

NO MORE BORING CONTENT

SUMMER ISSUE

**8 Easy (*And Hot!*)
Ways to Turn Your
Content from ZZZ
to OMG**

**SHOCK
YOUR
READERS**

(They love it!)

**COME FULL
CIRCLE**

*(How does the
story end?)*

**MAKE IT
EASY**

*(Try skimmable
subheads!)*

OH SO BAD!

STEAL THESE IDEAS FROM WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

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NO MORE BORING CONTENT

B2B decision makers are bored.

Don't get mad at *us*—that statement comes from a survey of B2B buyers where 82% said they wish B2B marketing had the creativity associated with B2C. And during challenging times, this craving for an entertaining read ramps up even higher.

Hero's Journey Content's founder came up writing for the women's magazines (think: *Redbook*, *Woman's Day*, *Family Circle*), where the content is fresh, readable, and fun—even on topics as dry as budgeting and nutrition.

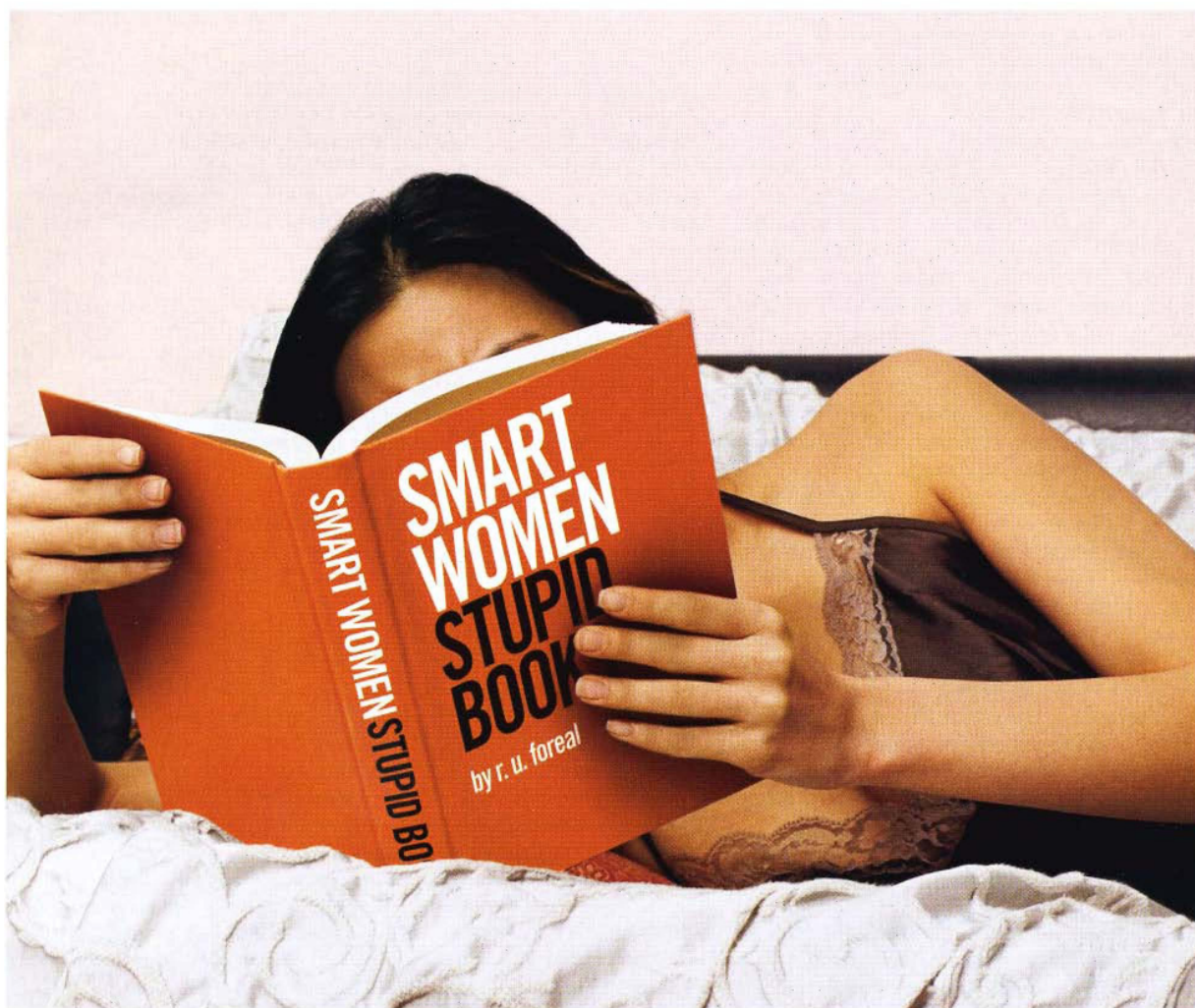
Here, we dissected one of Linda's articles for *Women's Health* magazine to show how you can incorporate these same principles into your B2B content. Each of the numbers on the article corresponds to an explanation of that element on the following pages.

