Rethink Your Content Marketing

How smarter content marketing is changing the
PR, Search and Social Landscape.

linkdex

momentology**.**

about

There is no singular approach to Content Marketing. This ebook captures the concepts and ideas of thirty-one of the most prominent individuals, the thought leaders, working within the digital marketing domain.

From Ann Hadley's Does your content convey honest empathy? to Avinash Kaushik's The See-Think-Do Framework we believe this publication constitutes the most comprehensive collection of quality articles in the Content Marketing space to date.

As digital marketers we work within a continually evolving online space. We must learn, adapt, and share knowledge of our experiences. We must have the right tools, the right strategies, the right frameworks to measure efficacy.

We hope this will provide you with the inspiration to rethink how you approach Content Marketing.

Matt Roberts
Co-founder of Linkdex

contentspage

Introduction: The Content Marketing Landscape

Integration

Content Marketing Strategy

contentspage

Creating Great Content

Smarter Content Marketing

Introduction:
The Content Marketing Landscape

foreword

Joe Pulizzi

Treasure this moment in time. As content marketers, we may never see another moment like it in our lives.

- Technology barriers are all but obliterated. Setting up a publishing operation in the past used to be a six-figure investment. Today, if any brand wants to, publishing on the web can be as easy as a free Wordpress account.

- Expert journalists—who once shunned content marketing— are now largely open to working with brands.

● Customer acceptance of brand-owned content is at an all-time high.

● Buy-in for content marketing—at even the most senior levels in industries of all kinds—is widely accepted.

Add to this, budgets from advertising, social media and search engine optimization are spilling into the content arena. Brands truly have become the *de facto* informational source for their customers and prospects.

I'm a realist, so it would be easy to be concerned about all this good news. Is content marketing nearing bubble-stage? Is the strength of content marketing limited to just North America? Should we temper our excitement?

Let's look at what we know for sure:

● Content marketing is not new. The industry is now officially well over 100 years old. So, saying the art and practice of content marketing is here to stay is easy.

● In a highly connected, social world, how do we make an emotional connection with our customers without compelling stories? Even paid media king, *Coca-Cola*, is making the switch.

● Every organization's top marketing objectives are to 'get found,' drive leads and generate social sharing. Content supports each of those.

● Brands have deeper pockets than the media. Let's face it, companies like *Apple*, with its billions in cash, can buy and sell the likes of the *New York Times* multiple times over. The rise of sponsored content, for example, is in its most nascent stage.

The biggest change I've witnessed is the new organizational mindset that comes with a content marketing approach. Companies like **Red Bull, Procter & Gamble and River Pools & Spas** have shown us that a content-first approach works. Heck, look at the **Content Marketing Institute** and what *we've* accomplished by spinning the best stories.

If (and this is a big if) organizations can stop the campaign mentality and look at content marketing as a long-term strategy, sparks will fly. It's still early. With most organizations still creating content without any strategy at all, and without the right processes and resources in place, this old industry still has a long way to go.

I'm confident this eBook will help take you in the right direction with your own content marketing strategy.

\- Joe Pulizzi

Tweet This Quote

Enjoy, learn, share…and help lead this industry to the promised land!

Joe Pulizzi

Joe Pulizzi is the founder of the Content Marketing Institute, which runs the largest industry event, Content Marketing World, and produces Chief Content Officer magazine. Joe's new book, <u>Epic Content Marketing,</u> was just released.

https://twitter.com/JoePulizzi

https://plus.google.com/107959478034463437419/posts

http://www.linkedin.com/in/joepulizzi

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapterone

Lee Odden

The speed of change

The number of mobile devices being purchased has <u>surpassed computers</u>, globally online video traffic will be <u>55%</u> of all consumer Internet traffic in 2016 and <u>88%</u> of B2B marketers will increase or maintain their spend on content marketing over the next 12 months.

The evolution of digital business has required companies to adapt to changes in technology and evolving consumer preferences for information discovery, consumption and interaction.

It is simply not enough to rely on push marketing tactics and advertising limited to the promotion of product features and benefits. Consumers have more content choices in text, images, audio, video and interactive formats on more devices including smartphones, tablets and laptops. They expect more than just useful information from the brands they buy from.

In reaction to many of these changes in technology and an increased demand for information, many businesses have resolved to creating more content; more information to feed the insatiable appetite of the search and social web.

According to Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs Content Marketing: 2013 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends - North America study, 86% of B2C marketers and 93% of B2B marketers use content marketing respectively.

B2C

B2B
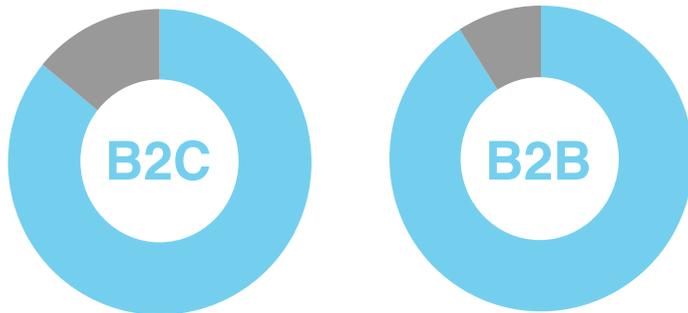
Unfortunately, simply creating more content isn't the answer. Competition is fierce for consumer's time and attention, raising the bar on content marketing from information to experience. Businesses must engage in smarter, customer focused content marketing, not simply creating more information.

The shift from traditional digital marketing to a focus on integrated content experiences will require companies to rethink their approach to content marketing. Making that transition requires an understanding of 4 essential shifts:

1   Information overload

According to a study from IBM, we're now creating 2.5 quintillion bytes daily— so much that 90% of the data in the world today has been created in the last two years alone.

Competition for attention has increased exponentially as brands evolve their publishing efforts and consumers are increasingly empowered to publish themselves. Blogs, social media sharing sites and networks are powered by brand and user generated content, all competing for time and attention.

Since most consumers are confronted by thousands of marketing messages every day, it's essential that companies understand their customers and those who influence them. Using the right tools for everything from influencer discovery to topic optimization, brands can embark on a continuous effort to improve the performance of their content investment.

Data analysis and optimization tools will surface knowledge of specific customer segments and their pain points, goals and those who influence them. Armed with such insight, marketers will be better prepared to craft meaningful content marketing experiences to exceed customer expectations and pass the competition. Businesses must think beyond the mechanical and transition to a more meaningful approach to PR, search, social media and content marketing.

2   Disruption or evolution?

Traditional publishing models have been significantly affected by these changes in technology and consumer information preferences.

Print based publications are on the decline, <u>newsroom resources and staff are shrinking</u> and the roles of brand publishers and traditional media publishers are exchanging.

For examples of those changes, look no further than the news of Amazon's Jeff Bezos buying the Washington Post or to American Express and it's content publishing business that includes lifestyle magazines like "Travel + Leisure", "Food & Wine" or it's highly successful online content community OPEN Forum. The disruption occurring in media and publishing has gained momentum and spells a huge opportunity for companies that can see the value of "brand as publisher" as a way to connect early and in a meaningful way with customers, influencers and communities.

3 Driven by the customer journey

The diversity of information options and access through myriad devices empowers consumers with more decision making power before they ever act on an intent to purchase. The customer journey from awareness to consideration to purchase weaves it's way through channels like search, news and social media in a dynamic path that is rarely linear and increasingly numb to push messaging.

Those companies that can attract and engage consumers earlier in the customer sales cycle can establish a stronger brand connection and influence sales, despite a greater diversity of content and rising competition.

Architecting a content marketing plan across the customer buying cycle and life cycle with the brand will enable marketers to plan content topics meaningful to each stage: awareness, interest, consideration, purchase, retention and advocacy. Content discovery, consumption and action at each stage can then be planned to optimize the customer experience.

4 "Great content isn't great until it's discovered, consumed and acted on."

Rethinking a content marketing strategy and it's integration with search, social media and PR requires a solid definition of content marketing:

"Content marketing is the planned creation, promotion and optimization of brand stories designed to create useful and meaningful experiences that attract, engage and inspire a target group of customers from awareness to purchase to advocacy."

With that definition, marketers can build a content marketing strategy that draws from both consumer insights and brand goals to create great content that is optimized for discovery, engagement and conversion towards business goals.

"Create useful and meaningful experiences that attract, engage and inspire a target group of customers."

Tweet This Quote

Next steps and key questions:

● What business goals could be solved by more useful and meaningful content?

● Who are the target audiences your business needs to connect with? What do they care about? What are their goals?

● Develop an editorial calendar that takes into account how each target customer segment discovers, consumes and acts on information needed during their buying cycle

● Build search, social media and media optimization best practices into your content planning and promotion efforts.

● Continuously analyze key performance indicators and business outcomes to optimize the performance of your content marketing investment

Lee Odden

Lee Odden is a pioneering digital marketer, author and agency CEO focused on growing community and optimizing marketing performance through integrated PR, search, social media and content marketing. For over 16 years he and his agency TopRank® Online Marketing have worked with major B2B and consumer brands to attract and engage communities inspiring sales and advocacy.

Cited by the Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Forbes and the New York Times for his expertise, Lee has been consulting and writing about integrated online marketing for nearly 10 years at TopRankBlog.com.

He is author of the book, Optimize: How to Attract and Engage More Customers by Integrating SEO, Social Media and Content Marketing published by Wiley.

Lee is also a popular keynote and subject matter expert speaker at digital marketing and PR conferences worldwide.

http://www.toprankblog.com

http://twitter.com/leeodden

http://www.linkedin.com/in/leeodden

https://plus.google.com/+LeeOdden

Return to contents page

chaptertwo

Bas van den Beld

The role of content in modern day marketing

Every now and then in business, but especially in digital marketing, a new word pops up to describe a 'new' strategy. Often it turns out that the strategy isn't really that new, it is just adopted by many and summarized by a new term.

"Content marketing" seems to be one of those terms. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it is a buzzword, which will go away sooner or later, but it is something which a lot or marketers have jumped on. And actually "content marketing" has been there for a much longer time than we might realize. It is a term however which in many cases is misinterpreted by those using it.

Let's take a big step back in time. Because Content Marketing might be a term, which seems to be one developed in the past few years, in fact we've been doing content marketing for a lot longer.

You could even say we as humans started doing content marketing back when we were cavemen. Back in those days we knew how to communicate by voice (it's difficult to call it 'language', but in a way it was): we knew how to get the message across. The problem however was that we could only get the message across to those we were 'talking' to in person. And we were looking for a way to 'broadcast' what we were saying to a bigger audience and to make it more permanent. The first 'written' language evolved from that need: murals. We painted our messages on the walls of our caves. The murals themselves were the first content we created, trying to make others understand and act based on that message actually is the first type of content marketing we as humans have been doing.

Taking a giant leap forward into the 20th and 21st century we have been creating content and doing content marketing on a much bigger scale. First with books, then newspapers and magazines, with which we tried to create information, which should push people in a certain direction, and after that television and radio were types of content which was used to make people think in different directions. And when the Internet came content got a boost: lots of new content appeared, content now also written by others than marketers.

And content marketing still played a big role because we wanted to make that content visible and understandable for as many people as possible. You can truly say that content marketing really got a boost with the rise of the web.

The role of SEO in the content

One of the main drivers for the growth of content marketing without a doubt has been Search Engine Optimization. We wanted to get our message across to as many potentially interested audiences as possible and SEO was a great driver to that.

Because there was (is) so much content online people turned to search engines to filter this content for them. The more relevant the search engine decided it was on a term the searcher chose, the more they trusted it. This lead to the realization amongst marketers that if you wanted to reach the audience you needed to be visible within search engines. And to be visible you needed content, content which then was optimized (or should we say 'marketed'?) to be picked up by the search engines. In a way you could say that Search Engine Optimization actually is content marketing.

The realization that content written with search engines in mind might get you visible for many people simply led to an explosion of content. You could often hear the phrase 'you don't need SEO, just good content will do'. And that is where it actually went wrong for content marketing: marketers started to diffuse content marketing with just content. The definition got grey.

That's why marketers should first start with understanding the definition of content marketing before they start creating content.

The definition of content marketing

What really is Content Marketing? There are many definitions out there. The Social Media Today website made a nice overview of some different definitions and explanations of Content Marketing.

Let's take <u>Wikipedia's definition</u> as a starting point:

"Content marketing is any marketing format that involves the creation and sharing of media and publishing content in order to acquire customers."

- Wikipedia

Tweet This Quote

This is the first part of the description on Wikipedia and there is one thing which is being used in all sorts of different definitions of Content Marketing:

● "Storytelling for Sales." (Content Marketing Institute)

● "Creating and sharing valuable free content" (Content Marketing Experience)

● "Creating and distributing digital assets" (Copyblogger)

● "Delivery of editorial content" (Bryan Haines)

The common denominator here is the 'creating' part of the content. And this is where it often goes wrong. Many brands feel creating the content is enough by itself.

Throw as much content towards the potential audience and something must stick. And if it doesn't stick, let's just try again and again and again.

The marketers of the brands actually seem to stop thinking after the term 'content' and forget the 'marketing' part of the term. This part is at least as important, if not more important. Creating is just a part of it. The sharing part another, but the most important part of content marketing does not take place at the brands but at the audience's side of things. Yes, a brand can create and yes, a brand can share, but without keeping in mind who you're targeting, it will all be useless.

The position of the target audience

The biggest mistake made is that brands start creating content from their own perspective.

"Look at how great we are" is the underlying message they are trying to send out. And they are hoping that the receiver will pick that up and 'share' their message. They create content from their own perspective or based on a profile of their audience.

There is one big problem here though: **there is no average target audience.**

Everybody who goes online has a different background. In business to business some are managers, others are specialists and others are just supportive. This makes they will each look at the content they are seeing from a different perspective.

The same goes for business to consumer. One visitor might be looking for a good time, the other is looking to buy and the third is merely investigating whether or not the brand is something they can relate to.

Everybody is different and everybody has different reasons for going online. So why are marketers creating the same content for all of them?

Chances are that when you create content for the average visitor, none of the visitors will be able to relate to the content, because it doesn't fit the needs of why they were looking for the content in the first place. You could still be ranking number one in Google for it, but it wouldn't help your brand at all. Because the visitors cannot relate to it.

What brands really need to do

This means brands have to make a switch when it comes to content:

Instead of just creating content, you need to create and market the content crafted to the specific needs of different target audiences.

You need to start understanding the differences between visitors. You need to figure out what is important to them. When doing research there are several things a brand needs to do:

Understand the goals of the audience

A brand needs to understand the different reasons why visitors are looking for specific types of content. What is their *intent* when they go online? What is their goal?

The brands should define the *different* reasons for going online, not just the average one, but specific ones: are they coming to buy, are they here for knowledge, do they want support or are they here for a good time?

Remember why people share

A good *reason* for Content Marketing is to make people talk, preferably even recommend you as a brand to their peers. But that means the content you provide people with has to be marketed in a way that will make these people share.

People talk with each other to form and grow social bonds. This means that anything they will say to someone else or share with someone else has the purpose of 'looking good' or 'making a point' towards someone else. Providing them with content to share which will make them look good to their peers will make you look good in the background.

Choose the right channels

Many brands pick one or more channels and start spreading their content there. The main reason for picking a channel in many cases is merely the size of the potential audience. No thought however goes into what makes people go to that specific channel: what are they doing there?

Have you ever thought of why people go to Facebook? In most cases they are not there for buying purposes. They are there to share information with friends and have a good time.

Sending out a 'sales message' to these people will not be received well in most cases. For brands it is therefore important to market content (it doesn't have to be their own content), which fits the needs of what people are doing in the specific channels.

The marketing part, which goes back to the original way of 'doing' content marketing: getting a message across. And throughout the history of marketing one thing has been important: the understanding of those you are targeting.
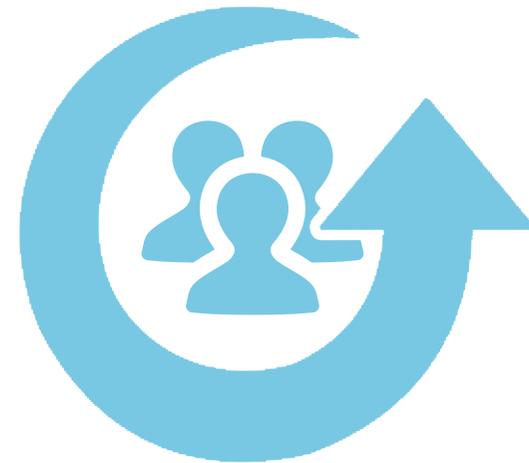
It is now hugely important for marketers to create, share and market the right content for the right reasons and the right people. Content which fits their needs, which will help them take the next step in whatever they are doing.

Current days Content Marketing: the right content for the right people

We have come a long way from creating mural paintings to modern day content marketing. Somewhere along the way however marketers made the mistake of just creating content and forgetting about the marketing part of it.

Bas van den Beld

Bas van den Beld a well known Online Marketing Strategist, trainer and speaker. Bas is widely considered to be an expert and influential on Internet Marketing, Social Marketing and Search Marketing worldwide and especially Europe.

Bas is the founder and owner of StateofDigital.com which is the predecessor of Stateofsearch.com, winner of the Best European Search Blog 2012. State of Digital focuses on getting the right content to the right people at the right time. Bas is winner of several speaker awards and was voted amongst the top Influential Marketers in the UK.

He consults with several type of companies on implementation of strategic Internet Marketing and provides training in Search Engine Marketing, Social Media in the organisation, and Social Marketing and Influence Marketing related topics. Bas also consults for agencies and brands helping them determine the right online business strategy and connecting them to the right influential people.

http://www.stateofdigital.com/

https://twitter.com/basvandenbeld

https://plus.google.com/107488392912382136407/

http://nl.linkedin.com/in/basvandenbeld/

https://www.facebook.com/basvandenbeld

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapterthree

Rick Ramos

7 reasons why "content marketing is the new black."

These days more and more companies are spending a larger percentage of their marketing budgets on producing great content. The reason for this is that content marketing works, producing a great ROI and it also avoids some of the pitfalls of other online marketing techniques.

Here are the top 7 reasons why "content marketing is the new Black:"

1 Standard banners can annoy users

Surveys have proven time and time again that users get annoyed by traditional banners and tune them out. Publishers have begun to use more eye-catching banners to produce the same conversion results they got in the past. This cycle is an ongoing process, and we are now left with full page take over flash ads that users hate, leaving many turning to ad blocking software to block all advertising on publishers sites.

Content marketing functions differently. Users thirst for great content and seek it out. They share it with their friends and want more. Great content is the polar opposite from standard banners.

2 You need to feed the social beast

Social media is a great avenue for reaching out to potential and existing customers by educating and entertaining them. One way to do that is to curate and distribute great content. This is a great first step to a solid content marketing strategy.

To fully realize your content marketing strategy, you need to begin to produce and host great content for yourself. This not only allows you to benefit from all the inbound traffic, you'll also have the ability to fully control the message.

3 Content educates throughout the sales funnel

If you're a B2B marketer or your product is fairly complicated, great content allows you to educate your potential customers while they are doing their initial online research. You can also help educate your existing customers and teach them the benefits of upgrading or buying accessory products or services.

Example – Canon Cameras
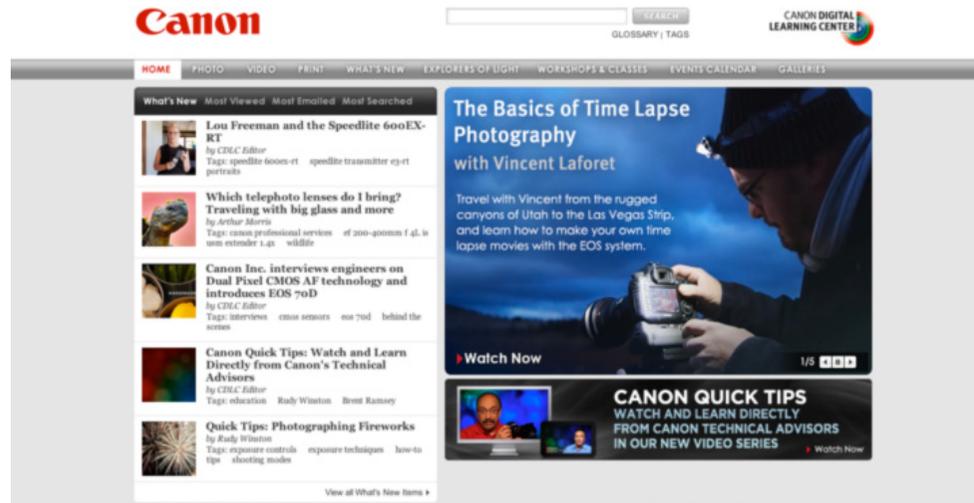
Canon spends a great deal to educate consumers on how to take amazing photographs. They work with some of the brightest minds in the photography industry to produce this great content. This type of content helps keep consumers loyal to their brand and also helps educate customers on different photographic situations that might require additional equipment.

4   Your SEO strategy depends on it

Google has been quickly releasing tweaks to their search algorithms to find great content and penalizing poorly written web pages. This began with the release of "Panda" in February 2011 and things will only continue to get harder for websites that try to game the system. People link to great content organically, and Google is tweaking their system to look for these signs.

You still need to do some of the basic SEO on-page fundamentals, but tricks like buying links and issuing press releases will no longer work.

5   Gain credibility in your industry

Every industry has thought leaders that command the most attention in their respective space. The easiest way to become well known within your industry is to start a continuing content marketing strategy. This will help position your brand in an authentic way as a leader in the space. It also helps drive word-of-mouth recommendations and drives things to go viral in the social channels. Content marketing is like the turtle in the classic tale about the race against the rabbit, slow and steady wins the race.

6   Quality content is a great sales & lead

If done correctly, content marketing can help convert your website visitors. A study by MarketingSherpa found that organic traffic converts into high quality sales leads at a 30% greater rate when the user is presented with high quality content. When you stop trying to sell so hard, the user puts down their guard and becomes more open to your message.

On average, consumers are already 70% through the sales funnel before they ever get to your website. They are generally already moderately educated about your product or service, but there is still time to influence their decision. Great content helps educate them on your product or service and lets them know why your brand is better than the competition.

7 Content marketing delivers a strong ROI

According to the Content Marketing Institute, on average, B2B marketers are spending 33 percent of their marketing budgets on content marketing in 2013. The majority of those surveyed also said that they will increase their content marketing spending over the next 12 months. What does this tell you about content marketing? People are seeing a return on their investment in quality content.

Content marketing is not a quick fix to marketing your product or service. There aren't any shortcuts to producing great content. It takes time and dedication to create a lot of content. Building an audience can also take awhile, and search engines can also sometimes be slow to find your content.

The payoff at the end though is that you're standing at the top of your industry and have produced a ton of content that is bringing you great leads on a daily basis. Working on a content strategy can also create a barrier-to-entry for your competitors that will take them years to replicate.

Rick Ramos

Mr. Rick Ramos is a seasoned veteran in online marketing with experience developing global brands for major industry players. He has worked at a comScore-rated top 50 web property and two of the world's largest ad networks as Vice President of Marketing. He is also author of "Content Marketing: Insider's Secret to Online Sales & Lead Generation," the #1 content marketing book on Amazon.com in 2013.

Rick develops and builds online media strategies for companies of all sizes, including several Fortune 500 companies.

He has been quoted in and his companies profiled by CNBC Business, The Wall Street Journal, AMEX OpenForum, Portfolio, Law.com, Ars Technica, CBS MoneyWatch, and more.

Rick also created the number one most-viewed banner of all time with over 3 billion impressions worldwide.

http://www.rickramos.com/

https://twitter.com/ricktramos

https://www.facebook.com/RickRamosCom

https://plus.google.com/113723748155315585081

http://www.linkedin.com/in/rickramos

amazon.com/author/rickramos

http://www.rickramos.com/feed/

Return to contents page

Linkdex

Linkdex

The World's Leading SaaS Platform Uniting Search, Social, PR & Content Channels
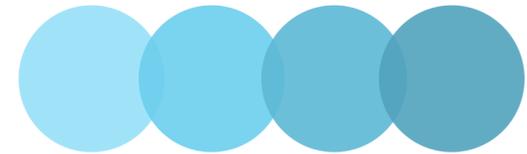
www.linkdex.com

Integration

chapterfour

Matt Roberts

Co-founder of Linkdex

Use content to supercharge your organic marketing

For a while now we've been looking for a way to describe the type of marketing Linkdex creates data and software for. Enterprise SEO Software? Sort of but no. Content Marketing Software? Again, sort of, but no. PR / Influencer Marketing Software? Same issue. Then what about being more generic and just calling it Digital Marketing? We could but what we do is more specific.

At the same time I have observed an industry struggling with similar issues. SEO was being dropped from job titles on LinkedIn even faster than people were self-proclaiming themselves SEO Experts in the early days of the profession. Earned Media and Inbound Marketing appear not to be loved and have struggled to get traction.

At the same time it was increasingly evident that the channels delivering the high ROI's were SEO, Content Marketing and Social Media and each needed the other to succeed. In fact, each of the channels need skills from other parts of an organization as well, such as PR.

This means that the brands that were going to win the share of the natural search battle were the ones that were able to find the optimal blend SEO, Content Marketing, PR & Social Media. Breaking down internal silos and working towards common goals.

After debating whether a new more appropriate label was helpful or required, I took counsel from the wise people I knew were closest to the debate. Philip Sheldrake, Author of *The Business of Influence* and chairs the CIPR group on measurement and evaluation. Lee Odden, Author of *Optimize* and someone who bridges the professions brilliantly. Anne Kennedy, Co-Author of "*Global Search Engine Marketing*" and thirty-five years experience in marketing and public relations and her Co-Author, Kristján Már Hauksson, not only one of the nicest people I've met, a very smart digital marketing thinker.

The label that got debated was Organic Marketing. Below I've included our captured debate. It's early days and still very much work in progress. In fact it's for you, the readers of this to decide whether this adds anything to how you go about marketing the businesses you're part of.

The DNA of organic marketing

There are two key strands to understanding Organic Marketing:

Firstly, stakeholders need to define the success of a project as traffic naturally referred from search engines, social media and highly relevant publication. Without a common goal the multi-disciplinary skill-sets required won't unite and work effectively as a team.

Secondly, success in maximizing the ROI of search, social, PR and content depends on teamwork. SEO's can't exist in a silo. Neither can Content Marketers, PR's and the other channels. Businesses that don't get departments / disciplines to work in teams will struggle to compete.

Both of these highlight the strength of Organic Marketing that are centred on its focus on measurement, ROI and teamwork.

With this in mind, a candidate definition is:

Organic marketing *is a multi-disciplinary marketing activity with the specific goal of publishing and promoting online content that people like, search for, and want to share. People find what Organic Marketers have published on search engines like Google, social networks like Twitter and Facebook, without ongoing paid media transactions taking place.*

Organic content – It's a natural ecosystem

The primary focus of Organic Marketing effort is the '**Marketing of Content**', where content should be considered the product being marketed. Seeing content as a product to be created and marketed helps hugely when it comes to creating optimal strategies.
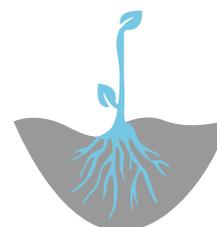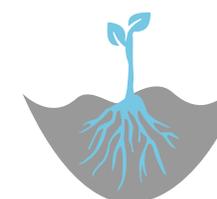
Search Engines   **Social Networks**   **Referred Traffic**
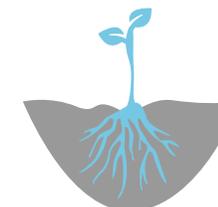
Organic content is part of a natural ecosystem where without the need for continued monetary intervention, a domain and its web pages are found, engaged and socialised with, and a business's marketing objectives met.

Like natural ecosystems that are exploited by people and companies for gain, they need to be maintained, tended to and nurtured as their environment changes and evolves, but for the most part, their life and success is relatively long-term and self-sustaining.

The **organic media channels** that provide organic visitors are:

● **Search engines** like Google. This is referred to as Organic Search.

● **Social networks / publishers** like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, WordPress, Reddit.

● **Referred traffic** from websites like digital new media and blogs.

Being part of a collective

Objectives like growing your share of search require a collective response. It's my opinion that no individual can successfully tackle the task of outperforming a competitive market single-handedly.

I'll work with you to find some great content hooks

I'll work with you to arrange a meetup for those bloggers

I'll make sure we're measuring the campaign's effectiveness

I'll work with you to prioritize our keyword strategy

I'll work with you to configure analytics

I'll work with you to prioritize our keyword strategy

The overlapping marketing disciplines / skills / data required to create the optimal conditions for organic marketing include but are not limited to:

● Content strategy & marketing

● Design & copywriting

● Conversion rate optimization

● SEO

● PR

● Social media marketing

● Influencer marketing

● Analytics

These marketing disciplines / skills are **organic marketing stakeholders.** This means that a business ability to collaborate and function in teams directly impacts their relative Organic Marketing Performance.

This then begs the question, "What makes one team outperform another?". This question was a source of great intrigue to me.

The answers I found were inspired by authors like Patrick Lencioni, who across a number of related books managed to sum up most of what all of the other texts were pointing at.

If you manage or are part of team I'd strongly recommend you open up this pandora's box.

The 4 pillars of organic marketing performance

Content for organic visibility

Content designed for Organic Visibility is about providing searchers with the best answer possible to a query. Not what old school SEO's would do which is get a worse than average page to rank and disappoint the searcher.

Keyword queries can be broadly arranged into 3 categories.

● **Owned** keywords like brand / products / and trademarks

● **Transactional** keywords that make a business money

● **Informational** keywords that build awareness of a brand

Having a strategy for all of these is essential. And when creating your plan don't think it's only about your website's rankings. It's not. For example, owned keywords and ZMOT are so intertwined in how you approach online content that to separate them or not attempt to manage them is a mistake. If you're new to the concept of ZMOT - download the book.

Content for socialization

Content for socialization comes in a variety of forms that include news, opinions, interviews, ebooks, white papers and more.

The media is also diverse and includes text based publishing, photography, illustrations, video, and infographics.

The socialization signals this content is looking to achieve are:

● **Organic Links** from websites like digital new media and blogs

● **Organic shares** from social networks like Twitter, Facebook, G+, Pinterest, Instagram

To maximize the links and shares (as well as mentions), from influential publications and authors **you need to get the PR and Social Media team engaged in the project.** Their ability to find and refine content angles, messages that resonate and influence are a critical component of Organic Marketing.

In fact you're reading an example of Content For Socialization. Linkdex have created this eBook in the hope that we might inspire you to write about it and share it socially.

Content optimization

Here's an obvious statement.

Web pages are a collection of words, phrases and media that are coded in a structured way to enable the page to render in browsers and be read by applications like search engines. A website is a collection of web pages organized and labelled using Information Architecture (IA) skills.

What's often missed by teams that don't have representation from the search team is that a business ability to optimize pages and websites for users and search engines is a critical component of maximizing a business' content visibility.

Content needs to be designed and written to influence the maximum number of visitors to complete your desired goals.

A secondary, but equally critical stage of the Content Optimization process is the creative and Conversion Rate Optimization process. Having CRO skills in your team can boost your bottom line in a significant way.

Performance measurement

The Organic Marketing Key Performance Indicators (OMKPI's) of Organic Marketing are defined by a business's marketing objectives and must be agreed upon by the Organic Marketing Stakeholders.

These are the specific and measurable things that leave no team member in any doubt as to whether they had achieved their goals or not.

They are objectives each team member can articulate along with the path to achieving them.

They should include metrics like:

● Content's search engine visibility against a defined keyword universe

● Organic traffic (brand vs non-brand)

● Keyword reach (Number of keywords)

● Content performance ratio (Pages / Visibility)

● Social / Referred / Direct traffic / Revenue / Goals e.g. subscribers

● Quality and number of unique referrers

- Quality and number of new links and mentions (But links are better)

- Brand / key product ZMOT profile

- Website technical optimization

- Content creation and socialization metrics

- Publisher and Authorship engagement

- Key influencer relationship stages / life cycle

- Key influencer outcomes / results

- Following (Social / Subscriber)

Organic Marketing

Paid media is complementary to organic marketing

It would be wrong to say that paid media does not affect Organic Media. If visitors shown paid media are sent to great content and they socialize it, the signal created from that socialization can and does impact Organic Marketing Performance.

However, paid media can only act as a catalyst / kickstarter to content that is capable of having a life of its own without ongoing paid media life support. If the content has no visibility without having paid media send visitors it should be thought of as a paid media asset.

Over to you

Does it matter what we call what we do? I think it does. Having a specific set of goals and framework to build a team around is the key to success. Of course this particular ecosystem is a part of a larger one called Marketing. But its ability to be SMART is its advantage.

To debate more, suggest edits and push this forward go to www.organicmarketingforum.org

To find out more about the SaaS Platform Linkdex are creating to help you supercharge your organic marketing visit www.linkdex.com

Matt Roberts

Matt Roberts is a marketing veteran with 10 years in traditional ad agencies and 10 years in digital. He's the co-founder of the award winning SaaS Marketing Platform, Linkdex. Together with his Linkdex team he's working with brands and agencies globally to create the technology needed to give brands a competitive advantage.

http://www.linkdex.com/

https://twitter.com/Linkdex

Return to contents page

chapterfive

Rob Garner

If you have a website, then you are already a real-time publisher

Are you still trying to determine your brand's content marketing strategy? Well, you're too late. The fact is if you have a website or social media presence, you are already a real-time content marketer.

Content marketing is nothing new, but the definition of publishing changed with the widespread adoption of social media and real-time publishing technologies. Not only are messages spread instantaneously through social spaces, but advances in language processing technology pushes content into search results within seconds of being published. Most importantly, the rise of the networked society that lives digitally has greatly increased expectations for the businesses they deal with. In other words, if they are digitally accessible 24/7, then the businesses they deal with should be too. From a content perspective, they expect your business to act less like a dusty old library, and more like TMZ.com.

Many legacy enterprises are positioned to fail in this landscape, while other unknown players may rise to the top. And this is by no means a new phenomenon. One need only look at how Borders succumbed to Amazon, and how the print classified ad business died off due to Craigslist and eBay to see the opportunities and threats of changing technology. This is true for both the smallest businesses and the largest enterprises.

As search engines have become more social, and social networks have become more algorithmic, marketers must stop considering these mediums separately. This basic fact is lost on many, if not most, social and content marketers. They are thinking about search the wrong way. Search is not a tactic to make your content more visible; it's a critical success factor that underpins your content strategy.

Additionally, social network engagement is now a key cornerstone of how search engines show results. The depth of a company's social network is now also an SEO tactic – the wider a network is, the more influence it will have on keyword triggers. So if your brand's social media team is not thinking about SEO best practices when posting content, you are leaving money and attribution on the table.

Let's take a look at Zappos as an example of a brand who is getting this right. Not only does Zappos have a wide body of content that is shared socially, but its content often dominates search results page in the paid and natural results. Furthermore, Zappos has more than 1,000 active representatives on Twitter, and they are ready to meet the needs of any Twitter user at a moment's notice. In effect, Zappos markets passively in real-time through search and actively in social media by being responsive in spaces like Twitter.

Billboard is another example of a company that is taking advantage of the real-time content marketing opportunity. In anticipation of the massive real-time spike in search queries around the Super Bowl halftime show, Billboard prepared a blog post (well in advance) in some of the greatest Super Bowl halftime performances. As multiple queries went into the top 10 in Twitter and Yahoo!, Billboard was there with relevant content that rode the wave of real-time keyword popularity, and also became a highly shared asset in social spaces as a side note to social conversations about the event itself.

Companies like Zappos and Billboard are embracing a new definition of the term "publishing". The new definition takes into account a brand's applications, databases, image and video publishing. For every tweet, every vote, every like, and every conversation, a new link and page is created, and it becomes part of the brand's digital publishing trail. Understanding this is what separates a mediocre social publisher and a great one.

With these examples in mind, here are some of the ways your business can go from a dusty old website, to a real-time content marketing machine:

Make your website come alive in real time. There are many things you can do to bring more of a live feel to your web presence, where your audience expects you to be there. Bring your external feeds from social spaces onto your site to show your audience the other places you are active. Also push some analytics into your

site to show that you have a pulse. Totals, active users online, and other metrics can show that there are people there behind the site. Adding your phone numbers, chat, and other alternative communications sends a message that you are ready to talk, listen, and share.

Focus on using your digital strategy for online CRM, and serving your audience. Service and customer relationship management are core functions of content and social media marketing. If you focus on solving the most common and uncommon problems for your audience, you will likely find that there is no shortage of content opportunities and methods to engage your audience in real-time.

Don't just wait for your audience to come to you - seek them out in search and social spaces. When considering the real-time user experience, it is important to note that your audience doesn't magically gravitate to your website, but they rather ask questions and engage outside of your owned spaces to talk about your company or relevant service or product. Use keyword research and audience research to find out how they speak, how they connect, where they connect, and who they connect with.

Speak to your audience in their own language, and write content in a way that connects with them linguistically. Many marketers talk about enabling your customers to become a part of the brand. One of the easiest ways to show your audience that you understand them is to speak in their own language. This means literally speaking their language in conversation, but also by publishing content that reflects their interests and problems.

Monitor real time research, and respond with content and conversation in real time. Again, this speaks to real-time user experience, active listening, and fluid content creation and response. Listen to your audience by being present, and also by looking for new keyword language as it appears, and jump into the conversation as you see fit, or as your audience demands it.

Obviously, content marketing is not new – brands have been creating content since the early days of radio and print (and even before). So like it or not, you are already a publisher, and because your audience is always on, they expect your content to be always on as well, and in real time.

How your brand uses its platform will ultimately determine if it survives or thrives in the real-time content marketing revolution.

Rob Garner

Rob Garner is the Chief Strategy Officer of the Advice Interactive Group, and also the author of "Search and Social: The Defintive Guide to Real-Time Content Marketing," Wiley/Sybex 2012. Garner has been a speaker at a number of industry conferences since 2004, including ad:tech Chicago and NYC; SXSW, SES in San Jose, NYC, and Chicago; Search Engine Watch LIVE in Dallas 2007; Rackspace Customer Event; Content Marketing World 2012, SMCDallas, DFWSEM, and the VeriSign Executive Conference in Dulles. Additionally, he writes a regular column for MediaPost Publications' Search Insider that provides insight into search campaign management experience and best practices. Rob is also a co-founder of the Dallas / Fort Worth Search Engine Marketing Association, and served as its president from 2006-August 2008.

He is also VP of Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization (SEMPO).

He has been quoted and featured in the following publications: Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones, Reuters, Mashable, MediaPost, Adweek, Ad Age, Direct Marketing News, Mobile Marketer, Smart Business Magazine, Search Marketing Standard, Search Engine Watch, ClickZ, CNNMoney, and The Dallas Morning News.

www.AdviceInteractive.com

rgarner@AdviceInteractive.com

http://www.amazon.com/Search-Social-Definitive-Real-Time-Marketing/dp/111826438X

www.Slideshare.net/robgarner1

www.LinkedIn.com/in/RobGarner

www.fb.com/Garner

gplus.to/RobGarner

http://www.mediapost.com/publications/author/2719/rob-garner/

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptersix

Andrew Smith

What can content marketing learn from PR? And vice versa.

Is content marketing just the latest in a long series of over-hyped approaches to marketing communications? Or is there really something in it? The reality probably lies somewhere in the middle.

But what is content marketing?

According to Joe Pulizzi, the Founder of the Content Marketing Institute: "Content Marketing is owning, as opposed to renting media. It's a marketing process to attract and retain customers by consistently creating and curating content in order to change or enhance a consumer's behavior."

Or to take it to an even more granular level, what is content itself?

Lee Odden at TopRank Online Marketing recently conducted an informal poll on Twitter, Facebook and Google+ asking that very question.

The responses were organized into 3 groups:

1 Content = things, objects, or tangibles like text, images, audio, video

2 Means to create experiences, value creation, or outcomes

3 Too ambiguous to define

So far, so good. The next inevitable question is: what content should I create?

The trite answer: whatever your target audience finds interesting, valuable and original.

As advertising legend David Ogilvy once said: "You cannot bore people into buying your product; you can only interest them in buying it."

Of course, this is easier said than done.

One way to look at content marketing is to view it as neither paid nor owned media, but rather as a form of earned media. And the granddaddy of all earned media is public relations (PR).

One of the key aspects of traditional PR has been a focus on media relations - in other words, helping others (journalists) to tell your story.

Content marketing on the other hand lets you tell your own story without requiring a third party to do it for you.

In both cases, the skill and value is in the editorial content creation process. Making decisions about what form of words, pictures, video and/or sound will deliver the desired end effect. Media relations practitioners have thus become adept at developing story and content ideas that stand the greatest chance of being used by journalists and turned into relevant content (not as easy as it looks).

Content marketing operates along similar principles - other than the fact that you don't have to persuade a third party to create the content. Content marketing can therefore be thought of as editorially driven marketing communications.

"You cannot bore people into buying your product; you can only interest them in buying it."

- David Ogilvy

Tweet This Quote

Think like a journalist to create meaningful content

A journalistic or editorial mindset is therefore helpful when it comes to creating content for marketing purposes (indeed, some organisations are hiring journalists to create content for precisely that reason).

But the editorial mindset is important from another standpoint - search engine optimisation.

Consider Google's view of backlinks today - that the best links come from high trust, high authority sites in a natural, editorial style context.

Panda and Penguin were intended to penalise sites with thin content - and sites being linked to from thin content. Another way of defining thin content would be as lacking in editorial quality.

Google itself constantly talks about "editorial quality" in the context of the kind of content it regards as being valuable and relevant to searchers (and by definition, the value of being linked to and from content that has editorial quality and authority).

Content marketing objectives should have a direct "line of sight" connection to organisational objectives - although all too often, they don't. The good news is that if effort is taken to define concrete and observable objectives for content marketing, the tools to measure its effectiveness don't have to cost the earth. One example would be the ability to make use of attribution analysis built into Google Analytics. This kind of technique allows content marketers to understand the direct and indirect contribution that content makes to measurable goals. As well as what mix of content really does deliver the most value to an organisation.

Successful content marketing requires editorial style skills and an editorial mindset. One marketing discipline that is already well versed in this area is public relations. PR skills can definitely help inform and shape a successful approach to content marketing. Ultimately, your content marketing strategy must be defined by your organisational objectives. All too often, this is neglected.

The value of content marketing can - and must - be measured. In the end, content marketing has a lot to gain from the world of public relations and an editorial mindset.

Andrew Smith

His career spans 28 years in PR, marketing communications and journalism - always aiming to be at the forefront of communications innovation.

He is co-author of 'Share This', a best-selling practical handbook to the biggest changes taking place in the media and its professions by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Social Media Panel. According to Lord Sugar: "This book is a useful guide to using social media effectively". He is also co-author of the follow up book, 'Share This Too', published by Wiley in August 2013.

He is an Approved Trainer in social media, analytics and SEO for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA).

He is a guest lecturer in social media and digital marketing at the University of Leeds Business School. In September 2011 he was named the 7th most influential person in social media and digital marketing in the UK in New Media Age magazine's Top 100 Social Influence chart.

http://www.escherman.com

http://blog.escherman.com

http://www.twitter.com/andismit

http://www.linkedin.com/in/andrewbrucesmith

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapterseven

Danny Denhard

Creating the perfect content cocktail - do PR, social, SEO & content mix well together?

When you are looking to go out to celebrate you often go out with friends for a drink, as I have worked in London for the last eight years, you usually end up in a bar, some good, some bad. As I used to run two bars, it is not always easy to know the difference between a good and a bad bar from the outside, likewise a good or bad bar person is equally hard to work out.

This could be said for most of the content marketing campaigns.

Have you ever been to a blind cocktail tasting?

