CONTENT MARKETING
FOR SCHOOLS

A HANDY GUIDE FOR SCHOOL HEADS & MARKETING MANAGERS

PICKLEJAR
COMMUNICATIONS

This guide was produced and distributed by
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About Pickle Jar Communications

Pickle Jar Communications is an international communications consultancy and agency dedicated to helping the education and education-related sectors advance their marketing and communications activity and approaches.

With experience of working with over 130 schools, colleges, universities and education-related organisations in more than 20 countries, the team at Pickle Jar Communications are leaders in education sector communications and marketing.

Our support services include:

- Audience research
- Audits and reviews of existing marketing and communications activities
- Competitor benchmarking
- Communications and marketing strategy and planning
- Content strategy and planning
- Content marketing
- Social media planning
- Producing content for websites and social media channels
- Community management
- Training and professional development
- Conference speaking

For a conversation about how we can support your school, please visit

picklejarcommunications.com/contact-us/

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is broad term that refers to a type of marketing activity. Specifically, content marketing draws target audiences towards you by providing them with content that…

- solves a problem that they are facing
- answers a question that they are asking
- provides them with something useful or valuable

Traditional marketing approaches for a school would typically talk about the school itself. It would communicate your key messages and unique selling points, and may involve you:

- sharing your outstanding exam results
- showcasing your excellent facilities
- celebrating your exciting range of extra curricular activities
- featuring parents and children saying how wonderful your school is.

Instead of starting with the school, content marketing starts inside the minds of the target audience, let's say parents of prospective students. It may involve you:

- providing advice for parents on how to support their child to achieve success in their examinations
- sharing a list of challenging questions that every parent should ask every school (not just yours) that they visit when selecting a school for their child
- providing advice on how to find the best non-academic activities and sports for their child to participate in
- providing tips from other parents on choosing a school, coping with the school run, finding things to do in the school vacation, and so forth.

Traditional marketing approaches and messages still have a strong role to play for your organisation, but content marketing provides an opportunity to:

- Create content that helps your school jump up search engine results
- Show your target audiences that you really understand what matters to them
- Offer them added-value and generous advice and guidance beyond just "selling" your school to them
- Showcase not just your facilities, but your knowledge and expertise
- Ensure that your audience keeps coming back to you for more advice and guidance
- Create the kind of content that parents won't just look at, but will share with their own friends and networks, thus behaving as an advocate for your school
- Generate a strong sense of community.

Getting Started: Understanding Your Audience

Successful content marketing begins with developing a deeper understanding of your target audience.

For marketing purposes, we often want to know demographic and geographic information about our target audiences. For content marketing purposes, we need to know so much more:

- What are they really interested in?
- What do they really care about?
- What is distracting them?
- What keeps them awake at night?
- What problems do they have – big and small – that need solving?
- What types of content do they engage with?
- What questions are they asking other people?
- What questions are they typing into search engines?

A combination of four approaches will help you to gather the insights that you need:

1. Secondary Desk Research

Search for existing reports published online that provide insights into what parents really think and feel. You may also find reports into channel preferences and audience behaviours online aligned to their demographic status. Take care to note the date that the research was conducted and published. Be wary with research into social and digital media. Even a report that is just 2 or 3 years old can be wildly out of date. Look for recent findings.

