

**Forging Ahead: Building a portfolio of online courses
to generate passive income and awareness for Forge
and Spark Media**

by

Zohra Shahabuddin

B.Ed., Allama Iqbal Open University, 2019

M.A., Federal Urdu University of Arts and Sciences, 2016

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Declaration of Committee

Name: Zohra Shahabuddin

Degree: Master of Publishing

Title: Forging Ahead: Building a portfolio of online courses to generate passive income and awareness for Forge and Spark Media

Committee:

John Maxwell
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Publishing

Leanne Johnson
Committee Member
Senior Lecturer, Publishing

Shannon Emmerson
Committee Member
Founder and CEO
Forge and Spark Media

Abstract

This report illustrates how a content marketing agency can leverage its expertise to generate passive income and increase awareness to potential clients and companies. This report focuses on Forge and Spark Media, a Vancouver-based, remote-first, all-women content marketing agency, and its initiative to launch a series of online courses for its target audience. The report also documents the importance of exploring different venues to generate passive income, particularly in a post-pandemic environment where digital culture has flourished due to social isolation and a shift to work-from-home mode.

As of 2023, Forge and Spark Media has launched two courses, “*Better Messaging*”, “*Better Results*”, and “*Better Online Brand Design*”. Specifically, this report documents the entire process of launching the courses, notably their Go-to-Market plan, and aims to provide recommendations for future courses.

Keywords: content marketing; online courses; marketing; passive income; Forge and Spark Media

Dedication

To my past, present and future selves.

Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of my MPUB Program. Coming to a new country as an international student was a challenging but enriching experience.

First, I would like to acknowledge the awesome support from my whole cohort. *Fake Books Real Friends* became the mantra of our MPUB 2021 cohort, and I am grateful to have made such amazing friends.

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Glossary

BOBD	Better Online Brand Design.
F&S	Forge and Spark.
PPC	Pay-per-click.
Story Package	A story package is a term used by Forge and Spark, which refers to a mini content campaign that includes a search-optimized long-form blog post, social posts, stories, and videos (Rodenhizer 2023).
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association.

Chapter 1. About Forge and Spark

In 2021, during my professional placement as part of the Master of Publishing program(MPUB), I worked with Forge and Spark, a content marketing agency headquartered in Vancouver. This report comprehensively accounts for Forge and Spark's foray into online courses. It delves into their go-to-market strategy and insights. It also offers crucial recommendations for future courses.

1.1. What is content marketing?

In simple words, content marketing is marketing your product or services through content for multiple channels. Content can be a long- or short-form piece of writing, or it can be visual or audio. Multiple channels mean websites, social media handles, podcasts, and email newsletters.

The Content Marketing Institute, a leading platform, defines content marketing in these words: “Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action” (Institute).

Figure has been redacted due to copyright reasons.

Figure 1. Example of UNHCR Refugee Agency podcast landing page raising awareness about plight of refugees through visual content. (Source: UNHCR website)

Content marketing differs from conventional marketing in that it focuses on providing informative and precise details about the products and how they meet consumers' needs rather than solely promoting the product. While content marketing is often regarded as a recent development in the business world, a similar approach has existed for creating content.

As James T. Cole II describes it,

At one time, content marketing was described as custom publishing or sponsored programming. John Deere's magazine, *The Furrow*, first published in 1895, and the Michelin Travel Guides, launched in 1900, are early examples of custom publishing that still build upon and enhance the values of their respective brands today. (Cole II 2020)

With the growth of the internet, content marketing has expanded from traditional print media to include various platforms such as video, audio, blogs, social media, company websites, and more.

1.2. Why content marketing matters in present time for businesses

Before the emergence of technologies such as smartphones, the options for marketing were limited to print, television, and radio. With the widespread adoption of smartphones, however, new marketing channels like Facebook and Instagram have emerged, changing how businesses market their products. This phenomenon has led to users being bombarded with a constant stream of ads daily. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this situation, as social isolation, and a shift towards working from home have increased people's consumption of online information (Branscombe 2020).

Businesses and brands are fighting for human attention as it is scarce. With audiences becoming more intelligent and discerning, businesses must provide more valuable, relevant, and consistent content than traditional marketing techniques such as commercials and print ads. As audiences are now media literate and can tune out conventional advertising, they seek content that satisfies their needs and answers their specific questions. Content marketing helps brands cut through the noise and abundance of information and deliver their message.

1.3. What does Forge and Spark do?

Forge and Spark Media was founded in November 2012 by Shannon Emmerson, who was promoted to VP of Digital Business Development at Canada Wide Media and laid off shortly after that. Determined to set her own path rather than relying on an employer, Emmerson founded Forge & Spark Media, drawing on her previous experience building departments and teams at Electronic Arts and Canada Wide Media. She registered Forge and Spark Media as a sole proprietorship and began consulting services in communications, content marketing, and copywriting.

Figure has been redacted due to copyright reasons.

Figure 2. A recent photoshoot of F&S team for website (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

Forge and Spark's vision is "to support purpose-driven brands with genuine, effective content and social media marketing" (Spark). F&S is committed to putting its values into practice, which serve as a guiding force in selecting projects and delivering outstanding work and results. Forge and Spark's values embody creative excellence, firm kindness, resourcefulness, collaborative strength, and integrity. These values act as a compass to steer them toward the highest level of performance.

F&S provides a wide array of content marketing services. It includes content marketing, strategy and training, website and social media content, marketing campaigns, and special projects. They are further divided into services such as audience segments, persona development, social media posts, blog writing, recruiting campaigns, and lead generation campaigns.

Emmerson's vision for F&S had been to provide practical content. However, their work with Genus Capital Management caused F&S to pivot towards a new goal: not only delivering excellence in service, but also promoting social, environmental, and economic improvements for their team, partners, and community. As a result, F&S now places the greatest value in their business on improving the quality of life of its team members (Emmerson 2022).

In 2022 Forge and Spark became B Corp certified (About B Corp Certification). Going forward, F&S sees this certification "as a foundation from which to grow and evolve, using our business to create positive impact for our team members, our clients, our partners, our communities, and the planet, too" (Emmerson 2022). After getting its B-Corp certification, F&S shifted its focus to serve fellow B Corps, social ventures, non-profits, charities, and other business leaders who want to do more than make money (Emmerson, Founding Forge and Spark story 2023).

1.4. Forge and Spark's Portfolio

Since its establishment, F&S has collaborated with various brands and organizations. Though it may not be feasible to showcase all its work in this report, a selection of its notable projects is presented below to provide insight into the nature of Forge and Spark's work.

1.4.1. Genus Capital Management social strategy and ongoing production

Genus Capital Management is a B-Corp certified investment management firm based in Vancouver. They contacted F&S to develop a social media strategy for their new auto-onboarding tool to reach their young, social-media-savvy audience.

F&S conducted a series of workshops with Genus to analyze competitors' landscape, current and new products, existing customer profiles, and business goals. F&S also examined Genus' social channels and analytics to develop a comprehensive social media strategy.

The result included two new audience personas, corresponding user paths, and channels. This was a part of a social strategy to target new audiences, increase traffic and generate conversions. F&S also created a condensed social media handbook as a practical playbook for Genus to use with internal content creators and external marketing partners.

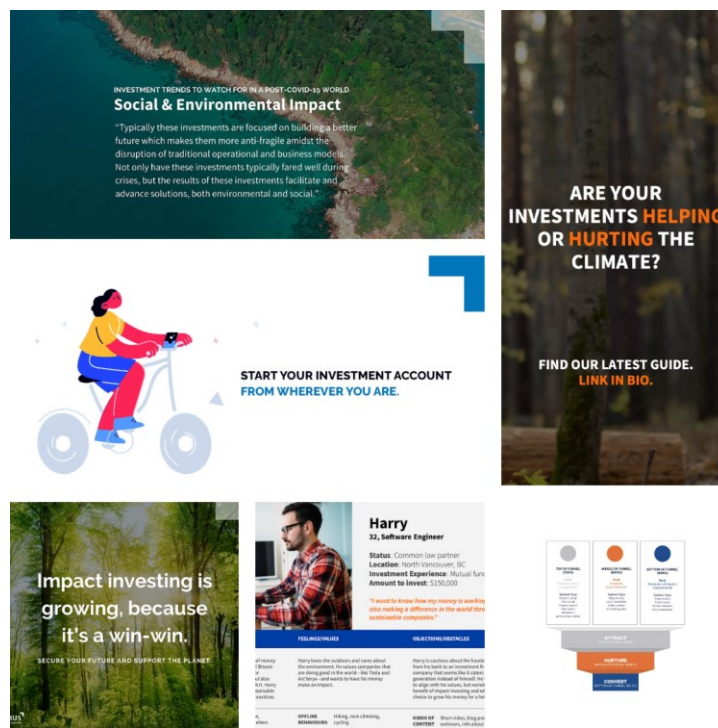


Figure 3. Few examples of the work F&S did for Genus Capital (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

F&S has been actively involved in refreshing Genus' strategy on multiple occasions since their initial engagement. They have also launched two campaigns to generate leads and continue to deliver "story packages," which are a combination of search-optimized blog posts written by journalists to promote Genus' services and events. These packages are accompanied by social media content such as posts, stories, and reels, and are promoted using paid advertising.

1.4.2. YMCA of Metro Vancouver recruitment campaign

The Metro Vancouver of YMCA initially contacted Forge and Spark in 2020 to launch a recruitment campaign for its Kids' Clubs across Metro Vancouver. However, it was paused due to the pandemic. In 2022, it was resumed to engage suitable candidates through the YMCA's social channels and drive them to the landing page on its website.



Figure 4. Social Post highlighting benefits of working at YMCA. (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

Forge and Spark created a landing page featuring information about open positions and highlighting the benefits of working in the YMCA's Kids Club through employees' experiences. They also developed a series of content for the YMCA's social channels and paid posts to direct potential candidates to the YMCA website.

1.4.3. Amy's Kitchen employer branding and recruitment campaign

Amy's Kitchen is a family-owned meal manufacturing company. They contacted F&S to develop recruitment campaigns for all their manufacturing plants to attract local talent and tell Amy's story as an employer.

