

DATA DRIVEN STRATEGIES FOR Writing Effective Titles & Headlines



HubSpot + Outbrain®

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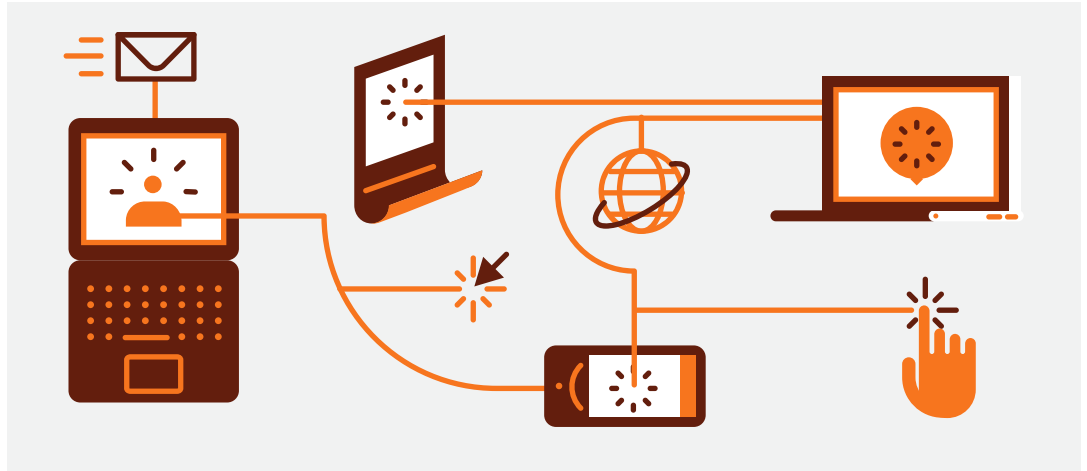
SECTION

1

THE BASICS

Content Marketing

THE BASICS



Content marketing is the new king of the digital marketing world. Marketers of all stripes are embracing non-interruptive inbound marketing. Why? Because it lets them build rapport with their prospects and customers organically. Content marketing's power to connect with and grow engaged audiences is huge for one reason: people like it. It puts customers first. Instead of bothering them with ads, it supplies them with genuinely useful, entertaining, and interesting content.

The thing about content marketing is that to do it right, you need a plan. To make that plan, you have to really understand what drives readers to click on, read, share, or interact with different kinds of content. You also need to have clear and explicit business goals for a particular piece of content **before** creating it.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of goals marketers have for content: traffic, engagement, and conversion. Each goal has its own metric for success, and each does something different for your organization.

SECTION

1

THE BASICS

GOAL	WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU	METRICS TO TRACK
TRAFFIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to display ad impressions • Increases video views • Improves site metrics (comScore, etc) • Creates brand awareness & brand lift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clicks (or CTR) • Unique Visitors (reach) • Pageviews • Video starts • Brand equity research
ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds readership/audience • Builds brand loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pageviews per session • Social shares & Likes • Time on site • Bounce rate • Return Visits
CONVERSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquires new customers • free trial sign ups • blog subscribers • newsletter sign ups • ebook downloads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion Rate • Cost per Acquisition • Leads • Sales • ROI

This guide contains data analysis from two established leaders in the space, Outbrain and HubSpot, to help you gain insights on what makes content successful in both paid and organic distribution and amplification. Specifically, we'll be looking at how headlines affect reader behavior in the context of each of these three goals.

WHY OUTBRAIN & HUBSPOT?

[Outbrain](#) is the world's largest content discovery platform. We bring personalized, relevant online, mobile, and video content to audiences while helping publishers understand their audiences through data. Each month, Outbrain delivers 190 billion content recommendations to 561 million unique visitors around the world. This singularly positions us to deliver insights to marketers on what works and what doesn't.

[HubSpot](#) is an inbound marketing and sales software that helps companies attract visitors, convert leads, and close customers. More than 11,500 companies in 70 countries use our marketing and sales software to grow, and over 300,000 professionals receive HubSpot's blog posts in their inboxes every day.

Outbrain and HubSpot are the perfect team to bring you this analysis, since we represent complementary content marketing specialties. Outbrain has a truly massive network of headlines from our clients, whose content varies in scope and type, and HubSpot has our own awesome in-house content that we feed through our large, single-topic-specific network.

SECTION

1

THE BASICS

WHERE WE GOT THE DATA

To get the insights we are sharing here, Outbrain analyzed our expansive data to uncover key trends in our network in the area of headline performance. We drew a sample of more than 3.3 million paid link headlines from the pool of English language paid links that ran across Outbrain's network of 100,000+ publisher sites from the beginning of October 2013 through the end of September 2014. We then examined the impact of a number of headline variables on clickthrough rates and post-click engagement metrics. In the HubSpot examples provided in this ebook, all data was taken from our Marketing blog between September 2013 and September 2014.

A NOTE ON THESE (OR ANY) RECOMMENDATIONS

You should never force your content to fit “best practices.” What we are providing here is what we have seen work for us and other marketers, based on our data analysis. You know your audience and your brand best. If the findings and recommendations contained in this ebook don't fit with your brand voice or mission, don't use them!

We do suggest that everybody experiment with headlines (while carefully tracking response rates)--the results may surprise you. Sometimes the headlines audiences respond the most to aren't the ones that seem intuitively to be the “best.” In any case, use this guide as just that...a guide.

SECTION

2

WHY HEADLINES
MATTER

WHY HEADLINES MATTER



Your headline or title is often a reader's first interaction with your brand online, so it's arguably the most critical component of your content marketing strategy. It's your first, and maybe only, chance to grab your target audience's attention.

Your reader has complete control--they either choose to click and engage with your content or they don't. It's that simple. Interesting and relevant stories are important, but if your headline doesn't communicate value to the reader, nobody's going to see them. You can (and should!) always optimize and try again, but every dud headline costs you crucial opportunities to reach your audience.

The most important headline rule is: respect the reader experience. In this era of clickbait (eye-catching content whose main purpose is to attract attention), it's more important than ever to write a headline that delivers on its promise. At the most basic level, you want the reader to have a good experience with your brand. When she clicks on a link, you've got to be sure she's getting what she expected and not being duped in some sort of digital shell-game. Once you lose that trust, it's gone.

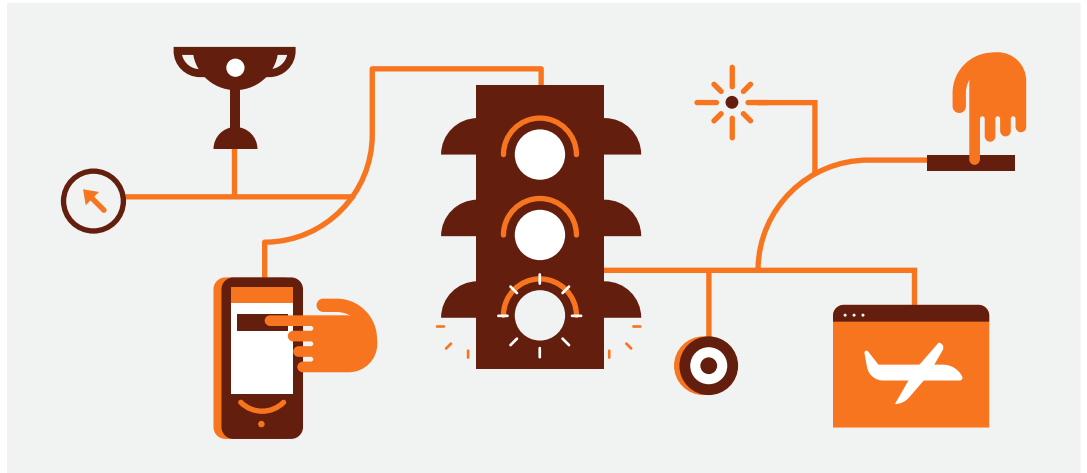
SECTION

3

TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

Traffic Goals & Clickthrough Rate

THE FIRST MEASURE OF SUCCESS



Let's face it, clicks matter. Regardless of what your strategic goals are for your content marketing, without that first click, you've got nothing. So in this section, we'll analyze clickthrough rate (CTR) as a measure of reach. If you're trying to grow your traffic, CTR is the metric you want to be looking at. So what increases CTR and what hurts it?

