



CONTENT MARKETING IS KING

2013

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In the past, businesses could get away with sending their messages in short bursts through traditional marketing mediums. But today, businesses are shifting toward attracting their target market with good content. The importance of quality content has caused many marketers to transform into publishing departments that create and distribute educational and compelling content to their customers. Your business needs to start doing exactly the same thing.

Content marketing has given small businesses the opportunity to become publishers of news and content and has leveled the playing field. Now, even the little guys can publish content. But the challenge that small businesses usually face is finding the time and talent to develop a consistent flow of new and interesting information.

Some marketers believe they can use any type of content to support any type of marketing. And while content marketing makes use of social media, it's different than social media marketing.

Customers expect businesses to have registered social media profiles on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Social profiles give customers a way to connect with you and ask questions about your products and services. Social profiles also act as platforms for distributing content, which helps build the audience needed to grow and expand your customer base.

When you post high quality content, you're giving potential customers free and useful information (as opposed to hard-selling your offerings). With articles, blog posts, case studies and whitepapers, you can use your expertise to creatively attract and engage an audience and build your brand. Content and social media marketing work in tandem to help increase that audience by distributing links to your high quality content.

Why Business Managers Should Support Content Marketing

When it comes to content marketing, a business needs to focus on its top priorities – lead generation and brand awareness. Content marketing builds your brand's identity in a way that's personable and attractive to millions of Internet users.

The main reason why traditional advertising is no longer enough is that people find the information they need online. Consumers have moved online as their first choice to research a product, company or solution. Content helps you attract people to your products as they relate to solutions offered, not products sold.

A Website Isn't Enough

A static, five page website doesn't build trust or a consumer base. A volume of frequent and useful content drives SEO, which helps businesses rank well on Google. An absence of fresh content leads to poor rankings and no visibility on search engines or other platforms.

Some traditional marketers feel that content marketing is giving away something for free with no return. But by producing content, your business becomes a reliable, trusted source of information, which is then associated with your products. A good reputation is priceless.

Content Marketing Makes Financial Sense

Content marketing takes time and money to produce (whether created in-house or outsourced to a copywriter), but it's extremely cost effective when compared to other online tactics such as display or paid search advertising. You need to look at content marketing as an opportunity to address the largest audience possible. Producing content and distributing it online is like being a keynote speaker at a conference full of potential clients – every single day.

Measurable Interaction and Returns

There are a number of metrics by which the success of a content marketing strategy can be measured. According to 2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, marketers look at the following things:

Measurement Criteria for B2B Content Marketing Success



2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks–North America: CMI/MarketingProfs

Web Traffic. The number of visits your website gets is one of the metrics that shows whether you're publishing quality content that people are reading. Analytics programs can determine what people are looking for, how long they stay on certain pages of content, and what they find most useful. This allows you to further tailor your content strategy to ensure that potential customers visit and engage with your website.

Direct Sales. While it's great to build a loyal following with a content marketing strategy, the bottom line remains an important part of every business. If you're able to increase your direct sales thanks to publishing useful content, you know you're on the right track.

Sales Lead Quality. The quality of sales leads is also a great way to measure how well you understand customers. If the content you publish clearly addresses your target market's needs, it will attract quality sales leads.

Qualitative Customer Feedback. When you start engaging with customers online, you gain the opportunity to ask customers for feedback via a website form, an article, or through comments on social media.

Reaching an Audience with Content Marketing

Customers are online and looking for products, services and solutions to their problems. It's up to you to grab customers first (and make no mistake - the competition from other companies trying to do just that is huge).

Content marketing is about understanding what consumers are searching for and how long they are prepared to look for it.

Create Great Content

In order to start creating the kind of content your customers want to read, follow these five steps:

Understand the Challenges Customers Face. Businesses can't write for everybody – they need to identify a well-defined (and well-understood) group of prospects. This is an area where persona development and targeted persona content can help businesses immensely.

Solve Problems. Businesses need to shift the way they market their offerings. Instead of defining the value of products or services as features, you need to focus on the problems that your target audience faces and create content that solves these problems.

Become a Trusted Source. An important part of content marketing is to become a trusted source of information for target buyers. Businesses should aim to build a loyal following that trusts the information they publish. This only happens when you create meaningful content that helps solve problems.