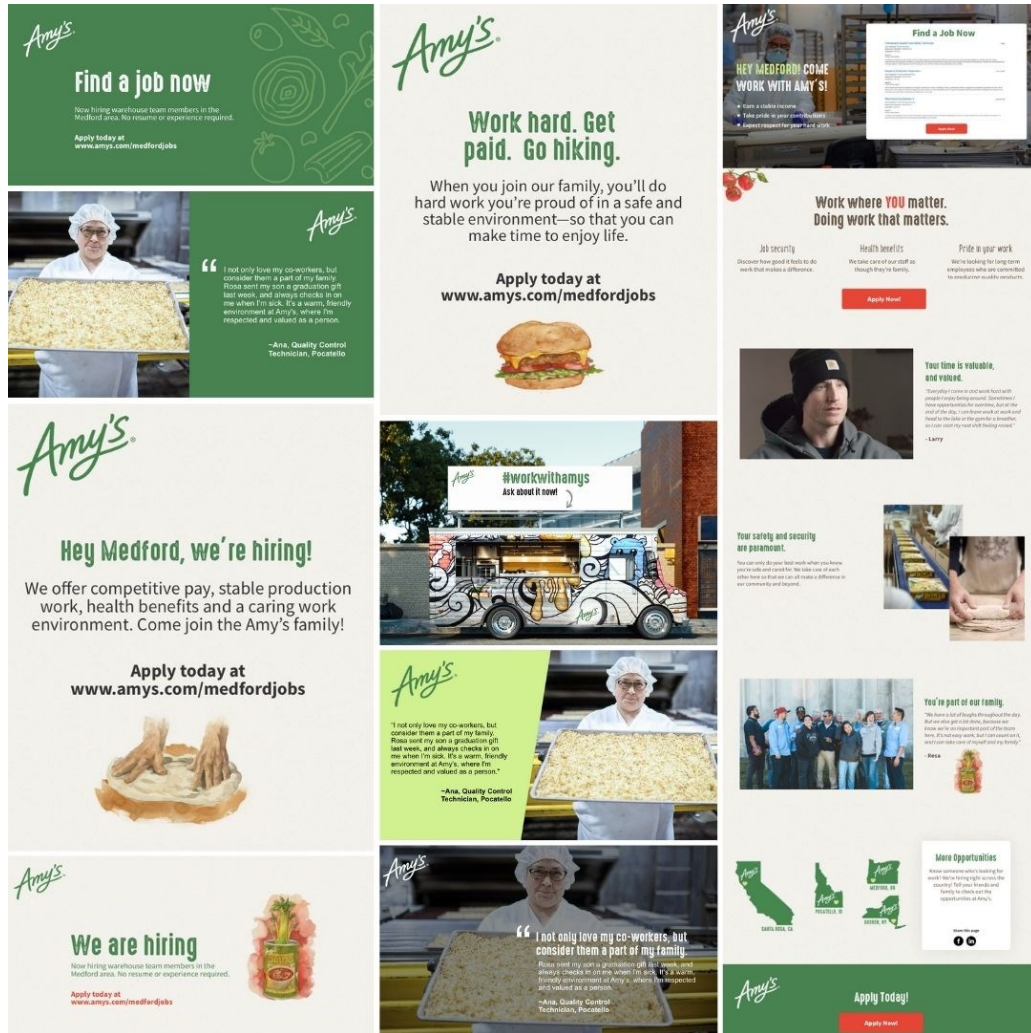


Figure 5. Few examples of the work FS did for the recruitment campaign for Amy's Kitchen (Source: Forge and Spark website)

The work conducted by Forge and Spark resulted in a recruitment campaign that was both clear and repeatable. This campaign was centered around a resonant landing page and organic social content. In addition, the campaign utilized promotion via PPC and social ads as well as events. Through this work, Amy's gained a deeper understanding of how to engage with candidates regarding recruiting and employer branding. Amy's has since adopted the four tailored personas created by Forge and Spark for their plants in Santa Rosa, Pocatello, Medford, and San Jose. Additionally, the team's simple-to-follow story gathering framework enabled Amy's to easily capture moving employee stories with clarity on where and how to share those stories.

This chapter briefly introduced the concept and importance of content marketing in the present day. It also introduced Forge and Spark, a content marketing agency founded by Shannon Emmerson, and highlighted some notable work done by Forge and Spark. The next chapter explores F&S's venture into online courses, a brief introduction to online courses, and the benefits and challenges of online courses.

Chapter 2. Online Courses and their Significance

2.1. F&S venture to launch online courses

In 2021, Shannon Emmerson, the founder and CEO of Forge and Spark, saw an opportunity for growth inspired by the pandemic (Emmerson 2023). She wanted to keep her agency small but impactful. So, she decided to add online courses to their services.

Emmerson had two primary goals for introducing online courses into Forge and Spark's repertoire. Her primary objective was establishing her company as an industry authority and a leading resource for expertise. Emmerson believed that by sharing their extensive knowledge through online courses, Forge and Spark could solidify their position and become the go-to source of trusted information within their field.

Emmerson's other primary goal was centered around the scalability of online courses—recognizing the potential for online courses to generate recurring revenue streams, which traditional service-based business models often need. By diversifying into online courses, she aimed to create a separate division that could help multiply the revenue streams of Forge and Spark without requiring a significant expansion of her team. This strategic move allowed her existing team to remain focused on delivering premium agency services to a select clientele while also exploring new opportunities for growth and influence in the digital education landscape.

2.2. The new ways of doing business and generating passive income

The internet has brought about an impact on our work, communication, and access to information. With each passing day, from education to entertainment, the internet has opened a world of possibilities, connecting individuals across vast distances, empowering knowledge seekers, and providing myriad avenues for leisure and recreation.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, accelerated and magnified this transformation. Lockdown policies, social distancing, and disrupted supply chains wreaked havoc on businesses. Every sector and industry had to change their business

model to keep up with the new norm. Retailers introduced curbside pickup for online and phone orders due to restrictions on customers entering stores. These new measures allowed employees to deliver items beyond the store without customer contact, providing employment and ensuring that customers received their orders (Morgan 2020).

Even with all these efforts, only some industries and sectors could not reach the revenue level they had before the pandemic. This crisis allowed them to explore or develop new products to generate other income streams. For example, before the pandemic, Spotify's business model had no apparent drawbacks, as it relied heavily on free users who had to endure advertisements. This approach was a promising strategy to fuel the company's growth and progress in the long run. However, during the pandemic, advertising agencies reduced their budgets, causing a once-profitable source of revenue to become a burden. To counteract the decline in income, Spotify wisely shifted its focus to generating original content—inspired by Netflix's successful approach—by introducing podcasts. These podcasts have experienced a significant surge in both their popularity and volume over the past year (Manzoni and Luo 2020).

The key question for Spotify was how to leverage its existing infrastructure and content to generate new revenue streams. By shifting its focus to offering original content, Spotify transformed from an intermediary in music delivery to a source of original content for its consumers. This strategic pivot has been regarded as a brilliant long-term move (Manzoni and Luo 2020).

The internet also made it possible to introduce online learning, which was already gaining traction before the pandemic. However, COVID-19 accelerated its usage. Initially, educational institutions utilized online courses, but companies started using them during the pandemic for training (Scribani 2020). Over time, businesses and content creators recognized online learning's potential for establishing awareness, visibility and generating revenue.

2.3. What are online courses?

Online courses are a form of education delivered through the internet. Every online course has some structure, such as modules or units, to deliver information in an

organized manner. Online courses are divided into four forms: live courses, self-paced courses, cohort courses, and drip courses (What is an online course?).

In live courses, sessions are taught in real-time, whereas in self-paced courses, students work through content at their own pace. Cohort courses take place when students collaborate with each other in a specific timeframe. In drip courses, students are not given access to full content at once; each module is released weekly.

Each online course is delivered through a learning management system and includes various components to create an engaging learning experience. Thinkific, Coursera, and Teachable are examples of learning management systems. These components include live online sessions, pre-recorded videos, breakout groups, discussion groups, templates, worksheets, discussion boards, and projects. The selection of components for online courses is contingent upon the subject matter and breadth of the curriculum.

In summation, online courses are a flexible and convenient way to learn, with various forms such as live, self-paced, cohort, and drip courses. Online courses are becoming a significant component of the mainstream landscape, with an ever-growing number of individuals and organizations electing to utilize this form of learning.

2.4. Why are businesses creating online courses?

E-learning, also known as online learning, has experienced a considerable surge in popularity in the past decade due to the convergence of education and the internet, offering individuals a chance to acquire new skills (Scribani 2020). However, since the emergence of COVID-19, online learning has become even more essential in people's lives.

The widespread availability of the internet and the shift to remote work due to COVID-19 have led to rising demand for digital learning to enhance skills. Coursera witnessed a significant surge in student registrations, from 21 million in 2016 to 71 million in 2020 and 92 million in 2021 (Wood 2022). This substantial increase reflects the global acceptance of online education, including higher education courses and participation from vulnerable or remote communities.

Online learning has become a versatile tool not just for the education sector but for various industries and businesses as well. Companies are using online learning platforms for training their employees as it is flexible, time-saving, and efficient. Passive income generation is one aspect of creating online courses for businesses; however, the more important goal is to position these businesses as industry experts and raise awareness about their services. Creating online courses also helps them build a community and foster continuous engagement.

Online courses continue to benefit learners and course creators; the following are a few benefits that online courses offer.

2.4.1. New markets

In his 2006 book “The Long Tail,” Chris Anderson observes that the introduction of the web and the internet has expanded audiences' scope, resulting in a shift in consumption patterns. Anderson says, “Our culture and economy are increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of hits (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve and moving toward a huge number of niches in the tail” (Anderson 2006).

Anderson suggests that the long tail connects supply with demand, and this same principle applies to online learning (Anderson 2006). Due to its flexibility of access, online learning can reach a wider audience than in-person. As Wood notes “Enrolment numbers more than doubled in 2020 and increased by 32% the following year, peaking at 189 million” (Wood 2022). Online learning is an opportunity for course creators to generate revenue by creating online courses that cater to diverse learners and connect them with the education they seek.

Online learning has revolutionized education, offering flexibility and convenience. Learners can self-pace their studies, access course material as needed, and engage in immersive virtual discussions, quizzes, and collaborative activities, fostering a strong learning community.

2.4.2. Cost effective

Online learning offers numerous advantages, including cost savings. Anderson calls it the democratization of production tools (Anderson 2006). By taking online courses, students can avoid commuting and travel expenses, which saves time and money. While setting up online courses takes time and effort initially, they are scalable.

Furthermore, online courses can be easily modified and updated. Platforms such as Thinkific make the whole process streamlined and efficient, while other tools, such as Canva, can significantly aid in designing the courses' layouts and modules.

To summarize, businesses are creating online courses due to the numerous benefits that e-learning offers. The flexibility of access to a broader audience, personalized learning experiences, and cost savings are some of the advantages that have contributed to the surge in popularity of online learning. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online learning, making it an essential tool for education, training, and revenue generation in various industries and businesses.

2.5. Challenges of online learning

Online learning has challenges, including the initial cost of setting up online courses, which can be significant. However, as economies of scale come into play, these costs tend to decrease over time (Appana 2008). Another challenge is the technical expertise required to design and set up online courses, which differs from traditional instruction. Fortunately, platforms like LearnWorlds and Thinkific have made creating, selling, and promoting online courses easier.

Figure has been redacted due to copyright reasons.

Figure 6. Learnworld website main page (Source: Learnworld website)

Another concern related to online learning is the availability of technology, such as computers, laptops, and internet access. However, internet users are steadily growing. The latest data indicates that there are now more than 5.18 billion individuals using the internet, equating to 64.6 percent of the world's population. Analysis reveals that 147 million people started to use the internet in the 12 months to April 2023. However, delays in the reporting of internet research mean that growth may be meaningfully higher than this figure suggests (Kemp).

Despite its limitations, online learning is a growing industry that is here to stay. Both educational institutions and commercial organizations increasingly turn to online learning for instruction, training, and revenue. With its flexibility and low cost, online courses provide an opportunity to reach new markets and generate revenue.

2.6. Target audience of online learning

Online learning's potential audience is vast and diverse, as anyone with access to the internet and a laptop can participate. The broad range of individuals who can benefit from online learning includes students, working professionals, entrepreneurs, and lifelong learners seeking new skills. The available online courses cover various fields and subjects, each with goals and learning objectives, and can be delivered live or through pre-recorded sessions.

With such a varied landscape, narrowing down the target audience for online courses can be challenging, as the opportunities for learning and growth are endless. This diversity makes online learning an attractive option for many people, as they can access courses that align with their specific interests and goals, regardless of their background or location.

This chapter highlighted the significance of online courses in today's business landscape, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Online courses provide businesses with the flexibility and extensive reach to establish themselves as experts, increase awareness, and connect with their audience. Despite the challenges of setup costs and technical requirements, online courses are an effective tool for achieving these objectives. The growing number of internet users and improved platforms address these limitations. The diverse target audience, including students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and lifelong learners, contributes to the continuous growth of the online learning industry. Online courses have become indispensable for modern education, business, and revenue generation. The next chapter will shed light on Forge and Spark's courses and the vision behind them.

