



The Guide to
Building Your Audience
With Quality Content



The Dangers of Renting an Audience

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Every business needs an audience to communicate the value of its products and services to, but building an organic following of prospective customers is a challenge for many businesses.

This means that when the need for marketing arises, many businesses elect to throw money at the issue in the form of outbound marketing methods; think posters, TV, and radio adverts – anything intended to reach an audience beyond your sphere of influence.

But is this really the best way to generate leads? At Prize Content, we recognise that there are two ways to generate leads through content marketing: by renting an audience and by earning one.

What is Renting an Audience?

Outbound marketing methods work by paying an established platform for temporary access to its audience. Whether it's an ad spot for radio and TV or a promoted post on social media, these avenues rely on borrowing someone else's audience for a limited period of time. Because of the short-lived and unreliable nature of this audience, we like to call this renting an audience.

When you rent an audience, your advert may be seen by many people. But the fact remains: they aren't your audience. They are, in fact, the audience of the platform holder. Renting an audience means your company is paying to momentarily capture the attention of someone else's audience. A short while later, when you stop paying for advertising, you have to give that audience back to its owner.

Relying on a Rented Audience is Dangerous

Relying solely on renting an audience is a risky approach for your business. When you rent an audience, you'll get what you paid for: eyes on your ads. But, as with all rentals, you eventually have to give that audience back. When your campaign is over, any missed leads will disappear with it, leaving you back at square one.

Renting is expensive

The longevity of the audience isn't renting's only weakness. To maintain the audience through traditional marketing methods, your company must continue to fund these activities. That means pausing your paid marketing won't just slow the momentum of your brand – it will stop it dead in its tracks. The need to maintain this rented audience can result in your business spending eye-watering

amounts to continue these marketing activities.

High-pressure, High-stress

Another fault in the rented audience model is the efficacy of the adverts. Renting an audience does not guarantee improved sales figures or increased income yet, due to the heavy financial burden of funding your marketing, there is increased pressure to convert that audience into paying customers.

There is a time and a place when renting an audience makes sense, which we'll talk about in a later post. But in most scenarios, your business needs another option.

Earning Your Audience

The alternative to renting your audience is organically building an invested audience that follows your channels directly. How? Through consistent, quality content marketing.

Audiences have grown tired of paid-for advertising. Every day, consumers are exposed to an untold number of adverts. Whether they use an ad blocker on digital devices or have developed a subconscious ad blocker in their minds, consumers have simply become accustomed to tuning out all but the most compelling of adverts.

Quality content marketing is not

presented in the style of an advert. It is authentic, valuable content that your target audience sincerely wants to engage with. When your audience has something to gain from your content, you don't need to trick them into reading it; they'll do it because they want to.

That's what we call earning your audience.

The Benefits of an Earned Audience

An earned audience is with you for the long haul. Unlike a rented audience, they won't drop off after the latest campaign ends. Instead, they'll hang around, giving you the opportunity to convert them over time.

As you work to build your audience, your business will benefit in a number of ways.

As your library of content grows, it becomes a source of credibility for your company. The content exhibits your industry knowledge and expertise, which can be enough to convert a lead into a customer.

Additionally, the value of your content marketing encourages existing customers to remain loyal to your brand, rather than looking elsewhere.

Next: How to Earn an Audience

How to Earn an Audience

An audience is a powerful tool for a business. Comprising existing customers, potential leads, and even people with just a passing interest, this audience is the prime target for marketing campaigns and sales drives.

But what do you do if your company doesn't have an audience? Well, we've previously discussed the dangers of relying on renting an audience through paid advertising, and we wouldn't recommend following that strategy. The alternative is to earn an audience, which might not be as hard or as expensive as you think.

What is Earning an Audience?

Through paid marketing and advertising campaigns, businesses gain access to a temporary audience owned by someone else. When the business stops funding their marketing activity, this rented audience is no longer exposed to the campaign and is returned to its owner. That is why we call this renting an audience.

Earning an audience involves more than just paying for exposure and a proliferation of advertisements. It means establishing and nurturing an

audience by producing something valuable to them.

