

Killer Flagship Content
*How To Create and Promote Truly
Compelling Blog Resources*

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Killer Flagship Content

What is Flagship Content?

Walk into a shopping mall and at the ends or in the corners are usually huge big-name stores. These are anchor units, the flagships of the mall. For many people they are a destination in their own right, or a big part of the decision process in choosing where to go. The smaller units fill in the gaps, gaining walk-by traffic as people move from one anchor to another or from an anchor to the food court. Attracting these big stores can make or break a mall, without them the customer numbers aren't as great and the smaller stores go elsewhere. But we still shop at the smaller stores and might spend more money there. Part of the appeal of anchor stores is psychological. Mall owners will do anything, including cash inducements, to keep the anchors.

So how can we apply this to professional blogging?

The lesson is more relevant to creating compelling blogs than it first seems. What is your blog known for? Is there anything that you could point to that your blog really owns? It could be a single post, a series of posts, an over-arching "message". Now think about your favourite blogs. I am sure you go back to these blogs because of good quality regularly updated content but is there also a reference or series that you can refer to again and again?

This is "flagship content". It is an effective way of creating a powerful blog property using a core of content that you build around. The post, series or "message" is added to and referred to repeatedly over time, increasing the original value and relevance and also keeping it fresh. While the main benefit is branding and educational value, there are other benefits I will describe later.

"..flagship has crossed over into common parlance, where it means the most important or leading member of a group. It has also come to be an adjective describing the most prominent or highly touted product, location, or service among those offered by a company."

-- Wikipedia

You might be wondering what I am getting at, after all many blogs do quite nicely without any of these things. BoingBoing for one example? Well my theory is not every blog needs anchor content but all blogs could benefit. If you are launching a new blog you should definitely consider creating Flagship Content as a priority.

I just quoted Wikipedia. People laugh about quoting Wikipedia, suggesting Wiki content is not to be trusted, yada yada. But people still do it like I just have. Why is that?

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People like resources they can refer to. We like **easy**. I could have done more research, found the person who coined the phrase, quoted a particular dictionary, etc. But I didn't. Wikipedia is familiar to my target audience (you) and had a good phrase that worked for me.

We don't want to be trawling search engines, if there is one good reference we will use it. Especially if we can keep turning to that same resource and get more value out of it. Wikipedia is my go-to resource for any number of questions. When more and more people reference the same resource it becomes viral and it becomes an authority. If your resource gets to that point your blog is elevated to a whole new level.

One way of looking at it is to think of Flagship Content is as the “go-to” resource for your niche. Just like Wikipedia is the lazy bloggers go-to reference for general research, your Flagship Content is the place everyone will link to when they think of your topic. When people visit your killer content and find it valuable, they will want to subscribe to your blog, sign up to your email list and come back again and again. And tell their friends. And buy your stuff.

If that sounds like a popular buzzword you might have heard, “Linkbait”, there are a couple of major differences.

Flagship Content versus Link Bait

First, Flagship Content is stuff you are proud to tell people about. Content that is so compelling it draws visitors like a magnet. A resource that people love to talk about, perfectly tuned to your audience. While you might find truly incredible resources that were created as link bait I think most people would agree a lot more link bait has been about creating more buzz than is necessarily deserved.

Secondly Link bait can be very much like attention seeking for the sake of it, just to attract attention and links. Flagship content is about long term value. Providing something truly useful and original that will stand the test of time. A concrete base that you can build your blog upon.

That all sounds good in theory but you might still want concrete examples to know this is really something worth doing. Let's take a look at what specific benefits Flagship Content can bring ...

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Why create Flagship Content?

The downside of course, as with most worthwhile endeavours, is this content is hard to produce. You need to put in the time and effort, and that is after thinking up a killer idea.

Yes, it is hard work. But it is worth it, worth it in so many ways. Just off the top of my head there are several excellent benefits including:

Fame - Put your blog on the map - As well as being all the more likely to get attention from the bookmarking sites and a torrent of traffic your blog name will get known.

