

Can we protect our intellectual property from AI?

When you take a break...

I haven't blogged in nearly a year and a half, and now, as I've recommitted to blogging more regularly, I come to find out that my content can end up being used by AI. I've seen some content producers say that they've cut back on the amount of information they share on blogs and other social media channels because they are tired of seeing it stolen and used by AI without attribution or compensation.

Meanwhile, more and more businesses are embracing AI to produce content and other written materials, such as emails, social media posts, etc. In fact, not a day goes by that I don't get spam emails offering me AI training.

AI has changed our world

What is happening is that AI is going over everything in the public domain to answer queries and produce documents. It is also "learning" from your data and content.

AI may be taking over the world, but should it take over our intellectual property?

What differentiates my blog and any written material I produce is me—my experience, my creativity, my point of view. I choose how to write something, what to include, the angle it takes, and the tone it uses. It doesn't seem right that AI could take what makes my writing unique to me and use it to recreate content for others to use. What can be done?

You need to protect your content

It turns out as content producers, we now must protect our websites and blogs from AI bots. Although AI is not supposed to use material that is copyrighted (you do have a copyright on your website, don't you?), I am not sure that is stopping those bots.

It seems we have to go on the offensive and create actual obstacles for these bots. Dave Morelo provides several actions you can take in the article [How to Protect Your Website From AI Scraping](#). However, many of Morelo's suggestions also mean reducing the visibility of your content. This will also impact your website and blog as it will most likely reduce visits, and maybe impact your SEO.

The bottom line is that right now we are living in the wild world of AI, and it has consequences for those of us who produce original content. We'll have to find a balance between protecting our content and allowing people to find it.

Storytelling versus writing

I am a huge Scandi-noir fiction fan. Recently, I was reading (yet again) a mystery by an Icelandic author (in translation, of course). I noticed the writing was a bit stilted. Some of the phrases didn't sound right, and I can only imagine this was a translation/translator issue. Translating is hard work. You need to understand the language, obviously. And you also need to understand author's tone and intent so you can choose the best word or phrase when many will do. This is especially true with colloquial expressions that don't translate directly. And I am sure these colloquialisms, and some peculiarities of Icelandic culture didn't quite make it in the

translation. And yet there was a blurb on the book jacket by an American crime author, praising the Icelandic author, saying she was a “magnificent writer.” I doubt that the American read the work in the original Icelandic, so she had no way to judge the writing. What she was judging, and rightly so, was the *storytelling*.

Storytelling versus writing

Good storytelling is not the same as good writing, and neither is good writing also good storytelling. Writing and storytelling are two different, albeit related, skills.

Good storytelling pulls you in. It makes you want to know more.

Good writing is about knowing how to use language and its mechanics to communicate ideas clearly.

Can you have one without the other? Yes, you can. And I would argue that the best stories are also the best written.



Photo by Yaroslav Shuraev from Pexels

Think about your favorite book

If you've ever read a book with an intriguing plot, but with utilitarian writing, you understand that storytelling is a skill separate from writing. Books written by good storytellers who are mediocre writers are readable because you are interested in the story and you want to know more.

If you've ever read a book that's so well written, where the words sing, but there is no discernible plot or the story being told is boring, chances are you stopped reading or read the book super slowly. Beautiful writing alone does not make a readable book.

And I would bet that your favorite books, the ones you recommend or perhaps even re-read, are the ones that have a great story and are well written.

Here's the bottom line for content writers

For those of us who write any sort of content, focusing on *what* we are trying to say should come first. Then, we should think about *how* to say it. If we get both these elements—storytelling and writing—done right, we'll create content worth reading.

2 big digital marketing mistakes with easy fixes

It happened at least twice this week (and it's only Thursday of a short work week): I came across two different digital

marketing mistakes. One involves email marketing and the other involves content marketing. And I see different organizations making the same mistakes every single week.

These two digital marketing mistakes are common, and yet easily fixable. Take the time to make these fixes today, and I can promise you almost instant results.

Big digital marketing mistake #1: Sending an all-image/graphics email

Even though email marketing is one of the oldest and most useful forms of digital marketing, there are still lots of organizations that make the mistake of sending out emails that are completely image/graphics-based. I just got one last night. It was made up of several images that provided information about promotions at different locations. And I couldn't see any of the information.

