

THE SECRET TO INTERNET CONTENT MARKETING SUCCESS

Presented by Dashboard Internet Marketing



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Once Upon a Time...

Once upon a time...

Long ago, in a land far away...

It was a dark and stormy night...

Do you remember how much you loved stories when you were a kid? I know I did! The day my mom took me to the library and handed me my very own children's library card was one of the happiest days of my life. *Where the Wild Things Are; One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish...* my imagination grew under the loving wings of these storybook guides. Years later, as an adult, you'll rarely find me without a book; I gravitate towards inspirational content even though my work often requires me to read industry-related materials. But you know what? I enjoy those non-fiction tomes that read more like a story, and often recommend them to friends.

The truth is, human beings crave stories. From our ancestors who told stories around the campfire or the hearth to modern-day movies with cliff-hanger endings, we love to laugh and cry with heroes and heroines. We root for the good guys and boo the bad guys. Stories attract us as adults as naturally as they did when we were children.

So why are so many marketing "stories" so...boring? Think about it for a minute. How many brand stories capture your attention, never mind your imagination and devotion? And those that do manage to hold your attention for more than a few seconds during a television commercial – ask yourself, "Why?"

Why did that brand story stick with you?

Chances are good that it contained the seed of a story, watered with the artistry of a good designer and copywriter and fertilized with imagination. Such stories grow into powerful, strong brands that tower over the competitors like mighty oaks, strong and majestic, living ages beyond their initial growth spurt.

That's the kind of brand I want you to have. Strong. Able to withstand the storms of a variable economy or fickle consumer tastes. A brand that people remember long after the commercial is over or the next website clicked.

Such a brand tells a story. Such a brand utilizes content marketing.

KEY FACT:

People remember stories. Good content marketing engages the imagination and tells a story while achieving your company's marketing goals.

Content Marketing: The Wave of the Future

Welcome to content marketing for non-marketers. Content marketing has been around for over 100 years, but in the past year or two, it has grown in importance. Most marketers are now recognizing that some form of content marketing is almost required for both brand marketing and direct response marketing - yet few marketers really understand, know and use content marketing effectively.

What is content marketing? It's using content - written materials, pictures, audio recordings, video recordings, and any other shareable, viewable or listen-to media - to engage with your target customers. Such content attracts and engages their attention. It's not sales copy; there is little, if any, direct sales pitch contained within the content marketing materials you share with your customers. Instead, content marketing shares information in ways that amuse, enrage, entertain, educate or illuminate the target audience.

Why Use Content Marketing?

Many people aren't paying attention to advertising.

According to an article posted on [Marketing Land](#)ⁱ, Nielsen's latest global trust and advertising report shows a marked decline in consumer trust of advertising, declining 24%, 20%, and 25% between 2009 - 2011. The most "trustworthy" sources of information listed included recommendations from friends, consumer opinions posted online, and editorial content. [Econsultancy](#)ⁱⁱ also published the top priorities of digital marketing managers for 2013. What came out on top? Content marketing. 39% of respondents cited content marketing as their priority, the top response of all.

The Content Marketing Institute reports that 91% of all B2B (business to business) marketers responding to their 2012 survey are using content marketing, with the majority using 5 to 9 different tactics to reach their target audience. This shows a robust, engaged use of content marketing for many businesses who sell goods and services to other businesses.

Whether companies are seeking to sell to consumers or businesses, or generating leads and referrals, content marketing is growing in importance and dominating the budgets of most digital marketers.

The data supports what many people sense; people trust advertising less and less, and personal recommendations more and more. And if they can't get a personal recommendation from friends or family, they turn to online recommendations and content.

And that's where content marketing comes in.

What Content Marketing Isn't

Content marketing isn't new. Over 100 years ago, John Deere, the farm equipment manufacturing company, began producing a magazine for farmers that has grown to hundreds of thousands of loyal subscribers today. The Kroger supermarket chain produces a half-hour weekly cooking show with recipes featuring its products. A local bridal shop sponsors an 8-page bridal magazine filled with colorful photos of gowns, tuxedos, and flower arrangements. The veterinary office distributes booklets on how to battle fleas and ticks. Content marketing surrounds us.

Content marketing is not about directly promoting or selling products. Perhaps the name for this term should be changed, because many people get confused by the word "marketing", thinking that "marketing" is only about promoting, selling and hyping a product or service.

Lastly, content marketing is not a quick fix. While it can generate an overnight success, it typically takes time to build, cultivate and nurture a potential audience. But that audience typically remains loyal to the brand long after an advertising campaign has ended.

KEY FACTS:

- *Content marketing is a growing trend, with the majority of digital marketers and business to business marketers using at least 5 or more forms of content marketing as part of their marketing mix.*
- *Content marketing is a new term, but content marketing itself has been a viable form of marketing for over 100 years.*
- *Today, the internet and social media have made content marketing more accessible than ever by a larger number of businesses.*

Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing must be strategic if it is to be effective. Just plunking down whatever comes to mind and calling it content marketing may feel cathartic, but it will rarely be effective.

