Beginner Guide

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B2B Marketing™

Content Marketing



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Raise your game with content



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Welcome to what I hope is the first of many beginner guides. After asking you for lots of feedback, you gave us the resounding response that you'd like to see more basic information on specific marketing techniques, business concerns and strategic issues.

In response to this we've launched beginner guides. The first focuses on the hottest topic of the moment: content marketing. Many B2B brands have woken up to the fact that content is 'king' and are using it at an unprecedented rate, leaving some marketers confused as to how they can ensure cut through in an oversaturated market. Only the best content will reach its target audience as buyers become more selective over the content they want to consume. It's no longer good enough to be just doing content marketing – it's quality rather than quantity that will raise your game.

The *Beginner's Guide to Content Marketing* includes a step-by-step implementation process, content marketing plan templates to help you get started, an award-winning case study to show you what success looks like, key learnings outlining skills and disciplines you need to adopt, and a handy further reading list.

So whether you're early in your career, unfamiliar with the subject area, switching to a marketing career, or just want a refresher, we hope you find this introductory guide to content marketing useful.

If you're interested in content marketing trends and activities in B2B organisations, our *Content Marketing Benchmarking Report* will enable you to benchmark your current activity. Premium members can download it for free, and non-members can buy it online For £150 +VAT. You can find the report here: b2bmarketing.net/content-benchmarking

To submit feedback, topic ideas or register your interest in contributing, email gemma.huckle@b2bmarketing.net

How to content marketing

HARRY GARDINER
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Content marketing is a strategy to create content that rounds out a brand's personality, increases awareness and, most importantly, brings in customers. It's an integral cog in the B2B communication machine, and a huge factor in generating leads.

So let's take a look at five stages you'll need to go through when undertaking a B2B content marketing campaign.

1. Form a strategy

Some people mistake content marketers for glorified copywriters, but in reality copywriting is only a small fraction of the overall content marketing process. Good marketing takes planning, testing and fine tuning; and content is no different.

Begin by establishing exactly what you aim to accomplish with your campaign. Yes, your overall goal is to generate leads, but how will you do that? Will you look to solve a certain problem (like all good content should)? Or are you going to share your specialist knowledge with other businesses?

Outline your objectives and how you will meet them by planning which types of content would be most suited to meet your user's needs. Identify a problem, need or opportunity and create content for those clients that meets the purpose.

Don't just focus on your own clientele though; carry out competitor research to understand what brands similar to the ones you're attempting to acquire are doing, then show your potential clients how you can do it better.

If you're aiming to secure a particular type of business you've had dealings with before, consult past case studies and assess what worked best for that industry. Learn from previous mistakes and adapt your plans to suit the new prospects.

Look in-depth at what you plan on creating, which platforms you'll be using to produce it, how you'll go about promoting it to your target market and how long the campaign will run for. Create an editorial calendar (see p.6) in order to organise and prioritise all the work, allocating duties to the relevant members of your team.

2. Create content

Once you've put together a bulletproof plan, it's time to get creative and produce an award-winning campaign.

Utilise all the resources at your disposal in order to create the best work possible. You want to focus on quality over quantity. Anyone with a laptop can produce page after page of uninteresting blog posts, or create pointlessly dull, clipart-esque infographics.

What skills do your team possess that make them different from every other marketing team out there? What are each individual's unique selling points (USPs)? Find out what they are and use them to your advantage.

The work you produce will reflect your brand, so if you're unsure of certain aspects, or you don't have the necessary skills to complete the job properly, consult a trusted freelancer who does. The internet is full of talented individuals, in fact you're probably following a few who are looking for work on Twitter right now. Reach out to those you are certain will do a good job.

3. Promote content

What's the best way to promote great content? Give it away freely. Offering your content as a downloadable resource for others to access in exchange for an email address or other details not only helps increase awareness, it also helps you gather valuable data and build your bank of contacts.

By letting those who visit your site watch videos, read blog posts and download informative whitepapers without having to pay, you're giving them free reign to share your content with whoever they please.

That's not to say you should work for free. The content you give away should act as an advertisement for your brand, reminding those who read it that if they work with your business; they will consistently receive pieces of this quality and higher.