The big problem with these emails is that in most email clients (Outlook, Gmail, etc.) you have to download images in order to see them. So, if your email is made up exclusively of images, your recipients will not see anything unless they specifically click on "download images." And unless your email subject line is extremely compelling and/or descriptive, your recipients may not take that extra step, and your email marketing campaign will be a waste.

Easy fix: Use images in email sparingly, and make sure the important information (i.e., dates, costs, location, etc.) is *text-based*.

Big digital marketing mistake #2: Not having a sharing mechanism on your content

Just this week, a lawyer I know shared a link to a blog post his firm created regarding GDPR (the new European data regulation that went into effect on May 25). I checked it out, and thought it would be useful to my network, but when I went

to share it, I found that there were no sharing buttons of any type. In 2018, more than ten years into Facebook and Twitter, and 15 years into LinkedIn, there is simply no excuse for not having sharing buttons. Sharing buttons allow your readers to easily share your content to their preferred social media network (mine are at the very bottom of this post if you'd like to share this content).

Social sharing is key to content marketing because it amplifies the reach of your blog post or article or microsite.

Easy fix: Add sharing buttons to your blog and to any other page on your website that a reader may want to share (for example, your contact page). There are many different plug-ins available to do this work for you (ShareThis, AddThis, etc.). You can also read Hubspots's useful cheat sheet: [How to Create Social Media Buttons for All the Top Social Networks](#). Or simply search "social sharing buttons."

Have you seen these digital marketing mistakes? Are you making these digital marketing mistakes? I am interested in your experiences. Please comment to let me know.

Two big problems muddling your message

When I do any copy editing and/or proofreading, I always come across two problems: wordiness and punctuation mistakes. These problems affect how clear your writing is and muddle your

message. That's because when readers have to read overlong, poorly punctuated sentences, filled with unnecessary words, they don't understand what you are trying to say.

Problem #1: Wordiness

Wordiness is using too many words to say what you mean.

How do you fix this problem?

- **Eliminate extra words and phrases**

When I was in grad school, one of my professors (the wonderful Jack Falla), had us write a press release, and then go back and eliminate ten words. The problem with this approach is that wordy people often think they need all the words they have written. They don't.

Today's Nonprofit Marketing Guide has a great post listing wordy phrases and their much more succinct alternatives. Read it [here](#).

- **Ask yourself if you are being redundant**

Phrases such as "basic fundamentals" are redundant.

- **Use active voice**

Active voice uses fewer words than passive voice. It's more direct.

Problem #2: Punctuation mistakes

Punctuation is a tool to make your sentences work better. You use a period to end a sentence and a comma to insert a pause. You use a colon to indicate something is following and a semicolon to separate two big ideas in one sentence. We also use parentheses to add extra information to a sentence and em dashes to set off words or phrases.

How do you fix this problem?

- **Learn how to use the comma properly**

The comma seems to trip lots of people up. Either they use it too much or not enough. And then there's the whole serial or Oxford comma debate. In any case, Grammar Book has some useful rules for comma usage.

- **Learn when to use the em dash**

Em dashes are not to be confused with the shorter en dashes and the even shorter dashes or hyphens. The Punctuation Guide has a good explanation of how to use em dashes.

- **Watch out for improper capitalization and apostrophes**

It's become epidemic lately – people are using capitalization to indicate importance. That's not how it works. Use caps at the beginning of a sentence, and to indicate proper names. The president may be important, but unless you are expressly referring to President Barack Obama, there's no need to capitalize the word alone.

Apostrophes are meant to convey possession. They do not make a word plural. Hamilton University calls the misuse of the apostrophe a deadly sin of writing. Check it out.

To be clear, be concise

Sometimes people are wordy because they don't have anything to say. That's a lack of message. No amount of removing redundancies will fix it. However, if you've written something and you are not sure whether it's communicating what you want it to say, make sure to eliminate wordiness and correct your punctuation. Chances are that being more concise (and precise with your punctuation) will clarify whatever it is you are trying to say.

If you need some help eliminating wordiness, fixing punctuation, and making your writing clearer, contact me!

Is sharing part of your content strategy?

