BuildUp BOOKINGS

07

BONUS 07 OF 11 · MASTERING VACATION RENTAL MARKETING

The 12-Month Content System

A companion resource to the 2nd edition

WHAT YOU'LL HAVE WHEN YOU FINISH

A twelve-month content calendar template and plan, built backwards from when your guests actually book, organized into clusters that compound, with one piece of work feeding five channels.

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Facts checked November 2026
buildupbookings.com/book-bonuses

PART 1

Do this now

Start here. Each one works on its own.

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1 **Find your real booking window.**

Pull your last twelve months of reservations and chart booking date against arrival date. The gap is your booking window, and it is almost certainly longer than you think. Everything in this document is scheduled against it.

2 **Stop planning by calendar month.**

Publishing an October piece in October is publishing it to people who already booked. Content has to land when people are *researching*, not when they are *arriving*.

3 **Pick three clusters, not thirty topics.**

A cluster is a group of related pieces that link to each other and to one commercial page. Thirty unrelated posts build nothing.

4 **Write down what you know that a search engine does not.**

Which beach is better in October. Where the road washes out. Which restaurant stops taking reservations in July. This is the entire basis of content that outperforms, and no tool will generate it for you.

5 **Accept your real publishing capacity.**

Two pieces a month, sustained for a year, beats eight pieces in January and nothing after. Pick the number you will actually hit in month nine.

6 **Set up the repurposing chain before you write.**

Each piece should be planned as a blog post *and* an email *and* social *and* video from the start. Deciding afterward is how the extra channels never happen.

7 **Put names and dates on it.**

A content calendar with no owner is a wish. Every row gets a person and a due date.

PART 2

The depth

The full method.

Why a blank grid is not a system

Most content calendar templates are a blank monthly grid with icons for social, blog and article. That is a container, not a plan. It presumes you already know what to publish, when to publish it, and why — which is the actual hard part.

A working system answers four questions the grid cannot:

1. **When** does a piece need to be live, given when people research?
2. **What** does it need to be about, given what you want to sell?
3. **How** does it connect to everything else you have published?
4. **Who** is writing it, and by when?

Start with the booking window, not the season

This is the content mistake I see most often in this industry.

Your guests do not decide in the month they travel. They decide weeks or months earlier. So the question is never "what should we publish in June?" It is "**when do people who travel in June start looking?**"

Pull your reservation data and compute the median gap between booking date and arrival date. Do it separately for your peak season and your shoulder seasons, because they often differ. In many markets peak books further out and shoulder books later and more impulsively; check whether yours does.

Then work backwards:

> **Publish date = arrival season start – booking window – time to rank**

That third term is the one people forget. A new piece of content does not perform on day one. Give it weeks to months to gain any search traction, and longer in a competitive market. Which means a piece targeting your peak season needs to exist well before the research even starts.

The practical consequence: **your content calendar runs roughly a season ahead of your operations calendar.** You write about fall in spring. If that feels strange, it is because the grid trained you to think in months.

Three clusters beat thirty posts

A cluster is a set of pieces that cover one topic thoroughly, link to each other, and all point at one commercial page. It works better than scattered posts for two reasons: it establishes you as covering a subject properly rather than glancingly, and the internal links concentrate authority on the page you actually want to rank.

For a vacation rental company, the clusters that reliably earn their keep:

CLUSTER	CONTAINS	POINTS AT
Destination guide	Things to do, where to eat, best time to visit, getting here, with kids, in each season	Your market landing page
Neighborhood / area	One piece per area you have properties in, plus a comparison piece	Area-specific property listings
Trip type	Families, couples, large groups, pets, remote work — whatever you actually serve	Filtered property collections
Seasonal	What each season is genuinely like, events, what closes, what to pack	Seasonal availability pages
Homeowner ***(if you acquire owners)***	Local regulations, what properties earn, self-manage vs manage, choosing a manager	Your owner acquisition page

Pick three. Cover them properly. Add the fourth next year.

The comparison piece inside a cluster is worth calling out separately, because it is both the most useful to a guest and the most extractable by machines. “North end vs south end: which should you stay in” answered as a table is the kind of content that is easy to lift into an AI answer and cite.

What actually earns you traffic and citations

Here is the book’s rule, and it reorders most content plans: **the content that earns citations and rankings is the content that helps someone plan a trip, not the content that asks for a booking.**

Travel guides, seasonal advice, neighborhood breakdowns — those earn the links, the citations and the brand mentions. Destination landing pages and property-management sales pages earn comparatively little on their own.

This is uncomfortable if you evaluate every page by conversion rate, because your best-performing content will convert poorly when measured directly. But the guide earns the visit, the visit earns the trust, the internal link carries them to the property, and the property converts. Measure the cluster, not the page.

The practical rule: be genuinely useful upstream to get booked downstream.

