



*This is an excerpt from Steve Rosenbaum's book Curation Nation. If you would like to read the rest, Curation Nation is available for purchase online and at your local bookstore.*

## Chapter 6. Tools and Techniques

SO, YOU'RE READY TO DIVE IN AND BE A CURATOR. Not just as a hobby, but as part of building a brand, a business, and even (gasp) earning a living.

Well, to do that you'll need to think about your business in three parts. *Publishing*, *Advertising*, and *Syndication*. It's those three legs of the stool that will get you going, get you revenue, and over time build a business. While the individual tools may change over time, the basic thesis is tried and true. How can you create a content site that is engaging and easily updatable and current? Then, how can you find revenue once visitors start to come to the site? And finally, how can you reach out and tell the story of your site so that more folks will show up at your front door and tell their friends. Sounds simple? Well, the good news is almost everything you need to build a curation-centric business is free. So, you can get started right now.

But let's first walk through the three building blocks, and give you some guideposts so you can explore the tools without too much pain.

## A. PUBLISHING

There are a number of great ways to get your site launched right now. To some extent, you need to think about what you want your site to feel like. Spend time looking at sites you like, and think about their “business model”. Think about what it costs them to make the site, and how they earn a living from it. For example, The New York Times has a large number of paid reporters, editors, and photographers. Their model is based on being part of a large institution with its own revenue stream. So, unless you have very deep pockets that may not be the way to go. Oh, and since this is a book about Curation, think more about sites that gather and organize links and excerpts. Take a look at Techmeme or BusinessInsider or Gawker. These are sites that use a mix of gathered and curated links, a bit of original reporting, and a lot of effort to package and promote their brand so that web readers will come to expect that they’ve got the right curated collection.

Here are three examples of different kinds of sites:

**Big Media:** USA Today

**Curated / Created mix:** NY Magazine’s pop culture website, Vulture

**Pure Curation:** Media reDEFined / TechMeme

For the purposes of our journey into the world of tools, I’m going to assume that you’ve decided to be a Curated/Created mixer. You’ve decided that you want to be the ‘go to’ source for all folks looking to be serious fans of BBQ. I don’t mean the weekend grill jockey, or the 4<sup>th</sup> of July burgers and hotdog’s hero, I mean a serious Barbeque aficionado. Competitive cooking. Serious eats. Ok, so put on your apron and fire up the grill, its time to get cooking – and curating.

## B. STEP ONE – PICK A PLATFORM.

The good news is you’ve got plenty of choices. The bad news is that you’ve got plenty of choices. If you’re going to be a blogger, mostly text then there are some great solid solutions in Wordpress, Movable Type and Blogger.com. Each of them has their own fans and critics. Of the three, blogger is probably the one that has the least flexibility. Both Wordpress and Movable Type have big communities of free plugins, templates, and freelance designers who can help you grow and enhance your site as your editorial needs and skills grow. TypePad.com is the hosted version of Movable type, so you don’t need to pay to set up your own server. This isn’t a technical book, so I’m not going to get into the ins and outs of each platform – a quick Google search like “Wordpress vs. Movable type” will get you into the conversation.

Another popular option is one of the growing micro-blog platforms like Tumblr. *Tumblr.com* is less for long form writers and more for folks who want to have lots of quick hits – links, photos, posts, etc. It’s super easy to get started, but as with all things, the simpler it is, the less likely you’ll be able to enhance it to be a full-fledged web site down the road. So, pick with some care if you want to use one of these software platforms.

Here’s a tip. If you really like the look, feel and functionality of a site – you can always use

the “view source” menu item in your web browser and then search for a few platforms like “wordpress” within the HTML code. You should be able to tell what that site is built on. Often times, that’s the best way to find the platform that mirrors your needs.

## B. STEP 2: FIND YOUR SOURCES.

Here’s the big ‘ah ha’ moment for Content Curators. Ok, first of all, for the purposes of this chapter – we’re going to be building a championship BBQ site. The first stop is Wikipedia. Sure, I know the obvious ‘key’ words like BBQ—but I want to get a quick overview of the other words that could help attract appropriate content. The goal is to find the places on the web that can be sources for content to populate your site.

Quickly we learn that there are a number of keywords that need to be part of my aggregation search terms. Both “barbeque” and “barbecue” are proper spelling. In Canada it’s called broiling. Keywords matter – a lot. Because part of the service you’re going to provide your visitors is sorting out the difference between Broiling and Grilling. Visitors are folks that have forgone the hunt and peck of search, and are looking for contextual, curated content.