Chapter 3. Forge and Spark Online Courses

3.1. Vision behind F&S online courses

In 2021 Shannon Emmerson, founder and CEO of Forge and Spark, suggested launching online courses after seeing rapid growth during the pandemic. Emmerson did not want to make F&S a big agency, but rather a small but mighty agency that delivers premium content and service. (Emmerson, Founding Forge and Spark Story 2023).

Emmerson's vision for F&S online courses had two goals. First, to be recognized as an industry expert, Forge and Spark needed to teach and leverage their expertise to build recognition and authority. Second, Emmerson knew that online courses are scalable. She understood the potential of recurring income through online courses compared to service businesses. Emmerson hoped that launching a scalable division of the business would allow F&S to grow overall revenue without significantly growing the team, allowing her existing team to continue to service a small number of clients with premium agency services.

In 2021, Forge and Spark launched their first course, "Better Messaging, Better Results"; and were preparing to release their second course, "Better Online Brand Design". The reason Emmerson launched "Better Messaging, Better Results" as their first course is that Emmerson is the expert on this area and wanted to develop agency's reputation. Likewise, the second course "Better Online Brand Design" created by Lara Kroeker also shows her expertise in design.

Emmerson has set general and specific goals for Forge and Spark courses. Their general goal was to expand their audience by cultivating a community of individuals who trust and recommend Forge and Spark, potentially converting them into clients for their services. For their online courses, they aimed to grow their educational mailing list to foster relationships with their audience and establish trust. They also hoped to convert this mailing list into clients for their agency services. Ultimately, their objective was to generate revenue through course sales (Emmerson, Founding Forge and Spark Story 2023).

3.2. First Course – “Better Messaging, Better Results”

“Better Messaging, Better Results” is about getting your messaging right for your social media. The course introduces the learner to a guideline on creating a messaging map that resonates with the key audience at every stage of their journey.

3.2.1. Goals and objectives of the course

In 2021, F&S introduced its inaugural course, "Better Messaging, Better Results," which aimed to achieve several goals and objectives. Its primary objective was to serve as a pilot project, laying the foundation for developing a robust system that could be utilized in future courses. Additionally, the course aimed to establish an educational stream that could be scaled up and generate revenue. A specific target was set to generate a minimum of \$7500 to cover costs and concurrently build an email list of 500 subscribers (Spark, Project Plan: Phase 1 - Better Messaging Online Course Marketing Plan 2021).

3.2.2. Target audience of the course

Forge and Spark developed three audience personas for their online courses(see figure 11). As F&S was venturing for the first time into online education, they started with a broad audience as they needed to figure out their primary audience.

1. Startup Suzie

Suzie, a knowledgeable small business owner, is eager to drive growth in her business. Recognizing the significance of content marketing, she understands the need to expand her expertise in this area. She aims to acquire valuable insights and apply them effectively to scale her business. Operating within a limited budget, Suzie is determined to optimize her resources for maximum impact on business growth.

2. Lovely Lucy

As the goal of F&S is to convert learners into potential clients, Lucy is the main target demographic for Forge and Spark services. As a member of a company, she benefits from available marketing resources. However, Lucy also recognizes the significance of educating the public on crucial topics. With a busy schedule, she often

finds herself overwhelmed with numerous responsibilities. Her goal is to have support in creating better content that only requires a small amount of her time. F&S aims to capture Lucy's attention through their courses, with the aspiration of providing valuable knowledge and transforming her into a potential client for their agency services.

3. Middle Management Mark

Mark holds a middle management position within a prominent tech company, serving in a leadership role that connects the marketing and sales departments. While he may possess a limited marketing background, Mark appreciates the significance and impact of effective marketing strategies. His overarching goal is to enhance his knowledge, constantly upgrade his skills, and cultivate innovative ideas to drive superior outcomes within his company. By seeking continuous improvement, Mark aspires to contribute to the company's success and achieve better results through his newfound expertise.

3.2.3. Overview of the course

“Better Messaging, Better Results” was initially launched as a webinar for \$47 in November 2021 on F&S LinkedIn. Forge and Spark decided on the price after consultation with a Thinkific representative who suggested keeping it under \$50 to get volume. Later, it was released as an on-demand course on Thinkific at \$67. The price increase covered the cost of course production for F&S. The prices of both courses launched so far are minimal, as F&S wants volume and they want the courses to serve as thought leadership tools that show Forge and Spark’s expertise and help grow their brand awareness, leading to potential clients. “Better Messaging, Better Results” has eight chapters and 23 lessons. The course takes approximately 2 hours to complete and is available later even when one completes the course.

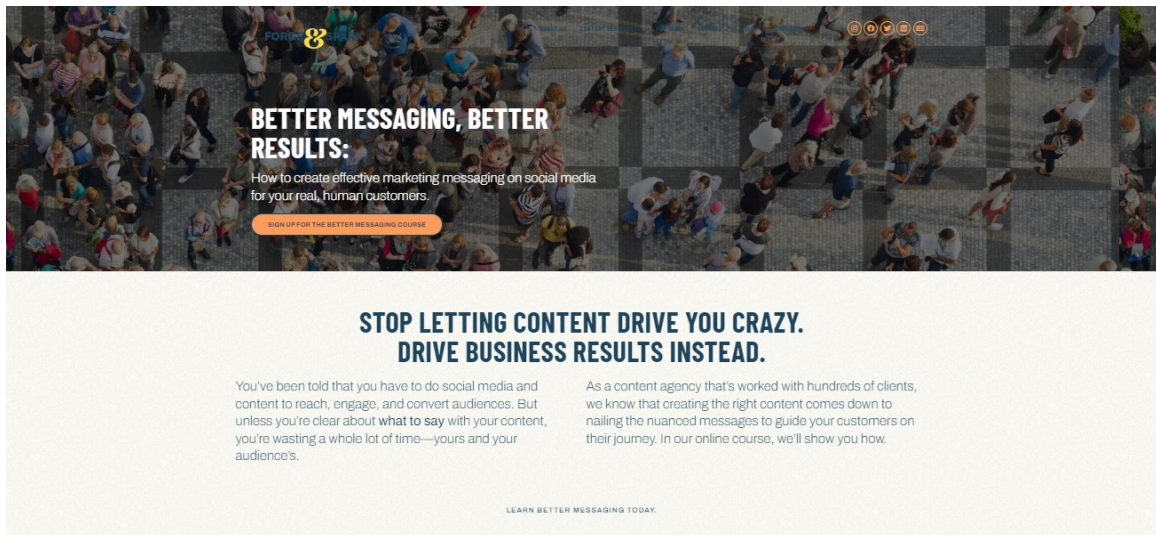


Figure 7. Landing page of “Better Messaging, Better Results course”. (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

1. Orientation: course overview and materials

This chapter introduces Emmerson as the course instructor and outlines the course’s core elements: content goals, defining target audiences, building personas, and outlining the customer journey. Additionally, it provides downloadable course materials, including the Better Messaging worksheet (in PDF and Excel formats) and a guideline with 20 questions for persona creation.

2. Introduction: what is better messaging?

In this chapter, Emmerson defines messaging, highlights the difference between good and bad, provides examples of messaging types, and introduces the messaging framework and customer journey.

3. Setting clear and actionable content objectives

This chapter introduces OKR (objectives and key results) and asks learners to fill out the Better Messaging worksheet, where they will include their business objectives, content objectives, key results (how will you measure success), and audience actions (what actions you want your audience to take to achieve your key results).

	A	B	C	D	E
2	Step 1: YOUR OBJECTIVES				
4	PRIMARY BUSINESS OBJECTIVES	CONTENT OBJECTIVES	KEY RESULTS	AUDIENCE ACTIONS	
5	What's the actual business result you're looking for?	How can content help you achieve your business objectives? What could content marketing and messaging can help you achieve?	What are the actual results you can measure to show that you're making progress towards your objective?	List up to 5 key steps you need your audience to take in order to get those key results? Consider what would prompt them to discover you, to engage with you, to consider your solution/product/service, and to tell others about it.	
6	YOUR ANSWER	YOUR ANSWER: CONTENT OBJECTIVES	YOUR ANSWER: KEY RESULTS	YOUR ANSWER: AUDIENCE ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE KEY RESULTS	
8	Examples				
9	Get more qualified customers	Generate qualified leads	Newspaper subscriptions & opens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discover and consume our content Come to our site Sign up for a our newsletter Fill out an intake form Participate in discovery call 	
10	Grow brand awareness	Grow online audience / following	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followers on social Traffic to website Likes/comments/shares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See one of our posts via a share, boost, or original post Like it internally and then externally - Like/comments/share/save Follow us on one of our channels Visit our website 	

Figure 8. Better Messaging worksheet, which participants fill starting with business objectives, content objectives, key results, and audience actions. (Source: Better Messaging, Better Results Course)

4. Understanding your very human audiences + Developing your first persona

This chapter begins with selecting a singular persona or target audience and capturing their essential details within the Better Messaging worksheet. The worksheet encompasses key parameters such as the persona's name, a comprehensive description, pain points, desired gains, and online behavioral patterns. It also introduces the “Job to Be Done” framework.

5. Aligning your offerings and making sure you’re getting something out of your messaging, too

This lesson delves into the crucial process of aligning your offerings with the specific needs of your audience through effective messaging. Building upon the foundation of the Better Messaging worksheet, this lesson takes a step further by guiding course participants to craft messaging that relates to the job to be done, pain points, and content relevant to their target audience. By doing so, learners can develop a comprehensive understanding of tailoring messaging to meet customer needs and drive desired outcomes.

6. Defining your messaging

In this chapter, Emmerson explores mindset quotes for each customer journey stage and their role in tailoring messaging. Learners are instructed to complete the next

step of the Better Messaging worksheet, focusing on actions, knowledge, and perceptions for each stage.

Step 4: YOUR MESSAGING JOB - "DO, KNOW, BELIEVE"			
	ACTIONS: WHAT YOU NEED THEM TO DO	KNOWLEDGE: WHAT YOU NEED THEM TO KNOW	PERCEPTIONS: WHAT YOU NEED THEM TO BELIEVE
	When it comes to this person, what do you need them to do?	What do they need to know or understand about you to take action? Consider the pains you alleviate (see Step 3) and the gains you offer with your products and services.	What do they need to believe or feel about your brand or product in order to take action?
In General	YOUR ANSWER: AUDIENCE ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE KEY RESULTS	YOUR ANSWER: KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO TAKE ACTION	YOUR ANSWER: BELIEF REQUIRED IN GENERAL TO TAKE ACTION
Discovery / Awareness	ACTIONS REQUIRED TO DISCOVER YOU	KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO DISCOVER YOU	BELIEFS REQUIRED TO DISCOVER YOU
Engagement / Consideration	ACTIONS REQUIRED TO ENGAGE WITH YOU	KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO ENGAGE WITH YOU	BELIEFS REQUIRED TO ENGAGE WITH YOU
Decision / Purchase	ACTIONS REQUIRED TO MAKE A DECISION/CONVERSION	KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO MAKE A DECISION/CONVERSION	BELIEFS REQUIRED TO MAKE A DECISION/CONVERSION
Delight / Advocacy	ACTIONS REQUIRED TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT YOU	KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT YOU	BELIEFS REQUIRED TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT YOU

Figure 9. "Your Messaging Job" worksheet which learners fill out for each stage of customer journey. (Source: Better Messaging, Better Result course)

7. Expressing your messaging through content

Participants create a messaging map for the target audience in this final step, incorporating key persona details, mindset, messaging opportunities, stage-specific content, and desired actions. Emmerson shares a filled-out example featuring Lucy, a target audience for Forge and Spark, to assist learners in understanding the process.