Brand – Your blog gets known and *known for the right reasons* (quality content). It is far easier to get across all the great things your blog can do for people by *showing* rather than *telling*. Give people a great resource, demonstrate your value and expertise, get your blog known for doing good things.

SEO - Search engine performance - given prominence on your blog navigation and references in future posts promotes the post in the search engines, also this anchor content is more likely to be linked to by others.

Authority – there is so much value in being *the* source, tool, service or expert. Search engines love authorities as much as people do. When one resource stands out above the crowd it is that resource that gets all the attention, is seen as the go-to article and who's author gets media attention.

Visibility – Especially in more crowded niches it is difficult to stand out from the rest. Truly original and valuable flagship content can help you break through the noise. There is only space in peoples heads for one or two blogs in each category, make sure yours is number one choice every time.

Value – Some websites are liked. Others are loved. The most successful though are *needed*. Wouldn't it be great to create a blog people can't do without?

Longevity – short term traffic boosts are all well and good but Flagship Content brings the good stuff. Long term, consistent, quality visitors, without having to rely on baiting, trickery or fickle search results. These visitors are usually referred by other bloggers, pre-sold on what you have to offer.

Viral Appeal - something to recommend, something to remember, something to link to. Yes they could pass on your blog URL but anchor content gives people a "because".

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Marketability - on occasion you will need a "portfolio piece" - something representative of your blog or your work, pro blog gigs, book deals, media appearances, press releases You don't always want to use your most recent post for this. A great flagship can sell a blog or your writing skills far better than asking the person to subscribe and read a while.

Expansion into products - if you build up a good series or a well fleshed out post that can form the basis for workshops, training materials, book publishing ... it actually makes the job easier because you can add to it incrementally all the while building up feedback and tuning your effort to what works.

Convert Your Traffic – traffic isn't the only end point, if you are clever you can take these quality, pre-sold visitors and convert them into customers. They come, they see, they enjoy, they trust, they buy. Everyone's a winner! Even if you have nothing to sell you can get them to subscribe to your RSS and email list.

Traffic Conversion

That last point is an important one, enough that I think I should talk about it a bit more. This resource that we are talking about building is not just an end in itself but part of a bigger entity. The tip of your blog iceberg. While your content can and will bring in visitors the true value is in funnelling those visitors to a sales page, related content, a send-to-friend feature and *especially* your email and RSS subscription buttons.

Flagship Content can take your blog from being “interesting” to being a must-have bookmark or subscription. Your blog could be an entertaining stop-over or a recommended resource. Many blogs get the occasional random Digg, Slashdotting, etc, but how many of those thousands of visitors ever return or pass the link to their friends?

Start thinking about your content as small parts of a larger system. Each page the visitor lands on is a link in a chain taking them towards a destination. For many bloggers that destination is off the site via an ad click. This is fine but once your killer content is bringing in top quality visitors you might want to consider bigger ambitions than 2c clicks. You will have the draw and the repeat audience to achieve it.

Bottom line, traffic is no good if you have little of value to see. Having one or two great flagship destinations on your blog will give you something worth visiting and more importantly something to recommend to others.

All your promotion efforts without flagship content might be in vain. It is not enough for people to know *where* to visit, you need to give them a ***why***. Your Flagship Content is your ***why!***

OK, convinced you could benefit from creating a great resource? Let's get started thinking up ideas for your blogs killer Flagship Content ...

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Generating Flagship Content Ideas

You already have everything you need to create your Flagship Content. It just takes a bit of brainstorming. Granted you might not believe me right now and you might well be sat reading this with one eyebrow raised in mild disbelief. Stick with me.

Start at the beginning

First of all usually the idea for your blog comes first and the motivations and opportunities in your blog niche will inform what you do with it. *Something* made you want to create that killer walrus polishing blog. If that is the case you could have had in the back of your mind a mission to create *the* walrus web site to end all water-bound mammal hygiene resources.

In most cases you will have chosen a topic you know about quite well. You have a great deal of knowledge and experience to draw from. Go back to how you chose what you wanted to write about. Address what area you chose as your niche and research the subject area.

