

Content Marketing—An Introduction

The subtle –yet *dynamic*—secret to successfully marketing your business

Have the results of your current online marketing strategies flat-lined?
Are your traditional advertising initiatives yielding diminishing returns?

Across all platforms, both product- and service-oriented businesses are finding that tried-and-true methods of promotion that prevailed for centuries –or decades on the Web—have largely become ineffective.

Why? Well, in a world where nearly 90% of all consumers search for and, perhaps more importantly, *research* the goods and services they seek, old-school boasts of “best products” and claims of “superior service” will likely fall on deaf ears. In fact, adjective-heavy hype will probably turn *off* more potential new customers than it will attract.

Furthermore, your competition is no longer just the merchant or provider up the street. The Internet is now a ubiquitous marketplace where your rivals for attention –and commercial trade—are nationwide, perhaps even global.

You *must* differentiate yourself from your competitors. If all that seemingly separates your enterprise from other firms is pricing, at any given moment, you may be just a cross-town discount away from oblivion.

How do you elevate your profile amidst the crowd? Your voice above the din? Content Marketing.

Definition: **Content Marketing** (*noun*) Content Marketing is the practice of providing informational and creative material that is relevant and interesting to potential customers, as well as third-party entities that may drive consumer trade to the provider's business.

Content Marketing is *not* direct sales. It is a means of communicating with prospective and existing customers alike. When effective, it inspires increased trade, consumer loyalty and an elevated profile in the competitive marketplace.

By the way, Content Marketing may be a relatively recent buzz phrase, but its roots date way back before the dawn of the Internet. For example, when Campbell Soup began printing recipes on the back of their cans' labels in the 1940s—that was a form of Content Marketing.

Most-Popular Content Marketing Initiatives

There's no boilerplate Content Marketing strategy. It can and *should* be as unique as your business or industry. Depending on the size and scale of your enterprise, some or all of these initiatives may be right for you:

- **Subscriber Newsletters**

Site visitors sign-up for regularly published emails. The presentation should look clean and smart; text should be embellished with excellent graphic art, compelling imagery or photos. Lead story should link to and conclude on your website.

- **Blogs**

Every business should have a blog on their website. This is your chief location to establish your voice and connect with consumers. Don't hesitate to stir the pot a little. Express pertinent opinions. And always be conversational. If humor is appropriate and you can execute it well, go for it.

A hardware store may not provide the same compelling narrative opportunities as hospice care, but when possible, emotion rules the

day. If you can coax a laugh or a tear out of someone visiting your site, they'll be back for more.

- **Newsfeeds**

If your industry is one in which daily information influences constituent response, such as investment management, commodities, politics, sports, et al, become a trusted source for reliable, up-to-date news.

- **e-Books**

Are you an acknowledged expert in your realm of endeavor? Write a book for distribution on Kindle and other e-readers. Sell it for \$2.99 on Amazon. But give it away free on your website.

- **How-to Guides**

Examples:

- Small-engine repair shop? Illustrate how to replace lawnmower cutting belts.
- Pediatrician? Describe how to safely clean children's ears.
- Plumber? Show how to remove a drain trap to unclog a sink.

Imagine the value-to-consumer that these tips represent, obviating the need for a service call or a doctor's visit. And in the case of child safety, nothing resonates like connecting with the protective parental instinct.

- **Embedded Videos**

Now do the How-to Guide one better. Demonstrate these procedures in a low- to no-cost video, post it on YouTube and embed it on your website. Build an archive of guides and videos on your site. They're assets that will attract traffic and potential new customers for years to come.

- **Open Forums / Q&A Forums**

Create a forum/chat room where customers can congregate and discuss topics pertinent to your trade. Don't just post a static FAQ page on your site. Manage an active Q&A forum and archive important topics, questions and solutions.

- **Live Online Help**

An initiative perhaps best-suited for larger enterprises, but the value of online, real-time consumer assistance can't be underestimated.

- **White Papers & Case Studies**

Expanded and comprehensive treatments on industry trends, management and logistics solutions, product development and countless other inside-industry topics can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars when purchased from third-party institutes. As such, white papers are probably most germane to the B2B domain. But be sure not to reveal trade secrets that might diminish your competitive advantage.

Case studies, on the other hand, provide a unique way to tell real-life stories—often with a component of drama or true human emotion—that illustrates how your products or services have impacted the success and lives of previous customers. Pepper liberally with appropriate images and testimonials.

- **Information Graphics**

Pie-charts, graphs and illustrations have never slipped from fashion in depicting trends—good, bad and static. When indeed a picture paints a thousand words, use it to good advantage.

Effective Content Marketing Creation

At many a corporate boardroom table these days, seated alongside the CEO, CFO and CIO, you will find a chair for the newly-minted CCO—Chief Content Officer. Such is the business world's recent acceptance of the old axiom that "content is king." *Your* infrastructure and budget may not allow a boardroom table, let alone a CCO, but nobody knows your business like you do.