## C. KEYWORD SEARCH TERMS

Next, let’s build a collection of search terms that can help you find both content and later advertisements for your site. These terms will be your ‘keywords’ – the text that is linked to content on the web, and that will be linked to or excerpted on your site.

Here are some tools for keyword searches:

**SEMRush** is a research tool for both Search Engine Optimization and Pay Per Click (PPC) keyword data. It has a free version, and a paid version with more results.

**Compete** is a research tool for keywords, and sites. If you want to know what other sites are in the Barbecue space, Compete can tell you, for free. And not only can you find sites, but you can find what key words they’re using, and how they’re measuring up over time.

**Rank Tracker** is a rank-checking tool for keywords. You can see where your keywords rank with this tool.

**Wordtracker.com** may be the best known of the tools in this space. Word tracking claims that more than 3 million people use them to manage their keyword research and link building campaigns. That’s a big number, but probably right.

But, for simplicity sake, let’s just start with Google Keyword Tool. When you search any topic (such as “Barbecue”) with this tool, Google quickly responds with 100 top key words, ranked by search demand. This is powerful free data that you can use. If you’re thinking about what kind of curation site you want to build, and you’re deciding between BBQ and Fried Chicken, this search tool will tell you that BBQ is a more popular search. More web visitors are going to be looking for your site if you build a BBQ editorial site.

Here’s just a sample of what Google returned for barbecue:

*barbecue recipe, gas barbecue , barbecue restaurants ,barbecue restaurant, barbecue rib ,barbecue catering, barbecue cooking, barbecue grilling ,barbecue marinade, barbecue beef, barbecue grills ,charcoal barbecue, barbecue menu, Weber barbecue, outdoor barbecue, barbecue tools, barbecue tips, barbecue accessories, barbecue smokers, barbecue ribs, barbecue rub, grilling, stainless steel barbecue, grill, pork barbecue, gas barbecue grill, barbecue set, buy barbecue, barbecue review, barbecue tool, barbecue reviews, barbecue smoker, barbecue chicken recipe, barbecue caterers, barbecue pork, barbecue take out, barbecue grille, bar b que,barbecue steak, barbecue rotisserie, barbecue meat, barbecue marinades, barbecue recipes, bbq recipe, grilled barbecue, barbecue pork tenderloin, cheap barbecue, barbecue salmon, barbecue corn, barbecue dining*

Yes, there's a lot of data, but don't freak out. It turns out that BBQ has lots of niches and keywords and categories. This is very good news – it's why the web needs YOU. There's so much complexity in all of the content categories that someone is going to sort through all those key words and find a way to turn that data into coherent content. The key to that collection of search terms is that you can see in that cloud of data both the topics that you'll want to include in your site, and the potential ads that you'll be able to attract. Now, not every search term is an editorial category. For example, "Weber" is the name of a brand of BBQ grills. You may not want to have an editorial category called "Weber" but you sure might want to have their ads on your site, or reach out to Weber's agency to see if they want to sponsor your site. Poking around in the tag-cloud (a collection of related words sized by popularity) the phrase "Barbecue Kings" catches my eye, so I'm going to name my site that.

And, using just the keywords BBQ, Barbeque and Barbecue – here's what an automatic aggregation solution delivers. A collection of video content, organized by key words, by topic, and by search terms. But most importantly – with videos chosen and featured by ME. So, the computer does the heavy lifting, but I get to share my favorite BBQ videos with you.

Link: <http://barbecuekings.magnify.net/>

## RSS Feeds

Next, I'm going to go in search of some RSS feeds. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. It's a way for you to find content within a category and have it pushed TO you (rather than search). You can get RSS feeds by putting keywords into an RSS reader. There are a number of choices, but for this exercise we'll use a Google reader.

Link: <http://www.google.com/reader>

Link: <http://fastflip.googlelabs.com>

Link: <http://www.google.com/alerts>

In the three links above, you'll find tools that allow you to find and organize RSS feeds (reader) read pages RSS feeds like a magazine (fastflip) and automate Google so that you get an email alert to notify you if Google finds content that has your chosen keyword in it (alerts). Each of them are valuable curation tools.

You may find that you want to set up a pretty sophisticated set of saved searches on Google News, links in your RSS reader, and even searches for images on Flickr and other content sharing sites. This way you've got a regular stream of new content that you can scan, and add to your curated content offering. This is the way that you're helping your readers – doing the heavy lifting of finding and sorting so they don't have to.

