30 DAYS
OF BLOGGING

on website design & development

TMA+Peritus

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Meet the Bloggers

Tom Marks
Chief Blogger

Tom is a prolific producer of content and one of Wisconsin's leading website writers. He founded TMA+Peritus in 1983 and was one of the first in Wisconsin to promote content marketing back around the turn of the century.

Kathy Marks
Guest Blogger

Kathy is a digital strategist and partner in TMA+Peritus. She excels at organizing, leading and managing complex website projects. Don't ask her to start a new website project without an integrated business strategy. It makes her cranky.

Kurt Huber
Guest Blogger

Kurt has been the Senior Art Director at TMA+Peritus since 2005 and has worked on hundreds of digital projects. But he's not just a one-trick pony; as you can see, the dude can flat-out write.

30 Days of Blogging About Websites Starts Today

July 16, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day One: And so it goes. I'm writing a blog every day for the next 30 days about website design, development, search engine optimization, content and the kitchen sink. Uninterrupted. Undeterred. Unencumbered. I have a few guests from Madison who will join me along the way – they'll be riding shotgun, doing a little color analysis, acting as wingmen (women), ombudsmen (ombudswomen) and arbiters. My love of sports, show tunes and vegetables might seep into the discussion, therefore the kitchen sink and the fridge.

Let's talk about words, word counts, and Jakob Nielsen, the famed website usability consultant and principal at the Nielsen Norman Group. NNG did a wonderful study that reached a telling conclusion that the average web guest reads 28% of what's on a web page. So, even the greatest of writers and storytellers should take note, writing for the web is not like print, broadcast or journalism. In a separate study, NNG discovered through eye movement technology and other research applications that we lose interest at the 250 word mark. By the end of this sentence, I'll already be at 192 words. Do I still have your attention?

With web visitors having the attention span of an adolescent, this means you better use devices like pull quotes and bullets to grab some attention.

> "The average web guest reads 28% of what's on a web page.
> We lose interest at the 250 word mark."

And that's my promise to you. No website design and development post will exceed 250 words, not including the pull quote. Over and out at 250.

DAY 01

Ad Spending is Up, but Where it's Up is Most Telling

July 17, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Two: It's been a long time since ad spending in the U.S. saw an increase. In fact, it was 10 years ago when we last saw a bump, and that was the same year we saw a wardrobe malfunction at the Super Bowl, and Google launched Gmail amid great skepticism. And there's been no shortage of skepticism about advertising spend increases for a long, long time. But it's here, and it directly affects how you should think about website design and development.

Allow me to connect the dollar signs. According to eMarketer, we'll see an increase of 5.3% in advertising spend this year reaching a total investment of just over $180 billion. But what can the increased spend be attributed to? Mobile, mobile and more mobile. This year, advertising spending on mobile devices will trail only television advertising and advertising on desktops and laptops. Yes, it will surpass magazine, newspaper and radio advertising crossing the finish line with 10% of all advertising purchased. But get this; the mobile advertising investment in 2014 will be 83% greater than it was in 2013.

Mobile advertising investment in 2014 will be 83% greater than it was in 2013

According to eMarketer's estimates, we'll spend 2 hours and 51 minutes each day on our phones, and with some of my children, that means during dinner, under the table, texting and eating, which is very bad for the digestive system. Is your website ready for this increase in activity? Has it been designed following the best practices of responsive design? Boy, it better be and stat. 246 words minus the headline and sub-header – catch you tomorrow.

DAY
02

Let's Be Honest About Content Marketing

July 18, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Three: Let's get real. Content Marketing isn't anything that my generation initiated, or the greatest generation of all before me, or several generations before them. In fact, men living in London in 1731 were content marketed by a chap named Edward Cave – no doubt the originator of the man-Cave. Every brochure, catalog, website, TV spot, video, direct mailer, you name it, is nothing more than an empty platform, a dinner plate without food, a beer mug without brew. And it's been that way for several centuries.

But there are two critical Content Marketing differences between the days of yore and today. Okay, there are probably hundreds, but let's focus on two.

1. In the past, Content Marketing was project-based, and to a great extent it still is, but its effectiveness can only be realized if it's processed-based.

2. Not that many years ago, Content Marketing was voluntary, but today it's a requirement and a mandatory discipline for effective search engine optimization, specifically, and business success generally.

You must turn Content Marketing into a regularly scheduled daily event just as you would a daily strategy meeting or a coffee break, albeit a very long coffee break. The point is, it's just not going to work unless it consumes several hours of your day, and that's at a minimum. A pro golfer doesn't hit one bucket of balls and calls it good. Is it mandatory? Maybe not quite as much as the air you breath and the food you eat, but it's up there. With 90% of all organic search occurring from the first page of search, you'll need to Content Market to sustain your first page position, or climb the ladder to page one, presuming, of course, you have no interest in paying your way to the top. There'll be plenty more on Content Marketing over the next few weeks, and even though I've been aggressively doing it since the turn of the century, it appears I'm still a few centuries behind.

DAY 03

Think of Your Website as if it Were David

July 19, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Four: That would be David Ogilvy of course. He wasn't just a legendary adman, he was actually a legendary salesman cutting his teeth selling stoves door-to-door. Decades ago, Ogilvy said, "The worst fault a salesman can commit is to be a bore. Foster any attempt to talk about other things; the longer you stay the better you get to know the prospect, and the more you will be trusted."

David Ogilvy

Now, think about this in regard to your website. Is it boring? Strike one. Is it loaded with content, are there lots of things to talk about? If not, then strike two. Is it sticky, are people spending ample time on your site? If they aren't, strike three. Are you building trust by way of your website, nurturing leads, adding value because of your content, being a thought leader? If not, strike four.

Here's a few approaches to your next website redesign project that would win the approval of the legendary salesman.

1 **Website design is always based on content,** the content you have now and the content your strategic website brief indicates you'll have in the future. As improbable as it sounds, there are still plenty of web companies that start the process with design. Wrong. You're going to have a more compelling design that's less boring when you start with content.

2 **Websites are content critical,** you should have a lot to talk about because you do have satisfied customers who are probably willing to share how pleased they are with your company.

3 **If you want people to spend time on your site,** then find out what your audience wants, do a little voice-of-customer research, and give the people what they want, which is a lot less about you and a lot more about solving problems.

