

# *“Gets The People GOING!”*

An in-depth look at the **10 qualities** that made our most shared, most successful blog posts stand out from the rest – and how you can use them too.

*With love, from a tiny office in Stockholm.*



## Forward

When push comes to shove, it's always good to play to your strengths. So when Responster brought me on – a copywriter by trade - it made sense that blogging and written word would become a primary focus of our content strategy.

The thing about blogging is that *it's hard* to make sure that what you're writing is valuable enough that people give a damn. Then, the *even harder* thing hits you: Even once you think you've penned something great, initial traction, readership, and social sharing are far from a given.

We've had our blog going 7 or 8 months as of writing this (May 2016), and it's quickly become one of the most trafficked parts of our site, second only to our homepage.

That said, we've had our fair share of duds along the way. It's frustrating to have a post take off and get shared 317 times in its first couple of days of life, but then have the next one see 40 shares in two weeks.

That bugged me a lot.

So I started to take a deep look at the properties of our most popular posts – from how they were planned, sourced, and written, to even our initial sharing strategy after publishing – and this little report represents the results of that digging. Small nuggets of possibly-obvious-in-theory-but-tricky-in-practice qualities that make posts more shareable.

After describing each one, I've included a short "Now It's Your Turn" type section to help you bring that winning quality into your own content, if you so-choose 😊

Finally, it's important to know that the two posts I refer to throughout this report are "[21 Ways We Promote Our Blog Posts](#)" and "[The Ultimate Guide to Snapchat.](#)" They are the two posts that have far out-paced the rest since starting our blog, and were the ones I studied most while writing this.

Throughout the PDF, I'll often refer to them as the '21 Ways post' and the 'Snapchat Guide,' respectfully.

Thanks for reading, and if you like what you learn, don't hesitate to [visit us sometime](#).

Sincerely,

*Brandon Landis, Community Manager & Chief Customer Success Wizard @ Responster, the super-simple survey tool.*

P.S. If you have any questions, you can always email me directly at [brandon@responster.com](mailto:brandon@responster.com) – I respond scary-quick.

P.P.S. Yes, I know my job title is too long.

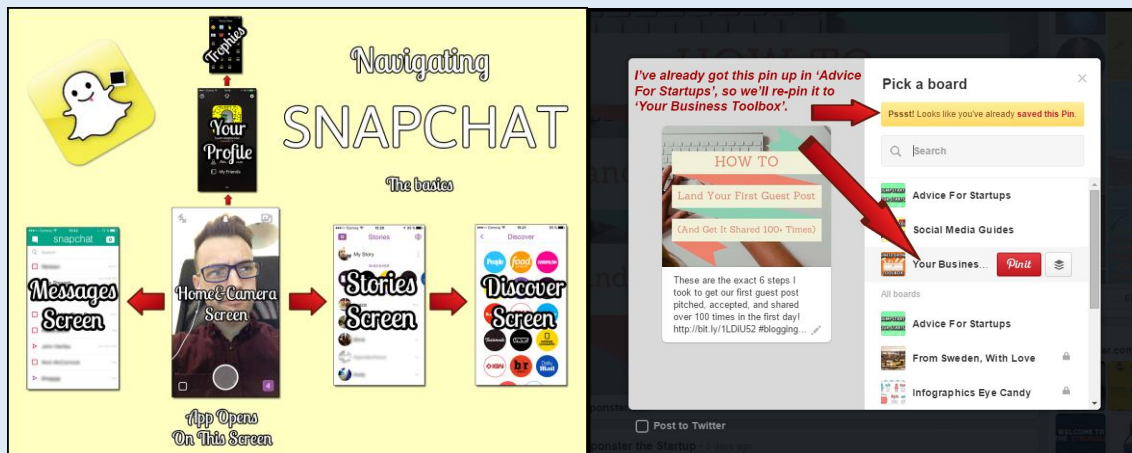
## Quality #1: Step-by-step & actionable (to a fault)

One of the first things that becomes very evident when looking at our posts that got shared and talked about the most is the fact that they had *painfully* specific steps someone reading them could follow.

