

LEARNING MADE EASY



# Content Marketing

for  
**dummies**  
A Wiley Brand



Identify and understand  
your audience

Learn the three forms of  
content marketing

Optimize your content

**GETTING STARTED SERIES**

DUMMIES CUSTOM SOLUTIONS

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding content marketing
- » Discovering your audience
- » Learning how to think like a publisher
- » Establishing content marketing goals
- » Researching your competition

# Getting Started in Content Marketing

Content marketing encompasses all forms of content that add value to consumers, thereby directly or indirectly promoting a business, brand, products, or services. Content marketing occurs both online and offline, but the free and simple tools of the social Web have opened up the ability for companies of all sizes to compete alongside one another, not for market share but for voice and influence.

Marketing a business using content isn't a new concept; however, it has evolved in recent years to mean far more than creating a company brochure filled with overtly promotional messages and images. Today, content marketing focuses on creating content that is meaningful and useful to consumers with promotion taking a backseat to adding value, particularly adding value to the online conversation happening across the social Web.

To achieve success, companies need to engage consumers rather than interrupt them. Consider a pop-up ad appearing on a website today. It wasn't so long ago that pop-up ads were all the rage among marketers. Today, they're a sure-fire way to annoy customers and cause them to turn away from your brand. Rather than taking control of consumers' online experiences, businesses need to enhance those experiences, and they can do it with content that adds value and engages consumers.

# Defining the Three Forms of Content Marketing

Content marketing comes in three basic forms — long-form, short-form, and conversations. It's important to understand that content marketing is still a relatively new form of marketing, and no one knows the recipe for success. Only a few rules and some loose guidelines are available for businesses and marketers to follow. In fact, you're really limited only by your creativity and dedication. Truth be told, any content that you make publicly available online and offline could be considered a type of content marketing because all content is a reflection of your brand and business. Furthermore, all content opens up a potential talking point for consumers to consider, dissect, analyze, and debate.

The three forms of content marketing that you can create, publish, and share as part of your content marketing plan follow:

- » **Long-form content marketing:** Includes all published content that's longer than a few sentences and that offers deep value, such as blog posts, articles, ebooks, press releases, white papers, presentations, videos, podcasts, webinars, and so on.
- » **Short-form content marketing:** Includes all published content with no more than a few sentences and that communicates useful information, such as social updates, graphics, images, and so on.
- » **Conversations and sharing content marketing:** Can happen through conversations about published content and through the sharing of published content, such as blog comments, social updates, link sharing via social bookmarking, comments on videos and images, and so on.

The important thing to remember is that you're likely to see overlap between the three forms as well as overlap with social media and traditional online marketing efforts. That's a good thing! The best marketing plan is a fully integrated strategy where one piece connects to the next.

## Identifying Your Audience

Finding your audience is a fundamental step in building a business. Once you determine the customers you want to target, you need to then define ways to find those customers in order to provide them with meaningful advertising, promotions, and

so on — or in the case of content marketing, more useful and shareworthy content. The traditional way of taking this step is to segment your customers by focusing on similar demographic characteristics, such as age, income level, gender, and so on, and then to find similar people based on those demographics.

However, this approach is not necessarily the most effective way to segment and target customers in the world of the social Web. It's true that you need to know the primary demographic profiles of your best customer audiences and whether those profiles match sites where your audience might spend time; however, those factors aren't the only ones that matter — because the social Web can be analyzed using behaviors in addition to demographics. In fact, behavioral targeting is often more powerful than demographic targeting because, while using the Internet for researching, communicating, shopping, building relationships, and more, people don't necessarily reveal personal demographic information. Furthermore, the social Web is filled with people who participate in conversations and publish content anonymously or by using pseudonyms, so it can be very difficult to actually compile demographic information about these people.

Clearly, relying on demographic segmentation when building a content marketing strategy may lead your business down a path to failure. Instead, Internet users need to be segmented and targeted based on their online behaviors. What sites do they visit? What conversations do they join, and what do they say in those conversations? What content do they share with their own audiences? Those are just a few of the relevant questions marketers need to ask to understand their current and potential online audiences.