Your readers are relying on *you* to save them from B2B boredom—and to inspire them to action.

Here's how to do it.

Editor-in-chief **Linda Formichelli**

Apex, NC



i was a self-help junkie

When you start curling up with Dr. Phil on a nightly basis, it's time to rewrite the rules of self-improvement **By Linda Formicelli**

1

LAST September, my husband and I moved to New Hampshire from Massachusetts. My longtime pals were now hours away, and I wanted to meet new people and establish roots in fresh soil. Really, I did. But did I join a book club, sign up for a cooking class, or do any of a hundred other activities that would require me to leave the house and make contact with living, breathing bodies? No. I huddled on the couch with Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Welcome to the mindset of a self-help junkie.

Most women's nightstands are piled high with classic novels, magazines, chick lit, and the occasional *Best American Erotica*. On mine? Teetering stacks of self-help books. For every negative emotion that flits through my mind, there's a title—or 12—offering a cure. *Letting Go of Shame*, *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, *Fearless Living*—yes, I've read them all. Self-help books give me a kind of high—the same I'm-on-top-of-the-world kick a compulsive shopper feels when she finds a pair of Jimmy Choos at half price. But the high wears off when the book ends (or the foyer is crowded with pumps and stilettos). I'm left with a feeling of needing more, more, more. Sure, *Optimal Thinking* sounds good, but—ooh—how does it compare with the wisdom to be found in *Women Who Think Too Much* or *Eating, Drinking,*

2

Overthinking? Must...read...to...find...out.

And therein lies the problem: I spend more time reading about how to live my life than actually living it. Poring over the pages of *Self-Esteem* primes me for a confrontation with that incompetent counter-jockey at the DMV. A quibble with an old friend has me reaching for *The Friendship Crisis* to map out my next move.

My moment of clarity—if I can lapse into self-help speak for a sec—came when I realized that I never got past the reading and on to the real-life solutions. We'd moved in September; it was now December, and I hadn't so much as had a conversation with anyone but my husband and the DMV guy. "For some people, reading the books fools them into thinking they're making changes when they're not actually doing much," says Debra Hope, Ph.D., a psychology professor at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. "Self-help books can keep you one step from your life."

I'm Not OK, You're Not OK

I'm not the only one who relies on words to battle my woes. According to Bowker's Books in Print, a publishing industry data service, there are close to 32,000 self-help titles in print in the United States today, which means that countless thousands are joining me in my pursuit of self-actualization, empowerment, and wealth through the power of positive thinking. And we'll need those positive thoughts: Americans spent a whopping \$668 million on self-help books in 2005, a 44 percent increase over 10 years earlier.

The trend seems to be a girl thing: *Publishers Weekly* reports that women account for 85 percent of the category's sales. One reason is that anxiety and depression tend to hit women more often than men, says Harold Dawley, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and owner of selfhelpbooks.com, which sells self-help books and publishes daily self-help articles. "Women also read more books than men and are more inclined to seek help," he says.

What's behind this movement toward self-improvement? According to Dr. Hope, most of us have what we need to survive—food, shelter, a decent income, a network of friends—which lets us take our eyes off the prize and fix them squarely on our navels. "We can start to focus on ourselves, excessively so in some cases," Dr. Hope says. No surprise there. My junkiehood kicked into high gear once I reached a level of professional success. Instead of obsessing about how my husband and I would pay the mortgage, I started turning to self-help books to fix the intangibles. Tomorrow's dinner? Taken care of. My emotional state? Time to crack open *Living Your Best Life*.

The (Self-Help) Road Less Traveled

So how do I break my self-help addiction and regain my life? Dr. Hope suggests I start by trading in the literature of transformation for a damn good book. When you're looking for something to read, do you want to engage your imagination, or, in her words, "read something that makes you realize your life is inadequate"? Enough said. The next time I head to Barnes & Noble, I pass quickly through the self-help section. My fingers twitch when I eye some sure-to-be pop-psych classics: *31 Words to Create a Guilt-Free Life* and *The Last Self-Help Book You'll Ever Need*. Wait, that could be a good one...no, just keep walking. I hit the fiction aisle and stock up on popular titles I'd passed over in my ongoing quest for self-improvement: *The Time Traveler's Wife* and *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Reading about a young girl in pre-World War II Japan who's sold into servitude, separated from her sister, and tormented by rivals for decades puts my 21st-century troubles—dripping chalupe juice on my new suede jacket—in perspective.

