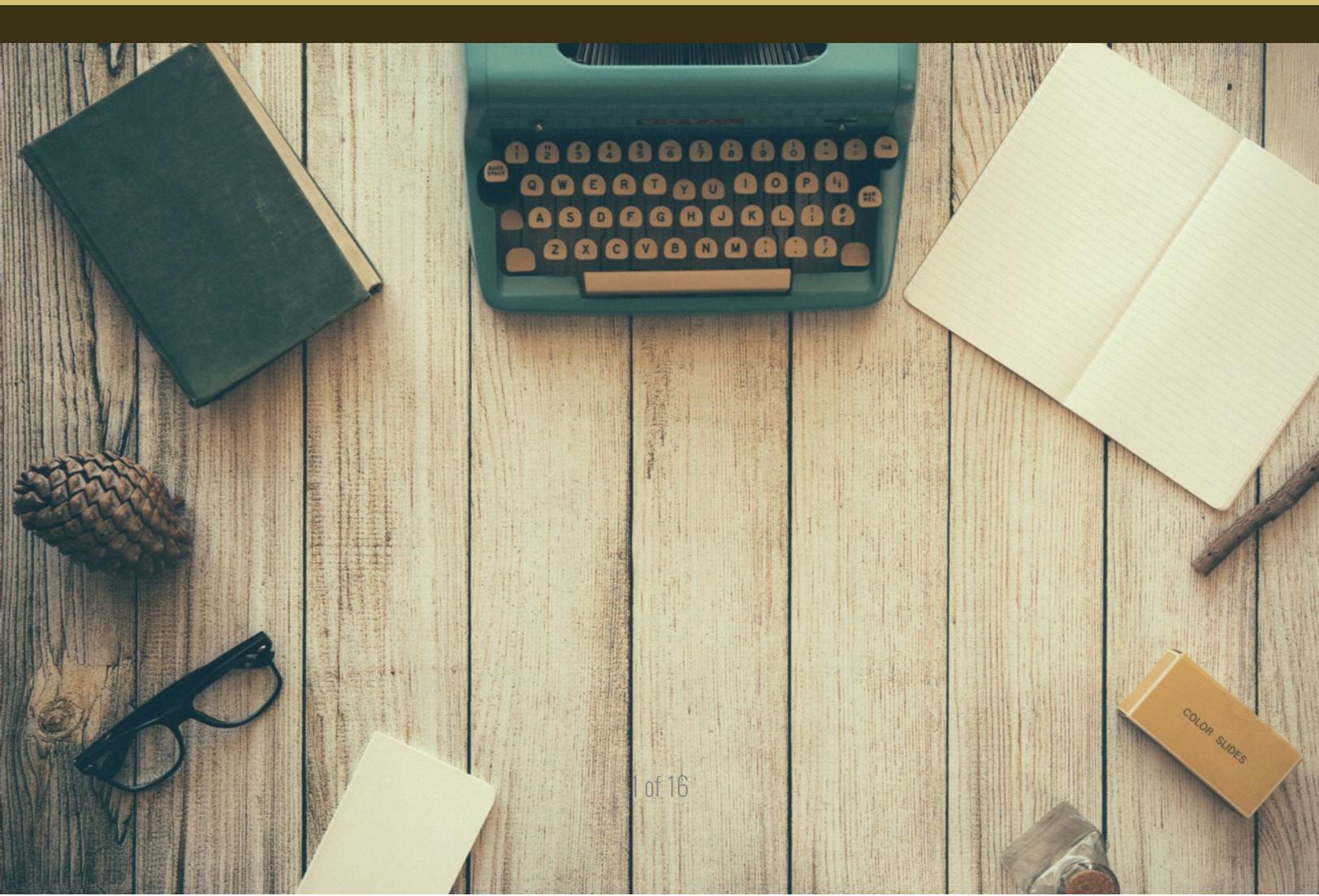


GROW & CONVERT

The #1 Problem With Content Upgrades and What I've Learned To Do Instead

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The #1 Problem With Content Upgrades and What I've Learned To Do Instead

In the last post on [converting blog traffic](#), we talked about measuring your conversion rates and putting calls-to-actions in the proper places so you convert as much traffic into leads as possible.

In this article we're going to talk about a particular conversion tactic called [content upgrades](#).

Content upgrades are a game changer for the conversion rate of your blog (or any content based site).