HERE'S A QUICK LOOK AT FINDINGS FROM OUR DATA ANALYSIS:

- When used in a headline, the words "photo" and "who" increase CTR, whereas the words "easy," "how to," "credit," "cure," "magic," and "free" decrease CTR.
- Making references to the reader by using the words "you," "your," or "you're" in the headline decreases CTR.
- Including positive superlatives ("best," "always") in headlines decreases CTR.
- Headlines generate the highest level of engagement at moderate lengths (81-100 characters).
- Bracketed clarifications, which are clarifications of the type of content represented by the headline - e.g. [Infographic], increase CTR when included in headlines.
- When used in the headline, the words "simple," "tip," "trick," "amazing," and "secret" decrease CTR.
- Using words that convey a sense of urgency (e.g., "need," "now") in the headline decreases CTR.

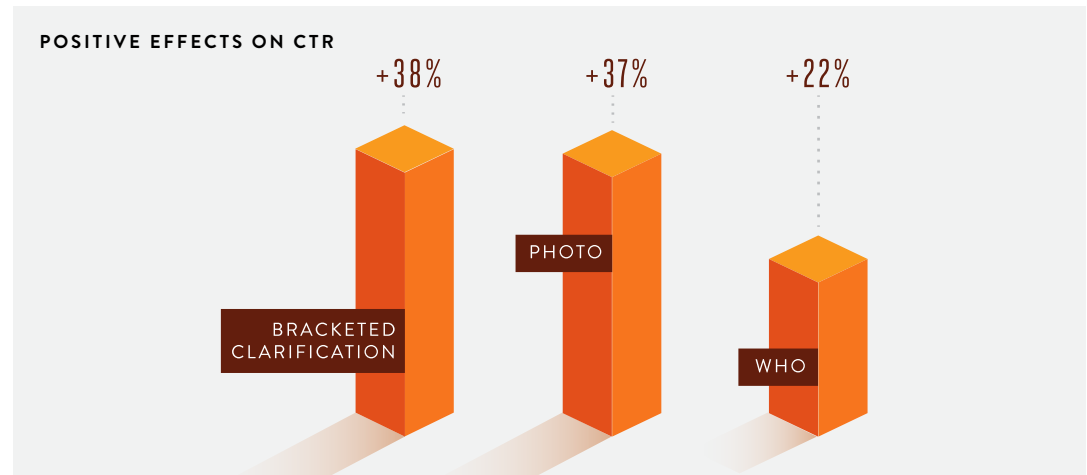
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TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

THE GOOD:

What Kinds of Headlines Compel People to Click?



Taking a deeper dive into our data, we found that certain words and kinds of headlines led to significantly more clicks. These findings are based on data analysis over 2013 and 2014, so we can see that these takeaways have remained consistent.

PEOPLE CARE ABOUT THE WHOS, NOT THE WHYS

Headlines that included the word “who” generated a 22% higher CTR than headlines without the word “who.” “Why,” on the other hand, decreased CTR by 37%. When it comes to intriguing readers with your headlines, focus on who not why.

SHOW ME, SHOW ME, SHOW ME

Headlines featuring the word “photo(s)” performed 37% better than headlines without this word, a margin even larger than we’ve found previously (29% increase among 2013 headlines).

IT IS WHAT IT SAYS ON THE TIN

Headlines with bracketed clarifications (e.g., [photos], [interview], [video], [slideshow], etc.) performed 38% better than headlines without clarifications, suggesting readers are more likely to click when they have a clear picture of what lies behind the headline.

October 9, 2014 // 12:00 PM

A Look Inside Mashable’s Evolution [Interview]

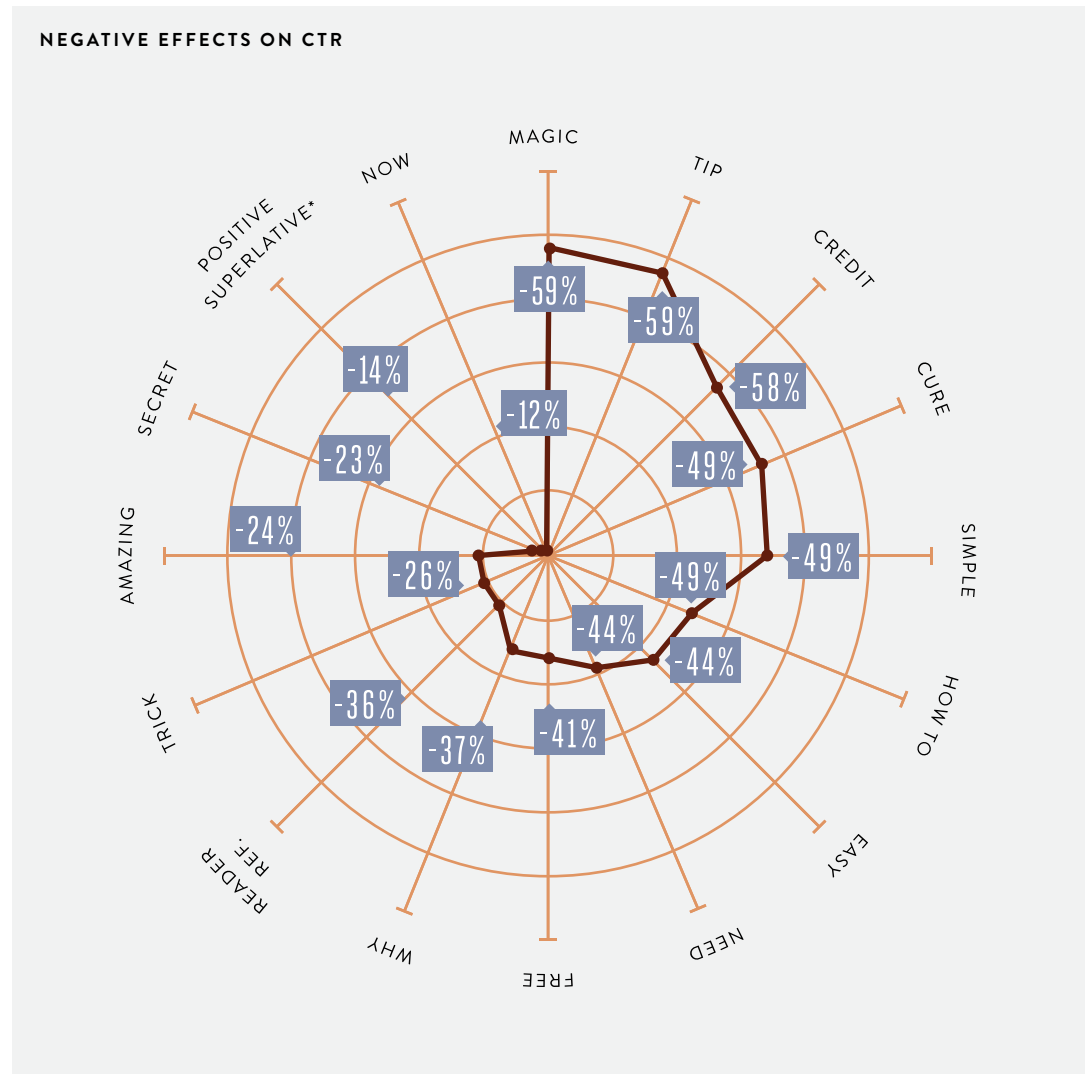
Written by [Joe Chernov](#) | [@jchernov](#)

SECTION

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TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR**THE BAD:**

What Kinds of Headlines Make People Not Click?