Add a blog page to your website *today*. Write about things your customers can relate to. Forget the sales pitch. Offer valuable advice,

provide resources and paint portraits of how things should look, function, taste or feel when they're working right.

Let's say your potential customer is at Point A and they want to get to Point D ("*D*" for *Destination*), if your content is consistent and compelling, they will ultimately realize that your products and services that are staring them in the face are just what they need to achieve their desired results.

The information you have provided your customer has branded you a trusted advisor, not a salesperson. Become a resource that provides solutions—your products and services will sell themselves.

Types of Effective Content

The most compelling content provides information that:

- **Meets emotional, practical or logistical needs**
 - **Confirms or challenges commonly-held beliefs**
 - **Stimulates emotions – laughter, tears, outrage or empathy**
 - **Provides a twist on conventional old stories**
 - **Offers a practical solution**
 - **Shares info of measurable value (measurable in dollars, effort or time)**
 - **Reveals secrets that elevates reader to "insider" status**
 - **Tells stories of triumph, e.g., "Kitchen Table Biz Idea Sells for \$19m"**
 - **Reinforces reader's sense of judgment, self-esteem**
 - **Gives absolution or removes guilt**
 - **Inspires/nurtures big dreams or objectives**
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Top 5 General Topics (click-through) on the Web*:

1. **Technology**
2. **Finance**
3. **Health Matters**
4. **How-to Guides**
5. **Entertainment**

[*searchenginewatch.com](http://searchenginewatch.com)

Copywriting for Content Marketing – In-House or Outsourced?

Your best material should originate from within your own firm. No matter how generic purveyors of products or service practitioners within your industry may be, the whole point of Content Marketing is to separate you from the pack.

If you have a natural-born communicator amongst your ranks, terrific. That individual may be you. But if time or talent is elusive, utilizing an external, specialized copywriter may be your best option. Typically, they will work closely with you, familiarizing her- or himself with your company and its products and services.

Shared Content

Many companies belong to trade associations that provide their members with information and feature material that can be reprinted on your site. But that material is available to your competitors as well. Better to *repurpose* than reprint. That material can be expanded upon or incorporated in content geared more specifically to your enterprise. Through industry research and familiarity with your firm, a good copywriter becomes a Subject Matter Expert, and is likely to find hidden virtues in your business that you may have come to take for granted.

Content Partnerships

Sometimes two disparate businesses can team-up and create cooperative promotional and marketing initiatives that are exponential in value, providing cross-site, content-sharing opportunities in the process.

Imagine the possibilities for these alliances:

- **Furniture Store & Interior Designer**
- **Veterinarian & Pet Store**
- **Manufacturer / Wholesaler /Retailer** (*a potent triumvirate*)
- **IT Design Firm & Technology Services Provider**
- **Nonprofits & Commercial Enterprises**

The possibilities are endless. And history is rife with examples of symbiotic businesses whose collaborations ultimately resulted in mergers. Bacardi & Coke, anyone?

Tips for Writing More Effective Content

Whether generating your own content or supervising the work of a professional copywriter, here are some general tips on crafting an effective narrative:

- Tell stories and share information that provide value.
- Eliminate sales pitches, create an *experience* that sells.
- Writing tips:
 - Devise topics in which reader can identify his or her needs.
 - Make sure your headlines address the value of the content. Subheads reinforce the title headline. Aspects of specificity and urgency (numbers and deadline references) are usually compelling.

Examples: **10 Common Mistakes That Can Torpedo
Your New Product Launch**

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Headline: **How Will the New Healthcare Act Impact  
Your Business?**

Subhead: **Take advantage of these cost-saving incentives  
Before December 31.**

- Copy should be easily digested—short, chunky paragraphs with surrounding space and uncluttered graphics that allow your messaging to breathe.
- Narrative should be conversational, concise & active—not past tense.
- Pepper your headlines and copy with keywords, but not to unnatural excess. Search Engine Optimization remains important, but 94% of search results are organic, versus the meager 6% that paid search initiatives yield.
- Create a strategy that dovetails with your objectives. For example: create serial content that's relevant to an upcoming product roll-out.
- If your company has distinct departments, make sure that your content is in-sync with all disparate efforts for unified results.
- Set a schedule for publishing your newsletters and blog posts and stick to it. Extra posts when necessary are fine, but if your followers are used to starting their workweek with your content and a cup of coffee on Monday morning, make sure your newsletter is awaiting them in their inbox.
- Create content that people are compelled to share. When the value of your content becomes social media-worthy, it's value to *you* becomes exponential.
- **Give. Assist. Deliver. Entertain. Share. Inform.** These should be the tenets of your Content Marketing initiatives.



Content Marketing is most effective when the information provided is consistently valuable, published regularly and conveyed in a “voice” that establishes rapport with its audience. In essence, it’s a subtle, but ultimately more durable, emotional approach to brand building.

It’s personal. B2B or B2C, you’re establishing a relationship with your customer. If your Content Marketing initiatives are executed well and rooted in principles of good will, fellowship and exceptional customer service, the return on your efforts will be extraordinary.