But here's the #1 problem content marketers have with content upgrades: **no time**. To do them well, it takes time, and to do it at scale it can be oppressively time-consuming.

So in today's post I'm going to walk through 3 techniques I've used to get most of the benefit of content upgrades with a fraction of the time input.

Let's dive in...

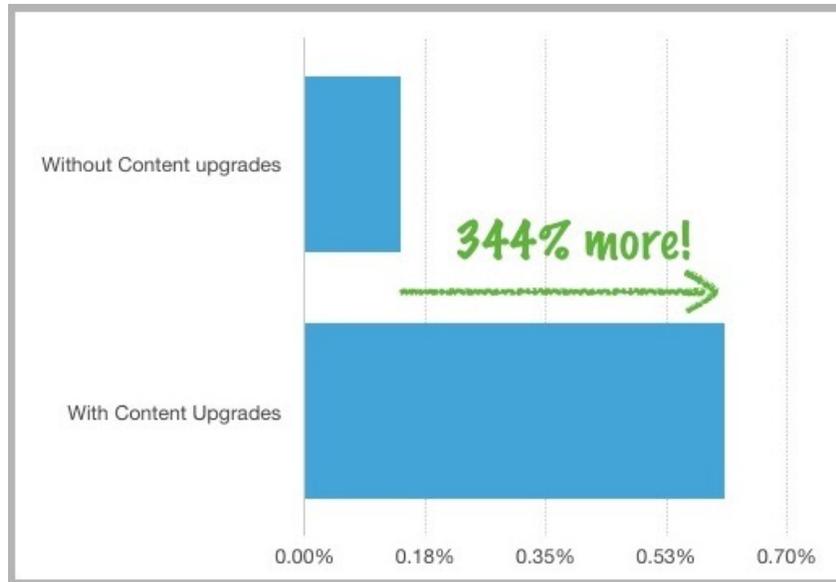
What are Content Upgrades and How Well Do They Convert?

In short, content upgrades are content specific bonuses. Instead of offering a generic ebook at the end of your posts, you offer a bonus that's intimately tied to the topic of that post itself.

And they convert like crazy.

For example, we implemented content upgrades on a few high traffic posts on [JeffBullas.com](#), and after 2 months, the 4 posts with content upgrades were converting 344% more than the rest of the top 20 posts on his site.

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What were the upgrades? We made simple checklists of the

strategies he was writing about in those posts. For example, here's a checklist for a post he had on SEO:



We gave away these checklists free in exchange for an email.

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The reason content upgrades convert so well is because users on that page are already reading a post about SEO. So when they see an offer for something intimately related to implementing that posts' ideas (the checklist), a far greater percentage of them optin. These types of optins work much better than something like a generic eBook offered site-wide.

Brian Dean of Backlinko.com implemented a similar checklist style content upgrade on one his articles and saw a 785% increase in conversion rate from 0.54% to 4.82%.

The Impact That a 500% Increase in Optins Can Have in Lead Generation for a Business

Primary Dimension: **Landing Page** Source Keyword Other ▾

Secondary dimension ▾ Sort Type: Default ▾

Landing Page		Goal Conversion Rate ▾ ↓
		785.01% ↑ 4.82% vs 0.54%
1.	/google-ranking-factors	
	Jun 1, 2014 - Jun 9, 2014	4.82%
	May 1, 2014 - May 31, 2014	0.54%

If your business has a blog that is getting 100,000 uniques a month, generating 300% to 800% more email addresses or leads from the traffic can be a top-of-the-funnel game changer.

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For example, let's say you run marketing at a SaaS business (say a sales/CRM platform) and you spend 2 years building a sales blog to 100,000 uniques a month. Great.

Let's say you convert 0.5% of that traffic to an email list, where they get sent through an autoresponder that eventually pitches them a free trial of your platform. Let's say 10% of subscribers from the autoresponder start a free trial. That means every month you're getting 50 free trials from the blog ($100k * 0.5% * 10%$).

But if you increased that rate by 500% (to 2.5% optins from blog content)?

That's 250 leads, or 200 *more* free trials a month!

The Problem With Content Upgrades Is, Ironically, Content

The problem with content upgrades, of course, is that they require you to make a unique bonus for *each* blog post. You can imagine how tedious that would be on large blogs with lots of blog posts and lots of traffic.

