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Dear Friend,

When people talk about putting something together, you often hear them mention "building blocks." In putting together an article (or story), however, I think the analogy of a puzzle is better.

With building blocks, it's important to stack them up in just the right order (as in smaller blocks going on top of larger ones, and balancing them all just right). With a puzzle, it doesn't really matter which piece you start with. Some people prefer to start at the edges, some start in the middle. Either way, the puzzle comes together just fine.

In the same way, there's a variety of ways to write an article. Some start at the beginning, some at the end. You just need to make sure you have all the information in one place before you start!

In this issue, I'll help you figure out which four "pieces" you need to include in all of your articles - whether you or someone else is writing them.

Filling in the Holes with the Right Pieces

by Chris Wilson

Do you remember the first time you wrote a report for school? Where did you start?

Didn't you have to do some research first - like looking up facts about the country you were writing about, or finding pictures you could use to illustrate your report?



Figuring out which pieces fit best in your puzzle (aka "article") will make a huge difference in your content marketing.

Those were pieces of your puzzle.

When it came time to write, you may have tried starting at the beginning, but then decided it was easier to write a section in the middle first.

Ask any professional writer, whether s/he writes books or marketing copy, and you'll find that each of them does it differently.

Headline

Typically, I don't consider this piece as one that needs to be written until *AFTER* the article is done. But not according to a post I saw at Copyblogger.com, which said you should write the headline before writing anything else.

I know that with book titles (the equivalent of headlines with articles), the wording is considered so important that the publisher is usually the one who chooses the wording, with maybe a little input from the author.

I remember in the movie [Julie & Julia](#) that both the publisher and Julia Child went through a lot of possibilities before settling on [Mastering the Art of French Cooking](#) for Julia's first cookbook. (By the way, seeing all the rave reviews about this book on Amazon makes me want to take a look at the book myself!)

Hook

The second puzzle piece that needs to show up in your article is the "hook" - information that grabs a reader's attention. (In journalism and copywriting, this is usually called a "lead.")

A piece of dialogue, a story excerpt (anecdote), a shocking fact ... these are just some examples of writing that make great lead-ins to articles that immediately capture one's attention. You could also ask a question, share a quote, or state something so outrageous that people can't help but read on.

Body

This third piece is where the bulk of your article lies - the core information you're trying to share, complete with transitions and subheads and large "chunks" of material that convey the message you're trying to relay.

News stories are always written using the "inverted pyramid" style: who, what, where, when, and why must all appear in the first one or two paragraphs. That way, if a news editor needs to cut part of a story out (which usually means deleting the last several paragraphs), the main message won't be lost.

Feature articles flow a little more naturally (one reason I always preferred writing features over news stories). Generally, these types of articles fall into one of six categories:

1. **How-to** - A series of steps that explain how to do something. Very popular with those looking for quick answers.
2. **Round-up** - Another popular format that involves getting quotes from several different people on one topic. Examples: "Why I became an entrepreneur" - answered by five small business owners. "Who was the most influential person in your life?" - answered by 10 celebrities.
3. **List** - This format is used when several items are similar, requiring just a brief description for each. These items are usually organized with bullets or numbers. Examples: "12 Best Italian Restaurants in New York City," "5 Tips on Organizing Your Office Space," and "8 Health Problems to Watch for in Your Pet."
4. **Interview** - Obviously, this involves talking to someone on a particular topic. Subject matter experts (SMEs) and celebrities are among those most commonly approached for this type of article.
5. **Inspirational** - Personal stories and essays can sometimes be turned into motivational articles that can, in turn, be used in your marketing. If done properly, these types of articles can be very effective. If you're in the habit of posting personal experiences to a blog, these can be a great resource.
6. **Review** - This type of article usually focuses on at least three different brands or products. The article needs to be objective, listing the pros and cons of each item.

When figuring out which types of articles are best for your own company's content marketing, try to include a good mix of the categories I mentioned above. Variety will hold people's interest and keep them coming back to your website (or you) to learn more.

Close

The fourth puzzle piece wraps up the article. Often, this part refers back to the "lead" or "hook." Other types of conclusions could be a summary statement, an anecdote, a final quote, or a "call to action."

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Listed below are some resources that explain the "puzzle pieces" I mentioned above a little better. A couple of these resources contain several additional ideas for articles, too.

RESOURCES

[*You Can Write for Magazines*](#) by Greg Daugherty. With over 20 years in the magazine business, the author of this book also sold hundreds of articles as a freelancer. He devotes entire chapters to different types of articles, including "How to Write How-to Articles" and "Interviews that Get People Talking." Another chapter - "The Secrets of Winning Leads" - gives in-depth info on how to fill in this all-important piece of your puzzle.

[*The 30-Minute Writer*](#) by Connie Emerson. If finding the time to write articles is a challenge for you, you're going to love this book. Emerson shows you, based on her own experience, how to make the most of limited periods of time. One chapter - "Itty Bitty Stories" - explains how to write anecdotes (mini-versions of stories) in record time. This type of writing can later be transformed into blog posts and/or longer articles for your content marketing.

["7 Fantastic Resources for Great Content Marketing Ideas"](#) by Jason Miller. Posted on Zoomerang.com two weeks ago, this blog post offers seven different ways business owners can find ideas for marketing content to use on their websites and in articles. It also does a good job of explaining why "custom content" is so important to any type of marketing you do.

"According to a recent study by the [Custom Content Council](#)," says Miller, "73% of consumers prefer to get their information about an organization in articles rather than advertisements."

To your success,



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