

## Pillar Content

Hello, this is Yaro. This topic is possibly the most important topic you are going to cover when it comes to successful blogging, or at least I think it is the most important. The two elements of successful blogging are content and marketing, which I talked about in the *Blog Profits Blueprint*. Today we are going to cover content and how to produce pillar content, which is the principle I introduced to you in the *Blog Profits Blueprint*, and we are going to elaborate on now.

Blogs essentially are means of distributing information and providing value to your readers. For you to have success as a blogger, you need to demonstrate value on a consistent basis. To do that, I recommend the principle of Pillar Content, or a Pillar Article. I say Pillar Content because it doesn't have to be written words. You can do more extensive alternative media formats, like video, audio and imagery to go along with words or instead of words—that still can be as effective as a pillar article. So, pillar content is a more relevant label for this sort of content.

I think you can understand the principle here. The “pillar” is the foundation for a successful blog. It's the reason people come to your blog. It's the reason they keep coming back, because they expect to have more pillars from you, more great content, and most importantly, it's why other people will link to you, bringing you the traffic in the first place. If you don't have that audience and those communication channels coming into your blog, it doesn't matter how good your content is, because no one is reading it. Your pillar content, while it is not technically a marketing tool, in a lot of ways is actually your marketing. It is the reason you get traffic in the first place. So, obviously, you want to nail this aspect of your blogging really well.

I know from the feedback I get when people have problems blogging that they don't understand why their content isn't pulling traffic and why their blog isn't taking off. There are a few things I want to go over here to help you avoid these common mistakes that most bloggers make that could keep you from really building a successful blog. It is really important that you read this carefully to be able to execute what I am talking about. If you don't get these principles nailed in your blog, no matter what I tell you to do, no matter how many techniques you use in marketing, you just won't get any traction. You need traction to build on your previous success, and to slowly build that traffic and start making income. So really, really pay attention to these principles.

Now, let's move straight into this. I'm assuming you've written some content already for you blog or you are about to, but you haven't necessarily had big success yet with really good content taking off and gaining traction, bringing in

lots of links and lots of new readers. You haven't hit a big communication channel as a result of one of your articles. You may not inherently understand what it takes to produce good content. Until you actually start blogging and producing good content, you won't really know what it was that you hit the nail on the head with in this case.

That's the beautiful thing about my experience with this. Once you've done it once, you realize, "Ah! I've scratched that itch that my readers have. I see they really have a need for information along these lines or information delivered in this format. So if I just keep doing more of this, I'm going to get more, similar results." And that's what most successful bloggers do: they will hit a really nice traffic vein, a really interesting topic, a really interesting medium of communication, and repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat. They build more traffic and more traffic and more traffic. That's exactly why things like the List Article, which is one of the Pillar Article concepts I mention in the *Blog Profits Blueprint*, took off and continues to take off. One of the most common recommendations you will get from anyone who is writing about successful blogging is still to write List Articles.

A List Article, just like it sounds like, is usually the Top 7 Somethings of Something. So, the Top 7 Tips to Boost Your Blog Traffic Beyond a Thousand Readers, Top 7 Mistakes Bloggers Make that Cause Them to Lose Their Readership, these are the sort of very standard article titles. The content is basically a very short list of dot points numbered 1 to 7 or whatever, that lists things in concise information presentation through dot points or numbered points. These are not paragraphs; these are not long articles. There's a reason these articles work so well: It's the ease of consumption of information. Remember, with the Internet, we are working with an audience that has a very short attention span, that are used to scanning documents, and that are used to reading pages within 3 seconds and moving on to the next page. That is why the List Article has become so popular; it can break through the short attention span and in a very quick amount of time, grab someone's attention, and they will finish reading the article. If you've entertained them, you've educated them; you've provided value to them; and they are likely to bookmark you or add your blog to their RSS feed reader, and, you've just captured a new reader.

If you had this huge, massive article (3,000-word block of text), it's harder for the average scanner to commit to reading that article. It works for some people to have a large article like that. Steve Pavlina's a great case. I'm a good case for this as well. I write some really large articles sometimes, even breaking the 3,000-word mark. I know I turn some people off with that, but my regular readers will stick with me. They will read my solid articles because they've come to expect that from me, so there is some real value in that. It's not necessarily the most effective means to communicate, but it's one way it can be done.

If you're still in your early days in the business of blogging and you don't have a loyal audience yet, you really need to do everything you can to capture people's naturally short attention spans. So, the List Article is a very effective tool. The List Article is a formula that's worked for many bloggers before, and it will work for you if you hit on a topic that your audience is interested in. It's not a guarantee, but in most cases it should work, especially if your information is valuable. It's a good format to use.