The workflow, per piece

Same process every time, so it becomes routine rather than a decision:

1. **Pick the target question**, phrased the way a guest would ask it. Not a keyword — a question.
2. **Check what already ranks.** If the top results are all thin listicles from national travel sites, you can beat them with local specificity. If they are all genuinely excellent local resources, pick a narrower angle.
3. **Write the answer first.** Open with a self-contained answer block of roughly 134 to 167 words directly under a heading that asks the question (our working target, not a platform rule). This is what makes a passage easy to quote.
4. **Then the depth**, with the things only you know. Specific names, specific timing, specific tradeoffs. Every generic sentence is a sentence a machine could have written, and those are the ones that get you ignored.
5. **Add a table** if any part of the content is comparative. Tables extract cleanly and read well.
6. **Byline it to a real person** with a photo and two lines on why they know this market.
7. **Link it** to the other pieces in its cluster and to the commercial page the cluster points at.
8. **Take your own photos.** Stock imagery of a place undercuts the entire premise of local expertise.

The repurposing chain

One piece of work, five outputs. Plan all five up front, because retrofitting never happens.

FROM ONE GUIDE	YOU GET
Blog post	The canonical version on your own domain
Email	The best section, trimmed, with a link to the full piece
Social	Three to five posts — one per useful fact, not one linking to the post
Video	Walk the thing you wrote about. Publish to YouTube with a real title and description.
Guidebook section	The evergreen parts belong in your in-property guidebook

The video output is the one most companies skip and the one with the most upside. In Ahrefs' December 2025 study of 75,000 brands, mentions on YouTube were the factor most closely tied to showing up in AI answers, and you already own a camera and a market. You do not need production value. You need to be there.

Cadence you will actually sustain

Be honest about capacity. The failure mode is always the same: an ambitious calendar, four weeks of enthusiasm, then nothing, followed by the conclusion that content does not work.

IF YOU CAN COMMIT	DO THIS
1 piece / month	One cluster only. Finish it before starting another. Twelve months to full coverage of one topic is fine.
2 pieces / month	Two clusters in parallel. This is the realistic target for most operators.
4 pieces / month	Three clusters plus a monthly seasonal piece. Requires a dedicated writer or an agency.
8+ pieces / month	You have a content team. Different problem, not covered here.

Slower and sustained beats faster and abandoned.

PART 3

Worked example

One example, all the way through.

Ridgeline Cabin Co. — fictional company, 40 mountain cabins, the running example across these bonuses. Capacity: two pieces a month.

Step 1 — Their real booking window

SEASON	MEDIAN BOOKING WINDOW	RESEARCH STARTS
Peak — leaf season, Oct	14 weeks out	early July
Peak — summer, Jul–Aug	11 weeks out	mid April
Shoulder — spring	5 weeks out	mid March
Off — Jan–Feb	3 weeks out	early January

Add roughly three months for a new piece to gain traction, and the leaf-season content needs to be live by **April** — six months before the season it targets, and three months before anyone starts researching it. Under the old calendar-grid approach they were publishing it in September, which is after most of those bookings were already made.

Step 2 — Their three clusters

Cluster A: Leaf season *(their highest-revenue season, so it gets the most work)* → points at the seasonal availability page

Cluster B: Cabins with hot tubs *(their strongest differentiator and best-converting filter)* → points at the hot tub property collection

Cluster C: Families with young kids *(their largest guest segment)* → points at the family-friendly collection

Deferred to next year: the homeowner cluster and the neighborhood cluster. Deferring them is the decision that makes the plan achievable.

Step 3 — Twelve months, 24 pieces

MONTH	PIECE 1	PIECE 2	CLUSTER	TARGETS
Jan	When leaves actually peak here (and why the forecasts are wrong)	Winter cabin road conditions, honestly	A / seasonal	Oct + current

MONTH	PIECE 1	PIECE 2	CLUSTER	TARGETS
Feb	Leaf season week by week	Hot tub in the snow: what it's actually like	A / B	Oct + current
Mar	Where to see color without the crowds	Spring in the valley: what's open, what isn't	A / seasonal	Oct + spring
Apr	**Leaf season guide (pillar)**	Cabins with hot tubs: what to look for	A / B	**Oct**
May	Driving here in October: the routes that back up	Hot tub maintenance and what we do between stays	A / B	Oct
Jun	Photographing fall color: local spots	Summer with kids: the swimming holes	A / C	Oct + summer
Jul	October with kids: what works	**Family cabin guide (pillar)**	A + C / C	Oct + next summer
Aug	Leaf season packing list	Rainy day activities with kids	A / C	Oct
Sep	Last-minute October availability	Hot tub cabins for couples	A / B	Oct + winter
Oct	**Hot tub cabin guide (pillar)**	Thanksgiving and the shoulder weeks	B / seasonal	Winter + next year
Nov	Winter here: what closes, what stays open	Kid-friendly cabins in winter	seasonal / C	Winter
Dec	Planning next October now	Cabin comparison: north end vs south end	A / comparison	Next Oct

Note the shape: **leaf-season content dominates January through August**, for a season that starts in October. Almost none of it publishes in the month it is about. That is the point.

