on that number, they would know that their advertising dollars were being reasonably well spent. Every customer they acquire is spending, on average, more than it costs to acquire them.

On the other hand, if that same company had an LTV of only \$75, it would demonstrate that they are not allocating their advertising budget wisely. They would need to take a hard look at their marketing strategy.

Regrouping and Strategizing

After you've crunched the numbers, the final step is to look at your advertising budget and determine what you need to do differently.

If you're using Google AdWords, you should keep in mind that the top three paid options on the search results page get approximately 41% of the clicks. Instead of trying to compete for a top keyword, focus your attention on long-tail keywords that are less competitive.

You may also want to consider moving away from search engine advertising and reallocating your budget to social media advertising and other, more cost-effective options.

The key to making the most of your advertising budget is to make the most of each dollar you spend. Crunching the numbers can help you eliminate waste and maximize your profits.



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Connect with us today to learn more about our "done for you" PPC Management Services!



7 MARKETING TOOLS YOU SHOULD BE USING TO MARKET YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS

Small business owners face some real challenges when it comes to marketing their business. Often they can't afford to hire a full-time (or even a part-time) marketing person. They may outsource their marketing. In some cases, they may even have to handle it themselves. That's not an easy task, particularly for people who are already wearing multiple hats in the course of a day.

Marketing is especially important when it comes to reaching mobile users. Research shows that 46% of all searches on Google are local searches. Owners of brick and mortar business can't afford to ignore mobile marketing.

Fortunately, there are some ways to make the job a bit easier than it otherwise would be. Tools and apps can provide local business owners with the means to stay on top of their marketing even in the midst of a busy workday. Here are seven of our favorites.



GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



BING PLACES FOR BUSINESS

It should come as no surprise that Google My Business is first on our list. Google is working to make it easier than ever before for mobile users to search local business from their smart phones or tablets. The "Okay Google" feature is voice activated, making it simple for people to search companies even when they're driving.

Google My Business is free, but you'll have to get things set up to reap the rewards of using it. To start, click [here](#) to provide information about your business. You should fill out your profile completely and upload several pictures.

Once you've done that, you can use this tool to access detailed data about how and when people are searching your business. You'll be able to find:

- » The number of clicks and views you receive
- » Reviews of your business
- » Requests for driving directions to your business
- » Traffic information for your website

It's very user-friendly and you can use the information you collect to improve your marketing.

It can be easy to lose sight of Bing because it remains in Google's shadow. However, it's important to keep in mind that, despite its second-place status, 33% of all internet searches are done on Bing. That's too big a number to ignore.

The process for using Bing Places for Business is similar to that for Google My Business. You'll need to click [here](#) to claim your business profile and complete the required information. Here again, remember, to add pictures.

Once you've completed your profile, you'll have to verify your business. You'll get a PIN in the mail or via text message. After that, you'll be able to monitor and reply to reviews, update information, and track search traffic and clicks.

One nice thing about using Bing is that some of your competitors may not be using it thanks to Google's dominance. Fine-tuning your profile can help give you a leg up when it comes to differentiating yourself from the competition.



YELP MOBILE APP

Did you know that Yelp gets 145 million unique visitors each month? That's a pretty impressive number for any site. It's even more impressive when you consider that many people won't visit a business without reading reviews on Yelp first.

If you haven't already claimed your business on Yelp, you should do so immediately. Make sure to review all of the information there and correct mistakes as needed. Once you have updated your information, you can download the mobile app by clicking [here](#). You should also add pictures to give people an idea of what to expect from your business.

Using the app, you can manage every aspect of your Yelp page. You'll be able to:

- » Read and respond to customer reviews
- » Track leads
- » Monitor customer engagement
- » Answer customer questions and deal with customer service issues

Remember that negative reviews represent an opportunity to show customers that you care about their experience. Respond professionally and politely and you may even convince people to revise their reviews.



FACEBOOK PAGES MANAGER

The chances are good that you already have a Facebook page for your business. But if you're not managing it properly, you may not be getting the most from it. Fortunately, the Facebook Pages Manager mobile app can help.

Using the app, you can:

- » Receive push notifications for activity on your page
- » Post status updates and other content
- » Reply to comments and questions
- » Respond to messages
- » Track your content's performance

It's an easy way to manage your Facebook page on the go.



GOOGLE ALERTS

An important aspect of local marketing is reputation management. As much as you might like to believe that you can control what people say about you online, that's not always true. Google Alerts can help you stay on top of it.

To set up Google Alerts for your business, all you need to do is sign in to your Gmail account and go to Google Alerts. From there, you'll be able to type in your business name to receive an email alert – and a push notification if you desire – every time your company is mentioned online.

You may also want to use Google Alerts to track your competitors. Knowing where and how your competitors are mentioned can be extremely helpful. It may even help you track down new online marketing opportunities.



MENTION

Mention is monitoring software that allows companies to keep an eye on their company's reputation on social media and on the web. You can download their mobile app for iOS or Android by clicking [here](#).

Once you have the app installed on your phone, you'll be able to:

- » Track performance of your social media accounts and posts
- » Manage your social media content from the dashboard
- » Communicate with members of your staff or your social media team
- » Find influencers in your industry or niche

It's a comprehensive tool that you can use to take your local marketing to a new level.