In both cases (our Snapchat Guide and 21 Ways post) screenshots, videos, or GIF's accompanied almost every step. Sometimes, we may have even done *too* much handholding, but we'd rather land on that side of things than giving too little in terms of instruction.

Posts did well that outlined a process that could be followed to achieve a certain result. In the case of the Snapchat Guide, it was every step possible from complete newbie to a Snapping wizard with an understanding of all facets of the app. In the case of the sharing guide, it was getting screenshots of every described action for giving one's low-traction blog posts the kick start they need to get picked up and shared by others.

In both posts (Snapchat Guide left, 21 Ways post right), I used screenshots with arrows to walk readers through actions.



### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

1. Make sure you outline a clear progression of steps to meet your promised or stated goal.
2. Take the time to include images, GIF's, and/or videos to make steps clear.
3. Make them *even clearer* by inserting arrows, highlighting, circling, etc.

## Quality #2: Table of Contents / At-A-Glance Navigation

One thing we're all guilty of is probably finding a blog post or article that sounds interesting, giving it a scan – but not a real read – and adding it to our content calendar. It's a reality of content marketing, but it does help get your writing in front of more actual readers eventually.

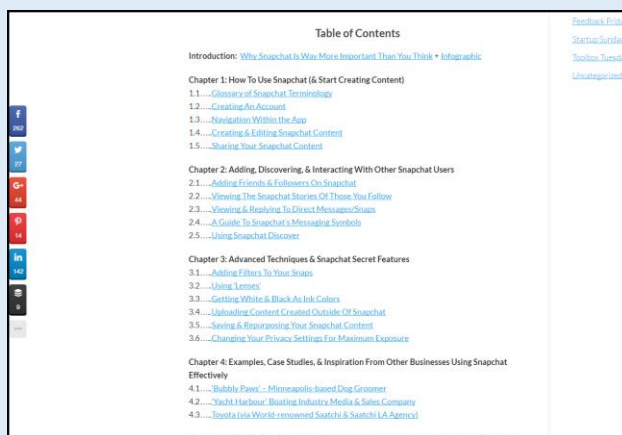
Our Snapchat post was over 6,000 words long, and expecting people to scroll through it to figure out what all was in it would have been social share suicide.

Instead, we led off with a table of contents that demonstrated value and showed everything someone would learn from taking it in. Ninety percent or more of initial sharers weren't going to read every word of that post, so we made it easy for them to at least assess the value their audience might get from it if they put it into their sharing calendar.

While we missed the opportunity with our 21 Ways blog post, we still wrote a quick-yet-detailed introduction that let people know *exactly* what they were going to learn without reading the entire post. Honestly, if we had gone ahead and just listed out the 21 ways in the beginning of the post (and linked to each of them so people could jump around the post easily), that post probably would have done even better.

When writing all-encompassing guides that cover a topic from its most basic to its most complex, you're going to have different readers only interested in certain parts.

You should accommodate all interest and proficiency levels, and this is best facilitated by making it super easy to pick out pertinent details of the post's value within the first 10-15 seconds.



The screenshot shows a table of contents for 'The Snapchat Guide'. It is organized into chapters and sections, with each item linked. The table of contents is as follows:

- Introduction: [Why Snapchat Is Way More Important Than You Think • Infographic](#)
- Chapter 1: How To Use Snapchat (6 Start Creating Content)
  - 1.1...[Glossary of Snapchat Terminology](#)
  - 1.2...[Creating An Account](#)
  - 1.3...[Navigation Within The App](#)
  - 1.4...[Creating & Editing Snapchat Content](#)
  - 1.5...[Sharing Your Snapchat Content](#)
- Chapter 2: Adding, Discovering, & Interacting With Other Snapchat Users
  - 2.1...[Adding Friends & Followers On Snapchat](#)
  - 2.2...[Viewing The Snapchat Stories Of Those You Follow](#)
  - 2.3...[Viewing & Replying To Direct Messages/Snaps](#)
  - 2.4...[A Guide To Snapchat's Messaging Symbols](#)
  - 2.5...[Using Snapchat Discover](#)
- Chapter 3: Advanced Techniques & Snapchat Secret Features
  - 3.1...[Adding Filters To Your Snaps](#)
  - 3.2...[Using Lenses](#)
  - 3.3...[Getting White & Black As Ink Colors](#)
  - 3.4...[Uploading Content Created Outside Of Snapchat](#)
  - 3.5...[Saving & Repurposing Your Snapchat Content](#)
  - 3.6...[Changing Your Privacy Settings For Maximum Exposure](#)
- Chapter 4: Examples, Case Studies, & Inspiration From Other Businesses Using Snapchat Effectively
  - 4.1...[Shake! Pave! - Minneapolis-based Dog Groomer](#)
  - 4.2...[Yacht Harbour: Boosting Industry Media & Sales Company](#)
  - 4.3...[Toyota Ixja World-renowned Saatchi & Saatchi LA Agency](#)
- Chapter 5: Time For Getting Started, & Formulating A Winning Snapchat Strategy For YOUR

*The Snapchat Guide's table of contents has trouble fitting on one height of a laptop screen; if that doesn't scream "big, valuable resource alert!" to content curators, I'm not sure what does.*

## How to Infuse Your Content with this Quality:

Use on-page anchor links to quickly create a table of contents that breaks your post up quickly into all of its most important sections. Not only will you help readers get to what they want quicker (always appreciated!), but other brands looking to curate content will be more likely to share it!

If you don't know how to do same-page linking with anchor links, here's an easy resource to get you up and running :) - <http://www.echoecho.com/htmllinks08.htm>

## Quality #3: Timely and Topical to *Your Audience*

In the case of our 21 Ways post, we were approaching an “evergreen” topic. At least for now, there are still people interested in creating and growing blogs, so content in that area is continually relevant.

In the case of the Snapchat Guide, we were more intentional with our timing, knowing that the platform was hitting critical mass in usage and awareness (I began working on that post in January 2016 and published it in the first week of February).

Either of these approaches is fine (evergreen or specifically timed to a certain popular topic), and both come with different pros and cons. The key is that you identify a topic that’s interesting and valuable to your *audience*, not necessarily to you yourself. I see bloggers write about what they think will be helpful but don’t actually validate against the reading habits of their audience (I’m guilty of this too, and several posts that flopped were the result). I know ‘timely and topical’ isn’t anything revolutionary, but it has been an important enough factor in the success of our blog posts that I had to include it.

### Choosing evergreen topics:

Pros:

- More likely to stay relevant for longer
- Easily recognizable as a valuable topic

Cons:

- May not be as ‘sexy’ or exciting
- You will compete with more established guides on the same topic (mostly relevant for SEO)

### Choosing timely, hot topics:

Pros:

- More interesting, new
- Chance to be perceived as an early adopter, innovator, or thought leader

Cons:

- If the topic doesn’t live up to the hype, you may see a sharp drop off in residual traffic later on
- There will likely be a lot of competing noise about the topic when you publish; you’ll need to be exceptional to stand out

## How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

Make sure every topic you write about is relevant in the moment, either due to long-term staying power or newfound popularity. Formulate how you’ll stand out from the noise - what will make your spin on a popular or oft-done topic different? *If you can’t answer this question, go back to the drawing board. >:D*

## Quality #4: Involve the Input of External Sources *that No One Else Has Used*

The 21 Ways blog post wasn't just an aggregate of techniques we'd come up with on our own, but also those we'd picked up from other bloggers who'd had success with them before we took them for a spin ourselves. Sure, we'd incorporated them into our own process, so there was firsthand experience, but we certainly weren't innovators in that space.

In the Snapchat Guide, we took it a step further. If you found this PDF via our [article on sourcing blog posts using HARO](#), then you already know that we brought in outside case studies from companies who had more experience with using Snapchat as a marketing tool than we did.

