



CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY – HOW TO CREATE A HIGH IMPACT CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT »

Content marketing is everywhere. As the web and social media have become integral parts of all of our lives, large and small companies are using content to build engagement with both current and potential customers.

Developing great content is one of the most important aspects of marketing. Providing excellent and relevant content to potential buyers establishes you as an expert and authority, and it helps engage potential customers throughout the buying cycle. This creates brand loyalty, improves retention, focuses attention, and generates leads. Engaging new and existing customers by educating them is a great way to build relationships, and it helps you become a thought leader and industry expert.

It is important that your content: answers the right questions, provides something of value for everyone who needs it, and can make a difference for the organization.

Consumer products companies as different as Kraft Foods and Lego have been using content marketing for years to engage with customers, build their brands, and grow sales. Kraft started with recipe books and evolved into sophisticated websites and apps to help their loyal customers understand how to use food products such as Velveeta cheese, Cool Whip and Jell-o in new and innovative ways. In the toy category, Lego has a Lego Club which produces a beautiful monthly magazine for Lego fans and their parents. They also produce videos, games, and other content to make sure they are top-of-mind for their customers for every birthday or holiday.

B2B-focused organizations are also producing and promoting a large variety of content. Companies that sell to business buyers produce videos, white papers, articles, info graphics, e-books, and more in order to engage potential customers at many points in the buying process.

Incredibly, 86% of marketers are using content marketing today. A recent Content Marketing Institute surveys show that the most popular types of B2B content are social media content, articles on a website, newsletters, blogs, events, case studies, and videos. B2C organizations are using slightly fewer types of content, but are still very active and use almost the same top seven types of content.

Today there is more content being produced in more formats than ever, with an average marketer using 12 different tactics. Out of that range of different tactics, about 8% are using only a small handful. 38% of marketers are using up to 9 different tactics, but 11% of are using over 20 different tactics in their content marketing programs.

From Tactics to Strategy

Many organizations just create a bunch of content, but it's important to move from just creating content to leveraging it as part of an integrated strategy. This content marketing strategy will include designing the right content based on the needs of your audience, creating a manageable content program calendar, and promoting all your content using social media and digital advertising in order to drive traffic, leads, and sales. Your strategy should also include ways to measure the results of your content marketing program so you can clearly demonstrate to the organization how you're making an impact.

Does your content develop goals, and reach your intended audience? Are you leveraging your content properly?

How effective is your own Content Marketing program? It's interesting that very few marketers feel that they are being effective in this area. According to one study, only about 7% of marketers rated themselves as very effective and 25% said they were somewhat effective. This means that only 32% of marketers felt like they are really doing a great job with content marketing, and most marketers thinking they're mediocre at best.

Once you implement the program described in this chapter, I hope you will feel that you have created a world-class content marketing program that's directly tied to your organization's marketing strategy. You will learn how to create the right content and develop the metrics that show that it's effective so that you can be confident that you are making a positive impact on your organization.

Six Step Content Marketing Strategy

In this chapter, I'll give you six steps to building a comprehensive content marketing strategy.

The first step is for you to identify your content marketing goals, determine what you are trying to accomplish, and define the business benefits that you're trying to achieve. In this step, you will also create the metrics you need to understand the impact you are making.

The second step is to review your website analytics, your competitors' websites, and the content you already have through a comprehensive content audit.

The third step is to understand your buyer's journey and the process they go through to identify what they want to buy and who they want to buy it from.

The fourth step is to create personas for the market segments you want to address using market segmentation techniques to figure out who your best customer is and how you can speak to their needs directly. To create personas, you will need to understand your ideal customer, how they make buying decisions, the questions they ask, and the content they need.

Once we have that base in place, **the fifth step is to create an editorial calendar** so that you have a solid plan in place to create the content for your program. This will include creating a specific plan for who's going to write or create the content you need for your program.

The sixth and final step is leveraging your content for results. This includes building your brand, engaging with your customers, getting leads, and ultimately growing sales. You'll learn about how to use all of your content for SEO, digital advertising, e-mail, and a number of other programs.

Step I: Content Marketing Goals

Are you using your content for lead generation, thought leadership, brand awareness, or generating website traffic and keyword visibility?

There are many things you can accomplish with your content marketing program, and it's important to focus on the right goals for your organization. According to one study, one of the most popular goals for content marketing programs is **lead generation**. If your organization markets and sells to other businesses, you're most likely going to be using your content to drive leads.

