

The Content Shareability Formula

There's no website that couldn't benefit from more social media traffic and every blogger, business and site owner is interested in creating pages and content that get more social shares.

Especially for magazine style websites (as discussed in the Authority Magazine System webinar), getting social media traffic is an essential component to making it all work.

The "Good Content" Fallacy

There's a strong and very common misconception among bloggers and marketers that what you need to get more shares is to create "good content".

More specifically, most of us have this idea of good content being, big, epic, value-packed content. A large post with more information and more content is better than a short post, right?

Part of the problem is also when SEO advice and social media advice get mixed up. There is indeed a lot of data that suggest longer content tends to rank above shorter content, so from the point of view of optimizing for search traffic, the longer = better concept makes sense. But that doesn't mean longer content is always better or that we can combine search engine optimization and social sharing optimization into one thing, just by creating bigger, longer posts.

None of this is to say that good content or long, in-depth posts are a bad thing. It's just important to understand that **the quality and length of a post alone doesn't determine its shareability.** When you're creating content with the goal of getting more social shares and traffic, it pays to know what really matters... which brings us to the formula:

The Formula

The Content Shareability Formula is:

$$\frac{\text{Emotional Impact} + \text{Status Effect}}{\text{Cost of Consumption}}$$

Let's take a closer look at what the terms mean:

Emotional Impact

How does the content make your readers feel? And how strong is the feeling? This determines the emotional impact of a piece of content.

Status Effect

How will sharing the piece of content affect the sharer's status? Will it make them look cool, clever or in the know? Will there be any negative connotations for the sharer? All humans are very aware of their status and it is called *social* media, after all. The more a visitor feels like sharing a piece of content will improve their status, the more likely they are to share.

Cost of Consumption

How long does it take to get the benefit out of the content? Is it a simple image, a short video or a long post? The more time and effort it takes to read and understand a piece of content and the more abstract the benefit, the higher the cost of consumption.

Examples

To better understand the formula, let's look at some examples that help illustrate the 3 factors:

Example 1: Funny Image

If you've done any content marketing, you've probably watched in despair as a silly image or a shaky video of some kittens garnered massive social media attention and sent floods of traffic to someone's website, while your carefully crafted content remains mostly ignored. The formula explains what's going on.

In this case, we have a **good emotional impact** (laughter), a **beneficial status effect** (making others laugh + there are no detrimental effects to sharing something cute or funny – it's uncontroversial) and a very low cost of consumption. This is really the key, here. The benefit isn't huge (it's just a mild emotional spike and a quick laugh), but the **cost of consumption is virtually non-existent**. You can see the image, get a chuckle out of it and re-share it within just a few seconds.



Example 2: Boring Wall of Text

This is what we'd typically look at as bad content. There is some benefit to be gotten from reading all the text, but not much. Since there isn't much benefit, sharing it could be detrimental to your status (wasting people's time) and the cost of consumption is very high. Result: no one is willing to share the content.

Example 3: Massive, Epic Post

We assume that this post is immensely valuable. Reading and understanding all of it can make a real difference to your life. That's where the emotional impact comes from (you feel grateful and enriched). There's also a very positive status effect, since

sharing this content will make the sharer look smart and he's passing on value to others. The reason this will get fewer shares than our first example is just in the cost of consumption. Because it takes so long to take it all in, not many visitors will get the full benefit and so won't get to the point where they actually share the post.

Strategy

How can knowing about the formula help you with your content marketing?

There are two strategies you can employ, based on the formula:

Strategy 1: Social Content

Within your content marketing strategy, you can create content that's specifically made for social media. You can have a mix of posts with higher cost of consumption, that may be aimed primarily at selling your product or service, helping members and customers, getting search engine traffic etc. plus short, easy to consume content that's made specifically for garnering more social traffic.

An example would be a company that maintains a Pinterest account where they share image macros and things like that.

Strategy 2: The Hybrid

You can adapt your longer-form content to make it more shareable as well. Here are some ways to do that:

- Make the content easily scannable, so that visitors can get an overview and get some benefit, even if they just briefly scan through the content.
- Combine easy-to-consume with in-depth content. For example, have a quick and entertaining video that explains the basics, followed by a long, in-depth article with all the details.
- Sprinkle entertaining images and quotes throughout your content. Many authors use quotes and anecdotes throughout their writing, because they know it makes it more entertaining and easier to keep reading.