Similarly, certain words and headline concepts stand out as things people just don't like to click. One consideration in this category is saturation--once a certain kind of headline becomes popular among clickbaiters, readers no longer trust the keywords in that headline. Because of that, the "bad words" are more likely to evolve over time.

I'M NOT LOOKING FOR INSTRUCTIONS

Headlines containing the phrase "how to" performed 49% worse than headlines without this phrase, showing that reader aversion to this phrase has not dissipated much since the 46%

SECTION

3

TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

decrease we saw in 2013. This year we found that another instruction-oriented word, “tip,” also decreased CTR by 59%. These behaviors highlight the difference between a reader in search mode and in content consumption mode. How-tos can be highly desirable to people searching for specific content, but they’re less appealing to readers who are browsing.

TAKE IT EASY

Headlines with the word “easy” generated a 44% lower CTR than headlines without this word, consistent with the 46% decrease we saw in 2013. This year we also saw a 49% decrease in CTR among headlines containing the word “simple.” Readers are constantly bombarded with “easy ways” and “easy steps” that start to sound spammy. Further, “simple steps” speak more to the search mode reader with a goal and less to the person consuming content.

POSITIVE OVERLOAD

Headlines that used positive superlatives (“always” or “best”) performed 14% worse than headlines that did not, showing not much has changed since the 23% decrease we saw in 2013. Contrary to popular belief and their widespread use in headlines, these words do not appear to be compelling to readers. This may simply be a product of overuse, or it could be because readers are skeptical of sources’ motives for endorsement. On the flip side, sources of negative information may be more likely to be perceived as impartial and authentic.

YOU DON’T KNOW ME

Headlines that made references to the reader by including the word, “you,” “your,” or “you’re” performed 36% worse than headlines that did not contain any of these words, showing a heightened distaste for this tactic since 2013 when we saw a 21% decrease in CTR among such headlines. The attempt to make readers feel as though they’re being spoken to directly appears to do more harm than good.

STOP BEING SO PUSHY!

Headlines with language that conveys a sense of urgency (“need,” “now”) generated lower CTRs than headlines that didn’t use such pushy language (44% and 12% lower). The negative impact of the word “need” is something we also saw in 2013 (it seems readers have become more amenable to the word “must”, which previously appeared amongst pushy words that hurt CTR). Readers are resistant to words that demand action or attention. These words can have an advertorial feel rather than an editorial feel. Also, their overuse in headlines over time has weakened their ability to convey a true sense of urgency.

READERS HAVE SPAM FILTERS, TOO

Headlines that contained the word “magic” generated a 59% lower CTR than those that did not. Likewise, headlines with other words that often trigger email spam filters like “credit,” “cure,” or “free” performed worse than headlines without these words (58%, 49%, and 41% lower, respectively). The negative impact of these words has grown significantly since 2013, when the decrease in CTR resulting from these words ranged from 11 to 27%. It appears that readers are continuing to get savvier at gauging content quality from headlines and developing refined spam filters of their own. This year we found that the words “trick,” “amazing,” and “secret” also hurt CTR (23%, 24%, and 26% decreases).

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TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

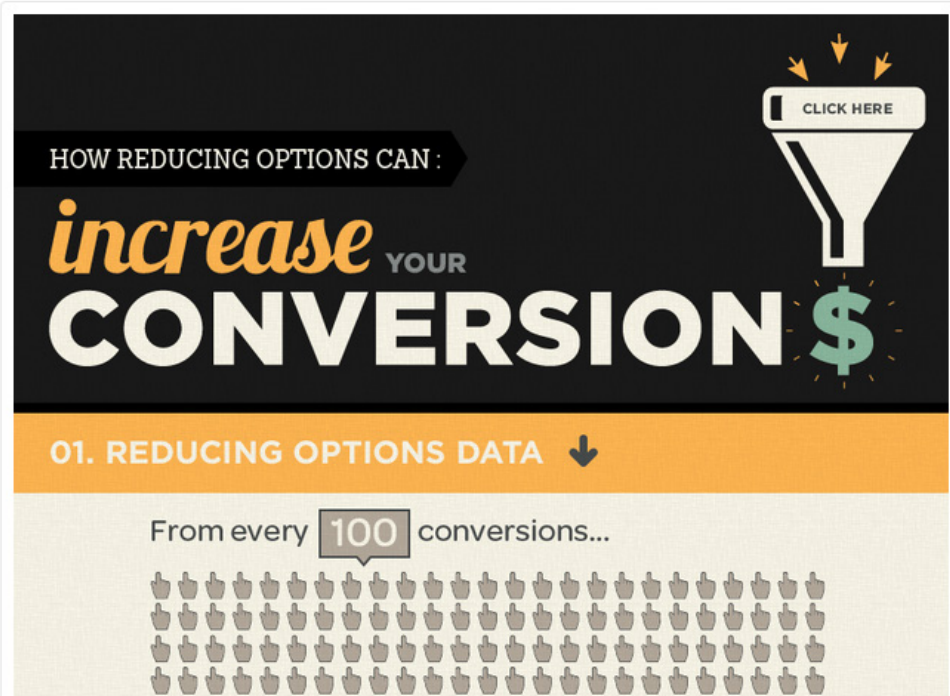
DEEP DIVE: BRACKETED KEYWORDS AND CLICKTHROUGH RATES

As we said above, including bracketed keywords in your titles can give you a drastic increase in post views. This technique has been successful both in Outbrain's content discovery network and HubSpot's blog, so we thought we'd give you even more specifics about how this especially effective headline technique works. Here's what a blog post looks like with the bracket-style headline:

November 21, 2014 // 12:00 PM

How to Increase Conversion Rates by Decreasing Choices [Infographic]

Written by [Ginny Soskey](#) | [@gsosk](#)



Adding bracketed terms to the end of your headlines helps your reader see what she's going to get before even clicking. In the example above, she knows right away that the narrative will come from a visual infographic. Before she even clicks, she knows that this post will be A) easy to consume, B) full of data, and C) a how-to about increasing her conversion rates. Now, when she clicks through, she won't be disappointed because she knows exactly what she's going to get.