In contrast to a rented audience, an earned audience is one that is developed through non-financial means, such as sharing actionable knowledge, offering useful advice, and being perceived as a thought leader. The people who engage with your company from this do so at their own will after developing an organic connection, rather than being influenced by paid advertisements.

Why Earn an Audience?

Many businesses are reluctant to try earning an audience due to the effort required. However, an earned audience is the pinnacle for any company, and the initial time investment is quickly rewarded. Here's why:

Loyalty

In general, consumers are fickle. They often follow the crowd or chase the lowest prices, trends which led to Forbes proclaiming in 2016 that brand loyalty was dead. While many businesses are competing for bought or rented audiences, an earned audience self-selects your company — a statement of loyalty in itself.

The initial connection they have with your brand will stay with them, and if they are nurtured correctly during their time as your customer, they are likely to return again and again.

Pre-qualified Leads

As part of the sales process, any lead generated should be qualified to determine if their interest is likely to result in a sale. This is a time-consuming and potentially costly exercise. But, when it comes to earned audiences, every lead is pre-qualified. These potential customers have already engaged with your company and have shown interest in your offering, making them a quality lead immediately.

A Cost-effective Strategy

Unlike audiences that have been attracted by expensive marketing and advertising campaigns, earned audiences do not come at a premium. Their connection to your brand is an emotional one based on trust earned through value offered, not engineered interest or eye-catching designs. What's more, as quality leads, people in the earned audience are also far more likely to make a purchase, further improving their fiscal value.

How to Earn an Audience

Now you know what earning an audience means, and all the benefits that come with it, you want to know how to do it, right? Well, don't worry

— we're here to tell you.

The key to earning an audience is offering something of value and building a connection. This might be advice, guidance, insight, free resources, technical information — anything that your target market would find useful. The vehicle to delivering these valuable commodities is content.

Through unique, engaging, and valuable content, you can connect with your target market and elicit certain responses, including:

- Trust
- Admiration
- Positive Sentiment
- Respect
- A Desire to be Associated with Your Brand

These emotions drive people to follow and interact with your company. The perception of your brand is also a significant factor in consumer decision-making, and consistently delivering valuable content marketing is a fantastic way to improve external opinions of your company.

Next: How to Retain a Following

How to Retain a Consumer Following

Establishing a consumer base filled with people who follow and associate with your brand is essential for any company. But what sets the most successful businesses apart is their ability to keep those consumers interested over time, following your brand and ultimately turning them into paying customers.

Retaining a following isn't easy, and there are many things to consider if you are to do so effectively. Here are just a few things to keep in mind:

Deliver Memorable Customer Experiences

Nowadays, the consumer's expectation of the experience your company will take them on is higher than ever before.

No one likes to feel ignored, so maintaining contact with your followers, whether they have become a customer or not, will make sure they remain engaged.

Convincing social proof is one of the biggest factors in influencing consumers to buy your product or service. That means you need to deliver an experience that your followers and customers will want to share positively with others. If you don't, you'll go unheard - or worse, your reputation could be damaged with the details of negative customer experiences.

Offer Valuable Content

Who doesn't love getting something for nothing? Well, we know who definitely does — consumers!

They are always on the lookout for valuable information and insight, and when they find it in the shape of free content, it's not something they forget in a hurry. In fact, when consumers find a company that provides valuable content free of charge, they will return time and time again to find out what else they have to offer.

Regularly delivering valuable content to consumers, most of whom are not existing customers, is how you establish a consumer following and earn your audience. So, what does valuable content look like? Well, the specific theme of your content will differ depending on the industry you are in. However, the overall aim is no different whether you are an emergency plumber or an accountancy firm: your content needs to be valuable to your consumer following.

You can ensure consumers find value in your work by filling your content with:

- Insights into the industry.
- Advice on common problems.

- Free resources or templates.
- Partial examples of your work.
- Answers to frequently asked questions.

When it comes to defining the specifics of your content, it is beneficial to have a comprehensive understanding of consumers; and most importantly what their problems and challenges are. By helping to resolve their problems — whether through advice, instructions, or resources — your content immediately holds undeniable value.