Write Fresh Content. Businesses do still need standard content like a five page website with contact details and company history, but they also need to provide timely content at regular intervals. Blog posts are a great way to do this. Creating a blog-powered website can be a huge differentiating factor for small and medium-sized businesses.

Make It Easy to Buy. Businesses don't have to hard sell, but they need to make it easy for people to transition from interested prospect to paying customer. Online products, contact information and services need to be easily accessible.

Distribute Content Online

Posting and distributing content online gives businesses the opportunity to create more ways for their customers to find, read about and trust them. A content marketing strategy that includes social media marketing creates a campaign-driven, highly strategic plan to track the cause and effect of these efforts through consumer engagement. Measurements like the number of retweets or the amount of people sharing your content show results and drive future campaigns.

The main goals of a content marketing strategy are lead generation and customer retention, which are achieved by sharing free and useful information to create brand awareness and position you as an expert in your field.

Content Marketing is About the Customer

A business's website should be more about its customers and less about the bottom line. If customers can see that you prioritize their needs, they'll trust you and your product, which sets them on their way to becoming an advocate of your brand.

Make Content Personal

Content marketing gives businesses a unique platform on which to address clients personally and casually. You can be more fun and get creative with these interactions since you aren't limited the way you are with other types of advertising.

Build Search Personas

Most businesses have more than one target audience and need to create content for each potential buyer. A good starting point when planning a content strategy is to identify the top three to five personas that are likely to visit your website. Think about each of these personas in terms of the information they'd want to access from your website, and help them make the decision to use your products or services. Tailor your content towards the kind of people who are most likely to visit your website.

Consider the groups of people who buy from a paint company: handy household owners on a budget, small or large contractors, and artists. What would their concerns be and how would they differ? What do they want from the paint they buy? These questions provide answers that the paint company can use to attract potential clients that are looking for a solution rather than a product. The paint company could create content with titles such as: "How to Paint Wooden Furniture" or "What Paint Products Are Best for Industrial Buildings?"

SEO, or more specifically, the use of relevant keywords to create and optimize compelling content is an important part of an effective content strategy. But first you need to take a step back and determine what techniques align with your customers' needs. Create search personas to better understand what your customers are searching for online. Use these steps to build search personas:

Define Your Ideal Customer. Businesses should be able to pinpoint their ideal customer. If you own a business that sells paint, you know your target market is relatively hands-on in terms of building and renovating, and they're more likely to be men aged 25 – 45.

Understand Customers' Problems and Challenges. How would your customers articulate their pain points? What type of keywords would they be typing into search engines? A man looking for paint may search for "exterior paint" or "easy to clean interior paint", for example.

Create Great Content. You need to create great content that's optimized for these search phrases. Your content also needs to offer a solution, such as a call to action that will enable the reader to contact you for more information or to buy the product immediately.

Intrigue the Reader. It's not easy to convert a searcher into a customer on a single page, so focus on calls to action that compel the reader to dive further into your sales funnel. Keep writing pages that are relevant to your searchers and drill down into things that are interesting and relevant to them.

Next, determine which social networks your potential customers are on. Younger, less formal searchers use Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, while professionals are more likely to use LinkedIn. These are the social media profiles you need to create in order to distribute your content to the right people and build your customer base.

Channel Potential Buyers

If there's one thing that frustrates readers, it's reading content they're not particularly interested in while trying to find a solution to their problem. Channel your potential buyers directly to relevant content by asking them exactly why they're on your site.

For example, allow website visitors to select the content channel they prefer by having a clear site structure, easy navigation and proper content segmentation. This helps readers avoid content they have no interest in and guides them to relevant areas of your website more efficiently.

You can also enable a reader to relate to your content immediately by using customer testimonials and case studies. These are both perfect ways to show your potential clients that your product is as high quality as your marketing media suggests.

Use Marketing Funnels

The marketing funnel is a model that follows the journey of how a potential customer becomes a client. Planning and creating a funnel helps you determine exactly how you can streamline the sales process of your company.

This model will help ensure that you don't miss out on the most significant audience – the people who are looking for a solution, but aren't yet aware that your company can provide it. The best way to achieve this is to publish educational blogs, articles and social media links parallel to your product and services. These should try to address reasons that potential clients could come into contact with your company. Here are the steps of a marketing funnel:

Step One. In the first stage, potential buyers have a query about something they're looking for but may not know where to find relevant information or what product they actually require. People use search engines and social sites to help them find what they're looking for, which hopefully leads them to your business's website and social profiles.