2. Observational Desk Research

Search social media sites for individual profiles of people whom are representative of your target audience. Mothers are often very active online, so can be very easy to find. Observe activity in their online communities and forums. See what they really talk about and ask other mothers, for example. See who they follow and what content they share (Twitter is great for this, as can be Pinterest and Instagram).
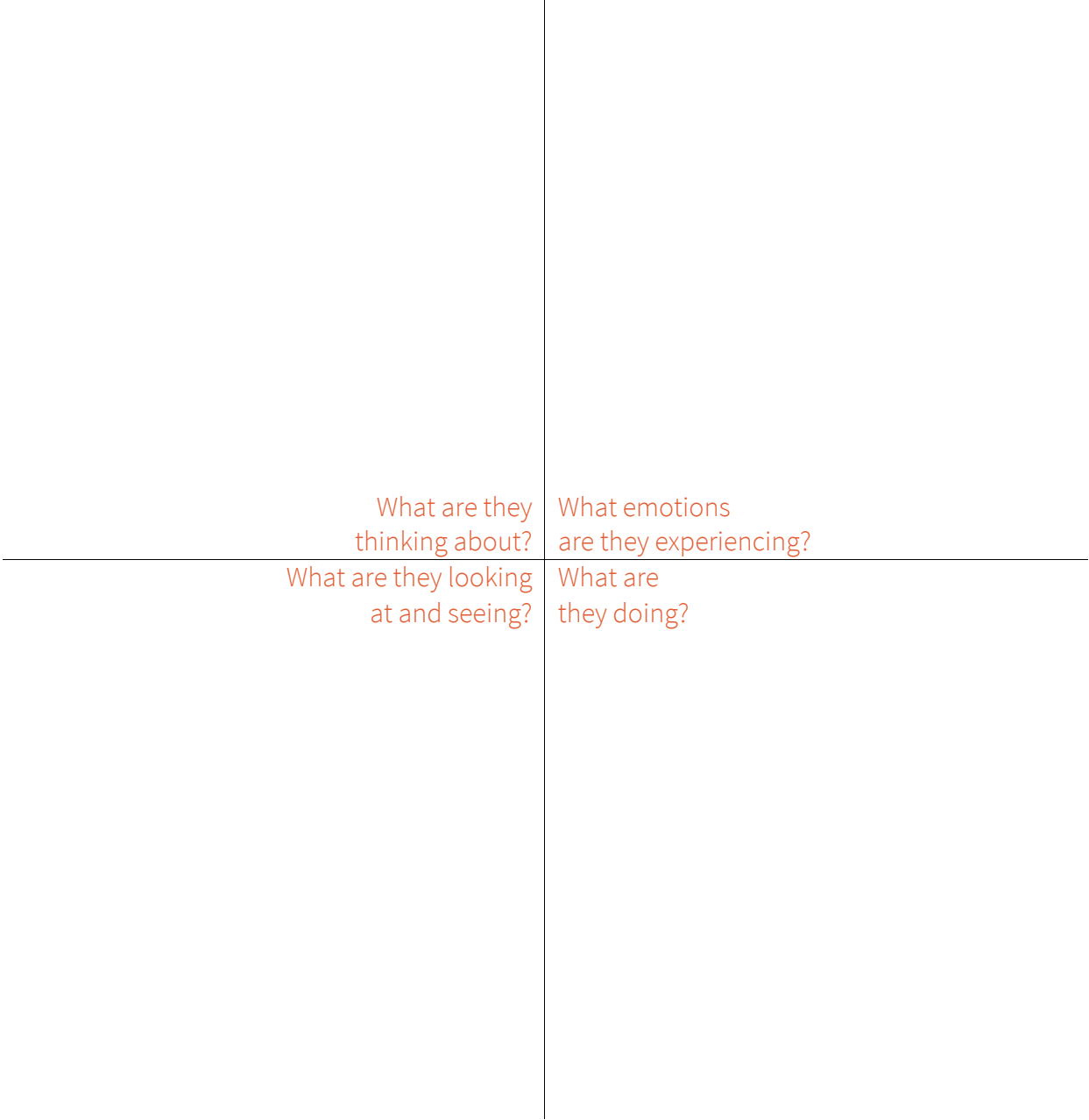
3. Primary Audience Research

Design your own original audience research or commission research from an agency. A combination of surveys, analytics reviews, user-testing, one-to-one interviews and focus groups should provide you with a wealth of knowledge and insights. Try to reach parents of prospective students instead of researching parents of your current students. This way you will gather more meaningful insights without bias.

4. Key Phrase Research

Key phrase research provides you with insights into the types of things that people are actually typing into search engines. Google's Adword Planner tools are helpful for this and a free way to access useful insights. You'll find out what people are searching for and how often particular words and phrases are typed into search engines. Search for things that aren't just variations of your school name.

Making Sense of Your Findings: Empathy Mapping

Empathy mapping is a commonly used technique for planning a content strategy or content marketing approach. You design a template, like the one below, and fill in the quadrants to set out what is really going on in your audiences' lives (not just in relation to your school)[1].

What are they
thinking about?