What is your overall business strategy? How will your content marketing efforts bolster your marketplace position as leader, follower, innovator, etc.? How will your content marketing efforts support your brand position or influence your position among consumers?

These and many other questions need to be answered before you work out the tactical implementation of a content marketing plan. Creating your content marketing strategy alongside your company's overall marketing strategy makes sense, and it's a good idea to work with a professional internet marketing firm or content consultant to ensure that the goals are aligned and that the actual strategy you choose will help you attain your goals.

KEY FACT:

An effective content marketing strategy is one that is aligned with your company's overall business and marketing strategy, and will help you achieve your marketing goals.

How Content Marketing Is Used

Content marketing is used in a variety of ways:

- **Brand awareness** - content can be used to shape and form brand awareness and recognition in the minds of consumers.
- **Awareness** - by using informative content, companies can raise awareness of their products, services and activities in the minds of consumers.
- **Increase website traffic** - organic or natural search engine optimization is a method by which internet marketers use content infused with carefully selected keywords to match user queries into search engines with their web pages. If used correctly and ethically, organic SEO practices and content marketing are the perfect blend to increase website traffic.
- **Social media** - social media 'likes' and 'shares' are an important part of building online reputation and website traffic. Links shared from your content via social media platforms provide you with an additional way to gain more site visitors, traffic and awareness.
- **Lead generation** - offering a white paper, eBook or case study if a consumer opts into an email list or a contact form is a powerful method of lead generation.
- **Acquisition** - many forms of content can also be used to convert information seekers into actual customers or buyers.
- **Engagement** - a reliable source of information about a particular niche topic, or providing a place for interaction and connections engages customers and potential customers in a brand.
- **Loyalty** - perhaps the most powerful and elusive of the marketer's goals is loyalty. Content marketing offers a powerful method of generating loyalty by providing consumers with something other sources don't offer - information, tailored to their wants and needs, in forms they enjoy.

Which reason stands out for your business to use content marketing?

You may have more than one reason to integrate content marketing into your company's plans for the year. But before enacting a content marketing strategy, be sure to identify and articulate your goals and integrate them into all of your marketing and sales plans for the year.

KEY FACT:

Content marketing can be used for many reasons, but be sure you know the reason why YOU are choosing to use it to help your company achieve its goals.

Types of Content

The "content" in "content marketing" refers to any material that delivers information and builds your brand. Earlier in this paper, we shared two examples of content marketing – John Deere's magazine for farmers and Kroger's weekly cooking show. Content can be in print, audiovisual or electronic formats, or any combination of formats.

Written content remains some of the most popular materials for content marketing. Written content is often described as either long form or short form content. Long form is perhaps the best known and includes eBooks such as this one, white papers, case studies, tip booklets, articles and blogs. Short form content is often used to refer to shorter messages such as Twitter updates that function like mini content nuggets, micro blogging sites such as Tumblr, and others.

But think beyond text on the page or screen. Content marketers also share video and audio recordings. Podcasting and videos can also be used successfully as part of your content marketing efforts. Even slides can be shared as part of a content marketing program, as well as images. Social media sites such as Pinterest encourage sharing photos, and many savvy marketers have emblazoned their company's original images with slogans, saying and more which can spread quickly on the popular site. Infographics are another emerging area for content marketers.

Content can be:

- Written materials in long or short forms
- Social media posts
- Audio recordings (podcasts)
- Video recordings
- Pictures, graphics, and charts

KEY FACT:

"Content" refers to information shared through audio, visual or written communications.

Choosing the Right Mix

When starting a content marketing program, the plethora of choices can feel overwhelming. Should you start a business blog, a micro blogging site, an article marketing program or a channel on YouTube? Or would it be better to begin podcasting and sharing photos? Here are some tips to choose the best blend of content channels for you content marketing efforts:

- **Choose the content marketing channels your customers prefer.** Get to know your customers and learn where they go for information. That's where you need to become the leader in sharing information.
- **Consider which channels showcase your message the best.** A wedding photographer will naturally want to use image-intense content marketing channels. An education website may lean towards long form copy.
- **Build on what you already have.** Before embarking on a content marketing strategy, take an inventory of the content that you already own, whether it's articles, blogs, podcasts or other materials. Build on what you have while adding new materials to your content marketing programs.

Plan for Content Marketing Success

Know what you can accomplish using your own resources and what may needs to be turned over to an agency or skilled freelancers to complete - many marketing teams and individuals embark on a content marketing plan without considering every aspect of such a plan.

For instance, you may currently have a staff member who is a good writer and who you expect to write most of the articles and blog posts, but what will you do if that person leaves the company? Understand all the ramifications of your choices and be realistic about what you can successfully create within the resources of your company and what you may need to have an expert outside of your company create. Having your teenage daughter videotape your birthday party is fine; having her videotape your content marketing video in which you want to impress your potential customers with your professionalism might not be. Know what you have to work with and what you may need to find.