	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Example: LUCY'S MESSAGING JOURNEY					
2						
3		Discovery / Awareness	Engagement / Consideration	Decision / Purchase	Delight / Advocacy	
4						
5	Persona Mindset					
6		Overworked and overloaded but not actively looking for support "These women are smart! I wasn't really thinking about hiring anyone to help with marketing but I could use it..."	Has seen our content and likes it Oh, I can really see how having a content partner could get results and make life easier!	Is considering getting in touch "Should I get in touch? I might try their newsletter or one of their free courses or sessions first"	Generally likes what we do and share "I LOVE this group of women and their values. I'm happy to like and share their stuff and tell others about them."	
7						
8						
9	Messaging Opportunities	Make Lucy aware that she doesn't have to do it all alone	Show her our content is valuable in educating her team	Show her our quality of work - webinars, e-guides, courses	Celebrate our team and clients	
10						
11	Content That Generally Works At This Stage	Non-branded content addressing Lucy's concerns about content, showing up with authenticity, and saving time while achieving ROI	Lightly branded content that shows F&S unique spin on purpose-driven content	Branded close-the-deal content that encourages newsletter sign-up	Human content reflecting a valued relationship among our team and with our clients	
12						
13	Stage-Based Actions	Search	Engages (likes/comments/likes)	Subscribes to newsletter	Shares our content &/or enthusiastic responses	

Figure 10. Filled out Messaging Map as an example to help course participants. (Source: Better Messaging, Better Results course)

8. Conclusions and takeaways

In the final lesson, Emmerson concisely summarizes the course, emphasizing essential takeaways: establishing clear business objectives, setting key results, comprehending audience pain points and desired gains, and understanding the customer journey. She encourages participants to move forward confidently, creating compelling content that resonates with their audience. Emmerson congratulates the course participants for completing the program and invites them to share their feedback through a post-course survey. Lastly, she concludes the course with a call to action, inviting learners to sign up for the Forge and Spark newsletter and ensuring continued engagement and access to valuable resources.

3.3. Second Course – “Better Online Brand Design”

“Better Online Brand Design” is the second course recently launched by Forge and Spark. The course instructor is Lara Kroeker, Creative Director at Forge and Spark. “Better Online Brand Design” is about creating a visual brand system that can be used across multiple channels.

3.3.1. Goals and objectives of the course

The second course's "Better Online Brand Design" primary goal remains the same as the "Better Messaging Better Results" course, which is to develop a scalable, ongoing product-based source of revenue for Forge and Spark. This course also aims to expand F&S's audience and identify potential F&S customers interested in services like style guide development. Furthermore, the objective is to continue learning for F&S and apply the gained knowledge to future courses. From a monetization standpoint, the goal is to achieve a minimum revenue of \$1000. (Spark, Better Online Brand Design Go-To-Market Plan 2022 2022)

3.3.2. Target audience

Forge and Spark's online courses embody an iterative approach, where they continuously learn and apply their insights with each new course they launch. In the case of "Better Online Brand Design," they have made specific adjustments to cater to their target audience. While the target audience remains the same as the "Better Messaging Better Results" course, Forge and Spark emphasized understanding their audience's pain points, desired gains, and the tasks they aim to accomplish within online brand design.

In their pursuit of a more tailored experience, Forge and Spark have identified three distinct audience segments. The first segment, represented by Paola, a small business owner, is their primary target for course sales. The other two segments, Jae, a product manager in a tech company, and Lucy, a marketing head in a company, are specifically targeted for their style guides.

By differentiating their audience and fine-tuning their offerings, Forge and Spark strive to provide a comprehensive and effective learning experience for participants seeking to enhance their skills in online brand design. Through the iterative process of learning, adapting, and implementing insights, Forge and Spark ensure that their courses deliver maximum value and relevance to their diverse audience.

*I get the value of premium content and social media marketing – but I can't afford an agency YET!
What can you teach me?**

COURSE TARGET
PAOLA, 32
Values-Led Side Hustler

Paola works part-time to make a living and is doing their best to make their side hustle – a values-led project – a viable business and as great as it can be. Her hustle is her passion. They are DIY all the way, doing pretty much everything, and willing to learn what they don't know. Marketing isn't their strong suit but they can't afford to hire out – so they need to learn from the best. They will read our content, take our courses, and hopefully hire us in the future.

JOB TO BE DONE	PAINS	WHAT WE NEED THEM TO...	HOW OUR CONTENT CAN HELP
Learn how to look and sound better in their content and social marketing	Tight budget; not yet enough money to hire people or an agency to help with marketing	DO: Take our course or hire us to help them create a style guide. Along the way, download our lead magnet and stay on our newsletter	Teach them how to do the most important thing first, and well / how to craft a lean but effective plan, visuals, content calendar, etc.
Grow her business-on a budget	Needs results from her marketing to grow her business	FEEL: That we share her values and are trustworthy, un-stuffy, content savvy, and could really support her	Inspire them with/consistently show them examples of great content (relevant to them)
Stay true to her values in her business and marketing	Isn't quite sure what to focus on in content marketing	UNDERSTAND: FGS helps with strategy and production; works as a partner where needed;	Encourage them with examples of what others like them have achieved with content
	Her content isn't strategic or cohesive yet; <u>misaligned</u> messaging and visuals		
	Not enough time! Needs a plan to follow that makes it easy for them to prioritize		

MAIN CTA: Sign up for newsletter **CHANNELS:** **OFFLINE BEHAVIORS:**

*Our services are great, but our content is BAD – especially on social. Could you teach my team and somehow make our content look good?**

STYLE GUIDE TARGET
JAE, 39
Manager-level, Purpose Biz

Jae is a product manager in a large tech company, leading a department or team, and responsible for "owning" the future of the product – as well as for its sales and marketing. They know how important it is to get the strategy and messaging around marketing right – especially on social – but doesn't have the expertise on his own, or the expertise (or personpower) on his team to deliver.

JOB TO BE DONE	PAINS	WHAT WE NEED THEM TO...	HOW OUR CONTENT CAN HELP
<u>To look good and make his brand look good</u> with better, more effective content	A poorly aligned team without a clear plan for content	DO: Download something tactical that impresses him → fill in form/email	Educate them/their team on what goes into content planning, running campaigns, organizing teams, making content look, feel, and sound better
<u>To find quality support, training or consulting</u> from a reliable partner	No expertise in content marketing or social media - knows they don't know enough	FEEL: Impressed by our experience, content, and results	Encourage them that their content can be better – in every way (with our help)
<u>To source, recommend, or hire a content agency</u> for strategy, production, or campaign work	They are doing digital marketing and advertising but lack skill/knowledge in content and/or social marketing	UNDERSTAND: FGS helps managers like them look GOOD to bosses and get results	Give them clear examples of our work and results they can share with bosses
<u>To nail the marketing for their product</u> in order to advance their career			

MAIN CTA: Download this / Get in touch **CHANNELS:** **OFFLINE BEHAVIORS:**

*"Most days I can't keep up – but I know the value of content and need to get it right for this business."**

STYLE GUIDE TARGET
LUCY, 40
Values-focused leader

Lucy heads marketing (and everything else, it seems!) in her values-focused company. She's entrepreneurial, savvy and reads what she can about being a better leader and business in the world. She's left-leaning, principled, and values honesty and authenticity. She also knows the value of solid business results, and doesn't suffer fools or snake oil salespeople.

JOB TO BE DONE	PAINS	WHAT WE NEED THEM TO...	HOW OUR CONTENT CAN HELP
A plan or support resulting in <u>better content for her business</u>	Time / too much on her plate	DO: Sign up for a our newsletter, download a lead magnet, consider us a potential partner or vendor	Show her <u>we know how</u> to strategize and work more effectively with content and social marketing (and can help her)
To <u>improve her brand content</u> (the look, feel, and/or quality)	Business growing pains: new opportunities & products require new marketing strategies	FEEL: That we share her values and are trustworthy, un-stuffy, content savvy, and could really support her	Make her look smart by giving her education to share with her teams
To <u>generate business value</u> from her team's marketing efforts	Always feeling behind / unprepared when it comes to content marketing	UNDERSTAND: FGS helps with strategy and production; works as a partner where needed;	Inspire her with excellent examples of premium content
	She's sometimes embarrassed by her co's content (or lack thereof)		Delight her with our humanness

MAIN CTA: Sign up for newsletter **CHANNELS:** **OFFLINE BEHAVIORS:**

Figure 11. Target Audience for BOBD course. (Source: Better Online Brand Design Go-to-Market Plan 2022)

3.3.3. Overview of the course

The promotional price of \$29 for “Better Online Brand Design” is an incentive for prospective course takers, encouraging them to enroll in the course and consider purchasing Forge and Spark’s services. F&S intends to keep this price. “Better Online Brand Design” focuses on inviting people and showing what F&S can do. Through this course, F&S intends to sell “Done for You” style guides to brands and businesses. The course is structured into five comprehensive modules comprising 22 chapters. The course lasts approximately 60 minutes, ensuring a concise yet informative learning experience.

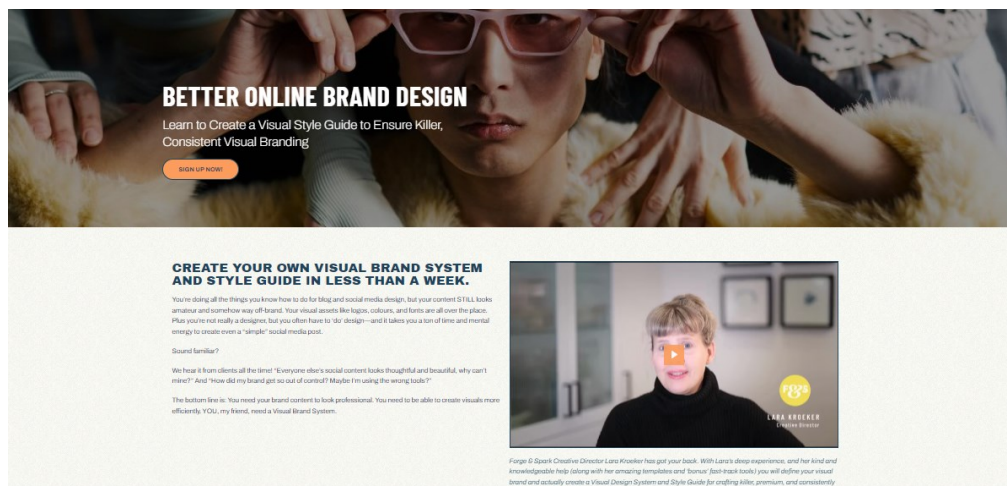


Figure 12. Landing page of Better Online Brand Design. (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

1. Orientation: course overview and material

In this chapter, participants will find a brief introductory video featuring Kroeker, where she acquaints herself and provides an overview of the course modules. Furthermore, participants must create an account on Canva, an essential step in the course. Kroeker also introduces the style guide workbook, an invaluable resource that participants can incorporate into their Canva account. This workbook will guide them in crafting their unique brand style guide as they progress through the course.

2. What is a visual strategy, and can it help my brand?

This lesson provides an in-depth examination of visual strategy and how the purpose and goals of a business guide it. Kroeker expertly explores the methods for effectively communicating a brand's mission, core values, and visual personality through

visual strategy. Additionally, the lesson highlights the significant benefits that visual strategy offers, including visual consistency, efficiency, and scalability, all of which play a pivotal role in driving the success of businesses.

3. Mission, values, tone, and style

In this lesson, Kroeker explores brand strategy in-depth, focusing on key elements such as brand mission, core values, and visual personality. She also shares a helpful resource, *"A Fast Track Guide to Defining Your Brand Mission, Core Values, and Visual Personality"* to assist course participants. Additionally, Kroeker provides examples of style guides to give learners a clear idea of how they can be applied. In this chapter, participants will also fill out the style guide workbook.

