

# The content marketing handbook

Everything you need to know about content marketing.



Content marketing handbook

Until now, there has been no comprehensive guidance on content marketing unless the services of a reputable content marketing agency has been engaged. Making such information accessible to everyone interested in buying your product or service is the primary goal of this guide.

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## Content marketing defined

The majority of marketing takes place via media platforms that are not owned by brands. Brands essentially 'rent' a space on the media platform via advertising, public relations or sponsorship. Brands therefore have no control over the content contained in these media platforms.

The loyalty of the consumer sits with the media platform, not with the brand that, through its spend, has in fact funded the media platform. In addition, consumers of media platforms have become experts at simply tuning out the marketing messages within them. With this in mind, content marketing is about creating your own media platform through which you can exclusively engage with your target market with specially selected content while building a loyal following.

Most buyers – whether individuals or those buying on behalf of businesses – first engage with suppliers through some form of content marketing. Placing more importance on this vital marketing channel will mean that your brand is more likely to succeed.

### Educating and engaging, not selling

The new era of content marketing is not about hard selling via the likes of brochures and PowerPoint decks. It's about engaging and connecting with your audience through relevant brand stories and educating them on appropriate topics.

## The forms and shapes of content

Content comes in many different formats. Naturally, each one has different benefits. Similarly, different personalities or demographics have different content preferences. Below is an overview of some content formats:

### Print magazine

Many brands use print magazines – just think of the airline or health insurance industries. They are expensive but portray lifestyle-related content well.

### Blog

Used to post regular articles online that can be categorised and archived, blogging is an extremely effective traffic generation media format.

### Video

Made popular through platforms like YouTube, video is capable of portraying complicated content in an interactive and easy-to-

understand manner.

### Tablet magazine

Due to the expense and length of time it takes to produce print magazines, creating a tablet magazine is a good way to reach affluent demographics.

### Newsletter

Almost every brand has or has had a newsletter – printed or online. Consumers are more likely to read newsletters that contain more than just internal company news.

### Webinar

Similar to video, a webinar is a live stream or recorded version of a presentation.

### Infographic

An infographic is a compelling read as it graphically represents a large set of data. Although infographics may seem 'trendy', they are powerful tools worth utilizing.

### Podcast

This is an audio recording that can be downloaded and listened to. It works well if you are targeting people that travel a lot.

### Social media

Specifically micro or short posts best used to advertise a piece of content by enticing people to visit the main piece.

## Aligning your content to your customer lifecycle

Just as your value propositions and messaging would be different for the various segments of your target market, your content marketing also needs to be segmented according to the personalities in your target market. For example, if you were marketing a moisturising lip balm and your target market included teenage girls and adventure sportsmen, the content you produce for each segment would be very different.

In addition to segmenting based on your target market, it is also important to segment content based on the action you are looking to achieve with a potential buyer in your customer lifecycle. There are six actions to consider:

1. Generate relevant traffic to your website
2. Convert an anonymous web visitor into a lead
3. Convert a lead into a customer
4. Provide customer service guidance to help customers get more out of your product or service or to find alternative uses for it

## Inbound content quality is based on the level of aggression

5. Retain existing customers and make them love and promote you
6. Upsell and cross-sell other products and services to existing customers

For each of the customer lifecycle stages there are specific content marketing tactics to implement. They are as follows:

### Generating relevant traffic

Identify the keywords that buyers may use to find your product or service and create relevant related content

### Visitor to lead conversion

Offer premium content that requires visitors to provide their contact details in order to access it

### Lead to customer conversion

Nurture leads down a path to purchase with strategic emails that educate and assist the buyer

### Customer service

Guide and educate a customer on how to better use your product or service

### Customer retention and advocacy

Provide resources that make an individual shine, ie. help them to do their job better

### Upsell and crosssell

Educate the buyer on your other products and services by following steps similar to those taken up until now

### Always have a call to action

For each stage, ensure you have relevant calls to action so that you can achieve your objective and measure the effectiveness of your content marketing.

### Always think about viral value

For every piece of content you produce, ask yourself, "What can we do to make people want to share this?" and make it easy for them to share it with their social networks.

## The required levels of commitment

Marketing teams have always been involved with content production. However, there has been an evolution in the production of content.