4 **I think it's high time we apply the trust barometer to websites,** people can spot a pretender faster than you can say Bernie Madoff. Build trust and nurture leads by being consistently insightful. They'll come back for more as long as you're willing to put more into it.

Your website should be a sales machine. Part David Ogilvy, part Dale Carnegie and part Erica Feidner. Erica who? Oh yes, she being the one who sold over $40 million in Steinway pianos in spite of an incredibly long sales cycle and virtually no repeat purchases.

DAY
04

I'm Trying to Debunk First Impression Research About Web Sites

July 20, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Five: But I'm not having much luck. The wonderfully gifted Will Rogers famously said, "You'll never get a second chance to make a good first impression." Corny? Yes. Overused? Yes. True? Mostly. I was slogging my way through a Harvard research study titled Predicting Users' First Impressions of Website Aesthetics With a Quantification of Perceived Visual Complexity and Colorfulness - hey, they're researchers not copywriters - when I got the hairbrained idea to really take a long, hard look at the people who make the claims that we pass judgement about a website in 7 seconds, or 4 seconds or the blink of an eye. I've been using statistics like this time and again, but now it's time to see if these researches are heretics, gadflies and charlatans.

They're not. Harvard, by all accounts, is a reputable institution. They might not possess the ability to draft engaging titles for their research, in fact, this one is downright off putting, but I do trust their findings. The most important revelation in the Harvard study is that it verified many of the studies prior to it that have clearly found that first impressions regarding a website can literally be measured in milliseconds. I also found it interesting that adults 45 and older preferred sites with low visual complexity, and that study participants found the websites of Webby Award winners, no more appealing than websites that were not award winners.

In a study conducted by Carlton University in Ottawa, Canada that was reported in the Journal Behaviour & Technology, the findings were equally conclusive. Researchers found that aesthetic opinions were formed in 50 milliseconds and a "halo effect" resulted in lasting impressions, good or bad, about a website. Finally, an eye movement tracking study by Missouri University of Science & Technology, found that it takes two-tenths of a second to form a website first impression.

Other than the fact that you better have a killer home page, what does all of this mean? First, you better focus on your load times because we're a downright impatient lot. Second, if you're creating three home page concepts, for instance, treat them like flash cards and get some immediate reactions from your specific audience segment. Third, website design is far too important to leave up to just the designers. It's going to require a team of strategists, copywriters (website copywriters that is), designers, salespeople and key audience types to get the home page right the first time.

DAY
05

Every Picture Tells a Story, Don't It?

July 21, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Six: Rod Stewart sang it, but bad grammar aside, I think every website better tell a story, shouldn't it? In fact, when I write websites I compartmentalize my stories into two groups. The first being the sales story and the second being the proof point story.

For the sales story, I always think in terms of the sales motion, which is the process from introduction to close. If I look at the company's product and services and see that there are repeat, incremental and value-added sales opportunities, then I'll probably try to tell a sales story along the lines of *The Relationship Close*. I'll write my copy to build trust by offering insights and perspectives into the challenges of the market space. In sales, no matter how hard you try to deliver something of value, if your prospect doesn't like you, they probably won't buy from you. It doesn't matter if it's a web page or a boardroom.

There are many types of sales closes from the *Columbo* and *Puppy Dog* closes all the way to the *Assumptive* and *Backwards* closes. Some work better online than others, but the point is, sometimes if you hit a dead-end with your web text, try reformatting it into sales closes.

Proof point stories build trust in a different way, they remove the company from the sales equation and let someone else do the selling. I try to use four different proof point copy techniques in my web writing:

1. **Lift out customer quotes do more than provide much needed references to the web guest,** they also help to break-up paragraphs of copy, and are easily updated assuming you've developed your website correctly.

2. **Video testimonials are compelling if they're short, 60 to 90 seconds is all you need,** and when tagged correctly with keywords, they're search engine optimization-rich.

3. **Perception, attitude and satisfaction research can win the day,** assuming that you didn't conduct the research internally. If you did, there's little, if any, credibility.

4. **Case studies are excellent but most often they're used incorrectly.** Don't just place a PDF of your printed case study on your site and call it good. Place your complete case study on your web page and take advantage of the keywords. Include your PDF for printable convenience. If your case study is more than 250 words, and almost all of them are, you'll initiate the process of being passed-over, passed-up and passed-by. As I've referenced in previous posts, the research is conclusive, we lose interest when a web page contains more than 250 words of copy, so keep it brief.

And when I say keep it brief, that applies to me, too.

DAY
06

The Real Reason Email Subject Lines Are Important

July 22, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Seven: There's been plenty of research conducted about email subject lines, some good, some bad and some just plain silly. I always marvel at Mail Chimp's list of worst performing email subject lines with *Final reminder for complimentary entry to attend the West Freelands BCI Cluster Conference 2006* maintaining a comfortable lead for eight straight years.

Assuming you're ultimately looking to drive traffic to your website or a key landing page somewhere, the email subject line is going to be a primary barrier to successful open rates, and your email's content, the barrier to a click through. Considering you need to get past the subject line and past your copy just to get to the web page, let alone wanting the web visitor to take some form of action once they've landed, is nothing short of a tall order.

There's no shortage of statistics – no more than six words, less than 130 characters, don't use all caps and exclamation points, or the words **Free, Help** and **Percent-Off.** That's all reasonable. However, what's quite revealing is in a study conducted by **Adestra,** they determined that subject lines for B2B emails had a stronger open rate when they were 6-10 words in length, but a weaker click-through rate. This tells us that we should use a longer subject line when the email does not require the reader to take a click-through action.

> But what's missing in all of this research? Creativity and a default excuse. I've closed business from a three word subject line that I've used time and again. It's not overwhelmingly creative but it does seems to be engaging. *It Can't Hurt.*

I've used this in business development to insurance companies, to manufacturers, to banks and to property management companies. In my text, I reference the amount of website work we've done in the industry, I reference the names of clients, even the recipient's competitors. I might reference a few insights, as well as some other insights I'll share with them when we meet. It works like a charm. And from what I hear in our initial meetings, they've fully scoured our website without having to bother with a click-through action. Give it a try and see if it works for you.