If not I would highly recommend it, imagine someone making you great cocktails and then tailoring a cocktail to your specific tastes.
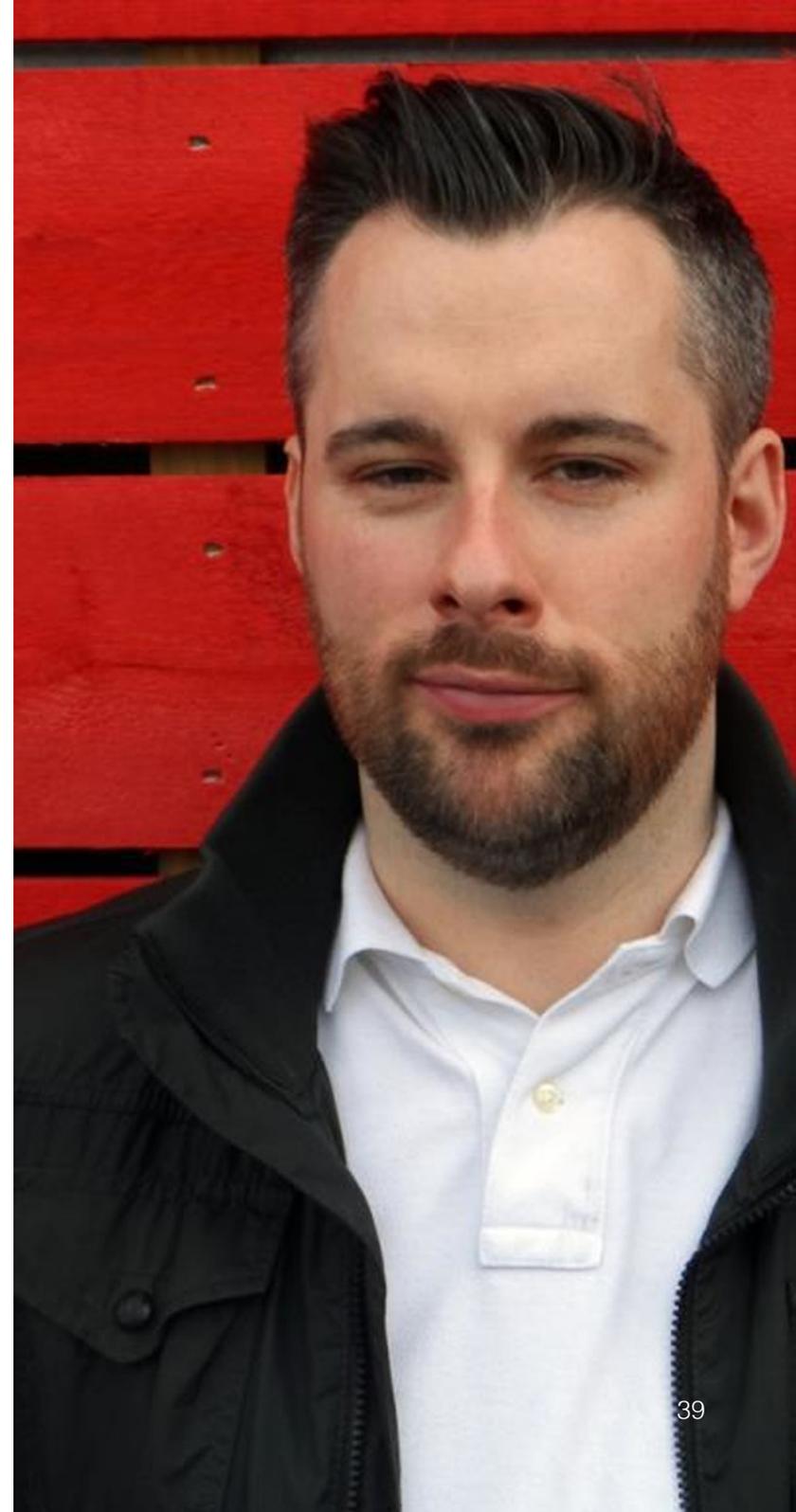
I know that's the holy grail for many drinkers especially those who are spirit or cocktail drinkers.

In content marketing, the holy grail is super targeted content to your interests and likes. Like advertising, your content or brand means different things to different people, there is no such thing as a mass market anymore.

Being someone who knows a thing or two about drinks and cocktails, let's break down the core components of what makes a great cocktail and then apply them to content marketing.

The core components of a good cocktail:

- Ice
- Spirits
- Fresh Fruit
- Cocktail Equipment

Now that you have the components let's talk about what cocktails you can make with just these core components:

- Sours - double measure of spirit, sugar syrup or half table spoon of sugar

- Tom Collins - 1 juice of a whole lemon, sugar syrup, double measure of gin

- Daiquiri - 1 part sugar syrup, 2 parts lime, 8 parts rum

- Margarita - 1 part tequila, 1 part Orange Liqueur, 1 part lime

You know you can actually make a quality cocktail at home and you do not always need all of the fancy bar equipment or all the best spirits.
Does this sound familiar? The same principle applies to quality or compelling content.

There is an argument that you can get a premixed cocktail and enjoy it like a real cocktail, unfortunately these premixed cocktails are not good, and it's pretty much the same as premixed / generic web content.

So let's make a great content cocktail, my personal favourite a Rum Old Fashioned (not to be confused with Don Drapers drink the Old Fashioned with Bourbon or Whiskey).

The glass: First of all you need a glass, ideally an Old Fashioned Tumbler, the tumbler is designed to compliment the drink, specifically to the way you enjoy the cocktail.

The ice: In an Old Fashioned, the ice is one of the most important parts, it acts not only as the cooling part of the cocktail but also mixes all the flavours together and helps to dilute the strong rum you add. The ice in our cocktail is the social media in your content marketing campaign. Social media is always an integral part of any great content campaign. It is the broadcast medium. It is the notification that someone wants to receive which often leads to the key share or gaining the eyeballs on the campaign which could lead to a write up, a link or it becoming a lead story for multiple publications both off and online.

The Rum: The rum, the best part to most, is the strongest flavour, the most important part to me personally; it is the section of the cocktail that brings the sweetness and the kick to the cocktail.

The type and quality of the rum is important, you have to have good golden rum; the better the quality, the better the finish of the cocktail, the more you will enjoy it. The rum is the PR in our quality cocktail, PR is the most important section, the sell in, the connections, the relationships. Without quality PR the cocktail will lack taste, balance and the right flavour for us to enjoy the cocktail or succeed with the content marketing campaign.

The bitters and gomme: Despite the name, this is the underrated section of the cocktail. The bitters and gomme add a bitter twang and a sweetener to the potentially dry or strong cocktail. SEO acts as the hidden element in the content cocktail, the basics have to be followed. The unseen components are applied so you rank well and get the most from the content marketing campaign. My personal rule is: content marketing should never just be done SEO.

The Stirring: What's next is the most important section to mixologists for this content cocktail, you have to stir, not only a few times but over 30 times to get the cocktail to ensure all of the ingredients are perfectly mixed together. It also ensures the Rum Old Fashioned is served to the perfect temperature and continues to be enjoyed until the last drops.

This is exactly the same for any great content marketing campaign or project, all of the teams (ingredients) have to mix together to get the best result or the best cocktail. Without synergy and everyone knowing their specific part in the campaign, the project simply won't perform to its best potential even if it consists of the best ingredients.

Lastly, the fruit or in this case the orange peel/twist: The orange twist is the garnish, it is the finishing element of the cocktail. Without the twist - the orange zest oils, the cocktail is not complete. If the cocktail is not finished correctly it does not have the same finish or the right quality. Much like any content piece the content has to be desirable, visually attractive and compelling.

So here are the key takeaways:

- Everyone should know what ingredients are and why, and the part they play in the bigger picture / cocktail.

- The ingredients are interchangeable as well as discipline but must mix or shake well

- Opinions and flavours matter, what's horrible to you might be the ideal drink for someone else. Remember everyone now is used to being targeted by their interests, their likes or their affinity.

- Ensure you always present it well, cocktails that look awful generally are awful Always ensure your content viewable, shareable and actionable especially on mobile

You wouldn't order a cocktail in an old man's pub or low quality pub chain (for the British readers an example, Wetherspoons) - but just think you might be served by a mixologist. Think of that when it comes to the first viewing of a content marketing project, does the content do what it says at first glance? If not you better sell it well at first glance or answer the question quickly otherwise your project just won't be consumed.

Danny Denhard

Danny is an eleven year digital lead, leading SEO, Social Media and Content Marketing. Over the last decade Danny has led successful campaigns for large global brands in the most competitive verticals including: money saving, classifieds, property, travel, mortgage, finance, high-end fashion and e-commerce.

Danny currently heads up European SEO for VoucherCodes.co.uk (RetailMeNot). He is an experienced conference speaker and recently spoke at the Content Marketing Show.

http://dannydenhard.com

http://twitter.com/dannydenhard

http://www.linkedin.com/in/dannydenhard

https://plus.google.com/u/0/112080127184383819662/posts

Return to contents page

chaptereight

Nick Garner

Organic marketing, driving social influence.

You want to buy a product or maybe use a service, so you go online just to see if you can find information to guide your purchase.

You're looking for trusted information to guide you on a decision path and search engines like Google are very helpful at giving you the information you need in your buying journey.

In this chapter we deal with a few big ideas:

- Online Social Influence: this occurs when one's emotions, opinions, or behaviours are affected by others.

- Trust signals: An indicator of trustworthiness.

- Organic marketing as a vehicle to build a campaign to deliver social influence through the right trust signals

This chapter examines the various aspects of social influence online and gives a practical 'how to' when running your own online social influence marketing project.

We incorporate these in an Organic Marketing framework to create sales uplift for a brand.

This chapter examines the various aspects of social influence online and gives a practical 'how to' when running your own online social influence marketing project.

Background

According to Google 84% of consumers purchasing decisions are influenced by what they see online.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project did a piece of research into search engine use over time and found most adult search engine users have faith in the fairness and accuracy of their results.

Because users use search engines more frequently, they are now better able to find information to help guide their purchasing decision.
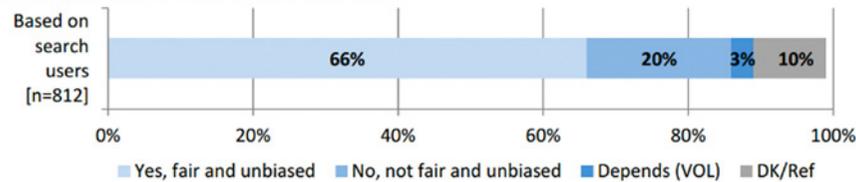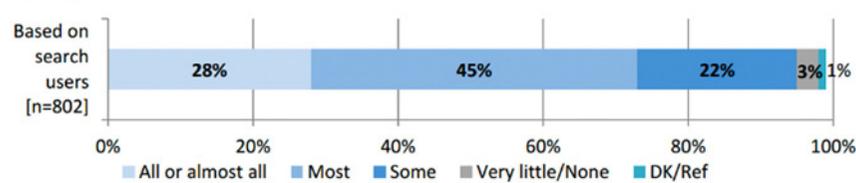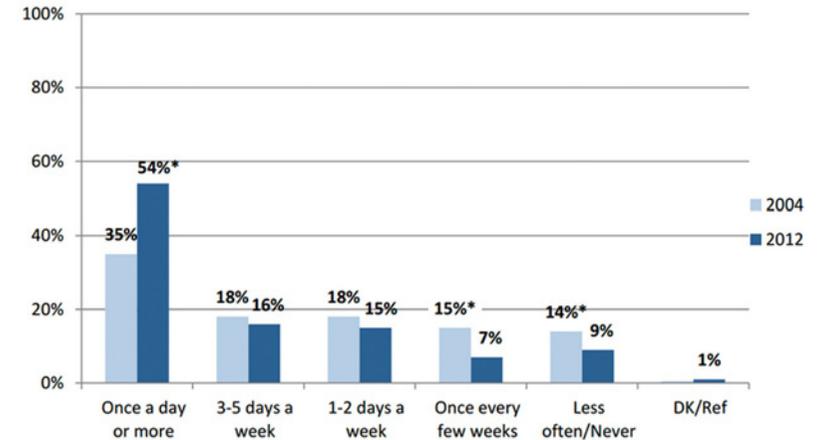
Source: Pew Internet | http://pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Search_Engine_Use_2012.pdf

Source: Pew Internet | http://pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Search_Engine_Use_2012.pdf

On average web, users will look at 10.4 sources of information before making a purchase decision. This figure varies by sector as shown below.
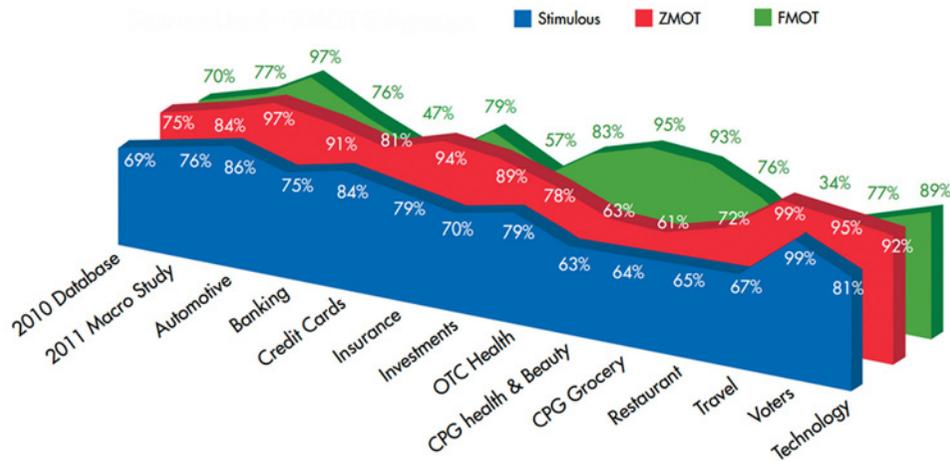
● 'Stimulus' which is branding and general awareness of a product brand or service.

● ZMOT: Zero Moment Of Truth i.e. when you check out a brand

● FMOT: First Moment Of Truth which is when you are buying

Source: Google http://www.zeromomentoftruth.com/

It's justifiable to say that consumers purchasing behaviour is influenced by what they read on the internet.

For a brand to build a body of 'social influence', they have to:

● Demonstrate their ability to satisfy a need at a reasonable price.

● Encourage the creation of socially influencing content.

● Actively promote socially influencing content.

The most potent social influence is not what is said through a brand's owned media, but through independent sources.

As social animals, humans are very good at acting upon 'micro social signals'. These signals steer the behaviour that affects our social interaction and ultimately allows us to function in large societies. We take this inbuilt skill for understanding 'micro signals' and use it in the selection process for a product or service.

Since the internet is how so many of us gather information to help us select the products and services we will buy, as marketers it makes sense to stimulate this process to win more business.

Ultimately consumers want three questions to be answered:

● Is this right for me?

● Is this worth it?

● Will this brand deliver what it promises?

If a consumer isn't sure what is right for them, they will research to find out more. Once they're sure it's the right product or service, they will look for validation from others to make sure their purchase is a good one.

The following diagram shows the consumer journey over time, where online social influence reaches its maximum intensity in the active evaluation phase of the purchase cycle.
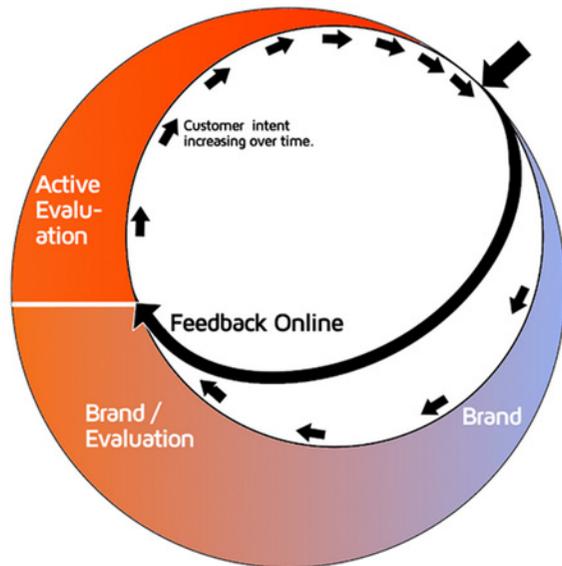
Source: 90 Digital

Trust signals & social influence

Social influence

Social influence happens when a consumer's emotions, opinions, or behaviors are affected by others. When applying social influence to the internet, its proven consumer buying behaviour is affected by it.

The underlying criteria for effective social influence is trust in the source of information, allowing it to influence you.

This is slightly different to 'word of mouth', where the driver is trusted personal referral directly leading to an immediate purchase.

The internet has been a massive driver of social influence. In the developed world 77% of the population have internet access, with 67.7% of us actively contributing content to it. With so much participation, the relevance and volume of influencing information is huge.

Sitting as the gateway into all this information are search engines. Consumers use search engines to seek more detail on a product or service. They then seek the opinions of trusted individuals or the collective assessment of less trusted individuals i.e. user reviews. Consumers then amass a body of 'proof' to influence a buying decision.
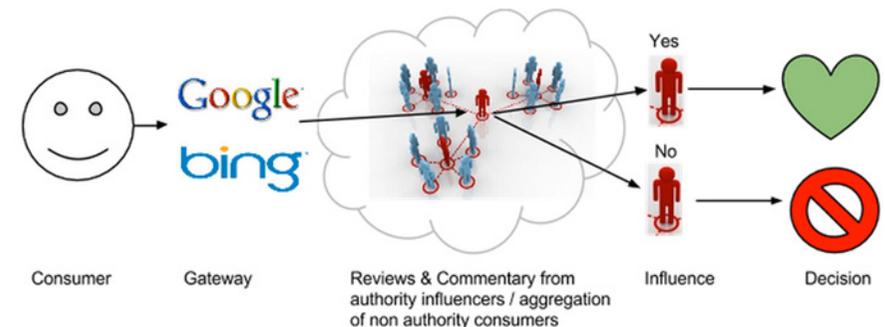
Source: 90 Digital

Background: ZMOT and Google's 5,000 person study

In 2011 Google commissioned shopper sciences to do a 5,000 person study on the research behaviour of consumers. They wanted to understand how much search affected the buying process and wanted to give this process a mental framework. They called it Zero Moment of Truth. [ZMOT]

The main idea behind ZMOT is that web users will research online for products and services before they buy.

Before the internet, consumers would ask friends and maybe get information from main stream media. Once a decision was made, they would go to the shop and be heavily influenced by the sales person. This was because the salesperson had more knowledge than the consumer. Being driven by profit, the salesperson would sell the most profitable product. If the user had a bad experience, the negative feedback would be contained within the consumers circle of friends.

Today, consumers do their research, they know more than the sales person and so get what they want. Whether they are happy or not, they will share their views online for others to be warned. All of this makes online reputation very important.

In the following diagram we have:

- 'Stimulus' which is branding and general awareness of a product brand or service.

- ZMOT: Zero Moment Of Truth i.e. when you check out a brand

- FMOT: First Moment Of Truth which is when you are buying

- SMOT: Second moment of truth when you experience the product

Source: Google http://www.zeromomentoftruth.com/
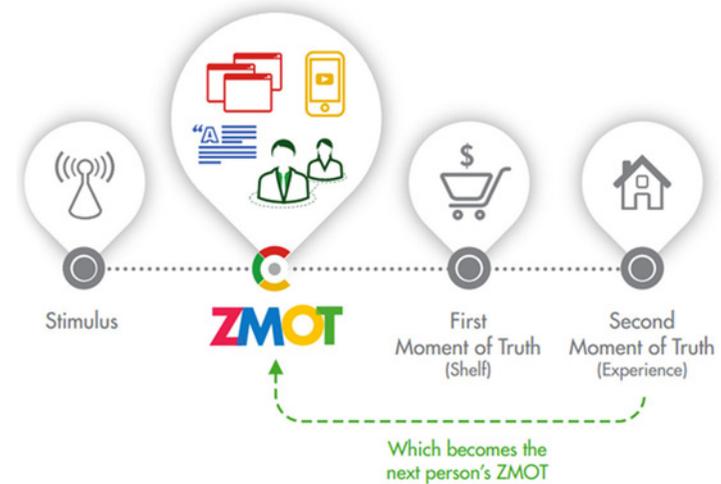
Using data from the 5,000 person panel, this chart below shows the percentages of those influenced by ZMOT, broken into activities:

Activity	Percentage
Searched online, used search engine (net)	50%
Talked with friends/family about the product	49%
Comparison shopped products online	38%
Sought information from a product brand/manufacturer website	36%
Read product reviews or endorsements online	31%
Read comments following an article/opinion piece online	22%
Sought information from a retailer/store website	22%
Became a friend/follower/"liked" a brand	18%

Source: Google

It's interesting to note how social media only impacted ZMOT for 18% of all users, whereas search affected 50%, just ahead of friends and family at 49%.

Google found that users looked at an average of 10.4 sources of information before making a buying decision

Category Purchased	Number of sources used by the typical shopper	Average usage across sources	% of shoppers influenced at ZMOT
Automotive	18.2	34%	97%
Technology (Consumer Electrionics)	14.8	30%	92%
Voters	14.7	35%	95%
Travel	10.2	22%	99%
Over-the-Counter Health	9.8	18%	78%
Consumer Packaged Goods: Grocery	7.3	15%	61%
Consumer Packaged Goods: Health/Beauty/Personal Care	7	14%	63%
Quick-Serve Restaurants	5.8	12%	72%
Banking	10.8	25%	91%
Insurance	11.7	26%	94%
Credit Card	8.6	19%	81%
Investments	8.9	20%	89%

Source: Google

As you see, the bigger the investment the greater number of information sources are used.

It's undeniable consumers extensively research online and they're influenced by the information they see on search engines. The next question is how to stimulate and promote social influence in your favour.

Stimulating social influence

Social influence comes through what others say about you, so for brands the great question is how you stimulate social influence whilst remaining ethical, inside the law and retain credibility as a brand.

The route to influence lies in a simple idea; 'It's not what you say about yourself, it's what others say about you'.

You can't force someone to give you a genuinely positive review, it has to be earned. This leads to a fundamental question about your business; are you good enough to be praised?

If you're lucky enough to have a business where the market HAS to use you, despite a terrible consumer experience, that's alright until some kind of trigger event occurs and all that 'bad karma' comes back to haunt you.

Aside: Ryanair had a profits warning for Autumn 2013. Initially the CEO Michael O'leary promised to be aggressive on fare cuts and more advertising, but when shareholders raised their concerns, it wasn't about fare cutting, but about how rude and abrupt their customer services culture has been.

To heighten the negative sentiment towards Ryanair, the Daily Mail ran a story about a doctor whose family had died in a housefire and was charged £160 by Ryanair because he needed to take an earlier flight to see his dead family.

The reason Ryanair had been able to carry on with this bad customer experience culture is because they have a partial monopoly on low fares to certain destinations and the consumer's desire to save money has outweighed the unpleasant experience Ryanair offers.

Gather proof you are good

To build social influence online there are two sources for positive feedback:

- Sources who are not customers

- Those who are

For non customers, the best place to seek favourable feedback is with people who have authority and visibility. If they only have authority and not much visibility, a brand can go ahead and market this content.

If non customers have visibility but not much authority, it's not worth pursuing a relationship because ultimately users will not see the 'non authoritative, high visibility' person as credible. An example is a footballer praising a cooking product. The exception is where the footballer is famous for football and cooking.

For the second group, customers, the 'influence gathering' process is internal. If they have purchased online, they will a have a live email address. Provided the user has allowed the brand to communicate with them post purchase, there will be the means to ask for feedback.

Generate the right trust signals

To have social influence you need to be trusted by others, so it's important to understand what signals count.

The signals

If you can answer 'Yes' to these trust signals, you're most probably looking at an influencing source of information.

If it's a non customer commentary:

- Is the site already known to me through recommendation?

- Is the commentary well written?

- Are there comments from readers either agreeing and/or adding to the content?

- Has this person been writing about this subject for a long time?

- Are the social indicators good? i.e. enough Facebook likes, Google +1's

- Is there a body of other information on the site around the subject?

- Are opinions balanced?

- Does it reference others who are also authorities in the subject?

If it's customer reviews:

● Are there enough reviews, ideally 10 or more reviews is sufficient

● Are the reviews balanced and coherent

● Do the reviewers justify their opinion

● If it's a negative review, is their argument and reasoning coherent?

● Are the reviews on a site you trust

● Are they validated? i.e. Amazon Verified Purchaser

● Were the reviews helpful? i.e. number of people saying they were?

As we know it's very hard to quantify things like 'balanced opinions', however if you subscribe to the concept of 'wisdom of crowds' i.e. where an aggregation of opinions is more balanced than a single opinion, you'll trust anything where there's a general consensus amongst many contributors.

So experts who have consensus and reviews that all 'line up' and in great enough volume, are great trust signals and will influence potential customers.

Timing, relevance and influence

Great trust signals mean nothing if they're unseen by potential customers. This is where search engines come in.

Search engines are aware that many users want to go through a research process before buying products and services.

Once online consumers have made their purchasing decision, they want the most direct route to a purchase. This is where search engines make their money as a middleman, charging advertisers for prominence on search phrases with high buyer intent. This is called Pay Per Click [PPC] advertising.

Aside: We often think of paid search adverts taking up a huge percentage of clicks on the internet, but in reality PPC only accounts for about 7%. The other 93% of clicks is from natural search .
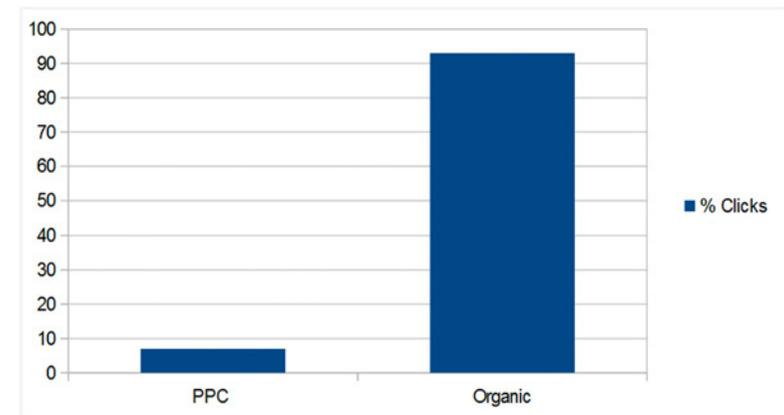
When search queries are looked at by intent , the breakdown is roughly as follows:

● Transactional searches are i.e. 'buy [product]: 10%

● Navigational searches are repeat searches for a known destination i.e. 'facebook': 10%

● Informational searches are i.e. 'reviews [product]: 80%

Source: Google.com
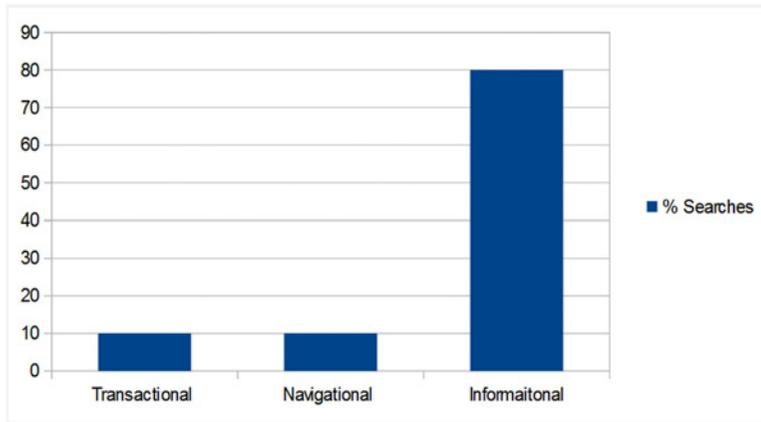
It's in the interests of search engines to help consumers find the best information possible to help make a buying decision and guide them through PPC advertising.

This is one reason Google have been pushing 'Authorship' so hard. By attributing content to certain individuals and ranking this content on their search engine, it makes it easier for consumers trust those pages with known authorship.

Source: Google.com

On Google there is also aggregated review information displayed on their search results. They are called rich snippets and give consumers a quick reference for how popular and well reviewed a product or service is.

Finally, if we assume first search result is best, then if we trust search engines to get the right information for us, we will trust high rankings results more than low ranking ones.

According to Eidleman trust barometer, in the developed world, search engines are trusted more than hybrid media, social media and owned media. The only media trusted more than search engines is traditional media like TV and newspaper.

However with TV and newspapers, they are both broadcast media, so there is no two way interaction. You just consume and if the relevant information isn't there at your time of consumption…it's gone forever. This is why search engines are more relevant and timely.
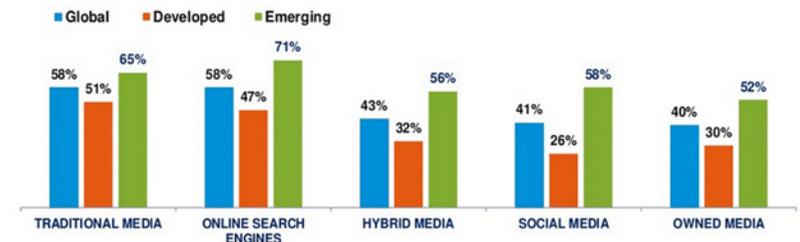
Source: Edelman Trust Barometer

So if a search result has authorship, review ratings and is 1st for a query, it's a strong set of trust signals. Not only is it trustworthy, it's relevant and timely. All of this makes natural search a huge driver to influence consumers online.

In the developed world, where search has 51% trust score, social media only has 26%. This is because Social Media tends not to structure social feedback in a way that is easy for consumers to make use of. Also in social media content is 'discovered' rather than sought out, so there is a bias towards populist content which will probably not be about a niche product or service. All of this means Social Media is a less trusted source for consumer advice.

Conclusion

Social influence is driven by consumers feeding back their experiences and others seeking answers to purchasing questions. Left to develop unaided, this is a powerful tool for a brand, but when this natural process is given marketing stimulus, it becomes completely game changing for a business. This is where Organic Marketing plays it's part.

Organic marketing

Definition

Organic Marketing is defined as "a multi-disciplinary marketing activity with the specific goal of publishing and promoting online content that people like, search for, and want to share. Visitors find what Organic Marketers have published on search engines like Google, social networks like Twitter and Facebook, without ongoing paid media transactions taking place."

Source: http://www.organicmarketingforum.org/

Here, we go through how to incorporate Organic Marketing as a way of leveraging Social Influence. In other words, take content that is influential, but has very little visibility and give it prominence using an Organic Marketing toolset.

Concepts

The main focus for Organic Marketing is to 'market content' and once it's been given a marketing push where it becomes prominent, the content should become self sustaining. This means a continued flow of direct traffic, naturally occurring citations and links from other web sites, referred traffic from search engines and social 'likes' and 'follows'.

The process

As with all marketing, efficient process is the way to effective execution in Organic Marketing campaigns.

Search engines

Search engines like Google and Bing use a combination of content relevance, PageRank and TrustRank, to decide what pages should be ranked where, for a given search term.

The greater the competition to be ranked highly for a keyword, the more relevant content has to be and the greater the amount of PageRank and TrustRank a page needs to rank. Both PageRank and TrustRank are affected by the number and quality of inbound links to a given page. The greater the number of appropriate links, the more likely a page is to rank on a competitive keyword, assuming on-page content relevance,

For search engine optimisation specialists, the questions are always 'which web links' and 'what is relevant content'.

A good way of thinking about ranking and links is to think of a link as a vote. If a site links to another site, it is effectively a 'vote'. With search engines, links from different sites carry varying 'voting power'. Therefore links from the right sites will give you lots of 'voting power' and thus rankings. Search engines use this 'voting' mechanism as a partial way of getting the right pages to rank for the right keywords. According to Moz.com, an authoritative site on search marketing, links account for around 40% of ranking factors.

The degree of competition is largely dependent on whether it is a commercially attractive keyword.

Aside: A very useful metric for competition is Google Adwords cost per click data. Advertisers bid for prominence on commercially relevant search result pages. They want users to click on these adverts to convert them into customers. The more commercially attractive a customer is, the more an advertiser will pay for each click from Google. Thus you have cost per click as a useful indicator of search competition. According to Spyfu, an Adwords data aggregation business, as of September 2013 the highest known cost per click is $491.75 for 'mesothelioma trial attorney'.

To rank, you need links which can come from a combination of active outreach or passive natural linking to your content.

As a marketing channel, SEO is very effective on return on investment, as Econsultancy have shown 32% of respondents stating it had given excellent ROI.

Source: http://econsultancy.com
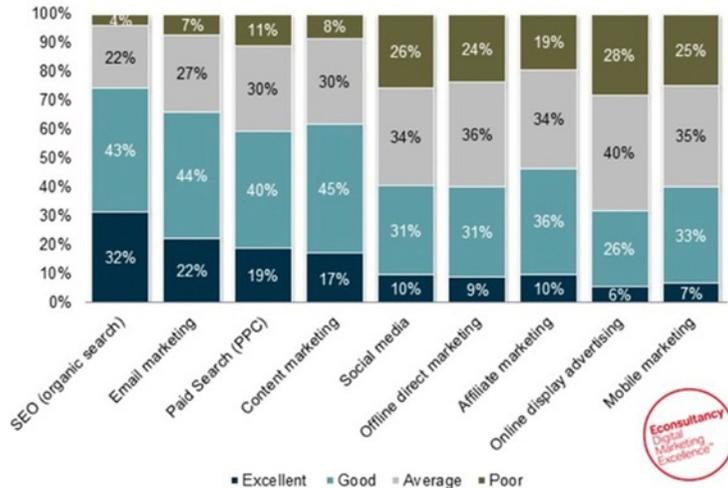
Referred traffic

This is where a 3rd party site might have a link to you and users come to your site through that link. Strictly speaking search engines fall into this category, however for the purposes of this article, lets exclude them here.

Arguably if users click on a the link to you, the content must be very attractive. Part of getting referral traffic is from actively promoting it through outreach. The collateral benefit is to obtain links which help you rank.

Social networking services [social media]

These include Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin and any other site where users are encouraged to make contributions within an online social network.

Here the model for propagating content is different from search. It is driven by intent (i.e. a user decides to actively search out information on something). In Social Media a user will typically discover information as they use a social media site. (i.e. Social is passive, search is active).

Because content is discovered, it means you have to target the right users who have visibility in a social group or advertise to the right people in a very targeted way. Sites like Facebook have extremely accurate information on their users, so advertisers can zero right into exactly the type of person they want to communicate with.

Aside: As with most advertising, the more 'commercial' the messaging, typically the less well it is received. Search is the only real exception because they will deliver commercial search results when a user wants them.

This is very important to organic marketing because it means with the right social media advertising strategy, you can 'seed' the right content with the right people.

Assuming your goal is interaction and ultimately a sale Social media is a superb vehicle within Organic Marketing.

When all these routes to winning traffic are combined in an Organic Marketing campaign the effects are potent.

Tracking and measurement

KPI's

Key Performance Indicators [KPI's] come in many forms. Within social media alone, David Berkowitz lists over 100 KPI's in a post about Social Media Metrics.

For a KPI to be trusted, it needs robust analytics. The foundation of online analytics is data. Data is usually collected by tracking tags which sit on web sites. When a site has converting traffic, it can usually attribute those conversions to the source of the traffic (i.e. paid search, natural search referring site and so on).

As a general rule, meaningful metrics are ones which show you 'what success looks like'.

Organic marketing KPI's

In organic Marketing the core metrics include:

- Keyword organic visibility

- Organic traffic [brand vs non-brand]

- Keyword reach [Number of keywords]

- Content performance ratio [Pages / Visibility]

- Social / Referred / Direct traffic / Revenue / Goals e.g. subscribers

- Number of unique referrers

- Brand / key product ZMOT profile

- Website technical optimization

- Content creation and socialization metrics

- Publisher and Authorship engagement

- Key influencer relationship stages / life cycle

- Key influencer outcomes / results

- Following [Social / Subscriber]

- Domain trust metrics e.g. TrustRank

Source: http://www.organicmarketingforum.org/

Where tracking breaks down is when users might go to a 3rd party website, then to another site and finally to your site to convert. Along their journey users are forming an opinion of you, which persuades or dissuades them to purchase from you. Therefore if it's agreed a KPI measures 'what success looks like', then for Organic Marketing it's worth adopting a more pragmatic approach to KPI's.

The following diagram explains how a customer journey is in fact very complex and so hard to track.

1-1 **The traditional marketing funnel**
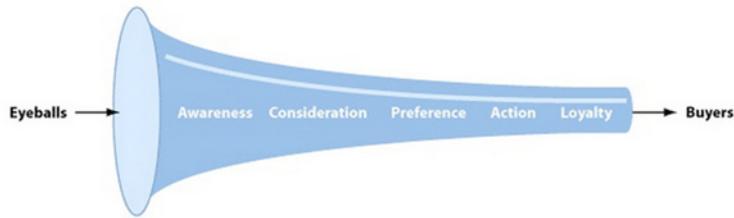
1-2 **Complexity lies at the center of the marketing funnel**
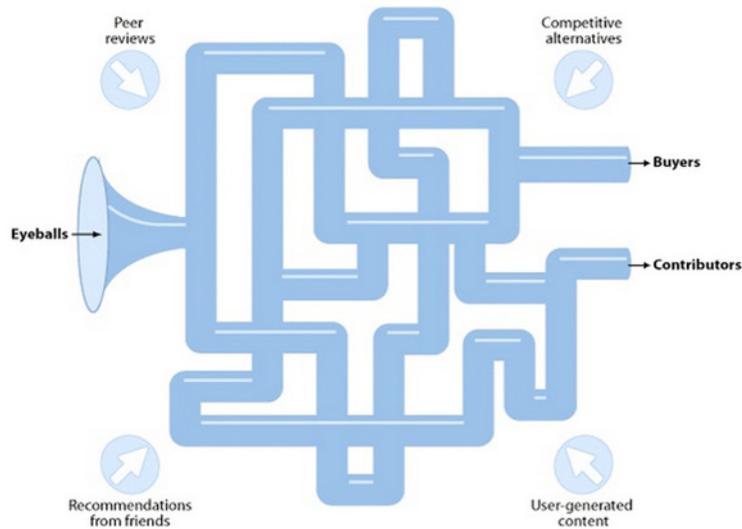
42124   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Attributing the success of social influence

When all these routes to winning traffic are combined in an Organic Marketing campaign the effects are potent.

Deciding what piece of content was the trigger to a purchase is very difficult. For this reason, brands should consider any social influence campaign as a 'communications piece' and not measuring KPI it in the same way as PPC, affiliate marketing or banner advertising where traffic is directed straight to the web property on which the conversion occurs.

A useful metric for Social Influence is the Online Reputation Score™(ORS) which attributes a 'persuasiveness score' to any item of content. The scores are tallied up and are summarized in a positive or negative percentile. This is an excellent way to understand whether your online reputation persuades or dissuades potential consumers to buy from you.

A typical application for ORS is in search results. If you have a target keyphrase which is influential i.e. '[name of product] reviews' or '[brand name] reviews', you can score each search result and come up with an aggregate score for the results on that page. Typically Adwords results are not included because it is assumed users know they are paid for placement as opposed to organic search placements. The ORS score can be weighted by the position of the search result, the estimated traffic volumes for a keyword and to some extent the cost per click values.
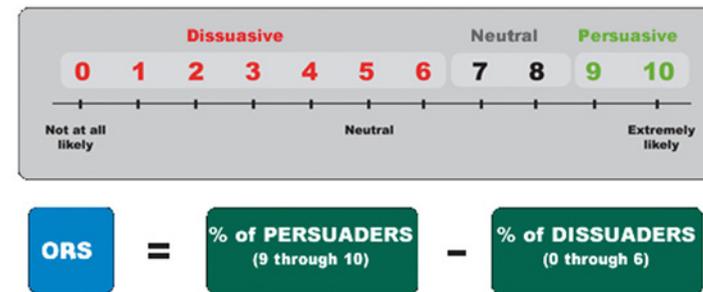
Source: 90 Digital

The concept and scoring formulae are closely related to Net Promoter Score™ [NPS]

Putting it all together

In this final segment, we go into the mechanics for how to use Organic Marketing in building Social influence.

At this stage, a brand will have a clear idea of what social influence is, what the attributes of a socially influencing piece of content is and what KPI's sit with it. The brand will also understand Organic Marketing, the vehicle used for promoting social influence. Now it's a case of lining up all the ingredients into a process to stimulate the creation of social influence content and promote it effectively.

1 Step one: Stimulating the content

As mentioned earlier, social influence content is either produced by non-customers or many customers.

Non customer influencer

It's best to seek out individuals with authority and relevance. Linkdex, a SaaS tool specifically designed around Organic Marketing, has a useful feature which helps you find influencing authors of content. They are influential because when these people produce content, others either link to it or tweet about it.

Another way of finding influencing people is to use search engines. The logic is if they rank well on 'influence' keywords i.e. [brand name] review, or on keywords less closely related to a brand i.e. [name of competing product] review, then these people have both visibility and authority.

Customer influencer

A brand will have a database of existing customers who they can reach out to for feedback.

The important part of this is to ask them to give their review on a 3rd party site which has no clear association with the brand being reviewed. This is important because as mentioned earlier, 'its not what you say, but what others say about you'. Therefore keeping reviews on a neutral third party site will give this review content far more potency.

Whilst it's ethically suspect, a brand can elect to only reach out to customers who appear to have had a good experience and so are far more likely to give a good review.

2 Step 2: Promoting the content

A brand has done it's outreach and there is a body of positive content on the internet. The next part of the cycle is to promote this positive feedback .

The main idea is to promote what other people say about the brand to steer social influence in the brand's favour.

Search engines

Firstly a brand has to do a keyword audit to work out which keywords are the most likely to affect a consumer purchasing decision. Typically this will be '[brand]', '[brand] reviews', [product/service], '[product/service] reviews', and other phrases like '[brand] stole my money'.

Once the keywords have been picked, a competition analysis needs to be done. This determines how much resource is needed to rank a given piece of content on a given keyword.

The brand will have a body of relevant, influencing content which it will do link building on. A brand then decides which pieces of content are most persuasive and most relevant to a given keyword. The content which meets both criteria are promoted.

Once the pages are ranked, the relevant ORS scores will begin to rise and there should a trackable uplift on conversions from natural and paid search.

Social media

There is an aversion to commercial content in social media, so the aim is propagate awareness of certain pieces of content amongst a very targeted audience.

Facebook is very effective at extremely targeted advertising. It's therefore very important to have a   defined picture of exactly who the brand is interested in reaching out to.

The ideal content is non commercial i.e. Without a strong call to action and references other sources of advocacy about the brand's product or service. Once again the strategy is to promote what others say about you.

Retargeting

Retargeting is a form of online targeted advertising by which online advertising is targeted to consumers based on their previous Internet actions, in situations where these actions did not result in a sale or conversion. Source: wikipedia.org

Web publishers become a part of an advertising network, so when a web user visits a given website, cookies are dropped and the user will see adverts related to that web site as they navigate through other sites on the advertising network. This is why users feel like they are 'being followed' on the internet.

To promote influencing content, a brand would create a series of banner adverts promoting the number and quality of reviews for their product. The brand might have a landing page linking to reviews and feedback on the product, along with a call to action to buy the item.

This tactic is used when promoting movies and theatre shows.

The relevant KPI is not click through rate, but number of impressions on relevant web sites and so would be accounted for in the same ways as brand spend.

Offline media

There is a place for offline media in the influence mix, however because of its characteristics, it tends to be best for building authority and brand awareness.

Case studies

Kia motors

Kia motors has had a reputation for producing uninspired cars, however they have an excellent reputation for reliability. In a recent advertising campaign they focused on positive feedback for their cars. At the end of the TV advert there was a call to action asking viewers to visit their site to see the huge body of socially influencing content stating how good their cars are.

Source: Kia Motors | http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzvXjS_z924

Because 52% of us are likely to be using an internet enabled device whilst watching TV, it made sense for Kia to try a campaign with a call to action for user to go online.

Whether a user goes straight to kia.co.uk, or does a search for 'kia reviews', they will end up on the home page of the site where there is a clear reference to 'Kia reviews'.

Source: Kia Motors | http://kia.co.uk
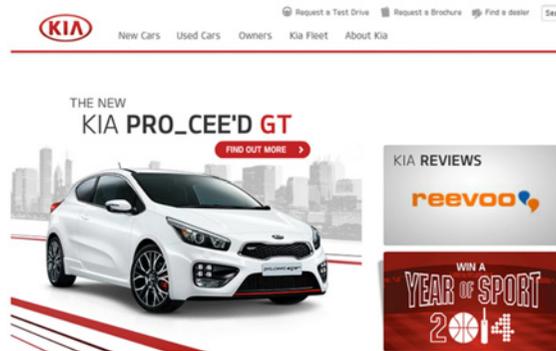
At the core of the campaign are the reviews, which are very positive. Presumably aggregating these reviews had been a big task, because Kia would have had to contact new and existing owners asking them to review their car. However the outcome is impressive both from the high review scores and the large numbers of reviews.

Source: revoo.com

Conclusion. This is a great example of social influence being leveraged in mass media.

Wetherell Estate Agents

Not every brand wants to allocate huge budgets for television campaigns, so its helpful to look at smaller more nimble influence campaigns which don't necessarily use online reviews as a social influencer.

Wetherell's specialise in the top end of Mayfair the property market. The highest valued house on their books at time of writing is £35,000,000. (Equivalent to 144 average houses in the UK). With so few buyers and sellers in this price bracket, trust and reputation is core. People 'buy' into Peter Wetherell's influence and ability to get huge deals transacted.

For this campaign, Peter Wetherell, the owner of Wetherell estate agents had adopted an advocacy strategy by positioning himself as the main driver to build renewed awareness for an exclusive part of Central London called Tyburnia.

The strategy was to build an influential online footprint leveraging all the offline PR activity led by Alex Lawrie a property PR specialist. The aim was to rank an article from a news paper No1 for keyphrase 'tyburnia'.

Alex won placements in The Sunday Times, Metro, City AM and The Evening Standard . The Online agency 90 Digital, wasn't able to work with the Sunday Times story because they had put up a paywall. The Metro and City AM, whilst good papers, didn't have the authority of The Evening Standard.