Finding other articles and published material that supports your assertions already helps immensely with adding authority to your blog posts, and taking the additional step of seeking out your own first-hand sources takes it one step further.

There's an entire chapter of the Snapchat Guide that is just case studies/examples of content and campaigns from other companies. Being able to brag that the guide included 'specific examples' and 'case studies' no doubt caught some eyeballs as the post was being shared around.

### **This accomplishes 3 things:**

- 1) It lets gives more weight to what you're writing about since it's backed up with multiple sources; you aren't just asking readers to take your word for it.
- 2) It lets you expand the range of topics you can write about, and how much you can dig into them, since you aren't limited to only things you personally have extensive experience in.
- 3) It gives brands outside of your own an incentive to share your post (because they were featured in it!).

### **How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:**

For every post you write, consider bringing in outside sources for additional content and for validation of what you're writing. We're fans of using a site like HARO, but you can also ask friends, colleagues, and acquaintances with relevant experiences, pull research together from other blogs and publications (give credit, of course), or put out a call for input on social media; searching tweets, for example, might help you come across people who can offer your post some additional weight.

## Quality #5: Better than Anything Else on the Topic

We touched on quality in the last section, but let's really drive it home: ***In order to get above-average sharing and engagement on your posts, you'll have to write above-average posts.***

Way too often, blogs are filled with “listicles” that offer no new insight and probably perform underwhelmingly in terms of traffic and lead generation. We get it: Early on, we too were guilty of some quicker, shorter content that didn't really bring much new to the table. But we realized that blogging isn't really a game worth being in if you don't want to create the really good stuff.

With our 21 Ways post, we tried to combine both volume and personal experience that we could back up into a better sharing list than the other content we'd seen on the topic. So we wanted more points and advice than were typically in a “this is what we did that worked” post, but also as deep of *quality* instruction backing up each point as we could. In hindsight, we could have probably even done better and wracked our brains for a few more sharing methods, but we were young in our blogging process then.

For the Snapchat Guide, we went all out. Hours of planning a table of contents, tons of visual instruction materials, interviews, and small case studies/examples from brands using the platform well - we wanted there to be no question that we'd created a better, more-detailed guide than what someone wanting to learn Snapchat could find on anyone else's blog. I went to Business Insider and other established publications, looked at the content they'd put out on Snapchat, and then set my mind to one-upping it.

It took a lot of time, but it was worth it. Our efforts were validated when Snapchat's twitter itself (with 1.2m followers) shared our guide. And again when Hubspot sent it out to their 600k+ following.

### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

This is one-of if not *the* most important factor in this guide: The time, effort, and work you put in is directly proportional to what you get out. It's nothing profound, but in a world where bloggers are slinging 500-word mediocre content pieces 5 times per week, I urge you to stand out by making content that blows everything else out of the water. I can all but guarantee that publishing truly exceptional, insightful content every 2-3 weeks will work out better for you in the long run than posting something of lower, re-hashed quality every single day.

In a nutshell, the success of our best posts boiled down to working the hardest on them – who knew? :P

## Quality #6: Outlined and structured before it was actually written

The 21 Ways post was the first post to our blog where instead of writing in a stream of consciousness approach, I planned out what every point would be in advance, then worked to fill in each section with details.

We did the same for the Snapchat Guide, organizing the guide like a book, starting with chapters or sections and then building a full table of contents around what subdivisions of each chapter would make sure someone came away from that section with a complete understanding of it.

Going one step deeper, I then planned out what I would need to make each section happen. For example, reaching out to other companies who had results with Snapchat made that section much more compelling than if we could only share our own (very cursory) experiments on the platform.

For the parts I *did* know well (like navigating the app, which I'd picked up from personal use), I outlined what instructions I would need to bring someone up to speed, what visuals would supplement those instructions, and noted any areas I wanted to do some research on before writing, in case my knowledge of them wasn't quite complete.