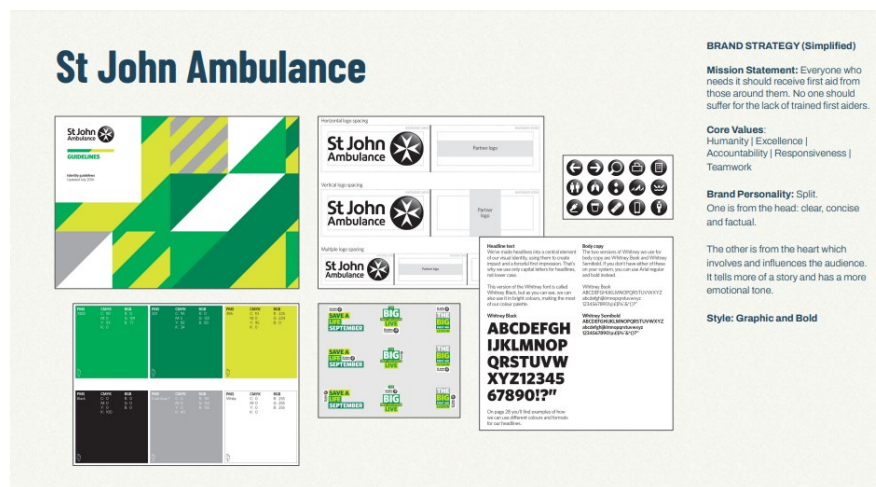


Figure 13. An example of a style guide used in Better Online Brand to help participants understand the style guide. (Source: Better Online Brand Design course)

4. Evaluate the health of your visual branding

In this module, Kroeker begins by conducting a brand audit, encouraging participants to complete the brand assets section of the style guide workbook. This exercise lets them understand the brand identity's strengths and weaknesses. Participants can pinpoint areas requiring updates or new elements to ensure consistency by engaging in this activity. Kroeker also provides a valuable resource, *"8 Beautiful Brand Design Style Guidebook,"* which provides inspiration for learners.

5. Clear and actionable brand elements

In this chapter, Kroeker deeply explains brand elements such as logos, color palettes, typography, illustrations, iconography, photography, patterns, and textures. She explains each element with samples and provides additional resources for participants.

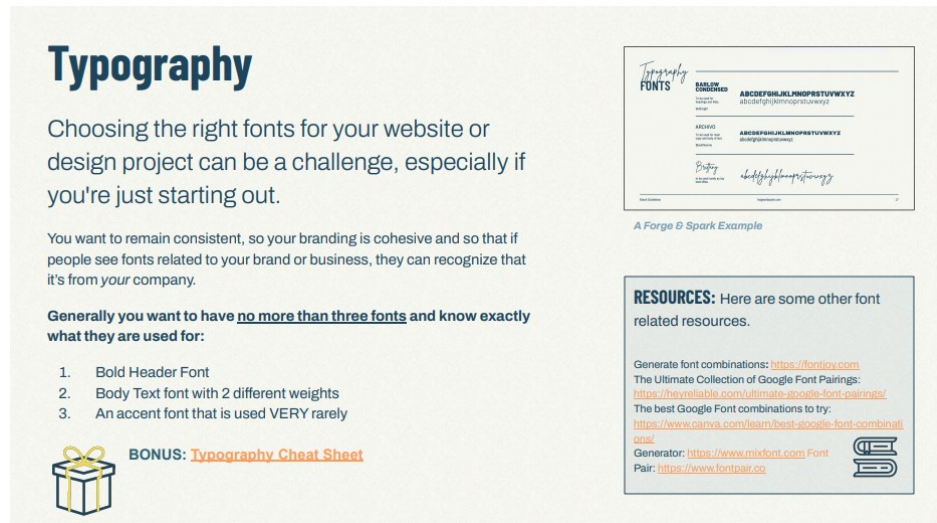


Figure 14. Slide from Better Online Brand Design course about typography and resources. (Source: Better Online Brand Design course)

6. Using your style guide with your team

In this last module, Kroeker shares best practices for organizing and sharing visual style guides with internal and external stakeholders. She also introduces the concept of creating templates. As with other modules, this chapter shares ready-to-use template resources.

7. Conclusion and Takeaways

Ultimately, Kroeker congratulates everyone for completing "Better Online Brand Design" and encourages the participants to reach out to Forge and Spark for further support related to content marketing, social media marketing, or visual branding.

This chapter comprehensively described the courses launched by Forge and Spark: "Better Messaging, Better Results" and "Better Online Brand Design." It delved into the details of the course modules and resources. The upcoming chapter will outline Forge and Spark's go-to-market plan, showcasing their strategic efforts to market these courses effectively.

Chapter 4. Go-To-Market Plan for Online Courses

4.1. Go-to-Market Plan for “Better Messaging Better Results” course

The preceding chapter provided a detailed exposition of the “Better Messaging, Better Results” and “Better Online Brand Design” courses offered by Forge and Spark, offering an in-depth insight into their respective modules, and accompanying resources. This upcoming chapter shifts focus to Forge and Spark's strategic initiatives for effectively bringing these courses to market. It outlines the concerted efforts and tactics employed to promote and position the courses as they go live.

4.1.1. Live webinar

F&S launched its first “Better Messaging Better Results” course as a 60-minute live webinar with Emmerson. The course is priced at \$67; however, for the webinar, F&S offered the promotional price of \$47 with a promo code of SparkFriends to get \$20 off. The webinar was promoted through the F&S newsletter and social media.

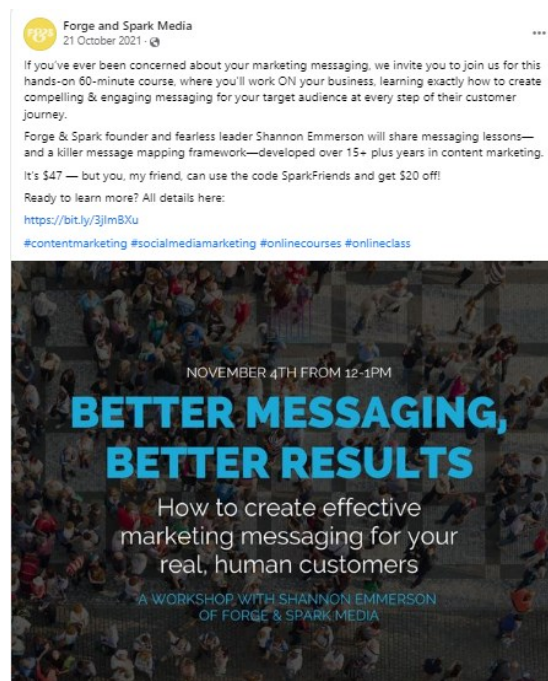


Figure 15. Facebook post created for the Better Messaging webinar. (Source: Forge and Spark's Facebook account)

4.1.2. Email marketing

Forge and Spark adopted a strategic approach to create a sales funnel for promoting their "Better Messaging Better Results" course. The first step was crafting a compelling blog post, *"Better Audience Personas = Better Marketing Messaging = Better Business Results"* Figure 16 that would resonate with their target audience and pique their interest in the course. This blog post was the entry point for potential participants into the sales funnel. Once individuals signed up for the lead magnet, they entered a nurturing journey facilitated by Forge and Spark. This nurturing journey involved a series of well-crafted follow-up emails strategically designed to guide and encourage participants to enroll in the "Better Messaging Better Results" course.

The first email with the subject *"20 Essential Persona Questions"* Figure 17 was sent after participants signed up, introduced Forge and Spark, and delivered the lead magnet. It also encouraged participants to sign up for the Better Messaging course. The first follow-up email with the subject *"Who Are My Customer Personas?"*, sent after a day, highlights the pain points of target audience Lucy, and offers the course as a solution.

The second follow-up email, *"Which Persona Will Help Me Hit My Business Goals?"*, sent after two days, introduced the concept of personas for business goals with a call to action to sign up for the Better Messaging course. The third follow-up email, *"Messaging That Stops the Scroll,"* sent after a waiting period of two days, highlighted the short and long-term benefits of the course. The final email with the subject line, *"Write the Right Way, Every Time,"* sent at the end of the nurturing journey, aimed to create a sense of urgency to encourage course sign-up.

By employing this strategic approach, Forge and Spark created an effective sales funnel that captured the attention of their target audience, nurtured their interest, and led them towards conversion, ultimately boosting enrollment in their "Better Messaging Better Results" course.



Figure 16. Blog Post with lead magnet “20 Best Questions for Better Customer Personas” created to promote the Better Messaging course. (Source: Forge and Spark Website)

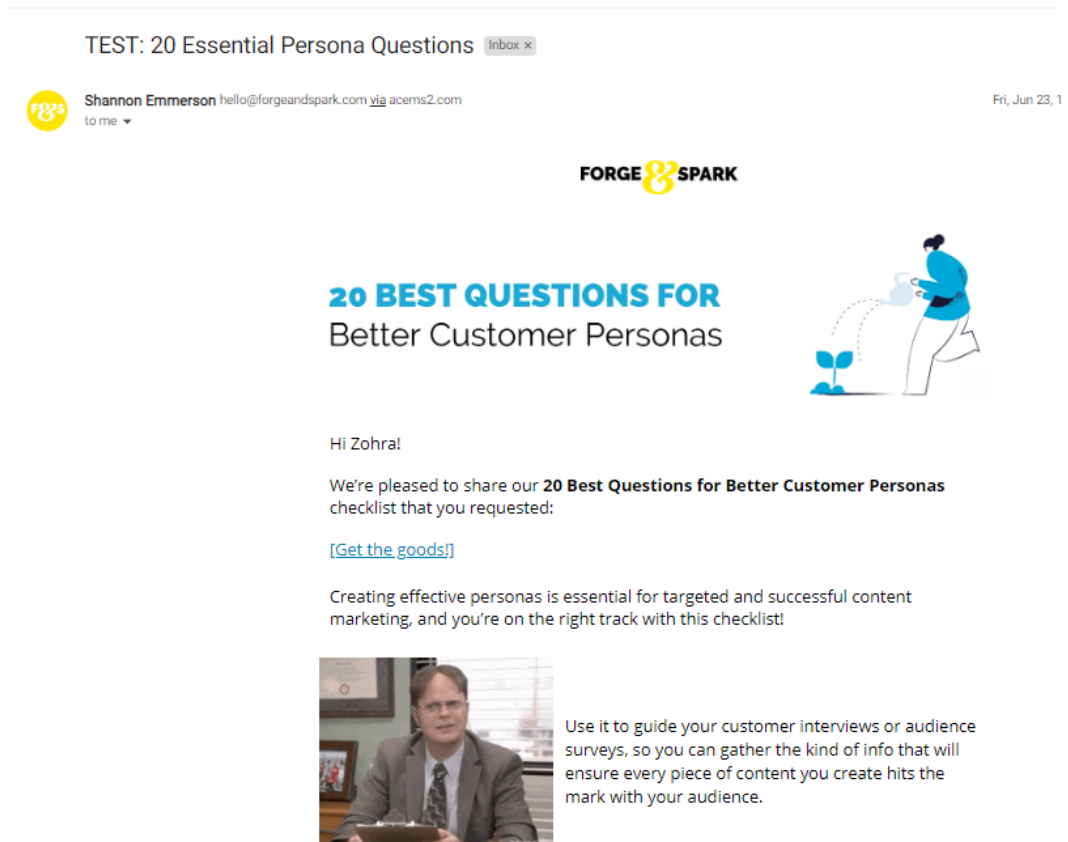


Figure 17. First email titled “20 Essential Personas Questions” delivering the lead magnet when you sign up for the lead magnet. (Source: Forge and Spark)

4.1.3. Forge and Spark newsletter

Forge and Spark implemented an effective promotional strategy for their course by leveraging their F&S newsletters. They offered a valuable incentive to their newsletter subscribers by providing a promo code that granted them free access to the course Figure 18. This unique opportunity allowed subscribers to benefit from the course's content without any cost, motivating them to engage with the material and experience its value firsthand. By utilizing their newsletters as a platform for exclusive offers, Forge and Spark engaged their audience, fostered loyalty among subscribers, and expanded the reach of their course promotion.