Like I mentioned in the *Blog Profits Blueprint*, the How-To Article is also a very good, basic, staple article. For example, if you can teach people how to do something, then that article will always remain in their minds as a fantastic tool to give to anyone who ever needs to learn how to do that specific thing. That's why How-To Articles are so effective as a Pillar Article concept as well. Really, if you could fill your blog with nothing but How-To's and List Articles, you'd probably do fantastically well, assuming your information is unique and valuable to your target audience.

I bring up those sorts of pillar concepts because if you have never had success with a big communication channel bringing in lots of traffic, then you've have to go out to other blogs, access what they did, and attempt to replicate their process. There is no need to re-invent the wheel; just take their concepts and apply it to your blog. The only area where you need to be creative is the actual content. The format remains the same—it's a List, it's a How-To, it's Definition piece, it's a Glossary, it's a lesson in a cantasia presentation, maybe it's a series of four articles that teaches you how to do something or is a deep-thinking piece that references your thoughts on something controversial in your industry. All these things are just formats to present your information. It's up to you to use these formats, which people really respond to well, and also to come up with really valuable information when you do use these formats to distribute your content.

I can give you these formats. I have done that and I will continue to do that. I will keep showing you examples of pillar articles. My blog is littered with them. I try to create a pillar with nearly every article I write. Some of them, of course, have performed better than others. I will do my best to point out the ones that have worked well and I will explain to you why, and maybe the one didn't work well, as we go through the whole *Blog Mastermind* course.

I need you to understand why you may not be succeeding today with your content. The likely reason is that you are doing one of several things: You may understand the concept of pillar articles, and you maybe producing Lists and How-To's, but the content within your Lists and your How-To's may not be valuable. You are either covering topics that are covered by other people and they are doing a better job of it than you are, or even if they are not doing a better job than you are, you are writing about topics that more popular or well-known bloggers are covering. You are not going to make a significant impact if you look

like a second-rate copycat to an already successful blogger, which again ties back into the need to find your own topic area and subdivide niches into niches so that you are really unique in the blogosphere and quite focused on what you are providing to an audience. Those are probably the main reasons you won't have success, despite the fact that you are using proven pillar concepts.

The other reason will be the other way around. The way you format your articles, the principles you use, and the type of English you use may be just not as compelling. This is really a copywriting issue. If your content is quite unique, original, and valuable, but it is not distributed in a sound format, then you will lose a lot of audience because you are not using the right triggers to catch their attention.

This is all about copywriting. Copywriting is a skill set that most people can learn, but it is a reasonably dynamic skill set, and it does take some training. I have done a little bit of training. I've read some books about the topic. But when it comes to something like writing a sales page or something else really important to me, I'll always get an established copywriter to write it for me.

In our case, though, we're talking about blog content creation. We are not going to outsource our blog articles to a copywriter. I'm sure that would be a very effective thing to do, if you had the financial resources or a friendship with a very good writer. If you had a copywriter review every single article you write before you post it to your blog, I'm sure it would do wonderful things for your traffic. There is nothing more powerful than a copywriter working their magic on your content. But I don't expect anyone reading this and truly interested in blogging will have those kinds of resources.

This is an 80/20 skill set. If you want to talk about copy in terms of studying how to become a better copywriter and blog article writer, you would spend 80% of the time (which gets you 80% of the results), learning the skill. This is clearly a very small part of your actual article; this is a case in which 5% of your article's *content* results in 80% of the traffic you are eventually see through the article. I'm talking about your article title. The title is by far the most important element of any blog article.

You should already know this if you you've listened to some of the bonus audios, in particular, the one I did with Brian Clark of Copyblogger.com. Brian blogs about this specific topic—how to write good copy for blogs. If you haven't done it yet, go to Copyblogger.com and read through all of his pillar articles, his how-to articles on how to write good headlines and compelling content. He has content on all aspects of copy. There's an area there on how to do good metaphors, heading and subheadings, creating curiosity, everything that goes into writing good copy for bloggers. If you adapted just a couple of the principles Brian teaches in those materials, you'll have a much stronger skill set on how to write

good copy than the average blogger does, and that's a big advantage in the blogosphere.

One of the main reasons most of the successful blogs can beat the other blogs is that they just have more compelling titles, which then lead to more compelling content. If you produce this compelling content and use the right kinds of titles over and over and over again, you will build a successful blog.