Your Flagship Content does not need to be perfect right away, nor does your Flagship always have to even be the same resource. Don't stress, just produce the best content you can, improve it as you go along and listen to feedback.

Beginners Advantage

The best bit is you don't need expertise necessarily, just make sure you address a real need. Actually thinking up the original idea is probably easiest for someone just starting out in a niche; as you learn you can record the lessons knowing it is all relevant for other beginners.

One way to do this is to keep a diary of sorts. Perhaps just a list of topics and questions, like your own FAQ, or maybe a journal. You could even blog it. As questions come to you and you answer them for your own benefit you are generating brilliant ideas for Flagship Content. Real-world problems and solutions are ideal for this. As I said before, address a real need.

My first breaks in writing came from the IT and Programming field. This happened almost by accident. As I learned new things, as you constantly need to do in IT, I wrote up the problem and solutions. It's my style to simplify things, especially needlessly complicated things. These articles attracted attention because of that. While others had more elegant, complete or perhaps better styled solutions people understood mine a little easier. Being able to communicate a concept is a key factor in something becoming viral; word of mouth requires being able to find the words.

You can be sure when you have just learned something valuable there will be someone just behind you on the learning curve who would be grateful for a simple explanation of your new-found knowledge.

But what if you are an old hand? Perhaps you have forgotten what it is to be a beginner in your particular field?

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Creating Expert Flagship Content

An experts advantage is obviously the greater depth of knowledge and experience to draw from. Not just ideas for topics but how these topics inter-relate, awareness of what is and is not critically important, ramifications of ideas and what ideas are soon to be obsolete and which are ever-green. A newbie to any subject has to rely on others for guidance, experts lead the way.

Many experts also have ready-made credibility. You can refer to qualifications, work experience, testimonials or perhaps you are well-known enough in your niche that no support for your credibility is necessary.

Still you might be struggling to think where you might find ideas for your own killer resource.

Just by being aware can bring ideas. Set yourself the task to generate possibilities then relax into your daily schedule. Over the course of a couple of days ideas will ferment and bubble to the surface. Perhaps a telephone call, an Instant Messenger chat, an email, something will spark inspiration?

Your daily blogging schedule will also help you to find resource ideas. In your RSS will be blogosphere conversations, read between the lines. What is important, what are people worrying about. How are people working, and what can you do to help people get there smarter, easier, and more effective.

Of course you will be generating ideas daily for blog posts. Look back over your archives. There is gold there if only you can see the nuggets shining out at you. Is there something there, maybe a series, or some interlinked posts, perhaps something you can expand upon?

Your audience will often tell you out of what you have produced so far that gave them most benefit. Look at your traffic and see where your visitors arrive, what they look at, what they return to. Analyse your in-bound links. What out of all your content do people link to. Do people talk about a specific item? Are phrases you coined being used in discussions outside your site? Monitor Technorati for any mention of you in quotes.

The text you are reading grew out of a post I wrote a while back that has been referred to over and over by others. Each time it was mentioned I would get follow-up questions. Those questions and my answers informed what needed to be added to create the resource you see.

Your audience is your best asset. I have said this over and over. If you don't already have an audience, borrow someone elses! Hmmm ... how can you do that? Let's see ...

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Engage Your Community to Create Killer Content

If you look around your niche you will see masses of raw material for your Flagship Content. It's all about knowing where to look. Luckily the place is usually pretty obvious. Where in your niche do people ask questions they really need answers to?

Most niches will have a forum, email discussion list, networking site, flickr discussion, usenet newsgroup and maybe even real-world meetings. If there isn't a forum that might be an opportunity for you but let's not get distracted. Communities form on-line around every subject imaginable.

While it is certainly an option to go in, grab some ideas, and dash back out to start writing, personally I wouldn't recommend this approach.

First of all that wouldn't be the most ethical thing for you to be doing. It probably is quite OK to use what you read for inspiration, providing you stop short of copy-paste-reword but on-line communities need give and take to thrive. The more people just take the worse off the web as a whole will be.