Another important goal for most content marketing programs is **thought leadership**, which is establishing your company as a leader and educating the market. The third most popular goal is **brand awareness**, which involves breaking through the clutter to build your brand and grow the overall reputation of your

organization. Other goals you may consider could include **nurturing your leads, driving sales, and building website traffic.**

After you've determined your overall goals, you'll need to turn each general goal into specific metrics that you can measure and your content marketing strategy can accomplish. In a recent survey, when marketers were asked about their most important metrics, the answered that they use website traffic, sales increases, social media sharing metrics and time spent on the website to measure success.

If you want to increase SEO visibility, you should set goals for specific keyword visibility and for increasing organic SEO traffic. If you want to increase social media engagement, you should set goals for how many followers or fans you want. It's important to be as specific as possible about how you want to make a difference. As you plan your social media content marketing goals, you should first create a benchmark to see how much traffic is coming to your website now from social media so that you can plan your improvements.

If you want to increase the effectiveness of your digital advertising program, consider what you want your new conversion rates to be or how many leads you want, or how you want to change the cost per lead. If your goal is to improve your email program, you may want to increase your email click through rates, open rates, or conversion rates.

There are so many goals that you can focus on, that it's best to get specific and create targets for yourself in each of these areas, so that you can demonstrate to the business that content marketing is having an impact.

Analytics Tools

In order to measure your success, you'll need to install and use the right tools. Google Analytics is one excellent tool to help you understand the traffic that's coming to your website and the source of that traffic.

Without analytics, your digital marketing programs will not be able to be assessed, monitored, and improved.

Google Webmaster tools are another way to see your website the way that Google sees your website. Among many other things, it shows your keyword visibility so that you can see the impact of your content marketing program on SEO.

Social Media management tools like Hootsuite and Spout Social can also be helpful to let you understand how your content marketing program is impacting social media followers and engagement.

Step 2: Analysis

Before you create a solid content marketing strategy, you have to do your homework and determine what you know, what you have, and what you need. To get started, you should start with a content audit to understand the content assets you already have in your organization.

As part of your content assessment, remember to review your Google Analytics or your other analytics tools and see what content is the most popular and effective, what gets the most mentions and retweets in social media, and even what content gets shared and liked in your industry.

Don't rush your content development, think about the personas that your content will reach and what you'd like to accomplish by reaching them.

You may have been producing articles, white papers, or video for years, but you may not feel like your content is high enough quality, or that it is addressing all the different market segments that you need to communicate to. As you do a content inventory, remember to rate the quality of your content and determine how it can fit into your plan.

Next, look at your competitors. What content do they have? Do they have more than you or less? Are you playing catch up, or do you have an opportunity to go way beyond them in terms of your content marketing program? When you look at your competitors, try to understand the topics that are important to them and the types of media are they using.

While you're looking at all this data, don't forget to talk to your customers and your salespeople. Often, your salespeople can tell you a lot about what they're hearing, and what they're learning

from customers and prospects about the content, issues, and media.

Next, start to review industry research and look at the topics that are most important to industry analysts. Often, they have their finger on the heartbeat of new topics that can be important as you put your plan together.

Once you've done your homework and understand the topics that might be part of your content marketing plan, you need to look internally at your own team to assess the skills you have internally to create new content. Do you have great writers on staff? Do you have a video department? Do you have great people that can produce graphics and infographics? If you don't have internal resources, you may need to find vendors or contractors to help you create all of the content you want as part of your plan.

Step 3: The Buyer's Journey

Make sure your content can reach your audience in all stages of their buying process.

As you build your content marketing plan, you will quickly realize that the content you need for a buyer who is early in the buying process is very different than the content you need for buyers who are about to make a purchase. If you want to create content that matters, you'll need to create content for your customers and prospects throughout the entire buyer's journey. In most complex purchasing decisions, buyers often go through an awareness phase, an evaluation phase, and a purchase phase.

To understand your buyer's journey, look at your own marketplace and ask yourself how your buyers make decisions. In every market and in every industry, this is going to be a little bit different. In general, a buyer starts his or her journey by identifying an issue or problem that they're having. Then they start researching potential solutions to the problem. From there, they start evaluating products and then potential vendors. Finally they study alternative products and vendors so that they can finally make a decision. Along the way, they come up with a list of decision criteria that will help them make a decision.

Let me give you two examples of how this works in different situations. One type of client we often work with is universities. When high school students and their parents make a buying decision for a 4-year college, they start by going through a process to try to figure out where they want to go to school and what are they interested in studying. Then they start reviewing schools and reading material from specific schools. They might also look at U.S. News & World Report or other articles that show school rankings. From there, they might look at potential schools in their area, talk to friends, and explore social media. They may also start looking at school websites and start talking to people at certain schools before they start narrowing down their list.

