



Curated Content

A Marketing Brief

Introduction

If you follow Volacci on social media or talk to us more than once in a blue moon, you've probably heard us mention content curation. Curating content is a great marketing tool, and one that's rapidly catching on. In this marketing brief, I am going to cover what content curation is, why we should include content curation in our digital marketing strategy, and one of the strategies we use to curate content at Volacci.

What is content curation?

You can't curate content if you don't know what it means to do so. So, as someone who curates content all day, the absolute simplest definition I can provide you with is this: **Content curation means writing articles about articles.**

You come into contact with curated content dozens of times a day. If you've ever read something on the Huffington Post, Lifehacker, Mashable, or even glanced at twitter, you've come into contact with curated content. If you've ever come across an article and sent it to your coworkers with a quick synopsis, congratulations! You've curated content.

But that definition is, in some senses, a little oversimplified. Curated content isn't just rehashing the same information over and over again. If you can, provide a unique spin: the point is to share and provide valuable news and perspectives on that news to your industry colleagues and to your clients. Curated content brings value back to your company by positioning your employees as thought leaders. We can now redefine the act of content curation as finding relevant industry articles and writing about them in a way that adds your own perspective.



News in every industry has an ebb and flow: one day, only one blog may post one piece of relevant content, and the next day, twenty news sources may mention something your readers would be interested in. One of the key components of curating, therefore, is distilling the sometimes-erratic release of news into a steady flow of easily-digestible information for your readers. So, our definition of curated content can be expanded again to regularly finding relevant industry articles and writing about them in a way that adds your own perspective on a reliable basis.

Finding relevant content doesn't mean just using listening tools like Google Alerts, but actively looking for news that may have passed under both my radar and my readers' radars. But just finding content isn't enough-- you have to distribute it. Share the content on your website and always, always include the accreditation link to original content. You don't want to plagiarize, and besides, linking back to the source is good manners and good SEO.

In light of all this information, I'm going to amend my original definition of what content curation is into a nice little four part statement:

Content curation is:

- 1. regularly finding relevant articles, news features, or blog posts;**
- 2. writing your own content that offers your own perspective those articles, news features, or blog posts; and**
- 3. sharing that content, with a link to the source article, on your website;**
- 4. and doing so consistently.**

Why should we curate content?

There are three areas of benefit when it comes to content curation: your customers, your brand, and your SEO.

1. Customers benefit from curated content

I listed this benefit first because it's the most important component of curated content. The focus of every curated piece should be on providing benefit to your audience. If this is not the main object, curating content will be detrimental.



How can it hurt? Here's the skinny: Not only will you lose your audience's interest, but you'll be penalized for doing so. Google and other search engines have advanced algorithms that evaluate your content, so if your content is boring and alienates your readers, not only will you lose your audience, but your site won't even rank on the SERPs. Talk about detriment.

Regularly publishing content on your website builds client trust in your brand's vitality. You're active, you're alert to the goings-on in your industry... so you'll probably be very aware of your

clients and their needs as well. It's good business to curate content: it shows that you're thoughtful, intentional, and most importantly passionate about what you do.

Curated content is important to your clients because it educates them. As a consumer, **I'm much more likely to trust the brand that provides me with the information to educate myself** not only about their product, but about their industry. Curated content goes a long way towards building relationships with your customers while requiring a very small amount of effort on the part of your brand.

2. Your brand benefits from curating content

Knowledge-sharing builds awareness of your brand with leads, customers, colleagues, and within your industry. Having good relationships with your industry colleagues is important to the ultimate success of your business as well. **Sharing information between colleagues-- and yes, even competitors occasionally-- is key to growth.** Posting great, informative content that sparks your colleagues' interest encourages sharing of that content, raising the visibility of your brand and positioning you as a thought leader.

Successful businesses lay claim to thought leadership within their industry. When they speak, people listen. And if you're a heavyweight thinker in your industry, your products or services will be recognized as highly effective.

Furthermore, curating content has a much more direct impact on your business: whoever curates the content is going to learn a lot about what's going on in the industry, oftentimes to the point that they can spot trends and new developments well before they arrive. Sifting through the sheer quantity of information that is a required part of curating content means that very little happens in your industry that you don't know about. What company doesn't want someone with that kind of knowledge on their staff?

