

DEEP SEA TREASURE:

Dive Rite Discovers
Content Marketing Opportunities



► OPPORTUNITY

Greek mythology tells a cautionary tale familiar to many business owners. It involves sirens, those bewitching creatures who lured sailors to the rocks with their enchanting music. The shipwrecked sailors drown chasing what appears so real.

Today, marketing mythology has similar sirens: Those copy-cats pulling your brand underwater and leaving wreckage in their wake. Market leaders in all industries recognize the need to stay a step ahead of copy-cat competition. Few were as familiar with the problems caused by imitators than a company called Dive Rite.

Dive Rite began in 1984 by developing some of the first dive gear for technical diving enthusiasts. Tech diving, also known as deep or overhead environment diving, exceeds the scope of recreational diving and is considered an extreme sport that requires advanced training, extensive experience and specialized equipment.

Unfortunately, by 2000 the Internet was making it easier for competitors to build and sell Dive Rite knock-off products. Dive Rite's market share began slipping, and by 2005 Dive Rite's once-maverick brand was seen as "just another technical dive gear brand."

"Research showed divers were not very aware of the quality and innovation coming out of Dive Rite compared to other brands. No one understood the Dive Rite brand, its history, and the quality of the gear because Dive Rite had stopped telling its story AND was unable to effectively represent its products," says Kathleen Byars, Dive Rite's Director of Marketing.

If the internet created Dive Rite's problem, couldn't the internet solve it, too?

Yes, but not at first.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

What They Do: Dive Rite designs, manufactures and sells (to dealers) advanced, or technical, scuba diving gear for technical diving.

Who They Help: Technical divers, also called "Tech Divers", who have advanced training, extensive experience, and a need for specialized equipment.

Industry: Scuba Diving/Extreme Sports

Number of Employees: 18

Size of Marketing Department: 1

Insource or Outsource Marketing?

Both: Graphic design, photography, and web communications are also regularly outsourced.

In Business Since: 1984

Headquarters: Lake City, Florida



Lamar Hires
Founder
Dive Rite

Dive Rite's first attempt in 2003 was to "fix the website." They hired a web designer to build a sexy, all-Flash site. The new website looked appealing – like those mythical sirens on the rocks – but there were some major problems just below the surface that contributed to a "perfect storm" of missteps. The Flash site was neither indexable by search engines, nor updateable.

By 2007, Dive Rite was virtually invisible on the web. The only search terms that generated Top 10 ranking in Google was for the company's name. Even *that* was coming up second or third from the top ranking. These problems disastrously affected their online marketing and overall brand awareness. Competitors started snapping up keywords and phrases.

It was easy to look out at a calm sea and ignore these problems - for awhile.

As the largest manufacturer in the technical scuba industry, Dive Rite's sales continued to grow despite the website. Sales were predominantly the result of launching new product categories. Dive Rite's lagging brand perception was hidden as its dealer base bolstered sales by purchasing more product from the new category offering. This allowed the company to exist in a happy bubble of denial.



Once Dive Rite completed its portfolio and no longer had new categories to add, the slip in market share and mind share became apparent. Like other companies, Dive Rite became frustrated by expensive, wasteful traditional marketing and advertising methods. They needed a lifeboat.



Kathleen Byars
Director of Marketing
Dive Rite

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► SOLUTION

Kathleen Byars contacted Russell Sparkman of Fusionspark Media in early 2007. Fusionspark Media is a boutique agency with locations on the east and west coasts.

“Our main problem was outdated product information on the website. So our initial approach was simply to fix the broken site. We initiated an agency search, and ironically enough, didn’t immediately settle on Fusionspark as we saw their agency as ‘story-tellers,’ and we wanted a web design that was product focused, not story focused. We didn’t quite get it! We found more than a web design agency, but rather a strategic partner who would stretch us to think beyond our current template,” says Kathleen.

Kathleen knew Dive Rite had a great backdrop for telling a story because the company’s 25-year history meant it had pioneered most pieces of dive gear being sold. Dive Rite didn’t just offer gear. The company could tell you why each dive gear product was designed and the best way to use it. An amazing depth of knowledge existed in the company because the founders and all the employees were technical divers.

This technical nature of the sport meant Dive Rite’s target audience was tech savvy. Many were already participating in conversations in online forums that covered all aspects of technical diving from technique to gear. Therefore, the first step was for Dive Rite to join the conversation by providing relevant and helpful content and pointing customers back to the company’s website.