In the case of each post, completion took a little longer than expected. Also in both cases, however, they would go on to net more shares than if I'd combined the average shares from the number of shorter posts I could have published in the same time.

### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

Don't be afraid to switch up your planning and writing process for a post, namely by putting more time into planning before you ever start getting into the meat of the content. Forming a complete 'reader journey' through your post and then working to fill in each step can be a good way to make sure you don't miss anything. An example of this would be the Snapchat guide's table of contents I outline in section 2, which was actually written before the post itself, and served as a great framework for making sure all of my bases were covered.



## Quality #7: Broad Appeal

We're a SaaS company whose product is a surveying tool, but our posts aren't all about surveying and collecting feedback. In fact, only a couple posts have been constructed around these topics so far.

One of our own favorite examples of how to do content marketing right is the Groove Blog. Groove is a customer support platform that's been wildly successful in building its customer-base using its blog. In one of their posts, they explain why they started writing about broad topics that appeal to a wide range of entrepreneurs, startup founders, and small business owners, rather than only writing on the topic of customer support (and thus much closer to their product area). In short, they understand that they can start with a very wide funnel and build trust over time to turn this audience into paying customers:

Almost nobody reads this blog for the very first time, and signs up for a Groove account on the same day.

It happens, but it's *very* rare.

Instead, when a reader converts into a Groove user, what typically happens looks more like this:

*Day 1:* They arrive on the blog via a referral or organic search, and read a post. They find the post valuable, so they sign up to get emails about new content.

*Days 2-7:* We send them an email drip sharing some of our most useful content. They continue to read our posts.

*Day 8:* We send them an email letting them know more about our customer service software product, and inviting them to give it a try for free. While some users do this, *most* who end up becoming customers don't sign up at this step.

*Days 9-90:* The subscriber remains on our email list and continues to read—and get value from—our weekly posts.

We have a similar approach with our blog, hypothesizing that it's more effective to write for a broader audience, of which a segment is our customer audience, and get more awareness and reach with our content, than to only target that small slice of the pie. In other words, we're casting a wider net and letting the choice catches find their way to us.

## How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

This is a direction that might not be for everyone - there's a very valid argument for going small and narrow and becoming a thought leader in one very specific niche that's closely aligned with your product. If you're like us, however, where name recognition is one of the biggest assets of your competitors, you may want to aim for broad awareness by attaching your name and blog topics that appeal to a larger demographic.

## Quality #8: Visual

I'm a writer, not a designer.

Even so, I know that the posts of ours which perform better have words that are heavily supplemented with images.

In both of our most popular posts, every piece of instruction is accompanied by images that guide readers through taking the described action. Not only do these images make the content more interesting than a giant wall of text, they also serve as signposts that help readers skim or jump to the sections they're most interested in.

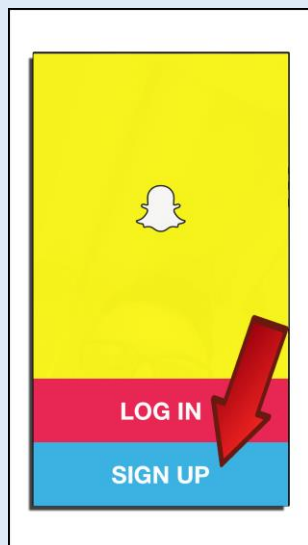
More and more, I strive to never write more than a couple hundred words without coming up with some sort of appropriate image to break up the letters, so-to-speak (this document is an exception, because I know you marketers can handle the purely information side of things!).

### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

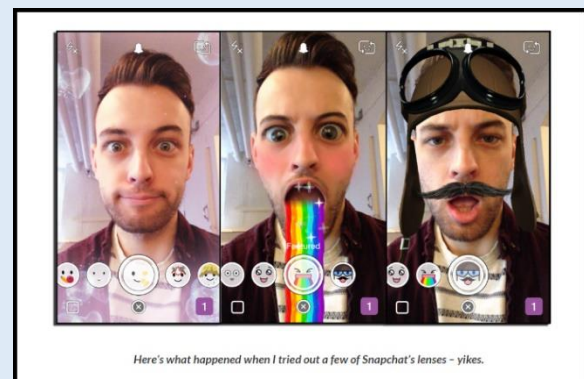
Take the time to create images that complement and guide through your post.