The Evening Standard was the only paper which 90 Digital wanted to promote because it had a combination of search engine friendliness relevance and the most authority.

Once the story was released online, there was an immediate outreach campaign to promote this story, led by Aferdita Pacrami the team lead on this project. Several sites subsequently linked to the Evening Standard story. This meant the story had a really good chance of ranking for the term 'tyburnia'.

The promotional process:

- Peter Wetherell published a report called 'Tyburnia, Belgravia's Sister'

- His PR agency Lawrie Cornish, promoted the report amongst the traditional papers targeting placement in the Sunday Times, City AM, Metro, London Evening Standard.

- Peter's digital agency 90 Digital, co-ordinated with the PR agency and re-purposed the newspaper story for online consumption.

- All the targeted papers published the story offline.

- The 90 Digital focused on the Evening Standard's online version of the story.

- The Evening Standard online story was promoted to over 50 relevant sites.

- When the story was taken by some of these websites, many of the 'credit' links went to the source story from the Evening Standard

The outomes: The Evening Standard story subsequently ranked No1 for 'Tyburnia' on Google.co.uk and two other pages from the wetherell.co.uk ranked in 4th and 5th positions.

The 600 year old place name 'Tyburnia' is now associated with (amongst other things)

- Peter Wetherell as a thought leader

- A comprehensive property report on Tyburnia

- An opportunity to buy property in this upcoming area.

Conclusion: This small example shows how timely and relevant online influence can be created through leveraging search to build the authority of a brand through ways other than online reviews.

3 Step 3: Determining what success looks like

As mentioned earlier there are 100's of indicators to chose from, so its very important to always start from a high level and work your way down into detail.

A good way to think of this is to look at 'distance' from 100% trackability for a sale.

A personal referral might be almost completely un-trackable, whereas pay per click would be 100% trackable and then there is everything else in between. Online Social influence sits about half way because you can see the indicators showing influence, but because of cross domain tracking issues it's very hard to work out which piece of content was the decider for someone to buy.

Websites (20 of 4907)	Upstream Clicks
Google UK	42.81%
Google	6.75%
eBay UK	4.07%
Facebook	3.15%
Argos	2.11%
Yahoo! Search - UK & Ireland	1.35%
Windows Live Mail	1.19%

Websites (20 of 4853)	Downstream Clicks
Google UK	7.16%
Argos	4.30%
Facebook	3.92%
eBay UK	3.88%
IIS.NET	3.01%
Google	2.89%
Windows Live Mail	2.68%

Upstream Websites Visited Before Ikea.co.uk | Source: Experian Hitwise
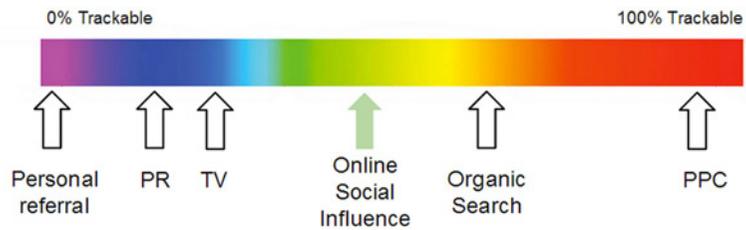
High level

Because online social influence has some means of attribution and trackability, it can be seen as a part of the online communications process a brand needs to undertake.

Mid level

At this distance, Online social influence can be seen on a per site and per search results page basis.

Sentiment scoring systems like Online Reputation Score (ORS) can work well here. By weighting the prominence of negative or positive information based on its visibility and potency at any given time, you can come up with an accurate way of measuring the rise or fall of social influence for a brand online.

When looking at the influence of certain sites there is a useful tool from Experian Hitwise called Clickstream which reports on where traffic comes from and goes to for a specific website or industry.

If you assume a given web site has socially influencing content, it is possible to get a rough idea for how much traffic has been 'touched' by this.

In this example from Experian you can see users had been to eBay and Argos, obviously to make a shopping comparison. If you know a site has influencing content, you can target that site for 'reputation repair' if there are issues. If the content doesn't rank well, then you can help the positive content to rank better.

Low level

It's hard to come up with any decently granular attribution, unless you happen to own or have tracking tags on 3rd party sites that contain influencing content. In that case you can track whether they had been to a particular site and a particular page in their journey to a conversion. If there is a high instance of users converting that have been to a particular site or sites, then you have some correlatory indicators.

Conclusion

Tracking is getting progressively more difficult because of the proliferation of different devices that users have. For Social influence marketing the best thing is to make some basic assumptions:

● Content can be anything from very positive to very negative and can be scored

● Content has varying degrees of visibility and so can be weighted on degree of visibility

● Content can have varying degrees of potency and so can be weighted

From this you can make weighted assumptions for what is important reputationally or not and work from there. Since search engines are such a huge driver of influence online, it makes sense to start with using search keywords, their relevance and traffic volumes and scoring the content which ranks on these keywords as core indicators for any social influence campaign.

Un-gaming the review system

With the growing importance of social influence online, brands sometimes resort to trying to game the review system to mislead users. This either happens with large numbers unnaturally positive reviews or unreasonably damning reviews of competitors.

We can be influenced easily

A research paper written by professors Lev Muchnik, Sinan Aral and Sean Taylor had demonstrated in a set of 300,000 randomised reviews how they could be manipulated in a substantial way.

If the first manipulated comment was positive, this comment influenced other to comment in a significantly more positive way, increasing the likelihood of positive ratings by 32%, and a 25% increase in the mean rating over the five months of the experiment.

Trust in review sites

David Ensing, Ph.D., of Maritz Research did a piece of research asking 3,404 people how much they trusted various review sites.

In this chart there is a correlation between age and trust, with 25-34 year olds being the least trusting. This correlates with an assumption that they are a combination of the most 'internet savvy' and life experienced. Older and younger people typically tend to have less capacity to read 'trust signals' on the internet and so take what they read on face value.

Percentage of Respondents That Think Rating Site Information is a Fair Representation of Customers' Experiences by Age

Of Those That Had Read Reviews at Sites, the Percentage Who Trust Most or All of the Information as an Accurate Representation of Customers' Experiences
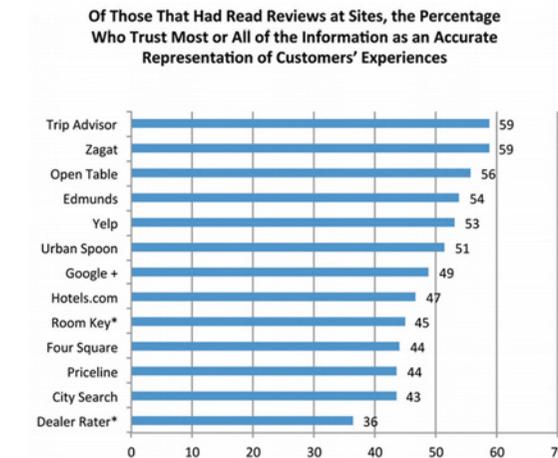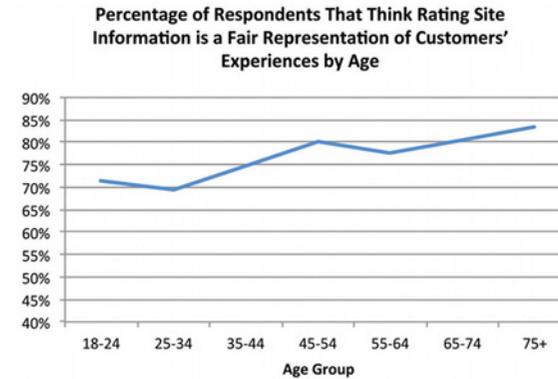
Source: maritzresearch.com

Yelp

Yelp, the large US review site has had 42 million reviews since being founded in 2004. In 2006 Yelp estimated that about 5% of all submitted reviews were fake. This has jumped to 20% of all submitted reviews in 2013.

Keeping on top of fake reviews is a huge task and one that's critical for its long term prosperity.

Source: http://people.hbs.edu/mluca/FakeItTillYouMakeIt.pdf
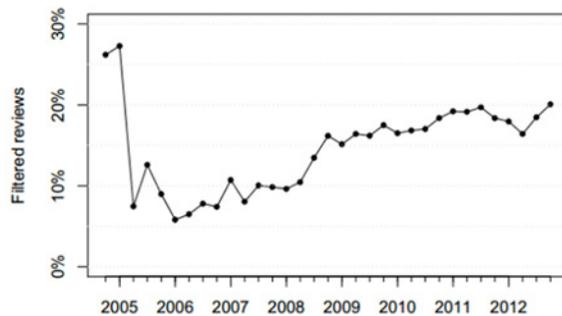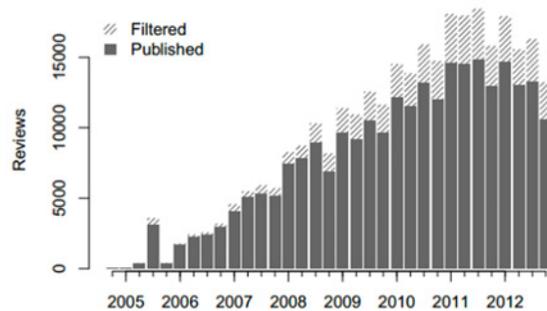
Amazon

There are very few review sites that use a proper validation process to determine whether someone is 'qualified' to write a critique or not. This is because it's very hard to verify a user bought a product or used a service if the review is not on a seller site.

As a way of reinforcing trust in their reviews, Amazon will tag a review as "Amazon Verified Purchase". This means the reviewer has purchased the item being reviewed, so the reader has some confidence in the authenticity of this review.

Source: amazon.co.uk

However saying that, Amazon still shows reviews from unverified sources and in 2004, Amazon.ca unintentionally revealed the identities of "anonymous" reviewers, briefly unmasking considerable self-reviewing by book authors.

Most sites don't have any thorough verification process because of the difficulties directly associating a purchase with a review. So review sites rely on a combination of trust and their own software to identify fake reviews.

Fines for fake reviews

In a recent case in New York, local district attorney set up a fake yoghurt shop and asked then posed as brands looking for help 'astroturfing' reviews i.e. giving fake grassroots reviews. The operation incriminated 19 businesses willing to post fake reviews on behalf of clients. These businesses were fined a total of $350,000. This highlights how seriously authorities are taking misrepresentation.

Source: yelp.com

Social influence affects income.

A highly-cited Harvard Business School study from 2011 estimated that a one-star rating increase on Yelp translated to an increase of 5% to 9% in revenues for a restaurant. Cornell researchers have found that a one-star swing in a hotel's online ratings at sites like Travelocity and TripAdvisor is tied to an 11% sway in room rates, on average.

Final thoughts

Brands and governments are beginning to wake up to the vast power of Social Influence from the internet

Online Social Influence is here to stay. With an Organic Marketing framework, some resource and a good ethical strategy, brands can amplify their online social influence many times over.

Welcome to the age of Online Influence Marketing.

Nick Garner

Nick Garner is CEO of 90 Digital, the Online Communications & Organic Marketing agency.

He is a regular conference speaker, Judge on the UK and International search awards and a thought leader on natural search marketing. Prior to this he was Head of Search for Unibet a large European iGaming business and prior to that search manager for Betfair.

http://www.90digital.com

http://www.linkedin.com/in/nickgarner

https://twitter.com/nickgarner

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapternine
Phil MacKechnie

Integration - breaking down internal silos

Customers nowadays are exposed to more content than ever before, both online & offline. Over the last few years, the web has seen a major structure shift whereas the focus has shifted from domains to people and their relationships with others. As a result, MoneySuperMarket is now in the position to accurately map and measure those social interactions.

This puts businesses in a powerful position as it is now far easier to understand how humans actually make decisions. During the last decade we've had the possibility to actually learn more about the human brain than ever before – highlighting how crucial it is to understand social behaviour. Understanding how we as humans interact with each other, how we make decisions & what really influences us.

This development however has also lead to the fact that businesses are now faced with a new type of consumer for whom search plays a crucial role as they can now access the web either on the go, from home or from the office. This again, highlights that we as consumers are all connected in a multi-channel device world – having constant access to the web.
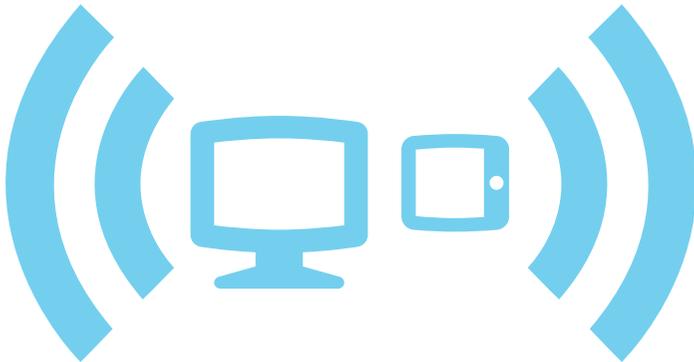
The key for brands is to have omni-channel touch points for its customers in place providing real, live and data driven content. The business landscape has become faster than ever. By purely looking at the evolution of SEO from Google's perspective we see that in 2007 keywords & links were the main components whereas later on that year universal, key phrases and links evolved. One year later we then saw that engagement, social metrics, universal, key phrases and links were evaluated. Whilst in 2012 authorship, multi-device, co-optimisation & engagement became the latest ranking factors – again, clearly undermining the shift from domains to people.

Content marketing is often referred to as the new SEO – which is all about earning links, to achieve, that brands need to be real and fast. The spectrum is broad as it includes:

- Universal content

- Social sharing

- Community management

- Digital PR skills (skills a lot of SEOs still need to pick up on)

- Authorship

- Influence network science

Content marketing is a far more integrated approach than SEO which has become a necessity to gain online visibility and to best serve and satisfy customers' needs in a multi-channel device environment. Clearly, the content marketing era highlights the shop vs. publishing business model which currently represents a major challenge for many brands. The integration of content, PR, social, search and CRM has become inevitable.

So what should brands focus on, in the first place? The starting point really has to be to look into data insights, understanding what the customer needs and desires.

The key challenges digital marketers are facing:

1 Structured Idea Generation – making ideas relevant by putting a creative twist on them as well as having processes in place.

2 Transmission – moving from the old SEO to a holistically integrated content marketing strategy

3 Agile Marketing – allowing and establishing a democratized workforce

4 Understanding how search actually influences brands and how it can amplify brand messaging

5 Understanding the latest search engine updates & features

6 Ranking Flux – in order to achieve this, content marketing skills need to be developed

7 Campaign KPI's – it's important to understand that quality always has to come before quantity

Earlier this year, MoneySuperMarket launched the Super Kid Savers campaign whereas the objective was to teach children how to effectively save money. First of all, the brand reached out to parents asking them how they teach their children to handle money responsibly. The best suggestions were then evaluated by a judges panel. The winning suggestions were then nicely curated via an online education station encouraging the younger population to log on and learn how to best save money. The campaign has proven to be a success, as well as earning MoneySuperMarket a European Search Awards nomination – hence the power of user generated content.

Brands simply can't afford to miss out any longer, and need to get on the content marketing bandwagon to optimise for search and implement a democratised workforce to create true online assets real and fast – to keep your target audience educated and entertained. Integration is a journey and not a race!

Phil MacKechnie

Phil holds one of the top digital marketing jobs in the UK – leading the digital MoneySuperMarket team driving its success by scaling search & data based decision making. Apart from that one of his other main responsibilities is to build top digital teams. MoneySuperMarket is a British price comparison website-based business specialising in financial services. The website enables consumers to compare prices on a range of products such as loans, credit cards & mortgages. The business' objective is to encourage people to switch to cheaper deals helping to make the most of their money.

http://www.moneysupermarket.com/

https://twitter.com/akcamiwik

Return to contents page

Linkdex

Linkdex

Get more of your content discovered and socialized, then measure its value.

www.linkdex.com

Content Marketing Strategy

chapterten

Robert Rose

Be remarkable or fail

Like the concept of content marketing itself, the idea of using "information" as an increasingly important way to compete is not new. As far back as 1959, Peter Drucker talked about the importance of "knowledge workers." As an example of this, consider that the cost to produce an automobile is 40 percent materials and 25 percent labor. On the other hand, the cost to produce a silicon chip is about 1 percent materials, 10 percent labor, and about 70 percent information.

Our access to information has evolved — it's more readily accessible now than in any previous moment in history. (We're even wearing access to information as an eyeglass accessory.) And, it's not just content marketing causing the glut of information — indeed we are all publishing more content and information to the web than ever before. According to EMC's 2012 Digital Universe study, it's predicted that we will publish and replicate 40 zettabyes of data by the year 2020, including white papers, infographics, Facebook posts, pictures of food, and on and on. How much is that? It's 57 times the amount of all the grains of sand on all the beaches on earth.
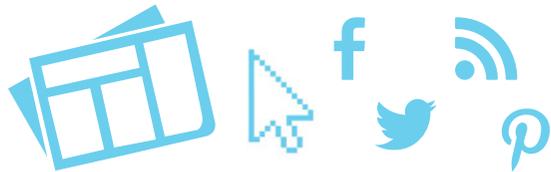
And that's the key to what we need to know about content marketing: Whether you believe the discipline is real, hype, or simply a meta tag for something marketers have been doing all along, there is (at this point) no dispute that ALL companies are evolving and creating content to drive business results.

The novelty is wearing off, and as I said in a post where I discussed the disillusionment of Content Marketing:

"It is the practice of marketing, on the whole, that is in the process of evolving, and content marketing is but one approach that factors into the entirety of this fundamental change."

 Tweet This Quote

- Robert Rose

So if (and it's a big IF) we are differentiating in our business by using a combination of owned, earned, and paid content to drive results, our competitors are, too. And as our process of marketing changes, so too must our content creators.

Content creators and the commodity of facts

Yes, it might be important today to create content that answers all the questions that may be brought up when using your products or services. But when all of your competitors have answered those same questions, and all of the "how-to" sites have leached on to your topic to answer them, as well, your giant, informative FAQ becomes nothing more than a bushel of corn, lined up against all the other bushels of corn, battling for relevance in a flat market.

But what can't be taken away is your *distinct point of view;* your differentiating story; i.e., the unique way you synthesize myriad facts into meaningful insight. Great content marketing will only come from a distinct and remarkable point of view. In short, if you can take the content in your content marketing approach and put your competitor's logo on the top, you need to rethink your plan.

The rarity of "remarkable"

Today, CMOs are faced with a huge, disruptive challenge: The promised power of using accumulated information (aka "big data") has the potential

to become an extraordinarily important aspect to creating a competitive advantage for businesses (Drucker lives!). But the value proposition of data has evolved. For the CMO, it isn't the data itself that will provide the competitive edge, nor is it the technology used to accumulate it. Only the combination of advancing questions, meaningful insight, and applied creativity will derive value from data — big or small.

Success in content marketing — and marketing on the whole — will come from our ability to render meaning. I wrote another post that talked about a new role that I envision being critical for business, called the "Manager of Meaning." What this means, from a content marketing perspective, is that thoughtful planning and a strong focus on creating differentiating, remarkable content that communicates from a strong point of view will be what separates the rare from the commodity.

What does this mean for content marketing in the short term? It means that as we build the business case for content marketing, we must first ask three basic questions, starting with *"why?"*:

● Why is this content important to our customers?

● What value will they derive from it?

● How will it differentiate us?

That's how content marketing agencies will add value for clients. That's how, as content marketers, we will distinguish our brands' value. And, that's how we, as an industry, will ultimately continue to use content as a powerful means to drive business results.

Robert Rose

Robert helps marketers become stellar storytellers. Robert is the Chief Strategist for the Content Marketing Institute, and Senior Contributing Analyst for Digital Clarity Group.

Robert is the author of the book Managing Content Marketing, which spent two weeks as a top ten marketing book on Amazon.com. As a recognized expert in content marketing strategy, digital media and the social Web, Robert innovates creative and technical strategies for a wide variety of clientele such as 3M, ADP, AT&T, KPMG, Staples, PTC and Petco. He is a featured writer for the online magazines iMedia Connection, Fierce Content Management and CMSWire and also a featured author in the book "Enterprise 2.0 How Technology, E-Commerce and Web 2.0 Are Transforming Business Virtually".

www.twitter.com/Robert_Rose

http://www.linkedin.com/in/robrose

https://www.facebook.com/TheRobertRose

Return to contents page

This chapter was originaly posted on *contentmarketinginstitute.com*

Linkdex

chaptereleven

Kevin Gibbons

Creating a multichannel content marketing strategy

I find that trying to answer the question "why great content matters" can be very difficult, mainly because despite running a large amount of content campaigns for clients, it's never a question we would start with first.

Strategy

Going back a step, it has to be about strategy. You really need to think about your business goals and marketing objectives.

This could be anything from:

● Raising brand awareness

● Improving your SEO and online authority

● Building your social audience

● Increasing direct sales or leads

● etc...

Ideally it will be a combination of all of the above, and more. That way you can have a fully integrated strategy, where everyone is involved towards having success across all of your owned, earned and paid media channels.
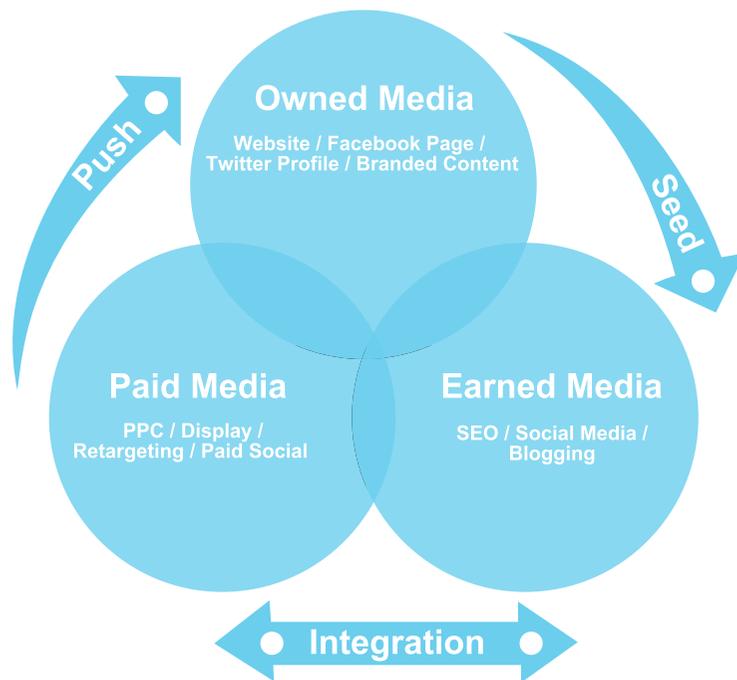
Once you have defined this, then and only then, can you start to think about if content is the right way to execute your strategy and achieve the goals you are looking for.

If you've decided it is the way to go, great! But in order to visualise what great content looks like, you need to know the goals you're looking to achieve first - otherwise you'll never know what success looks like! In some cases you might create something that you consider great, for example, you generate lots of online attention, links and social engagement - but if it's not valued by your business/client and/or their customers, it's likely to be wasted or undervalued.

Great content isn't produced in a silo

When thinking about how to create great content, it's rarely (if ever) done in a vacuum, this is because there's so many elements that need to fall into place.

For example, just at BlueGlass we have a team consisting of:

● Digital strategists

● Content production specialists

● Outreach & promotion specialists

● Biddable media specialists

Each content project is likely to involve someone from each of these teams, because great content alone isn't enough. You need an audience to tell your story to.

As mentioned above, it's important to think about strategy and goals at an early stage. But it's also important to start the outreach and social/paid promotion process early too – otherwise the content you've spent so much time producing, may fail to deliver when it comes to getting the attention of high quality publishers or social influencers.

However, If you can get their input and involvement early, you'll find that they can help you to mold your content into something that's far more likely to be a success, because that way you're all working together as part of the same team.

Measurement

Often the biggest mistake I still see in content is that the metrics of measurement are often very fluffy and beyond loose KPIs, such as links, search rankings or social metrics there's very little to be able to demonstrate ROI with.

If a video, for example, generates 1 million views, but that doesn't have any uplift in customer engagement/sales/word of mouth referrals/organic visibility etc (at any point in the customer lifecycle, not just directly) that isn't really the great success it might be considered.

Whereas a video that has 100 views and resonates with your top customers in order to help retain them as loyal customers into the future, is far more powerful. But it's all about measuring and proving it!

As an agency partner, we would very often use Linkdex to report on the uplift in organic market share uplift. Closely measuring how the content we have created has contributed towards an increase in online market share, organic leads delivered or directly referred sales. Ultimately proving return on investment, so that it's much easier to say "the value of that content campaign = x, so let's do more of it!" - because you're tying it back to real-world business metrics that matter.

What does great content look like?

When I start to think of great content, I'd think of the following traits, it:

● Tells your brands story to a targeted audience

● Resonates with current & potential customers

● Engages with a social audience, journalists and bloggers

● Influence sales at consideration buying phase

● Builds your brands reputation and online authority

● Grows your audience

● Useful, insightful, creative, funny, topical

● Is as concise or as detailed as it needs to be

These can quite clearly tie in with your business goals, it still allows you to be as creative as you need to be with your content, but you're linking it back to the success metrics that really matter.

There's a key difference here between your goals and what good content looks like too. SEO isn't what good content looks like, links should be a by-product of great content and increasing organic visibility is a knock-on effect of publishing content that resonates with your target audience, which is aligned with your SEO strategy.

The goal should be to create the best piece of content on a given subject and to promote it to a targeted and relevant audience. The SEO strategy should be to honestly believe that you've created the best piece of content available on the web, and have faith that if promoted well enough the search engines will reward this – because it provides the best results to searchers.

Quality vs quantity?

There's certainly a high emphasis on quality over quantity, with bigger campaigns and more focus on less projects. This has involved a large re-education in many ways, where it's no longer about the number of links you generate, for example, it's about the quality and the impact that this has from passing authority and link equity.
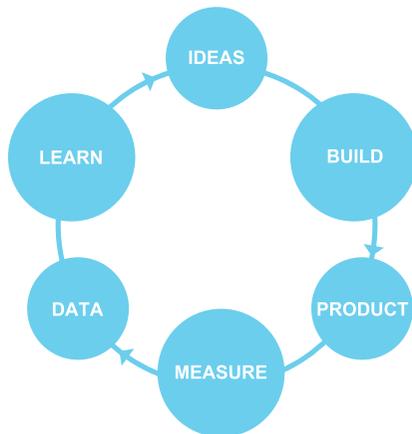
That said, there's still an argument for more <u>agile marketing campaigns</u> too.

A huge amount of content that is shared online today is topical, so there's a big opportunity in being quick onto the latest news story or trending topic.

This often can't afford the luxury of high quality – as it's all about being first. So this is where you need to have a team who can think on their feet, and be available to take advantage of any opportunities which may come up within your industry. Then you can add to it and build it up afterwards.

Target audience

It's always very useful to carefully consider your target audience when creating any content. Quite often the first thought when publishing content is to think of attracting the attention of bloggers and journalists.
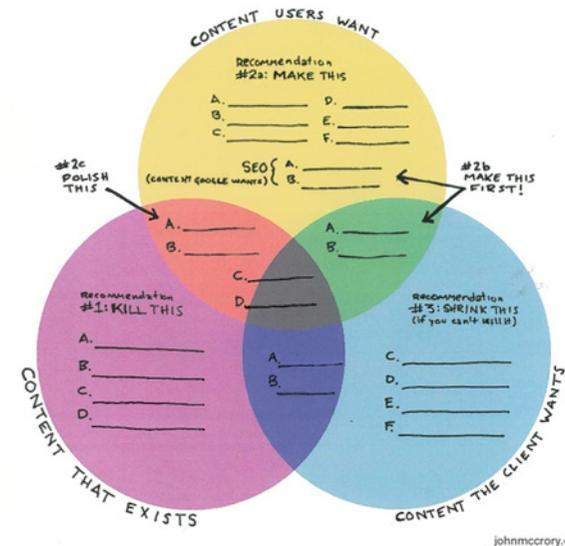
However, that often misses a big opportunity in consumer-led content. Everything you publish should support, re-enforce and strengthen your brands reputation.

This means from a branding perspective it's vital to consider the impact towards current and potential customers, so that your content can add value and give content that the client/customer wants as well as the user/reader.

If you are a big brand with thousands of customers and subscribers/social followers, wouldn't it be great to be able to create content which they can engage with and share?

That way, they can become your influencers and they you can help to share your brands story in order to leverage the influence of your content, in addition to the outreach and PR you have lined up.

Summary

Define your goals early and integrate content into your overall marketing strategy to get your whole team involved and behind you.

To answer the question "why great content matters", your marketing strategy should be driven by the key business goals you want to achieve. Content in itself shouldn't operate in a silo, it should play a key role within a multi-channel strategy which supports you to hit your overall marketing goals and business objectives.

Kevin Gibbons

Kevin Gibbons is Managing Director of Blue Glass a strategy driven digital marketing agency, specialising in the integration of owned, earned and paid media.

We work with clients such as Vistaprint, Momondo, Slashdot and Premier Farnell on a range of digital marketing, search, social and content projects.

http://twitter.com/kevgibbo

http://linkedin.com/in/kevingibbons

http://www.blueglass.co.uk/

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptertwelve
Paul Roetzer

The art and science of content marketing collide

Content marketing has reached a tipping point. From large enterprises to agile startups, budgets are swelling and companies are competing to capture consumers' hearts, minds and wallets.

While brands in every industry rush to fill the top of their marketing funnels with content-driven leads, the savviest of organizations are taking a more technical, scientific approach to personalization, automation and analytics at all stages of the funnel.

They are using content to connect with and engage internal and external audiences, and in the process fueling growth by selling more products and services to more people more often. Which, in the end, is what marketing is all about.

Let's take a look at six steps your organization can take to create and activate great content that produces meaningful business results.

1 Start with the art

Storytelling is, first and foremost, an art form. The most powerful brands learn to engage audiences through content.

As marketers, our job is to know our prospects and customers, and to match our knowledge and expertise with their need for products, services and information.

To stand out from the competition, we have to be remarkable and memorable, take chances, put our audiences' needs and goals ahead of our own, bring value to their lives, and help them find success and happiness.

And that's where content marketing comes in to the mix. We are all publishers, and we all have a unique story to tell. Great content gives businesses the ability to differentiate and connect in meaningful ways through story.

2 Take a full-funnel approach

Think of the marketing funnel more like an hourglass with four sections—brand, leads, sales and loyalty.

A full-funnel approach requires creating content assets that can be used to attract new visitors, subscribers and followers at the top of the funnel; generate leads and sales conversions in the middle; and increase loyalty with customers at the bottom.

The challenge with a traditional funnel is that it tends to focus on lead generation and stop at the sale, when your marketing strategy should start with the most profitable and valuable audience—your existing customers. By putting greater emphasis on customer retention and recurring sales, your organization can dramatically increase revenue and profits.

3 Have a game plan

It may seem obvious, but don't overlook the value of a sound content strategy.

● Define and segment **audiences.**

● Profile your **personas.**

● Catalog existing **content assets** and map them to your audiences' buying cycles.

● Establish **beats** and assign writers. For example, your beats may be by division, product or persona.

● Create an **editorial calendar** tied to business goals and company milestones.

● Conduct monthly **editorial meetings**.

● Educate the **sales team** on your content campaigns, and make it simple for them to leverage content assets to help drive revenue.

● Adopt a **multi-channel approach** to publishing, promoting, and re-purposing existing content.

● Integrate content into all areas of your **marketing strategy**, specifically social, search and public relations.

4 Get personal

Think about your experience with Amazon.com. Based on your historical buying behavior, they know what you like, and therefore they can present incredibly personalized recommendations that increase the likelihood of you buying again, and again, and again.

Now imagine if you were able to provide that same experience to your prospects and customers. You could recommend eBooks, blog posts, videos, webinars, products and services based on their interactions with your company.

Advances in marketing technology are making it possible to create personalized experiences with your brand. From the website copy and calls-to-action visitors see, to the automated emails that are sent, content can be tailored at the individual user level.

5 Find and fill your gaps

While the technology is emerging to personalize your marketing efforts, the reality is that many organizations have tremendous gaps preventing them from maximizing the return on their content marketing investments.

Access your marketing talent, technology and strategy to determine where your weaknesses lie, and then take action to move your marketing forward.

Where are your gaps?

● Do you have the right **content marketing tools** in place?

● Are your **writers** capable of producing high quality content that differentiates your brand and engages audience at all phases of the marketing funnel?

● If you outsource, do you have the right **agency partners**?

● Does your content marketing exist in a silo, or is it fully **integrated** across your marketing program?

● Are you setting **goals** and **measuring performance?**

6 Create value

Now, more than ever, quality is what matters in content marketing. Concentrate on solving problems, answering questions and positioning your organization and its leaders as indispensable industry resources.

As Jay Baer says in his *New York Times* bestselling book, *Youtility* focus on helping rather than selling. Become so valuable to your prospects and customers that when it comes time to make a buying decision, their loyalty lies with you.

Paul Roetzer

Paul Roetzer (@paulroetzer) is founder and CEO of PR 20/20, a Clevelandbased inbound marketing agency; author of The Marketing Agency Blueprint (Wiley); and creator of Marketing Agency Insider—the hub for a more open and collaborative agency ecosystem—and Marketing Score—a free assessment tool and marketing intelligence engine.

http://www.twitter.com/paulroetzer

http://www.linkedin.com/in/paulroetzer

https://plus.google.com/112945685547633076291/posts

https://www.facebook.com/PaulRoetzer

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapterthirteen
Michael Brito

Transforming your brand to the next media company

Great content does matter. But in order to scale, you need to operationalize the content engine in order produce relevant, game-changing content, daily.

Whether you work for a large brand, small business or just a consultant, you need start thinking like a media company. And the answer is right in plain site.

1 There is a content and media surplus in the market place and consumers have an attention deficit.

2 Consumer's lives' are dynamic and unpredictable, making it impossible for any brand to reach them consistently.

3 All consumers are influential, despite their Klout scores and are aiding their peers down the purchase funnel.

These factors alone should get you to at least start thinking about making the transition into a media company. But the question you may have is, "what exactly is a media company?"

At a very high level, media companies are content machines. But more importantly, they have five characteristics that you should adopt when thinking overall about content marketing or content strategy.

1 Storytelling

Media companies tell stories. Conde' Nast has a diverse narrative told through their media properties from fashion and travel to sports and weddings. Traditional news organizations also tell stories, although their narrative is current or breaking news.

Some news outlets have tried to up-level their narrative by using anecdotes like "Fair & Balanced" to differentiate themselves from their competition.

2 Content

Media companies are content machines with an "always on" mentality. It doesn't matter what time a day it is or what the hour, media companies distribute content all the time. For example, the New York Times publishes 1,500+ articles per day (including those from AP, Reuters, and so on) and 200 to 400 blog posts.

3 Relevance

Media companies provide relevant content all the time to someone, somewhere. They aren't in the business of providing content that's a few days or weeks old, unless they are holding off on a story to get more detailed information. The content is recent and, in many cases, real-time.

4 Ubiquity

Media companies are everywhere. They dominate the search engine results and their content is shared daily across social media channels.

They produce videos and advertise, and even their journalists have started building their own personal brands, which also feed the content engine day in and day out.

5 Agility

Media companies move quickly. They have subject matter experts and contributing writers who are prepared to write about any topic at any time. They also employ creative teams that can produce visual content at a moment's notice. They aren't held captive by approvals from a brand team or lawyers. They are content organizations and move quickly. They have workflows that facilitate the entire content supply chain (ideation, creation, approval, distribution and integration.)

For these reasons, your brand must start taking content serious and begin to make the right organizational changes to adapt. This also means that you need to elevate the conversation beyond content marketing. Content marketing is by nature, tactical. It can easily be done in a silo. If you are a marketer, there is absolutely nothing stopping you from creating, aggregating, and curating content and then posting it up in social media channels without having a strategy. You can hire consultants, agencies, and even third-party journalists and bloggers using platforms like Contently or eByline to create content and campaigns on your behalf. It's fairly easy and affordable to use services like Poptent or Genius Rocket to crowdsource highly produced video content. And guess what? You can do all of this without actually talking to anyone in your company. Now, the content itself might not be epic or change any specific consumer behavior but it's not hard to do, and it's not that expensive.

The reason why many of the brands struggle with content, storytelling, and scalability is because they are looking at content from an elementary point of view.

Content is not a box you check, a bubble you fill in, or a bullet point in a PowerPoint presentation. It's more than SEO (Search Engine Optimization); it's more than videos, Infographics, Instagram photos, and real-time marketing. You can't learn about content from clever blog titles like "10 Proven Tips to Learn This" or "5 Smart Tricks to Learn That." Content must be considered a strategic imperative for your business. You must become a content organization if you want to take your business to the next level.

Just as there is an art to storytelling; there also needs to be a strategic and operational plan that can help you create and distribute content; integrate it across paid, earned, and owned media; and measure it effectively. As a marketer, brand manager, or small business owner you must move beyond the content marketing buzzword and commit to building a content strategy that will allow you to execute your tactical content marketing initiatives flawlessly and at scale.
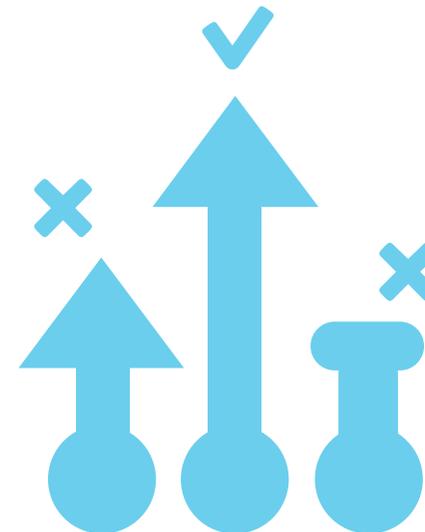
All media companies are content machines. They have the correct structures in place, aligned teams, and a robust editorial process, and they execute the distribution of their content flawlessly. Your brand must follow this model. Realizing that you still have rigorous business goals, you must challenge the status quo and think about content the way media companies do.

Michael Brito

Michael Brito is a Senior Vice President of Social Business Strategy at Edelman Digital. He provides strategic counsel to several of Edelman's top global accounts and is responsible for delivering social business and content strategy, community management operations and scaling programs globally. Previously, Michael worked for major brands in Silicon Valley to include Hewlett Packard, Yahoo! and Intel Corporation working in various marketing, social media and community management roles.

He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences as well as a guest lecturer at various universities including Cal Berkeley, the University of San Francisco, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Golden Gate University and Saint Mary's College of California. He is also an Adjunct Professor at San Jose State University and UC Berkeley teaching social business and strategic social media.

Michael has a Bachelor of Arts in Business degree from Saint Mary's College and a Master of Science, Integrated Marketing Communications degree from Golden Gate University. He proudly served eight years in the United States Marine Corps. Michael's book, Your Brand: The Next Media Company, will be released in October 2013. Find out more information here: https://www. facebook.com/TheNextMediaCompany

https://twitter.com/Britopian

http://www.linkedin.com/in/michaelbrito

http://www.britopian.com/

https://plus.google.com/103609242313555707641/posts

Return to contents page

Linkdex

Identify and understand your media and influencer landscape, fast.

Creating Great Content

chapterfourteen

Ann Handley

Does your content convey honest empathy?

Here are two startling facts about online marketing. The first: 70 percent of consumers prefer getting to know a company via content marketing rather than ads, according to ContentPlus. But (and this is the surprising part) brands spend more on advertising than on content such as articles, according to various industry sources.

http://www.contentplus.co.uk/marketing-resources/infographics/anatomy-of-content-marketing/

The second startling fact concerns business-to-business marketing: 93 percent of business-to-business marketers are using some kind of content in their marketing, but just 42 percent of them believe that content is effective, according to B2B Content Marketing: 2014 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America, a research study by MarketingProfs and the Content Marketing Institute.

http://www.slideshare.net/mprofs/b2b-content-marketing-2014-benchmarks-budgets-and-trendsnorth-america

Why are those facts startling? Because while content is increasingly a factor in both consumer and business decisions, brands are either uneasy with their efforts or they are missing the boat entirely.

Why does content matter? Consider how you approach any purchase you make: Whether you are looking to buy a lawn mower or a health plan, you're likely to Google your options. You probably read online reviews and recommendations. And you might poll your friends on Facebook or Twitter or Google+ or wherever you happen to hang out online. (In fact, that's exactly what I did when I wanted to buy a small, light digital camera for a recent trip to Croatia. All of that.)

WE 👍 **RECOMMEND**
WE 🐦 **RECOMMEND**
WE 8+ **RECOMMEND**
WE f **RECOMMEND**

Google calls this the "zero moment of truth," or ZMOT, which acknowledges that people come to a business through many online sources – via search, friend recommendations, online ratings, and more. In other words, the relationships we have with one another are increasingly leading us to brands; it's not simply marketers that lead brands to us, as JP LaFors of the Denver agency gyro points out on the ZMOT site.

The old model of marketing held that brands attracted us to them via advertising and other outreach efforts. But in today's search and social world, businesses should focus more on enabling interactions instead of chasing transactions. We should focus on helping the people we want to reach make decisions about the purchases they want to make via the online content we produce.

The key is to create helpful content that's seeded with honest empathy. How do you do that? Here are two primary ways:

1 Answer questions

"My golden rule of content marketing is to simply answer questions," says Marcus Sheridan, who saved his Warsaw, Virginia-based pool company, River Pools and Spa, from disaster by, in part, overhauling his marketing strategy. Instead of focusing on radio, television and pay-per-click advertising, as the company previously had, Marcus said in a recent talk at MarketingProfs that he shifted his strategy to focus on generating sales through informational blog posts and videos.

The key to his success, he says, didn't hinge on simply generating content. Rather, it hinged on the specific nature of that content. He was willing to answer the tough questions most pool installers want to avoid until they meet a customer face-to-face: How much will this cost? And what are the problems with fiberglass pools? Generally, pool installers -- like car dealers and purveyors of other big-ticket, complex items -- would rather avoid talking specifics because the final cost varies so widely, based on what options and specifics a buyer selects.

"My golden rule of content marketing is to simply answer questions."

- Marcus Sheridan

🐦 *Tweet This Quote*

The bigger lesson in Marcus's story is this: Too many companies are creating corporate-centric content instead of customer-centric content. What's the difference? The former is about you, while the latter is about what you do for your customer – a subtle yet critical shift. A good lens through which to view any content you produce is this: Will your customer thank you for this content? In effect, will your customer thank you for marketing to them? If the answer is yes, then you have gold.

By answering questions, you essentially are addressing specific pain points. You are demonstrating that you understand what specific issues and concerns or problems your customers have. In Marcus's case, he earned trust with would-be pool buyers. But in your business, depending on what you sell, you might be subtly communicating something different.

The bottom line is to produce content with clear utility for people, and content that's seeded with honest empathy for the problems that (presumably) your products or services can solve.

2 Watch your voice and tone

Voice and tone can go a long way toward articulating empathy in your content. "Voice" refers to the personality you convey in your copy and content, and it's unique to every company. I'm a fan of websites that communicate in simple terms, using direct language, in the words of your customers – in other words, with honest empathy.

For example, I like the way the UK government's site (Gov.UK) presents complex policies and guidelines in as simple and straightforward a manner as possible, in accordance with its published style guide. Any business can learn a lot from a government agency that suggests its web writers write in a style that is, among other things:

- Clear and concise

- Brisk but not terse

- Incisive (friendliness can lead to a lack of precision and unnecessary words) – but remain human (not a faceless machine)

- Serious but not pompous

(Side note: I smiled at the style guide's suggestion to avoid "Americanisms. You 'fill in' a form, not 'fill out' a form.")

In addition to voice, consider the tone you use, too. The voice of your website might be snarky, upbeat or fun, but you might want to shift the tone in some spots. Customer service pages -- or places a customer might visit when he or she has a problem -- might drop a snarky tone in favor of helpful empathy.

Clearly, the world in which we do business is now more complex. But at the same time, the search and social landscape also creates an enormous opportunity. The question becomes: What are you doing to take advantage of that opportunity?

Ann Handley

Ann Handley speaks and writes about how you can rethink the way your business markets. Cited in Forbes as the most influential woman in Social Media and recognized by ForbesWoman as one of the top 20 women bloggers, Ann Handley is the Chief Content Officer of MarketingProfs, a training and education company with the largest community of marketers in its category.

She is a monthly columnist for <u>Entrepreneur Magazine</u>, a member of the LinkedIn Influencer program , and the co-author of the best-selling book on content marketing <u>Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business</u> (Wiley, originally published 2011. Paperback 2012.) The book has been translated into nine languages, including Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Portuguese. She currently has more than 180,000 followers on Twitter.

A pioneer in digital marketing, Ann is the co-founder of ClickZ.com, which was one of the first sources of interactive marketing news and commentary. She started her career as a business journalist and editor.

