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# THE knowledge

Navigating the modern B2B marketing landscape

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THE  
CONTENT  
ISSUE

# EDITOR'S NOTE



**Firstly, Happy New Year! I'm delighted to kick off 2020 with this year's first issue of The Knowledge, which shines a light on content.**

Content is the building block of any successful marketing campaign. It's also constantly evolving, bringing new and exciting ways to capture the interests of relevant audiences the world over. Gone are the days when one lonely press release carried the weight of unfair expectations and marked the height of sophistication. The marketing industry is starting to recognise that content is a holistic organism – the once siloed pieces are working together as one to survive and thrive in a competitive landscape not unlike a battlefield.

B2B marketers now have the opportunity to harness the knowledge and tools at their disposal and leverage content to create strategies that provide meaningful results.

Ultimately, businesses need to adapt to focus on quality over quantity and create content that supports every stage of today's non-linear customer journey.

**Francesca MacKenzie**  
**Editor**





Content marketing is  
the only marketing left.

**Seth Godin**

# EXPERIENCE IS KING

**The production and distribution of content has been ingrained into what we do as marketing professionals from the word go. After all, what is marketing but using words and pictures to convince and entice? What are words and pictures but content?**

Content marketing is therefore not a new concept – far from it. But what is new is our understanding of it: we're finally figuring out how to centralise content strategy, management and creation within our organisations, and why that matters. In traditional B2B spaces with long-established ways of working, this change has been a long time coming and will always be a process. But when content is so intrinsic to marketing across the board, it is only a matter of time before content-centred thinking becomes the norm.

Ten years ago, content was recognised as siloed bits and pieces. A press release here, a newsletter there. Then, content slowly evolved into blog posts and white papers, tweets and infographics. The types of content at our disposal have multiplied and become more sophisticated, but many of us still think of them as separate entities that will somehow add up to more than the sum of their parts. If you're writing white papers, guest blog posts, Instagram captions and all the rest, then that's your content strategy all done, right?

Well, not quite. When it comes to content marketing, actual content creation doesn't start until fairly late on in the process. Before B2B marketers can even think about putting pen to paper (or finger to 'record' button), they must ensure that they're armed with a carefully considered, integrated content strategy that makes all the effort worthwhile.

When content marketing is done right, it creates an end-to-end experience for the customer, much like a UX or CX experience, but with arguably more moving parts to manage and more lateral thinking required to bring the experience to life. Within an optimised content experience, each piece of content is useful as a standalone item but is also connected, working as part of a whole to guide a buyer sequentially through the stages of their journey, no matter how complex or unique that journey may be.



A person's hands are visible at the bottom, holding a smartphone. The background is a dark, out-of-focus scene with numerous colorful bokeh lights in shades of red, green, and blue, suggesting a night cityscape or a festive event.

**Exceptional  
customer  
experiences  
are the only  
sustainable  
platform for  
competitive  
differentiation.**

**Kerry Bodine**

# WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS, OPEN THE DOOR

**Research from SEMrush indicates that “content marketing B2B” is currently the third-most expensive content marketing-related keyword to bid on.<sup>1</sup> Content marketing is a hot topic in B2B spaces, even the most monolithic ones: “Storytelling” has been picked out as one of the Top Trends for 2020 by Innova Market Insights, which offers insights and reporting for the heavyweights of the B2B food and beverage industry.<sup>2</sup>**

Clearly, content marketing is a growing opportunity which many B2B marketing professionals are already capitalising on. But this is the moment when we must ask ourselves, are we doing enough right to truly maximise content’s potential?

Consider this: according to research from LinkedIn and the Content Marketing Institute, B2B buyers would say it’s their responsibility to self-educate on potential solutions before even talking to a sales representative: only 12% want to meet in person, while 71% would prefer to conduct their own research wherever possible.<sup>3</sup> However, a different study from the Content Marketing Institute indicated that in-person events offer B2B marketers the highest chances for securing and converting leads.<sup>4</sup> So even though B2B buyers don’t want to be there, in-person events are where they convert the most. What’s wrong with this picture?