DAY 07

Why Website Sliders Don't Work

July 23, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Eight: I love sliders. I praise thee White Castle for your little, delicious, greasy bags of sliders, but hold the cheese, and hold that thought, for we'll focus on website sliders for the time being. I've had two conversations with clients last week, one in Madison and the other in Milwaukee, about why website sliders, also known as carousels, don't work. But I'll be the first to admit, in addition to White Castle sliders, I do like website sliders but for all the wrong reasons.

Back in the day of sliders, it would provide web text writers like myself the opportunity to create four or five highly creative messages and propositions designed to highlight a company's propositions, advantages and benefits. But the reasons to design your next website without sliders are too numerous to avoid. Test after test, from Jacob Nielsen to Notre Dame University, clearly show that click-through rates for sliders are 1% and of that 1%, almost all are for the first slider image. There's almost no interest for sliders, and no interest for sliders after position one. Do you really want to surrender a huge portion of your home page to a design technique that doesn't yield conversion? Of course you don't.

And as they say in the infomercial business, "But wait, there's more."

1. In advertising, I've always believed he who proves too much ends up proving nothing at all – sliders accentuate this belief.

2. Usability findings dictate that the user needs to be in control, their control is limited with sliders.

3. Sliders affect load times and that can be troublesome in our inpatient world.

4. Abandoning sliders will force you to develop power messaging that you can change-up on a monthly basis. This will help you with your search engine optimization, not to mention developing your new marketing propositions.

There are plenty of alternative website design techniques to sliders, but there's no substitute for those other mouth–watering sliders.

DAY 08

Repeat After Me. A Website is Never Done

July 24, 2014 | Kathy Marks

The following post is from Kathy Marks, Managing Director of TMA+Peritus and my partner. Kathy, among others, will be guest bloggers for the 30 Day Blog. Thanks for your contribution, Kathy.

Day Nine: That's right. Your website is meant to change and evolve over time by continuously adding new content and features. There was a time not so long ago, when we could design a website, breathe a sigh of relief when it was done, and let it sit for several years until it was time for a new redesign. Those days are long gone. Today, websites are meant to be content delivery platforms, requiring nurturing and ongoing attention.

Go into a new website design or redesign project with a 3-5 year plan and to get the most out of your investment, follow these basic guidelines to assure that your new website will flex and grow over time:

1 Build your site on a modern, widely supported, flexible and extendable platform, knowing that the site will need to change as your business changes. There are many great content management systems (CMS's) that you can choose from, depending on your requirements. Our top choices for a CMS are Wordpress and Drupal. Modern CMS platforms will provide you with a host of modules, plugins and widgets that are continuously being developed and improved upon by a worldwide network of talented developers.

2 Be sure to align your website strategy with your business strategy. Most businesses will have a 1-3 year business plan. Share your business plan with your website design and development team. They will be grateful. Make sure that your website helps you to achieve your business strategy and goals.

3 Treat your website as a salesperson. View your website as a digital sales representative. What are your sales goals? What is your sales process? Make sure that your website steps site visitors through a sales decision process. Your site needs to generate leads and convert visitors into customers. Make it go to work for you, delivering revenue to your bottom line.

Create a website, aligned with your business strategy, and expect a return on your investment.

Let's Talk About Us

July 25, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Ten: Or we can talk about About, or even about Us. The point is, there's some disagreement about About on your website. About how important About is, about if it should be About Us rather than About or even Us. But I'm stepping in to call a truce. I think it is important and it starts with some pretty interesting research. If you're in the B2B world, where many of us reside quite frequently, there's a February 2014 report titled *What B2B Buyers Want From Vendor Websites* and the insights are quite telling.

When respondents were asked what types of information they want from a B2B website, 90% said information about Products and Services. This makes sense. It also makes sense that 68% wanted contact information, although not as much sense. But coming in third at 61% was About, well ahead of the fourth place finisher, Marketing Collateral. On every one of our websites, and nearly everyone of our client's website, About is always in the top 10 in the content drilldown. As I said, it's important but not worth fighting over if it should be About Us or About, but for my money, less is more.

Don't put About in the utility navigation. Do spend a lot of time writing the page. Don't get hung-up on your history, as Thomas Jefferson said, "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past." I get the irony; I'm going back 200 years to tell you don't go back 200 years. Can you say who you are, what you do, and why you do it in two short paragraphs? You do that in a conversation everyday, which means you should be able to do that on your website.

Don't get hung-up on thinking your About page needs to be written like everyone's About page.

I just wrote a page for a large construction company that consisted entirely of an emotional story about what we do and why we do it from the CEO. And the reason I did that was because every general contractor's About text was the same as the next.

Thanks for letting me talk about *About.*

DAY
10

Just How Much is Enough?

July 26, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day 11: That's a really good question. I'd say eat until you're comfortable, but don't overeat, and don't think it's okay to stand-up at the table, unbutton your Sansabelts, and get ready for round two. But hey, I'm not a dietician, I'm a website writer and strategist.

So, an even better question is how much content should I produce to be content marketing? First of all, you can produce all the content you want, but if it's not being published, syndicated, shared and discussed, then all you're doing is writing to the choir and that's not going to be productive. The reason I know this is a great question is because it's asked of me every week. Although we'll never know for certain how much it takes to fulfill the carnivorous needs of Google's algorithm, which is content dependent, it doesn't hurt to create as much content as you can. But, and it's a very important but, it needs to be relevant to your customers and prospects. If all I did was write about spots in all my blogs, because it interests me, then my content would only be shared by sports fans and not marketers, and that's not my content objective. So, I suggest starting small but dreaming big. Try one blog post every week. I wrote a post a while back called *Blog it Like Drucker, check it out*.

Once you're off and running, make sure you mix it up. Content assets come in many forms, don't get stuck in narrative mode every time.

Remember, content is a video, infographic, research findings, white papers, case studies, POVs, a press release and the beat goes on. This is the type of content your customers and Google crave.

Just like a great steak or a plate of fresh vegetables from the local farmer's market.