A lot of brands devote a *lot* of time to making their content pretty. But if your posts and blogs and videos are all style with no substance—or payoff—you're pretty much wasting your time. Premium content and social media marketing starts with a strong messaging framework. When your marketing team is clear about what to say and when to say it during your customer's journey, creating your calendar and content is a breeze.

Better messaging is all about knowing what you need to ask your audiences to do, understand, and believe along the way—so that you can compel audiences to help *you* meet your goals. It seems like magic, but it's all about empathy.

In our client work we've fine-tuned a step-by-step process to create a messaging framework for content marketing, which we're excited to teach and share with you in the [Better Marketing, Better Results course](#), free for you with the code **SparkFamily**. We hope you'll join us.

Figure 18. F&S newsletter promoting the course. (Source: Forge and Spark newsletter)

4.1.4. Social media

Forge and Spark employed a multi-faceted marketing strategy to promote their course offerings. While email marketing primarily aimed to drive course sales, social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram Figure 19 were key platforms to raise awareness about Forge and Spark's courses.

By combining the power of email marketing for conversion and social media marketing for creating awareness, Forge and Spark maximized their reach, attracted new learners, and ensured a comprehensive marketing approach for their course promotion.

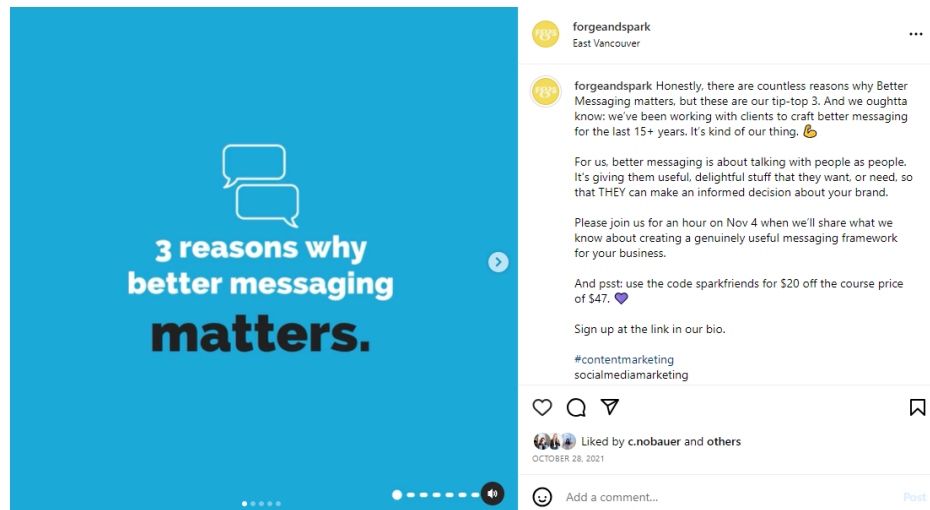


Figure 19. Instagram post promoting “Better Messaging Better Results” course. (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram Page)

4.2. Go-to-Market Plan for “Better Online Brand Design”

4.2.1. Email marketing

Following a previous tactic, Forge and Spark created a funnel to nurture their audience. Forge and Spark created two informative blog posts with different lead magnets designed to captivate and entice potential participants.

The first blog post created for the course was titled *“Why Your Brand Needs a Visual Style Guide for Online Content”*, Figure 20 with a lead magnet offering *“8 Beautiful Brand Design Style Examples”* Figure 21. Upon signing up, readers received

an email from Kroeker, sharing the lead magnet and encouraging them to enroll in the course. The second blog post, *"The Fast-track Guide to Defining Your Brand mission, Core values, and Visual style"* Figure 22, shared a downloadable worksheet as a lead magnet.

One significant difference between “Better Messaging Better Results ” and “Better Online Brand Design” is that for BOBD, Forge and Spark used their social media more frequently to maximize their visibility and reach. They strategically promoted the blog posts through these platforms, directing their audience to the course landing page on their website.

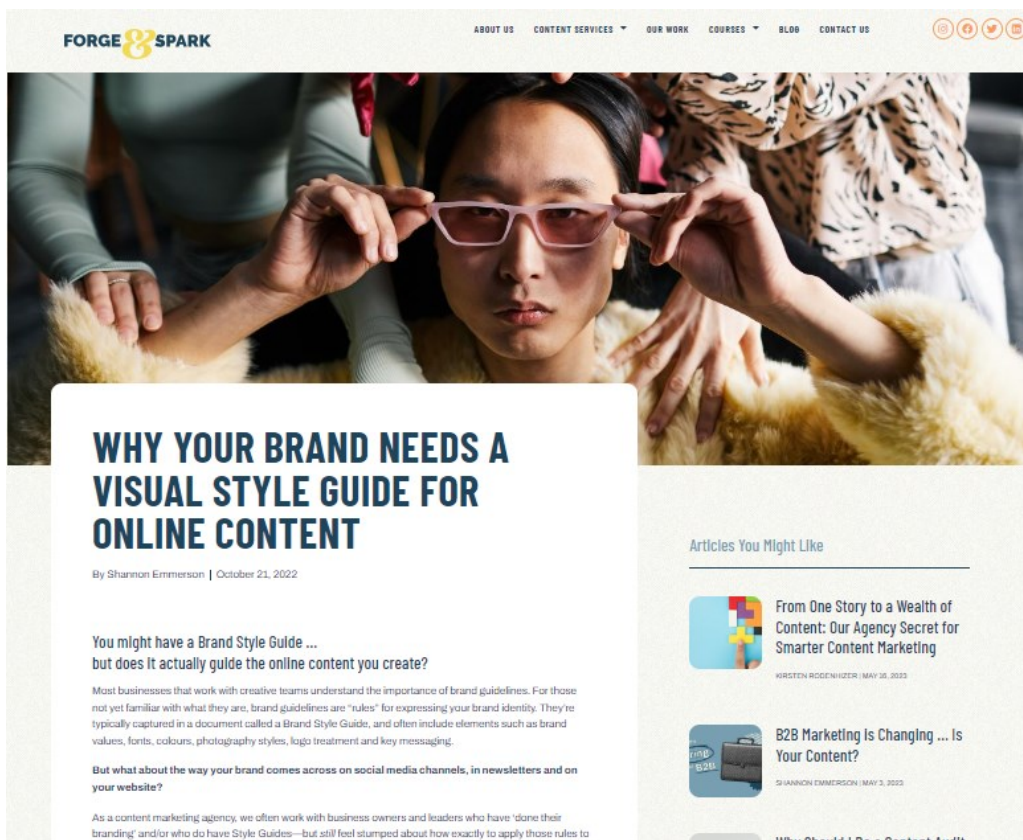


Figure 20. Blog post “Why Your Brand Needs a Visual Style Guide for Online Content” with lead magnet “8 Beautiful Brand Design Style Examples” and call to action to sign up for the BOBD course. (Source: Forge and Spark website)



Welcome, Zohra!

I'm excited to show you how you can create more beautiful, consistent visual branding for your business or organization—starting with these eight truly beautiful examples of Brand Design Styles, which I've gathered over several years.

As a Creative Director for a content agency, I know that creating the right design style for your brand is a key part of ensuring that your brand shows up in all the right ways, across a range of channels and in all of your online content.

So don't dally! Get inspired NOW with an eye to choosing the style that's perfect for you..

Grab your download here: [8 Beautiful Brand Design Style Examples](#)



And if you're interested in diving deeper on design with me, please feel free to

Figure 21. Email when you sign up for the lead magnet “8 Beautiful Brand Design Style Examples”. (Source: Forge and Spark)

A FAST-TRACK GUIDE TO DEFINING YOUR BRAND MISSION, CORE VALUES, & VISUAL PERSONALITY

By Shannon Emmerson | November 1, 2022

Visuals mean EVERYTHING on social media. But before you can design the right brand visuals, you need to ensure that your visuals are telling the right brand story.

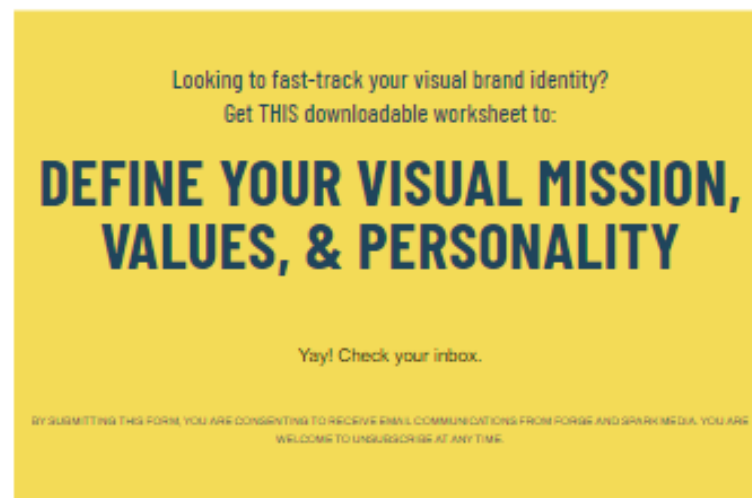
At Forge & Spark Media, we have a proven process for guiding purpose-driven brands and organizations through identifying their brand stories, and crafting the right content marketing and social media strategies.

We're not gonna sugarcoat it: the process can take months to get right.

But we also know a few shortcuts to get you started. We're happy to share these with you here so that you can get to work on crafting the right look and feel for your online brand.

We've designed this post to get you thinking about the foundations for your visual brand—and your brand communications in general. It's an excellent primer for [our Better Online Brand Design course, in which you'll learn EXACTLY how to create a Style Guide in Canva to Ensure Killer, consistent visual branding for your business.](#)

Sounds good? Let's go!



Looking to fast-track your visual brand identity?
Get THIS downloadable worksheet to:

DEFINE YOUR VISUAL MISSION, VALUES, & PERSONALITY

Yay! Check your inbox.

BY SUBMITTING THIS FORM, YOU ARE CONSENTING TO RECEIVE EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS FROM FORGE AND SPARK MEDIA. YOU ARE WELCOME TO UNSUBSCRIBE AT ANY TIME.

Your Brand Mission Statement

Before you can create a strong visual brand, you must be able to clearly define—both for yourself and for

Figure 22. Blog post “A Fast-track Guide to Defining Your Brand mission, Core values, & Visual personality” sharing downloadable worksheet and promoting BOBD course sign up. (Source: Forge and Spark website)

4.2.2. Social media

For BOBD, Forge and Spark paid particular attention to social media and created an extensive content batch (story package, a term used by F&S) to support and promote the course. The social posts were marketed on their Instagram Figure 23 and Figure 24, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts. Some posts were also paid ads Figure 27. Forge and Spark also created captivating reels Figure 25 and Figure 26 for BOBD course to capture audience attention.