In the past, content production was incident driven. When a product launched or a promotion was being run, the required content would be developed. Today, content production needs to be constant. The quantity of content produced depends on the goals you are trying to achieve.

### Inbound content quantity is based on level of aggression

If you want to adopt an inbound marketing strategy that focuses on ensuring your product or service is found by potential customers searching online and then convert them into leads and then customers, the amount of content required is based on how aggressive you want to be in this strategy. At the very minimum you should be creating two pieces of content per week, and you could be creating up to one piece every day.

### Other customer lifecycle content

For the other customer lifecycle stages' content, such as customer service, customer advocacy and cross-selling content, you should be looking at producing one to two pieces of content a week for each stage.

Fresh and regular content keeps your contacts engaged and your website ranked highly on Google.

### The role of social media in content marketing

Many brands struggle with social media marketing. This is primarily due to their content creation being incidental (as discussed in the previous chapter) and being focused on product and service features and value propositions instead of on educational and engaging brand-aligned content.

When you adopt a content marketing strategy, you will find that you have a constant stream of unique, fresh and relevant content to share on your social networks. As you are developing content for specific personalities and for where these personalities are situated in your customer lifecycle, your followers will find it relevant and will begin engaging with and sharing your content.

### Create your content marketing strategy before your social media strategy

If you try to create a social media strategy first, you will find the only content you have to share is being produced by other brands and is only loosely connected to the personalities in your target market. As a result, engagement will be low and posting will be intermittent.

As such, it is important to first develop your content marketing strategy, which will then inform your social media strategy. Social media essentially becomes part of your content distribution plan, a method of conversing about the content you have created and a way to source new content ideas.

### **Give your followers the opportunity to appear smart to their peers**

For every piece of content you create, always keep your target's personality and buying stage in mind. In addition, think about how the piece of content you are creating can make your followers look smart and informed if they share it amongst their peers. You will find your content suddenly going viral.

### **Building a sales pipeline with content marketing**

The first three stages of content marketing – collectively known as inbound marketing – are: generating relevant traffic to your website, converting anonymous website visitors into leads and converting leads into customers.

Inbound marketing focuses on finding potential buyers who are looking for a product or service that your brand sells and then guiding them down a path to purchase. It does all of this through the use of content.

### **Cause and effect marketing**

Marketers who adopt an inbound marketing strategy are able to calculate exactly how many visitors are required to their website in order to meet specific sales targets. They are also able to forecast the number of leads that will enter the sales funnel as a direct result of a specific action such as writing a blog post. This is essentially 'cause and effect marketing', and it allows marketers to conduct effective marketing that has a direct and measurable impact on a company's bottom line and that is closely linked to return on investment.

### **Filling the top of the funnel**

Once traffic has been driven to the website (as discussed in the previous paragraph), the anonymous web visitors are enticed with offers of exclusive or premium content in exchange for their contact details. Only serious buyers will part with their details in order to get this useful content. This acts as the first level of qualification and enters them into the top of your sales funnel.

### **Qualifying leads in the middle of the funnel**

Most of the leads that have entered the sales funnel are not ready to buy yet. At this point they are then taken through an automated programme that provides content designed to assist them in making their buying decision and qualifies them based on how they engage with the content. Only leads that are qualified

are then passed onto the relevant sales channels, where the final tasks at the bottom of the funnel – such as contract negotiations – are completed.

### **The importance of research in content production**

The best content is derived from interesting and well-researched insights. In developed countries there is a huge amount of research taking place at any given time. This means that it is easy to obtain new information and reports on which to base interesting articles, webinars, infographics and many other types of content.

### **Using research for 360 degree marketing campaigns**

Valuable insights gleaned from research aren't just useful for your content marketing strategy; they're also handy for other marketing disciplines.

For example, every time you produce a research piece, an event can be hosted to present the findings to your most important customers. You can also arrange media briefings resulting in coverage on TV, radio and in print news.

### **How much research do you need to do?**

Research can be costly, so the amount of research you can do is likely going to be linked to your budget. It would be ideal to produce one piece of primary research each quarter, but this is not affordable for all brands and may be excessive based on their marketing objectives. In addition to research conducted, another form of content that a brand could become known for is statistical pieces on the performance of your product, service or market over a specific period. As time progresses, you will be able to make insight comparisons about observed changes in your statistics.