By continually evaluating customer behaviors and adjusting the marketing strategy to address those behaviors, marketers can help ensure they find the right customer and introduce the best content for that customer, in the right places, and at the right time.

The best content marketing strategies involve finding your audience and publishing the right kind of content to interest these people and add value to their lives. A combination of demographic and behavioral targeting is essential to creating a solid content marketing strategy.

A good way to start identifying your customer and their needs is by building a persona or buyer's profile. This type of exercise helps you narrow down your customer, identify their pain points, and decide what content you can create to best meet their needs. For instructions and a template to start building a persona, click *here*.

## Discovering what your audience wants and needs

If you're not delivering the type of content your target audience wants and needs, they won't read or view your content nor will they share it. In fact, they might ignore you or publish negative responses to your content. You don't want that to happen.

Just as you need to determine what your audience wants and needs from your products and services to develop effective advertising, you need to determine what your audience wants and needs from content.

To find out what your audience wants and needs from your content, you can start by listening. In fact, listening is one of the most important parts of any successful content marketing strategy. You need to constantly be listening to the online conversation so that you can modify your content marketing strategy as necessary. Consumers move quickly and change their minds even more quickly. If they find your content to be stale or outdated, they'll move on in search of another business or destination that offers the type of value-added information they want and need.

Ask your customers both in person and online what kind of information they want and need. Publish a poll on your blog using a tool like PollDaddy or SurveyMonkey, or pose the question on a forum or group you belong to where your target audience spends time. Additionally, pay attention to your own website and blog analytics to see what content is driving a lot of traffic, comments, and incoming links.



REMEMBER

Your focus should be on long-term growth and trends. There will always be a few audience members who are louder than others, and certain pieces of content might attract a lot of attention. It's up to you to find fluctuations that spell opportunities and weed out anomalies that won't drive business in the long run. Pursue the opportunities aggressively, and put the anomalous traffic spikes on the backburner.

## Shifting from a Marketer to a Publisher Mindset

One of the first things you must do in order to be successful with content marketing is to forget everything you know about marketing. That's a scary concept for many people. For years, businesses have been following marketing strategies based on interrupting consumers. For your content marketing efforts to work, you need to put the aggressive marketing mindset on the backburner and focus on writing and publishing shareworthy content.

Therefore, as you're creating content, do so with your audience in mind, not your business goals. Deliver the content your audience wants and needs and then promote that content separately through your social media interactions. Inevitably, your content and social media marketing activities will overlap, but your content should be able to stand on its own, separate from your social media marketing tactics.

## Applying the 80-20 rule

In marketing theory, the 80-20 rule states that 80 percent of business comes from 20 percent of the customers. I like to use a similar concept when it comes to content marketing and social media marketing. Remember, you have to think like a publisher to be successful with content marketing. If you apply the 80-20 rule to your content marketing efforts, 80 percent or more of the content you develop should *not* be self-promotional and 20 percent or less should be self-promotional. That means the vast majority of the time you spend on content marketing activities won't be directly related to marketing at all.

But hold on! Just because 80 percent of your efforts aren't directly self-promotional doesn't mean they're not indirectly marketing your business. In fact, it's indirect marketing that makes content marketing so powerful. Every piece of content you publish or share can add value to the online experience and further strengthen your relationship with your online audience of brand advocates who will talk about your content and share it with their own audiences. Don't think content that doesn't directly promote your business isn't helping drive revenues. It just takes time to see the results. These interactions are happening indirectly and often the effects are not immediately apparent.



## UNDERSTANDING CONTENT MARKETING ETIQUETTE AND AVOIDING TURN-OFFS

As a content marketer, you have to adhere to both written laws and the unwritten rules of etiquette and acceptable behavior. If you break those unwritten rules, you could destroy all of your chances at achieving content marketing or social media marketing success. To help you get started on the right foot, here are some of the most common content marketing turn-offs and etiquette violations:

**Too much self-promotion:** Stick to the 80-20 rule. If you spend too much time talking about yourself and self-promoting rather than engaging with other people, sharing their content, and adding value to the online conversation, people will start to ignore you or remove you from their radar screens entirely.

