

# How to come up with topics: 23 ways to fill your editorial calendar fast



All this content marketing is nice and dandy. But how do you know what to write about all the time? And how do you come up with interesting topics when your company is, well, boring?

Hold on a minute.

Before you get convinced that your company is boring, have a look at the following book titles I found on Amazon:

1. [The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design](#) (290 pages)
2. [101 Ways to Have Fun with a Tennis Ball](#) (48 pages)
3. [Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why](#) (128 pages)
4. [British Moths: Second Edition](#) (448 pages)
5. [Taxidermy – A Complete Guide to the Methods of Collecting, Preparing, Mounting and Displaying Animals](#) (290 pages)
6. [The Potato: Its History and Culture: With a descriptive list of Heirloom Potato Varieties](#)(140 pages)

Yes, people have filled complete books with these (seemingly) boring topics. Amazing, right?

Now, do you honestly think that your product, service or field of expertise is so boring that it is impossible to create content for?

Didn't think so.

With a little imagination and creativity, you can create content about anything. Even if you're selling cog wheels, insurance or accounting software (No offense if you do sell those).

But I get it. Sometimes, our creativity engine falls flat. We seem to run out of ideas and anything we come up with seems to be said and done already. At times, it's extremely hard to come up with content that is:

- Relevant to your audience
- Different from any of your competitors' content
- Making an impact in the mind of your audience

Now, you can wait for the muse to call you or you can actively look out for ideas and kick that muse in the butt. Here are 23 places you can go to look for ideas. Hopefully, your muse will show up somewhere along the way.

## 1. Ask your customers

So obvious that it's not. When was the last time you asked your customers anything? In fact, it's something we rarely do, probably with the idea that we don't want to bother them.

However, surveying your customers can be extremely useful. Just ask 'What do you want to know from us? What is your biggest challenge? What piece of knowledge do you think you are missing?' Any moment of customer interaction is appropriate for this: a service call, a conference, a newsletter, after a meeting, or during a product training session.

*When was the last time you asked your customers anything?*

## 2. Tell customer success stories

The only thing you need to fill your content calendar is happy customers, whatever the industry you are in. [One of the most frequently consulted content types by B2B buyers is the customer success story.](#)

It's simple: talk about how your customers are using your product. (Spoiler alert: it's not always how you think they are using your product.) If you have satisfied customers (which I hope you have), then you have an inexhaustible content source.

*Satisfied customers are an inexhaustible content source.*

### **3. Ask your sales team**

Somewhere in the course of business history, sales and marketing got separated. Whether they left each other with slamming doors or just lost interest in each other, the relationship between sales and marketing is much like a marriage. Sure, it can be tough sometimes, but eventually they are meant to be together.

As marketers, we sometimes associate sales with the shifty skills of vacuum cleaner salesmen. But in reality, sales professionals at B2B companies act more like assistant-buyers than as pushy peddlers. They help customers make an informed buying decision. As such, they are best placed to know the needs, challenges and interests of their customers.

*Today's B2B sales professionals act as assistant-buyers. They know customer needs very well and can help you come up with unique topics.*

### **4. Talk to your service/support team**

Content marketing is about helping your customers. It's about answering their pressing questions. Guess who gets tough questions from customers all the time? Yes, your company support team is your go-to source for informational, problem-solving topics.

### **5. Check your buyer personas again**

You made these for a reason. If you have done your research, then buyer personas will present you with the worries, needs and challenges of your ideal customer. This is great blogging material.

Don't let your buyer personas die a lonely death somewhere the labyrinthine depths of your laptop. Buyer personas are meant to be working documents. Use them frequently to get content ideas and update them if you need to.

## 6. Get on a quick brainstorm with your colleagues

And I don't mean your marketing colleagues. Why not get a fresh perspective from someone from R&D, accounting or another department?

Brainstorms don't have to be long either. What has worked for me, is this three-step approach:

- Ten minutes of spitting the craziest ideas
- Next ten minutes: go out, have a walk, have a smoke if you must. Let your ideas simmer.
- Go back to the flip chart for another ten minutes of brainstorming.

## 7. Steal from your competitors



Is [Cigarettes & Alcohol](#) by Oasis one of the greatest rock-'n'-roll tunes every made? You bet. Is it "borrowed" from [Get it On](#) by T.Rex? Well, duh.

Now, I don't want to promote plagiarism. But stealing with your eyes or ears is OK, as long you do your own thing with the original material. Have you seen a popular blog post from one of your competitors? Then why not put your own spin on it?

## 8. Find inspiration on industry blogs

Everybody and their mum has a blog these days. The problem with many of your competitors' blogs is that they are biased or at least inclined to approach a topic in view of their commercial interests. This is much less the case with blogs from industry organizations or trade associations.