The main reason though why I would take an alternative approach is you will benefit far more by properly engaging in the community and becoming a full, productive, valuable member. Think about it. You become known, people trust what you write, they look for what else you have written on the subject and your answers are your own to use.

Take part in discussions and answer what questions you can. Answer the questions posed fully enough to satisfy the poster but feel free (and I would encourage you) to expand on your own blog. Themes, needs and trends will form, potential topics for your Flagship Content.

As an example take Digital Photography. Much has been written about Digital Photography, it's not a subject area easy to break into. Still on the forums questions arise, people answer them. Sometimes a simple Google search would have brought the correct satisfying answer, why do people still ask instead of spending time in the search engines?

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1. **Laziness** – if the first few results on Google do not seem exactly what you are looking for it is easy to just ask and hope someone will furnish you with a solution
2. **Confusion** – sometimes there are many answers – too many, which to believe? How to sort out the conflicting arguments?
3. **Vocabulary** – very common is the questioner, especially a newbie, does not have the right words to find the answer they are looking for. Experts write in their own language assuming everyone has access to the same terminology

What we really want

All three of these reasons provide you with an opportunity. They point the way for you to create a real stand-out and valuable resource even if at first glance the need is already satisfied. As busy web users we want

one trusted resource,
that fully answers the question,
in language we understand,
in a place we can easily find.

Let's take a look at some ideas you can use right now to create your own killer content ...

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10 Instant Flagship Content Ideas

Many of the following ideas could be used right now in any number of blogs. Some of them you might already have the beginnings right now and it could only be a matter of packaging.

For best results take the ideas and see how you can twist, combine, extend, enhance or embrace it to make it truly your own. The more unique your idea and the better implemented the more chance of success you will have.

Also keep in mind with each idea how well it fits into your blog, remember this content has to compliment and improve on the rest of your blog and form a foundation to build with not a replacement or distraction from it.

1. **Your biggest tip** - what one thing would you tell a newbie to your niche that will serve them best? What recommendations could you make to your peers to help them be better, more efficient, get superior results, save money, half their wasted time, be more fashionable, better looking, more popular, ...
2. **Vision** - do you have a vision for your niche? What should the niche be like in an ideal world? In the past authors have been able to attract considerable attention and fame by crafting a well-thought-out manifesto, just ask the “cluetrain” guys.
3. **Guides, How-To and Tutorials** - what steps or lessons do all new people need in your niche? Can you take a reader step by step through a process in pictorial or video form? People love to learn new skills, make things, save money with DIY projects, or just be entertained watching someone else do something cool.
4. **FAQs** - probably the easiest source AND content - a definitive FAQ can work extremely well. If questions are frequently asked then there is absolutely a need, so holding all the answers in one place will surely be a draw.
5. **Message** - it might be a political message, a certain point of view, or something more simple. Many of my favourite blogs have the message “anyone can do this”, many tutorials take the same position, including this one you are reading now ... obviously this needs to be backed up with the “how”.
6. **Research and Results** – ask your niche a burning question and compile the answers. Rinse and repeat. One of my past clients would receive millions of dollars worth of media exposure every year extremely cheaply by conducting a survey. The results were announced on national television news channels around the world, massive brand exposure that built and re-enforced authority.
7. **Jargon Buster** - many industries build up long dictionaries of jargon words, be the ultimate glossary. It is amazing how many links you will get just by having the best descriptions, interpretations and material. If you are feeling lazy, get your readers to contribute.

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8. **Product Database** - some sites have grown to prominence purely because of reader reviews, you don't necessarily even have to do the reviews yourself (great keywords for AdSense too!)
9. **Case Studies** – if you work in your niche, assuming you are successful, there should be many case studies you can draw on that will be a valuable education for your readers. Make a point of emphasising the lessons learned. Sometimes understanding how knowledge is and can be applied can be extremely useful to people learning something new. And of course it all helps show your authority and generate leads!
10. **Resource Round-up** – you don't have to produce all the raw content yourself, collecting together the best resources from your niche and linking from one place could be an extremely valuable asset.