What emotions
are they experiencing?

What are they looking
at and seeing?

What are
they doing?

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[1] For more advice on empathy mapping, see blog posts published on our sister company Utterly Content's blog about this:
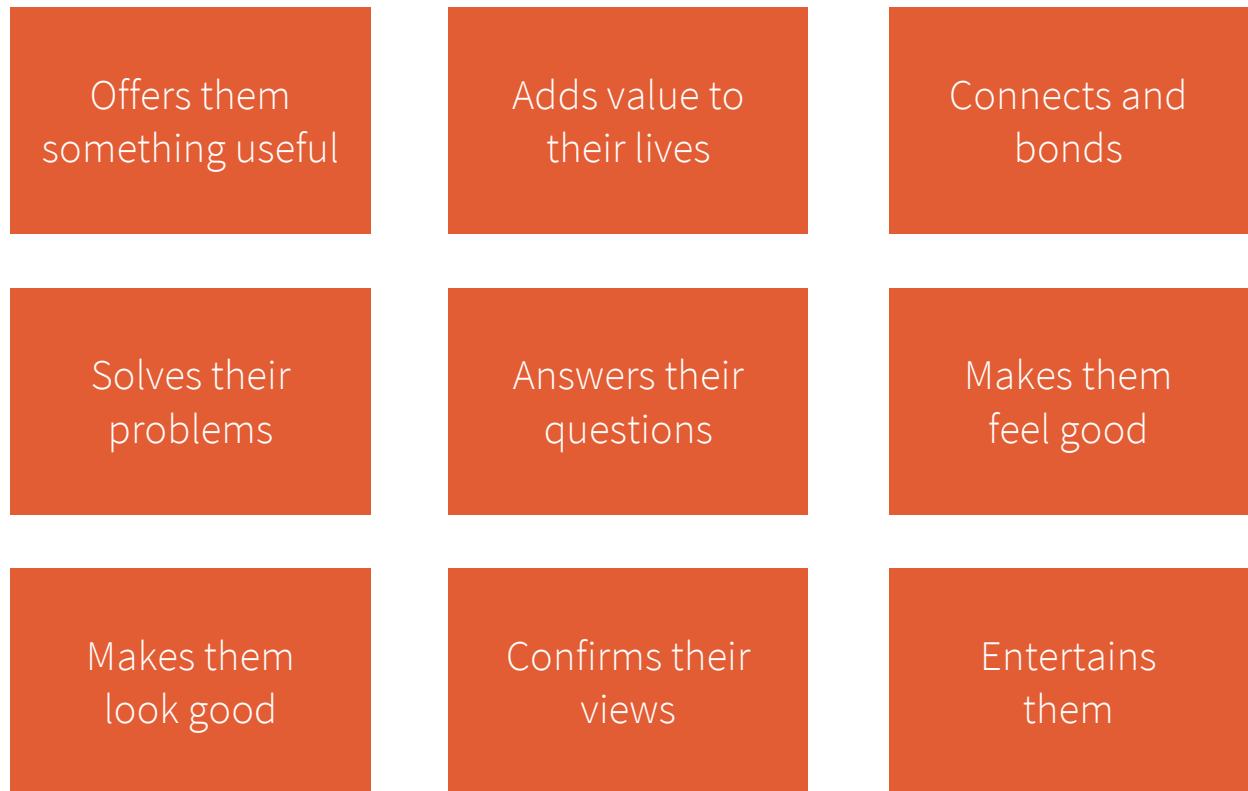
Creating Content Ideas

Once you've developed your empathy map, you can then take your findings from there and start to turn them into content ideas. The table below provides a good structure for taking those findings and turning them into content ideas. We've included a couple of examples to provide a clearer steer for how this process works…

Empathy map insight	Content idea	Publish and distribute
Doing: spending an hour in the car every day on school run	*5 things you can do in the car to make the school run educational for your child and fun for you*	*A blog post hosted on our school website and shared via Facebook and Pinterest*
Thinking: how can I make sure my son isn't distracted when he does his homework	*Inspiring ideas for designing a great home study space for your child*	*Either a blog post or a Pinterest board that curates home study inspiration*
Doing: spending 3 hours every week at the supermarket doing food shop	*Top tips to reduce your time in the supermarket to spend more quality time with your child*	*A blog post written by a parent. Could also include a planner sheet (handy download).*

What Makes Great Content for Content Marketing?