So that takes care of my need to read. But where does it leave my help-seeking ways? "Make friends, support people, and join groups that advance things you're concerned about," says Micki McGee,

“Self-help books give me the same I'm-on-top-of-the-world kick a compulsive shopper feels when she finds a pair of Jimmy Choos at half price.”

Ph.D., author of *Self Help, Inc.* As for all that stuff the books helped me with—self-esteem, anxiety, relationships—make a list of the good and not-so-good, suggests Patricia A. Farrell, Ph.D., author of *How to Be Your Own Therapist*. "Next to the ones that aren't so good, list three things you can do to begin making changes," she says. "Then give yourself simple weekly assignments to work toward those goals."

I've since offered my services to the local SPCA, joined a karate dojo, and sworn off an online forum that was a huge time-suck—and one more reason not to leave the house. If the whole program sounds totally self-help, well, I admit that it is. But hey, on some level that was the point—and it seems to be working. Oh sure, Dr. Phil and Suze Orman call out to me every night, but I haven't so much as turned a single page.

Linda Formichelli is a health writer based in Concord, New Hampshire. She is currently reading The Kite Runner. Look for her fine selection of used self-help books on half.com.

1

GET PERSONAL

Readers resonate with stories more than lifeless facts.

Steal It: You don't need to spill your guts like Linda did here, but consider: what is there about this content that will reach readers on a personal level? Can you weave a story about your client's challenges in a case study, or craft a hypothetical anecdote in the lead of a blog post?

2

GET DETAILED

Here, Linda lists some books she'd read and calls out Jimmy Choos. She could have just said "books" and "expensive pair of shoes," but these details paint a more vivid picture for the reader.

Steal It: Use precise examples instead of generic terms. The client in your case study didn't just *complain to their old service provider*, they *sent six unanswered messages to the helpdesk*.

3

OFFER SERVICE

This article could have been all me, me, me—and that would have been boring, boring, boring. Here, Linda starts bringing in *service* (that's mag-speak for *how-to*) with expert quotes and advice.

Steal It: Offer actionable advice from real experts where you can.

4

STICK TO THE THEME

The subheads in this article are plays on the titles of popular self-help books. The lesson here is that every section of a piece of content should explicitly tie into the theme.

Steal It: Don't expect readers to puzzle out how a piece of info is important to the theme (or to them). Keep visual touchpoints consistent, and use phrases like "[Situation we just mentioned] is why Best Business offers Y" to keep readers on track.

5

BE RELEVANT

A women's mag would never run a service piece without at least one stat that shows how many women are impacted (*and Y% don't even know it!*).

Steal It: Let readers know why they should care with verified stats showing how the topic is relevant to them.

6

DON'T SHY AWAY FROM CONTROVERSY

When Linda wrote “damn good book” here, she knew it would be mildly offensive to some readers. But to mangle a popular quote: if you’re not making anyone mad, you’re doing it wrong.

Steal It: Don’t be afraid to confront industry myths and pop your audience’s self-involved bubbles. They prefer that over bland assurances...and it’s where the real connections happen.

7

CHUNK IT DOWN

If there’s one thing women’s magazine editors know, it’s that no one wants to wade through dense blocks of text.

Steal It: Pull quotes like this one are a good way to break up your content. (For more packaging tips, download our guide [5 Ways to Build More Powerful Content Ideas](#).)

8

COME FULL CIRCLE

Here, the conclusion refers back to the beginning, with details on how Linda’s quest to break her obsession with self-help books ended up.

Steal It: Make sure the content solves the problem you posed in the lead.

1. **In a case study:** So how did your client’s sales improve after they used your services?
2. **In an article or blog post:** How will taking your advice help me solve the problem you posed at the beginning?
3. **In a guide:** Hey, can I have a quick reminder of the steps and how they’ll help me?

Coming full circle with your content will help cement the details in your audience’s mind—and leave them with a sense of satisfaction that all the loose threads have been tied neatly up.

Ready to bring some B2C excitement to *your* B2B content?

While I'm retired myself (after 25 years!), I have a small network of hand-picked writers I refer businesses to. Email me at lindaformichelli@gmail.com with details on your project (type, topics, timeline, budget) and I'll try to set up intros with some great writers that fit your needs.

[Connect with Linda Formichelli on LinkedIn](#)