DAY
11

Don't Hesitate to Put The E in Your Next Book

July 27, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day 12: I like Ebooks. In fact, I'm about to start my fifth one. More importantly, our clients, followers, friends and the general public seem to like them, too. How do I know this? Ebooks are analytics-rich and that's the first reason I'm down with them, or up, or both, depending on which generation you're talking to. I typically gate the content in my Ebooks at the second or third page depending on the length of the book. Now, before everyone gets up in arms about gated versus un-gated content, let me tell you my preference is always to give 100% access to the public whenever possible. But let's be honest, Ebooks are a lot of work for our team, and in the end, I still have a business to run, leads to generate, prospects to nurture, and sales to close.

I do open the floodgates after a few months and I only ask for a name, an email and the company name. I never ask for a phone number, a title or a web address. In my last Ebook, *How to Put the ROI in Your URL,* I had more than 1,000 downloads and the book was specific to only the insurance industry.

I like looking at the analytics, not just who downloaded, but how long they spent reading my efforts, how many repeat visitors there were to the page, and if they bounced from that landing page or went deeper into the site. But never, ever, will I pick-up the phone and call someone after the download. For my money, and potentially a lack of it, that type of sales etiquette is bad form, it's intrusive and invasive, and it's the dark side of sales. No thank you.

We recently completed an Ebook for a college, which was promoted by way of a TV and radio commercial. Boom.

Big numbers and huge increases in time spent on site. Remember, if you're looking for some website stickiness, the natural default is usually videos, but try an Ebook someday, it's stickier than gum on a shoe, but a lot more pleasing.

DAY
12

Don't Lose Contacts Through Your Contact

July 28, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Thirteen: Dale Carnegie once said, "We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts; what we do, how we look, what we say and how we say it." I've got no beef with that, although I'd add who you hang around with to the list. So, if this is mostly true, why is the Contact page on almost all websites an afterthought, vanilla, boring, poorly designed and even clumsily written? I don't have an answer; this was just a rhetorical question.

But the fact remains, web visitors leave web pages in droves by the second. Usability king Jacob Neilsen has more than taught us our chances of web page survival are slim, but there is a glimmer of hope if the visitor spends 10 seconds on a page, because if they spend 10, they'll spend 20, and if they spend 20, there's a chance they'll spend 30.

So, after you're finished with this web page, go directly to your Contact page and see if it contains the elements to hold your interest for 10 seconds and then 20 seconds. Is there more there than just your contact information? There should be. I like a strong headline at the top, some lead in copy before the contact information, some graphical element like a photo or a designed testimonial from a client, plus your Google map. That should be enough to hold some interest.

Now, let me give you an example. I recently wrote this copy for a Contact page promoting a college's student recruitment efforts for manufacturing classes:

It's not Your Father's Factory Anymore. That's because it's going to be your factory. You're going to raise the skill bar by building the one machine that outperforms all machines. You. And we'll do it with you, so contact us today and we'll get you the information you need tomorrow.

There are many techniques you can incorporate to increase the time on your Contact page, but if you're thinking in the direction of form submissions, checklists and a captcha if you're a B2B enterprise, that's just not going to do anything other than turn people away.

DAY 13

The Secret Ingredient to a Successful Website Redesign

July 29, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Fourteen: Well, I'll tell you want it isn't. It's not website design or website development. It's not search engine optimization (SEO) or great writing. It's not stunning photography, videos or properly crafted calls-to-action. It isn't even great project management. The secret ingredient to a successful website redesign project is a great Website Project Manager.

Yes ladies and gentlemen, the difference between project management and website project management might as well be the difference between an avocado and a mango, and I say that because we've developed websites for both. I've seen it time and again, with the same result, time and again. Website project management is not the same as placing an ad agency account executive in charge of a website redesign project. That rarely works. The same holds true for a designer or developer managing the project, or even worse, an ad agency principal.

A great website project manager has hundreds of web-based projects under their belt. I've seen our team manage more than a dozen sites at once and it's ballet-like.

I've seen our team manage a project with 5,000 stakeholders and it's synchronized swimming-like.

A great website project manager knows the right questions to ask because they know where and when the train can derail. They keep things on track, on budget, on time. In other words, they keep their scope on scope creep, and the client thanks them for that. They keep designers and developers talking. They understand the iterative process of a website design project – content, design, development, more content, more design, more development – repeat. And they have a strong working knowledge of every aspect of the Discover, Define, Design, Develop, Deploy and my personal sixth D, Derive process. And that's short for Derive Results, Derive Analytics Conclusions and Derive Client Satisfaction.

Most of all, a great website project manager knows how to manage the expectations. There aren't many of them out there, but when you find a talented website project manager, you're Destined for the seventh D – Destined For Success.

DAY 14

Build Trust When You Build Your Website

July 30, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Fifteen: Several of you have contacted me since my Day 6 Blog, Every Picture Tells a Story, Don't It? You wanted to know other ways to build trust by way of your website other than the four proof points I referenced, which were using client pull quotes throughout your website, video testimonials, perception, attitude and satisfaction research, and case studies.

But first, I have a few surefire ways to destroy trust for those who enjoy the macabre, the disturbing and the appalling. To destroy trust, utilize a tremendous amount of stock photography throughout your website. This might take a few moments to accomplish, so if you're looking for a way to obliterate trust, use the stock photo above. I believe this lovely young lady is the true Internet sensation with more impressions than Frank Caliendo. For a little added juice, put your stock photography on a template or themed website, and stick a canned newsletter under the category Resources. That should just about do it.

But, if you're looking to gain trust, here are a few more suggestions to consider. Use logos. Yes, use your logo and others, too. The logos of your clients are of tremendous importance.

People want to know the businesses you're doing business with, even their competitors.

Industry knowledge is critical to many decision makers, so don't hold back. And by all means use the logos of any awards, achievements, recognition from trade groups and certifications that you might have earned. Of course product reviews and social proof is important, but so are press pick-ups. Press releases are ineffective for building trust, but when your releases appear in a trusted periodical, now you have something worth showing.

And I can't possibly forget to mention, as I'm half way through 30 Days of Blogging, blogging. Want to build trust? Do what I'm doing. Want to toss it out the window? Blog once. Or blog twice, three months apart.

DAY 15

Animation Resuscitation

The following post is from Kurt Huber, Senior Art Director at TMA+Peritus. Kurt, among others, will be guest bloggers for the 30 Day Blog. Thanks for your contribution, Kurt.

July 31, 2014 | Kurt Huber

Day Sixteen: Flash animations have been on the decline for the last several years, due largely to Apple's decision to exclude it for reasons of security, browser instability and high CPU usage on all of its devices, and most of the other manufacturers followed suit.