Consistency is Key

Without consistency, your content marketing efforts will fail to retain your consumer following. In fact, a lack of consistency has the potential to do the exact opposite, convincing consumers that you are unreliable

The meaning of consistency in your content marketing is two-fold: being consistent in the quality of your content, and being consistent in the publishing of your content.

Every post your company publishes should meet the same high standards as the one preceding it: faultless grammar and spelling, a recognisable and reliable tone of voice, and real consumer value.

When it comes to consistency in publishing, you should establish a sustainable schedule for the release of

your content. Whether you choose to publish every two days, every week, every fortnight, or every month, consumers must know exactly when your company is releasing new content. Achieving consistency across the board is challenging, but doesn't have to be as painful as you might imagine. The most effective means of ensuring consistency is creating and following an editorial calendar.

Your editorial calendar will be filled with ideas for the topic of your content and also dictate when the content needs to be drafted and released. With this long-term plan in mind, you have enough notice to create quality content without the pressure of looming deadlines, as well as a schedule that leaves no excuses for missing publication dates.

Possessing a loyal consumer following is a great source of power for a business. It is a readymade source of leads that can be carefully nurtured and moved through the sales funnel. Though they may not be customers now, when they need your product or service, yours is the first company they will turn to. Your followers will also often act as advocates for your brand, recommending you to others, which results in the natural growth of your following.

Next: Produce Content Consumers Trust

Produce Content Consumers Trust

Now more than ever, gaining the trust of consumers is a strategic goal for businesses.

Why? Because trust is a determining factor for consumers when it comes to making purchase decisions. This was evidenced by research published in 2018 by SurveyMonkey, which showed that trust plays a role in the decision-making of 89% of UK consumers when making a big purchase.

As the impact of consumer trust grows, the efficacy of adverts wanes. For many years, advertising has been the go-to strategy for attracting and converting. But, recent statistics suggest its influence is decreasing. SurveyMonkey's research showed that 49% of UK consumers say that advertisements have not led to their most recent big purchases.

The advertising model also has to deal with an increasing number of avoidance methods being employed by consumers. 2019 research by Edelman reported that almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents used at least one advertising avoidance strategy, such as ad blocking (48%), changing media habits to see fewer ads (47%), or paying for streaming services (38%).

If advertising is no longer the driving force

behind decision-making it once was, **how do businesses gain the trust of consumers?**

Well, research released by Mention-Me in 2018 revealed that 71% of consumers prefer to discover brands for themselves, rather than being subject to advertising. If your business wants to gain the confidence of consumers, it needs to reach them organically, and content marketing is the perfect way to do just that.

Now, you can't just produce content and expect consumers to immediately associate with your brand. You need to produce content consumers trust. Here's how.

Focus on Conversations, Not Conversions

Yes, the end goal of your marketing activity is conversions; that goes without saying. And we mean it should literally go without saying.

Too often, businesses who substitute their usual advertising campaigns for content marketing treat their content as long adverts with more words. These conversion-focused pieces, produced by the company itself, are usually filled with a combination of shameless product plugs, self-praise, and internal

reflection. The result? A huge turn-off for consumers.

Think of it like this: if you had a friend who only spoke to you when they needed something, you would grow to embrace their presence with a feeling of distrust. On the other hand, if you had a friend who discussed your issues, offered advice, and generally helped you out, you would inherently trust them.

Make sure your content is the friend you'd like to have.

Your content marketing should be about conversations, not conversions. Connecting with consumers will help you to build relationships. Over time, your content helps to build trust within these relationships and, eventually, convert the consumers into customers.

Valuable Content is Trustworthy

Every product or service offers a solution to a common problem. If they didn't, there would be no demand, no market, and no money to be made. Take a moment to think about the problems your customers face every day and the reasons they need your product or service.

As an expert in your industry, you know how to resolve these problems. Consider, then, how valuable it would be for consumers to have the same

level of knowledge. If you use content marketing to share your expertise with consumers and offer them useful solutions that eliminate the issues that keep them up at night, they will trust your content, and they will trust you.