“Fusionspark’s immediate idea was to think of the website as the center of our marketing activities, connecting traditional marketing with online. Plus, they introduced us to the concept of SEO and how that could be achieved organically through content generation,” says Kathleen.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

- Develop an overarching content strategy based upon achieving measurable desired outcomes.
- Rebuild the website so search engines can index it (and non-programming humans can update it).
- Offer content that celebrates “story,” whether that story is connected to product, people, or both.
- Encourage customer connectivity - give them a platform and a role as seen with Solution Finder.
- Connect offline as well as online.
- Expand into additional social media channels such as Facebook.
- Lay the groundwork for additional user generated content.

► STEPS TO SUCCESS

Get Leadership Buy-In

“Hands down, the most important thing to have in place for this to even have a glimmer of hope of getting off the ground was the buy-in by the founders,” reports Russell. “You need to have someone on the client side who will be the content marketing champion, otherwise the agency can’t get in the door.”

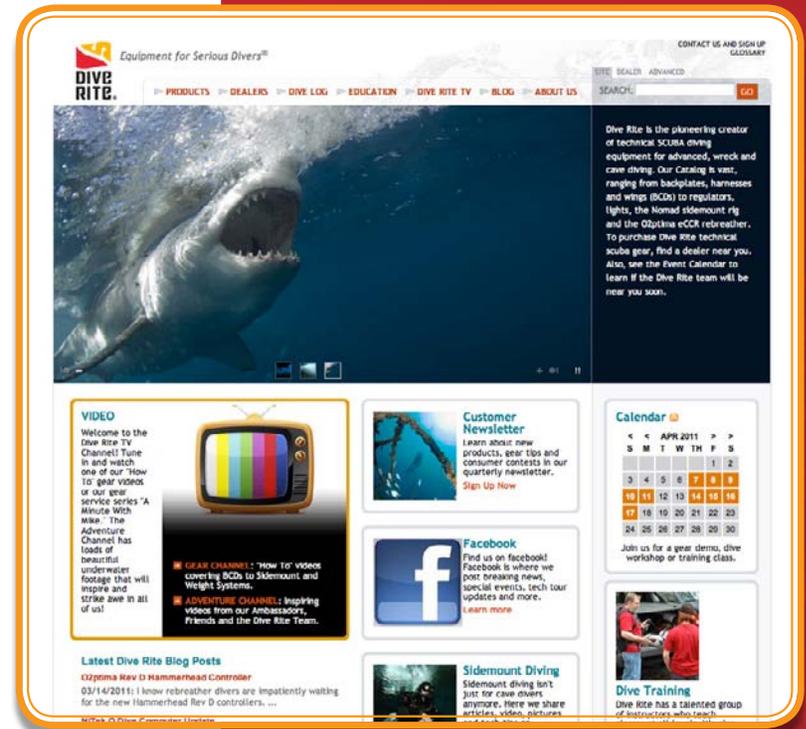
Take a Content Audit

Before the team could begin to improve the website, they needed to understand what exactly they had and decide what content to keep, update, or remove. They accomplished this through an audit.

Russell explains how they got started. “We knew content has to be mapped to specific strategic outcomes. Achieving those outcomes meant that the content was also mapped to specific target audiences and needs.”

The team gathered for a one-day onsite meeting. This intensive meeting included a comprehensive audit of the existing site. They also discussed target audiences, target audience needs, and desired outcomes from a market positioning perspective. Notes were transcribed and shared with Dive Rite, and the company prioritized tasks.

Since the earlier Flash-built site made site navigation unclear for some users, this in-depth review process was essentially a user experience design process. “This led us to content and functionality decisions mapped to meeting priority needs and achieving priority desired outcomes. The audiences ranged from the internal Dive Rite team, to their customers (dealers), to potential customers and so on,” says Russell.



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Focus on Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

The company knew that the site's new content needed to achieve several goals:

- Improve brand image
- Increase online awareness
- Increase organic online search results
- Develop customer and dealer retention

In addition to making the content stronger, Dive Rite focused on getting traction with search engine marketing, specifically with “long tail” search engine performance. This meant not only setting the goal of top ranking for primary keywords and phrases, (such as “technical dive gear”) but also multi-word searches that would drive traffic to Dive Rite.

Establish a Content Strategy

The team knew the content would need to re-establish the Dive Rite brand as the leading, pioneering brand in technical scuba diving gear. This meant not only properly highlighting products and making it easy for the audience to find them, but adding value by creating contextual relationships between instructional resources, training and events.