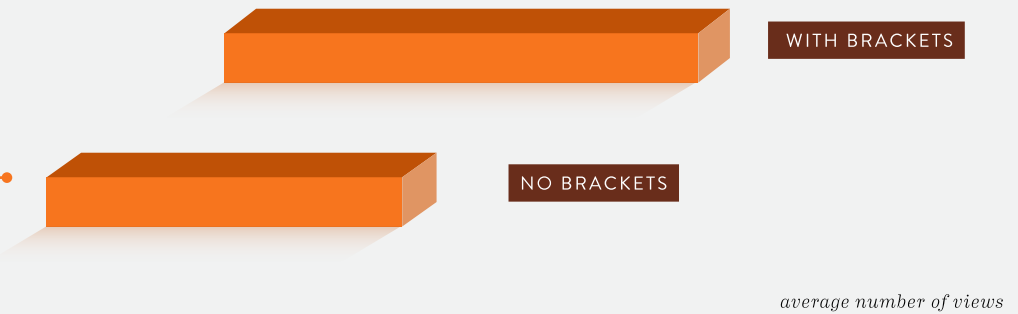
SECTION

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TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

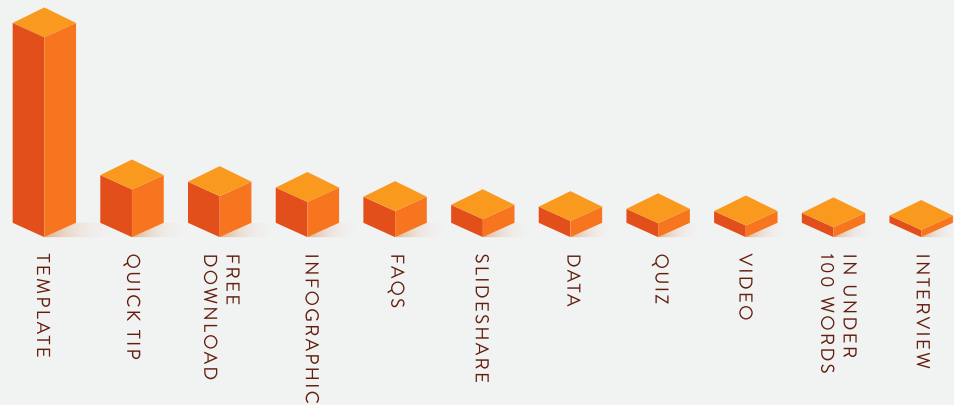
Our blog received a **33% increase in average post views** when using brackets in the title.

POST TITLE WITH BRACKETS VS. NO BRACKETS



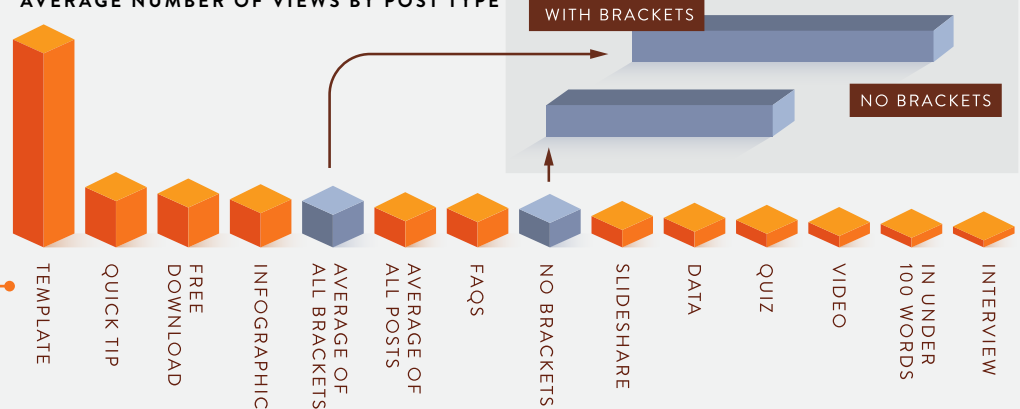
average number of views

AVERAGE NUMBER OF VIEWS BY BRACKET TYPE



We broke out that data even more to show which specific terms performed the best in headlines. From this graph, you'll see that [templates] got the highest average views of all bracketed terms.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF VIEWS BY POST TYPE



Here's where the bracketed terms fall in regards to the average or non-bracketed terms:

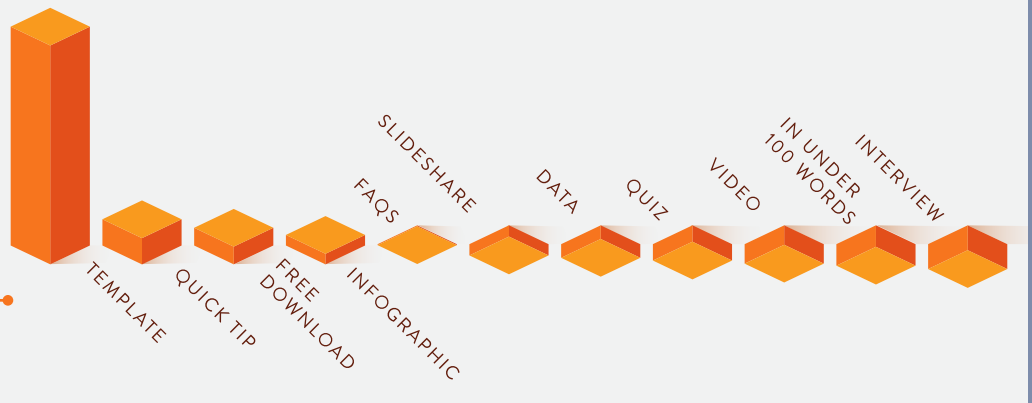
SECTION

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TRAFFIC
GOALS & CTR

And here's where the bracketed terms fall in regards to average post views (all posts):

% ABOVE OR BELOW AVERAGE POST VIEWS BY POST TYPE



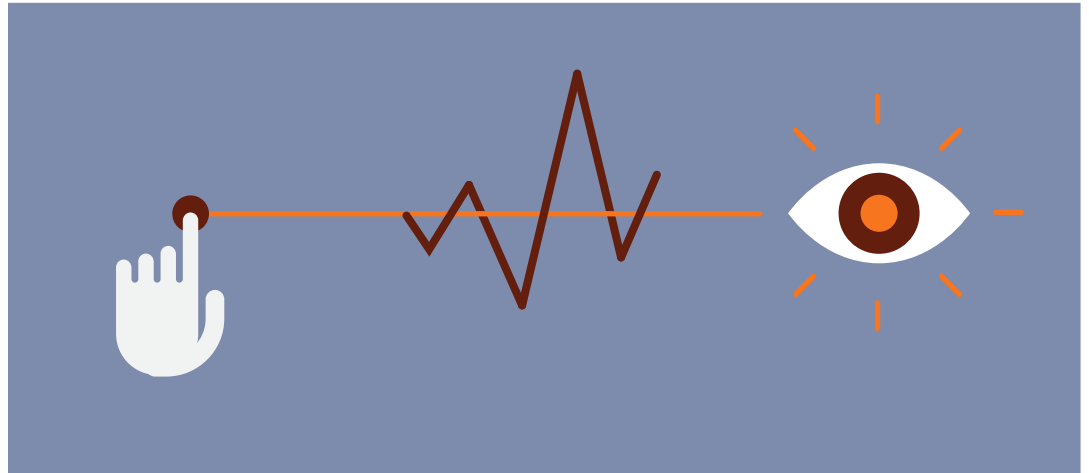
Remember that these charts show what has worked well (and what hasn't) for us as a B2B company. We would highly encourage you to try a variety of these bracketed terms and see which work best for you and your particular audience. Although some of these terms tend to perform below average for us, that doesn't mean they won't work for a different type of company. For instance, [Quiz] and [Video] are probably very successful for BuzzFeed or Upworthy whereas a [Template] or [Quick Tip] might not perform as strongly for them.

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ENGAGEMENT

Beyond the Click: ENGAGEMENT



Okay, so you got the click. Now what? After successfully driving traffic to your site, often the next goal is engagement. That basically just means that you want your readers to stick around and consume more of your content. The metric used to measure engagement is pageviews per session, or how many additional pages of content each unique reader views after the first click.