If you were to come to me with your blog and ask me to do a review and assess why it is your blog is not doing very well, I can almost guarantee you the number one reason would not be design; not what software you are using to run your blog; or how many people you've attracted with your comment marketing efforts. It would be your content. Your content would be lacking in some way, causing it to not pull in traffic. In most cases, you would likely be failing to really be original, remarkable, or not providing significant value.

It is a bit of an abstract topic, and I know for some of you it can be challenging to really put the reason why your content's not working while someone else's is. The best thing is to really study the effective content of other bloggers. When you find yourself reading other blogs, ask yourself, Why have you read this article from top to bottom? Why are you reading this from start to finish? There should be a very clear reason; a few subtle motivations and compelling triggers, whether it is, the types of words they use, or the very specific solutions to very specific problems they have that keeps you compelled and interested in their content.

These are principles you need to apply to your writing as well. You know your own market best. And hopefully, you are a customer of your own industry, so you know the feelings, desires, and the needs of the people you are trying to satisfy with your writing, so you can hit upon all the topics they really want to know about. Then, it's all just a matter of producing the content, using a powerful headline, powerful sub-headlines, how-to pillar article formats and list pillar article formats, and doing that over and over and over again.

Really take note when you hit a really good article. As soon as you get an article that gets a lot of traffic, assess what it is about it that worked, and keep it up, whether it's content creation or marketing efforts. I'll discuss marketing later, but certainly from the content creation part, assess what it is that seemed to really appeal to people. Check out the comments. That's one of the first places to get a good idea. If you can, get some specific feedback, because it's the readers who will really be able to tell you. They are the ones who actually enjoyed what you did. This can be as simple as leaving a comment after your own article, such as, "What did you really enjoy about this article?" Some people will be happy to tell you why they read your article.

Surveying your audience is by far the best way to find out what people respond well to. To give you an example, and this is an example of where surveying is really powerful, before creating this course you now are taking, *Blog Mastermind*, I had my *Blog Traffic Tips Newsletter*, which was and still is a very popular newsletter on how to grow your blog from zero to 1,000 daily readers. It's a free newsletter I write. It comes out roughly once a week. There's quite a back catalog there. If you signed up, you'd go through my series from the beginning. That's available from [Blogtrafficking.com](http://Blogtrafficking.com). Now, that newsletter, I reached about a year into publishing it. I had a readership of about 3,000 to 3,500 people when I decided to launch this *Blog Mastermind* program. Before I launched it, I asked my existing newsletter subscriber base what they wanted to see in a mentoring program, but more so, what were the most significant problems they were having with professional blogging, with blogging in general, and with how to make money from blogging

When I sent that e-mail, I received more than 120 replies from the readers. These were some solid replies. We're talking paragraph after paragraph. I asked five specific point questions. Some people answered very briefly with a few sentences, but there was a good chunk who wrote two or three paragraphs for each point, which made for some very compelling feedback for me. I've never gotten such good information about my target audience than I did when I sent out that one e-mail to my newsletter list. It told me what exact sticking points my readership was having problems with. It told me what level of skill set my readers had. It told me what sort of pricing they were willing to pay to join a mentoring program. It gave me a structure for an entire course in a lot of ways, because I could look through all the questions and create a sequence of topics that answered those most popular questions and those most difficult points that people are experiencing with their blogging. Really, what you are actually going through now in the *Blog Mastermind* program, and what's in the *Blog Profits Blueprint* is in a lot of ways influenced by what feedback I got when I sent out that one e-mail.

Obviously, this is the best way to find content that provides most value, because you are answering your audience's specific questions. You don't know those questions until you ask. As intuitive or as in tune with your marketplace as you may be, you don't know specifically until you actually ask someone what they have problems with.

Now, some of you don't have an audience yet, so you don't have anyone to ask yet. That's fair enough. You are going to have to run with your gut, your knowledge and your own experiences to try to find what your audience responds well to. This is a case of throwing things against the wall: testing different content ideas, seeing what topics people respond well to, and what you get no response to.

All this being said, you may not get an audience until you actually do marketing. There's a very good chance for most people that you won't have an established audience ready. All the lessons I give on marketing your blog goes hand-in-hand with everything I'm telling you with your content as well. But it's marketing that brings people to your content so you can then start conducting that research, getting some survey responses, or just getting any feedback whatsoever about your readership. However, that shouldn't stop you from starting off on the right foot and leading with pillar content from day one. Again, if you haven't read the *Blog Profits Blueprint*, please do so immediately. You will find six or seven structures regarding how to write pillar content and some perfect examples of what that actually is. You should be sitting down once a day and writing one of these pillar articles. That's a fantastic way to get a nice start to your blog.