Ann is based in Boston, Massachusetts.

https://twitter.com/MarketingProfs

http://www.linkedin.com/in/annhandley

http://www.annhandley.com/

https://plus.google.com/115918125306643310533/posts

A version of this article previously appeared in *Entrepreneur* magazine.

Return to contents page

chapterfifteen

Darren Fell

With content, you reap what you sow

The original purpose of the written word - all the way back to the handwritten parchments of the Middle Ages - was to keep people informed. Subsequent technological advances - Gutenberg's press, the typewriter and latterly the web - have increased the volume and reach of the written word, but the primary purpose remains the same. The written word is the perfect tool to pass information from a single source to multiple recipients.

Many companies forget this simple fact when embarking on content marketing exercises. They assume that because they have the tool - the written word - they can control the outcome. For businesses, that outcome is always to sell a product. However, in my experience, content designed specifically to sell a product will always underperform, and quite often fail entirely.

Consumers are getting more and more savvy and, especially online, have no qualms at all about simply going elsewhere if they don't like the material they are reading. If they feel they are seeing a sales pitch when they didn't expect to, the reaction is usually far from positive.

For all these reasons and more a genuine desire to inform, educate and entertain will always be the best starting point for great content - be it editorial, video, audio or even - god forbid - an infographic.

When founding Crunch - an online accountancy firm primarily aimed at freelancers - I decided a community approach would be a great way to build an early audience for the product. I launched FreelanceAdvisor.co.uk, hosting useful content put together by myself, some freelancing friends and other influential businesspeople I knew.

The site grew quickly and now, 5 years later, is the largest site of its kind in the UK, attracting around 100,000 visitors every month. We used this blog, started with purely altruistic intent, as a marketing channel for Crunch. The site now pays for itself in the number of leads it delivers per month, and has a full-time editorial staff.

A content strategy based largely on goodwill can be a hard sell for any Marketing Director, but I truly believe that therein lies the best returns. There are extra benefits, too.

Internal expertise

When a marketer realises that they should be 'doing content' (and they'll all get there eventually), there can be a temptation to run off to find an agency to fill that need. However, in-house will always trump agency work.

Why? Well, if you're a lawyer, there's a damn good chance you know bucketloads about legal issues. If you're an accountancy firm, like us, your office will be overflowing with tax expertise. This kind of knowledge is always best received first-hand, without passing through the filter of an agency - which will often only serve to dumb it down. In the worst cases, the agency will ignore your expertise entirely and produce bland, box-ticking listicles that could be published by just about anyone.

Any editorial or content efforts you undertake represent the most engaged a potential customer will be with your company short of a face-to-face conversation. They will be taking time out of their day to read, watch or interact with what you've produced. Give them something useful or teach them something new and you'll be building trust. Create something so great that they come back for more and the trust will be that much stronger.

Do you really want a third party producing something so important?

Educate your market

By attracting an audience to what you're producing, you have a great opportunity to educate them as customers. If your product is the best (it is, isn't it?), they'll be more likely to choose you once they have been suitably educated.
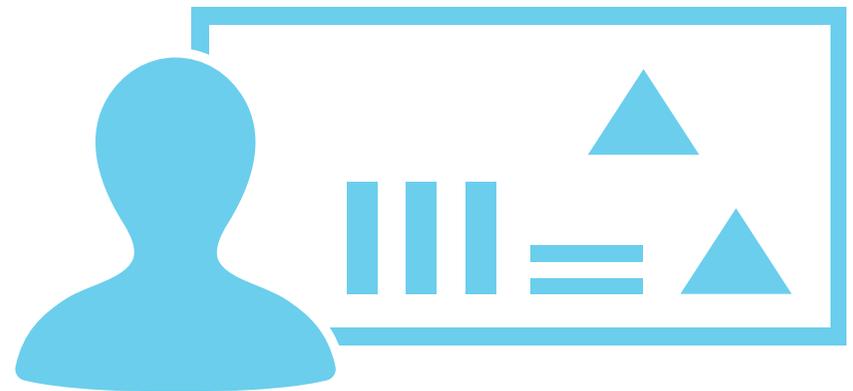
This strategy can work for even the most complicated subject matters - never underestimate your audience's capacity to absorb information. 'Black box' professions - where consumers put something in and get a result, but never see the actual process, are particularly juicy targets for this kind of education.

Teach someone something new, and they'll always remember where they got that knowledge.

Open up your business

People want to understand the businesses they are buying into. Cynics may say consumers just want a positive end result for themselves - the most bang for their buck - but movements like Fair Trade and the huge growth of organic foods show that consumers care. With the ability to produce great content comes the ability to better explain what your company is about.

Introduce some of your staff, give a virtual tour of your offices, or explain your professional values in a blog post. This type of material still fulfils our original criteria of informing people, but it is also helping customers make buying decisions.

The halo effect of great content is huge

Do good things, and good things will happen to you. Put time and effort into great, useful and entertaining content and you will see the benefits. These benefits will usually arrive in the most unexpected ways - but they will arrive. Since launching Freelance Advisor we've seen such benefits as:

- We've been featured in numerous national newspapers as freelancing experts

- We've been invited to speak at events, give presentations and contribute to other prominent freelancing sites

- Almost across the board, when people find out Freelance Advisor is run by Crunch they investigate the product - many become clients

And these are before we even mention the 'traditional' benefits of content marketing - primarily better search rankings and more chatter on social media.

Every company has their own way of dealing with content. Some outsource it entirely, some do it all in-house. Some mix-and-match where they need skills they don't have internally. Many don't have any 'strategy' at all; they just do what feels right. Each method has pros and cons, and there is no incorrect way. The thing to remember about great content is that it has to come from a genuine desire to help people. Do that, and you'll be just fine.

Darren Fell

Darren Fell is a serial entrepreneur and co-founder of <u>Crunch.co.uk,</u> an online accountancy service for freelancers, contractors and small businesses.

www.twitter.com/TeamCrunch

www.crunch.co.uk

Return to contents page

chaptersixteen
Hannah Smith

Why you need great content

You want to sell things.

People want to buy things.

Why then, is it so damned difficult to sell things?

Because it's not just you trying to make that sale.

The above rings true regardless of whether you're selling products or services. It's also true if you run on an advertising revenue model.

Competition is fierce.

People have more choice than ever before.

Media is fragmenting – there are more channels - offline, online, radio, TV, cinema, on-demand (I could go on); and more ways to consume said media - desktop, laptop, tablet, app, smartphone, TV (to name the obvious few).

We're all publishers now. Consumers as well as brands.

The rise of social networks means that just about anyone can publish online almost instantly.

LISTEN TO ME!

LISTEN TO ME!

LISTEN TO ME!

Brands and publishers are clamouring for people's attention.

People are clamouring for other people's attention.

How are you going to cut through that noise?

How are you going to reach those people you want to sell to?

This challenge is at the heart of why great content matters.

You want to sell things? You want your business to thrive?

Your content needs to matter to those you want to sell to.

What is Content?

It's anything and everything that you've ever created that's seen by your consumers (and would-be consumers). That includes website copy, images, videos, emails you send, direct mail, updates on social channels, press releases, advertising both on and offline, and so on. I could keep going all day on this, but hopefully you catch my drift.

It's also anything and everything you've ever publicly (wittingly or otherwise) said and done.

Remember the fiasco of Gordon Brown calling Gillian Duffy a bigot? Or GoDaddy's elephant killing CEO?

It also extends to content which you didn't create but is about you (whether it's on your site or not) e.g. user generated content, press coverage both positive and negative; customer reviews and complaints and so on.

Why do you need 'great' content?

Ultimately, how people feel about your content doesn't just colour how they feel about you.

More often than not, if they hate your content, they hate you. Conversely, if they love your content, they love you.

Extremes of emotion aside – if they don't notice your content, it likely means they aren't aware you exist. If, to all intents and purposes, you don't exist – you will struggle to sell anything.

Great content matters because you need people to notice you. You need to cut through the noise and win their attention.

Your content needs to matter to them.

Different horses for different courses.

You need different types of content for different purposes.

All content should be goal-driven - what you create depends on what you're trying to achieve. Only once you've defined the goal(s) for each specific type of content can you create it.

Additionally your content needs to support your brand values and positioning. If your content is dissonant with your brand then you'll confuse and/or even alienate those you're trying to reach.

I've listed some goals and common content types below; plus some great (as opposed to 'good') examples.

GOAL: Drive awareness

Common content types:

1 TV / Online video advertising

TV and video advertising can of course be used as a direct response channel, however typically this media works best to drive awareness.

Great examples include:

Old Spice – 'the man your man could smell like' (which gained huge traction both on and offline and saw product sales double).

Sainsbury's – 'try something new today' (delivered an additional £3 billion in revenue in just a year)

2 Content for links

Ideally the content you create to attract links should also appeal to the people you're looking to sell to.

Great examples include:

Simply Business - Guide to Google Analytics (has links from 188 sites)

Staples – Speed Reading Test (has links from 202 sites)

3 Content for social traction

Often content that's created for links also gains social traction, but here's a great example of content which existed purely for a social media campaigns –

Innocent – Tweet & Eat (the more people tweeted, the cheaper the product got – 40k vouchers were downloaded during the campaign)
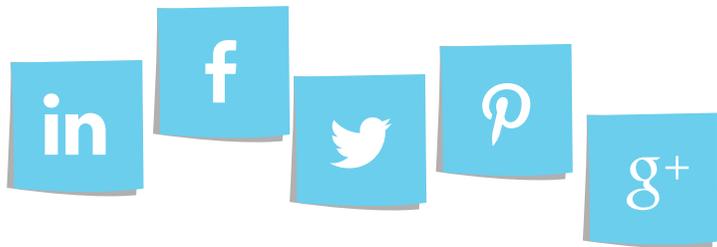
4 PR

When it comes to PR – it's all about the story and OK Cupid hit the jackpot with their 'iPhone users have more sex' headline. The story was covered by just about every major news outlet on and offline.

GOAL: Build trust

Common content types:

1 Your company's story

Why do you exist? What's your company all about?

Great examples include:

IKEA, Innocent, MailChimp & REI.

2 Your company's employees

Employee pages tell people a lot about your company (or at least they should) – show your faces and personalities.

Great examples include:

Etch & Kayak
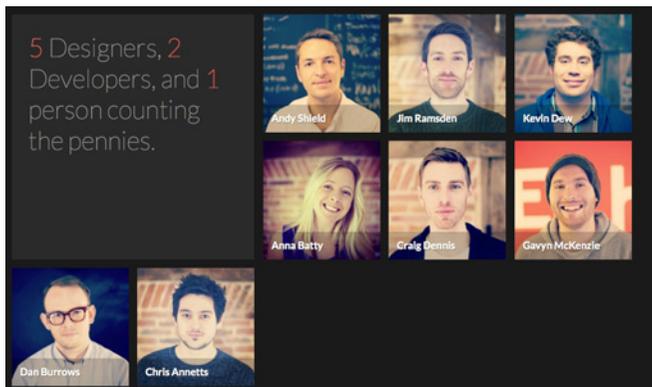
3 Terms & conditions

So often these are heinous, however Bandcamp have done a pretty great job of this.

GOAL: Move people from 'interest' to 'purchase'

Common content types:

1 Product pages

Do your product pages simply describe what you're peddling? You are miles off of the pace – here are some great examples:

ModCloth – give you 'the story' rather than a product description
Wish – compelling story-telling and a healthy dose of wit

2 Help sections / FAQs

Again, often these are woeful – again, see Bandcamp for how it should be done.

GOAL: Retain

Common content types:

1 Social updates

Gaining a following isn't enough – you need to keep people interacting with you.

Great examples include Innocent on Facebook

2 Email

I always look forward to receiving Quora's emails which point to interesting and often off-beat threads in addition to highlighting topics I'm already interested in.

3 Direct mail

Clearly the true measure of whether or not a piece of direct mail is successful is the extent to which it has the desired effect in terms of driving sales, nevertheless – here are some excellent creative examples. You might also like to take a leaf from Red Bull's book – they regularly surprise advocates with gifts.

4 Blog

Does your blog attract comments and social shares? Are you creating content that your audience wants, needs, loves?

Etsy are doing an incredible job.

GOAL: Recruit employees

The content on your site can also affect the people you attract to work for you.

Common content types:

1 Culture pages

Check out Hubspot and Moz.

2 Job ads (both on and offsite)

Are your job ads creative? Do they really reflect who you are and who you want to employ? Rather the write a traditional job ad, the Onion released <u>Fartscroll</u> to attract a Front End Developer.

At Distilled, we attracted a new hire off the back of our <u>404 page</u>.

'Good' Isn't Good Enough

There's a difference between good and great content.

Good content is rarely good enough to grab people's attention.

Great content not only grabs attention, it provokes reactions.

The sorts of reactions you want.

Judging the difference between 'good' and 'great' content

It's very difficult to be objective when it comes to content.

As such I'd recommend doing some research. There are many ways you can do this – set up focus groups with the types of people you're hoping to sell to; do a quick coffee shop test – take your laptop to your coffee house of choice and ask some people what they think; alternatively you could use sites like Feedback Army, or Mechanical Turk.

"Mediocrity is underrated, which, when you think about it, is kind of the point"

- Said by me, just now.

Questions like these will help you understand what other people think of your content:

● Would you trust information from this website?

● Is this website written by experts?

● Do the pages on this site have obvious errors?

● Does the website provide original content or information?

● Would you recognise this site as an authority?

● Does this website contain insightful analysis?

● Would you consider bookmarking pages on this site?

● Could pages from this site appear in print?

● Would you share this site with your friends via social media or email?

● Would you buy from this site?

Ultimately, as different content serves different purposes it can be difficult to judge whether or not it's 'good' or 'great' at launch. However, post launch you can review and see how well or otherwise your content is performing versus the goals you've set out.

For example, did the content you created for links actually attract them? Did the content you created to move people from 'interest' to 'purchase' actually result in more purchases?

Test, learn and iterate your content over time in order to improve results. Creating 'great' content isn't something you just do once and then you're done – you need to continue to work at improving it over time.

What should you care about?

What you should care about really depends on your channels to market and indeed how you plan to grow your business in the future.

If you care about organic search…

If organic search is a channel for you; or indeed you want it to be a key channel in the future, thanks to two black and white animal shaped Google updates, you need to care about great content:

Panda – February 2011

Whilst Google always told companies to build good quality pages for users – the reality was that in order to rank well in search, you actually didn't always need 'good' pages – particularly if what you were targeting were less competitive terms. This flaw in the algorithm led to some websites creating many 'low-quality' pages – some of which were essentially there only to attract search traffic in order to sell advertising space. In the industry they were dubbed content farms.

The Panda algorithm update was essentially about Google's battle to try to rank 'good quality' content. The following are quotes taken from a Wired interview:

Singhal: So we did Caffeine [a major update that improved Google's indexing process] in late 2009. Our index grew so quickly, and we were just crawling at a much faster speed. When that happened, we basically got a lot of good fresh content, and some not so good. The problem had shifted from random gibberish, which the spam team had nicely taken care of, into somewhat more like written prose. But the content was shallow.

Matt Cutts: It was like, "What's the bare minimum that I can do that's not spam?" It sort of fell between our respective groups. And then we decided, okay, we've got to come together and figure out how to address this.

Wired.com: Do you feel that this update has done what you wanted it to do?

Cutts: I would say so. I got an e-mail from someone who wrote out of the blue and said, "Hey, a couple months ago, I was worried that my daughter had pediatric multiple sclerosis, and the content farms were ranking above government sites, Now", she said, "the government sites are ranking higher. So I just wanted to write and say thank you."

This update changed the search landscape – companies can't keep on creating lots of 'low quality' pages and expect them to rank. You need to create better content.

Penguin – April 2012

Similarly, companies have long been obsessed with gaining links in order to improve search visibility and there's really only two ways to do so – earn links (typically by creating great content) or buy them.

Now Google have always been against buying links –because this manipulation of the link graph messes with their ability to deliver genuinely good results. However, the main issue was that despite Google's claims it was entirely possible to build great search visibility using tactics Google themselves claimed were manipulative and they did not reward.

In April 2012 Google finally hit back hard; and the Penguin update knocked out a lot of sites that had been engaging in the purchase of links.

There were always companies who elected not to engage those tactics Google had deemed manipulative. Rather than buying links, they focused on creating content which would attract good links. Typically they saw their site rankings improve post Penguin. Conversely, some companies who had previously been engaging in tactics deemed manipulative saw their site rankings fall.

To sum up, if you care about driving revenue via organic search visits then you need great content –for your product pages (to avoid the Panda algorithm); and great content to attract genuine, editorial links (to avoid the Penguin algorithm).

If you care about TV and/or online video advertising

TV audiences are increasingly fragmented due to the huge range of channels now available, not to mention DVR, on-demand and subscription services across devices causing further fragmentation. As such, just reaching your audience is tough enough.

But even if you reach them – how do you get them to watch your ads?

How do you stop them sloping off to make tea/coffee; fast forwarding; skipping or closing after 5 seconds if you're running pre-rolls?

Your advertising content needs to be compelling.

You need to grab your audience's attention; make them actually want to watch. Few are doing this well right now, but NSPCC's Underwear Rule was one pre-roll ad I actively wanted to watch until the end.

If you care about building a brand on a budget…

Dollar Shave Club built a brand with just a viral video and a healthy dose of PR. They took 12,000 orders in 48 hours.

Could they have done that with content that was just ok? Frankly no. Only truly excellent content which people want to shout about from the rooftops gains this sort of virality.

If you care about engaging via social media…

When it comes to engaging with people via social media it's all about conversation not broadcast.

If you want to build and retain your audience you need to share things which are genuinely of value to them. Whatever that value looks like. So you need a mix of things which are useful, interesting, funny etc.

You need to create the sort of content which your audience wants to share. It needs to be great, so they want to share your content with others too.

Of course you shouldn't simply be sharing you own content, you should also curate fantastic content from other sources too.

If you care about decreasing your reliance on just one channel…

Diversification is the name of the game for many businesses.

For example, many were overly-reliant on organic search and with the recent spate of updates have seen their revenue plummet.

Having just one channel to market makes for a very unstable business – of course you don't need to embrace *all* channels, but you do need appropriate content for whichever channels you are proposing to utilise.

Again, if you want to grab people's attention your content needs to be great.

If you care about people buying from you online

Does the content on your site highlight benefits as opposed to features? Does it address potential purchasers' objections? Do you look trustworthy?

If you want people to part with their hard-earned cash then you need to create content which moves them through the funnel from interest, to desire, to purchase.

If you don't? Well you might just find that they head off to spend their cash elsewhere.

If you care about repeat purchases…

Do you want people to buy from you again? What are you doing to engender their loyalty? What are you doing to ensure that you're always on their mind?

Whether you like to keep in touch with your customers via email, direct mail, or social channels you're going to need content that's relevant to them, that speaks to them and they actively want to receive. If you don't deliver, they'll stop listening.

Is great content alone, enough?

Unhappily no.

Even truly exceptional content won't drive sales if no one sees it. In addition to producing great content you also need to invest in promoting your content if you want to succeed.

Technical considerations

If your primary focus is web content, you'll also need to think about how people are going to consume it. The desktop is not the only way we consume web content today.

Invest in your website now. Your content needs to be consumable across a plethora of devices (desktop, tablet, mobile, TV) and in the future the number and variety of devices we use to consume content are only going to increase.

Is it easy to make a purchase if you're accessing your site via mobile? No? You're likely to be losing sales already.

Final thoughts

Why does great content matter?

How people feel about your content doesn't just colour how they feel about you. It is how they feel about you.

If they hate your content, they'll likely hate you. If they love your content, they love you. If they don't notice your content, it probably means they aren't aware you even exist.

Great content matters because you need people to notice you. You need to cut through the noise and win their attention.

You want to sell things? Your content needs to matter to the people you want to sell to.

Both now, and increasingly in the future; regardless of media or channel type, only great content will cut through the noise and speak to the people you want to sell to.

And once you've sold to them, you'll want to hold on to them, have them buy from you again.

Again, you'll need to create content that matters to them.

Will it be tough? Of course it will, but nothing worth doing is easy.

I'll leave you with a quote from Philip Kotler:

"The art of marketing is the art of brand building.

If you are not a brand you are a commodity.

Then price is everything and the low cost producer is the only winner".

\- Philip Kotler

Tweet This Quote

Hannah Smith

Hannah spent 7 years working in Offline Marketing until her fairy godmother told her that the internet was the future - not one to ignore such sage advice Hannah made the switch to online.

As Principal Consultant at Distilled she manages and implements technical, link building and content campaigns for clients across a range of verticals. Keen to share her knowledge and experience she's spoken at various conferences, both in the UK and abroad including MozCon, SearchLove, LinkLove, Be Wizard, BrightonSEO and Think Visibility. She's also an SEOmoz Associate, and writes for Medium, State of Digital and SEO Chicks.

hannah.smith@distilled.net

http://www.linkedin.com/in/hannahsmith

http://www.twitter.com/Hannah_Bo_Banna

https://plus.google.com/u/0/113315827234117974931/posts

Return to contents page

chapterseventeen
White.net

How to use content to diversify and strengthen your online marketing

Search marketing is getting harder. With Google rightly demanding higher standards of online content and superb user experience, marketers have their work cut out coming up with engaging ways of capturing the interest of web users.

We've created this guide to give you some inspiration and to show you that there's more to content than just guest blog posts and infographics (though infographics do get a mention along the way).

Most of the ideas you see in this chapter will be for things you can do or add to your own site to make it brilliant and help it rank in Google; comparatively few of the ideas are concerned with 'link building' in its traditional sense. I've taken this approach because Google values sites that are brilliant in their own right, not those that actively build links to themselves. Whatever your preferred terminology, the concept of 'inbound' marketing is coming to the fore. Nevertheless, I've also included a few ideas designed to promote your site legitimately to a wider audience via external sites.

WHITE.

BE BOLD

On-site copy

Let's start by looking at what you can be doing to improve the content on your own site. It's all very well bringing in lots of paid and organic search traffic, and reaching out to other sites with your content, but if visitors don't like your site when they reach it and leave straight away, your efforts will all have been for nothing. Your on-site content is by far the most important aspect of all your online activity and should present a strong impression of your business to your customers and potential customers. In doing so – in appealing to human beings – you will be doing pretty much everything you need to do in order to appeal to search engines. With good content, everyone wins!

Content audit

A content audit is a useful exercise with which to kick off the process of revamping your on-site content, as it will give you a rounded view of your site as it stands. A content audit should do the following:

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your current content

- Identify content that's working well for you already

- Identify content that could do with being improved

- Identify areas for adding new content

You may well find that with a bit of work, you can get your existing content working much harder for you by refreshing the copy, revamping the layout or presenting the same information in a new and more exciting way.

Refreshing existing content

So how do you go about refreshing the content you already have? Here are some tips to get you started.

- Have a read of the copy on your website and answer the following questions:

  - How long ago was it written?

  - Is the information accurate and up-to-date?

  - Does it still reflect where your brand is today, for example in terms of the language used?

  - Is it still relevant, or has the marketplace changed?

  - Does it conform to web writing best practice – using short, skimmable paragraphs, headings and bullet points where appropriate?

  - Is it consistent throughout the site – does it read as though it was written by one person or many?

  - Does it encourage users to take the actions you want them to take?

  - Is the English up to scratch? Can you see any typos, grammatical errors or badly worded sentences? Does your copy convey what you want it to in as concise and compelling a way as possible? Ask a copywriter to look over your content if necessary.

Your honest answers to these questions should help you identify copy that could do with being rewritten.

Also look at the other kinds of content on your site:

● How are the images on your site looking? Are there enough of them? Are there opportunities for adding images to support the copy? You know what they say – a picture speaks a thousand words.

● What other content types do you have on your site? Is there much variety? Have you thought about adding some videos, podcasts or reviews to introduce new content types to your site?

● Do you have any content that could be presented in a more engaging format? For instance, a long page of copy that could be better presented as a video, or a dry report full of statistics that would be easier to digest in a visual format, as an infographic?

Deloitte implemented the last of these suggestions with the annual Football Money League report on the wealthiest football clubs. Previously presented only as a lengthy report each year, it had great success with reaching a bigger audience when the key facts and figures from the report were presented as an infographic.

More on infographics later…

How to do it

So how do you go about refreshing the content you already have? Here are some things to think about to get you started.

Site architecture

If your site structure is changing along with the refresh, you'll need to plan out what copy you need for each page, and where each page sits within the hierarchy. This will help you when it comes to cross-referencing and crosslinking between pages, as well as planning your workload or writing briefs for your copywriter. Even if you're not planning a major overhaul of your site architecture, it's still worth considering whether you need any extra pages creating, or existing pages combining, in order to structure your content logically and deliver your message effectively and in a user-friendly manner.

Language and tone

What tone are you aiming for, and what language will you use to create it? Write a list of words and phrases that reflect your brand – how you describe your services, your USPs, your values, and so on. Decide whether you're going to use first person or third person. First person ("we are a digital marketing agency") is friendlier and more direct, while third person (for instance, "SEOptimise is a digital marketing agency") is arguably more distant, coldly business-like. Which you go may depend to an extent on the nature of your business and who your target audience is – so have a think about who your readers will be and ensure that your copy is appropriate to them.

Length

How much copy do you need for each page? Some best practice guides dictate a minimum Number of words per page, but conveying your message effectively is still the single most important consideration. Too much copy will put readers off, but not enough and you risk not being valued by Google as well as not providing enough information for readers, so you need to strike a balance.

Many websites have virtually no copy on their homepages, for instance, which could be bad for SEO, with impact on design being the usual factor for not adding more. But adding copy to a homepage doesn't have to impact the design; it's perfectly possible to add copy to a page, which will also help user experience and complement the existing design.

This is a good compromise, and you can see it in action in the screenshot below, which comes from towards the bottom of the <u>Notonthehighstreet</u> homepage.

Structure and calls to action

Think about how you'll structure the copy on each page. To start with, jot down your site plan and make a note of what each page is trying to achieve. What will a conversion be from this page? Websites are there to fulfil a purpose, and whether you're an e-commerce site or not, you'll still need to define conversions in order to assess how well your website is performing.

Examples of conversions include:

● Download a brochure

● Buy a product

● Remain on a page for a particular length of time

● Watch a video

● Send an enquiry

● Register for an event

● Sign up to a mailing list

Does your web content guide users to take these actions? If not, you should encourage readers to do what you want them to do by adding calls to action into your copy.

Internal links

I mentioned internal links in the section above on site architecture. It's good to include these contextually in the copy, as this gives users immediate access to other relevant information at the point at which they may want to see it. Other examples of good ways of including internal links – which also help strengthen your site architecture – are to have lists of 'related posts' at the end of a blog post, or a 'you may also be interested in' section for related products on a product page.

Identifying where you should be adding new content

Your content audit may also have highlighted opportunities for adding new content to your site. The most common ways of adding new content to a site are by blogging, a news section and/or a resources section.

Here are some things you can do to get inspiration for where there may be gaps in your content:

● Look at popular search terms that drive traffic to your site, and conduct some keyword research to identify some longer-tail search terms – do you have content that covers them?

● What are your most frequent questions or requests from customers? These can indicate that you should have content that answers them if you don't already.

● Look at what your competitors are doing, and what has worked well for them – this can indicate the sorts of content your target audience likes and engages with.

● Look objectively at your website and what it offers visitors. Are you sharing your knowledge and being helpful, or is your site purely sales-focused?

Online versions of offline content

Don't let your offline publications go to waste; they too can be helping drive traffic online. Does your company have any of the following printed materials lying about in your office?

● Brochures

● Leaflets

● Catalogues

● Magazines

● Product guides

● Newsletters

● Price lists

If so, get them online as downloadable PDFs, HTML pages or iPhone/iPad/mobile/tablet versions. It saves trees, too!

Once they're online, don't forget to optimise the title tags and meta descriptions, and ensure that they sit logically in your site architecture in such a way that both users and search engine spiders can find them easily.

A good example of offline content being made available online is Thomas Cook's extensive range of brochures, which are available in Thomas Cook shops or viewable online.

Taking offline formats online

You could go a step further and create an exclusively digital version of a popular offline format, just as Net-a-Porter does with The Edit Magazine. Doing so saves on print publishing costs,

Starting your own blog

We've covered all the reasons why your site should have a blog in a separate white paper, but I'm including a section on it here as well because its many benefits make it a particularly strong content idea for your site.

In short, if your site doesn't already have a blog, it should do. As well as building your brand and giving it a voice, it helps you rank better in search engines, too – it ensures a steady stream of fresh new content on a variety of relevant topics and naturally optimises your site for a whole load of long-tail keywords. Here's a nice example from Trafalgar:

How to set up a blog and things to consider

Here are some best practice tips for blogging:

- Host the blog on the same domain as the rest of your site, not on a separate domain or blogging site. So:

  http://www.seoptimise.com/blog ✔

  http://www.seoptimiseblog.com ✖

  http://seoptimiseblog.wordpress.com ✖

- Ensure that the design of the blog is consistent with the design of the rest of your site.

- Ensure your posts conform to web writing best practice, including using short paragraphs with subheadings, an optimised title if possible and bullet points if appropriate.

- Update regularly.

- Enable comments, moderate them and respond to them.

- Promote your blog via your social media channels and ensure posts have social media sharing buttons to encourage people to share your posts.

Blog post ideas

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of things to write about – even the most prolific writers occasionally suffer from the dreaded writers' block. Luckily, there are plenty of tried and tested blog post formats that may in themselves get your creative juices flowing. Here are loads of ideas to help inspire you, including examples of sites that have done each format well.

Go image crazy

People browsing the web are often pushed for time, and may not want to commit to reading an in-depth post. Make life easy for them by giving them something image-based. This sort of content is highly shareable, easily digestible and easy to put together.

There's no better example of it than Buzzfeed, a recent post on 33 Things Brits Do Better Than Everyone Else being just one of many brilliant image-based bits of content.

Tip: make sure you have permission to use any images you include. Google Images has an advanced search function; select 'images licensed for reuse' to find images it's ok to publish.

Interviews

If you ask the right questions, interviews can be interesting and engaging. You get the added benefit of the fact that the subject of the interview will probably promote the content to their own following, widening its reach and hopefully raising your brand awareness.

Luckily yours don't have to be quite as high profile as this recent Guardian piece in which Daniel Craig interviewed Thom Yorke; here's one Copify did with Reviews. co.uk's Callum McKeefery on user generated content.

Tip: interviews don't have to be conducted face to face, nor even over the phone.

Just email the subject a list of questions and they email back their answers. It means less work for you, too!

Industry event round-up

Great as a recap for people who were there, or as a way for people who couldn't make it to catch up on what they missed, industry event round-ups get lots of shares and links in the days following the event. As a business, they also show visitors to your site that you're actively involved in your industry, developing your knowledge and expertise by learning from others. Here's an example from our blog, with takeaways from SMX London 2013.

Tip: strike while the iron's hot. Don't leave it a week and then publish your round-up – try and get it published on the same day and tweet about it using the event's hashtag while people are still talking about it.

Answer people's questions

Whether you source the questions via social media first, or just tackle some frequently asked questions on a topic you're knowledgeable about, Q&As are great because they deal with what people want to know, and can help your site rank better for long-tail searches in which people ask specific questions.

The BBC does this sort of content to good effect when explaining complex current affairs to people who want to gain an introduction to the subject, such as this helpful Q&A on Egypt in turmoil.

Tip: Google is a great place to find out what questions people want to know the answers to. Just type in your topic and typical question openings such as "why do" and "what is" into the search bar and watch for the suggested results. For instance, typing in "cats why do" brings up "why do they purr", "why do they knead" and "why do they lick you". All great topics to cover on a pet-related website.

Twitter users to follow in your industry

Essentially a specific form of ego-bait – that is, content that bolsters people's egos, making them share it – creating a 'who to follow' resource should help earn social mentions from the people on the list as well as those who found it a helpful bit of content. Here's a cleverly titled example from PCMag of 140 characters to follow on Twitter.

Tip: use Topsy.com to identify influential Twitter users in your niche.

Best posts of the week

With so many great blogs around, not everyone has time to keep up with all the latest posts published, so doing a round-up of the best of the web is valuable because it gives people a single place to find the things they should be reading. Once you become trusted, you'll find your readership grows. And to take maximum advantage of this, let sites know when you've featured them - they'll help promote your round-up, raising brand awareness and building natural links and social mentions. Search Engine Land's SearchCap is a great example.

Tip: subscribe to a load of blogs in your niche and create an email rule to send new posts to a folder in your email client. Also, set up a Twitter list of people you know always share good stuff. Then at the end of each week, review your email inbox folder and Twitter list and you have a ready-made list of posts to choose from.

Lists

Who doesn't love a good list? The beauty of them is that they're easy to read, remember and refer to, and they almost can't help but conform to web writing best practice. They're also good because they show readers how far through the article they are.

Here's an example from Kodak – Top 10 Tips for Great Pictures – and from the NHS on 10 Tips to Beat Insomnia.

Tip: lists can be short, long or anything in between – just make sure you break up the paragraphs to ensure they're easy to read, one item per paragraph, and use subheadings if you can.

Day in the life

It's always interesting to read what other people get up to in their day-to-day lives, so 'day in the life' features have natural human interest. Admittedly some professions (such as this day in the life of an airline pilot) have more scope for an interesting feature than others, but with some thought, you're sure to find someone in your business or industry who people will be interested in reading about.

You could give it a careers slant, cross-linking with your Careers/Recruitment page and showing people who want to work in a particular job what it's like; as in this example from the job site Bayt International on a day in the life of a management consultant, which has had over 55,000 views.

Tip: include plenty of photos to make it more interesting and easier to relate to. You could even support the written content with a video of the person in question.

Debunk a myth

I'm not talking about Roswell or the Moon landings… I'm talking about tackling common misperceptions in your industry. I'm sure there are a few! Here's one on ABC about six myths of airline travel.

Tip: a good starting point if you're in need of ideas is to think about your frequently asked questions. Are you often having to answer the same question owing to a common misperception? If so, answer it in a blog post for all to see!

Explain how to use/get more out of handy tools

There are so many online tools these days that it can be a bit overwhelming, and difficult to know which ones are worth the effort of learning to use.

When we're all pushed for time, taking the time to learn how to use a new tool, or learning how to make more of the tools we already use, can get shoved to the bottom of the To Do list. So make someone's life easier by writing a handy guide to how to get started with (and make the most of) a useful tool that's relevant to your industry. Here's a good one on Lifehacker.com – 'I've been using Evernote all wrong. Here's why it's actually amazing'.

Tip: if you're reviewing a web-based tool, you could even put together a little tutorial video by filming your screen using video software such as Camtasia.

Talk about a recent piece of news

A blog can be a good place to talk about a recent piece of relevant news in a more informal setting, perhaps offering an opinion and your own insights. This allows you to pick up search traffic for topical events. You can also use the blog to unveil news relating to your business, being careful not to make your blog too obviously 'salesy' (which would be likely to put people off). Here's a recent example from Rococo Chocolates, reacting to the news story that the smell of chocolate can alter customer behaviour in bookshops.

Tip: in the next section, we'll look at how to set up a news section for your site; this gives you a place to write more formally and impartially about relevant news, if you favour a more journalistic style.

Learning from topical events

This sort of content capitalises on hot topics and can be great if the link between the event and what you're writing about isn't too tenuous (to give a made-up example that's strongly based on the sort of things you see, '10 things Nelson Mandela taught me about SEO'). Here's a better example – a post about 10 things we can learn from Hurricane Sandy.

Tip: never take advantage of a high-profile death or any other tragedy to try to gain more traffic to your site. It's poor taste and will probably backfire.

Court controversy

Being controversial is potentially a risky strategy, but one that can draw in the crowds. Just make sure it's for the right reasons – don't take it too far! You may find that this tactic works best when you pick a topic that's at the forefront of everyone's minds, when anybody who goes against the grain will stand out and get noticed – for example, a controversial take on a high-profile news story.

The great (or rather not-so-great) "SEO is dead" debate is an example of one that's done the rounds in our industry (to the point of being hackneyed). There are plenty of controversial topics on Debate.org if you're in need of inspiration, but be prepared for a mixed response and make sure you moderate any incoming comments to ensure that abusive responses don't automatically get published.

Tip: if you're going to risk this, it's probably best to keep the tone fairly light (if the subject matter permits). This can help diffuse or at least soften any negative feelings your post may provoke.

Guest editor

Do you feel you need to inject a breath of fresh air into your blog or magazine site? A guest editor could be just the thing you're looking for. The papers do it, and so do the Today Programme on Radio 4 and The Radio 2 Arts Show. So why not let an interesting person from your profession – or your company – take over your blog or social media account for a day? With plenty of prior promotion and social media to create a buzz around it, of course.

As for the format, it's up to you. You could have someone answering questions for a day, writing their own editorial, or selecting what gets published. For some inspiration, here's the news that Snoop Dogg (sorry – Snoop Lion – was to guest edit on the Wall Street Journal's Speakeasy blog…

Tip: create a set of guidelines for guest editors so that they're clear about what boundaries they're confined to.

Adding and maintaining a news section

Along with blogging, a well-run news section is a great way of ensuring that a steady stream of new content is added to your website, bringing additional traffic to your site and giving the search engines plenty to crawl. It also shows you to be a source of relevant knowledge, demonstrating your expertise and interest in the area, making it a great way to enhance your brand. The principle is similar to retailers who produce their own free magazines (such as Sainsbury's, Tesco and Boots) – it's adding value to their customers, while subtly promoting them as a business.

To clarify, what I'm talking about is a section of your site dedicated to reporting on news stories that are relevant to your industry, as distinct from a section for storing your company press releases (though obviously it's still good to have a separate page for these, to give journalists a helping hand).

For example, a travel site could have a "Travel News" section that would keep readers informed of things like forthcoming strike action and other things that might affect their travel plans, recent research on travel topics, changes in travel regulations, and so on. It could also report on things that may help encourage bookings, such as the Northern Lights being particularly strong this December.

Some examples of good news sections

Skyscanner's Travel News and Features section is a great example of an engaging news section, with an entertaining mix of travel advice and topical news stories, with the example below being one of their recent stories.

Looking at other sectors, here are some other good examples of the kind of content I'm talking about:

- Stork Butter: Baking News (see what they did there?)

- Harvey Nichols: HN Edit (fashion, beauty and food news)

- Knowthenet: Internet Safety & Security News

- Ecole Chocolat: Chocolate News

- Gramophone: Classical Music News

Blog, news section or both?

A news section is a bit different from a blog, so if you wanted, you could have both without having any overlap of content. While a blog allows a greater degree of informality and a far wider variety of topics and formats, a news section should be more formal and impartial, with no room for the personal opinion of the writer.

Like a blog, adding a news section to your site provides fresh new content on a regular basis, and can be used to report on recent news for your industry, thereby capitalising on traffic for relevant 'hot topics'. You might even be able to get your news stories featured in Google News, giving you an extra source of traffic.

Sources for news stories

To start with, where are good places to look for breaking news and other hot topics?

Here are some suggestions.

- Watch the news! Or listen to it on the radio. You never know when something relevant to your business will crop up.

- Bookmark news sources and check them regularly for new stories; for instance, if you're a travel site, simply bookmark pages such as the Telegraph, Guardian and Times Travel sections.

- Set up Google Alerts for topics relevant to your industry. Conduct your own survey or research and publish the results.

- Include a form on your news page that allows readers to submit news stories for consideration.

- Monitor press releases of companies and organisations relevant to your industry for any new and interesting stories and research results.

Some new Do's and Don'ts

Here's a summary of what you should and shouldn't do with your news section.

DO

- Cite your sources.

- Only use sources you know you can trust, and ideally have a back-up source as well.

- If you can, include a quotation from someone involved in the story, such as a witness. This could even be just a tweet from someone. This helps bring your news story to life.

- Proofread and, if necessary, sub-edit your news stories to ensure a uniform style across your stories and high standards of English.

- Get your story up on your website as quickly as possible – this will increase your likelihood of being linked to.

- Promote each news story on Facebook and Twitter with a compelling headline and a link to the story on your site.

- Optimise your headlines and title tags using likely search terms.

- Make it easy for people to share by adding social sharing buttons at the top of each article.

- Submit your news section to Google News – more on this below.

DON'T

- Post anything you can't verify as having actually happened.

- Post anything defamatory.

● Use stock photos – these may make readers less trusting of what you say!

● Copy other people's content – make the effort to tell a story in your own words

Submitting your site to Google News

If you do it well, you may be eligible to be featured in Google's News results. It goes without saying that you can't just submit any old site to Google News – Google wouldn't be Google if it didn't make things tricky for us, after all! Google offers some guidelines on the standards it expects from sites, with regard to quality and also the technical aspects that make your news stories easier for Google's algorithm to crawl successfully. These guidelines are summarised below for ease of reference:

General

● You should offer "timely reporting on matters that are important or interesting to our audience". Content such as how-to articles, advice columns or things like weather forecasts and stock market data are generally discounted.

● You should adhere to journalistic values – your content should be original and honest.

● Aggregated content should be separated using robots.txt, as only your own original work can be included.

● You should demonstrate authority and expertise.

● You should include information about yourself, which should be clearly accessible, including things like author bio, email address and phone number.

● You should ensure good user experience with high standards of English and minimal adverts and auto-playing videos.

Technical

● You should use unique, permanent URLs with at least three digits.

● When linking to other pages, you should use "at least a few words" in your anchor text. Note that Google won't be able to see links if they're in JavaScript, graphic or in a frame.

● Your articles should be formatted in HTML, not PDF or any other format.

● Make sure you're not blocking your news section with Robots.txt or metatags.

- Use stock photos – these may make readers less trusting of what you say!

- Copy other people's content – make the effort to tell a story in your own words.

- Google can't index audio files or multimedia content, but they can crawl "supplementary text" and some YouTube videos. That means that if you're going to include an audio clip in your article, you'll need to include a transcript along with it.

- You should ideally submit a Google News sitemap via Webmaster Tools.

Quality

- Your content should comply with Google's usual webmaster quality guidelines – that means not trying to manipulate Google in any way.

- You should only write about actual news, so your content can't be commercial. That also means no paid advertorials. If you do have this sort of content, separate it from your main news section.

- Your site should be user friendly, with rapid page load speed, minimal redirects and so on.

- You should ensure that if you do use Google's own meta tags, such as the news_keywords metatag, you should not abuse them by including irrelevant terms to try and rank for those terms.

As you can see from the guidelines above, the Google News section isn't suitable for all sites. The guidelines are also a reminder to maintain journalistic integrity and not to use your news section as a further promotional opportunity for your own products or services.

This is the link you need when you're ready to submit your site.

What to do when a story evolves

One final tip for your news section: if you're covering a story that's rapidly evolving, keep updating the story on the same URL, rather than creating a new URL/story for each update to the situation. That way, you'll gain SEO benefit from incoming links to a single strong page, rather than spreading links across several stories.

Resources you can add to your site

Adding useful resources to your site is a good way of demonstrating your expertise, as well as increasing the amount of valuable content on your site that keeps visitors and search engines happy and engaged. Useful resources can come in many forms, so here are plenty of ideas to inspire you.

White papers

Just like this guide, these are lengthier articles designed to convey knowledge and expertise, as well as being a useful resource that people can share online. These are generally quite specialist and will have a smaller audience than, say, your average infographic.

They're often presented as downloadable PDFs, designed to make them more attractive to read and to allow people to print them easily.

Tip: when you've written your white paper, don't just assume that people will find it of their own accord. Make it accessible on your site and then actively promote it via social media and your email newsletter if you have one, and contact bloggers and webmasters of industry-relevant websites to offer your white paper as a resource that their readers may find useful. Don't forget to make sure that your white paper links back to your website.

Video

Videos are a great way of adding multimedia content to your site and should ideally include a transcript so that Google can understand the content of the video (this also means that your video content can double up as a blog post or static page).

Airbnb uses video as part of its content strategy, as highlighted by this excellent post on The Bureau, while Moz's Whiteboard Friday is a prominent example from the world of SEO.

Tip: it's worth taking the time to edit your videos so that they look reasonably professional. Invest in a decent camera, or hire a professional who can help you achieve the look you want.

Product comparisons

Comparison sites may be done to death, but the opinions of real people still count for a lot, with an increasing number of web users reading online reviews before purchasing. How about comparing a few different products that are relevant to your industry that do the same thing and deciding on the best? Just like they do on the Gadget Show.

Tip: impartiality is key here. If you appear to be biased towards certain products or brands, readers will be far less likely to trust what you say. Getting independent readers on board to compare products may be a good way of ensuring impartiality, so think about creating a panel of independent consumers who write reviews in return for Amazon vouchers, discounts or similar.

Seasonal advice

As a nation absolutely obsessed by the weather, content based around seasonal advice is sure to go down a storm (forgive the pun) in the UK, while posts themed around major annual events such as Christmas are almost guaranteed an audience of interested readers. The BBC knows this – every year we see news articles every time it snows, because people are interested in things that directly affect them. During the 2013 heatwave, for example, the BBC published advice for coping with the soaring temperatures – Eight low-tech ways to keep cool in a heatwave. MORE TH>N went for the same idea with a Winter Driving Guide.

