



5 Foundations of Effective Content Marketing

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It's clear by now that the landscape of marketing and advertising has changed. Where traditional marketing efforts looked to print and TV media to build interest and engagement among prospective customers, now the growth of your brand relies on your ability to create and channel a compelling digital footprint. That is, it relies on how you present your company, products, and services online.

With that changing landscape comes a new responsibility: companies that seek a long-lasting and prosperous foothold within their industry must look beyond simply making the sale. You're now visibly responsible for guiding the entire sales process— from education and interest to lead generation and information capture— using your digital tool kit. And once you capture your prospective customer's attention, you must continue to engage and retain that attention for a chance to inspire trust and loyalty within your target audience.

This paradigm shift is intimidating for most companies. But if you can overcome that initial fear, you will soon realize that it is also empowering. You have unprecedented freedom over the image you present to your customers, the media, and the global market. And you can control that image (and bring in more customers) by implementing a low-cost, high ROI content marketing strategy.¹

Essential Steps of Effective Content Marketing

Put simply, content marketing is the process of building an authentic customer base using compelling original content and organic Search Engine Optimization techniques. Each strategy is comprised of different content assets according to the needs of your target audience and the fit of your product or service, resulting in any number of the following deliverables:

- On-site blog posts
- Off-site blog posts

¹ [93 Percent of Companies Using Inbound Marketing Increase Lead Generation](#) (Hubspot)

- eBooks and resource guides
- Case studies
- Email marketing newsletters
- Infographics
- SlideShares
- Social media updates
- Webinars
- YouTube videos

Like most effective strategies, the content marketing process is not an effortless one. Putting “Start a blog,” on your marketing team’s to-do list may get you a few articles, but it will not win the hearts or business of your customers. To reap the full suite of benefits of content marketing, you must approach your efforts with strategy and focus.

Ready to get started? Here are four VITAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT for implementing an effective content marketing strategy in any industry:

Clearly define your goals.

If you do not know what you’re shooting at, how will you know when you have struck your target? And furthermore, how will you know which effort is the one that hit the mark? Content marketing abides by the same rules. In order to accurately track and assess your progress over time, you need to define specific goals for your efforts.

Here are a few examples of viable goals you might look to achieve using a comprehensive content marketing strategy:

- Increase your website traffic
- Increase sales or awareness of a particular product
- Recruit among a particular demographic
- Increase levels of new member acquisition

- Reach and maintain high levels of membership retention

Do any of these goals speak to your business needs? Decide in advance which outcomes will define your success. Then put into place tracking mechanisms and processes to gather the necessary data.

Understand your target audience.

The more targeted and specific you can make every content asset, the more effective each asset will be. But the only way you can target your content is to have a deep understanding of your target customer's needs and wants and then speak to those needs and wants with the right tone, voice, and topic. Once you have a clear grasp of your marketing objectives, you must turn your attention to your target audience and customer persona segments.

Develop in-depth customer personas for each of your leading clients by using your website and social media channels to gather details about each persona's age, buying habits, reading preferences, and job titles.² When you're creating these personas, no detail is too small. When you think you're finished, dig deeper to address each customer's unique business challenges. Put yourself in their shoes and brainstorm what fears and assumptions they might have about the future of their industry.

Use this detailed information to customize each blog post, webinar, video, or white paper. Create with one goal and one customer in mind, and then focus on marketing that content to the targeted customer. As a result of these targeted efforts, you'll see increased customer engagement, website activity, and overall conversion.³

Diversify your content methods and delivery channels.

²[Are You Using Your B2B Marketing Personas Effectively?](#) (Search Engine Land)

³[Why Knowing Your Audience Is The Key To Success](#) (Forbes)

Topic-specific content assets are an effective way to convey information about your product or service and build brand awareness in a particular market. But if you stop there’ it’s just content. If only a fraction of the people who need to see it do so, you have not achieved anything at all. To maximize the efficiency of your content marketing efforts, you must make strategic choices in creating and marketing your content assets to your target audience.

First, focus on your customer’s interests. Within your target audience, there are segments with different needs and educational preferences.⁴ Speak to each segment by providing customized content of different kinds. For example, there are a number of options you can present to your targeted audience within the scope of “customer specific content assets.”

[Chart Opportunity: Downloadable matrix (or just image) for identifying topic, format, audience, learning style, with compelling examples.]

Topic <i>(As determined by established editorial schedule, breaking news, competitor activity, and needs of the customer)</i>	Purpose <i>(As determined by customer’s stage within your marketing funnel.)</i>	Format <i>(As determined by educational preference and purpose.)</i>	Audience <i>(As determined by customer personas and customer persona segments.)</i>
Industry history	Inform	On-site blog post	Customer persona #1
Industry breaking news	Educate	Off-site blog post	Customer persona #2

⁴ [How to Create Compelling Content Based on Learning Styles](#)
(Search Engine Watch)

Internal company update	Entice	eBook or resource guide	Customer persona #3
Case study or example	Convert	Case study	Customer persona #4
Recent realization	Social engagement	Email marketing newsletter	
Tips for customer		Infographic	
Behind the scenes information		SlideShare	
		Social media update	
		Webinar	
		YouTube video	

More educated or visual customers seek out text-heavy content like white papers, special reports, blog posts, and eBooks that they can use as a reference. More active or youthful customers might appreciate interactive media such as webinars, expert Q&A's, YouTube videos, and podcasts.⁵

The same principle of variety applies to your content delivery methods. Within a target market segment, you may have prospective clients who prefer Twitter to LinkedIn, or email to RSS feed, or vice versa. The only way to know (and to then target your efforts effectively) is to review the most current market research on your target customer and apply it to your promotional strategy.

If you do not target what you're sharing and how you're sharing it to the right people, they may not find it. Or worse, they may feel actively ignored. Either way, your content marketing portfolio will not reach its potential. Get the most dramatic results possible by giving your prospective customers the information they need in a form that fits their consumption preferences.

⁵ [Here Is Everything You Need to Know About the Millennial Consumer](#) (AdWeek)

Make your content naturally social.

As a successful brand or business, the most powerful weapon for success is already in your possession: you have proven that you meet your customer's need for a product or service. But disruptive, viral brands take it a step further. When a customer is satisfied with a product or service, he continues to use it. When a customer is bowled over by how much your product has changed his life or how easy it is to work with you, he shares it with everyone he knows.

Content marketing benefits from the same principle. People naturally want to share relevant and informative content with their networks. It's your job to not get in the way of that process. To that end, invest as much research and expert assistance as possible in creating content assets that are easy to share and exciting to think about. The more relevant and stimulating the content you create, the more delighted your customer will be to share it within their personal and professional networks.

Content marketing is not the latest trend in digital marketing. It is the new, universal way to do business online. Whether you choose to engage in the digital age or not, your company and digital footprint is being judged by these modern content marketing standards. Realize the benefits of this heightened level of engagement with your customers by setting your content marketing strategy into motion today.