3. SEO increases with more content

When I started at Volacci, I knew exactly nothing about SEO. I was brought on to do content, and I existed in my happy little content bubble, churning out curated posts, until one day one of my coworkers poked his head out of his office with good news.

I'd been curating two pieces of content a day for a client for a little over a month, and since we began posting that content-- no other changes had been made to the site-- traffic had increased by more than 26%.

As it turns out, **having websites with a lot of high-quality content will knock your SEO out of the park.** Google requires websites to meet its content freshness requirements, so if you're posting fresh content that includes a date and authorship info, as well as keyword-rich links to your site's most important pages, that's all going to contribute to bringing in more traffic. Additionally, posting fresh content makes it shareable, so you can promote it via social media and get a steady stream of traffic coming in from that, too.

So, to recap, curating content is important because:

- It builds trust with your customers
- It shows how engaged and thoughtful you are
- It provides knowledge to your audience

It promotes brand relevance
It builds industry credibility
It dramatically improves your SEO

Start Curating Content

Maybe you're chomping at the bit to get started curating content for your company, or maybe you just want to see if it's something that you can do. While curating content is as simple as finding an article, writing about it, and posting your new article to your webpage, there are several tools and considerations you need to consider.

1. Where will your content go?

Before you begin curating content, make sure that your website has the infrastructure to support it. This could range from posting your content in the blog under the #curatedcontent tag, creating an entirely new content type for your curated content in Drupal, or attaching a WordPress installation to your site. Figure out where the content is going to go before you start creating it. If you need to show what curated content would look like to your boss before you get started, I recommend creating a blog (WordPress works great for this) and curating a few sample pieces. This will also give you an idea of how much time it will take you to curate content. (Though the process is slow and challenging at first, don't worry-- it gets easier.)



If you only want to curate your content socially (meaning you don't want to host the content on your website), check out Paper.li or Scoop.it. Both are widely used platforms for curating content and cultivating thought leadership.

Once you've figured out where your content will go, it's time to move on to the next step:

2. Find your content

There are a variety of great listening tools that can be used for curating content. When I first designed Volacci's content curation program, I explored a number of paid and free options. Here's what I came across:

- Scoop.it: DIY instant news magazine, distributed socially
- Paper.li: DIY instant news magazine, distributed socially
- Storify: Curate posts from Twitter, other social platforms into larger articles.
- Jugnoo: A social CRM management platform.
- Scribit: Reposting and curating premium articles directly to your website.
- Xydo: Thought leader tracker and content curation tool
- Intigi: Content aggregator and curation tool

- Chill: Video curation with up and down voting, much like Digg or Reddit
- Flocker: DIY instant news magazine, distributed socially
- LOUD3R: DIY instant news magazine, distributed socially
- Qrait: Realtime curation platform that allows you to curate from anywhere on the web.

3. Offer your own perspective

You've found a suitable piece of content-- perhaps one that's very informative, or very thought provoking. So now it's time to curate. Write about the article-- summarize it, offer your own perspective on why it was interesting, or wrong, or whatever sort of unique viewpoint you have to offer and add to the original content. A number of curated pieces I've seen follow a fairly simple four-paragraph style. This is a much more basic method than the one Volacci uses for curation, but if you're looking to start a regular, reliable content curation program, this is a good formula to help you get the hang of curating:

Article Title

Introduction-- State something about the industry, or the article, or the writer of the article.

Quote, paraphrase, or list bullets-- Include the relevant information from the article, or the points you want your audience to take away.

Discussion-- Talk about what jumped out at you. This is where you share your own unique perspective on the content with your clients, thus bringing the true value to the curated piece.

Conclusion-- draw a conclusion and reach out to your audience with a question. This ties up the piece while opening it up for participation.

Here's a sample of this method. For my example article, I'm curating a blog entry I wrote several weeks about viral video. Just for fun, my thoughts and perspective will contrast against the curated article.

Viral Video: Fluke or Product of Planning?

The marketing world talks a lot about viral video, which has been elevated to holy-grail status in content marketing. A recent article from Leigh Carver over at Volacci discusses viral video, and how it comes to be-- or doesn't. The basis of Carver's blog is that a video won't go viral if you create it just to go viral.