KEY FACT:

Plan your content marketing strategy around materials you may already have, such as existing white papers, case studies and the like.

Creating Effective Content

Creating effective content begins by knowing your customers. Knowing who your customers are and the problems you solve for them is the key to all successful marketing.

Content marketing works best when the content is created for a clearly defined target audience. Ask yourself:

- **Who is my customer?** Identify specific demographic and psychographic attributes of customers. Are your customers male or female, young or old, highly educated or moderately educated, etc.? Do they live in a particular part of the city, state or country? What motivation do they have for buying your products or services?
- **Write an imaginary customer profile or persona.** In fiction writing, authors often create character profiles to help them visualize their characters and to keep the details accurate. A customer persona helps those in your company or your freelance team create content targeted to a specific customer. It helps you avoid generic "blah" copy that could be for anyone. The closer the content speaks to the target audience, the better.
- **Hire a professional.** Content writing takes time, effort, talent and experience. The best content marketers are those with a background in both writing and marketing. It takes more than the ability to write a grammatically correct sentence to create content that truly speaks to your target audience and helps you achieve your marketing goals. Your company may be fortunate enough to have an experienced content marketer on staff, but this is the exception for most small and medium sized businesses.

KEY FACT:

Knowing your target customer as an individual, not a generic group of facts, and creating content that speaks to the individual's wants, needs, desires and problems, is what sets great content marketing apart from mediocre content marketing efforts.

Keys to Successful Content Marketing

Now that you understand the basics of content marketing, let's talk a little bit about what makes a content marketing program successful. These include content that has -

- **Personality!** Personality may also be thought of as "tone" or "voice." Just like a fingerprint, your brand has a unique tone or voice, and great content marketing programs capture that unique flavor and bottle it in content that not only speaks to the target audience but also speaks in your brand's voice. Let your brand personality shine in your content marketing efforts.
- **Unique qualities.** Always strive for unique content. If you want to share existing content, by all means share it via a link or in the way acceptable to the content creator. But don't just serve up the same old thing. Strive for unique content, something that truly adds value to your customers' knowledge and information about the subject at hand.
- **Timely appeal.** Don't serve yesterday's stale news. Make sure your content speaks to your customers' wants, needs and interests now - not yesterday.

Measuring Effectiveness

It's important to measure the effectiveness of all marketing programs. Content marketing is typically measured by three metrics:

1. **Engagement** - How many visitors accessed your content? If the content is online, the metrics to examine include the number of visits and visitors, bounce rate, and time on the page.
2. **Sharing** - Was the content shared on social media platforms? If so, how often, and on which platforms?
3. **Leads or Sales** - What was the result of your content marketing program? While content marketing isn't intended as a direct sales mechanism, it should help your business generate leads or sales. Can you attribute any new business or business leads to your content marketing efforts?

Parting Thoughts

One of the hallmarks of content marketing is generosity. It's not something we often think about in marketing. After all, you promote or market your company to achieve a goal, right? Yet content marketing is inherently generous.

Content marketing generously shares thoughts, words, ideas and facts. It asks only to be noticed by the user. It is not direct marketing, where a direct and measurable action is sought in response to the materials. Rather, it asks to be read, understood and appreciated.

So be generous with your information when you share it using content marketing. Many companies fear they're "giving away the store" when they share information. They fear that they are sharing their recipe for the 'secret sauce' when they share specific information with customers.

Instead of worrying that you're giving away too much, focus instead of what benefits your customers the most. In this way, you'll share enough with your target audience so that they should see your deep and rich subject knowledge. Over time, you'll develop a reputation as the "go-to" industry resource, the one to trust on the subject. It's difficult, if not impossible, for the average person to duplicate what you do simply from reading your materials or listening to your podcasts and videos. But by sharing generously, you'll demonstrate that you have what it takes to help your customers be successful.

Generosity is good in marketing, especially content marketing, as it is in other aspects of life.

KEY FACTS

- ***Don't be afraid to be yourself and let your brand personality shine in your content marketing materials.***
- ***Make sure your content is interesting, timely, and engaging.***
- ***Share generously with your customers. In the end, everyone benefits.***

This eBook is brought to You Courtesy of [Dashboard Internet Marketing](#)

It was written by Jeanne Grunert, copywriter for Dashboard Internet Marketing.

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ⁱ Source: Nielsen statistics as quoted on Marketing Land. Accessed December, 2012
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ⁱⁱ Source: Social Media Today, [http://socialmediatoday.com/steve-olenski/1156771/content-marketing-and-e-commerce-tops-digital-marketers-priority-list-2013?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Social+Media+Today+\(all+posts\)&utm_content=Google+Feedfetcher](http://socialmediatoday.com/steve-olenski/1156771/content-marketing-and-e-commerce-tops-digital-marketers-priority-list-2013?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Social+Media+Today+(all+posts)&utm_content=Google+Feedfetcher)