You will know when you've hit some pillar content because of some very obvious reactions you get from your readership. The first thing is commenting. You'll notice a lot of comments or an unusually high amount of comments compared to the normal amount of comments you get. Now, if you are brand-new and have been getting no comments but suddenly you get three, four or five, then you've obviously hit upon a topic that's a little bit more powerful than the previous topics you were writing about. If you are already getting 20 comments a day and suddenly you hit 40 or 50, then again, it's all relative to your situation. You should be happy with any single jump you have and take that as an indication. Just never be too rigid with your assumptions.

Obviously, the other area where you will know if something is popular is if you have a lot of other blogs linking to your new article. If a really popular blog links to your article, that is a cause for celebration. You know you've hit upon a fantastic pillar concept in that case.

I enjoy doing some Internet research after I've produced a pillar article to see how many other blogs link to it, and how many other blogs are talking about it. Maybe you'll find it in forums. Obviously, you will get trackbacks sent to your blog if some other blogger writes on a topic specifically linking to your article. As your blog becomes more popular, this is something you could do almost on a daily basis. Every time you write a new article, there is a good chance there will be a handful of other bloggers who then go on to continue your ideas by writing their own articles. It's a really enjoyable process because, hey, who doesn't like seeing their work being discussed by other people on other blogs and other websites or in comments on your own website? It is one of the most enjoyable, intrinsic rewards you will ever get as a result of blogging when you see so many other people engaging in your content and really finding value in the ideas you present. That's a good sign, not just a warm-and-fuzzy feeling—it's a definite sign that you are gaining traction, hitting on topics people are interested in. And, of course, all this slowly leads to building a more successful blog and eventually

making more money as a result of the success you are enjoying in terms of traffic and producing pillar content.

One of the things I enjoy doing with my pillar content is creating a special repository for it, which is what I call an “Articles” page. This is an obvious thing to do with your blog because you want to demonstrate your best content in a separate page that is easy to find. Then, as you produce new content, your previous pillar articles will drop into your archives. While they still may be found from search engines and you may have people browsing through your archives if they are really, really, really getting into your blog, generally people only read the first page of Articles—your most recent content. You want to have a way to put your best content on display, especially as you produce more and more pillars over time.

This also is a good idea because it will help convince new readers who come to your blog for the first time that you are an established blogger, that you’ve done more than one good article, that they should subscribe to your RSS feed or bookmark your site and come back quite often because you are not a one-trick pony or a one-hit-wonder. You really can produce great content on a consistent basis, and they will see this and realize that it’s worth being a regular reader of your blog. Having an Articles page performs that role. They can go through and read just your top content.

I do this only with my pillar articles. I don’t put my news articles or my smaller articles on my Articles page because that would effectively just be a list of every single piece of content I have ever written. You really only want to put your best stuff on display. If all you did was write a paragraph linking to someone else’s article or regurgitating some specific news about your industry, that’s not really a pillar article. Pillar articles are significant, original content, and that’s the content you need to be putting in your Articles page for people to find when they come to your blog and have easy access to. It’s also a good idea just for research purposes, because some people will need to just find your previous content when they may have read it in the past and they remember it in the future as something they want to refer to or recommend to friends. I know people have done that with my content, because I still get comments on my old articles. Not as many as my new articles, obviously, but certainly any article that is currently in my Articles page will have a smattering of new comments each month because I have readers going through my Article page, looking through my older articles and still finding value in what I produced there.

I’m just going to wrap this up with a few final pointers on what it takes to produce pillar content from a more practical point of view. The mindset to creating pillar content is really more about getting into a habit, analyzing results of successful articles, and attempting to replicate that success on an ongoing basis. As long

as you are doing that, you have the right mindset to produce pillar content, and you will get rewards from it.

But there are a few other things from a practical standpoint that I would like to mention. I already discussed headlines as the number one point. That's always going to be the case, so work on that the most. Other things you can do to enhance your content as you're producing it are fairly obvious, but people just don't do it. It's quite surprising, because it really is simple to do. For example, if you find your article consists of long blocks of paragraph after paragraph, that's not easy for people to scan, and it's a little bit off-putting. Most people, if they see large blocks of text, will run away. They will click away from your page, which is not the outcome you want. So, you need to break down the thought process that your article produces and create headings and sub-headings to do that. That allows people to scan the article much more easily, and to feel a sense of progression by reading your article from heading to heading. It's a lot less scary.