There is now a viable animation alternative to Flash called SVG - Scalable Vector Graphics, and it's a top web trend for 2014. SVGs are vector-based lines, text, colors and shapes defined by geometry, rather than a conventional raster image or photo, which is comprised of many tiny colored pixels. SVGs keep page load times to a minimum and they allow for zooming in for close ups without looking pixellated, because they re-render after each zoom. SVGs can easily double in size for retina devices, they eliminate the need for separate images for multiple browser width scenarios, and they also print well. SVG animations work well with all major web browsers and mobile devices. Animations can range from subtle design touches to large, detailed animations and even interactive games. SVG is also an excellent choice for static images.

When used properly to tell your story, sell your products, or for just as a little bit of bling, SVG animations can breathe new life into your website on any device.

The key to their success is knowing your audience and making sure your animations are a help and not a hinderance to viewing critical information.

DAY 16

The Blog Blog

August 1, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Seventeen: Well, I've been putting it off, but I'm caving into external and internal pressures. Yes, I'm selling out, throwing in the towel, crying uncle, no mas. I'm writing a blog about blogging, which is so 2010. Maybe 2009.

But I'm sticking to the facts. Do you want to know why you should blog and blog like a rock star, which basically means doing it in excess? Companies that blog increase their web traffic by 55%. Over and out. Just kidding, but do I really need to continue? Certainly. 43% of companies that blogged in 2013, created at least one new customer as a direct result of their effort. Remember what the great one said – not Gretzky, the other great one, Peter Drucker, "There can be no business without a customer." You want customers? You want their business? Then you want to blog.

Here's a few more stats to save when your boss says no. It's true that 57% of all B2B sales decisions are made before anyone contacts a sales representative, but here's why this stat is really false. Who on earth would build a website that didn't clone a top sales person? That's what websites are today – lead generating, prospect nurturing, high performance sales machines. And your blog is a big part of it.

Is your boss a tightwad, skinflint and cheapskate? Hit him with this stat like Sugar Ray did to Roberto –

70% of people find out more about your company through blogs and articles than the outrageously expensive ads you're running.

Maybe then you'll get the go ahead.

DAY
17

Page One or Bust

August 2, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Eighteen: I've been reviewing the report issued by Chitika, the on line ad network, regarding their latest findings on Google's organic search results pages. And second page and third page – yes there are those, too.

If you want to be present and unaccounted for, be satisfied with your page two or page three placement on Google. If you want some page one action, as we all do, but don't want to pay for it, trust me, it's going to be a long slog, but well worth the slogging. Here's why – 91.7% of all the organic traffic action is found on page one. Page two accounts for a whopping 4.8% of the organic traffic, and page three is the nosebleed section delivering only 1.1% of the traffic.

It's been proven time and again that original, thoughtful, keyword embracing content can help you on the arduous journey to the top. And when I say top, why not set your sights on the summit? The good people at Chitika have delivered the goods and here's the search result for each page one position:

Search Results			
1	32.5%	6	4.4%
2	17.6%	7	3.5%
3	11.4%	8	3.1%
4	8.1%	9	2.6%
5	6.1%	10	2.4%

You need to do everything you can to get on the first page of search and that means content marketing everyday. It also means having a professional write or rewrite your website. First of all, it will help with your search objectives. Second, your website will be far more engaging and compelling if you invest in a web text writer. But remember, web writers and freelance writers aren't the same – a web writer knows the principles of SEO, knows proper copy weights, and understands the opportunities and the limits of keyword inclusion. And third, with better content – and more content – you'll end up with more indexed pages on Google, higher volumes of traffic, probably more leads, and in the end, more conversions.

DAY
18

The Content Marketing Calendar. Good Idea or Bad Idea?

August 3, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Nineteen: Good cop, bad cop. Net or no net. Jekyll or Hyde. Well, you get the point. The content marketing calendar, like the circus, is filled with peril and thrills. My simple advice is every business needs an editorial or content marketing calendar. But not everyone.

Like me. Take the 30 Day Blog for instance. I'm not working from a content marketing calendar, like the Flying Wallendas, I'm working without a net. In cases like these, I find the calendar inhibiting, limiting, time-consuming, and as much work as it takes to actually write a blog. I know others who feel the same. I also know that had I drafted a calendar for 30 straight days of blogging about website design and development, complete with topics, supporting research, syndication processes and KPIs, which should be part of your editorial calendar, I would have found the task daunting. I like the thrill of being unencumbered. I like the peril that comes with complete flexibility.

But it's not for everyone and it certainly shouldn't be for a business.

If you're responsible for content in your office, you'll need a monthly calendar.

Let's be honest, which essentially means that some people have been dishonest, random acts of content marketing just don't work. They won't hurt you, but they're not going to help that much, either. In addition to your topic, supporting documentation, review date, publishing date, writer and results, make certain you detail the syndication or publishing process. We all know, just because you write it doesn't mean they'll see it – or read it for that matter.

But don't let the calendar hang you up. Important events, seasonal opportunities, the weather, a chance meeting, something you overheard that's timely, these trump the calendar. There'll be plenty of time to get to your important subjects, but there's not always time to be timely.

DAY 19

Put Some Action in Your Calls-to-Action

August 4, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty: CTAs as we call them in the website design, development and writing business. My fellow Chicagoans, I know, to us the CTA is something else. My fellow music lovers, I know, to us the CTA is something else, provided you were around back then.

In general terms, I applaud the success of Hubspot. I think what they do yields them a lot of ink. That being the old way of saying impressions. But in one or two of their publications about calls-to-action, they were overstating the obvious when educating the reader about CTA buttons being colorful, large enough to see, and being located in an easy to find spot. Price of admission. But they really lost me when they wrote, "Action oriented: Begin with a verb like 'Download' or 'Register.'" Really? I think we can do better than that.

A CTA button is prime real estate to show web visitors that you know how to blend salesmanship with creativity. Download, Register, Learn More, Click Here, Read More just don't cut it.

Sure, I understand that once in a while you might need to default to these, but please, not with any degree of regularity.