**ANSWER
THE PUBLIC**

ANSWER THE PUBLIC

This last tool isn't a mobile app, but it's one that can help you attract traffic to both your website and social media pages.

AnswerThePublic is a free online tool that helps business owners and online marketers determine which questions in their niche or industry the public most wants answered.

The benefit of using a tool like this one is that it can help you spot trends and hot topics. All you need to do is enter your chosen keyword and your country. You'll end up with a list of questions that you can use to create content. You'll know before you start writing that the topic you've chosen is one that people want to read about.



CONCLUSION

There are lots of tools out there that you can use to market your local business, but these are seven of the best. Use them to improve your local SEO, increase brand recognition, and connect with new and potential customers.



TOP LOCAL SEO FACTORS FOR 2017

It's a new year, and for many companies, it's time to take a look at their SEO strategies and figure out where they can improve. There's no question that local SEO is more important than ever before. 56% of all mobile searches are local, meaning that they include city names or other local information in the keywords used.

What does that mean for you as a local business owner? It means you need to be hyper-focused on maximizing your local SEO. It's the only way to make sure that local customers don't miss you when they search for you. Here are the top ways to connect locally and grow your business.





RESEARCH LOCAL KEYWORDS



One of the biggest mistakes local business owners make when building their websites is not optimizing for local keywords. As stated above, the majority of mobile searches include local keywords. Customers who are out and about search for local businesses. If they can't find yours, they'll visit one of your competitors instead.

You can use Google AdWords' Keyword Planner to find the best local keywords for your business. You should be using a combination of short and long-tail keywords for the best results.

OPTIMIZE YOUR META DATA



Have you optimized the meta data on your website for local search? Meta data includes all of the tags and alternative descriptions on your site. It also includes the meta description that displays on Google beneath the name of your page.

A lot of local companies don't give enough thought to their meta data. They miss out on opportunities to connect with their target audience because they don't bother using local keywords.

Now is a good time to review all of the meta data on your website and update it to include your chosen keywords. It's a change that probably won't take much time to make, but it can make a huge difference in your site's rank on Google.

OPTIMIZE YOUR CONTENT FOR LOCAL KEYWORDS



Another way to make the most of local SEO is to optimize each piece of content you publish for your local keywords. An Atlanta bakery might use keywords like:

- » Atlanta GA bakery
- » Bakery in Atlanta GA
- » Atlanta wedding bakery

When you optimize your content for your chosen keywords, it's important to keep the focus on quality. Google does not look kindly on websites that stuff their content with keywords. Make sure to use your keywords in important locations, such as your title, subheadings, tags, and in the first 100 words of your content.

A good rule of thumb is to aim for approximately 1% keyword usage. That means that for a one thousand word blog post, you would use your primary keyword 10 times. You can also use some secondary keywords. As long as the content is

relevant and highly readable, you'll reap the full benefits of your keywords.

MAKE YOUR NAP LISTINGS CONSISTENT



When was the last time you checked the consistency of your NAP listings online? A NAP listing is any listing where your company's name, address, and phone number appear.

All of your NAP listings must be identical if you want to optimize your business for local search. It might seem like a silly thing, but even something small like using Ave instead of Avenue in a listing can compromise your SEO and make it more difficult for customers to find you.

Review all of your NAP listings and contact any website that has your information listed incorrectly. You should also check all of the address listings you control, including those on your website and social media profiles.



OPTIMIZE YOUR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS PAGE



If you haven't already claimed your company's listing on Google My Business, you should make it a priority for 2017. Google My Business is a free site for business owners. You can use it to give your SEO a boost.

The first step is to verify your business by clicking here. Once you've done that, you should review the existing information and update it to reflect your proper NAP listing, business hours, and other relevant information. We also recommend adding photographs and using your local keywords in the image tags.

Everything you write on Google My Business should be optimized for local search. That means that your company description and everything else you post there must include local keywords. This information will improve your Google search rank and ensure that local customers are able to find you when they search your chosen keywords.

PRIVATE BLOG NETWORK LINKS



A private blog network, or PBN, is a collection of authority websites that you use to build links back to your primary business site.

If you've heard of PBNs, you may also have heard that link building with them is considered problematic in some SEO circles. The reason for that is that some marketers have made a cottage industry out of building low-quality sites.



A low-quality PBN is one that includes sites that contain "spun" content – content that's been slightly rewritten but is essentially a copy of existing content. Google frowns on that practice and has penalized sites that feature spun content.

The key to using a PBN is to make sure that you post only high-quality content. You can cover similar topics, but it's important not to copy or nearly copy what you have on your own site. Google will pick up on that and it can cost you in the long run.

Of course, there's an easier way to take advantage of the "link juice" that quality PBN links can pass on to your website. Hiring a Local SEO professional with an established link network will save you time, and future headaches because they've already done the hard part.

CONCLUSION

The key to making the most of your local SEO is to be consistent and persistent. Any time your company name appears online, you should be using local keywords and other SEO tools. The more consistent you are, the easier it will be for the customers who are most likely to buy from you to find you.

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