For example, if your company is an internet service provider, you could provide statistics on the amount of bandwidth consumed by all of your customers over a quarter, the amount of emails sent and how much spam was blocked. Present this data in a useful infographic and watch it spread like wildfire.

### **Integrating content marketing into your overall marketing strategy**

Content marketing is not necessarily the best method for every brand. One size does not fit all. Your particular marketing objectives may be effectively solved with more traditional



marketing strategies.

However, if content marketing is something you would like to implement, it's important to ensure that you do not run it in a silo. Your content marketing strategy needs to be integrated into all your marketing properties.

#### **Public relations**

With all the interesting, original and fresh content you have produced, many media platforms will be grateful to have the opportunity to cover it on their channels. This is a great way to attract relevant traffic to your website.

#### **Advertising**

Ads offering consumers something for free get a much higher response rate. Take advantage of this by including calls to action in your advertising material that drive your target market to download free reports, guides and eBooks from your website.

#### **Digital**

Content marketing will have the most significant impact on your digital strategy. It will influence both your website and your social media practices – in fact it will impact the way you approach digital entirely.

#### **Direct marketing**

packages that include gift items and promotional material to potential customers. However, gatekeepers such as personal assistants often intercept these packages, or they are returned due to corporate governance rules.

Content marketing can be highly personalised and tailored to target specific individuals by reaching them through their favourite media channels and social networks. This provides a tangible alternative to traditional direct marketing.

#### **Events**

There are many ways to distribute your content as it is produced. One of these ways is through events. Events can be physical occasions (such as inviting leads and customers to a breakfast presentation) or digital (such as hosting webinars).

### **Measuring the success of content marketing**

The great thing about content marketing is that it is completely measurable. To benefit from this, you need to ensure that you are

measuring the correct things and taking action to rectify any anomalies that are uncovered.

Each of the content marketing stages has specific measurements. You can also have overall return on investment measures whereby you calculate the cost of all your content marketing over revenue generated by leads that marketing touched.

Here are some of the measurements you can implement for each stage of content marketing:

#### **Generating relevant traffic to your website**

- » Number of website visitors
- » Level of sharing of articles and pages
- » Reach of social media
- » PR coverage

#### **Converting website visitors into leads**

- » Website visitors vs. leads generated
- » Number of premium content pieces downloaded per contact
- » Level of sharing of premium content
- » • Leads by media channel, i.e. blog, online banner, PPC, event, advert

#### **Converting leads into customers**

- » Leads generated vs. leads qualified
- » Length of sales cycle
- » Most effective nurturing programmes
- » Most effective media channel

#### **Customer service guidance**

- » Number of visits to this content
- » Number of helpdesk tickets opened
- » Level of usage / increase in billing

#### **Customer retention and advocacy**

- » Number of articles read by an existing contact
- » Number of articles shared by existing contact
- » Premium content downloaded by existing contacts
- » Mentions in social media by existing contacts

#### **Cross selling and up selling**

- » Number of existing contacts that enter new lead nurturing programmes
- » Number of existing contacts that become qualified leads
- » for additional products based on nurturing programmes
- » Additional revenue generated from existing contacts

## Your content production options

Content marketing can either be done internally or outsourced. Both options have pros and cons and which option is the best differs for every company.

Major factors likely to affect your decision are the capabilities of your existing staff, your capacity to hire new staff and your available budget.

### The internal route

The benefit of opting to use existing staff to run your content marketing programme is that these people should have the best understanding of your products, services and markets. This means that they should be able to create great content. However, it is important in this instance to ensure that personnel are not preoccupied with other projects. Dropping the ball on your content marketing strategy will have a direct impact on your bottom line.

The best way to setup a team is to divide them into the content lifecycle stages (and of course by any other segmentation your company has implemented). You will then have a team responsible for each of the following stages:

- » Generating web traffic
- » Converting web visitors into leads
- » Converting leads into customers
- » Customer services and support
- » Customer retention and advocacy
- » Cross-selling and upselling

Within these teams you will need strategists, writers, web designers, graphic designers

and data analysts. Some of these roles will be overarching, covering all the lifecycle stages, while others will be dedicated to just one specific stage.