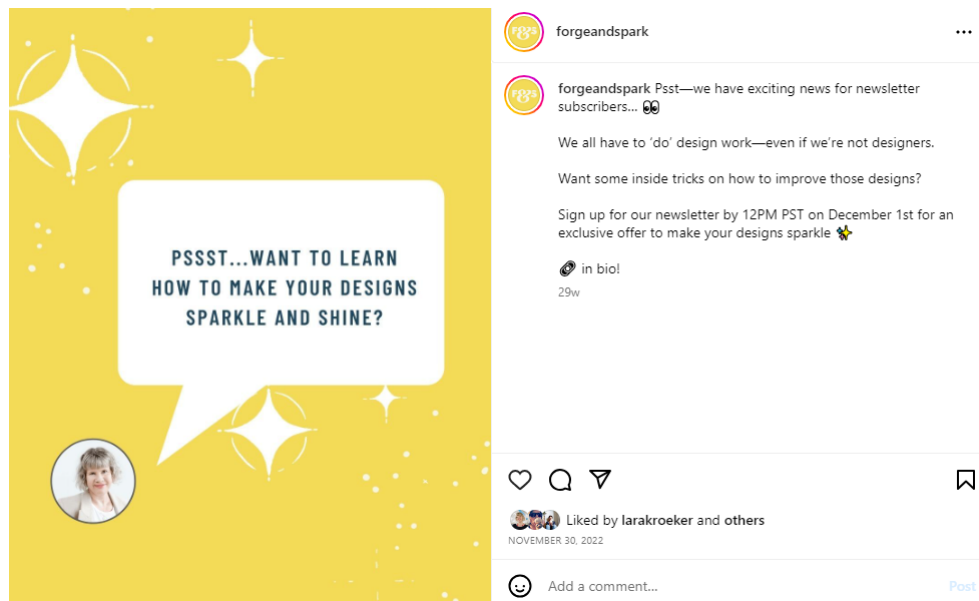


Figure 23. Pre-Launch teaser post for BOBD course (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram Page)

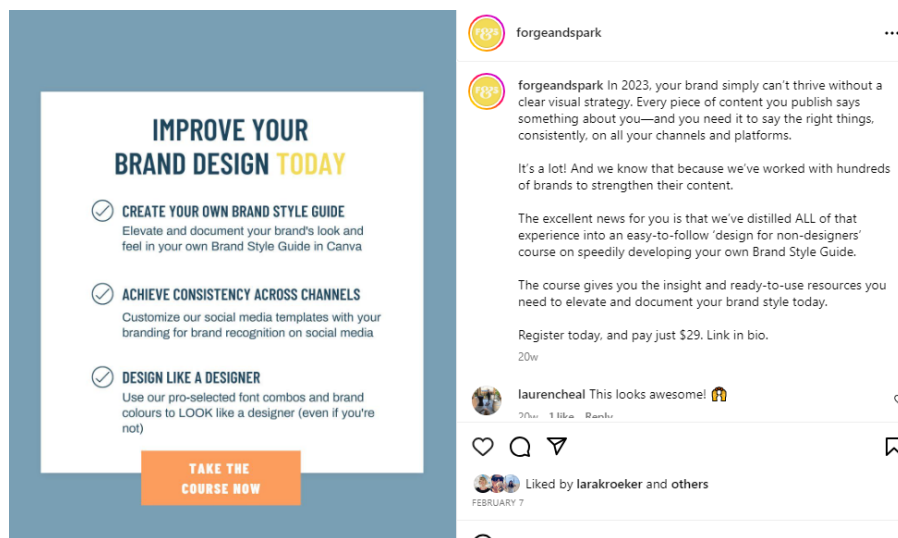


Figure 24. Social post for BOBD course highlighting features of the course. (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram Page)

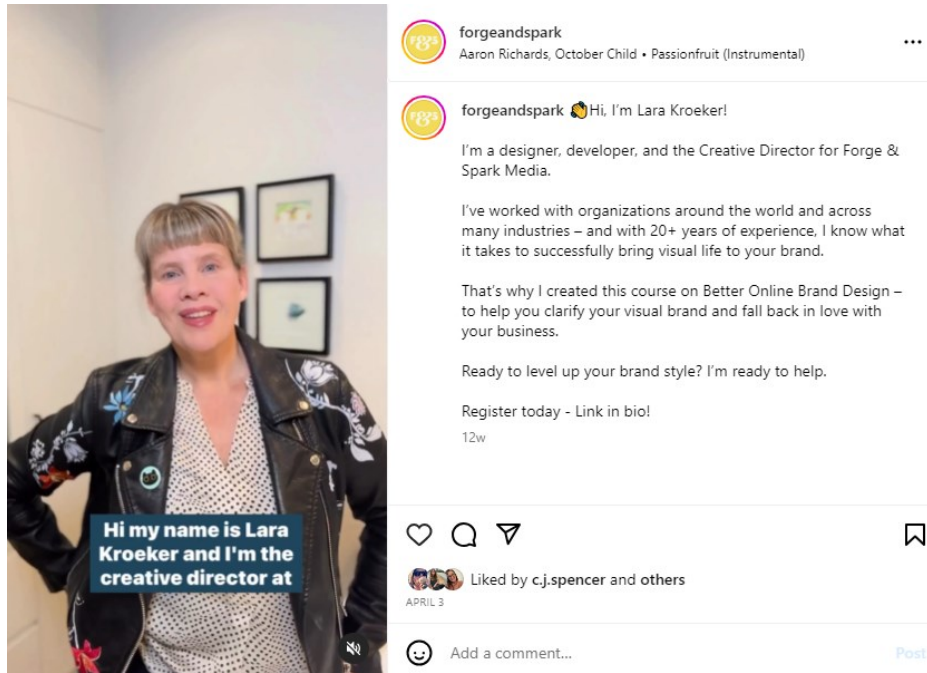


Figure 25. Reel created to introduce Kroeker, course instructor for “Better Online Brand Design”. (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram page)

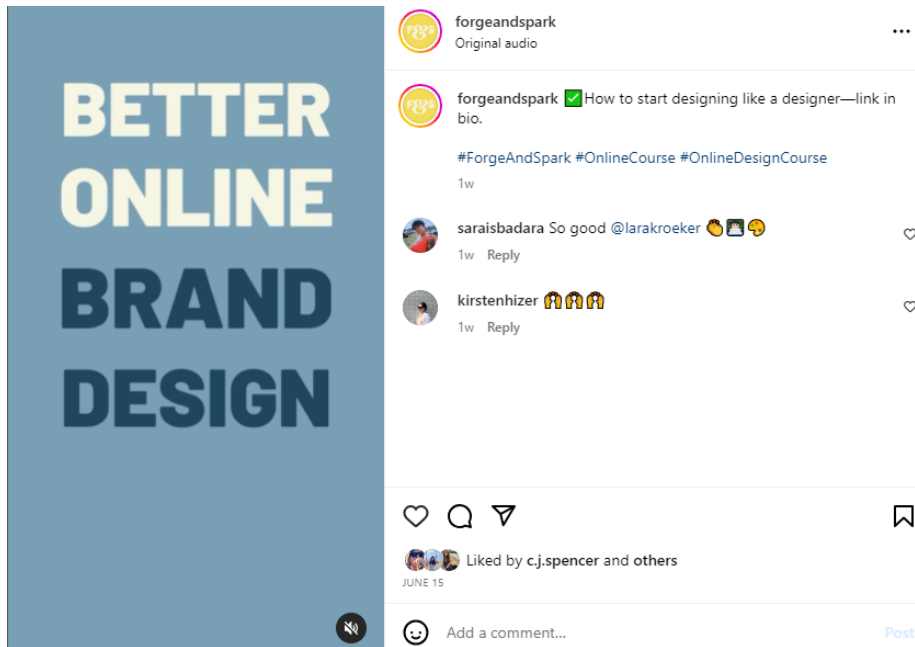


Figure 26. Reel created for BOBD course. (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram page.)

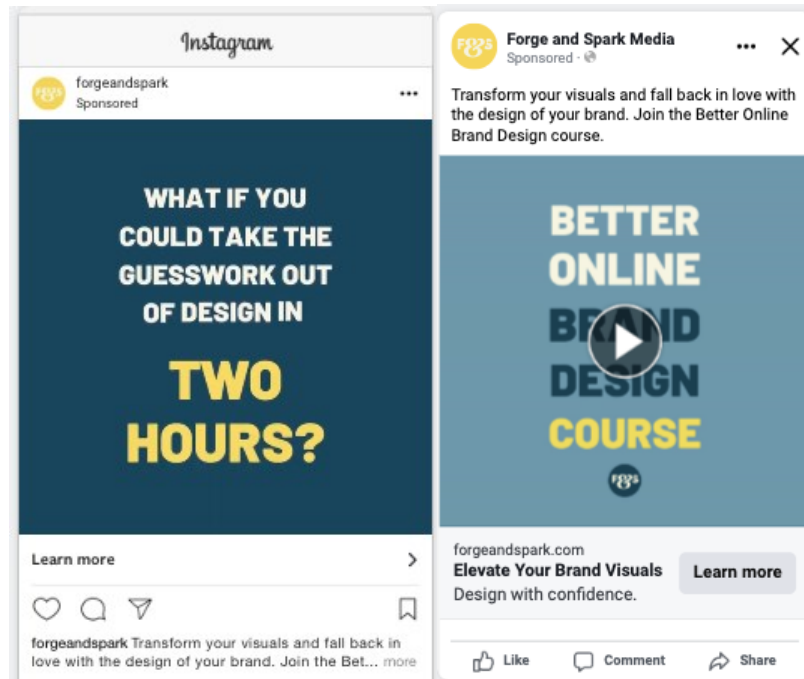


Figure 27. On left Instagram ad. On right Facebook ad (Source: Forge and Spark Instagram and Facebook account)

4.2.3. Forge and Spark newsletter

Forge and Spark seized the opportunity to reach a wider audience by leveraging F&S newsletters Figure 28 to promote their course. Recognizing the enduring effectiveness of newsletters as a valuable marketing tool, Forge and Spark have made a commitment to consistently utilize this channel for the promotion of their forthcoming courses.



Picture this: your team needs to publish a new sales landing page *and* prepare all of your social content for the week. Where do you typically start: with copy ... or design?

Interestingly, [Hubspot](#) found that—when designing landing pages—it's best to lead with copy. The thinking is simply that you can't design a conversion-focused page until you know what it's going to say. Our agency experience supports this. So for landing pages, for us, a copy-first strategy [works](#).

But social media is *very* different—channels like Instagram and TikTok, for

Figure 28. Recent FS newsletter promoting BOBD course. (Source: Forge and Spark)

To recap, Forge and Spark did a much more effective, diversified, and tailored marketing strategy for “Better Online Brand Design” than their first course, “Better Messaging, Better Results”. This concept stems from the fact that the online course process is iterative. With every new course launched, they are getting better at gauging their audience and tailoring their go-to-market plan accordingly.

This chapter highlighted the Go-to-Market plans for Forge and Spark's online courses, providing insights into their strategies for promoting the "Better Messaging Better Results" and "Better Online Brand Design" courses. The chapter explored various tactics, such as live webinars, email marketing, social media promotions, and newsletters, showcasing Forge and Spark's adaptability and growth in reaching their target audience. By refining their approaches and tailoring their strategies, they have established a strong foundation for success in the online education landscape. The next chapter features some recommendations for their online courses.

Chapter 5. Forging Ahead

5.1. Insights and lessons from Forge and Spark's course launch

In launching online courses at Forge and Spark, Emmerson has gleaned valuable insights that have significantly shaped their approach and yielded promising results. On a more specific level, with "Better Messaging, Better Results" F&S did not reach their sales goals for the course. However, they did see several leads, which led to service sales due to promoting and talking about the course, which allowed them to recoup their initial investment.