In my math for the hypothetical SaaS business above, to see a 500% increase in optins blog-wide, they'd have to in theory **make a content upgrade for every post**. That's going to be tough. Very few blogs of that size have a manageable number of posts.

So what do you do?

Today we're going to talk about 3 solutions that have worked well for me and other companies we've done this for:

1. **The Topicbox** – How to use a few content upgrades across a multitude of blog posts to get the majority of the conversion gain with a minimum of work.
2. **The PDF** – Developing a repeatable process to give bonuses away for every post
3. **The Cliffhanger** – How to use the content itself to increase optin rates without a unique upgrade.

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The Topicbox

Last year a company approached me to help increase their email optins from content. I thought:

Great! I can most certainly help you with that...

I had been working with blogs big and small to help grow their email lists, so I felt like like this was totally up my alley. The #1 tool I had in my arsenal was the content upgrade.

I was so confident that I would walk in, teach them what a content upgrade is, implement a bunch, their conversion rate would go through the roof, and we'd all be smoking cigars in a hot tub with gold chains around our necks.

Then they told me what their site was: [an investing news site](#) that publishes ~50 new articles a day.

What?! How were we supposed to make content upgrades for 50 new articles every day?

It sounded impossible.

Then I thought I had brilliant idea #2: Let me just look at their top 20 most popular pages and make content upgrades for those, and by the grace of the 80/20 rule, I'll convert most of their traffic.

That's when I learned something about traffic for news sites: they're hella spikey (NorCal reference). There's a spike in traffic when it comes out, and then it dies down as the next day/week's news takes hold. Traffic graphs like this are not unusual (this is an actual screenshot from ValueWalk):

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The top 20 articles this month are different from the top 20 next month. So making a single content upgrade for a single article doesn't make sense.

Argh. So now what?

That's when I had this idea:

What if instead of making content upgrades for individual articles, I just made *topic-specific content upgrades*. This way I could use them across an entire category of articles (past and future).

After all, the site reliably published articles on a few set topics: certain investing frameworks, certain famous investors, certain companies, and certain political issues.

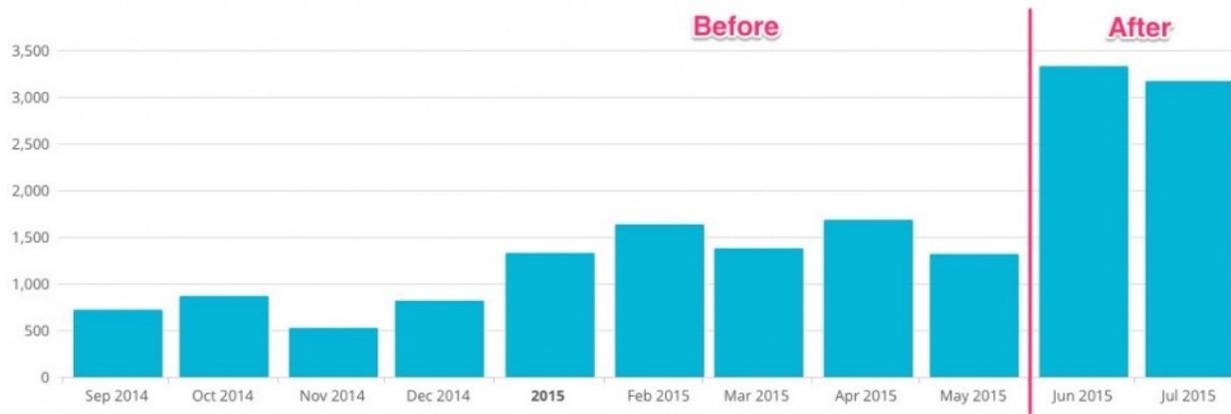
So, we worked with their creative team to create guides, books, or "best of" pages for each of those categories and we gave them away in exchange for an optin.

To easily implement them sitewide, we used [Optinmonster](#) popups because they let you target by WordPress category. By using this tool we could set a popup to show on all posts in a certain category. *All articles from then on in that category would show that popup.*

That's why I called this the [Topicbox Technique](#), because we used lightbox popups to actually promote the topic specific bonuses.

It worked brilliantly:

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Over the course of a couple months of rolling this out, **we saw a 216% increase in optins.**

And again, because their site was meticulous about having writers categorize each article, we didn't have to keep going back and adding individual URLs to the popups as new articles got published.

Steps to do this on your own site

Step 1: Figure out what your categories are.