## 9. Listen to podcasts

Podcasts are the new blogs, so there are a lot of ideas you can pick up in the podcastosphere. With podcast apps like [Stitcher](#), you can easily find an ever-growing number of shows dedicated to your industry.

## 10. Search on YouTube

More and more brands are moving over to YouTube as well. No wonder, because it's the second largest search engine after Google. You always need to separate the wheat from the chaff, but you'll find a lot of professionally produced YouTube channels that are worth following.

## 11. Read the trade press

Printed press may have a hard time these days, but the big advantage that traditional trade press has, is the network. Many trade magazines have been around in your industry for years, even before the birth of the internet. Especially in B2B, it makes sense to check out these publications for inspiration. Usually, the traditionally printed media have an online sibling as well.

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## 12. Visit industry conferences

No better way to get immersed into your subject matter than by visiting an industry conference. You have the opportunity to meet real people, see real products on display, and talk to real customers. There's no better way to gauge your market than by attending an industry trade show or event.

## 13. Search on Amazon.com

I admit, I absolutely love Amazon. I have bought so many books there already that these guys must know my credit card number by heart. But Amazon is not only

great for leaving your money. For me, it is also a source of inspiration. Just browse any topic, and you'll be presented with loads of titles that may inspire you.

## 14. Visit your local library or bookshop

As much as I love Amazon, you don't have to spend all your money on an internet mogul. Your local library or bookshop might serve just as well. Bonus: you're away from your computer and you can actually smell the paper from the books you're looking into.

## 15. Follow social media

I mention this with caution, because if you're a bit like me, social media can very easily result in a time-sucking rabbit hole. Then again, social media are essential if you want to gauge interests of customers, competitors, influencers and industry experts.

One way to keep sane in the world of social media is by using social media monitoring tools like Hootsuite, where you can filter social conversations by keyword.

## 16. Keyword research tools

There are a gazillion of tools out there that help you scorch the internet for people's interests. Here are a few of them that I occasionally use, but there are many more.

- [Ubersuggest](#): Search for popular keywords and therefore also possible blog topics
- [Google Trends](#): See how often a particular search term is entered and discover content trends.
- [Answer the Public](#): See how people search, based on Google autocomplete functionality.
- [BuzzSumo](#): Get a list of the most popular content on a particular topic.

## 17. Get ideas on Wikipedia

One of my favorite rabbit holes. It makes me think of my days as a kid when I thumbed through encyclopedia for hours on end (yes, I actually did that – don't ask). Is Wikipedia always accurate? Not sure. Wikipedia authors need to comply to certain [quality standards](#). But, as with all things on the internet, look at Wikipedia articles with a critical eye.

## 18. Question and answer websites

You probably know [Quora](#), but there are other popular question and answer sites: [answers.com](#), [Yahoo Answers](#) and [Ask.fm](#) to name a few.

## 19. Consult market research sites

If you are serious about getting accurate numbers and information, then consider one the many market research sites out there. This means that you might have to spend a few (more than a few) euros, but you'll have quality data in return. A few examples of research sites:

- [DeepDyve](#)
- [MarketingCharts](#)
- [IEEE GlobalSpec](#)
- [marketresearch.com](#)

## 20. Your hobbies and personal interests

A lot of how you look at the world is defined by your hobbies. Music is my thing: I check out the latest releases, spend too much time on [allmusic.com](#), and visit a gig every once and a while. When I'm lost for inspiration, [I sometimes look at a topic from a musical perspective](#). See also tip #7 in this listicle. Whatever your hobby or personal interest is, it might shine a different light on your topic, one that is worth exploring.

*Your hobby or personal interest might shine a different light on your topic.*

## 21. Interview an expert or industry leader

Look out for influencers, someone with authority in your industry. Interviewing an expert might add a unique angle to an existing idea, and as a bonus, it will generate traffic to your blog.

## 22. Newsjacking

Newsjacking is the art of piggybacking off the day's biggest news stories to draw attention to your own content. Look at big events, such as national elections, sports or celebrity news. But be careful with this: capitalizing on someone else's bad news can have a negative impact on your brand.

## 23. Check the annual calendar for special events

Whether it's Diwali, World Poetry Day or April Fool's Day, it's always worth exploring if you can link a special occasion with your topic. You can find inspiration with national holidays, religious days or [international days](#).

### **BONUS TIP: Keep a swipe file**

Ideas for your blog or content program can come at the most unexpected times: under the shower, on your driving commute to work, or while dozing off in your weekly marketing meeting. So, you need to catch those ideas while you can.

One way to do this is by keeping a swipe file, a collection of ideas, blog topics, headlines, etc. You can use a simple Word or Google document for this, but I like to use [Evernote](#), because this tool integrates with your browser, so you can add a web page to your swipe file in a few clicks.

Do you have more ways to stumble upon ideas? [Let me know](#) and I'll add them to the list.