**Intentionally or accidentally spamming:** Don't participate in activities that can be labeled as spam. For example, don't leave comments on blog posts that include nothing but links back to your own site, and don't publish blog posts that are nothing more than an ad or marketing piece selling your products. Always try to add value and engage people, and you should be safe.

**Not attributing sources:** Don't publish content without giving a virtual hat tip to the source that gave you the story idea. For example, if you publish a blog post about a hot topic related to your business that you heard about from another blog or online source, link back to that source within your content. Doing so helps to build relationships and adds to your credibility.

**Not sounding human:** Content marketing should avoid corporate rhetoric and should never read like a corporate brochure. Instead, content marketing should sound more personable and closer in tone and style to social media marketing than formal communications. No one will want to connect with you and engage with you if you sound like you're reading from a corporate document.

**Not acknowledging people:** Part of content marketing includes engaging with the people who read or view your content and respond to it. Don't publish content and forget it. You need to be available to respond to comments, answer questions, and so on, or your content marketing efforts will die before they have a chance to drive any indirect or direct results to your business.

**Sending automated messages:** People are busy, and automated messages clutter inboxes and annoy recipients. For example, don't send an automated self-promotional message to everyone who follows you on Twitter telling them to check out your website, blog, Facebook Page, and so on. That's an easy way to make people regret following you.

The more time you spend publishing content and engaging with other people, the more you'll discover about your target audience. Always listen to what they have to say so that you can adjust your content marketing efforts to meet their wants and needs. They're your best source of information for current turn-offs and etiquette expectations. Pay attention and apply what you find out! What is acceptable today may not be tomorrow.

## Adding value, staying relevant, and being shareworthy

If you're following the 80-20 rule, you know that 80 percent of your content should add value to the online experience, particularly for your target audience. This is how you build relationships and set expectations for your target audience and among online influencers who can help to spread your messages even farther across the global Web community. You need to take the time to research what type of information, messages, and content your target audience wants from a business like yours, and then deliver that content in a professional manner.

In addition, you need to offer content that your audience will share with others. Traditional publishers use this strategy to create content that not only sells newspapers or magazines but also offers a pass-along value that may convert secondary readers into subscribers. The same concept holds true for content marketing today. The difference is that today anyone, including you, can be a content publisher and use that content to lead to bigger and better things, such as brand awareness, business growth, and sales.

Never has there been such an exciting opportunity for small and mid-size businesses to stake their claims and position themselves for success — because now it's not necessarily the depth of your wallet that leads to success through content marketing but rather the depth of your words. Content marketing enables businesses to continually meet customer expectations and to add something extra to the consumer experience that helps develop trust, security, and loyalty.

Content marketing offers the perfect way for businesses to leverage the three S's of Customer Loyalty:

- » **Stability:** Customers become loyal to a product, brand, or business when it sends a consistent message they can trust and rely on.
- » **Sustainability:** Customers become loyal to a product, brand, or business when they believe it will be with them for a long time or at least for a specific amount of time with a predetermined end.
- » **Security:** Customers become loyal to a product, brand, or business when it gives them a feeling of comfort or peace of mind.

As you can see, consumers actively look for products, brands, and businesses that they feel they can trust and that won't abandon them. They become emotionally involved in the products, brands, and businesses that help them feel a sense of comfort. A well-executed content marketing strategy can offer the stability, sustainability, and security that consumers seek, and it can help them develop an emotional connection and relationship with a product, brand, or business.



# Establishing Goals and Choosing the Best Forms of Content Marketing

As you develop your content marketing strategy, you need to do so with goals in mind. Since content marketing is very much a long-term marketing strategy, you must define where you want your business to be in the future. This strategy includes determining how much time you can devote to content marketing, the resources available to help you with your content marketing efforts, and the results you want to attain from those efforts.