I can't believe that in mid-2016 I am still complaining about this, but it happened to me again just this morning. I came across an interesting blog post about-get this-content strategy, and it had NO SHARING BUTTONS. None. Zilch. There was no easy way to share this content out short of me cutting and pasting the URL or using an extension such as Buffer (as Jonathan Rick helpfully pointed out on Twitter).

Think about the user

Here's the thing, content strategy is supposed to keep the "user experience" (or UX) in mind. That means, that you, the content strategist or website/blog owner, need to think about your site's visitors: How do they use your site? What do they need to do on your site? What do they want to learn about you? How can you make the process easy and intuitive *for them*?

It's about being social

Sharing buttons have been around for years. There are dozens of plugins that allow this functionality in WordPress, and I am sure in any other blogging platform. Not having sharing buttons means you do not want your content to be shared. Which means you do not understand the purpose of content or the social aspect of social media (blogs are social media).

It's not difficult: **Your content strategy needs to include an easy way to share content.** And by the way, sharing content also includes being able to email it or print it (don't get me started on how many recipe sites don't have this functionality).

Make sure it works

But it's not enough to stick a sharing plugin on your blog or website and call it a day. You have to check that it actually works. And that it is providing the right information. And that it is easy to find and use. (Just yesterday, I came across another blog post that I wanted to share, and it did have a sharing button, microscopic, but there, and guess what, it didn't work.)

You will find sharing (and printing) buttons at the bottom of this post. Please consider sharing this so that we can get all the non-sharers on board.

How watching TV can make you a better content marketer

As a huge fan of British mysteries, I am always reading books by authors such as Peter Robinson, Peter Lovesey, Ann Cleeves, and Ian Rankin. And I watch many British detective shows such as "DCI Banks," "Inspector Morse," "Lewis," and "Vera." Many of these shows are directly based on British authors' books ("Vera" is based on Ann Cleeves' Vera Stanhope series), or based on the characters developed by the authors (Colin Dexter's character Inspector Morse has inspired three TV shows: "Inspector Morse," "Lewis," and "Endeavour").

Last Friday, I finished reading Ann Cleeves' "Harbour Street" and coincidentally (weirdly, really), the "Vera" episode ("On Harbour Street") that aired Saturday on WETA UK was based on that very book! It was a great opportunity to see how the TV

adaptation of the book stacked up— what was the same, what was different.

The same

The main premise of the story was exactly the same: an older woman, Margaret, is stabbed on the Metro. Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope's sergeant, Joe Ashworth and his daughter are on the train when the dead woman is found. Vera investigates, leading her to a house on Harbour Street in the town of Mardle, where the murdered woman lived. Vera pursues the investigation by talking to several people who knew the victim. Most of the main characters are the same: Vera, Joe, Margaret, Kate, and Dee (Margaret's friend, an alcoholic prostitute).

Yet different

Other characters are different or even completely eliminated. For example, in the book, Vera has a constable named Holly, but in the TV adaptation, her name is Shep. Also, last names are different for many of the characters. The TV episode follows the same general plot as the book but eliminates a few side stories (e.g., a burning down of a building for insurance purposes), changes several details (e.g., Dee falls to her death in the TV show whereas she is stabbed in the book) and even has a different murderer (not going to give that away!). The action in the book takes place right before Christmas and it is cold, snowy and the roads are icy. In the TV adaptation, the action is set in what could be summer (or late spring, early fall).

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is essentially re-purposing content, that is, taking various types of informational material (for example: a how-to video, a news article) at your disposal, and using it in different ways to help market your product or advocate for your cause.

How do you re-purpose content?

When you re-purpose content, you are generally taking material that was produced for a certain purpose and/or medium (e.g., a long-form article in a trade publication) and you are adapting to a different purpose and/or medium (perhaps a blog post).

Screenwriters re-purpose content, right?

If you want to adapt or re-purpose content successfully, you can learn from what the “Vera” screenwriters did with “On Harbour Street.” Basically, they took a 376-page book and made it fit the time and story constraints of a one-and-a-half hour TV show. To achieve this, they concentrated on the main character, Vera (since she’s the title character of the TV series), while cutting out non-essential stories and extraneous characters. Perhaps because it is easier to film outside during the warmer months, the timing of the action was changed from winter to summer.

There are three steps you should follow when re-purposing content:

1. Know and understand the original material

- What is the essence of this content?
- What are the content’s most important points or key messages?