With these goals in mind, the team followed these steps:

- Created a content strategy document. The document was written as a narrative for ease of discussion.
- Developed a site map
- Planned the wireframe navigation
- Designed and programmed the new site

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Who was involved?

Lamar Hires

Dive Rite Founder

Kathleen Byars

Dive Rite Marketing Director

Russell Sparkman

Managing Partner, Fusionspark Media

Kevin Sparkman

Managing Partner, Fusionspark Media

What was the time commitment?

The content marketing plan was executed in two phases over the course of approximately seven months. The initial phase introduced the product catalog in time for the summer dive season. The full website was deployed in time for DEMA, the dive industry's largest dive show. There was a period in which Fusionspark Media was on a retainer for ongoing consulting, but now the site's content is managed entirely by Dive Rite.

What tools did you use?

- Proprietary PHP / MySQL Content Management System, similar to open source CMS such as Drupal and Joomla
- Zoomify, so visitors can zoom into product photos

Hire Subject Matter Experts

“Our industry is one in which it is difficult to sub out. You are either a technical diver or not and you can't write about technical diving unless you do it,” says Kathleen. Russell was able to help with some of the writing as he is a technical diver, (he was trained by Kathleen Byars' husband, Scott) but a great deal of the writing was done in-house by Kathleen with oversight/edits from company owner, Lamar Hires.

A writer/researcher with cave diving background was hired on a contract basis. Dive Rite also worked with a local photographer for product photography.

Choose a Flexible Content Management System

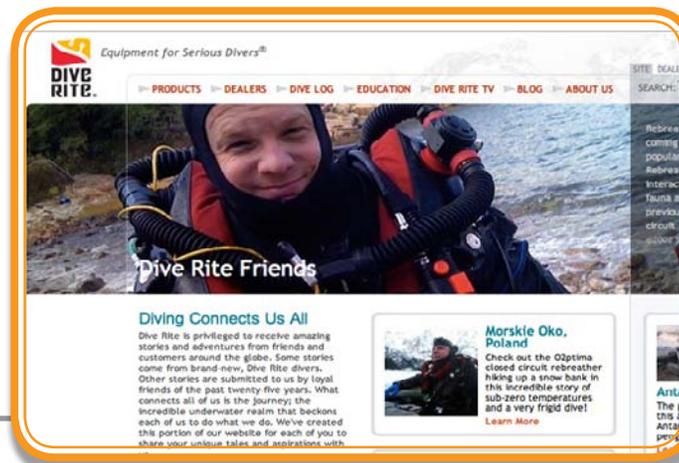
“Tactically, adopting a CMS-driven website allowed us to quickly launch new products or change product descriptions and add features, which was a laborious process with the former website,” reports Kathleen.

Tell a story

The content itself placed emphasis on story. Regardless of medium (text or video) the voice throughout emphasized real people. Content showcased the people and personalities behind the company, which is different than competitor sites.

The content strategy for the site included sections such as:

- History of cave diving
- Helpful product descriptions
- “How to” content
- Inspiring stories about real divers
- Stories from customers



THINGS THEY'RE GLAD THEY DID

Hire the right people.

Building and executing a content marketing strategy requires a specific combination of web savvy and communication skills. Don't trust this task to web developers or traditional marketers unless they demonstrate additional core competency in the workflow of planning, producing and deploying multiple types of content assets across multiple platforms, online and offline. This includes content experts, too. It is more valuable to get content from people who actually use and know your product than content from people who are unfamiliar. Sometimes this means tapping the expertise of those in your immediate surroundings.

Include your audience.

Your vendors, suppliers and customers can each provide highly effective content. Give them a platform on which to engage and curate the content they create.

Reallocate Budget from Traditional Marketing to Content Marketing

While the company focused on building online content, it minimized the amount of traditional marketing and paid advertising.

“The new website allowed us to cost effectively reach a niche audience with a ‘fringe’ interest, thereby overshadowing more traditional marketing such as print. To reach the same audience via print we would have to buy in at least 4-5 different magazines, which isn’t possible with our small budget,” Kathleen.

Instead, Dive Rite reached out to its community through a photo contest. This early exploration with online customer engagement resulted in a popular ad series in Advanced Diver Magazine. Winners were excited to share “their ad” with friends.

Use the Website to Connect with Customers

The new website enhanced Dive Rite’s ability to speak with customers. Dive Rite staff answered traditional customer service emails and wrote content for a customizable FAQ they named “Solution Finder.” The “Solution Finder” questions were collaboratively answered first by the Dive Rite team and eventually by customers.

