



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONTENT MARKETING

Can You Help with Expert Content Marketing?

Meet Joe. Although Joe works in your industry, he is not currently in the market for your product. He is, however, looking for a solution to a problem. He could really use some expertise from a reliable, knowledgeable source such as yourself. Is it worth your time to talk to Joe? You bet. In fact, you might want to offer Joe a refreshing beverage while you engage him in an entertaining and informative discussion about ways to solve that problem! By establishing yourself as an expert in a personable and interesting way, you've formed a relationship with Joe. Not only is he likely to view your company/brand favorably, but when he *is* in the market for your product, you'll probably be the first person he calls. This is the idea behind content marketing—a fast-growing and highly effective marketing strategy that can build your business and improve ROI.



"I'm Not Here to Sell You Anything"

Content marketing, also referred to as "inbound marketing," is the creation and use of relevant and compelling content to attract and convert leads, gain awareness, and build loyalty. It can also be described as the art of communicating with customers and prospects without explicitly selling. Now it might be as foreign for a marketer to create messages without a sales pitch as it is for a politician to give a straight answer, but trust us—80% of business decision-makers prefer to get information from articles versus advertisements. In addition, 70% say content marketing helps them feel closer to the sponsoring company, and 60% say company content helps them make better product decisions.¹



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In fact, over the past five years, research shows that decision-makers increasingly prefer customized educational information from a company (i.e., articles, videos, white papers, webinars, etc.) over ads. It makes perfect sense. The average person is inundated with more than 2,900 marketing messages per day, which is impossible to process in a meaningful way. Information overload can be downright annoying, especially when it comes in the form of a blaring commercial during your favorite television show or a pop-up ad in the middle of your search results. Enough already!

Meanwhile, effective content marketing is not viewed as an interruption or intrusion. When done right, customers actually look forward to your messages. And now for the best part—for B2B marketers, who typically rely on their expertise to win customers, content marketing is a perfect fit. B2B marketers have proprietary ideas, systems, and technologies that provide an excellent source of content. Unlike the Cokes and Nikes of the world (seriously, how much information do you need about soda or athletic shoes?), you probably need to spend a good deal of time educating your customers before they make a substantial investment in your product. In the past, this may have been done with stacks of glossy brochures and a series of lengthy sales meetings. Today, effective B2B marketers are starting the dialogue earlier and using more avenues to reach customers with content that is important to them. Within the realm of marketing, content is the asset that sets companies apart and breaks through the clutter.

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A report by the Content Marketing Institute shows:

- 90% of B2B marketers consider content key to their marketing mix.
- On average, content marketers use eight different tactics (e.g., social media, eNewsletters, case studies, blogs, white papers, events, surveys, webinars/webcasts, and videos).
- 89% of manufacturers use content marketing to generate brand awareness, while 85% stated sales as a goal.
- Most manufacturers (91%) used LinkedIn to distribute their content.



Start with the Customer

While many companies are jumping on the content marketing bandwagon, not all of them are playing the right tune. Like all successful marketing tactics, companies should develop an overall plan for content marketing. In fact, a 2014 report by the Content Marketing Institute found that B2B marketers who have a documented strategy are more effective and less challenged with every aspect of content marketing.² As you know, today's self-empowered buyers are more likely to reach out to companies for information, but they don't want to be bombarded by an endless stream of messages. They expect companies to know precisely when and how to reach them. Therefore, a good place to begin is by researching your target audience and creating buyer personas. In addition to the basics, you should consider:

- What guides your customers' purchasing decisions?
- What problems do your customers' encounter and how can you help solve them?
- When conducting a search, what keywords do your potential buyers typically use? (You want your content to be the answer to the question that your audience is asking.)
- What type of content do your customers like best? What makes them stop, click, and consume?

Remember, the goal here is to deliver information that answers questions, solves problems, inspires, or makes your buyers more knowledgeable. For instance, a tile supplier might feature how-to videos on efficiently installing different types of tile, positioning themselves as a helpful company who is concerned about creating good outcomes for their clients. When combined with "free advice from a pro" and innovative design ideas, this company can establish strong relationships with its customers and become the "go to" source of information and products.