2. Understand the medium where the content is to be re-purposed.

- What are the length/time/space constraints?
- When is the content going to appear?
- Will you need graphics or better explanations?

3. Understand and know the audience

- Who will be accessing the content?
- How will they be accessing the content?

- How are they different or the same as the audience for the original content?
- Do they have special needs?

Bottom line: To re-purpose any type of content, you must be able to maintain the content's original meaning while making it relevant to new audiences and different media.

What does the customer have to know?

This weekend I noticed the mums in front of my house were looking a bit sad...all droopy and discolored. Apparently, they were in dire need of watering.



Sad mums

What do dying mums have to do with marketing communications? Let me tell you.

A couple of weeks ago, I bought these mums at my local farmer's market . I asked the farmer/vendor how long they would last. She told me that mums are hardy and should last through Thanksgiving, providing some color as the flowering annuals die.

But at the rate my mums were going, they wouldn't make it to Halloween. So this past Saturday during my weekly visit to the farmer's market I asked the vendor about the mums: Should I water them or would it be OK to wait until it rained on Sunday? She told me that I should most definitely water them as soon as I got home, *because mums need a lot of water.*

Well, then. I had made the incorrect assumption that because mums are hardy plants, it meant they needed little water. If, when I bought them, she had mentioned that mums should be watered frequently, I would have done so. But she hadn't and this is exactly the type of information I needed to know to help my plants survive.

Customers don't know what they don't know. Period.

It's your job as a marketing/communications person (let's include sales under marketing here) to make sure they have the information they need to use your product or service

appropriately and get the most out of it.

You are the expert...not the customer

Customers don't know your product or service as well as you do. You are the real-life expert on your product or service. You know what it does, how it does it and why.

So, ask yourself this one simple question:

What does the customer/ client have to know about my product or service?

Once you have the answer to this question, your content marketing, copywriting, and especially your customer/client interaction, will all be easier.

If you need help figuring out what your customers should know about your product or service, get in touch! I can help.

**Is content marketing
necessary to business**

success?

Content must be the buzziest term in the communications /marketing field right now. Everywhere you turn it seem you find discussions of content strategy and marketing. There are articles on how to create or re-purpose content. There are discussions on what is the best content and what channel is it ideally shared on.

But is content marketing absolutely necessary for you to achieve your business objectives?

What is content marketing exactly?

First let's start with a definition of content marketing. According to the Content Marketing Institute (I highly recommend you check it out for its excellent and useful information), content marketing is:

the practice of creating relevant and compelling content in a consistent fashion to a targeted buyer, focusing on all stages of the buying process, from brand awareness through to brand evangelism.

Basically, you create content in order to sell something (your ideas, your product, your service) or obtain something (support).

I agree wholeheartedly with the theory that you should be providing information for your potential customers or supporters to make informed decisions. I am a huge fan of blogs in particular as an easy way to create and share content.

But, what about those that don't "do" content

That said, how do you explain the success of a content strategist I know who doesn't even have a website, much less

“content”? Or the digital media expert who has so much work she hasn’t blogged in months? Or the public relations agency that last tweeted in 2012?

And then there are the many successful small businesses (e.g., plumbers, caterers, etc.) that may have websites but that don’t usually have the staff, budget or time to handle blogging, tweeting, creating infographics, etc.

Another type of lead generation

What do these non-content producers have in common? Positive word-of-mouth. These business thrive on referrals and generally do not rely on internet searches as their main source of leads. (As an aside, there are referrals that come in the form of online reviews, and this is a subset of search engine optimization that relies on local search.)



Whispers by coolio-claire
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Content is not always online

Here’s the other thing: content is not always online. Content—a fancy word for information—can be shared face-to-face, in person. What you say to others about your business helps to market your business. This is why we develop key messages and elevator pitches. This is why we attend networking events. This is why we host coffees and get-togethers.

Yes, content works to achieve business objectives

The bottom line is that content marketing works, but it is not always the online and social media versions that are the most successful.

What are your thoughts? How much content do you produce? Is content at the heart of your marketing strategy? Let me know in the comments

How high is your website's barrier to entry?

Recently, I came across an article about how the Jewish online magazine Tablet is dealing with comments. It has decided to charge a fee to allow people to comment in order to make it harder for trolls to post obnoxious (and often anti-Semitic) comments. But there is an unintended consequence, and that is that legitimate commenters will now be dissuaded from commenting as well. The barrier to entry may prove too high.