During this time they will develop decision criteria that will help them sort out their options as they visit different schools. Finally, the student actually applies to a school, and then they make a decision once they get accepted. It's a very long, complicated process and the buyers consume a lot of information along the way.

Let's contrast this with a business to business example in a large company. If you're an IT buyer, let's say you're a director of IT, you might identify a problem where you don't have the right disaster recovery capabilities within your organization, and so you go through a very different process.

You start by identifying the problem: "What if there is a fire in my data center? What do I do?" Then you start researching solutions. You might look at what analysts are saying. You might read white papers. You might read examples of how other people solved this problem by asking questions on social media. In addition, you might also go to an event or conference to learn more.

While you are learning about options, studying alternatives, and talking to vendors, you will also be building a set of decision criteria to help you choose the best solution. Once you finish your research, you will start evaluating vendors and products and finally make a purchase decision.

These are just two examples, and for your industry, there may be a totally different type of buying process. You must consider what your buyers are actually doing to make buying decisions in order to create the content they need across the entire buying process.

From these two examples, I'm sure you can see the importance of having content early in the buying cycle. If your content can influence the buyer's key purchase criteria in your favor early in the process, then you will have a much stronger chance of winning them later. Also, if you are not part of the consideration set early in the process, you may never be considered for the purchase.

Align Content to the Buying Process

In B2B organizations, content like white papers, articles, and webinars fit well in the awareness phase. They help people understand the problem, come up with potential solutions, and think about how to address the situation.

In the evaluation phase, people are more interested in case studies and social media content to help them understand how other people actually solve their problems with a particular product. They also look at product information and company information to understand who makes the best products or delivers the best services.

In the purchase phase, they might be interested in a live demo or trial, or even an assessment to get some experience with the product before they make a final purchase decision.

Once you have a solid understanding of the buying process, you can plan your content more specifically. For each piece of content, you should ask yourself which stage of the buying process it addresses. Is it of the quality and timeliness that you really need? By aligning your content with the way people actually buy, you will be able to ensure you have all of the right content you need to win new customers.

Step 4: Buyer Personas

Not everyone is ready to buy right away, there is an education process that is crucial and doubles as thought leadership.

Now that you have a good assessment of your content, and a good understanding of the buying process and how your content fits, you're ready to create buyer personas. This step is where you get in touch with your customers in order to understand who they are, what they like, and what they are ultimately thinking. Here are a few things to consider to build buyer personas.

First, consider your customer's goals, their characteristics, and their obstacles or challenges. When you think about their objectives, remember to consider both their personal and professional goals. What are their personal objectives? What do they really want to get out of this product or solution personally? What are their professional objectives? What business goals do they want to accomplish?

In terms of their personal characteristics, what's their title? Where are they located? What experience do they have? What are some trigger events that might be moving them to look for a solution to their problem?

Take the time to understand all of the personas of your target customers.

Once you understand their goals and characteristics, you can start to understand their obstacles and the challenges they face. This step is where you put all your research and analytics together and start to think about who your ideal customer is. When you create personas, it's best to give each one a name and actually create a picture of your ideal customer.

Let me share an example that we developed for one of our clients. In this example, Chloe is a U.S.-based marketing director in the healthcare industry with about 5 years' experience in Digital Advertising, but she's struggling with how to use mobile advertising effectively in order to achieve her company's marketing goals so that she can get a promotion.

In this example, you can see how we've included her objectives, characteristics and obstacles in order to describe a persona that seems real. By using personas you can be more specific about the kind of content that's going to be helpful, not just to the general market, but to Chloe, a person you can actually visualize.

This will help you make your content more tangible and more useful.

When you first start developing personas, I would encourage you to start with no more than 3 to 5, so that you can focus on a few of the most important personas who are going to make a difference to your organization. By focusing on a few, you'll avoid getting bogged down and creating too many that you won't be able to adequately address. It will also be a much easier to develop great content for the most important personas rather than mediocre content or just a thin layer of content for all the personas you might imagine.

Step 5: Planning Your Content: Editorial Calendar

Once you create your buyer personas, you can begin to plan out the content you will need to produce in order to help your buyers make a good buying decision. Your buyer may want to read white papers, blogs, how-to content, and educational content in the awareness phase. In the evaluation phase, you may want to offer case studies, samples, product and company information that your buyer needs to properly evaluate your products and services.