Tip: generally, things that occur seasonally occur annually, allowing you plenty of time to prepare. But don't release content around things you assume will happen unless they actually do! You see this with magazines and catalogues every summer, with articles talking about fashion for the forthcoming scorching temperatures and headlines like "Here comes the sun" making one wonder, "What sun? There isn't any."

Checklists

The checklist is a piece of content you can create as a useful resource that people can download/print and tick things off.

An example would be a holiday checklist, that a travel site might provide to holidaymakers, such as this one from TheHolidayLet.com:
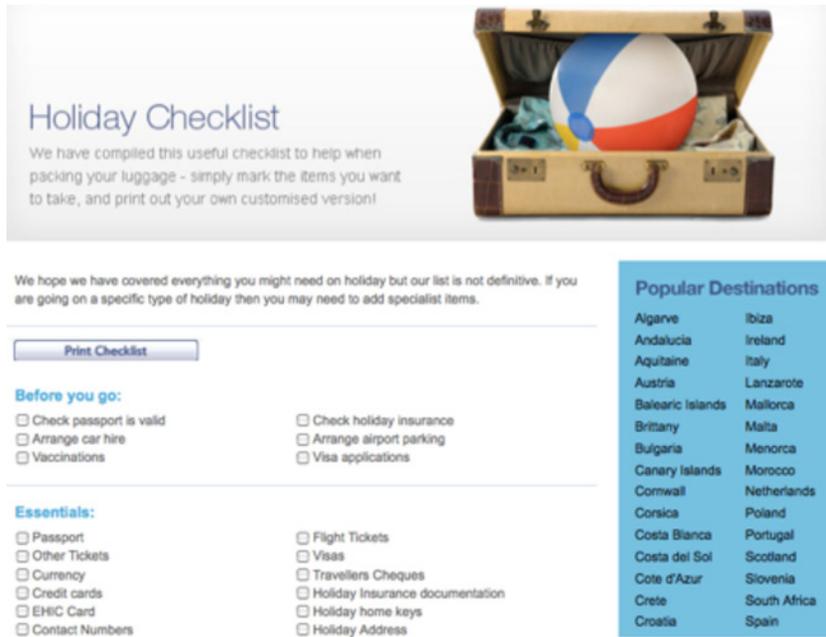
Tip: make it easy for people to download a printer-friendly version of the checklist, and make sure the items and tick boxes are nice and big, so that they're easy to check off and annotate.

Quizzes

As any pub quiz enthusiast or TV quiz show addict will tell you, quizzes are lots of fun. And you can use them to your advantage by creating one that highlights an issue in your area. Knowthenet.org.uk does this to good effect with quizzes designed to educate and raise awareness of internet issues, such as inadvertently breaking the law online.

The best quizzes have a competitive element that makes people want to show off their score (for example, how many countries can you name in 5 minutes), or an amusing result that makes people want to share for a laugh (such as Oatmeal's how many Justin Biebers could you take in a fight).

Perhaps the best ever example of this kind of content, though, is FreeRice.com, a site from the United Nations World Food Programme that allows users to test their general vocabulary while donating grains of rice to the third world (paid for by ads) for every correct answer. It's an ingenious concept that has seen fantastic results, feeding millions of people since its founding in 2007.

Tip: you don't need to come up with a concept as clever as Free Rice to enjoy your own success with the quiz format. Make it interesting, make it competitive, and you're well on the way to creating a successful quiz of your own.

Create an annotated map

They're more relevant to some companies or industries than others, but these can be a really useful resource for users. You could plot global or national trends, highlight areas of interest or present information in an interesting and original way.

For instance, a travel site could have a map showing the best places to see certain kinds of wildlife, rather than presenting this information in long-winded written form, such as this map of Costa Rica showing where you can see whales and dolphins.
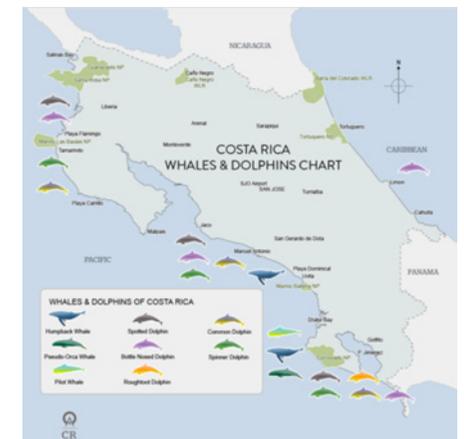
Tip: back up your map with at least a paragraph of text describing its contents or what can be learnt from it.

Though the map will do a good job of conveying a lot of information, it shouldn't be a straightforward replacement for copy; remember that search engines can't see the image, so its context is an important factor for them when deciding what search terms it is relevant to.

Case studies

Case studies are typically used to showcase how a company's product or service has transformed the life or business of someone who has bought them, and as such, they're a great way of convincing others to buy. They're good content to have on your website, and we've found them to be valuable offline as well. Even Microsoft does case studies.

Tip: before publishing a case study, make sure you have the client or customer's permission to do so.

Regular features

Creating a regularly recurring feature on your site, such as a column or weekly video, gives people something to look forward to, and is a great way of ensuring a steady stream of new content. Make sure you stick to it though – if you promise a regular feature, for example on a certain day of each week, you'll look unreliable if you don't keep to your word! Delia's Menu of the Month is a nice example. You could even borrow from the world of newspapers and make your regular feature an 'agony aunt' column, just like TalkTalk – it doesn't have to be about relationships, just any problem a reader might have.

Tip: create an editorial calendar on your computer and map out what you'll cover each week or month, several months in advance. Have your calendar send you a reminder a day or two before publication date so that you have plenty of time to prepare and don't miss a deadline.

Trend analysis

Trends are frequently analysed in our industry – for example this post from Econsultancy on top search trends in 2012.

But trend analysis makes for interesting content in any industry, and it's a great way of showing your expertise in a particular area while providing valuable insights and statistics that journalists love quoting.

You can make use of your own data, looking at things like changes in buying patterns or what products are most popular in different regions, or you could provide your own insight and analysis into data provided by an industry body, such as ABTA, or the Government, such as the data available on data.gov.uk. Here's what TravelSupermarket did – the Travel Trends Tracker.

Write an eBook

More and more people are reading things in digital formats these days, and producing an ebook eliminates a lot of the expense involved in traditional publishing. That doesn't mean you should write an ebook just for the sake of it; you obviously have to have something worth saying, and enough to say that it warrants a whole book rather than a blog post or white paper. There's nothing worse than reading a book on something that could have been said in a page. So think carefully about whether this is the most appropriate format for what you want to say.

Our friend and former colleague Marcus Taylor wrote an ebook called Get Noticed and did a great job of promoting it with its own website, which included loads of related content such as this video and tips on how to start a conversation.

Tip: if you've thought carefully and decided to go for it, plan out the chapters of your ebook and write notes on what you plan to say in each chapter. Commit to writing a certain amount per session, and when you're done, employ the services of a good copy editor.

How To Guide

Type "how to" into the Google AdWords Keyword Tool and the estimated volume (phrase match) is 414,000,000 global monthly searches.

That's pretty revealing about the world's search habits, and also indicates massive potential for tapping into searches beginning with "how to". Here's a recent example from CNET's How To series, How to connect an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch to your TV.

Tip: make your How To guide easy to digest and action by providing it in a step-by-step format. You could even include images or screenshots for each stage, to make it easier to follow and make your content more interesting and varied.

Animation

Got a complex concept that you're struggling to simplify and convey, or just want to explain or sell something in a different way to stand out? How about creating an animation! Here's one about how food is recycled.

Tip: This is obviously quite technically advanced content, so you'll probably want to hire an agency or freelancer to do this if you don't have the expertise in-house.

Podcast

Not many commercial sites offer podcasts as a content type, so this could be a good way for you to stand out from the crowd, demonstrate your expertise and give your readers something interesting to listen to on their morning commute. Here's a nice example from STA Travel.

Tip: getting your podcasts on iTunes widens your reach and allows people to subscribe to them easily.

Anti how to guides

As the wealth of TV programmes along the lines of "Holidays from Hell" and "When Vacations Attack" shows, people love hearing about what happens when things go wrong. The desire not to get things wrong (and thereby avoid embarrassment) is arguably a more powerful motivator than the desire to get things right, so provide your readers with a handy reference guide to things they should avoid, or how not to do something, in your industry. This format, which I'm calling an 'anti how to guide', works across the full spectrum of humour

to seriousness: from the Times Higher Education on how not to write a PhD thesis, to the Huffington Post on things you should never do after a break-up, to the Oatmeal's infographic on how to NOT sell something to my generation.

Tip: try not to 'name and shame' people or websites who've done things badly. It's not nice!
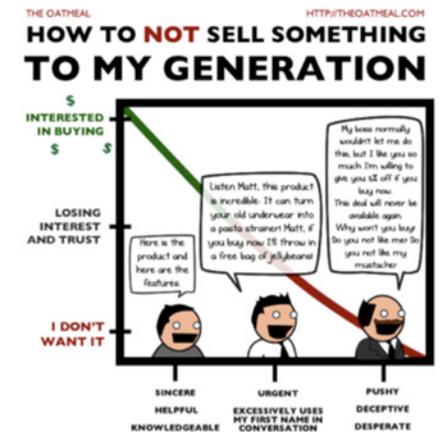
Presentation

As an industry, we're used to seeing conference speakers sharing their slides after an event. But this is a content type that you can also use on your site to showcase your expertise on a particular topic, and to provide advice or resources in a format that's nice and easy for readers to digest – and to use themselves. Here's a nice example from JESS3 – ten things CEOs need to know about design.

Tip: upload your presentation to sites such as Slideshare for extra exposure.

Crowdsourcing/UGC

The great thing about user generated content is that you get your readers to do the work for you; all you need to do is collate and publish it. It's the same principle as the 'letters to the editor' section you find in magazines and newspapers, only the internet makes it even easier to source other people's opinions and make it into content of your own. In fact, it's as easy as finding a Twitter hashtag on something relevant to your industry, picking out a few interesting ones, and cobbling them together under a heading such as 'what Twitter is saying about the royal baby' – just like Fox News did.

Tip: make sure you moderate all UGC content. Don't let users automatically upload their own content – it's a recipe for disaster!

Dummies' guides

The enduring popularity of the 'For Dummies' books surely indicates that there's a big market for content that simplifies – so why not exploit this and produce a 'dummy's guide' to something in your industry? It'll be a useful resource that could serve as a blog post, static content, a downloadable PDF or even an infographic, and if you pick your topic carefully, it could prove very popular. You don't need to use the 'dummy' word if you don't want to – it's the concept, of providing a simple, easy-to-digest introduction to a topic, that matters. For something a bit more sophisticated, for example, you could try something like 'for the uninitiated' or even just 'beginner's guide'. Here's one the NHS did on running tips for beginners.
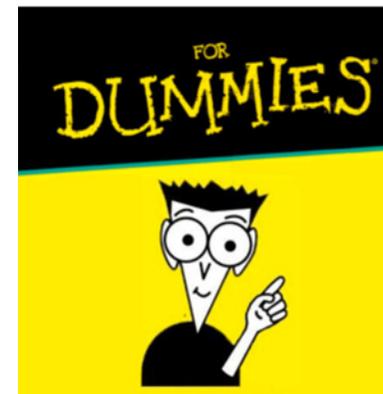
Tip: for content inspiration, find out what people are interested in by searching for "dummy's guide" and looking at the suggested search terms. For instance, typing ""dummy's guide" buy" reveals that people are looking for a dummy's guide to buying a house, shares, a laptop and a car. You can also type in terms that are relevant to your own sector.

Content Marketing

This section gives you some ideas for content that you can actively outreach to other sites. Most of these can be hosted on your own site to attract links naturally, as well as being promoted to bloggers and other websites in the hope that they will link back and drive traffic (not to mention raising brand awareness in the process).

Infographics

Done well, infographics are still a great way of presenting information in an engaging format, and we've found great success with getting them widely published (both online and offline). They're great for building brand awareness, driving traffic and gaining links and social mentions. Here's a snippet from a nice example from EasyJet:

Tip: make sure you use reliable statistics, and mention in a footnote where you got them from.

Timeline

Not quite the Facebook variety. As most of us probably found in history classes at school, timelines are a great way of presenting the progression of something through time. You can use this to create an interesting bit of content on something related to your industry, just like Thomson did with this history of aviation timeline, used to help publicise its addition of the new Boeing 787 Dreamliner to its fleet. Evans Halshaw did this superb history of James Bond cars.

Tip: HTML5 offers a visually striking format for timelines, with many possibilities for presenting information in a highly original way that's sure to impress.

Widget

The word probably conjures up the wrong sort of image in the minds of seasoned SEOs, who'll know about the ways in which black hats have exploited the widget to create thousands of easily manipulated links. But done legitimately, widgets can be a great content idea, raising brand awareness and helping drive specific goals. In no sector is the widget more valuable than for charities, which can use widgets to add 'donate' badges to supporters' sites, allowing readers to make charitable donations directly from external sites. Here's an example from War Child – the actual thing has a series of images, with the final one containing a 'donate now' call to action.

Tip: hire a designer to come up with a widget design for you, and make sure it's in keeping with your brand guidelines. This will help build brand recognition whilst maintaining a uniform brand identity across all channels.

Product reviews

Build up a reputation for providing honest reviews of products or services in your area, and you'll gain repeat visitors as well as long-tail search traffic from people searching for specific products. The best reviews are balanced, and come from experts – so try to stick to what you know.

Your reviews could meet the needs of a particular group of people; Mumsnet, for example, does product reviews that fit with its 'by parents for parents' mission, with reviews written by parents and angled towards others with children. Here's a product review I wrote about BuzzStream.

Tip: if you've been paid to write a review, make sure it's clear in your post that you have been. Otherwise you risk contravening advertising standards and may well destroy your credibility.

Ego-bait

We all love it when people say nice things about us, endorse our work, or present us as expert. And a lot of people will share content in which they're presented in a favourable light. So why not create a bit of content that massages the ego of some prominent people in your industry? They'll probably share it with their own following, meaning you get extra exposure. It's the same principle as the way you see brands retweeting nice things people have said about them online. Here's an example of how it works on Twitter, but a blog post would be even better:

Tip: use a site such as Topsy to find influential Twitter users in your area, and mention them if you say something nice about them or reference their work.

Run a Competition

A great way of gathering user details to aid your marketing campaigns, competitions can also be used to create valuable content and of course to raise brand awareness.

The Guardian's travel photography competition is a good example, giving them some gorgeous (free!) photo galleries of readers' photos that are sure to get links and shares.

Tip: partner with another company and ask them to provide the prize. It'll be good publicity for both of you and you can share the promotion.

Widget

This is a form of ego-bait, involving selecting the websites you want links from and acknowledging them as among the best in their industry. You link out to them, they get a badge recognising their achievement that they can put on their blog; so they get kudos, you get a link, and everybody wins. EasyJet did this with their Ultimate Rome Blogger list, providing those listed with a "Local Expert" badge that endorses the blog with the recognisable EasyJet brand, as well as linking back to EasyJet.

Tip: there does need to be an obvious link between your company and the subject of the blogs you're reaching out to, otherwise it looks contrived and will almost certainly fail. For instance, a firm of solicitors could run a 'best legal blog' badge campaign.

Host a Twitter chat session

Twitter chat sessions work by getting people answering questions and contributing to debates using a Twitter hashtag. As well as being a good way of getting discussion going via social media, you can create on-site content from these discussions by summarising these chats and people's tweets in a blog post afterwards, just like Dan Barker and James Gurd do over on ecomchat.org.

Tip: try to host Twitter chat sessions at the same time each week, so that your followers get used to getting involved regularly at a particular time.

Survey/poll

Conducting a survey or poll into an interesting topic in your area of expertise, and then publishing the results, is a fairly easy way to create original content. Here's a massive one – the Which? Car Survey – and another great example we're probably all familiar with, the BrightonSEO UK SEO salary survey.

Tip: SurveyMonkey is a great resource for low-budget marketing campaigns, providing free online survey software.

Email newsletter

Old-fashioned perhaps, but people do still read email newsletters if they feel they get value from them, and they can be a good way of highlighting and driving traffic to new content as and when it's added to your website. Here's a nice example I received last week from National Geographic, encouraging readers to visit the website to share their travel photos. They've even brought the email newsletter format right up to date by signing off with a hashtag - #LetsExplore.
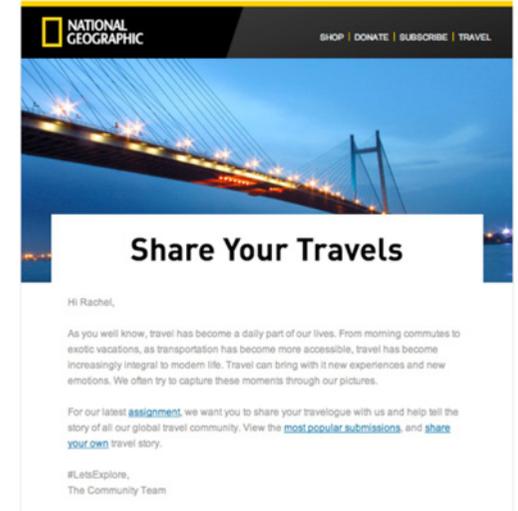
Tip: use tracking software to find out how many people click on the links in your emails, which links are the most popular and which link contexts are most successful at driving traffic. You can even go as far as tracking which clicks link to conversions.

Ask the experts

One form of ego-bait is to ask experts for their opinions, thereby creating useful content as well as widening your reach, as in this Econsultancy post on content marketing in 2013. Other ego-bait methods are discussed below. Here's another example – our very own Matthew Taylor talking about SEO over on the Copify blog.

Tip: the more well-known the expert, the better! There's no harm in asking a popular figure in your industry if they'd mind sparing a bit of time to offer their opinion. After all, it's all publicity for them and it needn't take up too much of their time.

Christmas card

It's the season of giving and sharing, so what better time to put out a great bit of content than the run-up to Christmas? With many companies now more conscious of their impact on the planet's resources, it's becoming increasingly popular to do online versions of Christmas cards rather than wasting trees. I'm not talking about those naff e-cards that there was a craze for about a decade ago. A great example is the Torchbox Christmas Choir, which featured each member of the team singing a different note, and allowed users to make up their own tune by clicking on each person, or to play pre-recorded ones. The Knightrider theme was one, prompting a tweet from none other than Mr. Hasselhoff himself. Also on the festive theme, perhaps you could try an advent calendar, revealing exclusive offers, entertaining images or mind-blowing facts behind each door.
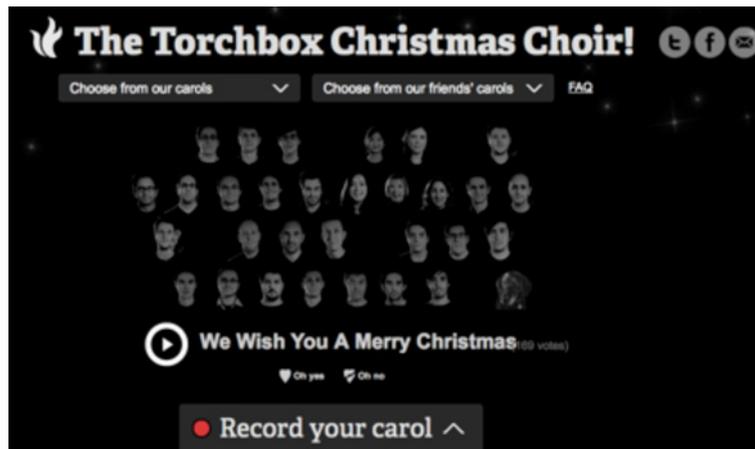
Tip: don't forget to send your Christmas card to all your clients or customers as well as promoting it via your social media!

Experiment/research

Conducting your own experiments into things relevant to your industry, and then publishing and promoting the results, is a great way to get noticed at the same time as pushing the boundaries of research and helping others to learn. This is more applicable to some industries than others, but it's certainly a format that works well in the world of SEO, in which nobody really knows exactly what affects rankings and by how much. Experiments we've conducted and written about on our blog have proved some of our most popular posts, such as this one by Marcus Taylor on what happens when you build 10,000 dodgy links to a new domain in 24 hours.

Tip: if you want your research to be taken seriously, be scientific about it. Apply proper scientific standards and methodology to demonstrate that the findings of your research can be relied upon.

Troubleshooting

Solving common problems is a good way of bringing in long-tail traffic from people who are trying to find out why something isn't working for them. As an example, this advice from Total Jobs is one of the results for a search for 'why can't I find a job'.

Tip: think about common customer queries and problems and address them. Alternatively, you could write about problems that people in your industry often face and might search for.

Hub of top resources/links

No, I don't mean a spammy directory! I mean a useful resource aimed at a particular niche, such as this example from The Next Web - 20 incredibly useful tools and resources for web designers.

Tip: don't just write a list of links and nothing else. Make your content more useful by offering a paragraph or so on each resource you mention, what it does and what makes it worthy of people's attention. Screenshots would make it even better.

And finally…

One final tip to round off this white paper.

Only produce content that you would want to read and share yourself.

If you're enthusiastic about your own content, the chances are far higher that your target audience will be as well!

We hope you've found this paper useful and informative. If you need more help, feel free to drop us a line at white.net

Stuart Tofts

White.net, previously SEOptimise, is a leading digital marketing agency that helps move businesses forward through an innovative approach to marketing businesses online. With an award-winning blog and a team of driven, forward-thinking consultants, White offers a successful combination of agency experience and an in-house level of client business knowledge. The White.net team works on a mix of digital marketing projects including search engine optimisation, pay-per-click, branded content and web analytics.

http://www.white.net/

stuart@white.net

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptereighteen
Melissa Rach

What makes content great?

If you're reading this, I'm going to assume you already know that content is important to your business. I suspect you've also deduced that better content yields better results. So it makes sense that you, like many others, want truly great content for your organization.

But before you spend a dime of your content budget, let's take a few minutes to think about what, exactly, makes great content extraordinary.

It seems like a simple question

At first, identifying exceptional content seems easy and obvious. Discussions around "great content" usually focus on one or more of these three factors:

● Personal opinion

We just know good content when we see it. We share articles that capture our thoughts on global warming or parenthood. We laugh hysterically at the video that dramatizes life with a labradoodle. And, we secretly covet the competitor's innovative new product descriptions. It's great content because we think it is.

● Popularity

Another way to tell content is great when lots of other people like it. We applaud content that goes viral—salivating over the traffic and social buzz it generates. 100 likes is nice but 100,000 is 100 times better. Surely, the 34,000,000 people who like Oreo on Facebook can't be wrong.

● Perfection

Content is great when it follows the rules. We congratulate content that lives up to our favorite best practices and corporate brand standards. We condemn content that doesn't follow the directions.

But, looks can be deceiving

If people say your content is popular, impactful, or perfectly executed, you're probably doing something right. Kudos to you. But, these three factors fall short of being hard-and-fast ways to identify great content 100% of the time.

For example:

● Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

Opinions are important, but there are big flaws in depending solely on the "know-it-when-we-see-it" attitude. First, content that's meaningful or impactful to one person is often irrelevant, hopeless drivel to another person. Second, in a business situation, everyone has their own ideas. Getting consensus can be painful and result in a boring, generic compromise.

● Not all content is meant to take the world by storm

Not every piece of great content is intended to be a worldwide sensation. You can create terrific content for a limited audience—such as nuclear physicists or citizens of a small town. Or, you can design content that's so elegant that readers hardly notice it, like instructions that make a complicated process easy.

● Popularity and greatness are not directly correlated

PSY's Gangnam Style has been viewed nearly 1.8 BILLION times on YouTube—making it the most watched YouTube video of all times. Even if it is amusing, does the number of views make it the greatest piece of content on YouTube? Ever? Before you answer, you should know Justin Bieber comes in second.

● Great content can be pleasantly messy

In the old days (i.e., 1992), it was a sin against the marketing gods to split an infinitive or disregard the Chicago Manual of Style. Today's fast-paced media channels, however, require quick work by authors with varying levels of experience.

Hurried tweets from the scene of an uprising can be riveting. Slightly awkward posts from subject matter experts can sound authentic. And, sometimes, advice on a technical help forum, written by some Ukrainian in broken English, can totally save your butt.

So, what really DOES make content great?

In the bestselling book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says you can turn your business into a great business by focusing on the intersection of the following three things:

- What you can be the best in the world at

- What you are deeply passionate about

- What drives your economic engine (a.k.a. what makes you money)

WHAT YOU ARE DEEPLY
PASSIONATE ABOUT

WHAT YOU CAN
**BE THE BEST IN
THE WORLD AT**

WHAT DRIVES
YOUR
**ECONOMIC
ENGINE**
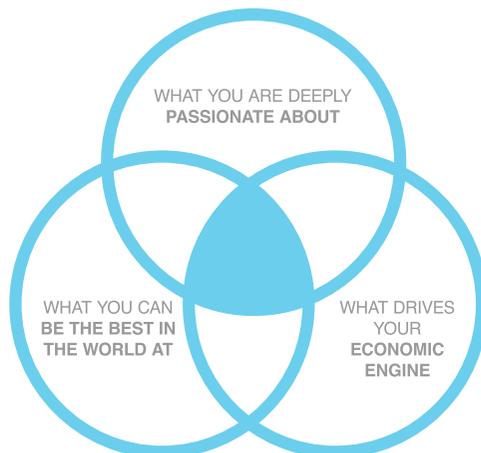
COPYRIGHT   2002 Jim Collins. Originally published from the book Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't

With a few edits and additions, we can make this formula work for content, too. All great content does five things. It:

1   Targets a specific audience

Great content is created with a specific group of people in mind. The group may be defined by demographics, topic proficiency, penchant for puns, or countless other characteristics. The smaller the group is, the easier it is to meet (and exceed) their expectations.

2   Demonstrates audience understanding

Great content forges a connection with the audience it serves. It speaks their language, participates in their culture, responds to their concerns, and anticipates their needs.

3   Shows passion for the topic

You can tell when a piece of content is created by someone who is enthusiastic about the subject matter. The content is more informative, more compelling, and more effective. Sure, it might be convenient to have college-age kids update your Twitter feed, but if they can't provide the same level of engagement as an expert in the field, you've lost an opportunity.

4 Provides a uniquely great service

Whether it informs, instructs, or simply entertains, great content provides a meaningful service for your target group. And it does so in a uniquely valuable way. Maybe you help your users stay up-to-date or maybe you help them stay calm during an emergency. Whatever it is, they turn to you to make their lives easier, better, or more enjoyable.

5 Has planned outcomes for the business

Content created because "the competitors have it" or because "the CEO wants it" is a shot in the dark. Every piece of content should be working toward a clear business goal and have measurement criteria in place before it launches. If you're trying to build awareness, maybe you measure popularity. If it's an annual report, maybe perfection is a consideration. Just remember, there are lots of other measurement options to consider depending on your objectives.

See it in action

There are lots of companies do content well. Here are a few examples of situations where someone made the choices required to make great content.

Amazon.com's customer reviews

In the early days, Amazon anticipated that people who were considering buying a book would like to see reviews from other customers. Book publishers were horrified. Some even threatened to boycott. But, those pieces of user-generated content—each targeted to an audience that was interested in a specific book and written by people who cared enough to comment—were a hit. And, the rest was history.

Annie Murphy Paul's email newsletter

When I get an email from learning consultant Annie Murphy Paul, I'm actually excited to see it in my mailbox. Why? Because she is writing to defined group of people like me (educators and professionals who need to know how people learn). The information she provides is almost always immediately relevant to my job. I'm sure she looks at the popularity of each email, but she also uses her content clout to get consulting projects and writing gigs for *The New Yorker* and *Time Magazine.*

REI.com's Expert Advice Section

To see real passion about a topic, visit REI's expert advice section. They don't just give you a few simple tips for choosing a backpack. They provide detailed expertise on the kind of pack that's right for your body type, hiking plans, and pack capacity needs. Then, they go further, offering information on how to pack your bag, hoist it up safely, adjust it, and clean it. Throughout the entire section you feel like you're an invited member of the outdoorsy club. By the time you leave, you feel confident about your backpack choice and you might even believe that agreeing to go camping was a good idea.

Now you're one step closer to great content

Creating great content takes a lot of hard work, but knowing what you want to create is half the battle.

Your content might not be destined to be shared thousands of times. Your audience might want you to sacrifice perfect form for informality. And, your mom might not like your content as much as your customers do. But as long as you have a solid definition of what great content means for your organization, you're on the right path.

Melissa Rach

Melissa Rach is co-founder of Dialog Studios, a content-focused business consultancy. She is the co-author of Content Strategy for the Web, 2nd edition and a columnist for Contents magazine. A renowned expert on content's impact on business, she speaks and writes regularly about content best practices, methodologies, and measurement.

www.dialogstudios.com

www.twitter.com/MelissaRach

www.linkedin.com/in/melissarach

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chapternineteen
Sonja Jefferson & Sharon Tanton

The year that content grew up

It has generated reams of statistics, acres of comment and the start of a backlash. Serious business budgets are being diverted, new specialist agencies are springing up, and old ones are joining the gold rush by hastily tacking the word 'content' above the door.

Content marketing has truly grown up this year with all the confusion and tantrums that coming of age involves.

Amongst all the noise and clamor, we ask in a quiet clear voice, *why does great content matter anyway?* With millions of new web pages being uploaded every day, do we really need any more content? Enough already!

Love it or meh it, great content is currency. In this digital age, where we all expect and demand answers NOW but refuse to be sold to or pushed into buying, great content is the best way you have of getting your business found and loved.

Of course there are always exceptions – some businesses do just fine without a strong digital presence – but for most of us, our websites and social feeds are our showrooms, help desks, libraries, sales offices and networking spaces. Great content makes our marketing worlds go round.

Your buyers demand nothing less than great

Why does the content have to be great? Because the people who buy our services won't accept anything less.

Today's buyers will just click away from websites that don't give them the answers they're looking for, aren't easy to use, or that just plain don't look or feel good. And don't even think of trying to sell too early. Today's buyers are cynical and savvy and 100% in control.

Kanye West coined it in our favourite tweet of last year:

@kanyewest
Kanye West

Don't ever try to sell me on anything. Give me ALL the information and I'll make my own decisions.

27 Feb via web   ☆ Favorite ↻ Undo Retweet ↩ Reply

Think about what he says for a minute, it's quite profound. No doubted tweeted in frustration, this is how we as buyers think today (as we slam the phone down on yet another cold call or delete another spam email). The web gives us the power and the tools we need to make up our own minds. For those selling products or services the job is to give people all they information they need, when and where they need it so they can come to their own conclusions.

Business development has shifted. Much, much more of the sales process is being conducted remotely, before the potential customers ever contacts your firm. Potential buyers are making decisions about whether you're the right people to do business with on the strength of your digital presence.

So great content is what buyers are searching for. Search engines know this too. Google's job is to deliver the best possible experience for the web visitor. The days when a ton of keyword-stuffed, meaningless delivered results are thankfully over. What Google really loves is content that answers the questions that people are asking.

What makes content great?

There's a world of difference between 'any old content' and content people appreciate, act upon and willingly share. Let's go back to basics for a minute and think about the nature of 'great'.

Great content is valuable

Truly valuable content is:

- Helpful (it answers the right questions)

- Entertaining (it's never dull)

- Authentic (it has genuine personality)

- Relevant (it gives your customer exactly what she's looking for)

- Timely (is there when she needs it)

Think quality over quantity. With more and more businesses cottoning on to the power of great content you need to keep your focus tight.

The temptation is to create more, more, more in the hope of being spotted in the content ocean. Far better to create something that you know your potential clients are really looking for, because that's the content that will resonate. It's also the content that they will find online. Remember Google loves content that answers the questions people are asking. Be specific, not generalist.

So how do you create great content that people really value?

You start by getting to know your customers and clients really well. By talking, listening and really understanding what challenges they are dealing with and how your business helps them. It's difficult to create truly great content in a boardroom. Great content doesn't need the slickness of an advertising campaign, (although we're all for beautiful design). What it needs is a laser sharp focus on the issues and ideas that are uppermost in the minds of the people you want to do business with.

This kind of great content needs great content creators. And yes there's a place for brilliant copywriters who can make the most mundane words sparkle, but there's even more room for your people – the client-facing experts who know their stuff and understand its relevancy – to share their ideas online too.

Simple truths make it work

How do you make great content work for your business? It isn't rocket science but a very human way of doing business. Alongside a focus on great content, there are a few simple truths at the heart of successful content marketing. We witness these elements working together in successful marketing operations we've had contact with around the world. We see them working for our clients, in our business, when collecting case studies for the *Valuable Content Marketing* book and with our Valuable Content Award winners too.

Great content starts with a story. Successful content marketing doesn't start with the content. To differentiate your business craft a meaningful story – a golden thread that that runs through all your content and communications.

Take time to work out what your business stands for. Without a grounding, compelling and authentic story – focusing on the 'why' not the what – your content runs the risk of being the same as everyone else's. (Read the wonderful Hiut Denim story: www.hiutdenim.co.uk - one of the best we have ever found. Their content takes the story further, and their 'Do One Thing Well' mantra has resonance for businesses and content marketers alike.)

Automation helps but isn't the whole answer. To get your marketing working place great content at the heart of your universe – the focus of a joined up marketing ecosystem. Automation can really help but it's not the whole answer. Even the best CRM won't do your thinking for you. Get that content working first and then automation will give you a system to really make it fly (not the other way around).

People make content marketing work. When you read about content marketing you'll hear a lot about automation, big data, SEO. What is sometimes forgotten is the people factor – at the end of the day you need a team to make content marketing work. Wider than the marketing department, success comes when you get all your people – your leadership team, your experts too – onside. Give them the skills, the knowledge, the desire, the organisation to succeed and willingly create and share content that clients love.

Live by the valuable code. Being helpful, generous, collaborative; with a laser-like customer focus – all these values the best content marketers share. The right attitude and behaviours underpin everything – whether you're blogging, tweeting, presenting at a conference or using content as part of the sales process. You will only succeed if your heart is in it: that's the simple truth.

A revolution in business practice

Sharing great content is more than a canny marketing technique. Focusing your marketing around sharing valuable content is the spearhead of a revolution in business practice. It turns marketing around to be of value to your community, whether or not people buy from you.

Marketing success is no longer the domain of those who shout the loudest, have the biggest budgets to play with, the hardest-nosed salespeople to convince and convert. Success comes from being the most helpful, the most collaborative, generous, the most creative, the most human - without expectation.

The number one business challenge today is trust and you cannot fake this desire to give value. Customers can feel the difference between content created and shared with their best interests at heart and content that is cynically produced by those who see this as the latest form of covert persuasion. Those who win the marketing game today are those who care the most about helping the community they are in business to serve.

'Customer-centricity' has of course been talked of for a long time but the rise of content marketing gives businesses the opportunity to practice what they preach – to show the world how customer-focused they are through the experience they create for their customers online.

So marketing is changing and now we're seeing other disciplines follow suit. Sales and service are next in line (look out for David Meerman Scott's new book on this subject – I can't wait for that). Human Resources, Finance, Operations and most of all Leadership – all must evolve in response to a changing world.

Creating and sharing great content is way more than the latest marketing technique. It is about better business; business with humanity. And that for us is why it matters most.

Sonja Jefferson

Sonja Jefferson is founder of UK content marketing consultancy Valuable Content, and a content consultant, writer and speaker. With a background in professional sales Sonja launched Valuable Content 12 years ago to help B2B firms use great content to win more business. Sonja is expert in getting to the heart of the message, showing people how to produce and share the right type of information to help a business grow.

http://www.twitter.com/sonjajefferson

http://www.linkedin.com/in/sonjajefferson

https://plus.google.com/117564561318271230790/about

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Valuable-Content/177261155649532

Sharon Tanton

Sharon Tanton is the creative director of Valuable Content. A copywriter by trade with a background in telling business stories, Sharon worked in radio, television, magazine features, and internal communications. She now helps companies to convey their message in a way that audiences appreciate. Her interest is in making business communication more human – no writing should be dull!

http://www.twitter.com/sjtanton

http://www.linkedin.com/in/sharontanton

https://plus.google.com/117564561318271230790/about

http://instagram.com/sjtanton

Sonja Jefferson and Sharon Tanton are the authors of 'Valuable Content Marketing – how to make quality content the key to your business success.'

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptertwenty

Susan Gunelius

Great content is shareworthy content

Great content creates long-term, organic, and sustainable growth for your brand and business. An effective marketing strategy focuses on creating, publishing, and sharing content (both online and offline) that consistently and persistently accomplishes three core goals:

1 Massages consumers' perceptions of your brand.

2 Sets consumers' expectations for your brand.

3 Creates brand experiences so consumers can self-select how they want to interact with your brand.

Savvy marketers understand why great content matters

Which would you rather do—continually chase Google (SEO-focus) and try to catch lightning in a bottle (viral-focus) or publish content that enables your brand to survive through any micro- or macro-environmental challenge? Savvy marketers understand that SEO, virality, and content should co-exist and complement each other because great content is a catalyst to both SEO and virality.

Now, ask yourself a second question. Would you rather have 10,000 Twitter followers who click the Follow button and never return, or would you prefer to have 1,000 Twitter followers who actively engage with you, share your content, and talk about you and your brand? Again, marketers who understand why great content matters also understand that the power of having 1,000 quality Twitter followers is significantly more effective in building your brand and business than having 10,000 Twitter followers who never engage with you.

What makes content great?

Audiences have more access to information today than ever before, and it takes mere seconds for them to evaluate the value of a piece of content. If they can't decide if a piece of content is worthy of their precious time, they'll click away and find another piece of content that meets their needs. If necessary, they can instantly ask hundreds, thousands, even millions of people their opinions about that piece of content and its source through social media.

Low quality content gets lost in the online clutter very quickly. If you want to stay relevant, you need to create great content that is shareworthy. This is the type of content people want to consume and share with their own audiences.

To create your own great content, make sure it includes one or more shareworthy elements (the more shareworthy elements a piece of content includes, the better):

1 Great content tells a story

The best content is made up of brand stories. Whether you create original characters for your stories or use buyer personas as your characters, you should give the audience characters they can relate to and want to cheer for. Create a story arc that can be resolved in a single piece of content or across multiple pieces of content, and allow the audience to become connected to the characters, to the story, and ultimately, to your brand.

2 Great content evokes emotions

Emotional branding is extremely powerful. Every piece of content you publish should have a real or perceived emotional component. What emotional triggers can you call upon in your content to emotionally connect your target audience to your brand? Do some testing to learn which emotions drive the results you want and need.

3 Great content is useful

Great content is truly useful to the target audience. Keep in mind, usefulness can come in many shapes and sizes. Before you create a piece of content, ask yourself why you're creating it and if the end product will be useful to your target audience. If it isn't useful, you need to retool it or abandon it.

4 Great content is meaningful

Great content matters to your target audience. It holds some type of meaning for them in the utility or entertainment value it provides. Why does your content matter to your consumers? Be careful not to rate your content's meaning based on your wants and needs. Consumers build brands, not companies, and what you think about your brand is irrelevant. All that matters is what your target audience believes is important and meaningful to them.

5 Great content is not self-promotional

If your content is self-promotional, the quality suffers. It becomes less shareworthy (unless it's published for direct promotional purposes such as communicating a special offer), and typically, it loses the majority of its value to your target audience and to your brand. Content marketing isn't about selling and advertising. It's about building relationships and trust with consumers and influencers as well as extending your brand to wider audiences. Follow the 80-20 rule where 80% or more of your content is not self-promotional and 20% or less is self-promotional. This is a safe balance that your audience is likely to accept.

360° content marketing

In simplest terms, content marketing is about organically driving sustainable word-of-mouth marketing and sales that will last for many years to come.

Now, we've come full circle, and you understand why creating great content should be a strategic imperative for any brand, business, or organization. Never underestimate the value of content as a powerful marketing catalyst. Instead, surround consumers with your shareworthy content and let it spread, evolve, and drive results.
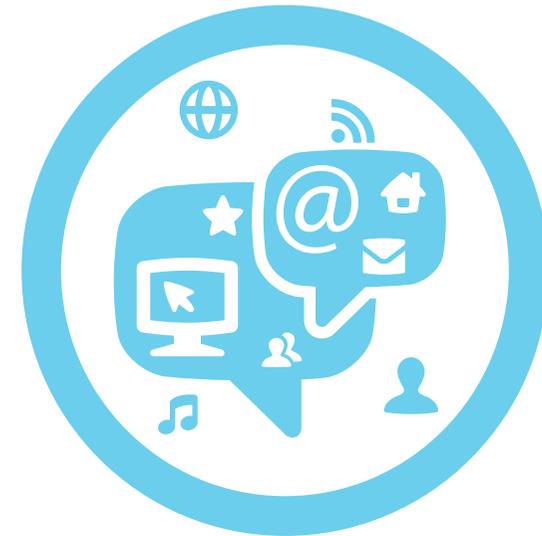
Susan Gunelius

Susan Gunelius is President & CEO of KeySplash Creative, Inc., a marketing communications company, and the author of ten marketing books, including the highly popular "30-Minute Social Media Marketing", Content Marketing for Dummies", "Kick-ass Copywriting in 10 Easy Steps", "The Complete Idiot's Guide to LinkedIn", and "Blogging All-in-One for Dummies".

Susan is a 20-year marketing veteran and has directed marketing programs for some of the largest companies in the world. Her client list includes small and large companies around the world and household brands like AT&T, HSBC, Citibank, Cox Communications, and many more.

Susan frequently speaks about marketing at events around the world, and her marketing articles can be found on leading business sites like Forbes, Entrepreneur, BusinessWeek, and more.

She also owns an award winning blog for business women at *WomenOnBusiness.com*, and was named the #1 women and leadership influencer online by Traackr.com. Susan is a member of the Network Solutions Social Media Advisory Board and the Devry University Industry Advisory Board.

http://www.keysplashcreative.com/

http://www.womenonbusiness.com/

http://www.twitter.com/susangunelius

http://www.twitter.com/womenonbusiness

http://www.linkedin.com/in/susangunelius

http://www.linkedin.com/company/keysplash-creative-inc-

https://plus.google.com/107478593543631183090/

https://plus.google.com/102283014159139547104/

http://www.facebook.com/susangunelius

http://www.facebook.com/keysplashcreative

http://www.facebook.com/womenonbusiness

susan@keysplashcreative.com

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptertwentyone
Suzanne Fanning

Content is no longer king

For years now, we have all heard the saying "Content is king." I am going to start by making the following controversial statement:

Content is no longer king.

A king is a relatively untouchable entity—far removed from the people, interacting little, adored, revered, or sometimes feared. Perhaps content used to sit nicely upon a throne for people to look at. In our shifting marketing landscape, however, content is not merely something we look at from a distance—it is our greatest form of social currency, and if we are smart, we actively deal in it every day. It buys us eyeballs, puts fans to work for us spreading information to generate conversations, and ultimately sells products for us. Incredible, relevant content that feeds the hearts and minds of your consumers will give them the ammo they need to outperform your best sales and marketing people when it comes to influencing purchases.

Why? Because according to the latest research by Nielsen, 92% of consumers believe recommendations from friends and family over all other forms of advertising. You might think that brands don't come up that frequently in "normal conversations," but the average American actually mentions brands 90 times per week according to Keller Fay research. Content gives them a reason to talk about yours!

Just having fans is not enough. It's great, but it's not enough. For the last few years, we've seen brands with one goal—GET MORE LIKES on FACEBOOK. They've been collecting thousands of fans with the promise of free IPads and other contests, but what happens now?

Now you want to find the folks who truly ARE your fans—the ones who are really interested in what you offer and you need to connect with them on a much deeper level. You need to talk to them and listen to them, and you need to constantly feed them from a delicious buffet of content that they'll be inclined to share with their own networks. The ones that come for your content instead of a prize are your true friends. Focus on them.

My friend, Geno Church of Brains on Fire, likes to talk about three triggers because fans talk about content that hits them in one of these ways:

1 Functional—Did it teach me something I need to know? I can share this and help other people do it!

2 Social—Does this elevate my social status? I can share this to define who I am and show others what I stand for!

3 Emotional—Does this either dramatically touch my heart or completely outrage me? I need to share this because of what I am feeling!

Conversations have always been important. This is nothing new, but what's going on in our digital world makes them even more important. Think about how you used to receive your daily dose of news. Years ago, it may have been the newspaper (generic news), or the evening television news (more generic news). You probably also had a small circle of friends that you talked to (actually talked to). We were all pretty much fed the same daily news.

Today, everyone custom designs their personalized newsfeeds. You select your Facebook friends and check not only the news from them several times daily, but also get the added bonus of their take on that news. You choose who to follow on Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., based on whether or not they align with your interests. So more than ever—people are controlling and spreading the conversation. Your only choice is to join that conversation in some way, and your ticket in is content. The goal of your content is to drive conversations—online and offline, but there are two important rules to remember:

Rule #1 Don't try to sell—nobody wants to pass on a sales pitch. Have you ever purposely avoided a sales call from a telemarketer or even a "friend" who was always trying to sell you something? Your fans have, too, and want to avoid you if you do it. They want some genuine, honest helpful info.