The December comparison piece — north end vs south end, written as a table — is deliberately last. It is the most extractable piece in the plan and it links to every other piece, so it works best once the cluster exists to link into.

Step 4 — One piece, repurposed

April's pillar: "Leaf season in the valley: a complete guide"

OUTPUT	WHAT IT BECAME	WHERE
Blog post	The full guide, 2,400 words, opening with a 150-word answer block under the heading "When do leaves peak in the valley?" Bylined to their operations lead, who has lived there eleven years.	Own site
Email	The week-by-week peak timing section, trimmed to 200 words, sent to the list in mid-July when research starts	ESP
Social	Five posts — one per week of peak color, each with a photo and a specific claim	Instagram, Facebook
Video	Ops lead drives the ridge road talking through what is peaking where. Filmed on a phone.	YouTube
Guidebook	The "where to see color" section added to the in-cabin digital guidebook	Guidebook tool

One afternoon of driving and one day of writing produced nine assets across five channels.

What they measured after a year

Not page-by-page conversion rate. **Cluster performance:** total organic entrances to any leaf-season piece, then how many of those sessions reached a property page, then October direct bookings against the prior year. The individual guides converted poorly on their own — as expected — and the cluster delivered.

PART 4

Your turn

Your worksheet. Print it and fill it in.

Your booking window

SEASON	MEDIAN BOOKING WINDOW	RESEARCH STARTS	PUBLISH BY
Peak			
Peak 2			
Shoulder			
Off			

Publish by = research start – 3 months for traction.

Your three clusters

	CLUSTER	PIECES IT NEEDS	COMMERCIAL PAGE IT POINTS AT
A			
B			
C			

Deferred to next year: _____

What you know that a search engine does not

Ten specifics. These are your entire competitive advantage in content.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Your capacity

Pieces per month I will still be publishing in month nine: _____

Who writes them: _____

Your twelve months

MONTH	PIECE	CLUSTER	SEASON IT TARGETS	OWNER	DUE	LIVE

MONTH	PIECE	CLUSTER	SEASON IT TARGETS	OWNER	DUE	LIVE

Per-piece checklist

Copy this for every piece. It is the difference between content and published words.

- ☐ Target question phrased as a guest would ask it
- ☐ Checked what already ranks
- ☐ Answer block of ~134–167 words directly under the question heading
- ☐ Contains at least three things only a local would know
- ☐ Table added if any part is comparative
- ☐ Bylined to a named person with a photo and credentials
- ☐ Linked to other pieces in its cluster
- ☐ Linked to the cluster's commercial page
- ☐ Own photography, no stock
- ☐ Alt text describes the actual image
- ☐ Email version scheduled
- ☐ Social posts drafted
- ☐ Video filmed
- ☐ Evergreen parts added to the guidebook

PART 5

How you'll know it worked

What to check, and when.

Month one to three — you are measuring *shipping*, not results. Did the pieces go live on their due dates, with the whole repurposing chain completed? If you are publishing but skipping the email and video outputs, the system is half-working and you are leaving most of the value on the table. There is no search signal to read yet, and looking for one this early is how people quit.

Month three to six — first real signals. Impressions on the target questions, not rankings. Impressions rising while position is still poor is exactly what early traction looks like. Also watch whether your answer blocks are getting surfaced in AI answers and featured snippets.

Month six to twelve — cluster performance. Total entrances to the cluster, the rate at which those sessions reach the commercial page, and revenue for the season the cluster targets against last year. This is the honest scoreboard.

Do not judge a guide by its own conversion rate. Your best content will look like it converts badly. That is the design. If you cut the pieces with the worst individual conversion rate you will systematically remove the content that was earning the traffic.

The failure mode, stated plainly: the calendar stops in month three. It is almost never a strategy problem — it is a capacity problem that was visible on day one and got planned around optimistically. If you are behind by month two, cut the calendar in half now rather than abandoning it in month four.

What genuine failure looks like: twelve months of consistent publishing with flat impressions on your target questions. That means the topics are wrong, or the market is more competitive than assumed, and the fix is a narrower angle rather than more volume.

PART 6

Where this lives in the book

Where to read more in the book.

Chapters: *Featherweight Content Marketing* — starting from zero. *Win the SEO game with long-tail search pages* and *Create content people actually care about* (Lightweight) — the cluster logic and the long-tail approach in full. *Curated core content for your site* — which pages every site needs. *Hold your spot as a contender with content marketing tactics at the Middleweight level* — where this becomes a real program. *How to maintain Middleweight marketing momentum on social media* — where the book offers this calendar.

Read alongside the **AI Search & GEO** bonus. The answer-block spec, the named-byline recommendation, the comparison-table advice and the "guides earn citations, sales pages don't" rule all come from the book's AI chapter, *The Ground Moved Under You*, and this document is how you operationalize them month by month.

One instruction from the AI appendix worth carrying into every piece: use these tools to work faster on material you already have, never to invent material you do not. The local specifics in your ten-item list above are the whole reason your content can win. A machine cannot supply them, and content that reads as though one did competes against the thing that wrote it and loses.

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