“We began including ‘Solution Finder’ links in our customer service emails and answers on scuba-centric forums. We discovered that increased customer dialogue coupled with the information on our site was creating a customer-led community of Dive Rite dedicated fans. They helped each other out with solutions by pointing each other to our website. Wow, the marketing was being done for us!” says Kathleen Byars.

THINGS THEY’RE GLAD THEY DID

Audit and build strategy early.

Do not skimp on the front-end work of a content audit and building a content strategy. It will save time in the long run.

Do it right, not overnight!

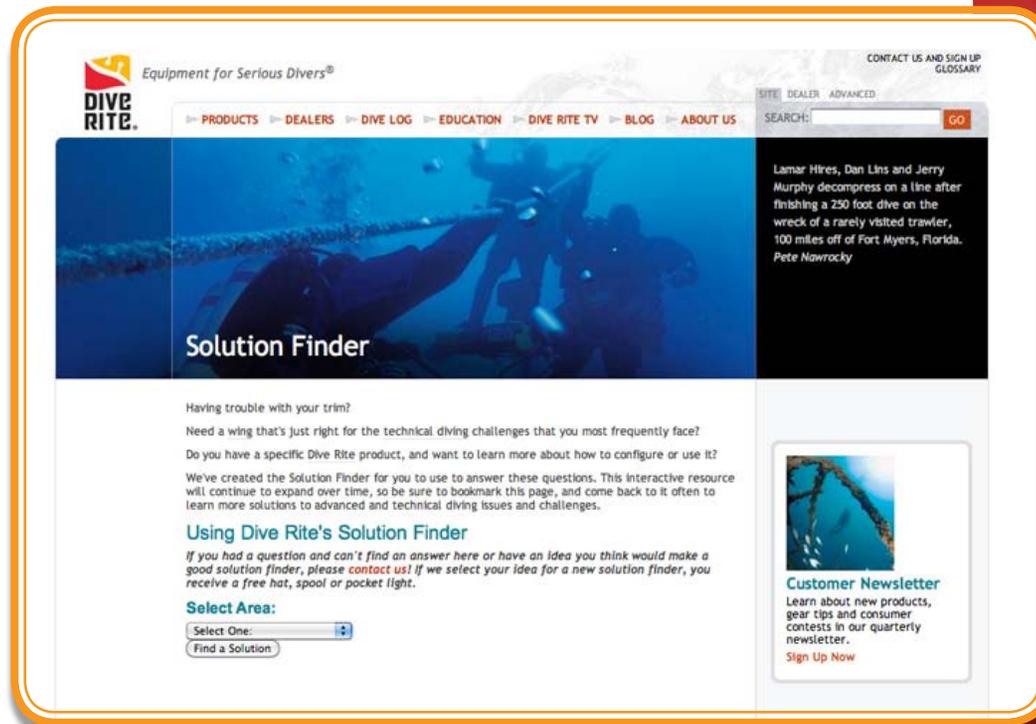
Some might be tempted to launch a “temporary” website to fix one that isn’t working. However, this would only serve to heighten the mistake and create more “fixes” down the road. Instead, plan and execute a complete overhaul at once. Take the time to do it correctly.

Customers took interest in the “Solution Finder” and helped broaden its data exponentially. One of the great challenges is how to get others to contribute quality content. Even though Dive Rite is not writing, editing, and publishing, the bulk of this customer-level content is still reviewed by Dive Rite’s marketing staff members and the owner.

Find Additional Ways to Connect with Customers

Dive Rite launched a “Tech Tour” to coincide with the new website. They sent employees across the nation to dive with local divers and educate dive shops on new gear. These adventures and the local dive shop host were promoted in a dedicated section of the website. “Events are legitimate activities to consider when developing content strategy because they provide opportunities to generate content, or have participants generate content,” reports Russell.

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► RESULTS ACHIEVED

There are several ways Dive Rite has found success with its content marketing program.

Increased Site Traffic

One of the primary goals for Dive Rite was high organic search rankings for key terms and phrases. By planning the right content, Dive Rite's traffic increased 65 percent without additional spending on advertising.