If you're like most blogs, you don't have meticulous categorization of each post in WordPress. You also probably don't publish 50 articles a day, so adding URLs manually to a popup is no big deal. In that case, you can use any popup service that lets you target by URL. [Sumome](#), for example, lets you do that for free.

To actually group posts into topics, just go through your top 20 – 50 posts in Google Analytics, look for patterns, and start labeling them by rough topic area. For example, here's how I would do that for Grow and Convert (even though we don't have 20 posts yet).

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1.	/content-marketing/grew-organic-visitors-suggested-search-hack/	Traffic
2.	/conversion-rate-optimization/blog-conversion-strategy/	Conversions
3.	/	
4.	/blog-traffic/blog-growth-stats-january-2015/	Updates
5.	/content-marketing/content-marketing-has-become-too-trendy/	Updates
6.	/content-marketing/building-content-team-hiring-inhouse-outsourcing-freelancers/	Hiring
7.	/content-marketing/our-entire-content-strategy-unveiled/	Traffic
8.	/about/	
9.	/content-marketing/how-to-find-evaluate-and-hire-writers-for-your-blog/	Hiring
10.	/blog-traffic/our-2015-blog-stats-the-art-of-content-promotion/	Updates

Step 2: Create genuinely useful bonuses for those posts Even this step may sound like it's too tedious:

I have to create 5 ebooks! FML....

Let me say this once and for all: **eBooks are not the be all end all of lead magnets. In fact, they're a bit over done, don't you think?**

In fact, even the "ultimate guide" is getting a bit tedious (do we really need another 100 tips to grow a social following?).

Let me give you some alternatives (instead of just complaining):

- **For personal, B2C blogs, try an insanely specific Q&A on a topic.** So for a fitness blog, if a topic is nutrition, you should pretty easily know (or be able to figure out) what the main 5 questions your readers ask about nutrition are. Answer them. Either by text, or by video. And offer that as the topic specific bonus. You don't need 100 questions! Or even 10, which is the most popular listicle number. Just a handful of questions answered really well will do the trick. It feels (and actually is) a lot more unique, specific, and valuable, than "My Ultimate Guide to Nutrition!", which has been done to death.

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- **For a B2B business, try a case study or collection of case studies on that topic.** This shows your expertise, and people looking to achieve a certain goal usually can't get enough of seeing other people achieve that goal. One caveat: Make sure the case study isn't just a 2 page PowerPoint presentation that has no meat about what actually happened and mostly just sells your company. That's not enticing. If "legal won't let me give more details" is an excuse, then think of something else.

Step 3: Give the bonus away with a popup (or slider, or on page form) on *all* posts on that topic.

I mentioned how to do it with Optinmonster using WordPress categories. If you have a manageable number of posts, then you can also use a tool like Sumome to target specific URLs to show your popup.

The PDF of the Post Itself

This is a lazy yet repeatable way to turn posts into a content upgrade: Just turn the post into a PDF.

Yes, it sounds ridiculous: Why would someone optin to get a PDF of what they just read. But trust me, people actually want that, for 2 reasons:

1. Most of your unique visitors to a post *do not read the post*. As evidence, my agency once investigated why some of a client's posts were converting really well (>4-8%) while others were not (<1-3%) when they all had content upgrades. We found that the posts that mentioned the content upgrade at the top were convert 315% better than the ones that *only* mentioned the content upgrade at the end. Think about that, it means even people who are willing to optin for the upgrade (your most engaged readers) won't optin unless you offer it at the top because they actually never scroll to the bottom. Think about that again.
2. Even if they do read the whole thing, people love saving things to read later and a PDF let's you do that.

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For example, just a few posts ago, a Grow and Convert reader, Michael, actually asked us for a PDF of the post:

 **Michael Pozdnev** · a month ago

Excellent article! I am very glad that you share such useful information, confirmed with data and your own experience, with the readers.

In fact, it is really important to approach all your actions correctly and keep track of them from the very beginning. Conversion settings, CTA are indispensable parts of a successful blog nowadays.

According to my own experience of using various CTA, several options based on user's preferences worked well. Sometimes there are fewer downloads of my bonuses than of the pdf versions of my posts. The same concerns your article: I would rather save it for the future as a pdf file, so that to be able to take advantage of the advice later on.

I wish success to your blog! I keep track of your development, since I'm interested in the subject matter of your posts and since I launched my own blog at the same time with you.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

In fact, Michael has noticed on his own blog that the PDF version of a post often gets the most signups.