Rule #2 Don't just talk about yourself—listen and participate in the conversation your friends are having. Ever had a friend who just wanted to talk about himself and never seemed interested in listening to anything you had to say?

Questions I get:

Any tips to make content go viral?

There is no magic bullet to make this happen, but aside from producing content that is really relevant to your consumers, you can also add visuals. Page views in social are 94% higher when they contain an image or a visual element. They can be pictures or words. I love this example from Hanes. It may seem hopeless or really odd to create a visual about socks or underwear, but they did a great job looking at it from an angle that got people sharing and talking!

Questions I get:

Does it always have to be deep, meaningful content?

That's a lot of pressure, and the answer is no. There is usually room for personality and humor even with the most hi-tech companies. Look at this fun example from Intel. While most of their fans tuned in for technical info, this playful post scored off the charts for engagement.

How do we handle negative conversations online?

Negative conversations are going to happen, but how you deal with them is what sets you apart. If there is a product problem, address it in front of everyone. If there is a customer service issue, make it right publically. If someone throws a silly comment out at your brand, follow what Smart Car did and throw it right back.

This clever response to a negative comment will go down in content history.
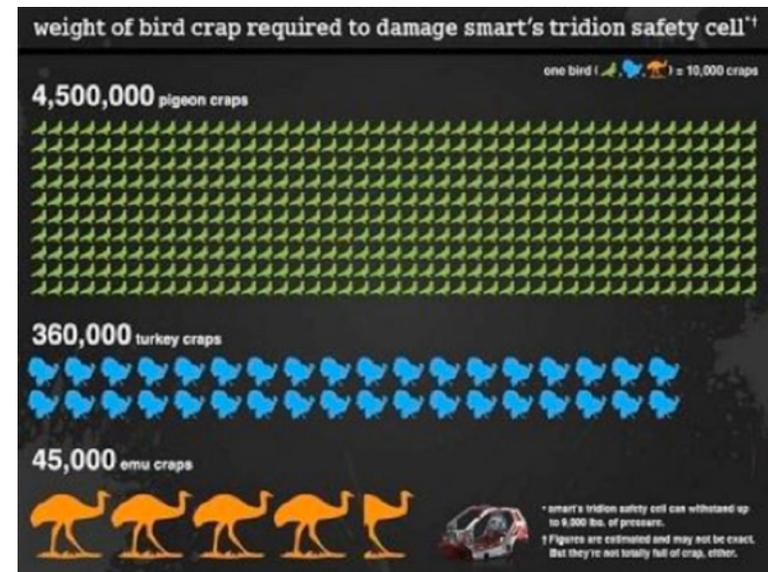
Is it ok to be controversial?

That depends on who you are. At WOMMA, we like to reflect lots of different approaches and opinions from the marketing world, and some of the most controversial are the ones that elicit the most conversation and sharing. Check out our infamous "Help for Homeless Post." People had various opinions about whether branding and fancy signs were really "helping the homeless," and they ALL wanted to share those opinions.

Measuring success. Hopefully by now, people are starting to realize that it's not about the number of fans you have, but about the engagement you can inspire. Here are a few ways you can move from activity metrics to engagement metrics that will really impact your business.

Converting Activity Metrics into Performance Value

© COPYRIGHT 2012, COMBLU, LLC.

COMBLU
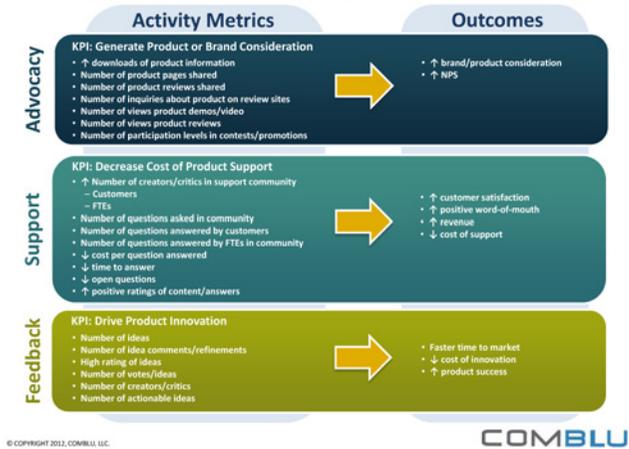
So content is definitely something that must be mastered. When you get it right, magical things happen—you'll develop a layer of Teflon because more people understand you and are equipped to answer questions about you, you'll get invaluable feedback and ideas from consumers in response to what you are doing, and you'll earn recommendations, which will lead to increased sales. We've seen sales triple with a good content plan that drives word of mouth. How does triple the sales sound for your company? It all begins with content.

Suzanne Fanning

Suzanne Fanning was an early believer in the power of WOM. By connecting with and empowering consumers (even before all the cool kids were talking about WOM) she was able to unleash the power of worldwide brand evangelism to drive unprecedented results for several global companies. The short list of all the excellent things that WOM helped her do included quadrupling website traffic, tripling POP and online sales, increasing blogosphere chatter by 600%, and significantly increasing net favorability--all within a one-year period. At that point she realized that consumers could market products and brands far better than the most savvy marketers. Her ultimate hobby became finding new ways to help companies embrace the love of their fans, "likes," ambassadors, evangelists (or whatever you want to call them). She even found ways to involve fans in new product development, customer service, ads, and in-store events.

Fast Company, Ad Age, Forbes, and PR Week have all featured the award-winning programs she helped develop. You may have also read about them in marketing books like How Smart Companies Get People Talking, Brains on Fire, the Secrets of Social Media Marketing , Killing Giants, and Groundswell. She has joined the WOMMA team because she is a believer in the incredible power of the brand/ consumer connection. The vehicles of communication are changing, but one thing remains the same--if you love your fans, they'll love you back. If you want to know more, just call her ...she'd love to connect with you.

http://twitter.com/womma

http://www.linkedin.com/company/word-of-mouth-marketing-association?trk=hb_tab_compy_id_78928

https://plus.google.com/u/0/b/113331385457748971932/

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptertwentytwo

Henneke Duistermaat

How to write great content and become an influential writer

Let's admit it.

Sometimes it feels like everything has been written already. There's too much information on the web.

How can you write original content? How can you craft influential articles? How can you inspire others with your writing?

It may seem difficult (or too late) to imagine how you can become an influential writer online. An authority. A thought leader. Let me tell you, it's not too late, not yet. Hard work is required, but you can write authoritative content — even if you feel like a beginner. But you need to start right now …

To do it, you need to learn these three essential skills:

- How to create original content;
- How to develop your own voice;
- How to become an inspirational writer.

Let's have a look at authority first:

What is authority?

In the offline world how often we talk is less important than what we have to say. Offline authority is based on your ability to influence, to change people's mind-set, to inspire people to take action, and to change the world.
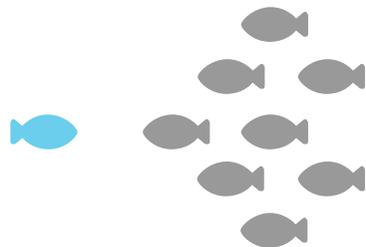
The AuthorRank algorithm will likely help Google to reflect offline authority better in the future because an online article's status will also be influenced by its author's standing.

What can make you influential? A few examples:

- Discovering the God particle or a cure for malaria;
- Sharing details of your dysfunctional life that speak strongly to your audience;
- Being insanely helpful and inspire your audience to change their mind or to take action.

The last example is — of course — a content marketer's territory. An influential content marketer is both incredibly helpful and persuasive. He's passionate about his field and generously shares his knowledge. But he might be divisive, too. He might speak strongly to a certain tribe of people, while others may not like his writing. His writing has personality and a recognizable voice.

How can you become an influential content marketer?

1 Steal ideas from different sources

"All creative work builds on what came before."

Tweet This Quote - Austin Kleon

The web feels like a giant echo chamber. Everything has been said, right?

It may feel impossible to create original content, but you can certainly do it. You can stop regurgitating the same information; and create unique content.
How?

Create your own mix of sources. Don't steal all your ideas from one or two bloggers. Steal from sources inside and outside your niche. Steal from writers, philosophers, scientists, musicians, and everyone else who inspires you.

Smart content marketers have a swipe file with inspirational quotes, fascinating ideas, and other stuff they like. Don't use your swipe file to imitate. Don't outright copy. Give credit to your sources, and let yourself be inspired by a multitude of ideas.

② Develop your own voice

"When I first started out in cartooning, I used to copy Hagar the Horrible. And my work was a replica of Hagar the Horrible. But then I added other cartoons, like Dennis the Menace, Calvin and Hobbes etc. And my work became my own."

- Sean D'Souza

Who are your heroes? Which writers or bloggers speak directly to your soul?

To create your own voice, analyze the writing styles and techniques of your favorite writers:

- Why do their headlines grab your attention?

- How do they draw you into their blog post?

- How do they structure their posts?

- How can you become a better writer?

- How do they use copywriting techniques like analogies, trigger words, and cliffhangers?

- How do stories make their articles memorable?

- How do they bond with their readers?

- Why are they fascinating?

You craft your own voice by studying your heroes and stealing their techniques.

Don't slavishly copy but learn from them. Pick the techniques you like from each of your heroes to create your own personal style; and let your passion shine through.

③ How to become a better writer

The easiest way to create new content is recycling existing information.

Change a how-to article into a how-not-to article. Turn a how-to into a list post. Turn your list post into an infographic. Combine two (or three) posts into a new post.

Recycling provides a quick way to create loads of content, but it won't make you a better writer; and it probably limits your potential to be influential. You need to push yourself to get better each time you write. You need to try new writing techniques, tackle more challenging topics, and link different ideas together.

To become a better writer you need deliberate practice. You need to step up the quality of your content; and fully engage your brain when writing. Introduce new analogies. Tell different stories. Try another angle or structure. Take your time to experiment. Quality content requires time.

You need to get out of your comfort zone to become a better writer.

4 Write crappy first drafts

"Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts."

Tweet This Quote   - Anne Lamott

Combining new ideas and writing original content is hard; it requires writing, rewriting, and rethinking.

Of course, exceptions exist, but for most of us, writing original content is difficult. You might be beating yourself up because you're not writing fast enough; and

because you're not producing enough content. But this idea that you need to speed up your writing could be killing your creativity.

Writing crappy first drafts is normal — especially if you're pushing yourself outside your comfort zone. But how do you deal with crappy first drafts? Look for these issues:

- Your best idea is often buried. Try and find it, and move it to the beginning of your article.

- Your draft is heading in myriad directions. There's too much going on. Go back to your one big idea: How do you want to inspire people? Cut everything that's irrelevant.

- Bad grammar, spelling mistakes, and redundant sentences. Don't worry about this until you've sorted out the flow of your content.

Writing a crappy first draft may feel pointless. Why write something you're going to change or delete? Don't worry. Crappy first drafts can lead to something magical.

5 Create inspirational conclusions

How can you influence people?

Stop thinking you're merely sharing information. You're creating content to inspire people.

Too often online articles fizzle out, because the author gets tired and lacks inspiration. Rather than write your conclusion last, why not write it first?

Writing inspirational paragraphs that teach is one of the most important skills a persuasive content marketer can develop. Study how your heroes inspire you, and steal their techniques.

The truth about great content

Writing great content is tough. It requires hard work, creative thinking, and original writing. And most of all it requires passion for your subject.

Don't just echo what others are saying. Have your own voice. Dare to be different. Research like crazy. Speak up. Share your opinion. Back up your opinion with studies and statistics. Let your personality shine through.

Remember: one epic post can have more impact than one hundred recycled posts. Stop acting like a blogging machine. Quit guest posting like a mediocre maniac. Instead, take your time to rethink and rewrite your posts.

Write less. Read more.

Talk less. Listen more.

Henneke Duistermaat

Henneke Duistermaat is an irreverent marketer and copywriter on a mission to stamp out gobbledygook. She is a regular contributor to popular marketing blogs such as KISSmetrics and Copyblogger. Find out more about Henneke and sign up to her free copywriting and content marketing tips at Enchanting Marketing.

http://www.enchantingmarketing.com/

https://twitter.com/HennekeD

https://plus.google.com/u/0/112999360652932707411/posts

http://www.linkedin.com/in/hennekeduistermaat

Return to contents page

Linkdex

Measure, analyze, forecast and report on your content's visibility and share of search.

www.linkdex.com
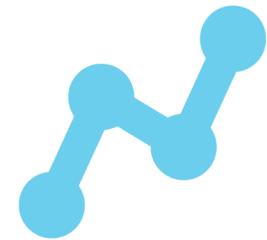
Smarter Content Marketing

chaptertwentythree

Avinash Kaushik

See-Think-Do: A Content, Marketing, Measurement Business Framework

The challenge with most marketing frameworks today is that they are too business centric (selfish, if you will) and they were created in a world where options for customer engagement and marketing were severely limited.

With an eye to solving those two problems, I've developed a framework that covers content, marketing and measurement. It is squarely focused on the customer, and is structured to take advantage of the remarkable possibilities that digital presents. I call it See-Think-Do.
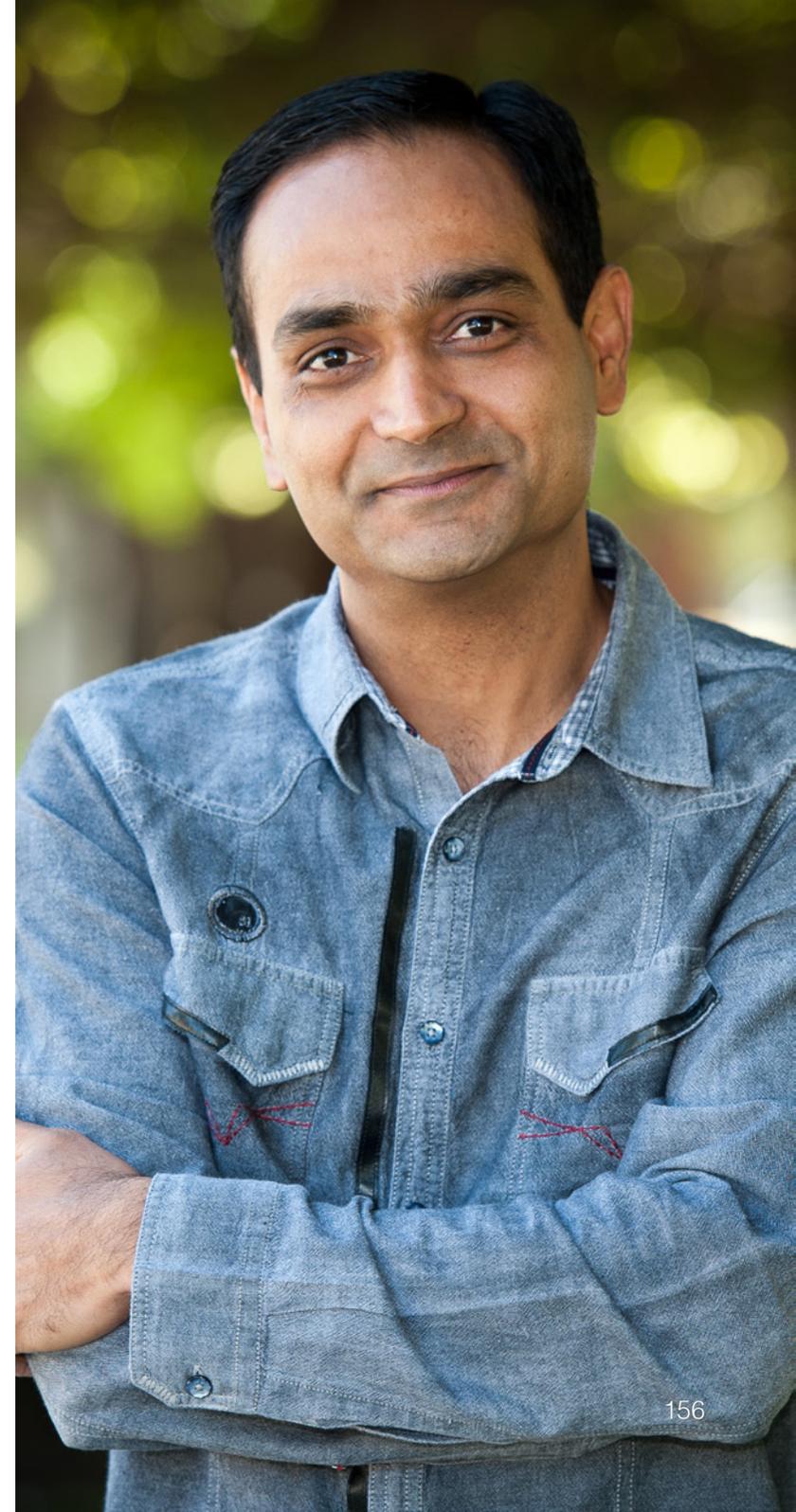
The Framework.

Unlike the traditional let's consider the demographics, or psychographics, of our audience, my framework clusters audiences into three consideration stages. Let's assume we are working for a business that sell's clothing.

My definition of the audience in the See stage are "all people who wear clothes." Essentially, this is the largest possible way in which you can frame your potential audience. Largest.

If you are not a clothing company, your definition of the audience could be "all people who wear shoes," or "all people who are connected with microprocessors inside all IT companies in the world," or "all people who use phones."

The See stage is exclusionary, though. For example, it won't include anyone who does not wear clothes. Or anyone who does not wear shoes. Or anyone who works with microcontrollers.

That's the See stage.

In the Think consideration stage are "all people who wear clothes who think they might need some."

This is essentially a subset of the See audience delineated by even the slightest amount of intent (which we can infer from their behavior, as an example). We don't know when they might need some clothes. But we know that they are thinking they need new clothes.

In the Do consideration stage are "all people who wear clothes who think they might need some, and are currently looking to buy them." It's a subset of the Think audience and perhaps the most desirable audience in the world. Everyone wants a piece of them. Or, all of them!

Three distinct consideration stages. See. Think. Do.

Consideration Stage	Audience
SEE	People who wear clothes [Use: shoes/phones/guns/microprocessors
THINK	People who wear clothes who are thinking they need some
DO	People who wear clothes who are thinking they need some, & are looking to buy right now.

Now that we have a simple framework to look at everything we do, it is time to ask three critical questions.

1 Do we have a See-Think-Do content strategy?

2 Do we have a See-Think-Do marketing strategy?

3 Do we have a See-Think-Do measurement strategy?

The See – Think – Do Framework: Content Strategy

If you want to grow your business, you are going to need content/engagement points for the See stage (the widest possible addressable audience) and for the Think stage (fill up your funnel at the very top, convince people early, build relationships, convert higher at a cheaper acquisition cost).

That way, when an audience chooses to engage with you digitally, you'll have an engagement point perfectly suited for their consideration stage, no matter which stage it is. Even if they are not ready to buy, you get a relationship even if it is tentative initially.

Take ModCloth as an example. It is a great business for many wonderful reasons. One key, absolutely key, reason is that it is not just a Do business. It has a very well crafted See and Think strategy.

This fact is patently clear when you visit any product page on their website.

There is a very crystal clear Do engagement point. ADD TO BAG. All caps. Red. Outstanding. But they don't stop there.
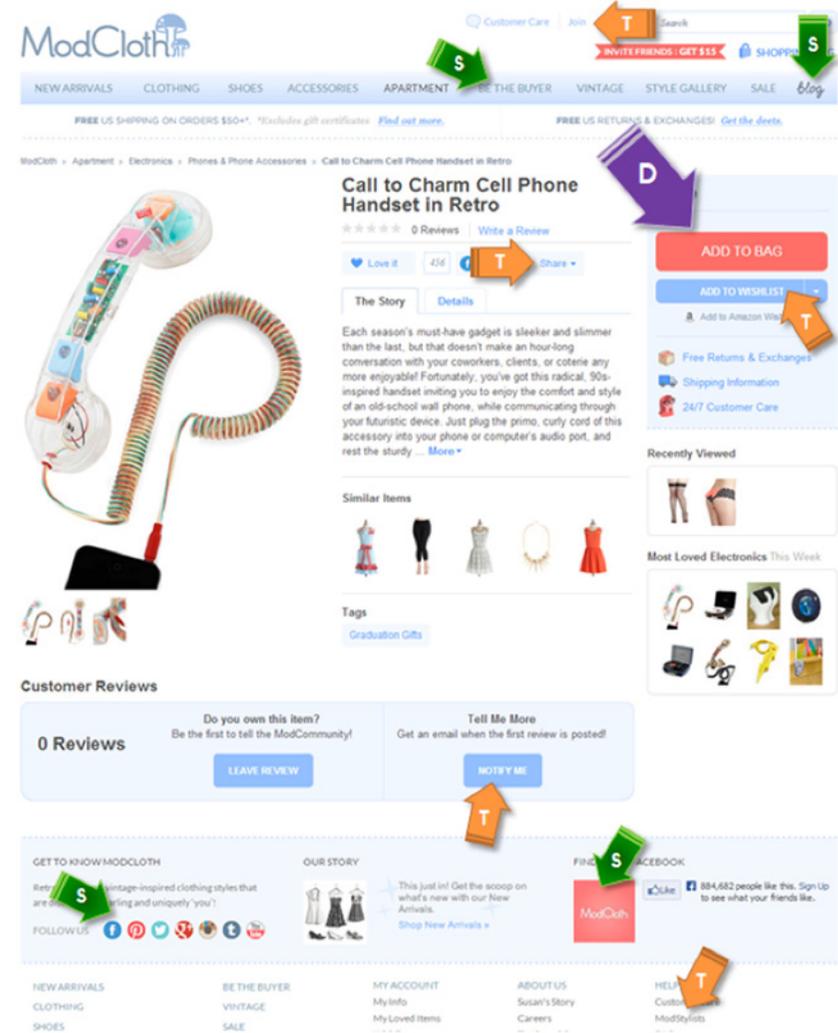
If you are in the See or Think consideration stages, there are plenty of engagement points for you (marked in green and orange respectively).

Perhaps you just love clothes (or shoes or accessories or furniture or ....) and you would like to engage with the brand by being a virtual fashion buyer for a day! Or perhaps you want to sign up for their blog, or follow them on social media or… any of a bunch of other things.

Perhaps you love clothes and you think you might need some at some point. Well, you can sign up to be notified of when reviews of something you are considering are posted (PS: how clever is that, and why does Amazon not do this?). Or perhaps you want connect with one of their ModStylists (you get love and advice, they get a bigger part of your wallet in the future!). Or perhaps you want to create a wishlist (boom! micro-conversion). Or … any of a bunch of other things.

If your business, like ModCloth, has See and Think content strategies, you are ready to have a profit-busting, global-maxima-achieving marketing and measurement strategy.

If you don't, you are going to eat smaller meals, you are going to solve for a smaller (local) maxima, and you are going to take advantage of a tiny part of the opportunity out there.

Another incredible benefit of a See-Think-Do content strategy is that you can now customize the experience of your customers across different digital platforms. As an example, Mobile is a strong See and Think platform, and for now, not a Do platform. You'll well placed to take advantage of this because you can simply customize your mobile home page to serve up Think content and, if you have it, See content. Deliver to customers what they want on platforms they want it. The simplest recipe for success!

The See – Think – Do Framework: Marketing Strategy

Now that we understand that audiences are in three distinct consideration stages, we can torture our marketing strategies with this simple question: Paid Search, what are we solving for?

What stage are our display ads targeted towards? Are our email marketing programs delivering content, offers, calls to action for a See audience, a Think audience or a Do audience? Or are our strategies simply irritating See customers with BUY NOW calls to action and underselling our products to a Do stage audience?

Great questions, right?

The answers to these questions will have an incredible impact on the execution strategy of our marketing programs.

If it is for the audience in the See stage, your ad creative will be broad, your ad targeting strategy will be demographic, psychographic based (that's all you have to go on in See) or maybe just geographic (based on where you do business), and your ad purpose will be primarily branding.

If it is for the audience in the Think stage, your ad creative will be a little narrower (so many ways to detect the initial hints of intent), your ad targeting strategy will be more specific (specific types of sites, content-driven ads, stronger ties to a particular category), and your ad purpose will be to present the value of your brand but also to drive some initial direct engagement with the brand (micro-conversions, for example, such as email address, video views, app downloads), a way into slightly stronger relationship with a possible future online or offline customer.

If your audience is in the Do stage, your ad creative will be much more focused (lots of intent signals possible), your ad targeting strategy will be intent-specific (retargeting, driven by prior history, full of intelligence from other customer like-type behavior, etc.), and your ad purpose will be to drive a $$$ outcome. If they want to spend, you want to show up first, smile, give them what they want, and take their money!

I recommend you go through this exercise for everything you do. Passing them through two filters:

1 Is our ad creative, targeting and purpose properly aligned with the consideration stage of the audience?

2 Is what we are currently doing all we can accomplish from that specific digital marketing channel?

They'll lead you to these discussions….

Why is it that PPC is only targeted to people who are looking to buy right now when there are 14.6 million queries that we can easily identify in the Think and See consideration stages?

Why is it that SEO is only focused on our brand terms and product names, when there are 9 million additional intent-identified queries in the Do stage and 14.6 million queries we can identify in the Think and See stages? Oh, and what is that small SEO effort at the very top? What are we trying to accomplish, and why do we have nothing in the Think stage?

Why is it that your Affiliate program is targeted only to the bottom of the Do stage? Oh, that makes sense. It is the people who Google "Brand Name Coupon Code" after they see the "Enter Coupon Code" in your Shopping Cart. :)

You might also get asked this question: Wait, don't we have Facebook, Twitter and Google+ channels? Don't we already book, tweet, plus a lot? Yes? So what is all that solving for? Why did you buy all those Facebook ads last month? Hmm … "We are not really sure what we are doing, maybe we should ask Jay the intern who's our Social Media Guru-in-Residence?"

In each area for which you ask the questions, optimize what you do currently (question one) and then figure out the best way to expand your efforts to take advantage of the available opportunity (question two).

When you do that last bit, you'll go through the exercise we did above with display when we properly slotted remarketing-driven ads, content-driven ads, product-based ads, social ads, etc. into their optimal consideration stages.

You'll do it with Paid Search, with SEO, with YouTube, with Affiliate and Email marketing and every other thing you have going on inside your company.

You might end up with a picture that looks like this one … an approximate amalgamation of the best practices across the portfolio of companies I work with….
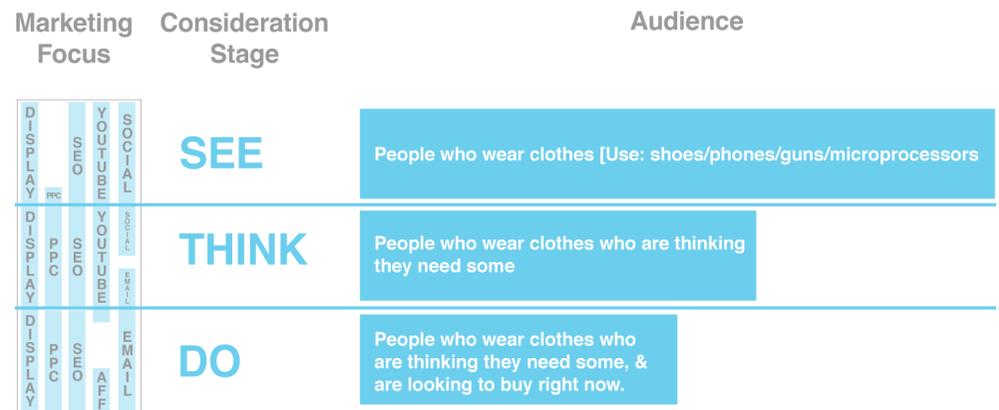
Or it might look a little different. You are B2C or B2Q or Non-profit or an Adult-oriented business. That's fine. Different is fine. It is the exercise that is important.

The See – Think – Do Framework: Measurement Strategy

Why is it that we had a poor, scattered marketing strategy in the first place? Why is it that the company did not have the robust marketing strategy you see above?

Why was it not truly optimized for See – Think – Do?

Yes, you can chalk up part of the blame to the fact that they don't have the right people, the CEO is horrible (not!), the CMO is super old, yada, yada, yada.

I believe the explanation is much, much simpler.

Why did the company have such a poor paid search strategy? Why were they not monetizing the entire opportunity?

Marketing Focus	Consideration Stage	Marketing Focus
	SEE	General interest Broad industry KWs Tech support KWs
	THINK	Category Kws YT Search Mid-funnel KWs Prob / Solution KWs
PPC	**DO**	Brand KWs Product names Lower funnel KWs

BEFORE   **AFTER**
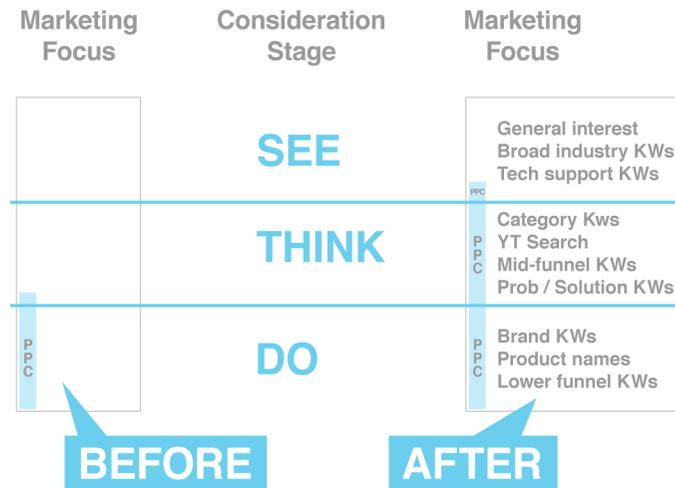
I believe it has to do with choosing the wrong success metrics. Or, if you prefer, picking the wrong key performance indicators.

The company obsesses about conversion rate. And yes, conversion it is important (but you should not obsess about it).

It judges everything by its ability to bring in money. Again, important.

But, depending on which benchmark you want to use, the average ecommerce conversion rate is around 2%.

Only people in the Do consideration stage are ready to buy, or close to ready to buy. If you judge your See and Think marketing campaigns (and content) via the conversion rate filter, you are judging a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

Astoundingly silly, you'll agree?

But we do that every day. Then we go back to our paid search campaigns and kill all the See and Think campaigns that "don't convert!"

We proceed to cut off our legs to run faster.

Data and measurement are important. We have to absolutely positively judge the success of our See and Think campaigns. We just have to be smarter about the metrics we use.

Here are my favorite metrics to measure success of our marketing efforts in each consideration stage…

Marketing Focus	Consideration Stage	Audience	
DISPLAY SEO YOUTUBE SOCIAL PPC	**SEE**	- # or % Interactions (platforms/ads) - Conversation, Amplification, Applause - Indexed Increase in Brand Awareness - % New Visits	C O S T
DISPLAY PPC SEO YOUTUBE SOCIAL EMAIL	**THINK**	- Click-Thru Rate - Page Depth - Per Visit Goal Value - % Assisted	E F F E C T I V E N E S S
DISPLAY PPC SEO YOUTUBE AFF EMAIL	**DO**	- Visitor Loyalty - Checkout Abandonment Rate - Conversion Rate - Profit (=Rev-Ad Cost-COGS)	

In the See stage you are simply trying to get the audience of people who wear clothes (/use phones/are connected to microprocessors/hold jobs at dentists) to be aware of your brand. That's it. This is the broadest possible audience you can find. Rather than gauging success with Do metrics, you should use the amount of interactions they have with your ads. For example, if you take over the YouTube home page Roadblock, judge success by the number of people who interacted with it. Or if you show an interstitial in the Expedia ad, measure interactions there. In both cases you are interrupting people, so just measure the success of that.

If your strategy is primarily Social, measure success using the best social media metrics: conversation, amplification, applause. For Display and PPC and SEO, consider measuring increased brand awareness. Some of these marketing mediums will send traffic to your site, measure their effectiveness at driving a new audience to you from the See stage (if your ads are targeted right), measure New Visits.

In the Think stage, things get a bit more sexy-cool. You know some of the audience is thinking of an outcome, they are just not ready to have a one night stand with you, not ready to buy right away. (Maybe some, though not a majority). Ok, that is fine. We'll optimize our marketing, and our measurement, to take advantage of the Think stage. We want people to engage with our ads (Click-Thru Rates). If they come to the site (mobile/desktop), we want them to not bounce and to engage with the site (Page Depth), and we want at least some of them to complete some micro-conversions that start a relationship with our brand (Per Visit Goal Value). Finally, we want to know if some of these marketing channels (Display, PPC, YT, Email, etc.) are engaging an audience in the Think stage that might convert in the future (% Assists).

In the Do stage, well I don't have to explain that one. You see the metrics above. You already obsess about them too much. :) The only surprise might be Loyalty. I consider it to be a powerful Do stage metric that exposes the customer behavior of multiple visits leading to one conversion.

Boom!

How cool is that?

Now you have a simple framework to direct your content creation efforts, to focus sharply your ad creative, targeting and purpose, and, finally, to help you measure effectiveness to ensure you are driving maximum business profitability.

The reason I'm so excited about this, above and beyond everything else, is that we now have a strategy that is squarely focused on our customers and their consideration stage. We deliver happiness and relevancy, they deliver business value back to us.

Win-Win.

Avinash Kaushik

Avinash is the author of two best selling books: Web Analytics 2.0 and Web Analytics: An Hour A Day (100% of the proceeds from both books are donated to The Smile Train, Doctors Without Borders and Ekal Vidyalaya). He is also a Digital Marketing Evangelist for Google (Data driven decision making uncomplexified) and the Co-Founder and Chief Education Officer for Market Motive (Online marketing education, on demand, high quality, fresh, every day!).

He is on the Board of Advisors for University of California Irvine (Web Intelligence Certificate program, go education!), University of Toronto (Social CRM program, Rotman Center for CRM Excellence) and Mind Your Group (Social Media, Analytics, Privacy, Reputation).

Avinash loves speaking and changing mindsets including presenting at the following conferences; Monaco Media Forum, JMP Innovators' Summit, Search Engine Strategies, Web 2.0, eMetrics, Ad-Tech, DMA events, BlogWorld, iCitizen. Working with the following Universitites; Stanford University, University of Utah, University of Virginia, Santa Clara University, VCU Brandcenter and as an Associate Instructor at the University of British Columbia. Avinash has also helped the following companies; IBM, Unilever, AOL, L'Oréal, Time Warner, AutoDesk, Vanguard, Toyota and Google.

You can connect with Avinash by visiting his blog: http://www.kaushik.net/ avinash/about/. This article originally appeared as a blog post on www.kaushik. net and has been republished with permission.

g+   https://plus.google.com/u/0/+avinash

🐦   http://twitter.com/avinash

f   http://www.facebook.com/avinash.kaushik?sk=wall

in   http://www.linkedin.com/in/akaushik

🔺   Return to contents page

chaptertwentyfour

Simon Penson

Content strategy - make your ideas your friends

The ability to create great content consistently is now the basis of any good digital marketing strategy. The growth of social and the improvement of search algorithms to prevent the gaming of SERPs have pushed companies to reevaluate their strategies and invest in content.

Such an approach, however, is not easy, and it requires an entirely new set of skills to execute well. Top of that list is the ability to create amazing ideas and then arrange them in a way that engages and retains your audience, while winning new eyeballs for your brand.

Ideas are the lifeblood of any strategy

It all starts and finishes with ideas. That is a lesson I learned very early in my career as a journalist and carried through with me as an editor. Without lots of great ones you have nothing.

Content flow

Great ideas should not be misconstrued as 'big ideas' however. Many, many people make that mistake and come unstuck in the long run, unable to find the resource to produce major content pieces consistently while other think that a single piece will change the world for their brand. Neither could be further from the truth.

You see, any great content strategy requires both big and small ideas to work. Like a great piece of music your strategy should 'ebb' and 'flow' in order for it to attract engagement and retain those reading it. The right combination of big and small ensures that the 'reader' is kept on their toes and that it is impossible to guess what may be next. Variety, after all, is the 'spice of life' and that saying is very true in this context.

The big ideas are very important of course, as it is those that will give your brand reach. Major content campaigns allow you to reach new audiences and will often be backed up by a promotions strategy that may cover influencer marketing, paid search and social and perhaps even above-the-line initiatives.

But by delivering that level of content all the time you simply SHOUT at your audience and they soon switch off. Smaller, 'regulars' help break these up, so magnifying the impact those campaigns have.

Brainstorming

The challenge with any ideation process is to make sure you don't leave any stone unturned in order to maximize your ability to deliver those big and small content pieces.

During the brainstorming process you have to combine the left brain's thinking with the right brain's creativity.

The team I work with at Zazzle Media has spent the last couple of years defining the pillars of the creation process to maximize our ability to output ideas.

Below you can see that general structure and we will walk through each one quickly now.

Before we do, however, we must ensure that the environment is conducive to creativity.

For instance, research tells us that the release of endorphin is proven to help trigger creativity. This could be as simple as brainstorming outside the office, getting a bit of fresh air can already make a big difference.

Once happy with the environment the next stage is the brainstorm session itself. But far from being a simple free-for-all real structure is necessary to ensure that no stone is left unturned in the hunt for consistently good ideas.

To do that, weirdly, requires a left-brained approach to a right-brained process and it's the structuring of that creative time that we've spent a lot of time on Zazzle in recent months.

That investment in iterating the process has left us with this; an eight 'pillared' approach and we run through each one below in turn:

Zazzle defined 8 pillars for their content strategy and they have separated brainstorming sessions based on these pillars.

1 Objectives

Ensure you understand what you actually want to achieve with your content, therefore you need to set realistic, achievable and measurable objectives.

2 Personas

Use existing personas and/or create new ones – define the different types of people you want to market too. Different personas need different types of content. You have to make sure that during the brainstorming sessions you find specific content ideas for these personas.

3 Data – search data, social data & surveys

Data should play a pivotal role in all decision making in marketing and content strategy is no different.

By informing a process with hard facts about your audience you are much better placed to create something they will like to consume and share.

We take data mining very seriously and will ensure that we have as much information as possible before walking into any brainstorm. As part of that process we will often leverage audience understanding from Facebook's Power Editor, which allows you to drill down into brand page audiences and understand their interests and what 'other' pages they 'Like'.
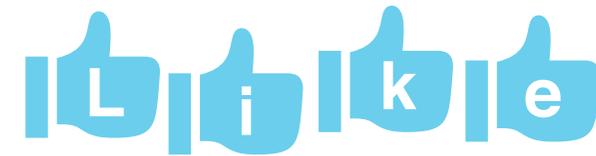
To give you an idea of what that looks like I have run an example report on a random brand page for you to see. Here we can take a view on the Phones 4 U audience from our own social data tool.

The tool allows the agency to prioritize the specific interest types. For example, when looking at TV show preferences, brands can create a pretty good picture of the person they are creating content for. This technique makes the brainstorming session easier because you're not guessing, you are looking at real data.

In the example the Phones4u's audience is much younger than the average Facebook audience. Where it gets really interesting though is to start looking into what else they are interested in.

We can see clearly here by doing this that TV shows, movies, celebrities and RnB are very important topics for this audience and by drilling down further into one of those categories we start to paint an extremely vivid picture of who these people are.

Knowing that they like programs such as *Jersey Shore, I'm a Celebrity and X Factor* helps us refine content strategy and the ideas we know they will share.

4 Content types

First of all, define relevant content types such as blog posts, videos, opinions, infographics and interviews followed by a specific brainstorming session around each type. After that, align those content types to the content ideas you've created beforehand. Examples would be a blog post on 'The 10 Best Apps', a video 'How To Make A...' or an interview '5 Minutes With...' etc.

5 Learning styles

This is quite a new addition to this process but it works very well, especially if you're brainstorming for an industry or a brand that relies on informational and educational content as part of their strategy. Individuals learn in very different ways and when you create 'how to' content you have to ensure that content is presented in the best possible way for the different types of learners. For instance the 3 main types of learners can be divided into:

- Logical: this type aims to understand through reason. These individuals are able to use the brain to perform complex calculations and create patterns to organize new information.

- Aural: aural learners use a combination of rhythm, sound and rhyme to focus and understand. Individuals may tend to use mnemonics and acrostic poems as learning tools.

- Verbal: this learning type is drawn to language and words to express themselves. Writing notes and talking out loud tends to be the most effective technique to help aid learning.

Understanding the different learning styles will help you to think more laterally on how to present that content.

6 Long tail

From a search perspective long tail is increasingly becoming more important. One very useful tool is Ubersuggest – an engine that works on Google's suggestion engine based on terms that people already searched for. It's especially useful when you try to think of regular ad content flow terms. If you are writing about things people are already searching for then you have a great opportunity, especially if you are writing on a good domain.

7 Semantic association

Google is very much looking into changing the way it works, the idea is to move from the document retrieval system to a semantic web that understands users' intents behind their queries. In other words, the association between and the reasons behind what we might be searching for. For example, if you are searching for president Barack Obama, the 'White House' or the 'Oval Office' are terms that would be semantically related phrases. Being able to understand that really helps you to think more laterally around your content creation ideas.

G
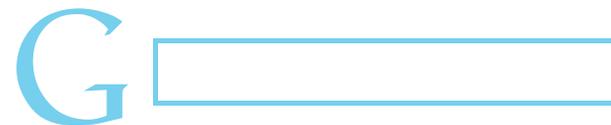
8 Platform

Your content will be very different across the different social platforms, especially in terms of outreach. Understanding what platform is most relevant for that particular brainstorming session is very important. You have to think about how you might present that content across the different platforms. If you've got a really big campaign idea it could be useful to use this specific element to then think about how you can repurpose that for the various, different platforms.

Tools that can help you with ideas for the creation process

Google trends

A useful tool when you are working on an editorial calendar. You can use Google trends to identify where spikes occurred or to understand what the right and best timing might be to publish future content.

Storyboard

A great tool when you and your team work on bigger content ideas. It leverages the power of storytelling at the workplace imposing a powerful way to communicate ideas, explain processes and document business requirements (agile user stories). It enables you to sit with your designer and your developer and 'storyboard' the specifics behind the campaigns and to ensure it's doable.

Bottlenose

This tool focuses on social trends, if you are looking for semantic associated topics it helps you to think more laterally. If you want to jump on things that people are already talking about or throw an idea into an already real and active conversation this is the right tool to figure out what that topic might be.

Quora

The question and answer website that is created, edited and organised by its community of users. It aggregates questions and answers to topics. Users can collaborate by editing questions and suggesting edits to other users' answers. Some of the best story ideas come from problems - therefore it's a great source of inspiration allowing you to create content that solves these problems.

Think with Google

This Google initiative offers users insights into consumer trends, marketing insights and industry trends as well as planning tools. It features plenty of interactive content and statistics, which alone can be a great source of inspiration.

Google public data

It provides public data and forecasts from a range of international and academic institutions including the World Bank and the University of Denver. The data is visualized nicely in the form of line graphs, bar graphs, cross sectional plots or maps.

Zanran

This tool is somehow similar to Google Public Data since it's a search engine for data and statistics. Its sole focus is to find graphs, charts and tables online - which can be previewed by hovering over the thumbnails. Similar to Google public data – a search engine for statistics.

Organizing and collecting data can be challenging, it's easy to drown in it. But once you have your data in place and interpreted it accurately you need to start thinking of integrating this data into your editorial calendar. This should then be the central document for your whole marketing strategy – that should really be the heartbeat of everything you do. And ideas are at the centre of that process.

Great content strategy gives you the assets you need to create long-term audiences of value around your brand.

Simon Penson

Simon is the founder and MD of Zazzle Media and is responsible for the day to day running and strategic direction for the business.

With a background in journalism as editor of two national consumer magazines and their websites Simon is well placed to understand the needs of a business and, most importantly, the content needed to create audiences of value around them. Apart from that he is one of the most influential digital marketing bloggers in the UK, publishing on the likes of Moz, Econsultancy and Search Engine Watch as well as being a well regarded industry speaker.

http://www.zazzlemedia.co.uk/

http://www.twitter.com/simonpenson

http://www.linkedin.com/in/simonpenson

http://pinterest.com/simonpenson/

Return to contents page

chaptertwentyfive

Andreas Ramos

The hub-and-spoke model of content

What's in this Chapter

Now that you saw the elements of content marketing in the last chapter, let's step back and look at the Big Picture. How do these pieces fit together? What is the relation between your website, the content, the distribution sites, and your audience?

