



# Selling Content in the 'Free' World (And How your CMS Can Help!)

| Using a CMS to Create Value |

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## Selling Content in the 'Free' World (And How your CMS Can Help!)

Whoever said "the best things in life are free" was probably not thinking about content. Then, along comes the 'big bang' of information technology and its progeny – the constantly unfolding (and largely 'free') online universe, to drastically rearrange our perceptions of value. Suddenly, the very same dollar one ungrudgingly parts with to pick up the daily news on the sidewalk is a deterrent online.

The Internet is about content. People aren't primarily surfing for pretty colors or fancy flash intros. They're looking for information that addresses immediate needs. With more than 100 million Web sites sprawled across the virtual horizon, there's a mammoth amount of content accessible from a mouse click. Such a quantum of data ensures there's a lot out there that interests an individual; and way more that doesn't. Sorting through reams of data to get to what interests them is something people now expect to do with minimal fuss (thanks Google!). So things couldn't be more straightforward for content providers, right?

Wrong! And here's the barb. Just because you have content people want or need, doesn't mean they'll be persuaded to buy it. Why would they when almost everything is duplicable and a lot of it is free!

## What's Better than Free?

One reason why the digital environment is such a great distribution system is because it is remarkably suited to copying. Copying runs deep in its genes. The foundational protocols of communication that make the Web possible also demand that every action, character and message is copied several times along the way. Quite simply, the digital economy runs on the fuel of duplication. And if the industrial revolution made mass-produced reproductions cheap, the digital revolution makes it free. That poses a considerable challenge to the established order of sales and marketing. Kevin Kelly, founding executive editor and self-pronounced 'Senior Maverick' at Wired magazine frames the big question plainly. "If reproductions of our best efforts are free, how can we keep going? To put it simply, how does one make money selling free copies?" But let's be clear here, currency on the internet can have multiple meanings depending on your business. Of course it's your paypal account or credit card number, but it can also be a lead generated from a prospect filling out a form. An action that we want to elicit from a customer or prospect is money one way or another whether it's an email address or \$99.99 for a subscription.



### Content non-negotiable

1. Listen to customer needs
2. Show what your product does for people, not just what it does
3. Give credible proof of claims
4. Communicate clearly
5. Make web content the crux of your web development

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In his insightful article, 'Better than free,' Kelly goes on to suggest that the only sustainable path to making people pay in a free world is to actually sell what cannot be copied! He goes on to explore the qualities or features he believes will generate the kind of value for digital content that will make people reach for their pockets even when there is a gratis carrot to be grabbed. Here are a few worth mulling over.

- ▶ Immediacy: Timely content is invaluable. People want to know about some things anytime they develop, while they want to know other things only when they have a felt need for it. Either way, a fresh carrot will win every time.
- ▶ Interpretation: The information is free, but the expertise to interpret what it means in a given context is what will make information truly valuable to consumers.
- ▶ Authenticity: The Internet confers true democracy on authorship. It is no surprise then that there's enough slanted, outdated and even blatantly spurious material out there. People will pay more for content they know is coming from an authentic source.
- ▶ Personalization: The web is a macrocosm, but it is advantaged over other media in its functional potentialities for infinite personalization. Customers can always be banked on to pay for the most personalized aggregation of relevant content even if it is all out there somewhere for free.
- ▶ Accessibility: Owning and maintaining tons of content is becoming far less appealing to the consumer of today. They would rather have someone else store and maintain data and pay them for the service as long as they have on-demand access to it.
- ▶ Find-ability: Everybody knows that content has no value unless it is seen. But Kelly makes the insightful comment that niche content will always depend on giant aggregators of content to help niche audiences find what they want. Even when the content is free, making it findable is something that can be sold.

## What's a CMS Got to Do With It?

Internet guru Gerry McGovern believes most Web sites are driven from a technical or graphical design perspective. In the digital world of free copies, that is a sure way to miss the bus. If content providers and marketers hope to make money, they will have to find ways to maximize value-generating potentialities into their content that cannot be duplicated. This can only happen when effectively structured and presented content is the driver. And of course, a good CMS is the ideal engine to ride on. Here are a few reasons why...

### [It helps content become the primary focus](#)

Typically that's easier said than done, especially when you are dealing with dynamic information spread across a complex business environment. But an effective CMS solution can streamline these numerous workflow issues and intuitively structure information to be visitor friendly. A friendly site means completed tasks. That's a big deal on the ever-distracting Web!

### [Better eyes + better ears = maximum personalization](#)

A CMS is great at this. Web analytics tools can help you see just how visitors act on your site and a CMS can actually affect workflows based on that information. Automatic workflows can execute appropriate content structure and visibility changes along pre-determined and flexible rules. New CMS capabilities are constantly enhancing the way media, images and video are displayed and rendered online. This can be crucial to maximizing your site's content experience. Also let's not forget social networking. It's here to stay and a CMS opens out the most viable way to encourage dialogue over your content – a surefire way to add intangible value that can't be copied, but can be sold.

### [Find-ability: trading smoke signals for GPS](#)

Even find-ability gets a shot in the arm. A good CMS should come bristling with revenue-driving features to improve sites, like guided navigation, results management, and keyword integration. Live performance statistics on search engine cataloging and optimization mean you don't have to sit in the dark with your fingers crossed, praying to be found.

### [Accessibility that isn't a pain in the SaaS!](#)

And things get even better with on demand CMS. On demand accessibility minus the install, upgrade and maintenance tedium wins hands down! Good SaaS offerings should give you excellent scalability, integration and support so you can focus selling content that is truly valuable in the digital era.

Everybody loves 'free'. And that is why it is here to stay. But the ability to create value and the urge to reward it is also fundamentally human. Content providers and online marketers will have to find a way to put it all together to stay in the game. And an effective CMS can be a winning hand.

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