Once you have your content, it is equally important to deploy it in a strategic manner. An editorial calendar can be very helpful for planning/scheduling your content.

In the purchase phase, you may want to offer specific engagement tools such as a live demo, a free trial, free assessment, or a coupon that the buyer needs in order to make a positive decision for you. As you plan your strategy and editorial calendar, remember that it all needs to be focused on your specific buyer personas so that you can tailor it to his or her specific needs.

Now that you have a plan and a strategy, you can focus on actually creating all of the content that you need. The average B to B marketer uses twelve of these different content types, so how do you go through the process of creating all of this content efficiently and effectively?

There are so many different types of content you could create, but if you are just starting out, I would encourage you to start off

with tools that are most popular such as social media, articles, newsletters, blogs, case studies, and videos.

To make content creation efficient and effective, you should start with core ideas. Start with core ideas around your products, thought leadership issues that you want to address, client stories, or even events.

Once you produce your core content, you should not just write a single article about it. If you've gone through the hard work of putting together an important thought leadership piece, the next step is to leverage that core content in as many different media as possible. For example, you can start by producing one solid white paper and then turn that into a series of articles. You can then use the articles to create shorter blog posts. From there, you re-purpose the content for your website, use it in an email campaign, and leverage it for your digital ad campaign. You can also Tweet about it, produce a short video, and even turn it into a podcast.

If you think about your editorial calendar as one continuous string of content production, you can take one project, which is maybe a white paper, and leverage it in many different ways to produce a wide variety of content for your program.

Editorial Calendar

If you have a variety of products/services, make sure you schedule them out over time to cover all areas of your business.

Once you understand how use leverage to produce a wide variety of content, you can do the detailed work of creating the editorial calendar to produce the content itself. The editorial calendar is basically a spreadsheet or project plan to take all of these different ideas we've discussed so far, and put them into a detailed plan.

Your editorial calendar should include the topic, project name, type of content, due date, the creator's name, the buying stage, and the persona this is addressed to. For example, if we want to build an awareness-level piece, I would create the task and assign it to David. It's targeted at the Chloe persona, who is a marketing director. We want David to produce a white paper on social media advertising strategies, and we're going to leverage

that through a number of tools. Our plan shows that we are going to also leverage that piece on our website, digital advertising, and our email campaigns.

The next example shows that we want Karen to write an evaluation stage-level piece targeted at Bill, the CFO. The piece is going to be an article focused on social media techniques, and we're going to leverage that on our blog and social media channels. With this simple tool, you can create a detailed plan to describe exactly who's doing what so that you have a fully functional editorial calendar.

Editorial calendars are an often talked about, but little used technique, so I'd encourage you to get very specific in your plan about exactly who's going to do what in building the content so that you can get it all done.

Ideas for Creating Content

At times, it might be difficult to think of new ideas for content, so here are a few techniques that might help you get new ideas.

There are many places to look when you need new content. Look to your customers, industry trends, or just tell an engaging story that can tie back to what you offer.

- Interview your customers
- Survey your readers to find out what they are interested in
- Highlight case studies and customer stories
- Share success and failures
- Tell a personal story

These are just some ideas that can help you come up with good content creation ideas.

Types of Content

Here are the most common types of content that you may use in your content marketing program.

White papers

The purpose of white papers is to provide customers with information about, or solutions to, problems they might have. They serve in establishing thought leadership and expertise by showing how you can help. A good white paper will capture the reader's attention and draw in a large audience. The best white

papers address the “pain” of your target audience in a powerful and provocative way. They can be focused on strategic issues or very tactical tips depending on your target audience.

Webinars

Webinars are a great way to engage a large and diverse audience in real-time.

It is important to be engaging and follow-up with your attendees.

Like white papers, webinars provide information that promotes thought leadership. Webinars, however, offer a valuable chance to interact with potential and existing customers as well as others in your field. A good webinar has many of the characteristics described above, but it also should have good speakers.

The best webinars will feature an industry celebrity who people want to hear and get close to. Imagine how differently you feel about going to a webinar featuring Larry Page, CEO of Google, vs. one of their many product managers. The actual content from one of their product manager may be more detailed and more useful to you, but don't discount the value of using a celebrity in your webinars. Once webinars are produced, they can also be recorded and reused as offers and additional content. The content can also be turned into a white paper and provide even more value.

Case studies

Case studies can provide valuable content about your company and the impact that it can make on customers. It exemplifies your problem solving skills and the impact you've had on real situation. The power of the case study is that it tells a story. Most people find it much easier to understand a story than a list of facts, features, and action items. The story can also have an emotional element or sense of suspense to make it more effective. People not only understand complex information from stories better, they also remember them better.