For example, he has a mega post on doing SEO audits, and offers 2 content upgrades: a checklist and a PDF download:

1. → **Free Bonus: [Download the checklist](#) with a 21-step SEO audit (4 of them are not included in this post) and increase the traffic to your blog.**

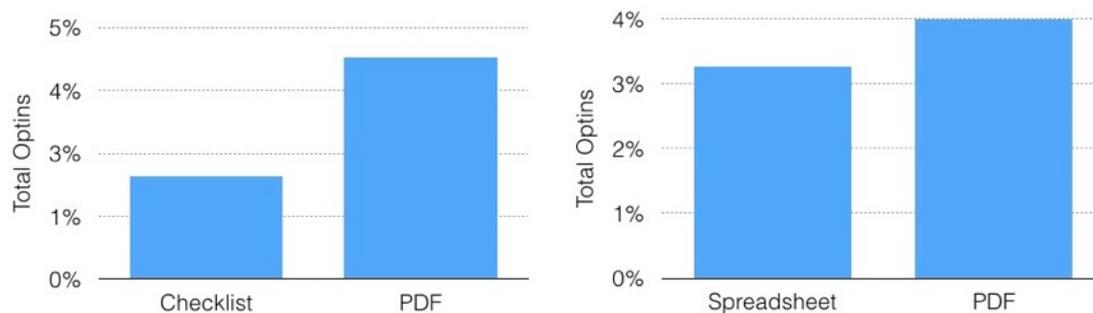


In this post, I will tell you how to complete an SEO audit in just a few quick steps.

2. → **CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THIS MONSTER POST AS A PDF**

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When he looks at his conversion rates, the PDF download is outperforming the “true” content upgrade (a checklist) on this post by almost double (left):



And the PDF outperformed on another post as well (right), where Michael analyzed a bunch of data from top bloggers and presented his analysis in the post. The content upgrade was the full spreadsheet of the data, but the PDF still got more downloads.

That’s crazy because the spreadsheet in that post is a *really topical* content upgrade. And yet, people preferred the PDF.

I’ll be honest, a part of me still believes that a *really good* content upgrade should beat the PDF version of a post. But this data is so intriguing that I’m testing it on this post (and the previous post in this series).

We’re giving away a PDF version of both posts. Together they cover blog conversions in solid detail and span over 7000 words. From setting up analytics, to positioning optin forms in the right place, to using popups vs. other tactics, to content upgrades and content upgrade alternatives, it’s all there. If you want it, you can get it for free here (just click this link and let us know where to email it).

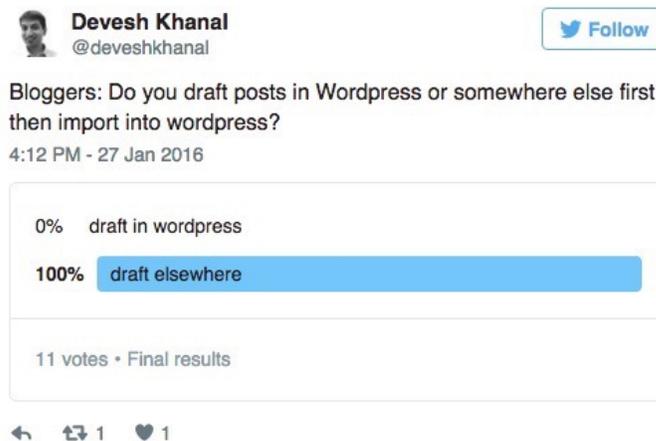
So, if you’re looking for a scalable process to implement content upgrades blog wide, PDF-ing (long) posts is definitely something I would consider. You will have to actually scale it somehow though, so fair warning.

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It took me 15 minutes to PDF this post and I hired someone from Fiverr to do the previous one (for \$5, although it seems everyone on Fiverr always wants to convince you that your task requires purchasing bonuses...argh.).

I haven't done this myself at scale, but here are some ideas:

1. **Manual** - If this converts well and readers keep wanting PDFs, we're thinking of drafting all posts in Word or Pages, finalizing there, saving as PDF, then, as the last step, importing them into Wordpress. I did a couple of (unscientific surveys) on how many people draft directly in Wordpress and it seems most do not:



2. **Assistant** - Hire an assistant to turn every post into a PDF. Simple enough. Seems tedious, but if it's getting you hundreds of more leads a month, it could be worth it.
3. **Software** - If your company is big enough, this is something to consider. If Instapaper, Pocket, Evernote, and a bunch of other services can scrape a page for the article, surely your tech team can find a way to do that for your blog and turn each into a PDF in a click or two. (Side note: If you know of software that does this already, let us know in the comments.)