According to the article,

- If you don't have a massive budget, you can't intentionally create a viral video
- Video that are deliberately made for vitality won't go viral
- All viral videos have components of education, entertainment, and excitement

I agree with Carver that viral videos need to be engaging and elicit an emotional response-- or, to quote Carver, they must "follow the three E's," but I also believe that viral videos can be intentionally crafted by brands with low budgets. Carver claims that an audience will see through attempts to become viral, though in my opinion, as long as the video excites them, they won't care. Technology is cheap, and I think that

as long as a video is fun and has good production value, it can be an effective viral marketing tool-- a video may not go viral with tens of millions of views, but it can still be shared around quite a bit and increase the effective of your marketing strategy tenfold.

So, if you define viral video as something that gets 30 million views on YouTube, you can't do it without a big budget-- but smaller-scale success can definitely be attained if you're careful about putting together your video. What do you think? If you make a video to go viral, will it go viral, or is that a cheap trick that won't work? Please share your opinions in the comments.

This curated sample very neatly follows the formula: In the first paragraph, the author discusses the topic, the industry, and the original article; in the second paragraph, she sums up the content that is being curated; in the third paragraph, she offers her own insight, and in the fourth paragraph, she ties the bite-sized content up neatly, and invites the audience in to participate in the discussion.

(Disclaimer: In case you're confused about what stance I actually take about viral video, I think that brands tend to lay it on a little thick when trying to make a video that will go viral-- so, really, brands should focus on the content of their video and whether it speaks to their audience, rather than running after a goose that may or may not lay a golden egg.)

Once you've finished your curated piece, get someone close to you to reread it-- preferably, a coworker, or someone else familiar with the industry or topic you're discussing. When I begin curating for a new client, I get outside perspective from as many sources as possible until I'm totally confident that my curation style and topics are on track; I recommend this to everyone, regardless of your knowledge of your industry. It's a great litmus test to make sure that your curated content is accessible: that it's written at a high enough level that you sound knowledgeable about the topic but remain accessible to a non-expert, unless you're explicitly targeting the intellectual heavyweights. Hitting this sweet spot increases the value of your content because it speaks both to colleagues in the industry and acts as educational material for your customers.

4. Post and Share

When posting, include a related image or two within your content-- having images included with blog entries significantly reduces bounce rate-- and if you use an image that you don't own, make sure you either give credit to the original photo owner, or include this text on your blog:

THIS BLOG claims no credit for any images posted on this site unless otherwise noted. Images on this blog are copyright to its respectful owners. If there is an image appearing on this blog that belongs to you and do not wish for it appear on this site, please E-mail with a link to said image and it will be promptly removed.

Post your content on your site with a catchy headline and image. Link to other relevant blogs and pages on your site within the text of your curated content-- for example, if you're a digital marketing agency that provides some [killer content curation services](#), and you mention content curation in the text of your blog, you should probably link to it.

You've put all this work into creating a blog entry-- now, show your hard work off by sharing what you've created with your friends and followers. Use social media to tweet out and post your curated article-- one thing I recommend doing is tagging whoever you curated the article from. So, for example, if you found a great article on Volacci and curated it to add some of your own perspective, you might say on twitter:

"Is @Volacci right about viral video?" or "Today we discuss a great article from @Volacci about content marketing"... and then, of course, include a link to your content, and the relevant hashtags. In the case of the example, I would probably include #viralvideo #videomarketing #contentmarketing. Distributing links to the article on your social networks maximizes the effectiveness of your article, giving it a chance to be noticed by someone who might not ordinarily access your website. Even better, @Volacci might retweet your post to all of their followers, thus dramatically increasing the number of visitors-- and potential customers-- to your site.

Conclusion

In conclusion, curating content is a great strategy for any brand. It provides valuable information about both the industry and about your brand's opinions and insights to inquiring customers, and the act of selecting content to curate ensures that your industry will remain cognizant of any important new developments. Curated content is incredibly valuable as an SEO tool, can be put together in as little as half an hour, and is a time-effective way to build credibility around your organization's website.