Marketing professionals are missing an opportunity to optimise the customer’s content experience. CMI’s research further suggests that most B2B marketers are using their budgets to achieve top-of-funnel goals: 75% prioritise generating more quality leads and 71% would like to attract more traffic. Meanwhile, only 56% are concerned with improving brand reputation and a mere 45% would like to improve customer engagement and loyalty.<sup>5</sup> These priorities reveal that many of us are looking at the problem backwards: improving engagement and loyalty through measures like reputation management is one of the most effective ways to attract new quality leads and traffic, and to keep doing so over time.

1. SEMrush, The State of Content Marketing 2019 Global Report

2. Food Ingredients First, “Storytelling: Winning with Words” leads Innova Market Insights’ Top Trends for 2020, <https://www.foodingredientsfirst.com/news/storytelling-winning-with-words-leads-innova-market-insights-top-trends-for-2020.html>


3. LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, Content Marketing: Unlocking Sales and Marketing Performance, <https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/content-marketing/unlocking-sales-and-marketing-performance/3qc>

4. Content Marketing Institute, 2020 B2B Content Marketing: What the Successful Do, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2019/10/success-differentiators-b2b-research/>

5. Ibid.

6. INFLUENCE, The power of earned media on the technology sales cycle, <https://influenceonline.co.uk/2019/04/16/the-power-of-earned-media-on-the-technology-sales-cycle/>





ACCORDING  
TO RESEARCH FROM  
THE CMO COUNCIL  
**9 OUT OF 10**  
**B2B BUYERS**  
STATE THAT  
ONLINE CONTENT  
**HAS A**  
MAJOR EFFECT  
ON THEIR  
PURCHASING  
DECISIONS.<sup>6</sup>




# GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

**It's not easy to deliver a content campaign that's effective over the long term. It takes drive, determination and consistent effort, because it's all too easy to lose momentum. This is where B2B marketers need to be patient: it can take years to see sustained uplift across metrics. Even the most optimistic might find themselves staring down a blank page, wondering if it's really worth writing yet another piece of content which few people will read.**

Not to mention, the competition for attention is fierce in B2B spaces. Buyers are inundated with so much content on a daily basis that they're forced to be selective. B2B marketers may begin to wonder, "how can we maximise engagement as early on as possible, so we don't need to rely on more content to push a lead through the funnel?". It's this mindset that can misdirect B2B marketers and can again lead to an over-reliance on top-of-funnel content.

Instead, B2B marketing professionals should focus on quality content over quantity, designed to support every stage of the customer journey. This is what forms the foundation of a truly integrated approach to content marketing.

Does all your organisation's content perform equally well? Of course it doesn't. In many cases, only a small portion of content generates the lion's share of traffic and engagement for a given brand. That's why B2B marketers should avoid churning out reams of content and instead focus their efforts on creating fewer pieces of higher quality, and then distributing those pieces effectively. It might well be more worthwhile to then repurpose those key pieces of content and redistribute them over time than to invest in creating new-but-similar content.

A woman with blonde hair is sitting at a yellow-topped diner table with a brown vinyl booth. She is holding a blue cup and looking towards the camera. The wall behind her is covered in wallpaper with a repeating pattern of palm trees. Two framed pictures hang on the wall: one of a landscape with a sunset and another of a still life with flowers. A single spherical pendant light hangs from the ceiling. The floor is made of large, light-colored tiles.

**Content marketing is  
really like a first date.  
If all you do is talk  
about yourself, there  
won't be a second date.**

**David Beebe**

# AUDIENCE FIRST, BRAND SECOND

**What makes for a great date? Or, what makes for a great piece of content? Here are three points to consider:**

- **Keep it relevant and useful.**

This one is a no-brainer. B2B content consumers are not looking for products – they’re looking for solutions to their problems. Keep your audience at the heart of your content by always considering what their problems and needs are, first and foremost. This will give you the authentic, emotive driver you need to make a connection.