Hub-and-Spoke as a model for your website and content

A widely-used idea in content marketing is the hub-and-spoke concept. Like a bicycle wheel with a hub in the center and spokes which radiate outwards, the website is the hub in the center, where the content originates. The content is then pushed out to the spokes, which are the distribution sites (such as YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and so on). People discover the content at those sites which leads them back to the website at the hub. The company's website is the center of their strategy.
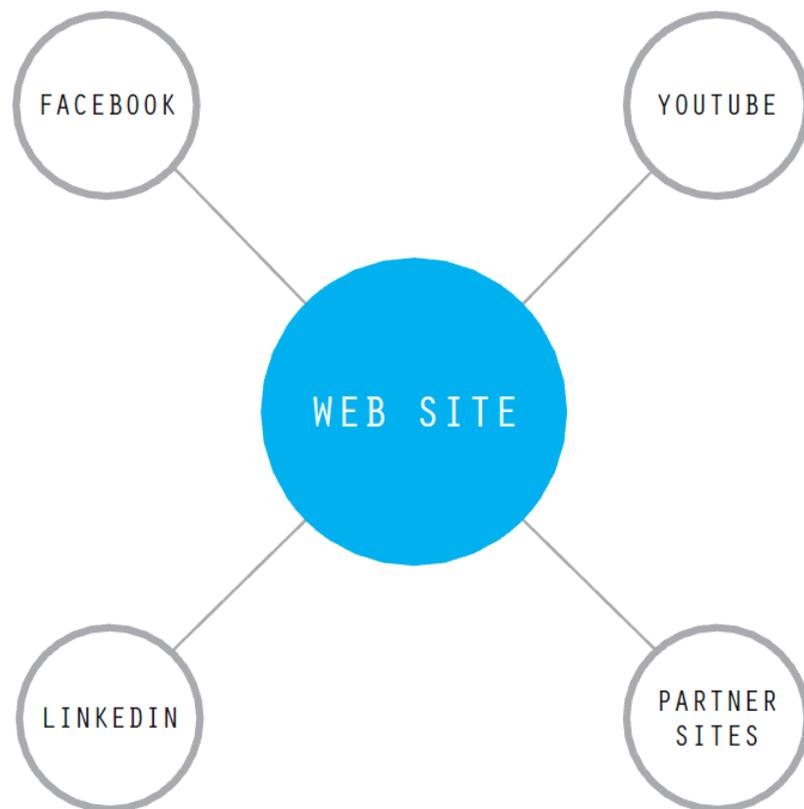
Figure 8: In the hub-and-spoke model for content marketing, the website is at the center. The spokes point out to the distribution sites where the content is placed.
The hub-and-spoke model comes from the transportation and distribution industry. Delta Airlines started using a hub-and-spoke model in 1955. They chose Atlanta as the center (the hub) and all flights radi-ated as spokes to and from the hub. It's also used by Wal-Mart, which has a hub in Arkansas. The FedEx hub is in Memphis, Tennessee and UPS has a hub in Louisville, Kentucky. (Why these cities? They're in the center of the population of North America.)

The idea of a website or blog as the hub and distribution of content to the spokes is a key concept in books such as Content Rules, by Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman (p. 143), Inbound Marketing, by Brian Halli-gan and Dharmesh Shah (p. 12-13), Valuable Content Marketing, by Sonja Jefferson and Sharon Tanton (p. 52-53), Content Strategy, by Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach (p. 77), and Optimize, by Lee Odden (p. 109-112). Many more blogs and articles use the hub-and-spoke model for content marketing.

This idea has been widely adopted by websites. I've built hundreds of websites since 1995 and I also used this idea.

After much discussion with the book's advisory team and delivering many presentations on content marketing, I began to realize something was wrong.

Twenty years ago, websites started as brochureware, which means they presented the organization from the organization's point of view. "We have a big office building; we have a CEO; we have a dog." Remember those?

The problem with those sites was that visitors didn't really care about the building, the CEO, or the dog. Visitors wanted to solve their problems. If the website didn't offer the solution, visitors just pressed backspace, returned to the search engine, and looked for another site.

Not much has changed. Today, most websites are basically interactive brochureware, which means they added features such as comments, downloads, registration forms, shopping carts, and so on, but the organization is still at the center. Marketers, web designers, and SEO focus on the organization's website as if the rest of the web doesn't exist. Amazon, for example, is all about Amazon. Facebook would be happy if the rest of the web got deleted.

Now, why is that wrong?

The model is wrong because it doesn't match what's really going on.

You've heard the story of the hardware store and the hammer, right? Nobody goes to a hardware store just to walk around in a hardware store. Nobody really wants a hammer either. Michelle buys a hammer because she wants to put in a nail to hang up a photo of her family. Her desire is to see the photo on the wall; the hammer is just part of the solution. She doesn't care about the hardware store, its CEO, or the dog.

Some of you may wonder what this has to do with a website. Ronda has a website, so she puts her content on her website. So isn't her website at the center? That's where Ronda is making a mistake. If she thinks of her website as the central point of her marketing, then she'll pay attention to her site and she won't think much about other sites. She may add some content to YouTube, Facebook, and a few more, but not much more.

And that's what's going on at nearly every website. Ask Ronda how many items of content she created. Many sites consider themselves to be big if they have 100-200 items on their site.

Next, ask her how many sites she uses for distribution. Probably not more than six. How should this be different? Ronghua, who has a tea export company in Sichuan, wants to reach as many customers as possible, so she sees her website as just another distribution site. Ronghua will also create as much content as possible. Her 500 articles and videos may end up on 2,000 sites, because she wants to get the maximum distribution for her content. That gives her more exposure to her audience.

See? You need to think of distributing your content, not controlling it.

So what should be at the center of your strategy?

Your customers should be in the center. The content should be written for them.

● The central issue is your customers' concerns and their problems, not your organization.

● Content is information that you create for your audience and customers.

● Distribution is how you distribute that content to your audience. You place your customer-centric content on many websites, including YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and, along with all of these websites, your content is also on your website. Your website or blog is just another distribution point. When you're successful at content distribution, your 5,000 items may appear on 50,000 pages, and most of those sites aren't yours.

Figure 9: An improved hub-and-spoke model for content marketing. The audience is in the center. The spokes point to distribution sites where content is placed. Your website is just another distribution site for your content.

It's actually against your interests to keep your content only on your site. It reduces your exposure to your audience. You want your content to be distributed as widely as possible. You want your ebook not just on your one web page. You want your ebook on 20,000 web pages. Are people copying it and making it available on their websites? Great! The more they share, the greater your presence, which also means greater share of presence over your competitors.

I'm not being flippant. A number of people downloaded my KPI ebook and hand it out to their visitors. Some people uploaded it to various ebook distribution sites. People had uploaded it to six different accounts at one book distribution site. Over 25,000 people had read it. I didn't get a penny in royalties. Was it piracy? Yes. Did I mind? Yes, of course. But the point of my ebook was to show people how to calculate KPIs, so that worked. I wrote the ebook several years ago, when I didn't know about content marketing, so the ebook wasn't trackable. I've fixed that now. If people want to distribute it, that's good.

Widespread distribution isn't just an idea for websites. In Silicon Valley, there's the Red Rock Café. It's a great local coffee house where musicians play music, they show movies, groups meet there, and artists display their work on the walls. But Red Rock is just one café. And then there's Starbucks. Their coffee is available in tens of thousands of supermarkets, millions of hotel rooms, on thousands of passenger air-planes, and many more locations. What's the difference between Red Rock Café and Starbucks? Most web-sites are like the Red Rock Café: they offer lots of things and interaction… at their website. They haven't moved to the Starbucks model where the customer's desire is the center. Starbucks solves this by ubiquitous distribution. Starbucks' goal is to be wherever people want to drink coffee.

This isn't a new idea. Companies have known for decades that a key factor of success in sales is a large number of distribution points. The more distribution, the greater the sales. Build as much distribution as possible so your content shows up wherever people have the needs that your products and services can solve.

Put the audience at the center of the hub and spoke

The audience at the center is a major shift in how to understand web distribution. Just as Copernicus changed the world from a geocentric to a heliocentric model of the universe, we move from a focus on the website as the center to a view where the customer is the center and our website is just another page.

This breaks the search engine model of the web. When Megan uses a search engine, she gets a search results page. The search engine shows only ten websites. She won't see all of the other websites for that search.

If your organization has several pages with the same content, the search engine won't show those pages. Megan won't be able to see your additional pages. This is good for people who are searching in a search engine.

But this hurts your content distribution. Search engines aren't good for your organization's outreach. The search engines have become, for better or worse, the gate to the web. As we all know, the lucky two or three at the top of page one in a search engine get 90% of all the traffic to that topic. Everyone else gets nothing. You want your content to be available on as many sites and pages as possible. People will discover you on those sites; they will pass your links and content to each other; they will talk about your content among themselves. Search engines don't matter to any of this.

As you'll see in the chapter on SEO, Google isn't the main resource for people to research your topics. You need an SEO strategy that gets around search engines, which we'll cover in that chapter.
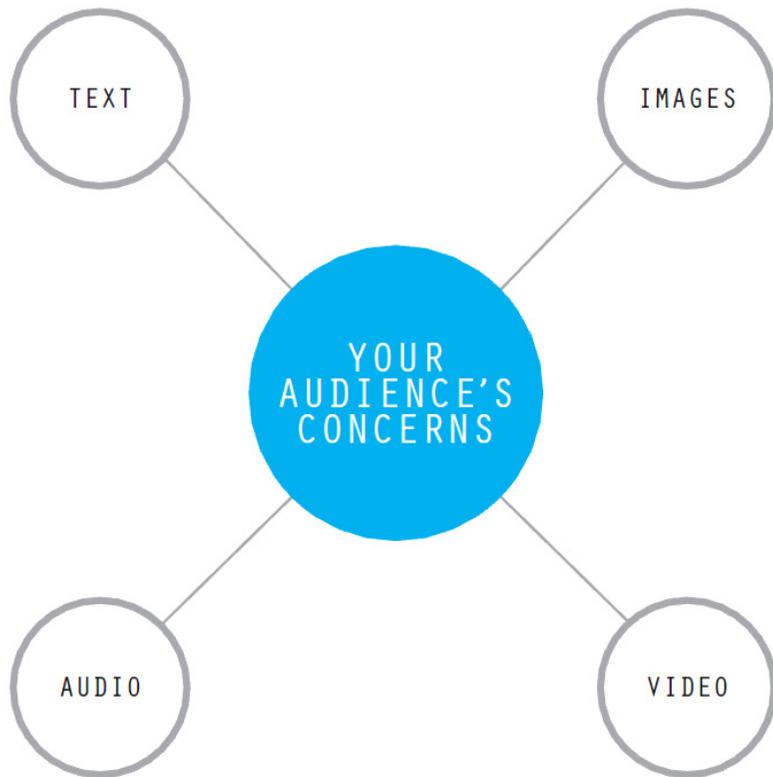
Figure 10: With the audience is at the center, content is pushed out to the distribution sites. Those content items can be in four different categories: text, images, video, and audio.

For example, you find that your audience wants to know how tea should be brewed (it's not as easy as you think). You reply by writing an article about brewing tea; you make a video; you take a series of photos and so on.

Next, you push the content items to the various distribution sites. For example, the photo essays are placed on Flickr, Picasa, and Pinterest. The videos go to YouTube, Vimeo, and so on. And yes, the articles, videos, and photos also go on your website. Your website is just another distribution point (okay, okay, you can call it your favorite distribution point).
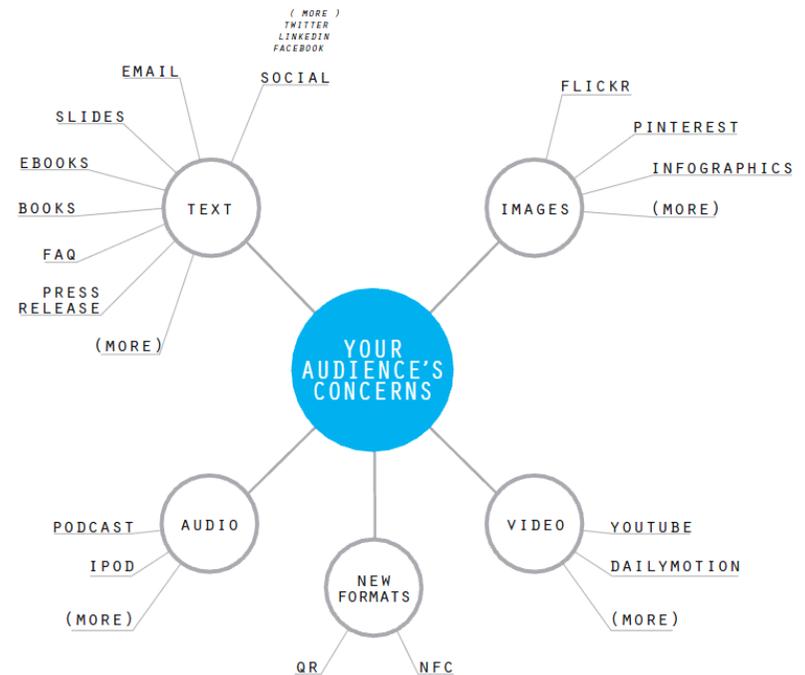
Figure 11: Each of the four categories (text, images, video, and audio) has formats. Images for example can be infographics, photographs, drawings, and cartoons. Each of these is placed on their appropriate distribution platform.

This doesn't mean you must use every format and distribution point. Some formats may not be relevant to you, so you can ignore those. Many distribution sites won't be relevant either, so don't bother with those.

Some of the spokes are sub-spokes. For example, text is the category which leads to the formats of social posting, such as tweets, Facebook, and so on.
Some spokes are longer than others. The ones that are important to you should be closer to your hub. Blogs and Twitter should be close to the center. If you're not doing much video, put it further away.

There are also new formats. QR codes (those funny little dotted squares) and NFC tags may become big. Or not. For some of you, these could be very useful. For others, not at all. (See this book's Resources page to learn more about NFC).

As I've said before, don't ignore a format or distribution site just because you don't like it. Test it and use data to make a decision. If the data shows it doesn't work, you'll be happy because you were right. If it works, you'll be happy too, because you're getting good results.

The content engine as a flow diagram

While making more than three dozen presentations on content marketing, I realized the hub-and-spoke metaphor wasn't the best way to explain content marketing. In fact, it just raised questions and created more confusion.

It made more sense to explain content production as a linear process that develops ideas into content. The process moves from left to right. The starting point is your audience. The end point is also your audience.

This is really important, so I'll repeat it: you start with your audience and you end with your audience.

Here is the editorial calendar as an illustration:

YOUR TARGET / THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR / CREATORS / QUALITY EDITOR / CONTENT WRANGLERS / THE TARGET AUDIENCE

EXPRESSES / SELECTS / MAKE / REVIEWS / DELIEVERS / FINDS

CONCERNS / TOPIC & FORMATS / CONTENTS / CONTENTS / to DISTRIBUTION SITES / ANSWERS

You use social tools to look at what people who drink tea discuss and ask

You select a common question: "What's better glass or ceramic tea pot?"

You decide to answer with a blog post (text) and a short video

You assign the topic to a writer and a videographer (one writes the text & the other makes a video)

The result is sent to quality review. She approves and sends the files to the content wrangler

The content wrangler puts the files on the blog and YouTube

The target audience sees your answer to their questions

Step	Issue	Description	An Example
Step 1	Identify Your Audience	Know who is in your audience, such as age, sex, income, education, location, what websites they visit, and so on.	Our audience are people who drink imported green tea
Step 2	Audience's Concerns	The audience discusses many questions in social sites, feedback forms, and forums.	What's better? Keep tea in the freezer? Boil water for tea? Ceramic pots?
Step 3	Review of Topics	The editorial team collects and reviews those discussions, conversations, and questions to see what the audience is discussing.	The water temperature issue comes up frequently. We sell tea thermometers. Let's answer that one.
Step 4	Select Topics	The editorial team notices recurring topics and write these as questions.	What's the ideal temperature for hot water for green tea?
Step 5	Select the Categories and Formats	The editorial team sees if the question can be answered in various categories (text, video, images, or audio) and formats (for example, FAQs and podcasts).	Let's write an FAQ and produce a podcast on how to measure the temperature for green tea.
Step 6	Assign to Creative Staff	The editorial team assigns the questions to the creative team.	Roslyn will write the FAQ and Anastasia turns it into a voice recording for a podcast.
Step 7	Quality Control	As each item is turned in, the quality control editors reviews and approves or rejects it.	The quality editor either approves each item or rejects it with requests for changes.
Step 8	Distribution	A staffer uploads the finished items to distribution sites.	Ahsan uploads the content items to the accounts at various distribution sites.
Step 9	Reach the Audience	Your audience sees your content.	Use analytics to see traffic, leads, and sales from the content.

Do you see? The audience is the focus. We start with the audience. In the end, we're back to the audience. The content is built for the audience. It's customer-centric content.

Summary of this chapter

Quite a chapter, no? We start out with an idea that everyone knows to be true, but it turns out that doesn't really work. We flip it around and put the customer at the center. Remember your customers? The reason your organization exists?

When you put your customers at the center, the search engine game is changed. Instead of doing whatever possible just to be one link at the top of a search engine, you switch to a world where you put your content wherever your customers are looking. That changes your distribution strategy.

Andreas Ramos

Andreas Ramos develops strategies and tactics for digital marketing.

Author of "Search Engine Marketing" (McGraw-Hill) and six other books on web technology. His book was also published by Tsing Hua University (Beijing), which also uses his courseware.

Andreas has been in Silicon Valley since 1995 where he has worked at SGI, SUN, Brio, Acxiom, and other companies. During the dotcom boom, he worked at over 25 companies. He cofounded two digital agencies; one grew to 175 staff and was acquired in 2012.

Andreas has been the analytics strategist for Stanford's MBA school. He manages a $500,000 Google Foundation grant for digital advertising for MIT.

He graduated in 1982 from the Universität Heidelberg, Germany.

Andreas Ramos is a leading author, advisor and expert on digital and social media marketing. He has consulted extensively with global corporations and start-ups seeking to build brand presence and grow revenues leveraging state-of-the-art digital strategies and best practices. A recognized authority on search engine optimization (SEO), web analytics, social media, pay per click (PPC) advertising, mobile and multi-channel content marketing, Ramos has written numerous articles and five books on these subjects, including "Search Engine Marketing" and "Inside SEO and PPC." He speaks frequently on digital marketing at conferences worldwide.

Andreas recently served as Director of Search Strategy for Acxiom, a leading, publicly traded marketing technology solutions and services provider, where he consulted with Fortune 500 companies. He helped found two digital marketing agencies, including the CCG Group and Postion2, a venture-funded search and social media marketing company, which was acquired in 2012. While at Position2, Ramos trained a team of 65 digital marketers based in Bangalore, India.

Andreas has built web sites and landing pages for hundreds of companies, and has developed best practices for mobile site optimization. He sits on the advisory boards of several Silicon Valley start-ups and has agency certification status with Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft and Facebook.

andreas@andreas.com

www.andreas.com

blog.andreas.com

twitter.com/Andreas_Ramos

LinkedIn.com/andreasramos

facebook.com/andreas.ramos

Return to contents page

Linkdex has non-exclusive permission to republish in any territory in any format the chapter "Hub and Spoke" from "The Big Book of Content Marketing" by Andreas Ramos. Rights remain with Andreas Ramos.

chaptertwentysix

Chelsea Adams

5 fresh ways to use content marketing as lead generation

In an era of inbound marketing, lead generation is all about creating content that appeals to the needs of your target market and then letting them come to you. Here are five types of content that any inbound marketer looking to make connections with interested – and potentially interested – personas shouldn't overlook.

1 Coordinate your own event (and your own event marketing)

This section is derived from my new content marketing book that I helped write with Bruce Clay and Murray Newlands.

Marketers attend dozens of tradeshows and events every year specifically to meet face to face with their target market and collect qualified leads. This concept isn't new.

But what about *coordinating your own event?*

If you're the event coordinator, you have the ability to guide the event experience and, accordingly, the storytelling process. This means the ability to funnel leads and conversations by working into your content marketing strategy contests, meet and greets, VIP demos, and other exclusive sign-up gated events.

SMX West 2013 industry example

In this example the folks who run SMX added to their conference content strategy a contest to find "the biggest search geek." To enter, participants needed to fill out a nine-field registration form that we marketers recognize to be a lead generation tool.
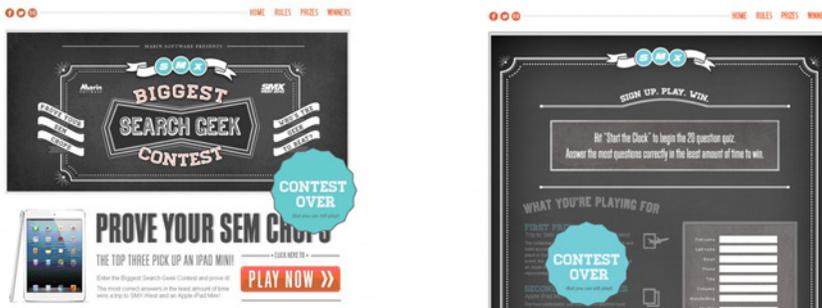
This lead generation experience hits all the right notes. Here are the top three genius elements that have the most impact, and make this experience the lead generation "gift that keeps on giving":

1) This is a "search geek" contest and SMX is undoubtedly an event where self-proclaimed search geeks come to commiserate, learn, and share trade secrets. This is the perfect example of a lead generation campaign that is targeted perfectly to the persona that is the most likely to convert or upgrade upon follow-up.

2) Part of the prize package is a trip to attend the conference, which means that not all participants are going to be attending the conference, but there is a very likely chance that all participants *would like to attend the conference*. That means this campaign is allowing SMX to extend beyond the in-person lead generation potential of their conference and into the otherwise immeasurable zone of people who have the desire to attend, but couldn't actually get their foot in the door.

3) This contest ended in March 2013, but they've geniusly left the experience active to allow people to continue to test their search geek prowess – and to let people continue to enter their lead generation information into the form.

In a nut shell, they've created the gift that keeps on giving: an engaging, fun experience that attracts the perfect target market, serves as a viral marketing campaign, and collects qualified leads both leading up to and long after the conference has ended.

2 Use Facebook apps to drive product giveaways

To attract more high-level leads, try creating a product giveaway scenario where you offer to give away your product, or a product that would attract a specific niche consumer. For instance, if you sell snack food (like NatureBox does in the industry example below) you can offer one lucky winner a plethora of your product in exchange for their contact information.

Other options would be to give away tickets to an industry conference you are hosting, or light-weight backpacking tents to collect leads that might be interested in purchasing a book about light-weight backpacking.

In both scenarios the idea is to establish a line of communication with members of a specific market and then use targeted follow-up content, such as social media posts or email newsletters, to push them farther down the funnel towards even more narrow lead generation gates or conversion.

NatureBox industry example

In this example healthy snack food provider NatureBox has created a Facebook Application that offers Facebook fans a chance to win 500 boxes of their product. The flow of this application content strategy is genius because it plays double lead-generation duty by having a Facebook Like barrier-to-entry before leading the interested party to the six-field contact information form.

This means NatureBox now has two opportunities to follow-up with their leads; through Facebook (direct message or in the Timeline newsfeed) and in email.
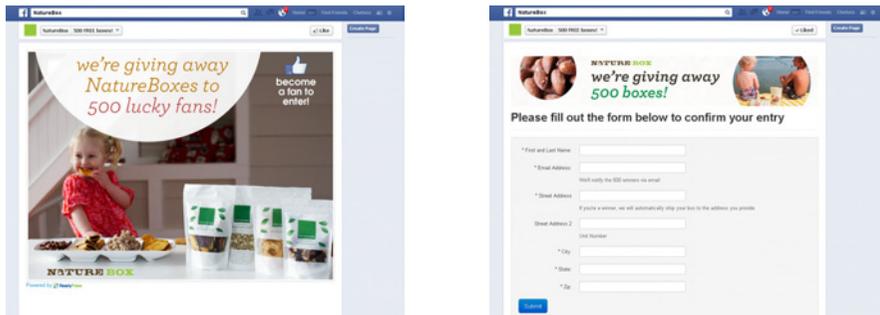
Launched to managed clients in May 2013, and to the public in August, Twitter Lead Generation Cards let you send out "expanded tweets" that encourage tweeters to opt into deals and other calls to action with a single in-tweet click. The one-button experience pulls the lead's name, email address, and Twitter handle from his or her account and sends the information to Twitter Ads where it can be analyzed in-line, downloaded as a CSV, or automatically sent to a CRM.

Like the product giveaway strategy, Twitter Lead Generation Cards are a great way to catch market leads at the interest level of the buying cycle, and then funnel them closer and closer to conversion with follow-up marketing. Plus, as an added bonus, Twitter reports that the "streamlined nature of the Lead Generation Card [has been] instrumental in driving a low cost-per-lead."

Twitter Lead Generation Cards are available to all Twitter advertisers, including small- and medium-sized business owners.

Twitter advertising blog industry example

Since the Lead Generation Card functionality can only be seen as promoted tweets, it's kind of a serendipitous experience when one comes your way. That said, I have not been graced with such serenity yet, so we'll have to reference the example Twitter has supplied in the Twitter Advertising Blog.

The genius of this experience comes from how truly seamless the functionality of the Card is. The main call to action is written into the 140 characters of the Tweet, a reaffirming call to action can be added to the button text, and the participant's contact information is automatically pulled in using their Twitter registration information.

Since the whole experience happens with a single click of a button without ever leaving Twitter there's a subtly to the experience that makes the lead never feel like they are a "lead," which I find to be an incredible asset in the fragile beginning stages of prospect nurturing.
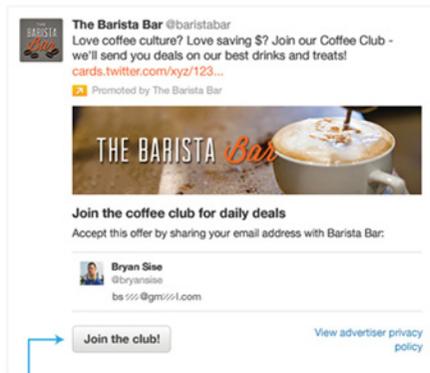
4 Turn up the heat with competitive analysis reports in paid search

Insert yourself right into the middle of a potential client's purchase research with a competitive analysis report that includes unbiased side by side comparisons of several competing industry products.

This form of content creation is a very smart route to take because it targets potential-clients who are in the research stage of the buying cycle – which means they are looking to spend money somewhere, they just haven't decided where yet.

Marketo industry Examplee

In this example Marketo has created a free vendor comparison to compete with fellow marketing-software provider HubSpot.

There are a couple particularly smart things happening in this example. For one, Marketo has put PPC ad-spend behind their content so that it gets in front of people who are searching for their competitor. This is smart not only because it has the potential to intercept clients from their competitor, but also because they are applying what they know about the behavior of their ideal targets to get in front of more qualified leads (think: *"HubSpot is a front-runner in the CRM industry so it is to be assumed people looking for HubSpot are looking for a CRM. This is the perfect time to show them side-by-side why my CRM is better"*).
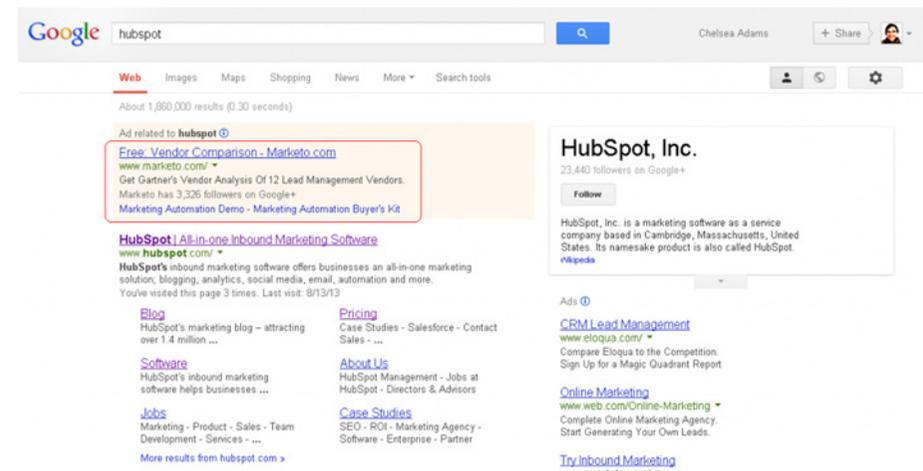
The second particularly smart part of this lead generation campaign shows up in the Company area of the lead gen. form where we see a predictive dropdown menu introduced.

By using what the lead has typed to supply several franchise options in the dropdown the form provides the lead with a quick way to select their specific branch of employment, and provides Marketo with a very specific way to track the lead down by telephone.

DOWNLOAD GARTNER MAGIC QUADRANT

Fill out the form to receive this report

First Name: * chelsea
Last Name: * Adams
Work Email: * XXXXX@BruceClay.com
Job Function: * Marketing - Mgr/Dir
Company: * Home Depot

The Home Depot Inc
(Home Depot, The) 2455 Paces Ferry Rd Nw, Atlanta, Georgia
Home Depot International, Inc.
(Home Depot, The) 2455 Paces Ferry Rd Se, Atlanta, Georgia
Home Depot U.S.A., Inc.
(Home Depot, The) 2455 Paces Ferry Rd Se, Atlanta, Georgia
Home Depot Of Canada Inc
(Home Depot) 1 Concorde Gate Suite 900, North York, Ontario
Installed Products Usa, LLC
(Home Depot Installed Products) 207 Kelsey Ln Ste G, Tampa, Florida
None of the Above

5 Use a SlideShare CTA to get more opportunity from your case studies

A great way to collect leads that are seriously considering your product is to provide a lead generation form at the end of your case studies.

Think about it: the people who are reading your case studies are the people who are really trying to envision themselves in a working relationship with you. In other words, high-impact leads that are like revenue diamonds in a potential-client coalmine.

Spredfast industry example

In this example Spredfast includes several case studies on their website, all in slideshow format. Each one has a lead generation form that pops up when the reader advances from page one to page two.

This is a great example of a way to work lead generation forms into your content without having to lock the content behind a 'this for that' content gate (*"I will give you this content if you give me that contact information"*).

As a bonus, SlideShare content is both SEO-friendly and easily shareable via social media, which means there is a lot of opportunity for your content – and your lead generation forms – to show up in organic search and social media timelines.

Why you should step out of your comfort zone

Content marketing for lead generation is just like any other content marketing – you need to know your goals, who your target market is, and where they tend to look for information and offers.

Sometimes a traditional landing page with a gated content experience works just fine (heck, if the rate by which I am submitting contact information to HubSpot in exchange for whitepapers is any indicator of its effectiveness, I'd even say it works great!) but I would encourage you never to get too complacent and comfortable in your marketing strategy.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel, but there's real opportunity to be capitalized on right outside your comfort zone. This is true with all things marketing, and especially for content marketing intended to attract fresh leads.

For more information on lead generation, social media marketing, storytelling, and using paid media effectively be sure to keep an eye out for my new content marketing book that I helped write with Bruce Clay and Murray Newlands.

Chelsea Adams

Chelsea Adams is a senior content writer at Bruce Clay, Inc. A long-distance cyclist, aspiring cob house builder, and schema/analytics/algorithm obsessor, Chelsea firmly believes that the application of content marketing and SEO best practices can improve your SERP rank as well as your marriage. Contact Chelsea through Twitter or Google +

https://twitter.com/chelseAdams

https://plus.google.com/u/0/114935370058529027585?rel=author

http://www.linkedin.com/in/chelseaadams

Return to contents page

Linkdex

chaptertwentyseven
Jonathan Alderson

Measuring the ROI of content marketing

Digital marketing provides us with more 'measurability' than just about any other arena. We have huge volumes of data and sophisticated analysis tools which can measure just about anything that a user does. We can assign values and revenues to key events, critically assess the performance of individual contributing factors, and identify key trends in a rolling process of testing, learning and improving performance. We can produce content which influences decisions, grows customer loyalty and consideration, and contributes to our bottom lines.

This is the dream, and the kind of sophisticated, informed marketing we all aspire to. Unfortunately, it's difficult, and few are doing it well - or even at all.

Corporate culture requires that initiatives be measurable and provable, but the processes and ways of thinking required to understand how content marketing contributes to end revenue are unfamiliar, and often require a significant change in the mind-set of organisations, and in the way they think about digital marketing.

Redefining ROI

In digital marketing, ROI is typically measured in terms of numbers of leads, ecommerce revenue or ad revenue. The historical limitations of tools like Google Analytics (and/or the lack of expertise around more advanced technical integrations) have conditioned us to limit ourselves to only thinking about websites and content delivering a small number of big goals – the form completions, hits on 'thank you' pages, and the end outcomes – and to do so at the expense of thinking about the many small, individual steps which a user may take on the road to a final conversion goal, each of which has its own success criteria and value (at least, in terms of contribution to the whole).

In the world of content, rarely is a page or campaign compelling enough to generate direct conversions in its own right (at significant volume, without aggressive channel campaigning). It's unrealistic to expect even the greatest great guide, review, tool or curated resource to directly generate significant, direct commercial returns. Stakeholders often have odd expectations of content, and it's a mistake to try and measure it in the same way as a channel or a campaign.

It's worth considering that Wikipedia defines ROI as "The concept of an investment of some resource yielding a benefit to the investor". There's no mention of conversions, leads, sales, or revenue; rather, it's a scenario-agnostic concept of 'getting something out when you put something in'.
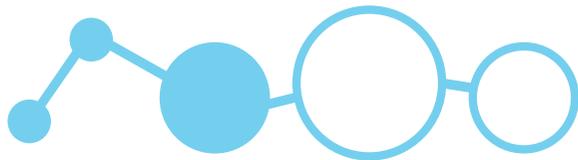
We need to think about ROI, then, as a multi-faceted thing; a completely bespoke concept in each scenario, differing by organisation, and by context – and certainly not limited to form completions, or even direct revenue.

Managing expectations

We need to be able to explicitly measure the ROI of content marketing in particular for two reasons - to understand and improve performance, and in order to be able to get sign off, budget, and/or buy-in from key stakeholders; it's challenging to get very far with effective content marketing on a shoestring budget. The lack of the kinds of ROI measurements and easy evidence of success which are prevalent in other areas of marketing (or the ingrained acceptance of the effectiveness of traditional marketing activities) is one of the key reasons why it's so hard to get buy-in – content marketing, without significant and ongoing investment, often won't appear to move the performance needle at all; and trying to measure pages and content in terms of typical conversion goals is unrealistic. Content marketing is about progressing users through nurture processes and permission funnels in a series of very small steps in order to ultimately deliver that final big step - and that's how we should measure its effectiveness. This doesn't give us a nice ROI number, though. Even with a sophisticated marketing strategy and consideration for multi-touch, content-led tactics, we struggle to get to a clean, coherent 'ROI' metric. There's a disconnect.

We have challenges beyond definition and proving that content works, too. Even if you can articulate what content ROI is, how do you break it out from the impact and ROI of everything else you do, of which content is a part? How do you measure the ROI of a piece of content, compared to the campaign you invested in to send traffic to it? Is content the asset, or the context? Typical digital marketing has us thinking in channel-centric terms; how many conversions did organic search deliver, for example, and how much did this cost? If your traffic is going to content, how do you model the ROI of each individual component when they're inextricably linked?

Ultimately, we need to change our definition of performance to consider the progression of users through small steps towards an end conversion.

Newsletter sign-ups, blog comments, self-service actions (such as reading an FAQ rather than phoning a helpline) are the kinds of small but important steps a user takes on their journey - steps which are empowered and determined by the existence and effectiveness of content. It's these small steps which matter, and by which individual pieces of content should be measured and considered.

So how do we understand the ROI of these individual steps, and communicate these in a language which resonates in a world where ROI has always been thought about in terms of end points?

Traditional thinking would suggest that ROI can be measured in three ways - through increasing revenue, decreasing costs, or improving brand. Typically, we've collectively managed the challenges of measuring the performance of content by leaning heavily on this final definition, and by talking about content in a different way to other activities. We use terms like 'engagement', 'halo effects', 'user experience', 'brand exposure' and 'intangible value' because we struggle to measure success in more familiar terms. This is dangerous, and only serves to further the challenges we all collectively have around convincing stakeholders of the value of effective content marketing and proving it with tangible ROI metrics. Engagement and brand perception will only get budgets signed off if it has a clear and direct line of site to revenue in all but the most liberal of organisations.

We need to treat content in the same way as any other marketing. Everything can be measured - or at least approximated - and given a real, tangible value... but it's a conceptual challenge to get there.

Moving beyond direct marketing

As an industry, we've got really good at understanding how channel-centric performance can be measured and improved, but at great cost - both literally and figuratively. Almost all paid media and campaign activity (such as PPC, Affiliate marketing, and even SEO) only chases the very tip of the prospects pool. The top of the funnel. We aim to grab the attention of people who are easily swayed and/or already almost at the purchase decision point, and to aggressively go after what works, continually chasing a sweet spot where there's a positive intersect between cost, volume and performance.

This is brute force marketing, and regardless of how well it targets and converts the 2% of the audience who only needed a little push, it criminally ignores the vast majority of people who are in the 'maybe' pot, and the remainder who may never convert, but who might otherwise have and be able to contribute real, tangible value. It ignores people who want to shop around, to think about their purchase, and to spend a few days exploring alternatives. It ignores the way in which all of us, and indeed, everybody else consumes digital content; over multiple visits, via multiple channels, each time taking incremental steps towards or away from a decision. The extent and depth of the challenge becomes apparent when you consider why, for example, paid search landing pages are so often radically different from organic search landing pages – when research shows that the consumer generally doesn't know the difference – or how often you see paid search marketing on a deep content page, a blog post, or a PDF of thought-leading research. We've created a marketing ecosystem which is only interested in chasing after the tip of the iceberg, because explicitly demonstrating how progressive nurturing works is difficult - far more so than just increasing budgets for a channel which already does an 'OK' job of churning through the relatively small number of highly qualified prospects it's already targeting.

As we've touched on, the challenges around differentiating the effectiveness of the traffic and the destination, coupled with the fact that we live in a marketing ecosystem where ownership of budgets/performance is channel-centric, make it incredibly hard to to do anything other than what appears to work immediately, here, in the now.

This necessitates limited risk, short-term wins, and 'best practice' tactics which we know, for better or worse, work. But, to take an example, the archetypal PPC landing page doesn't 'work' - it doesn't tap into a different market; and all of the research and performance analysis which shows that "removing distractions" and refining targeting is really just you continually refining your filter bubble and missing out on the opportunity to speak to a wider audience in a way in which they want to listen to. We're screaming "take our thing, take our thing!" into the void, because we can tell if and when it works - but we're missing out on having real, valuable communication with people who just need a little more time and respect; people who might be interested in our products and services, if only we'd speak to them on their terms. The ROI of content marketing, then, can be considered in terms of succeeding at initiating, maintaining, and progressing these conversations.

Attributing value

If we're moving away from the concept of single, large conversions into understanding the impact of individual actions, you need something to work with first. Unfortunately, many organisations are yet to begin this journey, the idea of investing in thought-leading publications, educational materials, freely accessible premium content or even a simple (but useful) email newsletter is met with outright hostility. Unfortunately, there's no easy solution in these cases; you'll need evidence of unarguable commercial success in order to release the budget for bigger, better investments. You need to strike gold or just get lucky, and get buy-in and small wins on a single initiative. Show that, even in a last-click, interruption-marketing environment, offering somebody something of value and asking for small permissions in return can work. Find your small success stories, and use that to open the door to something bigger.

Unfortunately, it's likely success won't come first time - the first few attempts at introducing valuable or useful content will crash and burn, because it's not enough for a brand's blog to publish a great blog post amidst a legacy of mediocre self-promotion posts (or to have no other assets at all), or to start sending out genuinely useful Tweets and to expect thousands of new followers overnight. Success only comes from supporting the whole journey, in small ways, across numerous touch-points. It's an uphill battle. You need to work your way through low-level, simple ideas and ways to provide value with content, and find something that demonstrates any kind of tangible return. Even if it generates less than you invest in it in time or cost. Prove that the value exists, and then put together a business case for scaling it up and trying again. You need to get your ROI before you can prove it, measure it, and act on it - and many brands are in a position where even with all of the measurement processes and infrastructure in place, they're not doing the things that they need to be doing in order to actually create any measurable success.

Modelling ROI

If we're trying to understand the value of individual actions, which lead to a larger and more explicitly measurable action, we need to work in terms of averages, propensities and estimates.

If we know that, for example, one per hundred people who subscribe to an email newsletter go on to make a purchase of £100 on average (you'll need to spot or measure these kinds of trends first), then you can assign a 'theoretical value' of £1 per email address subscription. Get more sophisticated, and go so far as to consider equivalent cost, too - if you had to buy a cold email list at ~£1 per email address, your subscription is actually worth £2 on average. Consider also over the course of that user's email subscription that you may send them ~100 emails, ~20 of which they may read and ~5 of which they may click through from, and work out what that'd cost you in paid search clicks (minus the cost of sending the emails) - total all of this up, and you're in a position where all of the small microconversions on your site are measured in terms of real money. This helps you to build compelling business cases, get buy-in, and most of all, to measure what works and to do more of it.

Most analytics suites will allow you to assign a value to a conversion, and even go so far as to allow you to calculate variable values. In our example above, it may be that your business intelligence data shows that, for example (with a bit of programming), men who sign up to receive an email on a Friday morning are 50% more likely to spend 20% more over the course of their subscription. Using rules and logic to factor this kind of thinking into your value modelling and marketing is incredibly powerful.

Tackling more abstract goals and turning them into ROI metrics is no more technically challenging, but requires some bespoke consideration in each case. Content which is designed to reduce costs through self-service actions, for example, can be measured by surveying the people who use it. If you FAQ pages provides the ability to vote as to whether a page answered their question or not, you can measure votes, and attribute value in terms of the equivalent savings of having to answer a phone call or respond to an email enquiry (you may need to adjust based on the propensity for people to respond/engage at all; try assessing participation rates based on people who surpass a certain time on page or who otherwise engage, rather than all visits in order to normalise for bouncing visits, etc.). Scale this to include considerations for overheads associated with those savings, such as staff salaries, lighting, heating and property overheads, and get super-sophisticated.

For objectives which aim to build brand, or to provide reassurance or education, you need to ask users whether the content was influential in their conversion decision. If a proportion of users consistently state that, for example, the educational video on your homepage played a key part in their decision-making process, you can attribute a proportion of the value generated by those customers back to that content. Asking your visitors whether or not they were able to complete their tasks, and whether your content positively influenced their behaviour and then assessing the impact of those scenarios on whether or how much customers spend unlocks a world of opportunities for assessing the propensity of content to influence conversion decisions - and with tangible metrics to boot.

With this kind of measurement in place inside your analysis tool, you can start to assess the performance of content at page-level, and to distinguish between channel performance and content performance.

Your existing channel data will let you know how much money you've spent driving traffic to a piece of content - your new metrics can give you value per visit, which, when considered in line with cost per visit, gives you the holy grail of revenue per visit by page, by channel, by keyword, by page, and by user type.

Real and estimated value

Of course, we're talking about estimated value, rather than actual revenue. We're working on averages and extrapolations in order to get a sense of direction as to what works, and what doesn't.

It's wholly feasible to perform the kind of modelling explored above with real data, mined from real customers and cross-checked against CRM data and with lifetime value analysis. But this process isn't quick, and relies on having access to the entire user journey, from end-to-end. That's fine for small one-off purchases, but impractical when large decisions may occur over multiple visits, and take significant time to complete.

What happens if somebody follows a link to a blog post from a Tweet, signs up for a newsletter, comes in three weeks later from an email about a special offer, buys a product, and three weeks later returns it (or cancels it) offline? You can't wait for all of this to happen and provide a neat story in your CRM before making any decisions on where to spend your money, or to make decisions on a daily ad budget, for example. The 'real truth' is nice, but no good for the here-and-now.

Realistically, you need to have both views of the truth. You need to map out the 'real' behaviour, spot trends, and use it to steer your direction through a process of continual reviews of and refinements to your estimation models – but you can't rely on it for tactical or practical decision-making. Join up everything you can, import and integrate downstream data, but don't aim to use it at ground-level, day-to-day decision making points.

Further complexity arises around service- or subscription-based models; do you consider the monthly value of the subscription, or the estimated lifetime value?

Or somewhere in-between, perhaps the total value of the subscription, minus a proportion based on propensity to cancel? Unfortunately, there's no easy answer here, and like many discussions around attribution modelling, you'll need to experiment and find what works best for you - based on modelling the numbers, and correlating the accuracy of your estimation model with real-world revenue retrospectively.

There's an educational battle to win here, and it's always an uphill struggle. Stakeholders will object to the idea of estimated and average metrics. The key message to put across is that your estimation model isn't designed to understand how much money the website makes – you already have tools which do that, but it's impossible to differentiate between whether it was the channel or the content which contributed to performance. You're trying to understand which combinations of activity generate value and to do more of that; and that this is the most effective way to do that. You're also continually using real data to refine and update your model (which will continually change), so it's the closest possible thing to 'the truth' which you can provide.

In summary, you absolutely need to measure and understand the true behaviour of visitors and actual revenue generated - but the timescales, complexity and other influences make this impossible to do quickly or easily enough to be able to use it to make tactical decisions. Your day-to-day analysis, recommendations and actions should come from an estimation model, which is refined by the periodical revisions of your worldview which should come from reviewing the true performance data.