Have you ever thought about how a visitor interacts with your website? What does that person need to do to find what he or she is looking for? What information is crucial and how easy is it to access it?

If you have been seeing a low conversion rate on your website, a drop in visitors, or a high bounce rate, perhaps you need to examine whether you have created an unintended (and intangible) barrier to entry or have built a barrier to entry that is too high.

Many websites have barriers to entry. Some are easily “climbed” and some are like Mount Everest, impossible. Generally, these barriers include “mechanical” barriers such as subscription fees, sign up forms, or registration requirements. Some barriers are more subtle, intangible, but still make it hard for visitors to access your content.

Mechanical barriers: High, medium and low walls to climb

In an effort to generate revenue from online readers, newspapers have added online **subscription fees**. That’s a high barrier to entry, since visitors will not only have to sign up, but provide payment. Some websites require **registration**, generally your email and a password. That’s also a medium barrier to entry. Yet other websites splash a newsletter **sign-up** before you can read the content, but generally you can close that out making it a low barrier to entry.

There are good reasons to create these barriers. After all, you may want to grow your marketing database or get some insight into who is visiting your website, or like many newspapers, you are looking for a source of revenue.

Intangible barriers: Creating a psychological “wall”

But barriers are not just mechanical or even visible. Your barriers to entry may be intangible and psychological. By that I mean that your barriers are tripping visitors’ heads. For example, your **website navigation** may not be intuitive or clear and may make it hard for visitors to find what they are looking for.

Another hard-to-quantify barrier is the **language** that you choose to use on your website. Many tech and government websites are flush with jargon that is *nearly unintelligible*

to an outsider.

Some websites make it hard for visitors by having too much **content** or information to sort through. Have you ever landed on a page that made your eyes and head hurt from information overload (or worse, visual overload)? Then you probably know what I mean, and I bet you just went elsewhere.

How would you classify your website in terms of barrier to entry? High, medium or low? Is it what you want or are you unintentionally turning visitors away?

Two content issues (or why I no longer read Mashable)

Last week, for my eight-week summer challenge post, I challenged you to clean out your social media channels, such as your RSS feeds. I did some cleaning myself, and I finally removed Mashable from my feeds. It's been there for a long time but I haven't been reading it for ages, and just marking everything as read without so much as scanning it.

When I first started on Twitter several years ago, Mashable was *the* source for how-to information and stats about Twitter. If you wanted to understand social media, you had to read Mashable. But in the past year or so, Mashable has become a source for all sorts of news. As I write this on Tuesday morning, some of the headlines on the site include these:

"At Least 22 Civilians Were Killed in Ukraine Today"

“12 Simple Tweaks That Make Your Resume Easier to Review”

“10 Heroic Women of World War I”

Do you see anything about about social media? Well, perhaps I scroll through the home page I could find a couple of articles about social media, but they are lost in the morass of lifestyle, career and general news articles. Some of these wide-ranging articles are potentially very interesting (and shareable), but not what I subscribed to Mashable for. And, to make matters worse, Mashable’s feed was overwhelming. There were around 60 new articles each day.

So here are the two issues with Mashable’s feed:

1. Too much content

2. The “wrong” content

In fact, we see one or both issues crop up in what I consider ineffective content.

With the first issue, too much content, you are overwhelming your readers. You are giving them so much that they end up not reading any of it. For example, I see this happening with Inc. Magazine’s RSS feed. Every day, there are dozens of new articles. Too much.

With the second issue, the “wrong” content, you are not providing readers with the content they want or need. I see this happening a lot, especially for websites/blogs that usually put out business/marketing advice and that are now peppering this information with self-help and self-improvement tales. Now, I have absolutely nothing against self-improvement, but I don’t go to Marketing King John Doe to find out how to be happier or fitter.

There’s only one solution to these content issues and that is to respect your readers.

You don't want to overwhelm your readers, and you want to make sure to respect their time. Too much content makes it hard for them to figure out what is important, what they should read. You should further respect your readers by providing them with the information they want and need.

What do you think? Are you swimming in a sea of content and looking for the nearest island? Or are you finding just enough content and all of it relevant to you?