Now you have read my list I am sure you will have some ideas. If not don't worry, your brain is now primed to think up your own great ideas but also to recognise a brilliant killer content formula when you see it. As you are surfing around you are bound to spot something somewhere that you can use as inspiration for your own Flagship resource.

Just remember to make it your own, something valuable, unique and remarkable.

Since we are on the subject anyway, let's discuss how to make sure your Flagship Content is a success shall we? ...

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Flagship Content Critical Success Factors

Your killer content will be your own, unique, valuable creation, but in order to be a success there are some features all Flagship Content resources need to have in common:

Be Remarkable – If you want to be remarked upon you need to be remarkable. Same old, me-too isn't going to cut it. Think how your content is going to be superior, more useful, in more depth, better researched, attractively presented, just plain *cooler* than anything else out there.

Magnetic Headlines – Spend good time creating the perfect headlines and link captions. You have seconds to convince your audience the content is worth looking at. Compel them onwards with a really effective title.

Easy to grasp – It will do you no good to have a woolly, befuddled confused mess. Be clear what your resource is about and communicate it succinctly.

Friendly URL – If your visitor can not copy and paste the URL into email, or tell someone over the phone, they will not be able to pass on word of mouth no matter how good it is or how much they would like to.

Immediate and obvious benefit – You have seconds to win over your reader, don't delay, get to the good stuff and send them away smiling.

Hype to a minimum – There is far too much BS floating around the blogosphere right now, the hype dial has been shifted up to 11. Counter that with real benefits plainly written.

Prominent placement – Don't hide your jewels, have it open where everyone can see it and link from everywhere, your homepage, your side bar, your about page, under each post, in your footer ... get the picture?

No barriers – This is not the time to put in password protection or a sign up page. Do all that once you have the reader high on your content, begging for just more hit.

Quality control – Yes I know, I can talk. Seriously though, grammar might not hold you back but every little piece of polish will help.

Just the start – Don't take the last point as a reason to never release your stuff into the wild. This is a journey, Flagship Content is a foundation, not the end. You can tweak this stuff, just don't publish anything *too* rough, OK?

Close the deal - Keep them while you have them – At the end of your resource give more links to related content, sell them on your subscription, show your registration page, even your search page, whatever, just don't leave your visitor dangling when they are primed and ready to sign up to whatever you have on offer.

Promoting Your Flagship Content

You need to get your content off the page into your readers head. Your readers need to know it is there, they need to consume and enjoy every last scrap of it and then they need to go out into the streets and the web singing its praises. Otherwise, what was the point?

Here are some key ways you can promote your content to give it the best chance of gaining attention and snowballing that popularity into a super-popular blog.

1. **Call to action** – wherever you can coax, prod, poke, encourage, engage, incentivise and push your reader into first reading your content then telling others about how great it is. It's not enough to say “here it is”. You must sell the reader on the benefits. What your content is about and most of all why they should read it. Then when they have read it why they should tell all their friends, family, enemies, local news outlet and town crier.

A good call to action will pay dividends so spend some time on it. Test alternatives. Try out options and beat your last attempt. You will want to use variations of your call to action everywhere so it had better be good. Bottom line, it needs to get the reader to do what you want *now*. Later becomes never, they need to feel the burning need to obey right this minute.

2. **Draw attention** – no point in spending all this time and effort to create something so cool then being shy about showing it off. Links are good, lots of links better, big-assed banner even better, big-assed banner and lots of links, now you are talking.
3. **Get the word out** - Tell your friends, inform other bloggers, mention it in forums and communities, email people, put out a press release even. I am not advocating spam. I'm talking about real communication, sincerely telling people who might be interested what real demonstrable benefit your content might have to their readers and what is in it for them. If you are on the level and stick within stated guidelines then many people will listen and drop you a link. Links can cascade, one mention from Darren Rowse, Techcrunch, BoingBoing could set you up with a massive increase in subscribers.
4. **Never miss an opportunity** – You need to mention your blog and your Flagship Content everywhere. Drop it into conversation. Email and forum signatures are a good place to start placing links. Set your instant messenger to show it off while you are at it. Put a line on your business cards. Use your call to action for maximum results.