Increased Referral Rates

Dive Rite sells products through a network of dealers not directly from its website. A "where to buy" button on the website generates some sales metrics. For instance, one of Dive Rite's primary online dealers has been tracking referrals from Dive Rite's site. He reports the following two metrics:

- Referrals to his ecommerce site from Dive Rite convert to a sale three times the rate as any other referral.
- Referrals to his ecommerce site from Dive Rite spend 15 minutes on his site, on average, which is double the amount of time spent by referrals from other sites.

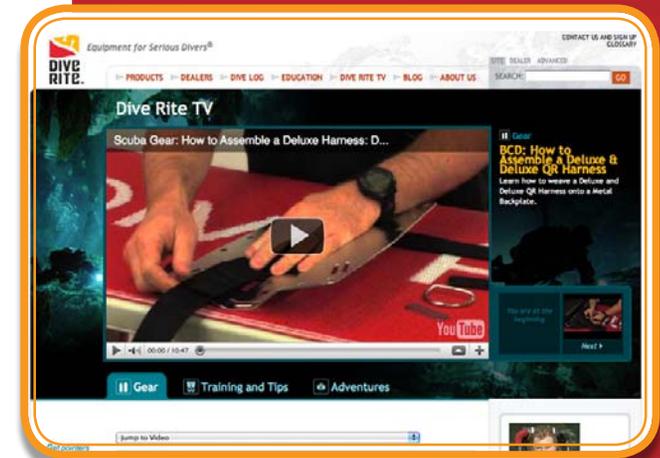
This dealer adds, "Diverite.com referrals are engaged, very high quality visitors who are motivated to buy."

Ability to Weather the Downturn

Dive Rite believes search engine returns and an improved site design are the primary reasons that keep customers interacting with the website content. The company remains one of the few businesses in its industry that is still making money, not just surviving. Says Kathleen, "We strongly believe our combination of innovative, premium products and content marketing strategy are the reasons for this."

A LOOK AT KEY CONTENT

- **CMS-driven website** for easy updating
- User-generated content (e.g., **photo contest**, **Solution Finder** questions)
- **Dive Rite TV** (Gear How-to's, Training and Tips, Adventure)



Leadership Positioning

“Our website’s content marketing strategy allowed us to not only regain market share, entrench our brand in the mindset of our customers and increase sales, but it put us in a leadership position in our industry,” reports Kathleen.

Competition Can’t Duplicate Your Content

Developing unique content allowed the company to tell its story and personalize the people behind the diving equipment. By offering a greater glimpse into more of “who they are” Dive Rite succeeded in creating a website that brand copycats could not rip off.

► WHERE THEY PLAN TO GO FROM HERE

Since relaunching its website with a content marketing focus, Dive Rite is expanding its web presence on forums and Facebook.

“The focus of the website launch was ‘content.’ The focus of the next phase is going to be ‘connect,’” reports Russell.

“We are now tackling You Tube and improving our blog etiquette. We are learning how to expand our brand across social media while gaining a closer relationship with our customers through social media dialogue and user-generated content, which is gratifying as well as priceless,” says Kathleen.

Increasing customer participation on the site and in these social media channels will be a major focus this year. “It was a pretty big leap of faith to get into content marketing in the first place. While user-generated content was discussed right from the very beginning, the organization wasn’t ready to step into that phase. Now they’re ready for it,” concludes Russell.

Bon Voyage!

“Our website’s content marketing strategy allowed us to not only regain market share, entrench our brand in the mindset of our customers and increase sales, but it put us in a leadership position in our industry.”



► EXPERT COMMENTARY

In early 2007, Dive Rite bet on quality content and won. Russell Sparkman shares what other marketers can learn from Dive Rite.

Be confident in content marketing. Today's environment is even more conducive to succeeding through a strategic content marketing plan, but you need confidence in this approach and have buy-in from the right people. Otherwise, projects like this never have the chance to get off the ground. In the case of Dive Rite, the owner of the company, Lamar, was very willing to listen to new ideas. His willingness to explore new approaches was not surprising as he was is a natural adventurer, discovering the deepest and darkest nooks and crannies of the earth, underwater no less.

An investment in high quality content is an investment in long term ROI. Dive Rite's web presence is rich with content that was impressive to site visitors four years ago, as it is to new site visitors today. Quality content has an evergreen value.

Never stop. The launch of a content-driven web presence doesn't end with launch but begins on the day of launch. Clients, particularly in small businesses, are easily distracted and as a result the type, quality, and frequency of the content development suffers. We need to educate clients earlier in the dialogs with the knowledge that they will be retaining us for services on an ongoing basis.



Russell Sparkman

President/CEO
Fusionspark Media, Inc.





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