The types of content that make up great content marketing is usually useful, relevant and interesting to your target audience in line with what's going on in their lives.

Nine qualities above all others seem to make for the most compelling content and therefore the kind of content that leads to successful content marketing. These are as follows:

Offers them something useful	Adds value to their lives	Connects and bonds
Solves their problems	Answers their questions	Makes them feel good
Makes them look good	Confirms their views	Entertains them

But will they share it?

In particular, the bottom three qualities also make for the kind of content that people are likely to share with others online.

When it comes to creating the kind of content that people will share, we need to think of that piece of content as an extension or manifestation of how that person wants other people to perceive them online.

In other words, our content can help our audiences to create the digital identity (their online personality) that they want other people to see. In order for them to share it, it must resonate with their identity and how they want other people to see them. So, if they want other people to think they are smart, create "clever" content for them. Or if they want people to think that they're funny, create "funny" content for them. They'll be more likely to share it.

Tips for Making Content Marketing Manageable for Schools

Most schools have very limited resource for marketing activity, often restricted to one or two members of staff and sometimes an "add on" to another job description. However, successful content marketing can still be achieved when you have little time to do it.

1. Plan, plan and plan some more…

Planning might feel like it eats into valuable time in which you could be writing that amazing blog post or sharing a great pin on Pinterest. However, spending a little time developing a content calendar and planning out your ideas in advance will save you time in the long run. Use it to also help you schedule time into your own diary to actually create or curate content.

2. Create AND curate

You don't have to create every piece of content yourself. Your audience will still love you if you are signpost amazing and useful content that other people have created. They'll keep coming back to you because you're the one that shares this great content! Even on a blog post, you could just write a simple introduction, add one or two insights of your own, and then link out to that great blog post that someone else has written. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest are great spaces to curate and share other people's content. Just remember to always take care to share using the proper sharing functionality within each platform and to never pretend that what you're sharing is your own creation. Attribution is good manners, and the mark of pride for a great curator.

3. Build a team of content contributors

No, we don't mean go out and recruit more people to the marketing team (that would be nice, wouldn't it?) Instead, recruit a team of volunteers from around the school to contribute. Let's say that you're aiming to write a new blog post every week. In a school of 26 teachers, you could ask each teacher to write a 500-word post just twice a year to fill your entire blog for the whole year. If not the teachers, work with parents and the PTA (or equivalent) to enlist volunteer bloggers and contributors from the parent community. You may even have students or alumni that you could call on to create posts or videos.

4. Draft in advance

Prepare draft versions of future posts well in advance. Even if all you save to begin with is the title suggestion for the post, at least it's there. Then you can dip in and out over time and add a paragraph here and then until, eventually, the post is complete.

5. Create content in batches and save it for later

At those times of year when you do have a little extra time, or when you're travelling somewhere, use that time to create a batch of new content or curate new content to share later. Save it and distribute it over time. Scheduling tools like Buffer are great for this.

Further Help and Advice

The resources in this pack are designed to help get you started with your school's approach to content marketing and cover the basics to help you on your way. But it's just the beginning.

If you would like help to get started, or to advance your existing approach, then our support comes in many forms:

- We publish new blog posts every week over at picklejarcommunications.com to provide free advice, tips, insights and resources to marketing and communications professionals working in schools, colleges and universities

- We can run workshops and training, with anything from a simple 60 minute webinar through to a more structured programme of workshops and away days to help you to shape and plan your content strategy, digital communications and content marketing approach

- We can provide audits and recommendations reports on your existing activity to help finesse your future activity for greater impact

- We can develop full content strategies, content marketing strategies and content plans to define the vision for your approach and help you put it into action

- We can plan and manage all of your content marketing activities for you, from planning and creating content, writing blog posts, curating links, through to managing your online communities and social media channels on your behalf

Whatever your budget and your need, there is always a way that the expert team at Pickle Jar Communications can help your school to advance its marketing and communications.

Visit www.picklejarcommunications.com/contact-us to get in touch and discuss your school's needs further.