Step Two. A buyer's next step is to do further research on your products with more in-depth information like eBooks, webinars and industry reports in order to make an informed decision. Your case studies and customer testimonials provide corroborating material to reassure potential clients that your product and service is their best choice.

Step Three. Lastly, detailed product information and analyst reports tell the potential client exactly how to use your product upon purchase.

This model helps you address and hold your potential client's attention from the very beginning of the process, allowing them to navigate through your content and move towards a purchase while empowering them with relevant information at each stage of the buying process.

The Importance of Content Marketing

- The Internet is the go-to tool for initial research – if you aren't there, you don't exist to many potential customers
- Staying power – the right kind of content is relevant for many years
- You get to communicate directly with your customers
- Content that is closely related to your product will attract new clients when they search for their needs rather than specific products
- Tell your customers about your expertise in the industry, where you're going and what you're planning so that you become a trusted advisor and strategic partner

Content Marketing Tactics

There are many different types of content. Here are just a few ideas:

Social Media. Use social networks to distribute links to content rather than posting the content itself. Answer product questions by linking to quality content.

Articles. Articles put your brand and product in the public eye. They also help you come across as an expert in your field and give your brand and products credibility.

Events. Distribute relevant, interesting content at trade shows and conferences. Draw people to your website properties by putting quick response (QR) codes on brochures and letting them know where they can ask you questions online (your social media profiles).

Blogs. Blogs give you a personal connection with your customers and provide you with the opportunity to give more detail than you'd be able to give on Facebook or Twitter.

Webinars. Create interactive conferences that allow you to train or educate people over the Internet (you could even broadcast a presentation on how to use your product). A name, face and a voice lend credibility to what you're saying.

Images. Content marketing isn't just text and video. Images, such as infographics, can be combined with your text to provide information-rich eye-candy for readers. Images can also attract search engine browsers and make your article or blog stand out from the crowd.

Content Calendar. Create a content calendar to make sure your potential customers are receiving relevant material at regular intervals. It allows you to schedule and organize material for blogs and social networks well in advance. This way you ensure that your Twitter and Facebook posts coincide with relevant blog posts. A content calendar that includes all your posting platforms helps potential clients move through social media along a clearly defined path that addresses their specific need.

Achieving Content Marketing Success

There are a few things businesses can do to ensure a content marketing strategy is successful. These are the qualities of a successful content marketing campaign:

- Well-written, high quality content
- Have something new to say and ensure your content is well researched
- Understand your target market and provide information people are looking for
- Give your target audience something they haven't seen before
- Do keyword research and create targeted content
- Your content needs to be personal because you need your consumers to like and trust you
- Be interesting and engaging by using videos, product reviews, podcasts and eBooks to add variety and creative flair to your content strategy
- Allow comments on your articles, blogs and social media to initiate two-way conversations
- Organize your publishing plan with an editorial calendar

Make Content Marketing Work for You

You can't do everything yourself, so assign a small team to handle content marketing for your company. Do intense research to determine which content marketing tactics work best for you.

Content marketing doesn't have to be limited to two or three people. Encourage participation from outside the marketing team – remember that you're trying to figure out what people from all walks of life want to know about your product. The people within your company have probably been asked many questions about your products that have never been addressed to a wider audience. These questions will help you generate content ideas that need to be researched. Similarly, if clients are contacting you with questions, chances are there are hundreds of people online that are asking the same thing. If you can answer these questions with interesting content, you've implemented a winning content marketing strategy.

Once you've got content ideas and people assigned to create content, set targets so that the team knows how many blog posts and social media updates need to be posted within a specific timeframe. Keep in mind that the backbone of successful content marketing is a consistent flow of new and interesting information. Lastly, use analytics programs to see how well you're doing and in what ways you can improve, add to and streamline your content marketing strategy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Francois Muscat is the WSI Area Representative for South Africa. He represents South African Consultants with excellence as he strives to ensure they achieve the utmost success. Francois has been a WSI Consultant since 2004.



Francois has won seven WSI awards including – Best Product Showcase, Excellence in Search Engine Optimization, Excellence in PPC, and two mentorship awards. Most recently he won the National Sales Award as Africa’s Franchisee of the Year at Stansted 2009. He also enjoys mentoring many WSI Internet Consultants internationally.

Francois operates his business out of Johannesburg, South Africa and specializes in content, social media and search engine marketing.