Successful engagement has a lot to do with the type of content you are driving audiences to--a slideshow or multi-page article naturally encourages readers to click along to read more. Ideally, though, the surrounding content on your site also engages readers by being interesting and relevant.

In this section, we're going to look at the relationship between headline attributes and reader engagement, measured by pageviews per session. Our analysis found that some types of headlines encourage engagement while others deter it.

Here's a quick look at what we've discovered:

- When used in the headline, bracketed clarifications as well as the words "amazing" and "photo" increase page views per session
- Reader references, positive superlatives, negative superlatives and the words "magic," "now," "cure," "need," "credit," "free," "simple," "how to," "secret," "easy," "tip," and "trick" decrease pageviews per session

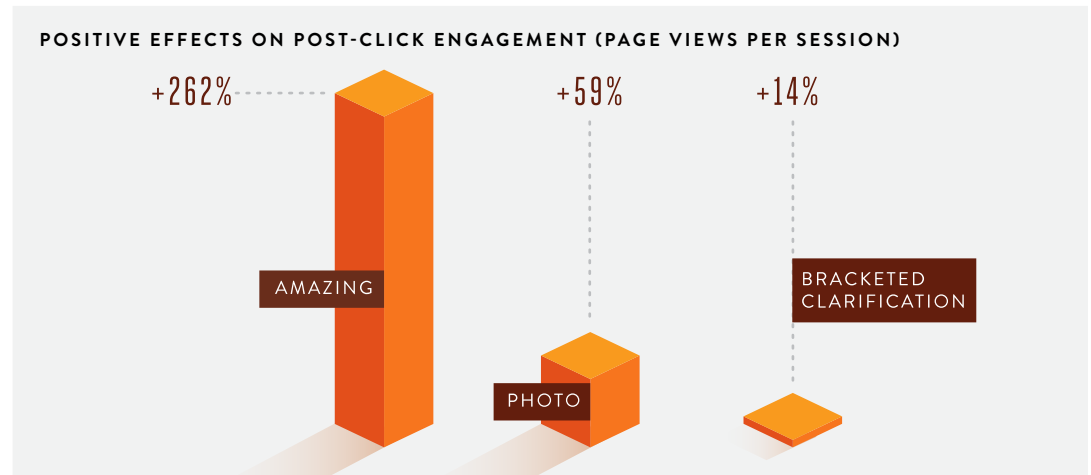
SECTION

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ENGAGEMENT

THE GOOD:

What Kinds of Headlines Make People Stick Around?



AMAZE ME

Despite the finding that featuring the word “amazing” in headlines can deter readers from clicking through, we see much higher post-click engagement levels among the few who do click through. While “amazing” may only attract a small audience, this is an audience that continues to be highly engaged.

October 16, 2014 // 12:00 PM

20 Tools for Creating and Delivering Amazing Presentations

Written by [Fergal Glynn](#)

LET ME SEE!

Headlines featuring the word “photo(s)” performed 59% better than headlines without this word, showing that visuals are a winner whether it’s getting the initial click or keeping readers engaged after the click.

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT I’M GETTING INTO

Headlines that ended with bracketed clarifications performed 14% better than headlines without such clarifications, showing that readers are not only more likely to click when they have a clear picture of what lies behind the headline, but are also more likely to stay engaged.

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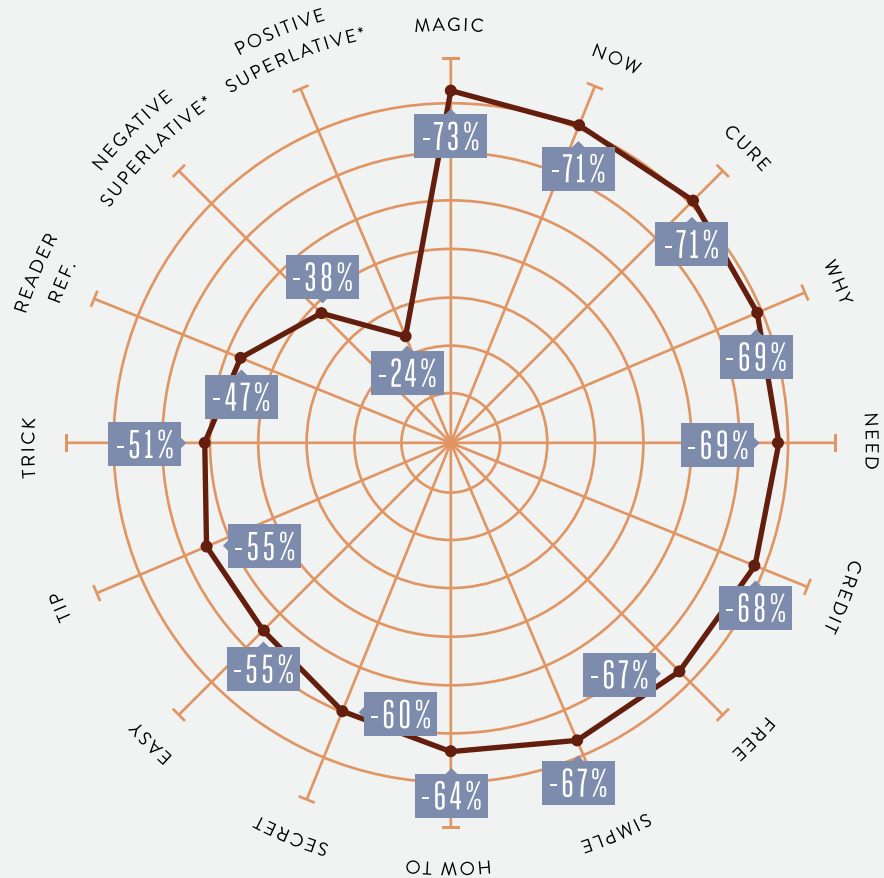
4

ENGAGEMENT

THE BAD

What Kinds of Headlines Are Dis-Engaging People?

NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON POST-CLICK ENGAGEMENT (PAGE VIEWS PER SESSION)



NOT JUST BAD FOR CLICKS

Aside from the word “amazing,” all of the headline elements that negatively impacted CTR also had a negative impact on pageviews per session.

EXTREMES DON'T STICK

When it comes to post-click engagement (pageviews per session), it's not only positive superlatives that hurt performance, but also negative superlatives. Negative superlatives like “worst” or “never” decreased pageviews per session by 59%.

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CONVERSION

Beyond the Click: CONVERSIONS



Content marketing in its truest form should not be overtly promotional. What sets it apart from other marketing techniques is the focus on providing value to the reader or viewer. That said, an important goal of content marketing (and one that is growing in popularity) is generating conversions.

A conversion is getting your reader to take some action. That action could be opting into a newsletter, buying something, agreeing to have a salesperson contact them, or anything else that gets them more involved with your organization. Generating conversions without a hard sell requires finesse.

One way to focus on a conversion goal is to throw your clickthrough rate out the window and write headlines that grab fewer numbers of people, but people who are more specifically interested in what you are trying to get them

to do. That might mean headlines that are less attention-grabbing to a general audience but chock full of meaty information on what the content (and conversion goal) are about.