And speaking of real estate, I once wrote a CTA button for a wonderful property management and real estate development company named Avante Properties. They were promoting a new community called Uptown. Because one of the owners is named Scott, who happens to be a great guy, I was left with little choice but to use the CTA Beam Me Uptown, Scotty.

The point is, people appreciate and recognize when you go the distance with your CTAs, and that means mixing them up. I like to have a CTA on every page, but I write the lead-in copy differently for each as well as the CTA button. A few of my other favorites from Avante Properties include Take Me To A Better Space in their commercial property search, and *More About Land, Less About Singing* when the lead in copy about land development referenced the classic Woody Guthrie tune, *This Land Is Your Land*.

Go after those calls-to-action. Make them great and make them memorable. It's worth the extra time and effort, and you'll see a difference in your conversion rates.

DAY 20

Make it Right – Don't Write Your Own Website

August 5, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty-One: I beg you. I implore you. I urge you politely and respectfully. Don't do it unless you're a trained professional. Writing your own website can singlehandedly ruin the experience for a web visitor, and quickly, too. In just the time it takes to say, *"F. Scott Fitzgerald might have been the greatest American writer ever, with the possible exception of Hemingway"* is all the time you have to capture and win the attention of a web guest. If you have the writing chops to do it, let it rip; if not, outsource.

Web text writers, and you've read it here before, are not the same as other writers. Web text writers understand search engine optimization. They work, as I do, with a keyword list of generally 100 words or more, laying right beside their keyboard. They understand the balance of copy weight as it relates to Google's famed algorithm. If you have to ask what that means, then you know for certain that writing your own website is a mistake. Essentially, it means that Google values longer content, but a web visitor does not. Knowing the workaround to this problem is invaluable. And most of all, web text writers know how to drive traffic to your site, and with traffic you'll get leads, and with leads you can nurture your prospects, and with nurtured prospects, you'll get profitable sales conversions.

Two years ago, very few companies would pay to have someone else write their website. Today, the floodgates have opened.

Since Google's algorithm change in May of 2013, which placed a heavy influence on search rank based on original, relevant and frequent content, many businesses finally understood that writing it themselves wasn't saving them money, it was costing them sales. And just to make certain businesses really understood it, Google fired another salvo across the corporate bow this May with another tweak to the algorithm. And guess what? 8% of the websites in the U.S. were impacted.

The lesson for businesses is that this is pretty serious business. And this writing lesson from F. Scott himself is also serious, but in a wonderful sort of way, "Cut out all these exclamation points. An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke." Right on!

DAY
21

Content Marketing ROI. Seriously?

August 6, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty Two: Well I'd say enough is enough. If someone wants you to prove the content ROI on your website, or asks you to provide the business case for spending money on content, your best course of action is to tilt your head in disbelief and walk away. Okay, that might be extreme, particularly if it's your supervisor or the CFO, but it's not extreme to answer their question with your question; I'd fire back with *what's the ROI of eating an apple?*

Or helping an elderly lady with her grocery bags. Or returning a lost wallet with the money and credit cards intact. Or taking a moment out of your day by helping someone who is unable to help himself. What's the ROI on that? The fact is, these are the right things to do, and if people don't understand that, so be it. My take is this. You can talk about the content requirements of Google's algorithm, you can discuss the relationship between content, search and conversions, you can cite statistic after statistic about traffic lift, stickiness and lead generation, videos and brand preference, and testimonials and the trust barometer. But if someone is looking to poke holes in your arguments as if you were a digital voodoo doll, then poke away they will. If someone wants to know the precise return on investment for a particular content campaign, then you might not win the day.

Unless it's today. Join me on the dark side of this argument. We understand loss far better than we have the capacity to understand gain. A loss is tangible, a gain is pie-in-the-sky. Make them do the work; figure out what the loss of an average customer is over the course of your company's average customer retention time. Depending on your revenue model, it could be thousands of dollars or millions of dollars. It could be one worker or dozens, and all the associated costs with layoffs and furloughs. It's just not worth the risk, which is, of course, the catalyst for loss.

Look, it's high-time we took the marketing out of content marketing.

It's content selling, and it's the new approach to preventing loss, so at least you have the prospect of gain well within your sights.

DAY 22

Above the Fold and Other Myths about Scrolling Websites

The following post is from Kathy Marks, Managing Partner of TMA+Peritus.

August 7, 2014 | Kathy Marks

Day Twenty Three: Is the term *Above the Fold* familiar to you? In yesteryear, Above the Fold was a newspaper term that referenced an advertisers preference to have their display ad appear above the fold of their local newspaper. Today, Above the Fold refers to the content on a website that you can see on your computer screen without scrolling. Although the Above the Fold myth has been questioned over the past eight years, we still get asked today about whether or not it's a good idea to put content below the fold. The definitive answer is yes, it is okay since all usability tests prove that website users today will scroll to view content.

Hoa Loranger, a usability expert and Director at Nielsen Norman Group, recently published an article discussing the following three myths:

Myth #1: Users don't scroll long pages: Users do scroll when the content is relevant, organized properly, and formatted for ease of scanning. In fact, people prefer scrolling the page for content over pagination when the topics within that page answer the right questions. The standard scroll wheel on a mouse, arrow keys, and track pads have made scrolling much easier than acquiring click targets.

Myth #2: Customers don't read information at the bottom of the page: Our eyetracking research show that while users spend 80% of their attention on information above the page fold, they allocate 20% of it to content below the fold. Reluctance to scroll is a behavior of the past. While you should still be mindful of people's limited attention span on websites and prioritize content wisely, you shouldn't fear long formats. People will see the bottom if you give them good reason to go there.

Myth #3: People avoid pages with a lot of content: People have the ability to handle vast amounts of information, when presented properly. In Writing for the Web courses, we emphasize the requirement for writing well, and more importantly, writing for web-based reading. Reading and scanning patterns are different between web-based and print-based content. While online users typically scan for information, it does not mean they want less information. Websites should not be information light. The same information needs to be written, structured, and presented differently.

Rest assured, knowing that people will scroll your website as long as you **provide them with well written, relevant content** that is targeted to the needs of your website audiences.

DAY 23

Bottoms Up

August 8, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty Four: There's been a lot of recent chatter about website footers. And rightfully so. If you sectioned off a web page, there'd be navigation (unless, of course, you're one of those people that places the global navigation in the footer), content, and the footer. But what's intriguing to me about the footer is it's the devil's playground, a den of thieves, the underworld of a website's underbelly.