However, you do need to approach content marketing realistically, or you won't be satisfied with your results. Remember, content marketing success comes in the form of long-term sustainable growth through brand building and relationship development, which lead to loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing. You can supplement your long-term strategy with short-term tactics such as discount promotions, contests, and so on, but the power of content marketing comes from the organic growth it creates.

With that in mind, you need to move forward with a highly focused content marketing plan. You can't be all things to all people. In fact, trying to spread yourself too thin will reduce your own content quality and confuse consumers. If you can't meet their expectations through your content, they'll leave you behind and find someone who can. The most powerful brands are highly focused brands with accessible content, so it makes sense that with all the clutter and competition for a share of voice online that optimized, niche-focused content can help you stake your claim in the online space. Your brand, online reputation, and business will benefit immensely if you take the time to choose a specific area of focus and optimize your content to ensure it can be found easily.

You also need to think about the types of content marketing you can realistically pursue given the amount of time and technical savvy they require. You'll want to consider the types of content your audience will best respond to as well, to ensure you make smart content choices that are an efficient and effective use of the time and resources available.

The best part about content marketing is that the tools of the social Web that enable you to publish content are fairly easy to use. If you can use word-processing software and an Internet browser, then you can use social Web tools.

Take some time to create accounts on the most popular sites that enable you to publish content such as WordPress.org for a blog, Facebook.com for social networking, and Twitter.com for microblogging. To choose which accounts are right for your business, first identify which tools you have the bandwidth to manage



## DON'T FORGET THE KEYWORDS

Before you begin creating and publishing content, take some time to identify what keywords and keyword phrases you need to focus on to optimize your content for your target audience. Drill down and find the specific keyword phrases that will drive traffic to your content — and that will help you avoid competing with larger organizations that have bigger budgets to spend on search engine optimization.

Following are several free and paid tools that can help you determine which keyword phrases to target in your content:

**Google AdWords Keyword Planner:** The free tool enables you to find out the popularity of keywords and see how certain ones might perform.

**Wordtracker:** To use Wordtracker, you have to pay a fee, but a free trial is available. If you're serious about keyword research, then Wordtracker is a good tool with a fairly reasonable price tag.

**Keyword Discovery:** Keyword Discovery is another tool for keyword research, but it also has a fee associated with it. A free trial is available, so you can give it a test drive before you pay anything. The results you'll get from Keyword Discovery are extensive and best for someone who really wants to drill down deep into keyword research.

**BrightEdge:** Although this is a pricey option, it provides a lot of great tools to help you achieve your content goals in addition to keyword optimization. One additional benefit is that it has enterprise options.



TIP

Search engine optimization is important, but don't let it take center stage. Your content is always the top priority. Make sure what you say is the cornerstone of your content marketing efforts. For the best chance of getting people to engage with and share your content, you need to be genuine and make sure the content you create is always meaningful, relevant, and useful to your customers.

effectively, where your target audience is most engaged, and what sites will be valuable for the long-term, and begin to define your marketing strategies using those tools as your top branded online destinations. Before you announce that you're joining the social Web or start reaching out to other people online, play around with the features and start publishing content to build up an archive of amazing content.

Next, it's time to develop goals. Your content marketing goals need to be realistic and measurable. For example, you might create a goal to develop three viable branded online destinations within the next three months, or you might create a goal to attract 1,000 quality Twitter followers over the next six months. These are both good goals, but make sure that you also identify what you will measure to prove if these strategies are effective, for instance what determines a viable destination or a quality follower. This could include traffic metrics that show the viability of a site or interactions details that prove the quality of a follower.

Make sure your content marketing goals are always based on quality, not quantity because if you publish quality content and focus on developing quality audiences, quantity will come organically in time. In other words, your content marketing strategy is successful when the compounding effect begins to truly work for you and you see your numbers growing simply because your content and conversations are meeting customer expectations.



REMEMBER

Quality content and relationships help you increase your sphere of influence in the online space, which is a valuable intangible business asset.