Here's what our data has to say about headlines and conversion rates:

- When used in the headline, bracketed clarifications as well as the word “need” increase conversion rate (CVR)
- References to the reader and using the word “trick” decrease CVR

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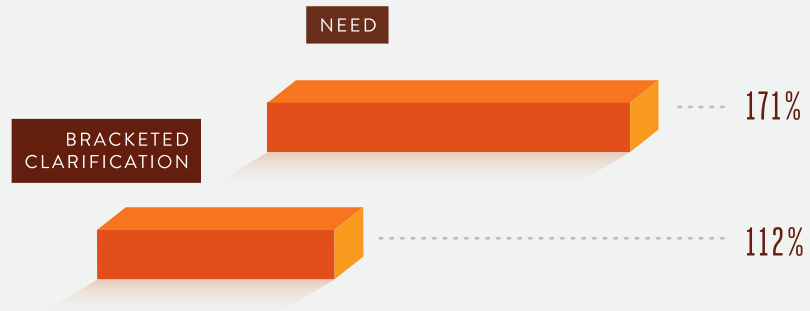
5

CONVERSION

THE GOOD

What Kinds of Headlines Make People Take Action?

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON CVR



I NEED TO HAVE IT!

While the word “need” leads to decreases in CTR and page views per session, it actually drives conversion rates up. While it may come off as too pushy to many, it appears to seal the deal among those who bite.

July 3, 2014 // 8:00 AM

Everything You Need to Know to Successfully Live-Tweet Your Event

Written by [Lindsay Kolowich](#) | @lkolo25

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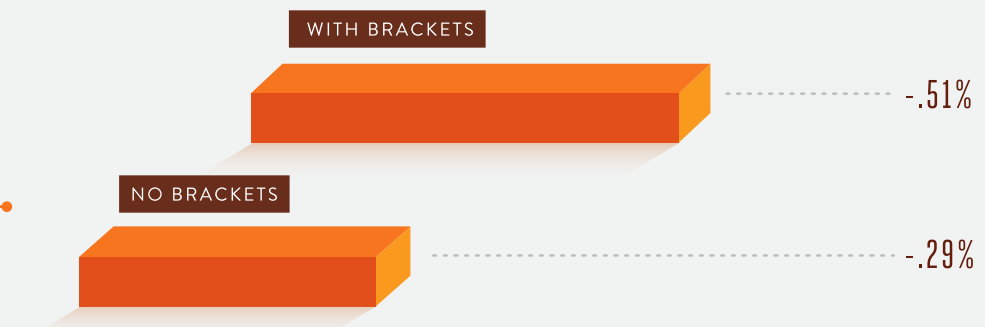
CONVERSION

SAVE ME A CLICK

Once again, headlines with bracketed clarifications are a winner, delivering 112% higher conversion rates than headlines without such clarifications. Readers are not only more likely to click and more likely to remain engaged after the click, but are also more likely to eventually convert when they are given a clear picture of what lies behind the headline.

DEEP DIVE: WHY BRACKET HEADLINES INCREASE CONVERSIONS

AVERAGE CONVERSION RATE



We found that our old friend the bracketed clarification not only increased CTR and engagement, it also increased the average conversion rate from 0.29% to 0.51%.

The reason for an increase in average conversion rate makes a lot of sense when you think about it. When your reader clicks on a post that has [Free Ebook] in the title, she knows going into that she's going to be offered an ebook download. Only people who want that ebook are going to click the link.

November 18, 2014 // 6:00 AM

Your New Go-to Guide to Content Promotion [Free Ebook]

Written by [Brittany Leaning](#) | @bleaning



FREE DOWNLOAD!

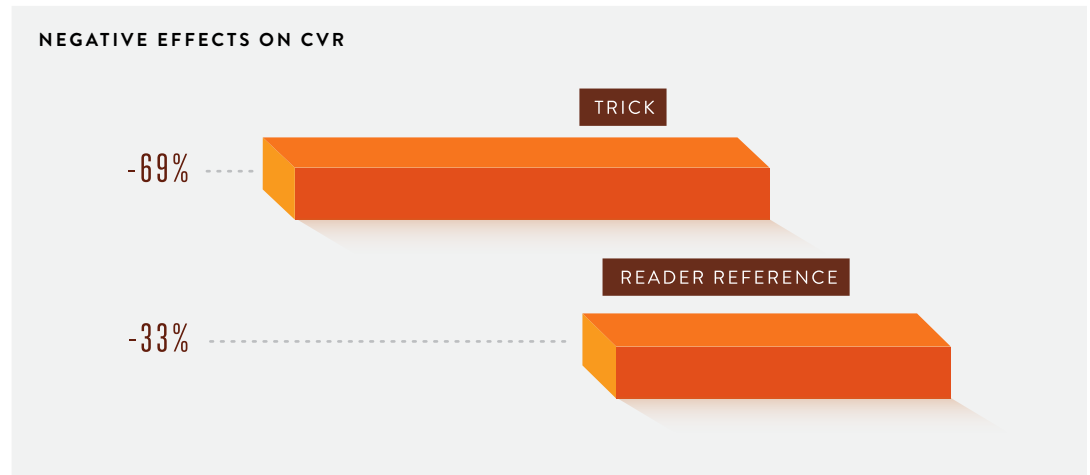
SECTION

5

CONVERSION

THE BAD

What Kinds of Headlines Reduce Conversion Rates?



YOU CAN'T TRICK ME

The word “trick” had a negative impact all around, not only decreasing CTR but also decreasing pageviews per session and conversion rates among those curious enough to click. It seems that even the small portion of the audience that decides to click on these headlines are not pleased with what they find.

DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

Here is another headline element with a negative impact all around. Headlines that made references to the reader by including the word, “you,” “your,” or “you’re” not only hurt CTR and page views per session but also decreased conversion rates by 33% on average.

DEEP DIVE: OPTIMIZING HEADLINES FOR CONVERSIONS

One way to receive more views, clicks, and conversions is by actively promoting your content through email, social media, guest blogging, or other promotional channels. These channels are all excellent short-term solutions that can give you a big boost in traffic, especially when you coordinate promotion in multiple places. However, you want to also think of the long-term benefits of every piece of content you create, which is where search engine optimization (SEO) comes in.

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CONVERSION

Take the post below as an example:



Using [HubSpot's Keywords Tool](#) and [Google Trends](#), we were able to determine that people in the marketing and business realm were often searching for a press release template to use. Luckily, HubSpot already had this as an offer titled [The Newsworthy Guide to Inbound Public Relations](#). Although this headline may sound sexier than “Free Press Release Template,” we found that people were actually searching way more often for the latter term. Since the blog post’s title promoting the offer was “[How to Write a Press Release \[Free Template\]](#),” we did happen to pop up in search results for “Free Press Release Template” on [blog.hubspot.com](#). However, there was one huge issue here: people were not converting on the post because the call-to-action (CTA) at the end of the post still read “The Newsworthy Guide to Inbound Public Relations.”

When you’re trying to get conversions, headlines aren’t the only language you should be sweating over. In a piece of content with multiple CTAs, you need to make sure that the CTA text is as compellingly clickable as any headline. For us, this often means repeating the search terms readers used to find your content in the first place.

SECTION

5

CONVERSION

For example, here's the blog post "[How to Write a Press Release \[Free Template\]](#)," with a CTA asking the reader to download some free materials (to generate leads for our sales team). After we optimized the body text, end-of-post CTA, and slide-in CTA (a call-to-action that slides in once you've read halfway through the post) using a specific keyword-based method, the conversion rate of this post increased by 240%:

ORIGINAL END-OF-POST CTA

Free Ebook & Template: **The Newsworthy Guide to Inbound Public Relations**

Learn how to switch to an Inbound PR strategy and use a customizable press release template to launch your next PR campaign.