But just handing your content out isn't enough. In order to really make an impact, you've got to ensure it is read by the right people. Who these 'right people' are will depend on your brand and the industry you're in.

Use sites such as Klout (ranks users by their online influence) and Followerwonk (enhances your Twitter outreach) to identify the key influencers in your line of work or the business you're targeting. Look for those who have built up a loyal following, and have a reputation for providing good information. If you think they'd have a legitimate interest in your content, then share it with them.

The joy of social media platforms, such as Twitter, is that you are free to contact who you wish. If you're lucky, they'll like your piece and share it with their peers. If not, try again with other people. But don't bombard anyone with requests; after all, it's not their job to promote your content.

4. Convert

Now that your content is in the right hands, it's time to start reaping the rewards of all your hard work. It's still not going to be easy though.

Where once it was the salesperson who introduced the product to a client, it is now much more likely the prospect will find your content themselves. Audiences are no longer passive; if a business wants something, they can easily search for it, without even leaving the comfort of their office.

As a result, you've got to make sure when people lay their eyes on your content, they want to buy whatever your brand is selling. When you're producing amazing content, and placing a clear call-to-action where the client can clearly see it, you're greatly increasing your chances of conversions.

Repackage your existing content to better suit the company you're marketing to. Show you're willing to go that extra mile to produce uniquely relevant content.

It's not just your content you need to focus on though. Your landing pages, websites and PPC campaigns all need to be specifically optimised to bring in revenue.

5. Evaluate

When it comes to assessing the performance of your content, refer back to your aims and analyse whether they were properly met.

Measure aspects such as engagement using freely available monitoring platforms such as Google Analytics. In order to get a more rounded view of your campaigns success, break down your findings into different sections, such as click-through-rates, social metrics and direct contacts.

Use this data to identify the strength of your campaign, and to decide what needs changing next time.

B2B Awards 2013: Best use of content marketing
Winner: 'OptaPro: Changing the conversation'

Opta provides insightful and diverting stats to the global broadcast and print media industry. It is used on a daily basis by media giants across the world, such as Sky Sports News, Sky Deutschland, El Pais, Gazetta dello Sport, MLSoccer.com and many more. The brand knew its data was the most accurate and in-depth in the market, and that it could benefit clubs in a number of different ways with player recruitment, opposition scouting and squad analysis. Unfortunately, however, these clubs only saw Opta's media work, and assumed that its data wasn't suitable for them. Opta therefore needed to adopt a different marketing strategy for this sector: one that effectively showcased the possibilities available to the professional game by using its data, as well as repositioning the brand at the centre of the rapidly developing sports analytics revolution. Opta created a dedicated sub-brand called OptaPro in March 2012, which catered specifically for professional football clubs. This allowed it to pursue a completely content-led strategy in order to effectively demonstrate the potential of its data.

Home to the experts

In the relatively infant sports analytics community, Opta saw the opportunity to embed OptaPro as the 'gold-standard' in statistical analysis, thereby establishing it as the most credible solution for professional clubs seeking greater understanding of their performance. The aim was to ensure OptaPro was seen as being home to the experts. Any writing and analysis needed to be considered as a valuable and important resource on any given sporting subject by professional analysts, leading bloggers and, to a lesser extent, regular sports fans. At the same time, OptaPro aimed to make the world of analytics more open, interactive and inclusive. Rather than the opaque nature and closed-shop approach of many of OptaPro's immediate competitors, it welcomes contributions from leading amateur analysts, comments on OptaPro-generated content and generally encourages discourse from interested parties.

The objectives behind the campaign were to develop a must-visit digital hub for the analytics community; effectively differentiate OptaPro from the main Opta brand; generate leads from clubs across the world; inspire and encourage bloggers and enthusiasts to use its data; provide a showcase for work from its community and engage with professional club analysts and coaches.

The campaign targeted three distinct groups: professional sports clubs, sports data analytics academics and sports data analytics enthusiasts. The key aim of the content strategy was to demonstrate how in-depth analysis of Opta data could be used to help clubs make tactical decisions. Its content adhered to four overarching qualities: useful, engaging and relevant; high quality; data focused/sufficiently analytical; and that it correctly positioned the brand. By understanding exactly what each type of content was designed to do, it allowed Opta to not only effectively target any output, but also measure ROI efficiently.

