



# A DATA-DRIVEN GUIDE TO CREATING VIRAL CONTENT

## CHECKLIST



When a piece of content goes viral, there's no magic or luck involved.

In fact:

According to new research, viral content tends to contain specific elements that push people to share.

I cover 21 of these elements in this checklist.

### 1 USE AN (ODD) NUMBER:

Headlines with numbers are 2x more to generate clicks vs. "how to" headlines, according to research by Conductor. And a study of 150,000 headlines revealed that odd-numbered headlines have a 20% better CTR than headlines with even numbers.

#### SOURCES:

<https://moz.com/blog/5-data-insights-into-the-headlines-readers-click> and <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/06/headline-click-through-rate/>

### 2 USE [BRACKETS]:

In an analysis of over 3 million headlines, Outbrain found using [brackets] in a headline bumped up CTR by 38%.

#### SOURCES:

[http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/53/file-2505556912-pdf/Data Driven Strategies For Writing Effective Titles and Headlines.pdf?t=1435309544199](http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/53/file-2505556912-pdf/Data%20Driven%20Strategies%20For%20Writing%20Effective%20Titles%20and%20Headlines.pdf?t=1435309544199)

### 3 SHORT URLS:

Short URLs are 2.5x more likely to attract a click, according to Marketing Sherpa.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/exs/Search08Excerpt.pdf>

### 4 DESCRIPTIVE URL:

Trusted domains get 25% more clicks, a Microsoft study discovered. Opt for [example.com/cute-cats](http://example.com/cute-cats) over [example.com/blog/post?id=5421!6g](http://example.com/blog/post?id=5421!6g).

**SOURCES:**

<http://research.microsoft.com/pubs/155941/domainbias.pdf>

### 5 INTRO=SHORT SENTENCES:

People only read 28% of a blog post, so you need to hook them fast. <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-little-do-users-read/>. How? Short sentences. Dr. John Morke found short sentences boosted content readability by 58%

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/concise-scannable-and-objective-how-to-write-for-the-web/>

### 6 COLORFUL IMAGE ABOVE THE FOLD:

Xerox found that colorful visuals made people 80% more likely to read a product guide.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.office.xerox.com/latest/COLFS-02UA.PDF>

## 7 IMAGES=MORE SHARES:

Skyword research found that content with at least one image generated 94% more views on social media.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/enterprise-marketing/skyword-study-add-images-to-improve-content-performance/>

## 8 IMAGES=MORE CREDIBILITY:

A Claremont Graduate University study found an image -- any image -- boosts content credibility by 75%.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001691813001376>

## 9 USE PRO IMAGES:

Image quality makes a huge difference. An internal Marketing Sherpa study found that pro images received 121% more Facebook shares than "semi-professional" photos.

**SOURCES:**

<http://sherpablog.marketingsherpa.com/social-networking-evangelism-community/facebook-image-shares/>

## 10 PUBLISH LONG CONTENT:

Professor Dr. Jonah Berger found that longer content was 76.8% more likely to be heavily shared. Aim for at least 1,500 words per post.

## 11 USE A "FEATURED IMAGE":

Setting a featured image ensures your social shares include an image. Social shares with images get 150% more retweets on Twitter and 53% more Likes on Facebook.

### SOURCES:

<https://blog.bufferapp.com/the-power-of-twitters-new-expanded-images-and-how-to-make-the-most-of-it>  
and

<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/33800/Photos-on-Facebook-Generate-53-More-Likes-Than-the-Average-Post-NEW-DATA.aspx>.

## 12 INCLUDE AN INFOGRAPHIC:

Infographics generate 2.3x more social shares than how-to posts, according to data from Buzzsumo.

### SOURCES:

<http://okdork.com/2014/04/21/why-content-goes-viral-what-analyzing-100-millions-articles-taught-us/>

## 13 PUT SHARE BUTTONS ABOVE THE FOLD:

A Google study found that elements above the fold are seen by 58% more people than those pushed further down the page.

### SOURCES:

[http://think.storage.googleapis.com/docs/the-importance-of-being-seen\\_study.pdf](http://think.storage.googleapis.com/docs/the-importance-of-being-seen_study.pdf)

## 14 INCLUDE HASHTAGS:

Dan Zarrella analyzed 1.2 million tweets and found that hashtag-containing tweets boosted retweets by 55%

### SOURCES:

<http://danzarrella.com/new-data-use-quotes-and-hashtags-to-get-more-retweets.html>

## 15 GET EMOTIONAL:

A study published in the Journal of Marketing Research found content that elicits the emotions "awe", "surprise" or "anger" was 28.3% more likely to go viral.

**SOURCES:**

[http://ldi.upenn.edu/uploads/media\\_items/virality.original.pdf](http://ldi.upenn.edu/uploads/media_items/virality.original.pdf)

## 16 MENTION INFLUENCERS:

Link to influential people in your post (and let them know about it). A Columbia University study found that for your content to go viral, influencer shares were "critical".

**SOURCES:**

<https://www.stat.berkeley.edu/~aldous/260-FMIE/Papers/watts.pdf>

## 17 PUBLISH BETWEEN 8AM AND 12PM.

27% of all social shares occur between 8am and 12pm EST, Shareaholic discovered.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.socialfresh.com/best-time-of-day-to-blog/>

## 18 USE "SCANNABLE" TEXT:

Like short paragraphs, subheadings and bulleted lists. Dr. Jakob Nielsen discovered that "scannable" online content boosted readability by 47%.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-users-read-on-the-web/>

## 19 BE INSANELY PRACTICAL:

Dr. Jonah Berger found that highly-practical articles are 34% more likely to go viral.

**SOURCES:**

[http://ldi.upenn.edu/uploads/media\\_items/virality.original.pdf](http://ldi.upenn.edu/uploads/media_items/virality.original.pdf)

## 20 SEO TAG COPY=ADWORDS ADS:

Adwords ads are designed to maximize clicks. Base your SEO title and description tags on Adwords ads to maximize traffic from search engines.

## 21 ASK PEOPLE TO SHARE:

Include a CTA at the end of your post...and make it personalized. Hubspot found that targeted CTAs ("Share these weight loss tips") outperformed generic CTAs ("share this post") by 42%:

**SOURCES:**

<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/personalized-calls-to-action-convert-better-data>