Read the conversations on the world wide Internet about the trickery, the shortcuts, even the potential link cheating that people promote, and you'd think the website footer was the equivalent of the famed Hole-in-the Wall where all the bank robbers camped-out in the late 1800s. But it's not, and it shouldn't be looked at in that regard. Add to that the opinions of some who believe you should start your website design and development process at the footer, and you have a three-ring circus on your hands.

Let's take first things first. For those who believe you start at the footer, you don't; this isn't a jungle-gym where the starting line is the ground. It's a website and there is no substantiated research and no eye-tracking findings that report that a web visitor starts at the footer. I'm all for loading the footer with the typical and anticipated information including, but not limited to contact information, email sign-ups, policy statements, copyright, office locations, site map or navigational links, and of course, the always exciting Compensation Disclosure if you're in the insurance trade.

But how much further do we really need to go? I'll ask this question: if you had a single, overwhelming and compelling sales proposition, and you knew that the chances were that your web guest would only see it once, is the footer where you'd stick the proposition? I hope not. I've seen more links in footers than Oscar Mayer has Smokies. I've seen as much design in a footer as there is in the *Communication Arts Annual*.

But my sense is this – if you're in professional services or cultivating business in a B2B environment, you're better off playing it right down the middle.

Use the expanded footer where it's genesis falls firmly in our willingness to scroll, but don't think of it as a salad bar either, there's only so much room on your plate.

DAY 24

The Three Most Important Words in Website Design

August 9, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty Five: I suppose if you're the CFO, it might be *how much will it cost?* But that's actually five words. If you're an IT Director, it might be *just so you know, IT will be driving this project*. But that's 10 words. Forget all that, the three most important words in a web design project are *Know Thy Audience*.

Now, every good web design company does some sort of discovery as part of their 5-D process. The really good web design firms place the most emphasis on discovery, but the really, really good web design companies include VOC (Voice-of-Customer) Research as part of their discovery process. How can you know your audience if you don't spend time talking to them? Specifically, what are their likes and dislikes about your current website, what's missing that shouldn't be missing, what do they like about your competitor's websites, what types of content is most important, and the beat goes on? By not having your web design company do VOC, you might as well be taking the piñata approach to design and development, and content writing, and information architecture, and SEO, and everything else for that matter.

VOC is a tricky business. You need to know how to draft segmented interview guides if your audiences are segmented, you need to know how to interview people in 20 minutes or less but walk away with an hour of information, you need to understand how to synthesize the data and draft audience personas, and like any qualitative research, you need to know how to read between the lines. Always ask for VOC as part of the discovery process.

> The more discovery and strategy you do upfront, the less you'll hear the CFO say, "And how much more will this cost?"

DAY
25

Why is a microsite not a website?

August 10, 2014 | Kurt Huber

Day Twenty Six: Well of course it is. Microsites have more definitions than Carters has pills. Incredibly, some definitions insist that a microsite be part of a larger site. What? Others proclaim a microsite must be temporary? Double what? And still some definitions assert that a microsite isn't a microsite unless it's a web page or a very small cluster of web pages. Really?

Here's what we believe a microsite is. It must have a separate URL. There must be a primary website associated to the microsite, if there isn't then the microsite graduates to website status. It must have a singular product, service or cause focus. Whether the microsite links to the primary site or not is irrelevant. It must serve a very particular demographic that is not readily served from the primary site. Lastly, who really cares?

I'm amused that the American Advertising Federation (AAF), of which I'm a member in good standing, an American Advertising Awards judge, and a chapter Past President has an awards category for microsites. I've judged a lot of them and don't recall ever seeing an entry in the microsite category that wasn't anything short of a full-scale website.

No wonder there's confusion, not even our own profession can get it right.

By and large I steer clear of microsites, although we just launched one for a wonderful client, Nicolet College, that's recruiting from a very narrow demographic who would not be well served by the primary site. Check it out at *www.notyourfathersfactory.com*. And by the way, many microsites fail to deliver because they're not specifically fueled to drive traffic. Not this one. This is promoted through TV and radio spots, direct marketing, digital advertising, social media and public relations.

Hey, should we talk about macrosites? Not now. I'm looking forward to something far more interesting.

DAY 26

Going Mobile

The following post is from Kurt Huber, Senior Art Director at TMA+Peritus.

August 11, 2014 | Kurt Huber

Day Twenty Seven: The Who's song, Going Mobile, is about the freedom we have to go anywhere and escape anything with automobiles and mobile homes. Mobile devices are also about freedom, but also our responsibilities to family, work, friends and others. They're always with us, and we're always available. For better, or for worse, these small devices have become the dominant way to surf the web, and this has meant a dramatic shift in how web designers, developers, marketers and writers create websites.
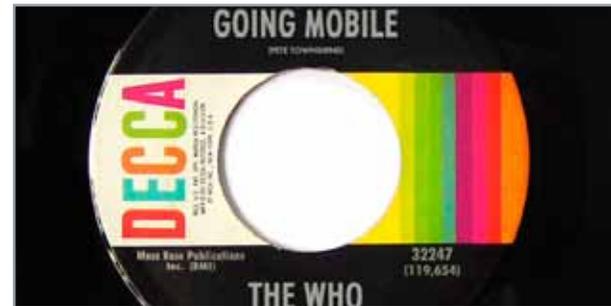
I'm Free. 1/3 of all web traffic is on smartphones and tablet devices and rising fast, while users are abandoning their traditional computers.

Getting in Tune. Google's algorithm favors responsive websites. If your website was designed for the desktop era, or if you have separate desktop and mobile versions of your site, it's time to move to a responsive website.

Who Are You? I Really Wanna Know. Mobile users need you to get to the point. Unnecessary copy needs to go away — now.

Pictures of Lily. Images need to be optimized, because fast load times are critical to mobile users. Retina users should also have higher resolution images available for their devices.

They Call Me the Seeker. A mobile site needs to be easy to navigate, links need to be large enough and separated enough to be easily pokeable with an index finger. Menus need to expand and collapse and/or move to the bottom to stay out of the way of the content.