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The CliffHanger

So just to recap, we've now covered creating fewer content upgrades (Topicbox Technique), and repeatable upgrades (PDFs). You should be able to get solid conversion rates with those.

This last example is going to be (in some ways) even easier than the other two: instead of a content upgrade, just give your audience a cliffhanger for the *next* post.

Since Grow and Convert has, to date, been a side project (100% emotional commitment, less than 100% time), we just haven't had the time to create content upgrades.

So instead, this is something we've just started trying on Grow and Convert and it's converting moderately well, considering how much easier it is than content upgrades. We haven't hit conversion rates as high as real content upgrades (not surprising) but considering how much easier this is, it's worth mentioning, so you have it in your arsenal.

Here's how it works.

Step 1: We take a topic (such as this post's topic: converting readers from content marketing), and plan to write 2 or 3 posts on it.

Step 2: When we write the first post on the topic, we intentionally *tease* the next post on the topic.

For example, in the our recent post on the [Suggested Search Hack](#), we teased the next post in the series:

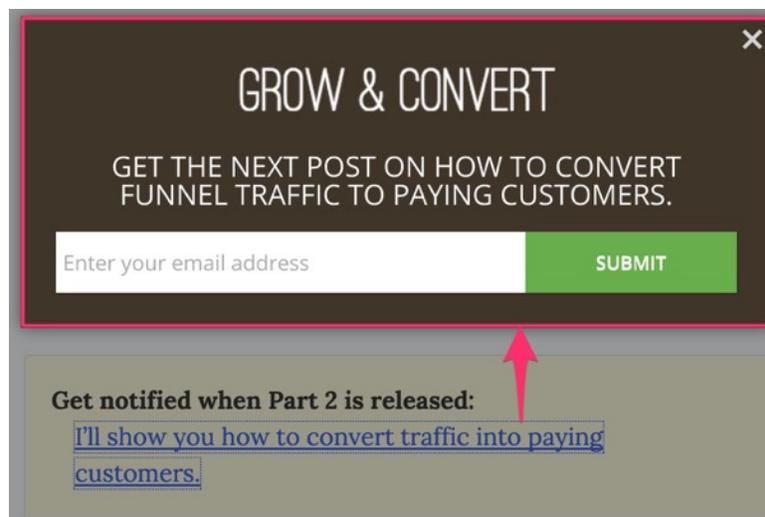
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You can create content that strategically brings leads in at different places in your sales funnel. That's what I'm going to show you in this post **(Part 1 of the series).**

i.e. more to come

Step 3: Then we attach a call to action with that tease to collect emails.

So in the above example, below the paragraph we showed above, we included an explicit call to action to get notified when Part 2 comes out. When you click the link, it opens this optin form:



The image shows a screenshot of an optin form. The form has a dark background with the text "GROW & CONVERT" at the top. Below that, it says "GET THE NEXT POST ON HOW TO CONVERT FUNNEL TRAFFIC TO PAYING CUSTOMERS." There is a white input field for "Enter your email address" and a green "SUBMIT" button. Below the form, there is a link that says "Get notified when Part 2 is released: [I'll show you how to convert traffic into paying customers.](#)" A red arrow points from the text "i.e. more to come" above to the link.

The post has received 3394 unique pageviews to date and led to 108 email subscribers:

So it has a 3.2% conversion rate.

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Since Grow and Convert is all about transparency, let me be the first to tell you that 3.2% on a good blog post with our current level of traffic (10k uniques) is not *stellar* (if we had a really good content upgrade, we should convert 6%+).

But considering we literally have *no* content upgrade for that post, that's pretty damn good. And note that 3.2% doesn't include the people who landed on that post and joined via our sitewide

popup or by clicking to the homepage and joining via our featurebox.

On another post, [Part 1 of this series on converting blog traffic](#), we did something similar, but our CTA for the next post in the series wasn't as clear (the popup just said "get updates of future posts"), and it's only converted around 2.1%. That's starting to approach "not good enough" territory, so, use this method with caution.