For "Better Online Brand Design", F&S lowered their sales goals -- in line with their learning -- and are treating the marketing much more as a way of sharing our thought leadership on visual content development and developing awareness that they are good at that work than about generating course sales. Anecdotally, F&S has noticed that in their sales calls with potential clients, many more people are asking about Style Guides and Visual Design Systems, indicating that they're seeing their advertising and content about the BOBD course.

On a more general level, two key lessons have emerged from this endeavor. First and foremost, Emmerson has recognized that developing online courses is time-consuming and challenging. It presented a significant learning curve, even for someone with a teaching and adjunct professorship background. Designing an online course necessitates a unique skill set. Additionally, as a content marketing agency, marketing a course differs significantly from promoting a business or product. This educational journey has enriched their knowledge and capabilities.

Secondly, while they have yet to witness an immediate influx of 'passive income' from selling these courses, a different, equally valuable trend has emerged. Their course offerings have become potent marketing tools, showcasing their expertise in critical areas, such as messaging and visual content. This strategic positioning has attracted promising leads and, in some cases, new clients. Witnessing the impact of positioning themselves as experts in these domains is reassuring.

Furthermore, launching a course is just the beginning. It's essential to maintain its relevance and continually market it. For example, Emmerson is currently refreshing the "Better Messaging, Better Results" course while working on a book titled "Content with Purpose: Marketing and Messaging for Real People." The synergy between the course and the book presents an opportunity to cross-promote and reinforce the knowledge they offer. F&S is excited about this journey and its potential for their educational offerings and agency.

5.2. Key recommendations

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, online learning is subject to change. As the dynamics of this field continue to transform, an ongoing imperative arises to enhance existing processes. This chapter delves into several key recommendations to empower Forge and Spark to expand their reach and better connect with a broader audience through their online course offerings. By implementing these suggestions, Forge and Spark can embrace the ever-changing nature of online education and position themselves for continued growth and success.

5.2.1. Prioritizing the needs of learners

Undoubtedly, Forge and Spark have demonstrated their prowess in crafting compelling content. However, when it comes to online courses, it is crucial to address prospective learners' immediate needs and expectations within the first few seconds. Therefore, a key recommendation is to prioritize and prominently feature the benefits and learning outcomes of the course on the landing page. By bringing this essential information to the forefront, Forge and Spark can effectively cater to the desires of their audience and ensure a more engaging and informative initial experience for potential learners.

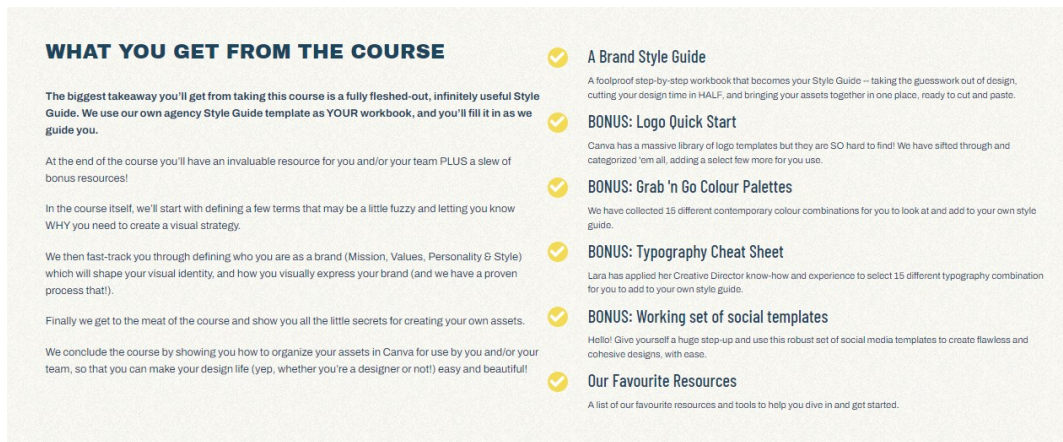


Figure 29. Landing page of BOBD. Recommendation to bring key takeaways to the top of landing page. (Source: Forge and Spark website)

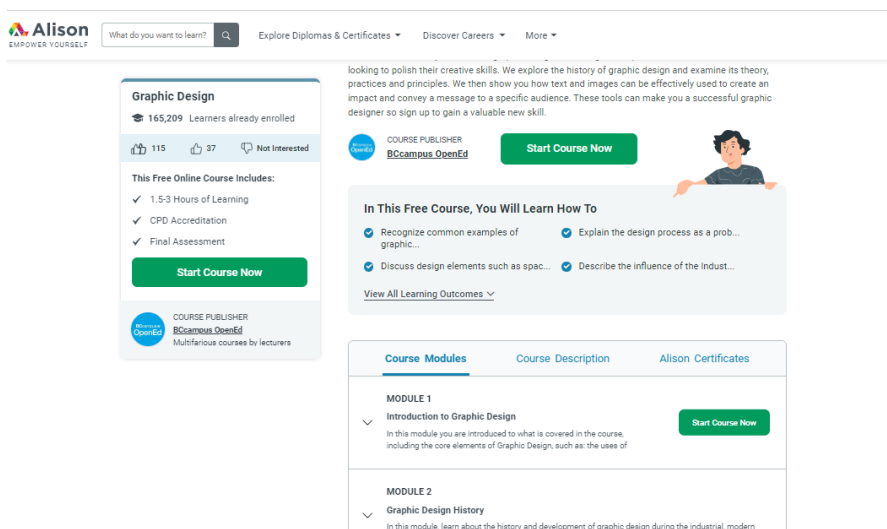


Figure 30. An example of showing how course modules is shown on top of the page. (Source: Alison website)

5.2.2. Expanding reach through partnerships

A partnership between Forge and Spark and Simon Fraser University's publishing department (MPUB) can benefit both parties significantly. By collaborating, Forge and Spark can reach a relevant audience of MPUB students who can benefit from their online courses. It is worth noting that Emerson, the founder of Forge and Spark, has prior experience teaching in the MPUB program, which adds credibility to the

partnership. The courses offered by Forge and Spark can serve as valuable resources for MPUB students, complementing their curriculum and enhancing their skills.

Moreover, this partnership opens other opportunities for collaboration within SFU, such as offering these courses as micro-credentials for alumni. By exploring these avenues, Forge and Spark can explore joint initiatives and offer certification or accreditation for completing their courses. This type of collaboration strengthens the ties between the academic institution and the online platform, benefiting both parties and expanding their reach.

5.2.3. Enhancing online course promotion through video testimonials

Harnessing testimonials' power can significantly enhance online courses' marketing strategy, instilling trust, and credibility. While the F&S website currently features text-based testimonials from previous course takers, it is worth considering the impact of video testimonials, especially in social media marketing, where videos are paramount for driving reach and engagement. By incorporating video testimonials, Forge and Spark can effectively capture the attention of potential learners, presenting them with authentic experiences and compelling narratives that resonate on a deeper level. This dynamic approach to showcasing the success stories and positive feedback of course-takers can amplify promotional efforts, garnering greater interest and boosting enrollment for Forge and Spark's online courses.

5.2.4. Exploring subscription models

Forge and Spark can significantly enhance their online learning strategy by implementing a subscription model that grants participants access to all their courses. By using a subscription, learners can enjoy a comprehensive and continuous learning experience, exploring various topics and skills covered in various courses. This approach adds value for participants, providing a cost-effective way to access multiple courses, fostering a sense of community and loyalty, and encouraging ongoing engagement and commitment to their learning journey. The subscription model presents an opportunity for Forge and Spark to build a sustainable revenue stream, which can be reinvested into course development, ensuring continuous improvement and innovation. Furthermore, gathering valuable data and insights from subscribers enables

personalized recommendations and targeted marketing, refining course content to meet learners' needs better and staying ahead in the competitive online learning market.

F&S is already exploring this model, and they want to develop at least three courses to offer users a membership to access all courses, plus any new courses that F&S will develop in the future.

5.2.5. Influencer marketing

Leveraging Influencer Marketing can be a powerful strategy for promoting online courses. With 1 in 4 marketers already utilizing influencers and a substantial 72% of Gen Z and Millennials following influencers on social media, there is immense potential for Forge and Spark to tap into this trend (Consult 2019). Specifically, partnering with nano influencers, who typically have less than 1000 followers but possess a dedicated and engaged niche community, can be beneficial.

Nano influencers are known for their exceptional engagement rates, as they have nurtured a loyal and closely connected following. Finding and identifying the right influencer can be time-consuming initially; however, in a long time, they can be much more effective in conversions. There are platforms such as Meltwater which can help in finding the right influencers. Moreover, collaborating with nano influencers proves to be budget-friendly, making it an attractive option for Forge and Spark. Forge and Spark can cultivate a devoted community around their online courses by strategically partnering with nano influencers, even with limited resources.

5.2.6. Leveraging AI to save time and increase productivity

Forge and Spark is already dabbling and experimenting with AI. One key observation by Forge and Spark during the creation of online courses was that it takes time and effort. The utilization of AI in course creation and development has the potential to bring about significant efficiencies. For instance, AI can be used to get content ideas, content creation, design and outline courses, scripts, and any other things required during the course design and creation.

This chapter offered critical recommendations for Forge and Spark to thrive in the dynamic online learning landscape. Prioritizing learners' needs, forming strategic

partnerships, and utilizing video testimonials can boost course promotion and credibility. Implementing a subscription model expands their reach, while influencer marketing with nano influencers fosters community engagement. Leveraging AI technology enhances course creation efficiency. By adopting these strategies, Forge and Spark can ensure continued growth and success in the online education industry.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In an era of rapid change, the business landscape is transforming. Technological advancements and the internet were already revolutionizing traditional business practices, and the pandemic further accelerated this process. As businesses adapted to the online realm, new avenues for income generation emerged, prompting brands to explore these opportunities.

Forge and Spark, recognizing the changing dynamics, launched ‘Better Messaging Better Results’ and “Better Online Brand Design” online courses to leverage their expertise to generate passive revenue, increase F&S brand awareness, and transition towards product-based services.

Regarding revenue, F&S faced challenges with “Better Messaging Better Results”. However, it increased brand awareness for Forge and Spark. The process of developing online courses is an iterative one, demanding constant adaptation and improvement. Drawing insights from the launch of first course “Better Messaging Better Results” F&S did a robust go-to-market, which is consistent and comprehensive. At the time of writing this report, the go-to-market plan for F&S second course “Better Online Brand Design” is ongoing and it is in its early stages to determine any conclusions.

Developing online courses is iterative, demanding continuous adaptation and improvement. Forge and Spark’s approach to their courses reflects an understanding of this cycle. While progress is evident, achieving success in this field is a long-term commitment. Establishing a distinct market presence requires patience and sustained effort. Beyond delivering quality content, it involves creating a unique niche that resonates with learners. This process of building credibility and trust takes time. The landscape of online education is ever-changing, demanding constant adjustment. Forge and Spark’s dedication to adaptation aligns well with this reality.

While F&S is moving in the right direction, building a brand in education takes persistent dedication and a long-term vision. Though immediate results might not be seen, commitment to refining their approach can pave the way for lasting success in online learning.

The purpose of this report was to document the process of launching online courses and its go-to-market plan. The report also offers recommendation on how to promote them in the future. While the recommendations are not exhaustive, they are a starting point for Forge and Spark to leverage and refine their approach in future courses.

In conclusion, the ever-evolving business landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. Forge and Spark's foray into online courses demonstrates their adaptability and willingness to embrace these changes. By consistently improving their offerings and employing effective promotional strategies, Forge and Spark can position themselves for long-term success in the dynamic world of online education.

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Appendix A. Active Campaign Email Marketing Flow of “ Better Messaging, Better Results” course