Write Shareable, Searchable Content

As we mentioned earlier, research demonstrates that 71% of consumers prefer to find businesses for themselves, rather than being influenced by advertising.

Now, there are two common methods of consumers discovering companies without advertisements; word of mouth (or recommendation) and internet searches. For your content to make use of these channels, it should be shareable and searchable.

Making sure your content is shareable will not be a problem if you heed our advice in the previous section.

When a consumer finds your content valuable, the chances are they will share it on social media, or recommend it to a friend or family member. Having discovered your content through a recommendation, the majority of consumers will immediately have a level of trust in your company.

If consumers trust content that is shared with them, then they definitely

trust content they find themselves. The most effective way to help consumers find your content themselves is to make it searchable. At this point, you're probably already thinking about SEO (search engine optimisation), and you'd be right to do so. However, SEO is such a broad topic that an in-depth analysis requires an entirely separate guide.

Our advice on searchable content is to write content that provides answers to common questions and, as referred to earlier, solutions to widespread problems. Search engines are usually the first place consumers go for

answers to their questions. The higher the number of people who ask a search engine a question that your content answers, the more likely it is that your writing will be found. If your solutions and answers are effective, the seeds of trust have been sown.

Content that avoids a salesperson-like approach, embraces conversation, represents real value to consumers, and is both shareable and searchable is the holy grail. When you combine these key factors in a piece of writing, it will be trusted by consumers far and wide.



Next: When to Rent an Audience

When to Rent an Audience

You read earlier in this guide about the dangers of relying solely on renting an audience. Although there are pitfalls to this marketing tactic, there are some situations where renting an audience is a productive and worthwhile strategy. To finish up this guide, we've outlined some of them for you below.

When You Need Immediate Results

Unlike organic marketing methods, such as blog posts and unpaid social media activity, paid marketing affords you immediate access to an audience. The fact that the audience is someone else's and doesn't belong to you is irrelevant if immediate results are what you are looking for.

Earning an audience takes time, with content having a longer gestation period. While usefully informative blog posts and well-run social media accounts will help you attract an audience over time, paid marketing delivers more instantaneous results.

If you are willing to pay the fee and sacrifice long-term consistency for short-term gain, then a paid marketing campaign will give you the quick results you need.

When You Need Exposure, Fast

If there's one situation when renting an audience is the perfect tactic, it's when your company needs fast, widespread exposure.

Paid advertisements placed in strategic locations will maximise the audience made aware of your business through the campaign. This might mean buying static adverts in places with heavy footfall, or designing paid social media campaigns to achieve the largest and most extensive reach possible.

Requiring swift exposure also means you are faced with a lack of time to develop a comprehensive plan. The process of building a reputation and earning an audience takes a lot of time, effort, and planning. When you are restricted in your ability to put together a comprehensive plan and strategy, renting an audience is the best option.

Paid-for marketing campaigns are a lot easier to plan and coordinate. In the space of just a few hours, you can produce printed marketing materials, design a website banner, or purchase targeted online advertising. The

entire plan can be created and actioned in just a single afternoon.

When You're Targeting a Specific Audience

Whether your company offers products and services that appeal to a niche market, or you have a very detailed and specific understanding of your primary audience, getting your message directly to them will significantly improve the results of your campaign.

Ensuring your most likely customers consume your organic marketing is a challenge, which is one reason why earning your audience takes time. In contrast, there are systems in place that make hitting your optimal audience that much easier when kickstarting a paid campaign.

Using PPC platforms like Facebook allows you to refine your target prospects with a mind-blowing variety of demographics and psychographics, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Occupation
- Relationship Status
- Income
- Education
- Interests

- Hobbies

With such powerful and pinpoint targeting possible, you can put your campaign in front of your ideal customer no matter how particular, niche, or specific they may be.

To make sure you get the best results from your next campaign, work with the Prize Content team. We specialise in creating marketing and communication campaigns perfectly suited to your company and designed specifically to achieve your key aims. Whether that means renting an audience or earning one, we can deliver the results you are looking for. ■



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Thanks for Reading!

We hope you found this guide useful.

If you did, give us a shout-out [@Prize_Content!](#)

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