[Download Ebook + Template Now](#)

OPTIMIZED END-OF-POST CTA

FREE TEMPLATE

FREE PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

[DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE >](#)

SLIDE-IN CTA UPDATE:

Featured Download:

THE NEWSWORTHY GUIDE TO INBOUND PUBLIC RELATIONS

[Download Now](#)



Featured Download:

FREE PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

[Download Now](#)



LINK TO RESOURCE AT TOP OF PAGE:

162

[in](#) Share

231

[f](#) Like

539

[t](#) Tweet

95

[g+](#)

Sometimes, old-school is a good thing. We love Throwback Thursday, 80s-themed parties, and Chuck Taylors (which have made a triumphant comeback).

Unfortunately, old-school isn't so trendy when it describes your company's [public relations strategy](#).

[\(Click here to learn how to write a press release and download our free press release template.\)](#)

Public relations should always be evolving, innovating, and improving to mirror how technology is shifting human behavior.



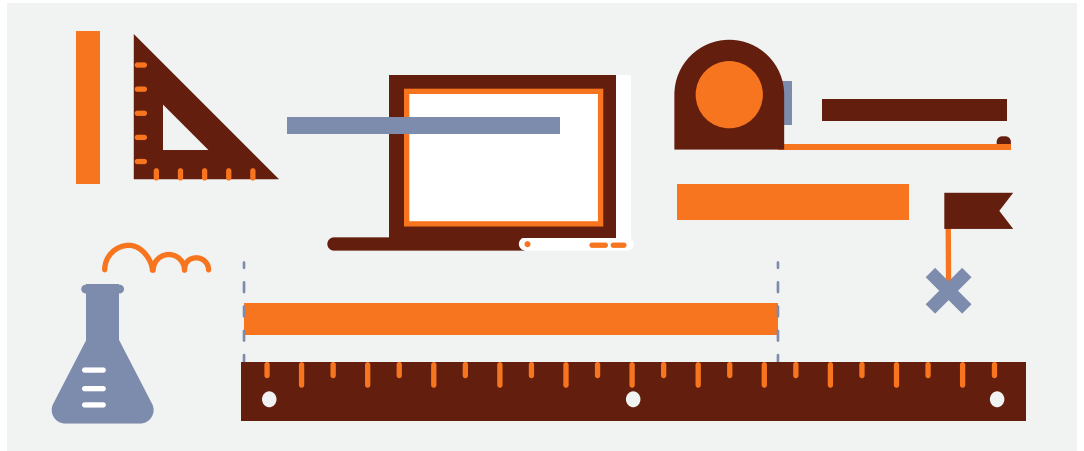
The data speaks for itself: if you optimize your posts based on keywords people are searching for instead of what you *think* a sexy title will be, you'll maximize your conversion rate. Not to mention, even without looking at the data, this just logically seems like a better user experience. If you're searching for a "Free Press Release Template," you should expect to get just that.

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HEADLINE
LENGTH

HEADLINE LENGTH

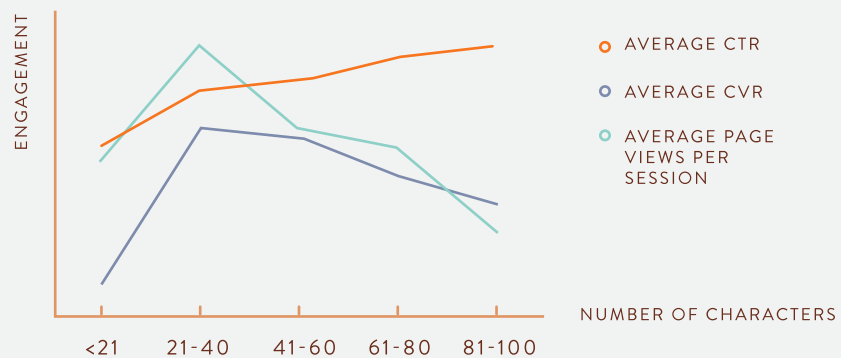


There are lots of variables to consider when trying to figure out the best headline length. From our findings, much depends on what your goals are and where the headline is appearing. For example, if you're looking for social shares, you definitely don't want to exceed 140 characters so that the headline is tweetable.

If you're trying to rank in search, a good rule-of-thumb is to keep your headlines under 65 characters so that they don't get shortened in search engine results. If you can't get your headlines under 65 characters, make sure you include the most vital information early on in your headline.

Fundamentally, you want your headline to be the length it takes to get the information across to the reader in an attention-grabbing way. But what are the best practice parameters?

ENGAGEMENT BY HEADLINE LENGTH



Let's take a look at some data:

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HEADLINE
LENGTH

The image above is the data collected by Outbrain from our content discovery network. These headlines are appearing on partner sites, generally without other context, other than as further reading for the user to engage with.

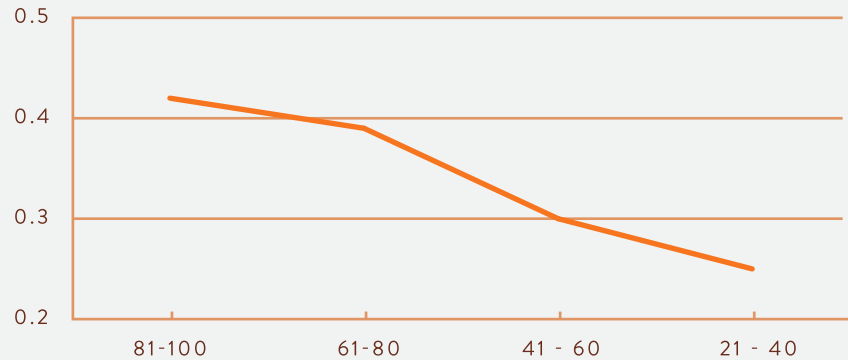
We found that CTR is highest for headlines with 81-100 characters. Post-click engagement, on the other hand, is highest for shorter headlines, between 21 and 40 characters. Both pageviews per session and conversion rate are highest at this shorter headline length.

DEEP DIVE: HEADLINE LENGTH

Keep in mind that conversion rates will vary depending on your particular industry and audience. Which is why you should always test, test, test to determine what works and what doesn't. "Best practices" are simply guidelines to help you provide you with a data-driven direction, however they're not certain for every audience.

For example, on HubSpot's blog, the more characters we have in a headline, the higher the conversion rate. This is because with HubSpot's blog post titles, the longer the title is, the more information we're giving you about the post before clicking through. Like we talked about in the conversion rate section, when people know what they're getting before they click, they're more likely to download an ebook, sign up for a webinar, or try a new tool.

CONVERSION RATE BY HEADLINE



Here's the data:

When testing headline length out for yourself, be sure to include a handful of very short headlines, very long ones, and some in between. Measure your results closely and determine the best practices that work best for your particular audience for generating views, clicks, and conversions.

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SOCIAL &
ORGANIC

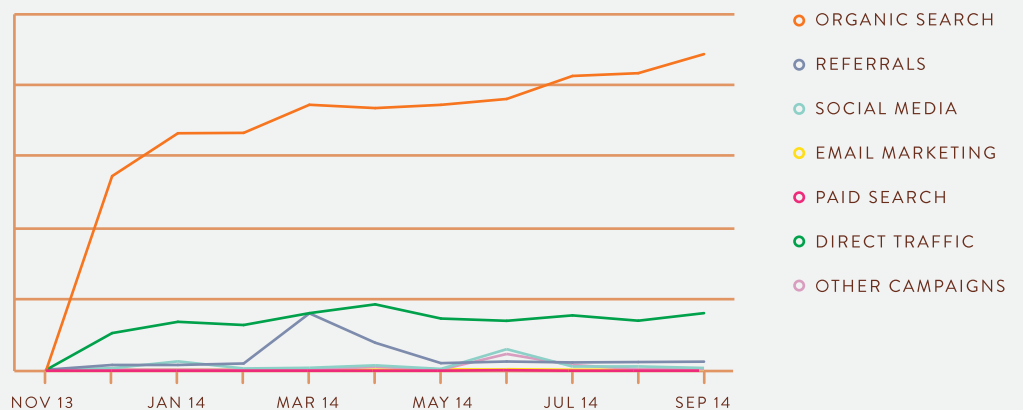
Finding Your Content

HOW SOCIAL & ORGANIC WORK TOGETHER



Should you optimize your headlines for search or for social? Which one is more important to driving traffic? Obviously, the answer to that will be different for every blog or website depending on search ranking, social outreach, your readers, and other factors. But we wanted to find out: will an initial bump in views help foster an environment for more social sharing, or will a bump in social sharing help foster an environment for more views? We went to the data to find out.