Video

Video use on the Internet has grown exponentially over the past few years. It has the ability to tell a story and communicate information in a powerful, creative, and emotional way that cannot be matched by text or even live events. Video can be

used to tell customer stories, educate your audience or sell. It can be used alongside of other content, such as when you include a one minute promotion in front of a white paper, or as a replacement for a detailed product data sheet.

Both professionally shot video and personal video is very acceptable on the Internet. Personal video has an amateur quality that people often find to be more real and authentic than the slick commercials often seen on TV. These can also be much less expensive to produce so that you can create more of them. If you choose to use personal video, make sure that the sound and video quality is good enough so that your users are not annoyed by the product, and they can still get significant value.

Comparison Guides

What can you offer that your competitors can't? A comparison guide is a great venue to illustrate this.

A guide to help users make decisions about the types of products they need is a very powerful format. People often struggle with finding all of the information they need to make an informed purchase decision and need one place that puts all of the issues together for them in an easy-to-use format. Keep in mind that a comparison guide can be written at several levels to help them at each stage of the buying cycle.

In the awareness phase, they need help understanding the types of solutions available. An example of this guide would be "SLR vs. Point and Shoot Cameras." In the consideration phase, they need help understanding how your products are different than others. An example of this type would be, "Cannon vs. Nikon – Who has the Best Lenses?" In the purchase phase, they need help understanding which of your products to choose. An example of this would be, "How to choose the right Nikon DSLR." Comparison guides are helpful because they address the core needs of the reader during the right phase of the buying cycle.

Step 6: Leverage your content for results.

Content makes all of your digital marketing programs easier. From social media to SEO to email and digital advertising, this section will help you understand how and where to leverage your content.

Social Media

Once you've produced your content, the first thing most companies do is promote it on social media channels. You can push it out on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google +, Pinterest and more. To do this, you will need to host the content on your website, blog, or another place on the Internet, and then create a post and link back to it. The links will be visible to your followers and fans, and many people will see them. Of course the more fans you have, the more traffic and engagement you will have.

The top social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google +, and Pinterest, but don't ignore some of the other social bookmarking sites such as StumbleUpon and Tumblr, etc., that can provide great links back to your content.

SEO

There are many ways you can use your content to boost your organic search engine rankings (SEO). The most highly rated tool in SEO is content creation since most marketers believe that as Google has gotten better with their search algorithm, they have weeded out a lot of the bad content and links. With recent Google changes, content creation stands out as the best SEO technique.

As you put your content on your website, you should include important keywords on the body copy as well as other html tags to make it look exactly like what the search engines want to see so that it can be effective for SEO purposes. You can also place your content on other sites or blogs and use it to link back to your website.

Email

You also want to leverage your content in your email campaigns since email is one of the most popular and important digital marketing techniques. If you have a multi-touch campaign, use the strategy that we've discussed here, in terms of the buying process, to plan your email campaign content. You might want to create a first-touch email that's awareness oriented, where you

You've spent the time planning and generating your content, now make sure you get every benefit you can from it!

feature a white paper or webinar. Touch two might be an “evaluate” oriented piece that's more case study oriented or product oriented, and in touch three, you might send a free trial offer or “get started” offer.

You can, of course, leverage the core content you have by targeting it at different personas. In order to do this you will need to segment your house email list so that you can send specific content to specific people through the buying cycle. This will allow you to customize the email copy to the persona you are addressing, so that it feels personal. Segmenting the list and sending personalized email is going to dramatically improve your email marketing program.

Digital Advertising

Digital advertising is a great place to share content such as white paper's.

The last technique we'll discuss here is leveraging your content for digital advertising. Strong content featured on well-designed landing pages can dramatically improve the results of your advertising programs. I've seen advertising programs that leverage good content increase conversation rates by 3 to 5 times. It can make a huge impact in your program if you're promoting content versus just building traffic to your website. You can get more leads, and it can dramatically increase the ROI of the program.

Content Marketing Strategy Summary

This 6-step content marketing strategy will help you create a world-class program that is efficient and effective, and makes a measurable difference to your organization. Remember to start with your content marketing goals, and then do your homework to analyze your buyer's journey so that you can build personas. When you complete this work, you can build a very specific editorial calendar to get the work done. Once you have a plan, you can leverage your content in every part of your digital marketing program. By following this strategy, you can create a comprehensive content marketing program that you can really be proud of.

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