There are lots of other ways to help see content that is bubbling up in your area of interest. There are a number of 'crowd-sourced' social recommendation sites that invite voting, and surface popular. Both Digg and Reddit offer searches that are going to turn up all kinds of links. Digg, for example, turned up a story about a video game company sending out a BBQ tool kit to make amends with unhappy customers. This story is weird, but it's still a kinda cool item for my BBQ site.

## **Twitter**

And finally, perhaps the most timely and fast moving source for information that you can add to the aggregation equation is Twitter. This micro-blogging tool, as you probably know, is the global phenomenon that has friends, business associates, and brands "Tweeting" about topics large and small. But consider Twitter your uber-aggregator, it's the world helping you find links and stories that you can add to your site. So use one of the Twitter alert searches like TweetAlarm.com to have your keywords reported to you.

## **Video**

So now you've got blogs, news, tweets, and images all on their way you with a bit of work each day to read headlines and put summaries and links on your site. But what about video? There's Tivo and other DVR's. You could record and the use various tools to rip those files and put them up. But you'd be likely in copyright violation. "Fair use" as it's called is notoriously hard to define unless you're a legitimate news outlet. Our BBQ site would be hard pressed to defend scraping BBQ videos off cable TV and reposting them. The good news is, you don't have to. There's YouTube of course, but that is going to be a very manual process. And there are a number of automatic video aggregators who will discover, embed, and manage video discovery for you. Magnify.net – the company I founded back in 2006 – is blazing a new trail in the area of Real-time Video Curation. There's no doubt that if video is core to what you're looking to, either making it, aggregating it, or both – then Magnify is a cool free solution.

The power of multi-media aggregation, as opposed to text, is that choosing which videos should be categorized requires human esthetic judgment. A video curator needs to see themes and context and order videos within that frame.

Simply put, gathering and sorting the right collection of text, video, images and such isn't the work of a computer – there's a human required. After you've set up all your sources, and set up a routine to find content everyday, and use some trusted sources from an RSS feed to automatically fill out some content on your site, you've created a pretty detailed workflow that takes time, and hopefully a better understanding of the ins and outs of barbeque than I have. After all, if you don't have passion and knowledge in the vertical you're going to aggregate and curate, then you're likely to be facing competition from someone who really LOVES grilling. They're going to have the secret sauce to create a content mix that is truly special. So pick your curation topics with your head and your heart.

### **B. STEP 3: CONTENT CREATION.**

Now that you've found sources to aggregate content, you're half way there. Because, as we've explored throughout this book, curation is about creating a mix – a unique blend of discovered, contributed, and created content that makes your content collection uniquely yours.

The good news is that you can create some content, and you don't have to create that much. If you're comfortable pointing a flip cam at yourself, then sure, why don't you record some videos? But don't think you need to try and impersonate the Anchor on the local news. In fact, don't do that. Do the opposite. Be you. Don't change. Because your audience is coming to you for authenticity, not fake glossy theatrics. If you're the guy or gal who wears overalls to the BBQ, well then – strap 'em on and let's get grillin! And if you're not comfortable turning the camera on yourself, you can still take a little video camera or still camera on location, and use that video or stills to illustrate a story about the local BBQ competition.

Content creation for your site can come from three sources: content you make – both text and video, content your visitors make for you, and content you contract others to make for your site. Content you make is going to set the tone. Do you want your BBQ site to be folksy, or technical, or for a serious foodie with a charcoal fetish? The tone of your site is going to come from you. The content that comes from your visitors is going to depend on how you invite them to participate. If you want neat tips and tricks, then you'll need to provide some examples. If you're looking for folks to become regular contributors to your site, then you'll need to invite a handful of experts to blog for your site. You might want to reach out to 5 or 10 experts and see if a few are looking for a home. Now that you've learned the actual work it takes to find platform, find aggregated content, build a site and start to get traffic, you can see why lots of folks would rather just post occasionally for you rather than deal with the whole effort of building their own site.

Shawn Collins, who runs the industry's biggest ad networking conference, *Affiliate Summit*, says finding the right tone in content is key. "People will follow your affiliate site as they get to know you. Odds are that you're not a journalist, so don't pretend. Just be yourself and write in your voice. It can sometimes get tough to think of things to write on your blog, so make it a practice to have an editorial calendar where you will schedule topics to write in the future. I frequently send myself email with ideas for future blog posts."

One thought you may want to consider is running a contest. Sites that have garnered significant traffic sometimes find that inviting their visitors to participate in a contest that values and even rewards visitors for making content for them. The handmade crafts site Etsy invited visitors to make a video for them that would become a TV commercial. The contest resulted in more than 250 entries of: 30 spots, and the winners were awarded a cash prize. The results were eye-popping. And Bicycling Magazine invited its visitors to make a video about why they deserved to win a bike. Of the hundreds of pieces of content submitted, the winner was heartfelt, funny, and authentic.