15 BRILLIANT EXAMPLES OF HOMEPAGE DESIGN



In this example of one of HubSpot's highest trafficked posts, the views from organic search go up over time:

The reason for this is that it ranks well in search due to keyword placement throughout the post. You can see a slight bump in traffic from referrals, social media, and a paid campaign throughout the life of this post, but the organic search traffic stayed up and will only continue to grow due to

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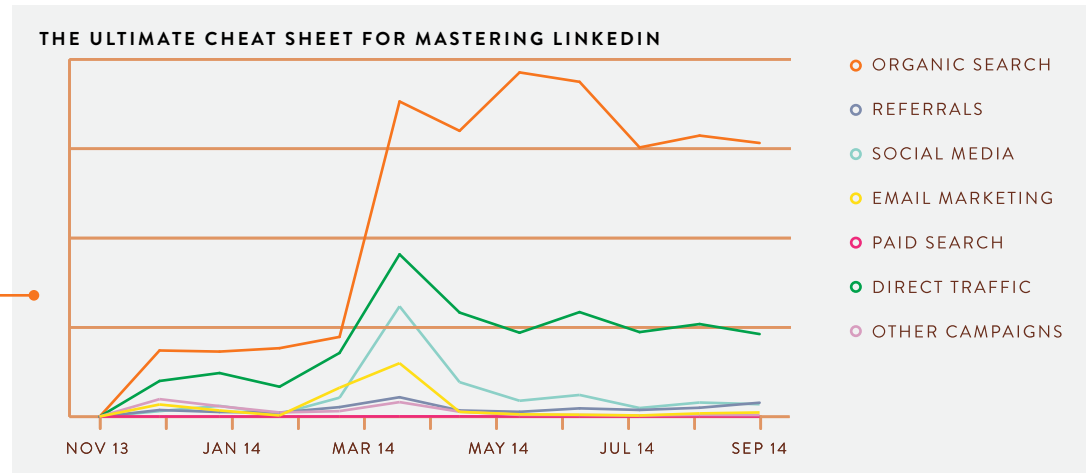
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SOCIAL &
ORGANIC

high search volume for this topic. “Examples of brilliant homepage design” is a term someone would search for organically when they wanted to get some inspiration for redesigning their website.

On the other hand, you can have an effect on the direction your organic search views move by creating a campaign and promoting a particular post on your various marketing channels throughout a given month.

In this example of another one of HubSpot’s highest trafficked posts, you’ll see that rallying around a campaign really does make a difference in the long term:



Email marketing and social media teamed up to promote this one helpful post. As a result of that teamwork, this post was able to rank better and it gave the post a consistent bump in organic search views for months to come.

So the answer is--both. Organic search traffic is incredibly important, but social sharing can not only give your traffic a temporary boost, it can improve your search traffic over the long term.

OPTIMIZING FOR SOCIAL AND SEARCH

The secret to optimizing for both social and search is to use keywords--words you know your audience is searching for. Keywords work best when they’re at the front of the headline. For example, if we want to rank for content marketing, “Content Marketing: Everything You Need to Know to Get Started,” will perform better than, “Everything You Need to Know to Get Started With Content Marketing.”

For search, make sure to keep the headlines under 65 characters so that they don’t get shortened. Or if you have to go longer, keep the most vital part of the headline at the beginning, to grab the reader’s attention.

Also, make sure your headlines are tweetable: you need them to be under 140 characters, but shorter is even better, so that they can be retweeted without truncation. Attention-grabbing and “clicky” is good, since you need to entice someone to navigate away from their social media page, but too sensational veers into spam territory.

Ultimately, you’ll need to experiment to find what your readers find most shareable. Get creative, try new things, and always test different headlines to see what style or format generates the most engagement for you.

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YOUR AUDIENCE,
YOUR DATA

Final Thought

YOUR AUDIENCE, YOUR DATA



We hope that diving in to all of this data has given you a starting place for optimizing your content marketing headlines. Whether you're looking for clicks, engagement, conversions, or all three, a content marketing campaign starts with great headlines, or ends with bad ones.

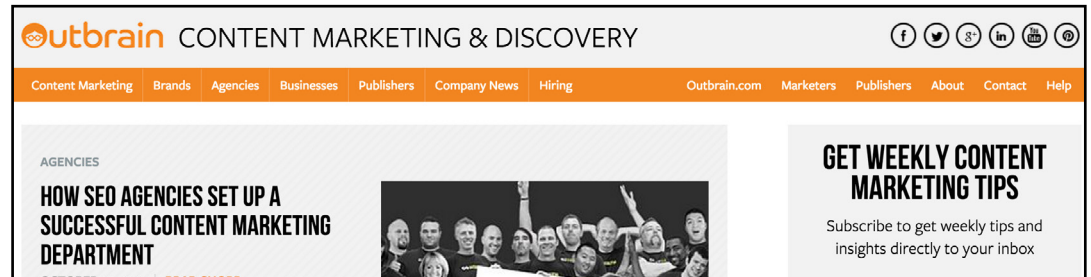
At HubSpot and Outbrain, we've collected this data over time and through lots of experimentation. We're excited to share it with you, but we also hope this spurs you to start collecting and analyzing your own data. After all, your audience is particular to you, and no two audiences are going to be exactly the

same. By experimenting and using metrics to measure the success of each experiment, you'll eventually be able to develop your own set of best practices for headline engagement. Data can be the most powerful tool in your content marketing toolbox--use it.

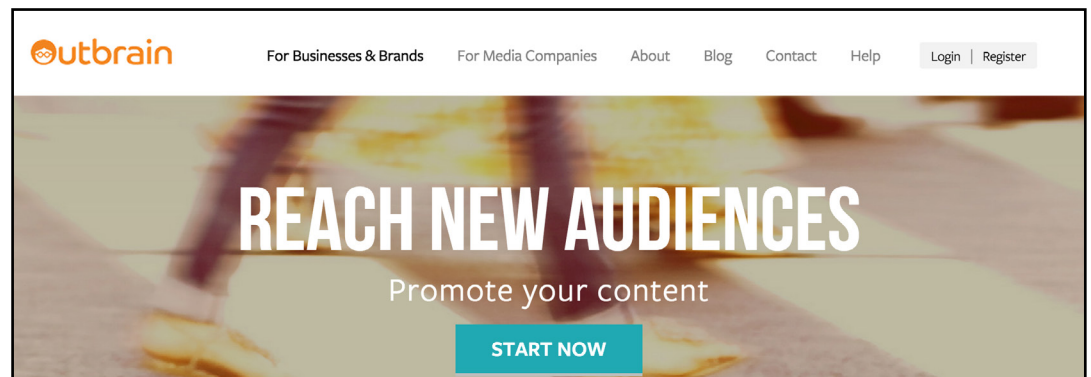
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