## Knowing Your Competition

You'll find it very difficult to achieve higher levels of business success if you don't know what your competitors are doing. In order to develop your content marketing strategy, you need to know your competition as well as you know yourself. Researching your competition allows you to react appropriately to their content marketing tactics and even to anticipate some of those potential tactics. In other words, by knowing your competition, you can more effectively position your business in the minds of consumers and meet their needs and expectations. More specifically, competitive research enables you to find and exploit your competitors' weaknesses, position your brand as a brand of choice, establish your unique niche, and differentiate your business from other businesses.



REMEMBER

Don't be tempted to assume that you already know everything about your competitors from years of experience. The social Web is a completely different space, and what worked offline through traditional marketing strategies and tactics is unlikely to work as effectively online. Consumers are actively looking for information. Give it to them, and know what your competition is doing so you can give consumers the information they're actively seeking better than your competition does.

# Finding your competition online and monitoring their activities

The first step to researching your competitors is finding them across the social Web. However, you need to analyze more than your competitors' websites. Fortunately, a variety of tools are available to help you find your competition online. When you find your competitors, you need to analyze what they're doing on their branded online destinations as well as on sites they don't own but simply maintain a presence on.

Following are a number of methods and tools you can use to conduct your competitive online research:

- » **Google Alerts:** Set up Google Alerts to send you alerts for your competitors' names.
- » **Social Media:** Follow your competitor's social media accounts, where you can receive their tweets and updates.
- » **LinkedIn:** Follow your competitors' profiles on LinkedIn and read their updates. If you know the names of your competitors' executives or employees, you can search for them on LinkedIn using the search tool. Note that you can't view a private profile unless you're connected with that person.
- » **On-site searches:** Visit your competitors' websites and blogs and look for links to other online profiles or branded destinations such as YouTube channels, Flickr profiles, and so on. Companies that are implementing a social media marketing or content marketing plan should have links to their various branded online destinations prominently displayed on their websites and blogs.



TIP

As you find your competitors' online destinations and conversations, analyze them to discover what kind of content your competitors are publishing. Can you find any gaps or any opportunities to “borrow” a share of voice or to offer content that your target audience isn't already getting from your competitors? Is there a way to repackage the type of information they're publishing to make it more useful and interesting to consumers? What content are your competitors publishing that sparks conversations or sharing? Your findings can help you determine what kind of content to create and where to publish it.

## Finding gaps and opportunities

As you monitor ongoing conversations within your target audience, as well as your competitors' involvement in those conversations and related content, look for opportunities to fill gaps and offer something different or offer similar information in a better way. In other words, don't market scared. Just because your competitors are publishing a specific type of content in a specific way doesn't mean those strategies or tactics are right for you and your audience. However, knowing what those strategies and tactics are can help you differentiate your business or better position your brand as the brand of choice.

Just as each piece of content that you publish becomes part of the larger compounding effect that can deliver long-term sustainable growth to your business, so do your research and analysis efforts. Altogether, your activities will enable you to drive organic buzz about your business that can be far more powerful than a simple banner ad.

Try to think out-of-the-box and come up with new ways to offer content that your audience wants and needs. For example, if you sell customized gift baskets online, allow consumers to view those baskets through online video so that they can see exactly what their money will buy and make changes on demand. This visual approach provides a creative way to add a tangible element to an online buying process. A business that once could thrive only offline can now thrive online, thanks to creative content marketing and communications via the user-generated content of the social Web.

If you own a business that can help customers by offering step-by-step tutorials, don't just provide in-person training classes or instruction manuals. Instead, add a content marketing aspect by offering webinars or screencast tutorials. You can even turn tutorials into videos that can be shared across the social Web to broaden the reach of your content and indirectly market your business.

By offering useful information to consumers, you build a relationship with them based on appreciation and trust. In this way, you can deliver positive word-of-mouth marketing as well as tangible results to your business for years to come.

To get more tips on how you can expand your marketing efforts, visit [dummies.biz](http://dummies.biz) and check out our ***Getting Started marketing series***. This series includes ebooks highlighting the basics behind several popular marketing methods and a guide to help you bring these tactics together into an integrated marketing campaign.

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