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5. **Profile, Bio and Quotes** – Sometimes you get an opportunity to say more than just drop one line on the bottom of an email. In forum and networking site profiles put in a paragraph that not only says “I have a blog” but sell your Flagship Content, give a compelling reason for why they should click through and why it is so good. You will find not only do you get more traffic but you might just gain more forum friends and networking contacts by demonstrating your expertise so well. If another blogger or the media asks for a quote see if you can drop your content into the conversation somewhere “as explained more fully in my blog post series ...”, “you can read more about that ...”. When guest-posting on another blog, consider adding into your bio “author of ...”, “read more about ...”.
6. **Social Bookmarking** – Help readers bookmark you by adding the bookmarking widgets to your page. The best results come from having a fantastic headline and excellent content. You can submit to Digg etc yourself. *If you don't make a habit of it.* Yes you read right, you are well within acceptable practice to submit your own link because it is great content, not spam or Link Bait, Digg *wants* your great content.
7. **Share the link love** – While seemingly counter-intuitive there is a real benefit to this tip. Yes I am suggesting you link out and link often from your Flagship Content. Whaaat? Send traffic *away* in a list of suggestions for gaining more traffic? Daft as it sounds one of the ways people find out about resources is by the traffic coming to them *from* the resource. Or mentions of their own name in Technorati searches. It works, and it uses peoples natural behaviour to your advantage. When people get a link they are often more inclined to return the favour. Don't worry about search engines and reciprocal links, just do it.
8. **Reviews** – If another blogger is thinking of linking to you or mentioning your resource see if you can persuade them to do a review. You might gain some critical insight into how your resource might be improved, and possibly you could obtain some great ...
9. **Testimonials** – Sometimes people need a little bit of peer pressure to believe in something. Social proof of a resources validity and worth. Testimonials are a way to encourage someone to try out your content and also build authority.
10. **Advertise** – Once you have a call to action that works, know you are onto a winner, and hopefully seen some great results and a growing readership you might want to consider actually paying for advertising. You will know if the returns justify the expense but with Google Adwords or Text-Link-Ads you can try advertising without risking a fortune.

The best content in the world does nobody any good sat on a hard drive not being looked at. If you already have some traffic then this is a good start for seeding your Flagship Content into the web conciousness but you have to help it along its way to achieve your resources full potential. It's not going to promote itself without a bit of encouragement.

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Concluding Words

Just like the anchor stores in a mall, your Flagship Content draws in traffic but it is just the start of your relationship with a visitor, you need to follow up with consistent value. It is though the best to give a brilliant first impression.

Flagship Content gives your blog a core to build around, a kernel of a resource that you can grow and nourish over time. Each iteration will provide more and more value. This will protect you from falling foul of your competition and from the fickle mistress that is Google.

Like a magnet your killer resource will both draw attention and keep your visitors sticky like iron filings. The best resources become valuable day-to-day references. Stuff your niche will not want to be without. That is the holy grail.

When you have great Flagship Content you will get more word of mouth. As well as attracting attention, it gives people a reason to tell others why they should visit. They might even feel good telling people about it, it is something brilliant that “they” discovered.

Each time one person tells another your blog builds authority. You become more famous. Your competitors have to work that little harder to keep up.

Don't rest on your laurels though, make your hard work pay you back. Leverage your flagship, just when the reader is begging for more send them to subscribe to your blog without delay.

Just do it, Flagship Content could be the most rewarding effort you put into your blog since you launched it.

Talking about subscribing to blogs, if you liked this and you want to keep informed of updates and more blogging insights then you will want to subscribe to my blog at the following URL

<http://www.chrisg.com/subscribe/>

About Chris Garrett

Chris Garrett is a professional blogger, internet marketing consultant, author, amateur photographer and web development geek. He lives in the UK with his wife, daughter and two overweight moggies.

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