These are just some of the considerations we use in our mobile-first approach to building websites. If you don't have a responsive website by now, you need one very soon. I'll let Pete Townshend wrap this up for me, "Mobile, mobile, mobile yeah!"

DAY 27

Collaboration is a Three-Way Street

August 12, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty Eight: If you're looking for a successful outcome to your next website design and development project you better take a good, hard look at your collaboration methods – no matter what side of the desk you're on. There's you (the client), there's the website design firm (us), and there's the firm's technology. That's why it's a three-way street.
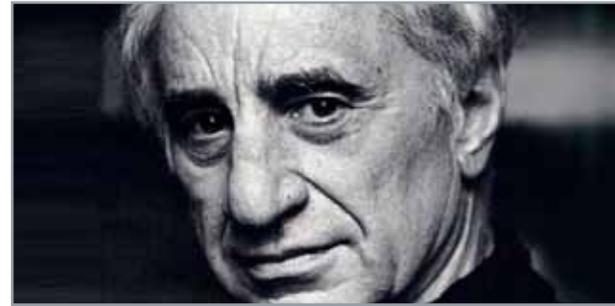
First, let's start with you. Most, but certainly not all, web projects that extend beyond the agreed upon timetable, go the distance because of client distractions. And that's understandable. Hey, you have a business to run, people to manage, sales to develop, fires to fight and profitable transactions to celebrate. But in all my years in this business, I've found that a one hour commitment each week to the web development process goes a long way. Now, I'm not talking about preparing content, digging up the old photos of the factory in the Red Wing shoe box or chasing down testimonials. I'm talking about one hour to make critical decisions each week, to answer some questions, and review some insights. Believe it or not, this really helps.

Second, let's talk about us.

> Most agencies believe what the great director, producer, writer and actor, Elia Kazan said, "I think there should be collaboration, but under my thumb."

Look, your website outcome is directly related to what you put into it. Agencies don't know your business as well as you do, not even close. The more we collaborate the better the results. That's in person, on Skype, on the whiteboard, the phone, but never through email. You cannot project manage a website through email. Never.

But you can through technology and that's a question you should always ask your website design and development firm. Not just their process, but ask them to name the technology tools and resources they use to manage the process. You can't really drive a technological process without technology, can you? Some tools agencies use are free and that's okay, but by and large, the enterprise-wide stuff is not, but it's essential. That's why it's a three-way street; you, us and the technology that keeps us collaborative.

DAY 28

The 30 Day Blog Results Are In – Part One

August 13, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Twenty Nine: I've been writing articles and blogs for years. I've written for TMA+Peritus, for newspapers and magazines (Gannett, In Business, Wisconsin Independent Agent to name a few), and for clients too many to name. But I've never tackled 30 blogs in a row without interruption, and I certainly never made the attempt to limit my subject matter to only website design and development.

I have had no less than a hundred people ask me for the results. I've actually met with several clients that wanted me to speak with them about the mid-term results and then the final results once all the votes were tallied. This blog is about the "soft" results, some of the things that have happened to me in the last 30 days and some of what I've learned.

I've had four speaking requests in 30 days. Some to groups with a modest attendance of 40, others over 100. More people than I can count, that I can remember, some who I don't know, others who know me – from my photo – have approached me in Madison and Milwaukee to tell me how much they're enjoying the 30 Day Blog.

Some are honest and admit to not reading all of them. Others say they've read every one – who am I to argue? And speaking of honesty, I did not write 30 blogs, I wrote 26 blogs with guest appearances from Kathy Marks and Kurt Huber. Some people have asked me about the mechanics of this, the process, the planning. To all of you, I answer with this: one day I had the idea, the next day I did it. That was one of only two days when I wrote the blog a day in advance. The furthest I stayed in front of the deadline was five days, but the average was three. A website pitch in Florida followed by a trip to Iowa caused me to go five days out. I did not plan any topics in advance. I researched for proof points as much as I could. I vowed to never write more than 250 words, but I neglected to tell you that some vows are meant to be broken, not that one, of course.

I found this to be easy. I am not convinced this can't be done by anyone who puts a little effort into it. I've told clients for years to blog, but mostly with the same results. We can't write, we don't have the resources, we don't have the time. I can write, but I do own my own business with dozens of clients across the country, I have a wife and four kids, the best dog ever who needs surgery, a 90 year old father and a guilty conscience. If I can do it, I know you can do it.

And tomorrow ladies and gentleman, the real results, the results you can tell your bosses about, the results that you can take to the bank – bank on it.

DAY
29

The 30 Day Blog Results Are In – Part Two

August 14, 2014 | Tom Marks

Day Thirty: The last day is upon us. 30 straight, uninterrupted days of blogging about website design and development have come to an end. Many of you want to know the hard results. The statistical results. *"Just the facts, ma'am"* as Joe Friday (Jack Webb) said in Dragnet. But before that, there's this.

You must know that content needs context. Random acts of content marketing won't hurt you, but they're sure not going to drive bottom line sales. Far from it. My 30 Days of Blogging is the perfect example of the balance between content and context. Your content needs a framework, just like a shuffleboard court needs its scoring diagram and hopscotch needs its rectangles. You need to theme your content, you need to change those themes with some degree of regularity, and you need to be consistent, but only for that short, themed period of time, and then move on to your next framework. Share with your audience 10 Days of Customer Insights or Q4 Bubbler Talk or what every optometrist should have – Better this way or that.

And why should your content or your blog have a framework? Because it's more readily approachable, it's more understandable, your audience knows what they're in for and what they're getting. And here's the proof.

- Our web traffic increased 10-fold in these 30 days. Let me repeat, 10-fold.
- Our Likes and Follows increased, too, but this was not as important to me.
- As I mentioned yesterday, I have received four requests to speak to communications professionals, which almost always results in a new client or two.
- And speaking of new clients, as a direct result of the 30 Day Blog, we have landed two new clients, and likely a third.

Back in my previous blog, The Blog Blog, I wrote that 43% of companies that blog generate at least one new customer as a direct result of their blogging activities. I'm your proof, your Guinea Pig, your lab experiment. Does anyone want to increase their web traffic 10-fold; create new customers with just 40 or 50 hours of work; does anyone want to be asked to speak to audiences of prospects? I sure do. But for now, I'm taking a short break; maybe a week, maybe less.

Thanks for reading along.

DAY 30

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