LINK - **Etsy** <http://etsy.magnify.net/>

LINK - **Bicycling** [http://video.bicycling.com/contests/win\\_any\\_bike\\_contest\\_2010](http://video.bicycling.com/contests/win_any_bike_contest_2010)

The other emerging source of content for site curation is the emerging trend toward what is being called Content Farms. Yahoo owns the content farm called *Associated Content*, and another is Demand Media. The idea is to offer freelancers relatively low pay to create content for you, but let them choose the topics that interest them so they can work on their own areas of interest, and on their own schedule. The need to access human skills on-demand was what convinced the folks at Amazon to create a service known as Mechanical Turk.

The name "*Mechanical Turk*" is drawn from a "robot" back in 1769, when a nobleman astonished Europe by building a mechanical chess-playing automaton that was able to beat human opponents. The "Turk" toured Europe was able to overcome brilliant challengers such as Benjamin Franklin and Napoleon Bonaparte. The secret behind the Mechanical Turk was a human chess master cleverly concealed inside the cabinet. It was a trick.

Today Amazon Mechanical Turk is based on the need that there are still many things that human beings can do that computers can't. For example, Amazon needed to scrub through its entire collection of JPEG CD covers and make sure that the image of The Rolling Stones was the correct image on the site's item page. There was simply no way to have a computer be able to know if the image was correct, it needed human intelligence.

Mechanical Turkers perform such acts as identifying objects in a photo or video, performing data de-duplication, transcribing audio recordings or researching data details. Traditionally, tasks like this have been accomplished by hiring temp workers. But now with Mechanical Turk you can post a job, set a price, and only pay for work that is good quality. So, for example, you could ask for an article written about every keyword for BBQ we found on Google, ask the worker (they call them Turkers) to include 500 words on the topic, and a

photo from Flickr that is available with a Creative Commons license that allows for commercial use. You could pay \$20 an article, and for \$200 you'd have 10 pieces of BBQ content that were yours.

That's a quick overview of content, but the Created, Contributed, and Contracted content is a powerful mix of sources that allow you to build a site without having a building full of writers or a fat bag of cash.

## A. ADVERTISING

So your site is ready to go. You've got great source content aggregated. You've sorted them into relevant verticals, and you've added your own high quality created content. You've even invited visitors to submit their own photos and video. You're ready to generate some revenue. There are four kinds of revenue we can expect from your BarbecueKings web site: the three main models that comprise affiliate marketing (CPA, CPC, and CPS) and Sponsorships.

1. **Cost Per Click (CPC)** These are the text ads that you see on all but the largest sites on the web. There are two major sources of these ads, Google Ad Sense and Yahoo Display Ads. Both of these services are known as Search Engine Advertising, and simply put, they allow you to sign up and put a bit of custom code on our page. Then, the ad network will read the metadata your page and discern from all the key words what ads are best suited for your visitor. In our case, ads for BBQ sauce, grills, grilling utensils, as well as other goods and services would be served up on our page. Keep in mind that the advertiser is only charged if a visitor clicks on their ad, and you're only paid per click, so the fresher and more engaging the content is on your page, the more likely you'll have visitors who found you by searching for "BBQ" and are therefore expressing *intent*. They aren't just casual visitors, with any luck your site is attracting serious BBQ talent. And they'll see your text ads as useful, even valuable since they need more sauces, grills, and high tech accoutrements.
2. **Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) and Affiliate Marketing.** This is a different kind of advertising. It gives you the opportunity to put actual offers on your site, actual ads for actual products and services where you get a piece of the action when your visitor clicks through and buys something. But sales aren't the only "actions" you can get paid for. If you offer registrations or subscriptions on your site, a CPA-based program can be very effective.
3. **Cost per sale (CPS)** represents cost per sale, and this model compensates an affiliate on a revenue-share for referring a sale.
4. **Sponsorship.** CPA, CPC, and CPS solutions are self-serve, and require little effort other than setting up an account and putting some code on your page. But without significant traffic, the dollars can be very low. If however you've made a good looking site that is well targeted, has fresh and updated content from good



sources, and is growing both traffic and potentially registered users, then you might do well to consider selling sponsorship. This takes some effort, as you need to figure out who's the right sponsor for your site, then either email them or call them, and propose that they take ads, and maybe a larger presence on your site. Sales are never easy but if our BBQ site was looking for a sponsor you might start by looking at site like [bbq-sauces.com](http://bbq-sauces.com).