- **Establish your credibility.**

B2B buyers seek relationships built on trust. To win trust, you need to demonstrate expertise and authority. Use content to position yourself as a thought leader within a key niche that matters to your buyers. Your content should be accurate, well-researched, in-depth and insightful in order to have an impact. If you want to be seen as authentic, it’s crucial to offer content that’s not always tied to blatant promotion but has intrinsic value on its own.

- **Stay connected and consistent.**

Ensure that your content expresses the same key beliefs and values across the board, so every individual piece is always on-brand. But make sure you’re not just rewriting the same piece over and over again. Instead, create connections between content pieces through the reiteration of the biggest-picture ideas, consistent tone of voice and design, and sequential positioning of content pieces along a customer journey.

For a shining example of B2B content done right, look no further than The Txchnologist by GE. This online magazine offers a wealth of fascinating reports on science and technology news and innovation, most of which is only tangentially related to GE’s own product offering. GE’s branding is minimal across the magazine, which is powered by the Tumblr social media platform. This savvy move gives The Txchnologist posts the look and feel of Tumblr posts, which are a familiar source of fun and learning for many content consumers, particularly growing numbers of millennials and Gen Z. What GE ends up with is high quality, high value content that always keeps audience preferences in mind.



# DATA DOES IT

**Now we've looked at the broader values that drive good content, we need to get a little more granular. It's time for data to do the talking. Before B2B marketers can offer the right kind of content to a receptive audience, they need to have a deep understanding of that audience – not only what motivates and inspires them, but also how they behave from moment to moment and click to click. Oh wait, did we say audience? We meant audiences, plural.**

It's vital to segment audiences into reader personas, which are similar to buyer personas. According to CMI's 2020 report, so far only one in three B2B marketers focus on improving the quality of their data for audience segmentation.<sup>7</sup> Without fully optimised data, there is a risk of misunderstanding an audience, missing some of them entirely, or lacking the insight to personalise content efforts most effectively.

Instead, why not wade into the data? Craft reader personas based on everything from basic demographic information right through to the topics that readers are interested in. A variety of data sources should be included in any analysis, from first-party intent data that tracks behaviour on owned channels to third-party intent data that tracks searches on external websites. It's also important to know which formats and devices specific reader groups prefer.

At first, there's an opportunity to discover unexplored segments or unaddressed topics which can boost a content strategy immediately for a quick win. But the bigger reward is in creating a more sensitive, relevant and responsive content strategy which speaks to new, returning and former buyers in a way that resonates with them over a long period of time.

Data provides B2B marketers with an opportunity to deliver dynamic personalisation, so that different visitors to a website can land on different content pages, based on their reader persona. Dynamic personalisation, enabled by the latest tech tools, can customise every interaction a visitor has on a website, which can be followed up by tailored emails and intelligent pop-ups. A highly personalised approach like this is of course rooted in Account Based Marketing (ABM) principles. ABM-oriented marketers are primed to take the lead in developing integrated content strategies, because of the inherent need for holistic campaign alignment which they are already addressing in their day-to-day activities.



**It is a  
capital  
mistake  
to theorise  
before one  
has data.**

**Sherlock Holmes**

# COOL STORY, BRO

**Data provides insight, which forms the basis of strategy. Then comes the need for actual content creation. How do businesses leverage data to create compelling content that's both effective and engaging? This is where storytelling comes in. Good storytelling techniques are essential for crafting authentic, captivating narratives that help customers to understand the 'why' of a brand and its products, and to see the clear differentiation of the company's value proposition.**

We won't get into the 'how' of great storytelling – we've already done that, in a previous issue. But, at this juncture, it's important simply to note that the way we consume media is changing. People are now keenly aware of when they're being advertised to, and they don't like it. There is a far greater need for content which informs and entertains, which is why longer-format content pieces often hold more value than brash, commanding advert campaigns. Advertorial content is becoming much more popular, as seen at American Express. The financial giant has recently commissioned a series of advertorials in UK newspaper The Independent. These pieces are positioned as 'how to' guides for small business owners and are by-lined as if written by a journalist.