That's the next point. It's also important to break up individual points of text, which is just a matter of using things like bold and italics, any highlighting text. You can use block quotes. If you are a Wordpress blogger, which you should be, you'll have the Block Quote function available to you within your Wordpress input box when you write articles. Bold, italics, and block quotes just help to, again, break up the pattern of long blocks of text, and they help you emphasize certain points. Again, this comes down to what it takes to copywrite successfully.. I'm not going to teach you a copywriting course, but if you ever get a chance to read a book or take a course in copywriting, I thoroughly recommend that. However, from a basic point of view, you can certainly develop skills and begin to intuitively choose what words or sentences you need to emphasize by using bold, italics, and block quotes to highlight these words and sentences.

Those simple techniques, headlines, sub-headlines, bold, italics, and block text, are all you really need to do in terms of formatting your document. Obviously, list points are important as well. I have already mentioned the list article format. Use dot points and numbered lists as many times as appropriate to break up the text again and make things easier to consume.

These are just tools you can use to present ideas and make the flow of information easier for your readers to consume. If you are not doing that right now, take the extra five minutes after you've finished writing an article to go through it and just break up any large paragraphs that just look like they are a little bit too scary to for people to read.

Also, just go ahead and make it a point to re-read your article as soon as you finish writing it. This may seem obvious to you, but this is something that some people just don't bother doing.

Spell checking is very easy to do, so there's really no reason to have misspelled words on your blog. Install the Google Toolbar. Go to Google, type in 'Google Toolbar,' and you will find a link to it. Put that on your browser. Google Toolbar includes a built-in spell checker. The Firefox browser also has one, but I recommend the Toolbar. When you finish writing an article, while it is still in that input box where you type your blog, just click Spell Check, and it will go through your article and highlight any words it thinks might be spelt wrong. That's a simple thing you can do to just slide that little extra fine-tooth comb over your writing so you are not putting out content that's not completely polished. You still might get grammar and spelling mistakes out the door (I know I do), but at least I know in most cases, 99% of my content is going out the door in a reasonably sound manner. While some people say that spelling really shouldn't have that much of an impact, there are people out there who are really, really picky about these things. The more people you can satisfy and the more professional you look, the better.

So, the spell check is another tool you can use. Go back and read your article at least once after you've written it, preferably twice. After you publish it, read it again. That's what I always do. I'll read it once after I've written it, publish it, and then read it again to see what it looks like live on my site and make sure I haven't forgotten anything.

All these things just provide a little boost to your content. It will always be the power of your headline and the power of your content that really dictates how well your articles do and whether an article becomes a pillar article or not. All these little extra steps you can do help bring in traffic from other sources as well. Remember, we are not talking just about raw readers who read your article the day it's published; we're talking about those who do searches and all the other traffic down the line—we're talking about attracting links from other bloggers, and there are all kinds of ways to try capture traffic with your content. The more avenues you have to do things, the more automated the whole process is, and the more habitually you do it, the better outcome you get from your blogging content.

I hope you have a better understanding now of what it takes to produce pillar content. Like I said before, it is a little bit of an abstract idea. You won't fully understand how a pillar article is produced until you've actually produced your first one. Really, when I say that, you have to get the rewards of a pillar article for it to be a pillar article. Just because you think you've produced a fantastic article, if you are not pulling in traffic from it, you haven't built some links from it. If you are a brand-new blog with just one or two links or one or two comments and are just noticing 10 to 50 new readers, that's enough to say that you've got your first pillar article. And, they will get better and better as you get more traffic.

But if you get nothing as a result of writing an article, and you look at it and think, “I thought this was a pillar article,” maybe you have to try something different. When you finally do hit that pillar article, it will become so much clearer for you, because you will understand what it takes. Essentially, we are attempting to define what is considered remarkable and of great value. You really can’t define that because we’re talking about perceptions of your readership, the general population, and audience. And all those things are constantly changing.

Everyone has a unique perception of what is remarkable because of their own circumstances, experiences, and what they enjoy. What is remarkable to one person won’t be remarkable to others. Your goal with pillar content is to produce something that is remarkable to large-enough chunk of the population, and certainly a large-enough chunk of the people in your specific topic area, your niche, that they will come, consume that topic, and spread the word about that topic. They will really enjoy it, get great value, and start to appreciate you, your blog, and all these wonderful outcomes as a result. It will fuel your traffic, and down the line that gives you the ability to make money through the monetization methods we’ll be using and you’ll be implementing on your blog.

I hope you understand what pillar content is. Next, we’ll discuss marketing. It goes hand-in-hand with pillar content.

This is Yaro Starak. I will catch you again soon.