Shawn Collins, who we introduced earlier, is the co-founder of the largest conference for action-oriented advertising. He's a blogger, web site builder, magazine publisher, and all around advertising entrepreneur. He's built many ad-supported sites, and shares this advice: "When I start up a new project. Affiliate sites should be viewed as long-term projects, and not quick hits." Collins' says it all comes down to finding content you care about that can work: "When starting a new affiliate site, don't try to leverage the latest trends. Instead, focus on topics that interest you. Try brainstorming 2-3 areas where you are passionate and create your site based on the one that you think you'd like to focus on the longest."

Lots of folks spend huge effort on getting the right name, and spend a ton of money buying a domain name from a previous owner or someone who's a domain 'squatter' someone holding on to the name so they can cash in. Collins says don't waste the money. "You can get a .com domain for around \$10 per year. Don't obsess about your domain name, I'd say you shouldn't spend more than 20 minutes picking it out. Just get something relevant to your topic, and the shorter the better. Start with a registration of one year, because you can extend it at any time, but if you decide the domain stinks, there is no use being locked into multiple years."

And finally, Collins says building an audience is going to take time. He advises being patient. "This is the cheapest and most important part of a new affiliate site: patience. Resist the temptation to put up ads right away. Instead, focus on building content to give people a reason to visit your site. When the time comes to incorporate ads, focus on relevant ads, and not those that pay the best. I'd suggest posting ten or more times (or longer) to a blog before any ads are up there. When you do put up ads, go beyond the banner. The vast majority of my affiliate commissions come from text links."

When you are looking to find the right ad networks here are a few good ones to explore: [buy.at](http://buy.at), Commission Junction, Google Affiliate Network, LinkShare, and ShareASale. There are a variety of ways that affiliates can find affiliate programs. Try searching Google for affiliate programs that make sense for your affiliate sites. For instance, if I have a site about Halloween costumes, I'd search for "*Halloween costume affiliate program*" to find merchants to promote.

## A. SYNDICATION

We're now at the fun part, getting the word out. Syndication is about getting your name, your links, and your buzz out and all over the web. It means simply putting little bits of 'bait' on sites where folks may be looking for your kinds of site, so you can lure them back to you. This is where you need a bit of old fashioned showmanship. Thinking back to our BBQ example, make a list of the entire places that might want your content. Consider competitors, magazines, search engines, video sites, it's all up for grabs. And, if you really want to build a following, come up with a gimmick. A weekly count down of the 'hottest' BBQ news. A regional (virtual) tour of the USA, one BBQ destination at a time. Whatever it is – make sure it's fun, easy to understand, and something you'll enjoy doing for a while. On the web, consistency is crucial. Your fans (yes, you'll have 'fans') expect you to be out there and publishing every day, or week, whatever schedules you set up. But it's critical that you not 'go dark'. The reason that readers/visitors are counting on your aggregation/curation skills is because they don't want to have to start looking for their own content one piece at a time. If you aren't consistent, they'll leave you. And syndication isn't just limited to web sites, popular social networking site like Facebook are a great way to gather groups of people, and tell your story to a fast growing network of friends and followers.

Here are some syndication tools you'll already be familiar with, that you'll need to consider if you're going to build buzz around your brand:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Youtube
- Ning
- Others (LinkedIn, Myspace, FourSquare)

These technologies are the big hits of the moment, yet there's a risk in seeing what's happening on the web through the filter of any single site or solution set. Curation is more of an idea than a technology. That said, certain companies and tools are leading the way. We're living in a time in which technologies seem to appear out of nowhere, get so big it seems like they'll be around forever, and then fade into the background. Remember MySpace? It was the big bad social network before Facebook. Now it's a shadow of its former self. As of this writing, social media is centralized around Facebook and Twitter. They are the two big players in the Content Curation space, but there's change in the air as the web evolved from static spaces to ever changing 'real-time' environments that require fast, fresh content rather than old stale links.

There's no doubt that being an Aggregator/Curator is real work. As Collins says; "You shouldn't expect much money for months. It takes time to build up a site and an audience. It can be a grind, but stick with it." That's right--there's definitely gold in them thar hills - you just need to know how to look for it. As curation replaces search as consumers' primary source of information, learning the tools and techniques now, and testing new solutions early, could give you the leg up as more and more advertising revenue flows into curated and contextual content spaces.

This excerpt is provided by *Magnify.net*.

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