### The outsourcing route

Outsourcing your content marketing is often the easiest option, allowing internal resources to manage agency deliveries and deal with any other projects. Initially outsourcing content marketing also allows you to give content marketing a try without the risk of potentially having to retrench staff if you find it is not as effective as hoped.

The question that needs to be answered is: to whom do you outsource?

- » PR agency
- » Digital agency
- » Content marketing agency
- » Inbound marketing agency

### PR agency

PR agencies are conventionally responsible for writing articles and liaising with the media.

For a PR agency to effectively implement your content marketing strategy, it needs to be able to plan articles and blog posts strategically, ensure return on investment, include a wide range of content types over and above articles (e.g. guides, videos, infographics) and deliver a considerably larger amount of content than it currently does. If an agency is capable of doing all of this, it could be a good fit.

### Digital agency

Digital agencies already run your website, campaign sites, email marketing, online advertising and possibly even your social media accounts. Because content marketing has such a high impact on these digital properties, it might seem logical to outsource this to them as well. This could be a solution if the agency can consistently deliver relevant and remarkable content without being distracted by other projects and campaigns. Remember, the success of content marketing depends on its consistency. Agencies offering content marketing should practice what they preach and also be prepared to be accountable for the generation of your revenue.

### Content marketing agency

These guys have been setup to create and curate content and as such they are certainly going to be able to deliver on your content production needs. The important thing to quiz them on is how they are going to ensure return on investment. Content marketing can be expensive and if you are not generating leads and increasing existing customer spend, it is difficult to justify. Like the digital agency, a content marketing agency must be prepared to be accountable for revenue generation.

### Inbound marketing agency

An inbound marketing agency uses content to build a sales pipeline and then uses content to qualify the leads. This process is managed through a piece of marketing automation software that tracks and measures success. If you are looking to include other elements of content marketing, such as customer service and customer advocacy content, ensure that the agency is comfortable creating that content for you. Also ensure that they are comfortable creating content for your specific industry. Lastly, it's important that they practice what they preach and are doing their own inbound marketing.

## How is content marketing different to SEO?

An SEO practitioner may argue that they can drive the same amount of traffic to your website with traditional SEO tactics, which are much more cost effective than content marketing.

The chief difference between the two traffic-building tactics is that content marketing seeks to add real value through creating content that covers topics potential buyers are actively looking for insight on, while SEO simply identifies the strategic keywords and then uses 'cheating' techniques to improve your site rating.

For example, traditional SEO methods include finding a blog or forum where comments can be submitted, writing a 'fake' comment using an identified strategic keyword and including a link back to your site. In contrast, a content marketing method would be to write an original, fascinating blog post using strategic keywords. Because the blog post is interesting, unique and valuable, other web users choose to link to it and as a result the network of links to your site grows.

By creating consistent and fresh online content your search rankings on sites such as Google increase dramatically. As a result, content marketing is often mistaken with search engine optimisation (SEO)

## Important considerations before adopting content marketing

This handbook has covered some important factors to consider before adopting a content marketing strategy, such as what types of content you want to focus on and who will be responsible for creating and managing it. In addition, you should also keep the following points in mind:

## Content marketing is a long-term strategy

It is unlikely that you will see results immediately. Content marketing should be seen as a long-term programme that will start yielding results after about six months. As content marketing is entirely measurable, you are in the meantime able to gain insights from your statistics and adjust your strategy based on these insights.

## Consistency is key to success

You need to have a non-stop flow of content. Whether you or an agency are developing your content, you need to make sure there is adherence to delivery according to a content calendar. As it is a repetitive, almost daily task, it can be tempting to put it at the bottom of your to-do list and occasionally miss a deliverable. Unfortunately, this will have a direct impact on your bottom line and will result in the failure of your content marketing.

## Build in your approval process and make provision for topical content

If you need to get content approved before posting it online – as is often the case with larger companies – it is vital to build that approval process into your content delivery calendar. Be careful not to write content the day before it should go out if it is going to take an extra week for it to be approved. Consistent posting is key and deviating from your content delivery calendar will wreak havoc with your strategy.

You should aim to create content well in advance, allow for the relevant people to sign off on it and then post it on schedule. Sometimes, however, opportunities arise for content to be developed based on current affairs and news. Ensure that you have a process in place to get quick approval when this occurs so that you can reap the benefits of posting topical content.