Practical tips

Redefining metrics - *visits vs. visitors*

Most analytics packages, even those with advanced multi-touch attribution modelling, provide visit-centric reports and data. Content consumption, site behaviour, conversions and outcomes are all measured and presented in the context of individual visits.

For some sites, this will be appropriate; but in many, it's a dangerous oversight (in many large purchase decision making processes, and especially in B2B, an end-conversion may not happen without many individual, successful visits). Examining performance in terms of individual visits is only useful when we need to understand how well we're progressing users through a decision funnel at any given point at a tactical level, in order to be able to improve specific stages - otherwise, understanding visitor-level behaviour is much more useful. How many real people did we help, end-to-end, over the lifespan of their experience? Where did things go wrong? Everybody's needs will differ, as their digital marketing and content differs, but using the right level of analysis is key. In some cases, your tools may allow you to use either view - in others, you may need to extract the data and perform your own analysis.

Redefining metrics - *conversion rate vs. success rate*

Start thinking about conversion rate as '% of traffic which we gained value from', and tag up your microconversions to provide juicy data. At this level of analysis, it doesn't matter what that action was; what matters is learning from and understanding the behaviour the highest and lowest performing segments, and only then drilling down into specific details and tactics. This is where you should be focusing your marketing efforts.

Beyond tweaking default metrics, whenever possible, it's key to use your own metrics. Taking your business objectives and site objectives and distilling them down into tangible, explicit metrics is a vital part of the process of understanding how your content is performing. Take the intangible, wooly objectives like 'help our users', and turn it into a metric - survey customers on how helpful the website was in a way which produces a trendable score or metric. Rinse, repeat, and do away with bounce rates and pageviews forever.

Re-imaging the funnel

Typical website and content analysis imagines a funnel, where visitors progress from general awareness, through a series of content, stages or channels, to ultimately convert.

With a more sophisticated approach to content marketing, you can switch to a funnel which maps out your nurture process, and measure what proportion and volume of people you're progressing through your customer lifecycle.

Cookie settings

Most tracking tools have predefined, default cookie lengths, session lengths, and campaign lengths. Half-hour sessions and month-long campaign windows might not make sense for your organisation or conversion types, especially when your content is long or complex. Tailor the timeout on each of these elements where possible to provide a more meaningful definition of 'success' for individual visits.
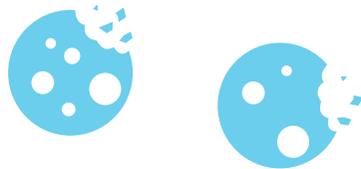
Survey on the impact of key assets

Use post-conversion surveying to ask things like "Was our white paper on [x] influential in your buying decision?". Reverse-engineer the value of the consumption of this asset in terms of its propensity to be part of the buying decision.

Use custom dimensions to identify trends

Factor in offline considerations like the weather, whether or not there's a major sporting event happening, the number of days until payday, or any other abstract scenarios you can come up with. Use tools like Universal Analytics to tie these into your data ecosystem, and capitalise on trends which provide higher content ROI in the context of *"value per"* metrics.

Import data

Google Analytics, and most enterprise analysis packages allow you to upload extra/ other data into your data warehouse. Adding content production costs alongside channel spend provides an extra layer of insight into what delivers performance, and where things don't quite stack up.

Extending this, it's worth taking advantage of your tool suite to automatically calculate content ROI at a higher level; factor in retainer costs, promotional budgets and even staff costs to gain a more comprehensive, end-to-end picture of just how much you're spending on content, and what that means to your bottom line.

You'll want to think about costs in terms of *fixed* recurring costs (such as agency retainers), variable recurring costs (such as channel spend), and *one-off* costs (such as production or advertising spend around a specific campaign). Carving up spends into these pots allows you to easily develop a system which records and uploads spend data into your reporting suite in a structured manner. If you're using Google Analytics, *Analytics Canvas* [http://www.analyticscanvas.com] is a great place to start prototyping a process.

In Summary...

● Think about content in terms of **value generated**

● **Lower the threshold** for the measurement of success, **get buy-in** from commitment to the ideals, and **get proof of concept** in order to begin to scale

● **Use best-guess value estimates for real-time decisions,** but **put review points in place** to sense-check downstream and big-picture data to steer understanding, decisions and future value estimation

● **Conversion rate** isn't a useful metric. Look at ***value per*** metrics, and **ask the user** in order to understand how successful individual experiences are

● Redefine success in terms of progressing users through nurture funnels, and align your marketing to this

● Start talking about and acting on content ROI in terms of real money!

Jonathan Alderson

Jono has a decade of blended experiences in digital marketing, with expertise in SEO, Analytics, campaign strategy and web development - from defining 'the big picture' and strategic direction, right down to getting his hands dirty in the nitty-gritty technical detail.

By day, his responsibilities as Head of SEO & Analytics at Twentysix keep him focused on guiding the continental evolution of the agency's search proposition, service offerings and operational capabilities; as well as working hand in hand with clients to develop long-term strategies for increasing their analytics maturity, digital marketing effectiveness, revenue and growth. By night, he is a WordPress, PHP, data and food geek.

www.jonoalderson.com

www.twitter.com/ jonoalderson

http://www.linkedin.com/in/jonoalderson

Linkdex

chaptertwentyeight

Stephen Lock

Frameworks to audit, measure & maximise content marketing ROI

The older (and hopefully wiser!) I get the more I realise the power of documentation, checklists and processes. They are essential to both scale and run projects with any kind of consistency. With the state of the digital marketing space, in terms recruiting during the current skills shortage, it's also incredibly common to train and work with younger, less experienced practitioners that require the structure and frameworks to be able to execute digital campaigns well.

At the start of my career a majority of the knowledge sharing online was completely unstructured, there were many examples of "chinese whispers" and best practices based on blog and forum posts. To be honest particularly with SEO topics a vast amount of advice was unreliable, based on inadequate datasets (making supposed research statistically irrelevant) and in today's world some of the older articles you can read are damn right dangerous.

Thanks to publishing houses like Wiley and O'Reilly, amazing industry sites like Econsultancy there is now far more reliable information in the wild.

As I watch our industry "grow up", I am seeing an emphasis on structure and processes, which thanks to how awesome the digital marketing community is, much is shared very openly. Even some of the largest brands, like MoneySupermarket have shared how they completely overhauled their approach and organisational structure to execute digital marketing campaigns more effectively in this new content marketing world. For many this will seem slightly tongue in cheek as content marketing was never anything particularly new, it's just been reframed and has been become such a hot topic in recent years.

This article is designed to celebrate this new world in terms of the positive effects of content marketing, promoting executing better digital campaigns, breaking down the silos and some of my favourite resources to help both strategy and tactical approaches for how to audit, measure and maximise ROI. These focus on fantastic frameworks; See-Think-Do, Content Channel Interaction, The Content Grid,The Awareness Ladder, Customer Decision Journeys,The Content Marketing Matrix, SOSTAC, and an example of our own adaptation of SMART(ER) Criteria, reapplied for content marketing.

There is loads of ground to cover so let's get started with one of my personal heros Avinash Kaushik:

See-Think-Do: A content, marketing, measurement business framework by Avinash Kaushik

Marketing Focus	Consideration Stage	Audience	
DISPLAY / SEO / PPC / YOUTUBE / SOCIAL	**SEE**	- # or % Interactions (platforms/ads) - Conversation, Amplification, Applause - Indexed Increase in Brand Awareness - % New Visits	COST
DISPLAY / PPC / SEO / YOUTUBE / SOCIAL / EMAIL	**THINK**	- Click-Thru Rate - Page Depth - Per Visit Goal Value - % Assisted	EFFECTIVENESS
DISPLAY / PPC / SEO / AFF / EMAIL	**DO**	- Visitor Loyalty - Checkout Abandonment Rate - Conversion Rate - Profit (=Rev-Ad Cost-COGS)	

Avinash Kaushik recently designed this solution to the problem he identified; that businesses need a framework to help measure ROI on multi-channel content marketing campaigns. It can also help you to plan a strategy that cascades down into actions and KPI's. This is an approach I have also seen promoted by Jono Alderson, another leading mind in web analytics.

He does a first rate job of matching channels and content to the different parts of the users journey that work almost as a simplified version of the Awareness Ladder from Ben Hunt and the "Coddle" stage reminds me of the research into Customer Decision Journeys from McKinsey, where a key takeaway is considering a new touch point; after a visitor converts.

This is really actionable as you can then map channels and content types such as blog posts, video and email content to the different stages and then assign success factors accordingly. Strategy maps to a customer-centric approach to content creation by channel with recommended metrics, this is probably the hardest part.

In short, it's genius and has been distilled into a solution that is as simple as possible, as in the words of Einstein "Everything Should Be Made as Simple as Possible, But Not Simpler". You can read about Avinash Kaushik's framework in chapter 23 or in his orginal blog post <u>here</u>.

Content channel interaction by Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach

Internally, a number of us have read Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach's book Content Strategy For The Web and something that has resonated with us was the key concept; Content Channel Interaction.

I would recommend reviewing her approach with a view to customising the diagram to your business. I believe this isn't a one size fits all solution. To be fair all of these resources should always be customised and common sense always needs to be applied. Every business is unique and from an author's perspective creating a solution that works for every business is both unrealistic and nigh impossible.

However what we love about Melissa's approach is it makes you think about the channels and types of content that are most appropriate to your users buying journey. It's an extremely healthy exercise and can be applied really well in two areas:

1 Most importantly it can be used as a gap analysis to make sure there aren't any obvious holes in your marketing collateral and approach.

2 A picture can tell the story of a thousand words. It can be really useful to visualise this concept for your team and to use internally to make it easy to understand what you are trying to achieve. At a higher level visualisation of data and concepts is almost always an effective strategy to try and drive insight.

We liked the ideas behind this so much we actually adapted our own version we use for staff internally to help understand how different pieces of content sit together and to help identify the best types of content for the right stages with customers.

Internally our team is always driven to try and practice what we preach and this is a great example. You can find Melissa Rach's book from wherever you like buying books from and you can find our adaptation, tailored for us as a SaaS business on the next page. Enjoy.

Content-Channel Interaction

The below diagram demonstrates the different channels that need to be considered and how they integrate into the sales cycle. This in turn affects the nature of the content we might need to create (e.g. whether it is informative, persuasive etc.):

Learn
⌄
Consider
⌄
Try
⌄
Buy
⌄
Use/ Maintain

Events, Think Tanks, Conferences

Website

Blog

Social Media

Email

Print

Sales Team

Account Man.

Blog
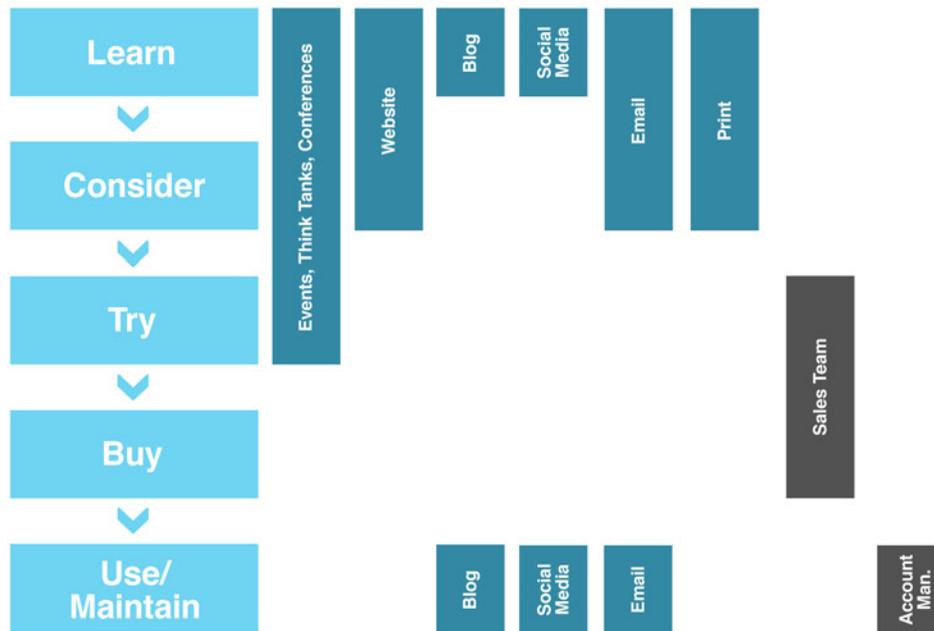
Social Media

Email

- Prospective clients can **Learn** about our services through events, the website, blog, social media, email and print (or from referrals/word of mouth).
  - This means the copy in these areas needs to support this educational aim.
  - See our personas to understand who our audiences are and what content they need.

- **Consideration** takes place at events, on the website with emails or print materials, where prospective clients can compare and assess our products.
  - We need to create more print material or digital assets that allow them to make these decisions. Prospective clients are always keen for educational print material.

- Our products can only be **Trialed** and **Demonstrated** at events or if organised via our sales team.
  - There should be a smooth and easy transition from consideration to trialing our services.

- Even if your website is non-transactionable and you can only **Buy** through your sales team, marketing / content should still deliver all of the key points covered in their pitches.
  - Sales should be reinforcing and expanding upon what leads have already Learned, Considered and Tried.

- **Maintenance** and further education can occur on the blog, social media and through email etc. Relationship building is key through Customer Services and Account Management.

Linkdex

The content marketing grid by Eloqua

Out of all of the resources I am sharing this is probably my favourite. I really like it because it's so actionable as it's approach is so tactical. Most importantly it's because it's actionable, and actionable is always a really good thing.

This is mainly because of the granularity of content types that is not included, even if you take all of the different types of content such as ROI calculators, case studies, quizzes and webinars for example it can act as a checklist for all of the types of content you should be considering for your strategy (deciding what not to do consciously can often be more important than deciding what to do!).

This granular approach also extends into actual social platforms including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Vimeo which will really help to demystify approaches to creating and marketing your content in the right places.

It also ties this all together with a similar frame to mapping content towards a user's journey. I strongly believe this is key for conversion, an often overlooked factor is the quality of traffic in relation to conversion. The traffic will be infinitely more likely to convert from a prospect interested in a webinar focused on your product than a popular viral that is far less targeted (and far more likely to include dancing cats!).

Personally, I will be using The Content Marketing Grid for both gap analysis and it's a great tool for brainstorming content ideas, which as a blogger and working with content is often the most important piece of the puzzle.

Idea Stormers by Bryan W. Mattimore, recommended to me by Simon Penson, is packed full of advice for ideation sessions. Mattimore even considers being able to consistently come up with better and more innovative ideas than your competitors as a key advantage. Really smart stuff and these approaches have never been more relevant to marketers thanks to the explosion of content marketing in recent years.

The Content Marketing Grid can be used to make sure you're at least aware of all of the main options for content creation and that you have a good spread throughout a user's journey from awareness to conversion.

It also touches on metrics, which are good for ideas, but I would recommend making sure you are also focusing on microconversions and reading Avinash Kaushik's and Justin Cutroni's blogs for choosing approaches to web analytics. The grid is available below and I hope you find at as useful as I do!
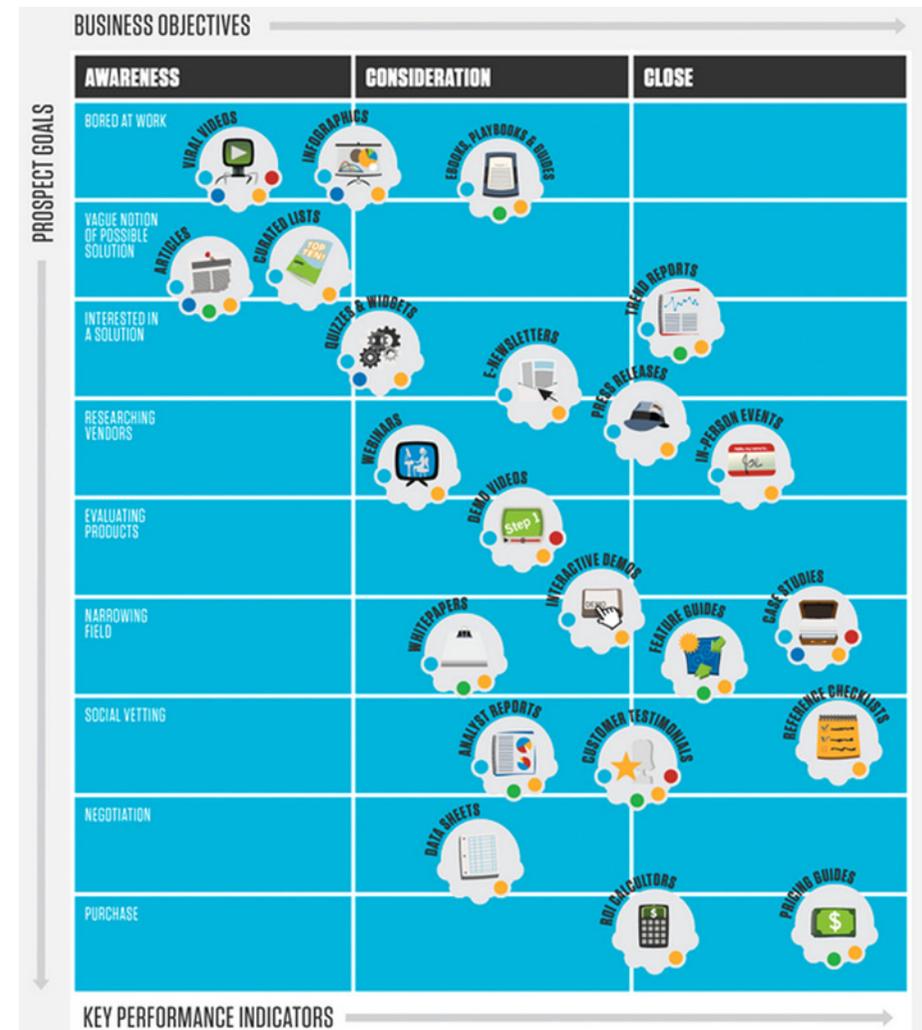
The Awareness Ladder by Ben Hunt

The Awareness Ladder was one of the most compelling concepts from Ben Hunt's popular book Convert.

It was also one of the first times I was exposed to the concept of matching keywords to buying cycles and since the explosion of content marketing and the pain of (not provided), I am meeting a lot of analysts that are getting really excited about this approach to driving insights and segmentation via keyword groups matched to The Awareness Ladder. The power of the concept is in it's simple goal of matching users to content, considering intent.

Some of the best applications include:

1 Analysis of keyword groups as opposed to keywords, especially helpful since (not provided).

2 This can also be extended to the analysis of a group of landing pages as this can be one of the most reliable methods to drive insights otherwise obfuscated by (not provided).

**3** Gap analysis for looking at content that may be missing and need to be created.

4 It has I am sure helped to inspire many of the approaches of mapping content to intent and user behaviour, which I would expect to be one of the keys to building a website and content that converts in an optimal way.

Stage #	What Searchers are Looking for at this Step	Example Keywords	What Your Web Page Needs to Offer the Searcher	Goal of the Web Page
0	Nothing. They don't have a need	None	Your website isn't involved at this stage. At this point you should be going to where your target audience is, and showing them how they have an unrecognized need	No web pages involved at this point
1	Basic information on the problem (what it is, why it needs to be solved)	diabetes; type 1 diabetes; type 2 diabetes; what is diabetes; symptoms of diabetes	Basic description of the problem, and why it needs to be solved; link to a "solutions" page	Get site visitors to click on link to go to the "solutions" page
2	Information on solutions available	diabetes treatment; treatment for diabetes; diabetes diet	Information on the range of solutions available to solve the problem	Get site visitors to click on link to product- or solution-specific page
3	Information on the benefits of a particular product/solution	victoza diabetes; neal barnard reversing diabetes	Information on the benefits of a particular product/solution	Get site visitors to click on link to the checkout page
4	Validation of their decision to purchase a specific product/ solution	victoza diabetes review	As many of the "principles of persuasion" as possible (social proof; reciprocity; liking; commitment/ consistency; authority; scarcity)	Get site visitors to click on link to the checkout page
5	To buy	buy victoza diabetes medicine	Confidence in the integrity of your website and the security of your checkout process	To facilitate the purchase as smoothly as possible

Customer decision journeys by McKinsey

Strangely I have only ever read a handful of copies of the Harvard Business Review and this is an article I've read and referenced a couple of times. It's one which comes up again and again...

It's a specialist piece of research around customer buying cycles and was the first piece I read on how the internet has changed people's buying behaviour and created a new touch point; after purchase. This is an area that I strongly believe in especially after working for a number of SaaS based businesses. Leading analysts also recommend focusing on loyalty metrics including repeat purchases and churn rates as key KPI's for online businesses.

If you are interested in these areas of research I would strongly recommend reading about Customer Decision Journeys here and also checking out Google's ZMOT research and The Customer Journey to Online Purchase. The latter is fantastic at showing how both different channels can impact customer buying decisions and there's even an interactive tool to show how this can change by vertical.

The content marketing matrix by Smart Insights

This reminds me of a similar approach to The Content Marketing Grid from Eloqua/Jess3. What I really like about the ideas from them are the refreshing spin on some of the concepts we have already discussed.

It is particularly powerful if used in combination with The Content Marketing Grid and I am planning on using these together for brainstorming sessions, as well as gap analysis, which is the other obvious application. You can access The Content Marketing Matrix here.

It shows the importance of building customer loyalty, e-commerce businesses are finding increasing numbers of customers read reviews after purchase to validate their decision and this can massively affect return rates.

From my own experience I have seen indicators of brands like Amazon attracting a disproportionately high clickthrough rate on SERP results pages. This can be attributed to them building such a massive online brand with an army of loyal customers.

You can use the methodology to:

1 Ensure you have at least considered each type of content.

2 Focus on different areas as part of your editorial calendar. For example you could build in a period of focusing in generating entertaining, inspirational, educational and conversion focused content. Alternatively you could ensure your editorial calendar has a constant balance of these different types of content to keep things fresh.
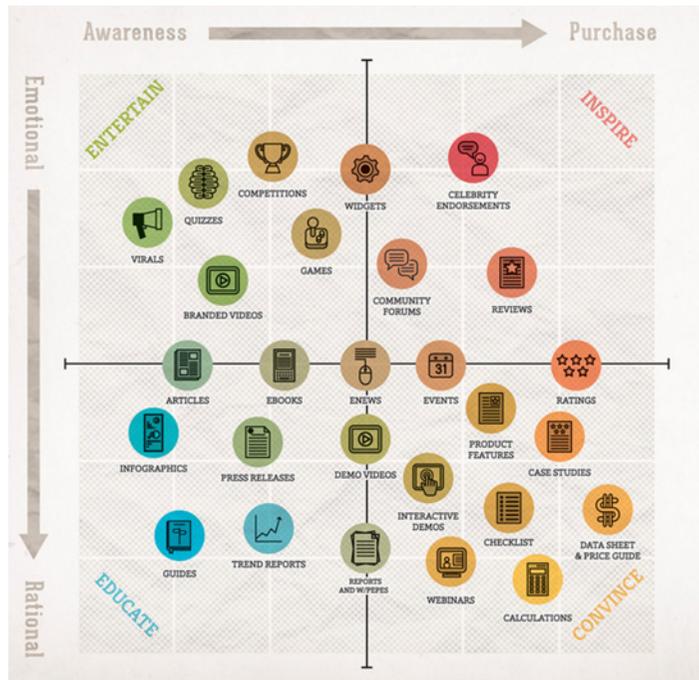
SOSTAC by Paul R. Smith

SOSTAC is a marketing planning model that I love and is in fact so powerful I would recommend it as an approach you could try for planning any kind of strategy and integrates well with actions, analytics/reporting and project management. I have also seen adaptations including SOST, where some sections have simply been removed or tailored for different situations and environments.

SOSTAC consists of:

- Situation Analysis - where are we now?

- Objectives - where do we want to be?

- Strategy - how do we get there?

- Tactics - the detail for how we get there...

- Actions - what do we actually need to do to get there and who is doing it?

- Control - measurement/KPI's/analytics, did we actually get there?

Personally I would recommend using the whole of SOSTAC from my own personal experience, but would also recommend applying common sense and not to blindly follow any methodology or framework just for the sake of it. This is especially evident in project management methodologies such as PRINCE2, where often they get spoken about negatively when it is the application that is at fault, not the framework.

The version I have included here from Smart Insights is very marketing orientated, but don't let that deter you from applying to any kind of project planning. All you need to do is consider the model from a high level and adapt its use to be more generic.

I have used SOSTAC previously to help design multi-channel campaigns, map out 12 month strategies and consider it a valuable tool in my arsenal for approaching any kind of marketing strategy or planning. Equally I would expect it to be an effective approach for content marketing too. You can read more about SOSTAC here and there are also a number of books available from both Paul R. Smith and Dave Chaffey that cover the model in great detail including Emarketing Excellence.

HOW DO WE MONITOR PERFORMANCE?

Optimising through:

5 S's , KPI's and web analytics

User experience review

Conversion rate optimisation

Frequency of reporting

Process of reporting and actions

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Marketplace SWOT:

5 S's performance and other KPI's (& trend)

Customer insight (who, why, how?)

Market Trends

Competitor analysis

Internal capabilities and resources

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

5 S's objectives:

Sell - customer acquisition and retention targets

Serve - customer satisfaction targets

Sizzle- wow factor (added value)

Speak - engaging customers

Save - quantified efficiency gains

THE DETAILS OF TACTICS

Who does what and when:

Responsibilities and structures

Processes and systems

Internal resources and skills

External agencies

HOW EXACTLY DO WE GET THERE?

Marketing mix:

8 P's

Incl. Communications Mix

Content Plan

Contact Plan

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

STOP & SIT:

Segments
Target markets
Objectives
Positioning (OVP)

&

Sequence (Trust, Try, Buy...)
Integration (CRM & D/Base)
Targeting and segmentation

SMART(ER) Criteria

During part of a recent branding exercise we are a heavily data driven business and internally we often have a healthy obsession with questions. This stems inevitably from working with talented developers, which is actually a theme that runs through my experience of good developers. They like to focus on problems and questions, then devise solutions (or answers) to those questions.

We also have such a vast amount of data available to us, it can be easy to be overwhelmed, much like when someone enters the world of web analytics for the first time. Often you can save yourself a significant amount of time and effort by making sure you have the right questions upfront. Especially if it's at the start of a large project or if you're dedicating significant resource to trying to achieve your goals. This was how we came to the conclusion that we like to think we give our clients "smarter answers" when trying to answer the $64,000 question of what does your company actually do?

During this process and research we also came across the famous SMART(ER) Criteria, used predominantly for goal setting, which will resonate with many digital marketers even if it's something they have never used before first hand.

Currently we are part of an evolving world where both ourselves and a majority of our clients are playing a game where you need to publish exceptional content to win. It was during this process that we realised SMART(ER) Criteria could actually be applied really well to content marketing (or actually as we prefer internally, marketing great content).

You can see our SMARTER Criteria adaptation for content marketing below, which was released for the Content Marketing Show in London this year. The different points act as themes throughout the content creation process and help act as a framework to make sure you are considering each point, never forgetting to set goals and reassess your campaigns iteratively.

S Specific, significant, shareable

M Measurable, meaningful, memorable

A Appropriate, ambitious, aligned

R Relevant, results-driven, resonant

T Timely, targeted, trackable

E Engaging, enjoyable, evergreen

R Rewarding, reassess, reaching

Linkdex

Key takeaways

● Using frameworks, checklists and documentation is often essential to deliver consistency and for both businesses and campaigns to scale elegantly.

- Luckily, as my article emphasises, there are some amazing frameworks and knowledge that have been shared publicly and are there for the taking.

- Campaigns and businesses are as unique as fingerprints, this is why it's essential to tailor approaches to your needs, applying healthy amounts of common sense.

- Frameworks can often be adapted, for example in my humble opinion SOSTAC can be applied to many situations far detached from the marketing world.

- The frameworks provided can massively help brainstorming and ideation sessions for content marketing.

- Gap analysis is probably the most actionable use of all when reviewing these frameworks and visualisations. You can use them as simple checklists to consider all of the different types of content and approaches to make sure that if there is an activity you aren't doing it's the result of a conscious decision.

- Choosing what not to is probably even more important than choosing what to do. It's important to execute well and not try to do too much. This is something I have seen throughout my career and often discuss with my team at work. You need to work on the optimal number of things to get the results you want.

- Tailoring content to parts of the user decision journey, to generate the highest possible quality of traffic I believe is a key factor for conversion that is rarely discussed.

- These resources can be invaluable for helping to make your life easier especially when planning editorial calendars and to make sure they aren't missing anything…

- Not only will the frameworks here help tactically, they also have the potential to help with strategy, measurement, KPI selection and even getting things done!

I hope you enjoyed this article. Are you a fan of models and frameworks? Please get in touch and let me know if you find them useful or would like to share any of your favourites I may have missed…

Stephen Lock

Steve is currently Product Manager for Linkdex, an innovative data and technology partner to leading agencies and brands around the globe. He is currently also the UK Co-Chair for SEMPO, the global SEM trade organisation. You can follow him on Twitter via @stevejlock.

Steve is an experienced SEO and social media specialist who has worked in-house, agency-side and freelance for a number of start ups and leading brands. He has presented at numerous conferences including SMX, BrightonSEO, Think Visibility, Internet World, ionSearch, SAScon, International Search Summit and MeasureCamp. Steve is also proud to have lectured in the UK.

Recently Steve is focusing more on writing and has started contributing to leading industry sites including Search Engine Journal. He plans to launch a new blog this year too, so watch this space…

https://twitter.com/stevejlock

http://www.linkedin.com/in/stephenjameslock

Return to contents page

chaptertwentynine

Gerry McGovern

Quality content means measuring outcomes, not inputs.

The nature of online allows you to measure outcomes in a way that was never really possible before. The Web is like a giant Petri dish of human behavior. On the Web customers leave a trail. We have the methods to observe what they are doing. Not what they say they are doing. Not what we think they are doing. What they are actually doing. People don't just consume content. They also create content. Their every movement is content. They leave a trail, a record.
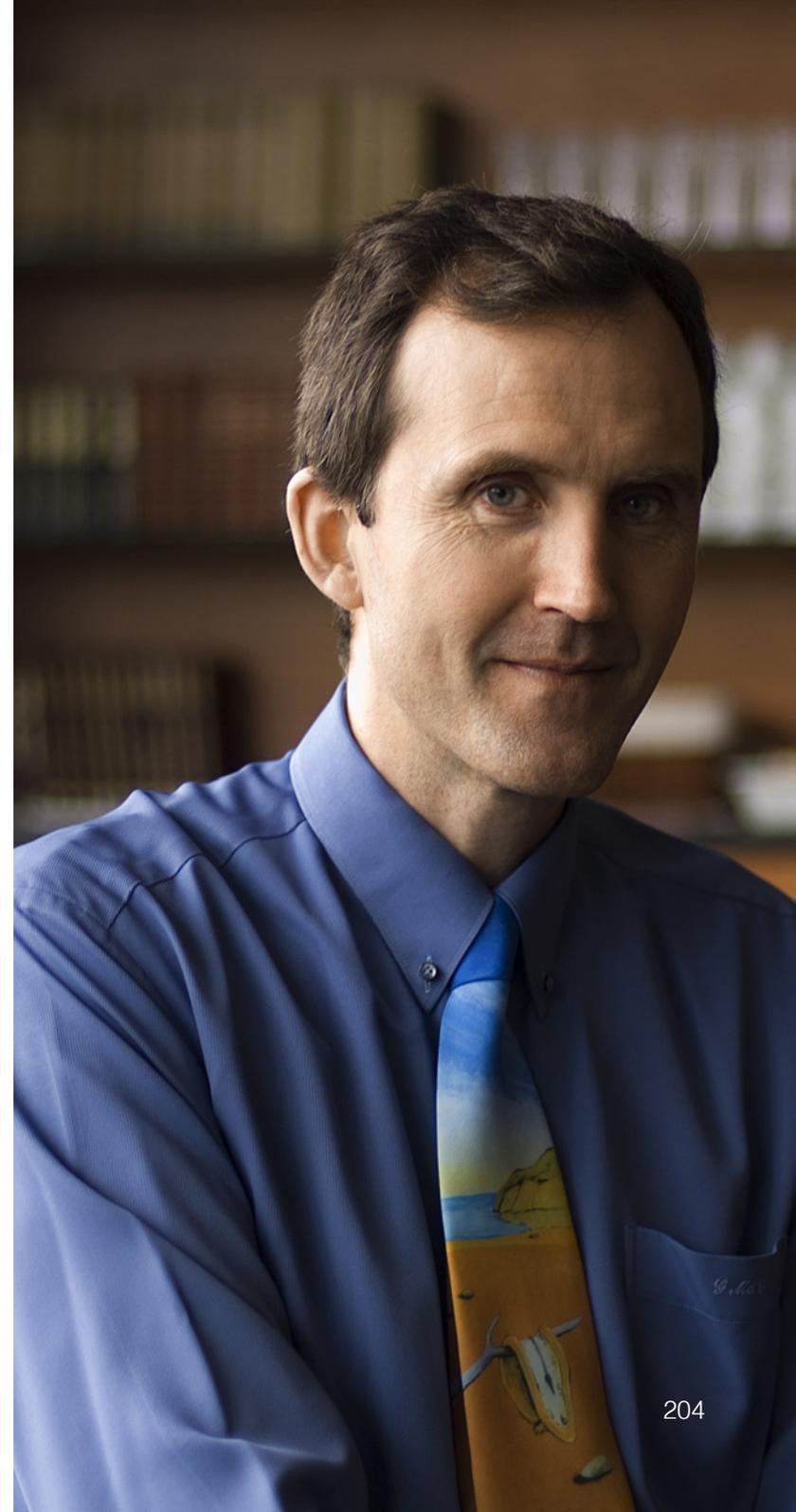
Most organizations only measure half of what's important. The inputs. The purchase and installation of a content management system is an input. It's measured as part of a project. Once the project is completed that is marked as a success. But as I have often seen, such software can make websites worse, as it allows many more employees to publish poor quality content with much greater ease. Very few organizations measure whether the content the content management system publishes is actually useful or not. That's an outcome.
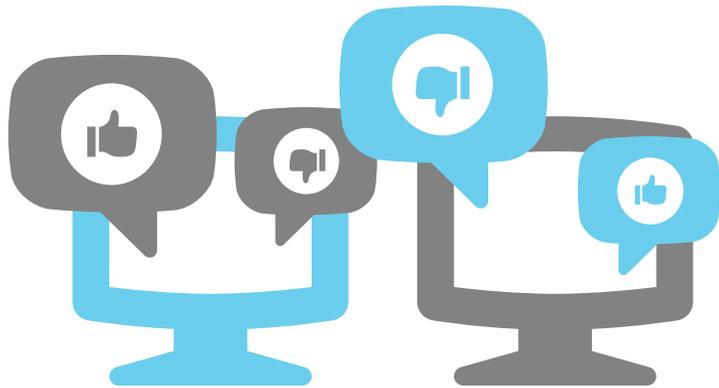
Website redesigns often focus on inputs. Another project. Change the graphical design. Project launched. Project success. But is it a success? What is the real outcome? Is it easier for customers to do things now? Very few organizations measure that.

We have a Cult of Volume when it comes to metrics. We reward people who add stuff. We rarely reward people who take stuff away. And yet at Customer Carewords we have found on numerous occasions that when you delete huge quantities of the content on a website, conversions go up and support requests go down. It's counterintuitive but it's true because the main message of the online world is that so much of what is out there is low quality and it just gets in the way of the good stuff.

One outcome that is measured when it comes to content is whether or not it has got attention. But that can often be a very problematic metric. Let's say you have a new product called Product X and you want to promote it. You start writing lots of content for it and really optimizing for search. The short term results look good as they result in increased visits to Product X pages. However, there can be hidden dangers.

Marketing tends to be about what is new rather than what we already have. How has this content marketing affected the ability of the customer to find the other products you offer? We do a lot of testing of customers where we observe their behavior as they use websites. If there's one thing we find again and again for organization after organization it's that most customers want to read as little as possible.

These impatient customers often end up on pages that are dominated by marketing content. They're trying to do basic things like get pricing, find out about installation, check up on security issues, understand about reliability, etc. Often, this basic content has been pushed down the page and the page looks cluttered. And what happens then? Customers get annoyed and confused and they scan quickly and then the hit the Back button—even though the information was there.

Let's go back to Product X and say that's six months later. On a daily basis people are now searching for Product X. But because there was so much content published on Product X, there are lots and lots of Product X pages coming back in the search results, and the actual homepage for the product is pushed down the results.

A proliferation of content on a product can result in a proliferation of search results, and a proliferation of links on the page. That's complexity.

How to get around this problem? We believe that the most important outcomes to measure are the customers' top tasks. In any environment, there are a small set of things that are really important to customers. We need to make sure that these tasks are easy to find and easy to do. This is where quality content really comes into its own.

One company we worked with deleted 90% of the content on its website. Sales went up by 100% It really focused on the top tasks of its customers. One of those top tasks it found was installation. Interestingly, when it made installation content more visible on its product pages that had a very big impact on increasing sales. Before customers made the decision to buy many of them wanted to find out what it really was like to install the product.

We need to take a more holistic view of quality content. Sometimes the most important content is largely ignored (support content). The structure of your online environment is content. Confusing menus and links are the number one reason for customers failing to complete their tasks. These links are made up of words. These words are content and can have a big impact on customers. For example, we once changed a link from "Find a dealer" to "Find a reseller". The results was a three-fold increase in inquiries to resellers/dealers.

Quality content is absolutely essential online. We measure quality content based on how it is consumed (its outcomes) in relation to the top tasks of customers. Is it helping customers do the most important things they came online to do or is it getting in the way?

Gerry McGovern

Gerry has published five books about the need for customer-centricity in the online world. His latest, The Stranger's Long Neck, focuses on how to identify and measure the top tasks of customers when they are online. He has spoken and consulted on website management in 35 countries. His company, Customer Carewords, specializes in helping large organizations (such as Microsoft, Cisco and VMware) make their online presence more successful by improving the performance of the top tasks of customers.

www.customercarewords.com

www.twitter.com/gerrymcgovern

gerry@customercarewords.com

Return to contents page

chapterthirty
Kristjan Hauksson

Content impact on a global scale

For some there is much ambiguity about what content marketing really is, but for me it is clear; it is all the content that leads to or supports a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Through the years (14) I have worked with hundreds of companies, supporting them in their local and global Internet Marketing efforts – and what they all have in common is content.

In the beginning this was content mainly situated on the client's website, but as external influence factors became clearer, this soon moved to other sites. As the rise of social magnified, other aspects linked to social started to kick in, but in the end it was all about content, interesting content.

But what is 'interesting'? I recently worked on a project with a footwear brand that worked in cooperation with a Formula One team. They created a video (content), starring one the drivers of the F1 team. They managed to strike funny content that was easily distributed and echoed, even by people who did not follow motor sports.

This content resulted in hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube within a few days, but not only that, there were also thousands of articles and blog posts, tweets, Facebook statuses, and so on regarding it. Fantastic results!

There was also a company that sells stainless steel furniture for veterinarians. Not very mainstream and not very "sexy" material. But it was a very focused niché that, if done well, could reach the target market with fair accuracy.

So through content, and in particular multilingual content, the idea was to influence those in the field of doctoring animals to come and visit their site and sign up for their mailing list (the KPI), which is what happened.

At the heart of all of this was good content. Content that influenced the right stakeholders; in the case of the footwear brand it was more as a branding exercise, whereas for the stainless steel company it was a focused approach.

So what do both of these have in common? The first stage was research, understanding the target audience and writing/creating content based on that. In both cases, the Forrester POST model was at the heart of that research.

People, objectives, strategy and technology.

So why this model? Firstly, the most common mistake I see marketers do is to choose the technology first. We have to be on Facebook, we have to use LinkedIn, we need to create a blog, etc.

But what if Facebook does not have any market share, or are there other social media networks that can be used with more efficiency?

This is why we always start with the people, the audience / stakeholders. We analyze the people we are aiming to get to, and from there we create the objectives.

The objectives need to be based on the target audience. What is the aim of the content used? This then leads to the strategy, and that part is vital as it shapes the end results. What is the plan? What is the bigger picture? Only at the final stage do we choose the technology. What technology suites are best to get the best end results?
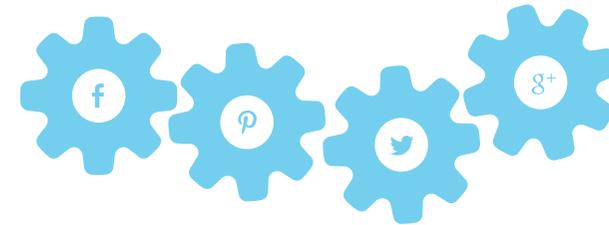
But the POST model is just the first step if you are going global. As soon as we go outside of our own markets we need to start thinking about the impact of culture, politics and other factors – sometimes called situation analysis.

Another common mistake that marketers do, and this is a tendency I see mainly with people coming from large countries like the USA, Germany, UK, etc., is generalizing.

Phrases such as "this is winning copy in our home market, it must work well in other countries too". In many cases, most of the people seeking advice need to be burned before they start to see the right path towards that market.

To those that are looking to enter into new markets where content is to play a role, I say conduct a situation analysis, make sure that you are prepared and that you understand the market. You do not have to speak the language, but if you can understand the market, then you can understand culture.

Here are a few samples:

German-speaking Austrians are not as likely to put as much emphasis on .DE sites as they do on .AT sites.

While in informational mode, Scandinavians are more open to using English, but as soon as they enter into transactional mode their local language kicks in.

Localize, don't just translate. There is a word for Mobile Phones in the German language. But the most used word for mobile phone is the slang term "handy".

The bottom line is that little nuggets like these can actually make or break the impact of your content in the targeted markets.

Kristjan Hauksson

Kristjan Mar Hauksson (@optimizeyourweb) is the founder of Nordic eMarketing and has worked as a consultant for Fortune Global 500 corporations, and small brands located in his home country, Iceland. Kristjan has also extensive experience working in online crisis management for government agencies, and has through his career worked with governments and/or their agencies in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia.

Kristjan specializes in multilingual Internet Marketing and is the co-author of the highly regarded book "Global Search Engine Marketing". His specialty is assisting companies in gaining international visibility through search engines and the holistic usage of the Internet as a global marketing medium. He co-wrote the first (and still the only) book about the topic of Internet Marketing in his home market and is the founder of the Iceland SEO/SEM forum, and sits on the board of directors at SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization). Kristjan is also on the advisory board for Bing Advertising.

He studied Electrical Technology with an emphasis on Electronics at Reykjavík Technical College (IS); he has a degree in Systems Analyzing from the Private School of Iceland Computer and Engineering (IS), an Internet Marketing degree from University of British Columbia (CA), and a degree in Global Marketing from Thunderbird University.

https://twitter.com/optimizeyourweb

http://is.linkedin.com/in/kristjanmarhauksson

http://www.nordicemarketing.com/

Return to contents page

Conclusion:

The future of digital marketing.

finalconclusion

Linkdex

The future is bright if you're marketing smarter content

I think we can all agree that the web is full of "OK content". Truly unremarkable digital noise that will fail to resonate and influence your audience.

What this eBook tells me is that if you can stop for a moment and plan something better - content that's smarter - you have something to market. Something that will say more about you, your business and your brand than any paid advertisement could achieve. You will have delighted your audience, inspired them to act and compelled them to share.

With the bar raised on the content we produce, send your thoughts to us at content@linkdex.com and together we can explore this new era for digital publishing and content marketing.

Linkdex

SUPERCHARGE
YOUR ORGANIC MARKETING

To maximize your digital ROI you need to integrate your Content, Search, Social and PR strategies and measure their impact.

**Grow
Organic Media**

**Publish
Smarter Content**

**Find Your
Influencers Fast**

**Manage Contacts
& Outreach**

**Rankings &
Multi-channel Analytics**

**Dashboards
& Reports**

Linkdex is the only platform that brings all of these areas together in one platform.
Breaking down the data silos and helping teams work together towards common goals.

Not only is the width and complexity of what Linkdex offers unrivaled, we
offer the depth specialist niche tools can provide. Unlocking the true power of integrated data.

creative commons

Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported (CC BY-ND 3.0)

This is a human-readable summary of the **Legal Code (the full license)**

Disclaimer

You are free:

    to Share — to copy, distribute and transmit the work to make commercial use of the work

Under the following conditions:

    Attribution — You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor
(but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

    Noncommercial — You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

    No Derivative Works — You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

With the understanding that:

    Waiver — Any of the above conditions can be **waived** if you get permission from the
copyright holder.

    Public Domain — Where the work or any of its elements is in the **public domain** under
applicable law, that status is in no way affected by the license.

Other Rights — In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:

•   Your fair dealing or **fair use** rights, or other applicable copyright exceptions and limitations;
•   The author's **moral** rights;
•   Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as **publicity** or privacy
    rights.

Notice — For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to
do this is with a link to this eBook.