Very long format pieces are now also entering the spotlight. According to SEMrush, long reads of 3000+ words get 3x more traffic, 2x more shares and 3.5x more backlinks than articles of average length.<sup>8</sup> This is likely due to the perceived value which longer content pieces deliver, compared to bite-sized blog posts.





# START YOUR CONTENT JOURNEY NOW

**There's no time to waste. Here are  
8 key tips to get you on your way:**

## **1. Have an aligned, integrated content strategy**

Research from CMI shows that a documented content marketing strategy is a key indicator of future success.<sup>9</sup> Having a holistic strategy that's aligned across your marketing function enables you to curate content and avoid repetitive or inharmonious assets. It also allows you to improve existing content and tailor it to meet the needs of different teams. Further research from CMI and LinkedIn shows that 81% of marketers in highly aligned companies collaborate with sales in using content, while only 25% of low aligned companies do.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Get the right team in place**

A good writer should only be one cog in a well-oiled content machine. You can't create great content without editors, graphic designers, AV teams and kit, SEO support, media relations professionals and analytics experts. Right now, 35% of B2B marketing teams have 2-5 members, while 32% have no full-time content person.<sup>11</sup> As the content landscape continues to evolve, those without the manpower will soon be left behind.

## **3. Craft the right tone of voice**

No matter what types of content you publish, it's essential that you tell your stories in your own, unique brand voice. Take some time to consider what this should sound like and its key attributes. Is it more casual or more formal? Which values does it attempt to convey? Putting in the effort to shape the tone from the start is what prevents your content for joining the vast, forgettable hordes that already exist online.

9. Content Marketing Institute, 2020 B2B Content Marketing: What the Successful Do, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2019/10/success-differentiators-b2b-research/>

10. LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, Content Marketing: Unlocking Sales and Marketing Performance, <https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/content-marketing/unlocking-sales-and-marketing-performance/3qc>

11. Content Marketing Institute, 2020 B2B Content Marketing: What the Successful Do, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2019/10/success-differentiators-b2b-research/>

#### **4. Assemble your toolkit**

Martech has come a long way, and there are now plenty of tools out there that can help you do content better and eliminate some of the pain points along the way. Tools like BuzzSumo and AnswerThePublic can help you generate ideas to write about, while sales enablement tools, like Showpad, can help you collate content in a way that's useful for salespeople out in the field. And those are just a few examples.

#### **5. Create a content calendar**

It's always useful to visually map out your content distribution plan, so you can see at a glance what topics and types of content are being leveraged when, and rearrange them with ease. Content calendars provide a much-needed structural framework which can nevertheless be flexible enough to accommodate news and trends on an ad-hoc basis.

#### **6. Repurpose what you already have**

Audit your existing content. Identify what needs updating and what could be transformed into another format. Could you pull together a visually engaging infographic from that technical white paper to share on social? Does that hero piece of longform content break down into blog posts that are easier to digest, with a narrower focus? According to SEMrush, 51% of content marketers think that updating and repurposing existing content is the most efficient content marketing tactic they tried in 2019.<sup>12</sup>


#### **7. Leverage diverse content formats**

Think beyond the blog post, the white paper and the press release. Potential content formats are many and varied these days, from webinars and live streams to podcasts and polls. Such formats can offer high-quality, cost-effective alternatives which offer greater opportunities for engagement and better positioning.