Of course, you can provide too much of a good thing. Content that is delivered too frequently or is simply a rehash of old information runs the risk of alienating customers. This brings us back to having an overall plan. It's important to determine frequency, content variety, and the media you will use to deliver your content upfront. If this seems daunting, you're not alone. When we start working with clients, we often find that marketing professionals who handle paid advertising, marketing collateral, direct mail, and several trade shows a year are challenged by developing content calendars that integrate multiple client personas and stages in the customers' buying journeys, not to mention analyzing customer response to the ongoing outreach. If you can relate to these challenges, an outside content agency may your best bet.



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Another consideration is using marketing automation, which allows companies to develop nurturing or drip campaigns that target leads and then move those leads down their funnel toward purchasing decisions. Strategic content planning identifies appropriate content resources at each stage of a buyer's journey, and customer responses to messaging are then used to determine which content is resonating best. Just as importantly, marketing automation can help determine KPIs and monitor analytics, allowing you to review results and retool efforts, if necessary. In other words, it can help you deliver the right message at the right time, determining what content has the most impact on lead generation, conversion rates, and closed sales.

When it comes to content, don't fall into a formulaic rut. It's easy to publish a regular stream of 400-word blog articles on industry-related topics, but with this strategy, customer interaction may be nonexistent due to boredom. A well-planned content strategy not only takes into account customer personas and their buying journey, but it's also designed to attract interest. By offering variety in style, length, and format, as well as interactive content such as surveys, you can keep content fresh and unexpected. Content should also be mobile-optimized for viewing on multiple devices.

A Little Fish in a Big Pond

Content marketing is a great way to make a big impact with a small budget, which is exactly what a start-up software company recently did. The company, which we'll call New Software, had a great product and a team of very smart people (hello, intellectual property!). However, in a market of software giants with huge marketing budgets, New Software was struggling to garner attention. Working with an agency, they developed a strong brand identity and, from there,

began disseminating messages supporting that image. Next, they started publishing informative and entertaining white papers on common computer issues. Using these white papers as a foundation, New Software also produced webinars with a unique style that became easily identifiable. In addition, visitors to their website could easily view a variety of customer testimonials. As their following of readers/viewers grew, so did their market share. Eventually, they hired a content marketing specialist to focus on developing fresh content, manage media, and monitor customer interaction. New Software is still a little fish in a big pond, but they are no longer worried about being devoured! In fact, they have settled into a successful niche without any traditional advertising.

SEO, ROI, and RRR

Our apologies for tossing around more acronyms than a government agency, but we can't complete a discussion of content marketing without three important elements. First, delivering quality content can have a positive effect on search engine optimization (SEO). Search engines, such as Google, want their searchers to be able to easily locate valuable content on their search topic. As a result, Google rewards providers of fresh, quality content with a higher search engine ranking than companies that have little or unoriginal content, and they penalize companies that have too much repetitive content. By combining your interesting, relevant content with carefully selected key words, you have a formula for better search results for your website. In fact, Marketing Sherpa ranked content creation as the single most effective SEO technique. Unquestionably, a solid content strategy can really impact website traffic, as well as keep a new lead engaged on your site.

Of course, as with any marketing endeavor, it all comes down to return on investment (ROI). Happily, content marketing costs 62% less, on average, than traditional marketing. What's more, for every dollar spent, content marketing generates approximately three times as many leads as traditional marketing.³ And because quality content can be "repurposed" in several formats, you definitely get some bang for your buck! However, it's not just smaller companies like our friends at New Software taking advantage of this improved ROI; marketing giant Kraft estimates that it generates an ROI four times higher through content marketing than it does with targeted advertising (*AdAge*, 2014).

Finally, we offer our own acronym to keep in mind as you develop your content marketing strategy—effective content marketing delivers the **right** messages to the **right** audience through the **right** media mix (RRR). It all begins and ends with customer relationships. Developing a successful content marketing strategy starts with knowing your customers and what they want, and then nurturing that relationship throughout the buying process with consistent, engaging quality content and then listening to what your customers have to say. Of course, offering a refreshing beverage couldn't hurt.

Sources

¹ Roper Public Affairs Survey, 2013

² *2014 B2B Content Marketing Research: Strategy Is Key to Effectiveness*, B2B Content Marketing: 2014 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute and Brightcove.

³ Demand Metric, 2013

Other Sources

B2B Marketing: Why Content Is the New Creative, DeSantis Breindel, 2010.

Building a Content Strategy to Improve ROI, Spry Ideas, 2015.