While screenshots and images that directly teach are excellent (boring but practical), it's also OK to complement the content with fun or even 'loosely related' images, even if they don't act as stand-ins for the written content (entertaining though still relevant). I recommend both types to keep things interesting.

Example of instructional image:



Example of complementary image:



## Quality #9: Custom Share-Images

This actually comes out of the 21 Ways blog post itself: One thing we've seen work well is creating more than one shareable image for each post. Specifically, we'll make an image that's the right dimensions for twitter, then for a Facebook post, another for Instagram, etc.

Sharing your article with the same image everywhere leads to cropping and details getting lost. Plus, people are going to be more likely to share something that looks great on whatever platform they're on right when they see it. We could actually do this better for some posts - I've gotten lazy or rushed before and probably paid the price (don't do it, don't be a lazy me!).

### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

Use [Canva.com](https://www.canva.com) (it's a free drag and drop design tool and they have templates for every social platform) to create a custom image for any platform you're going to share on. You can use the same title, same or similar imagery, etc., just make your posts native for each network.

As an example, we first used Canva to design the header image (top) that would accompany the post on our blog. On Facebook, however, we wanted to promote the post so we needed to also make a version with less text to accommodate their advertising rules, so we made the image on the bottom to serve this purpose. Each took no more than 10 minutes in Canva:



## Quality #10: We Asked A Lot Of People To Share Them, One By One

Yep. You made it to #10 and the last ingredient in the secret sauce is... asking. We do our own sharing, we push to all of our networks, but their reach is limited. The biggest asset most bloggers have is, well, the generosity of others who can get your content in front of more people.

I spend a considerable amount of time reaching out one by one to friends, acquaintances, companies, and strangers who have influence in a relevant area, highlighting what I've created, why their followers would like them for sharing it, and asking if they'd consider giving it a tweet.

Does it work every time? Of course not, but the more you put out, the more you'll hear back. We never would have gotten our posts shared by some bigtime sources without asking in the first place.

For example, I pestered Snapchat in tweets and DM's (even asked others to tweet the guide at them) for about a week after the post went live before, suddenly and without a word, they retweeted my link and description of the blog post and BOOM – a flood of traffic.

### How to Infuse Your Own Content with this Quality:

Once your post goes live, reach out on twitter, email, LinkedIn, reddit messages, Facebook, wherever the right people are. People are actually pretty nice, and if you've created something good, something you can highlight as valuable to that person's followers, they don't have much of a reason not to drop it in their content calendar.

My biggest piece of advice here is to focus your 'pitch' you write, again, on what the content offers their followers, why they'll look good for sharing it, etc. Failing that, see what kind of exchange you can leverage: Can you share a piece of their content as a trade? Offer to give them a free account with your company (if it's relevant)?

As a real-life example of this type of barter, I once included in my pitch a polite note that there was a slight error in someone's website headline and even wrote a couple re-writes I thought might convert better for them. They were very kind and appreciative, and also shared our content – win/win.

### Now what?

Well, my hope is that at least something here has been helpful and you're able to use these qualities to push your next blog post into scooping up a few (hundred) more shares! At the end of the day, the

blogging arena is in desperate need of higher quality, better-intended content, and maybe, together, we can push back against boring, clickbait listicles with little practical value.

If you haven't yet, please do check out [our blog](#) and consider subscribing if anything there interests you – we do our best to pen useful content for marketers, bloggers, startups, and small businesses, and we also take topic requests if there's something you're especially curious about.

Finally, if you find yourself needing to collect customer feedback, monitor employee morale, or otherwise make a survey or form, we'd love to have you try out our [simple, powerful survey builder](#).

To your success,

*Team Responster*