#### **8. Future-proof your content strategy**

Always keep in mind what's coming next for content. If you can position yourself now as the best provider in an as-yet-untapped channel, you'll be streets ahead when the competition finally catches up. Spaces such as voice search and platforms such as YouTube are creating new opportunities to play, where trial and error is still essential for progress.



A black and white photograph of three darts. The central dart is in sharp focus, pointing downwards. It has a light-colored, two-toned flight and a silver-colored barrel with a black tip. Two other darts are partially visible on the left and right edges of the frame, slightly out of focus. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

There are *three objectives* for content marketing: reach, engagement, conversion. Define key metrics for each." **Michael Brenner**

# IS IT WORKING?

**It's all very well to create a great piece of content based on insight and distributed over relevant channels to reach the right people. Any content marketer who's doing all that might be tempted to pat themselves on the back. But hold on a second! Last but not least, it's essential to track and measure the success of content, in order to affirm ROI.**

As the team at Honda have learned, measuring ROI requires different metrics for different types of content at each stage of the customer journey.<sup>13</sup> And as CMI's research reveals, 80% of B2B marketers use metrics to measure content performance, 65% have established KPIs and only 43% measure content marketing ROI. Clearly, if ROI cannot accurately be measured, then complete metrics are not yet in place.

Basic metric considerations should include the likes of traffic, organic search rankings, scroll depth, levels of social engagement and so on. There is, however, a risk of staying too basic. These days, it's not enough to measure how many likes a social post received, for example. What B2B marketers really need to know is where those likes come from and how many of them align with specific pre-developed reader and buyer personas.

In larger, more traditionalist B2B organisations, it's the content marketer's role to move the C-Suite away from these old school metrics by showing the power advanced data truly holds. With the right analytics and measurement, B2B marketers can prove to their teams that content marketing builds a subscriber base, attracts and nurtures qualified leads and generates profitable sales, including post-purchase sales.

BDB's Senior Content Manager, Azra Ahmed, believes that content analysis is most meaningful when testing and optimising are a standard part of the process:

*"B2B marketers can take advantage of social platforms like Twitter, where organic reach is still possible, to 'audition' content ideas, testing which topics drive shares and engagement. These learnings can then be used to develop longer form pieces of thought-leadership content which can be distributed through measurable channels.*

*And then, of course, highly optimised landing pages are essential destinations for any content journey. A/B testing can help B2B marketers identify what resonates with their visitors and craft landing page content that truly drives conversion."*

13. Festival of Marketing, What's hot and what's not: Making your content strategy agile to stay ahead of trends, [https://www.festivalofmarketing.com/2019-sessions?utm\\_source=InternalEmail&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_content=FOM20EM2&utm\\_campaign=FOM20](https://www.festivalofmarketing.com/2019-sessions?utm_source=InternalEmail&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=FOM20EM2&utm_campaign=FOM20)





If you can't measure it,  
you can't improve it. **Peter Drucker**



# JOURNEYS IN EVERY DIRECTION

**The customer journey is no longer linear, and content marketing is no longer achieved piece by piece. In 2020, content experiences must guide and follow customers in the spaces where they are most comfortable, reaching out to them with precisely the message which will resonate in any given moment.**

Historically, content marketers have tried to force customers into linear journeys from email to website to checkout, but this isn't working. It's vital to put control into the hands of customers and position content in non-linear pathways, where customers will stumble across them at their own leisure. And it can't just be any old content. B2B marketers must provide useful content that is accessible in varied, intuitive formats.

Change remains the only constant that B2B marketers can rely on. Content marketing is evolving just as rapidly as the technology which enables it and the buyer aspirations it seeks to fulfil. The only route to success is to adapt and evolve alongside it. B2B marketing professionals must always seek to try new things, engage with new trends and throw out old, inefficient ways of working. Developing an integrated content strategy is a vital part of becoming truly integrated and agile across every organisation. More and more, keeping integration and alignment at the heart of strategy is proving the key to success for B2B marketers working across departments and diverse markets.



# EVOLVE