Open to interaction

A variety of channels were used to distribute the OptaPro content. These included a dedicated website that, among other things, hosted a blog with original and engaging content encouraging guest posts from appropriate members of the analytics community. Professionally produced videos for OptaPro, as well as more informal footage (such as inhouse interviews) featured heavily on the website to drive visitor numbers. The website curated other high level analytical content via an 'interesting links' section.

Curated, as well as original, content also featured on weekly emails. Social media channels were leveraged too, including LinkedIn, Twitter and Google+. Finally, OptaPro formed a partnership with Manchester City Football Club for its 'MCFC analytics' campaign to release data for free to the analytics community, of which feedback was then curated and shared. Across all channels, interactivity was key, which helped differentiate the brand from its competitors.

Boosting credibility

As part of OptaPro's one year anniversary it attempted something of an experiment: a crowdsourced blog from some of the key players in the football analytics world including analysts from professional clubs, prominent bloggers, authors, academics and journalists. The result was a success and it effectively reinforced the message of OptaPro as a hub for analytical content. Since the launch, OptaPro content has been shared more than 23,000 times and there has been a 22 per cent increase in revenue from the target audience. There has also been a 29 per cent increase in customer numbers and an 83 per cent increase in the number of countries that are now active customers. In addition, there has been a massive increase in positive sentiment from the OptaPro community and increased level of credibility in the professional market.

Editorial calendar

Planning template b2bmarketing.net

This **editorial calendar** is your content production schedule for the year. If you don't have one, start by using this template so you can eventually develop your own planner that suits your production and delivery needs.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
A												
B												
C												
D												
E												
F												
G												
H												
I												
J												

Key learnings

1. Make a conscious effort to fully embed a content marketing plan into your wider scheduling:

- Start thinking about content.
- Understand inbound marketing.
- Create a content plan. Know what content you want to create, where and when you want to share it, and what you can expect to achieve.
- Be customer centric – think about what your customers are likely to want to see.

2. Show how important content marketing can be to the success of your organisation:

- Define your objectives and know what success looks like.
- Speak to colleagues to align marketing with wider business objectives to deliver returns that will make a difference.
- Agree what a lead looks like.
- Select the appropriate metrics offering the most useful insights.
- Present a business case that adds up and internal buy-in will not be a problem.

3. Commit to adopting content marketing strategies:

- Invest in content and reap the rewards.
- Always pin content creation to your business objectives to prove your investments are worthwhile.
- Repurpose and recycle. Remember, research doesn't just make a report; it's also a news story, an infographic, a blog, and a multitude of content pieces.
- Leverage internal skill. Encourage other capable individuals in other departments to create content.

4. Ensure your team's skills and techniques are up-to-date:

- Acknowledge weaknesses, assess where you are missing expertise and address it.
- Look inside and outside for assistance to help fill skills gaps.
- Invest in technology. Digital technologies can solve some of the challenges created by content distribution.
- Attempt to understand the objectives of other departments within your organisation, as well as overall aims.

5. Decide what content works where:

- If you know your audience well, use content types they like to consume. If you don't know their preferences, do your research.
- Don't dismiss traditional forms of marketing; they still work.
- There's a lot of noise out there, so new forms of content can make your brand stand out from the crowd.

6. Ensure your content reaches the right people at the right time:

- Allow your content to dictate the terms of engagement rather than the delivery mechanism.
- Make sure you are in places your customers want you to be.
- Digital delivery channels are great for maximising reach, but they struggle to deliver the same personalisation as real-life interactions.
- Make sure your audience knows what to do if they decide it would like to know more about your offering.
- Track success so you know if you have to adjust your approach.

7. Create sophisticated tailored content:

- Segment by creating distinct messages for each of your target groups.
- Embrace technologies that take the hassle out of ensuring recipients only receive content relevant to their needs.
- Have patience. Personalised content may be the end goal for many marketers. This won't happen overnight, but the wait will be worth it.

Further reading

The Marketer's Guide to Slideshare, Wheatland, T, Content Marketing Institute

Idea to iPhone, White, C, John Wiley & Sons

The Conversation Company, Van Belleghem, S , Kogan Page

How to write a Marketing Plan, Westwood, J, Kogan Page

Guru in a Bottle: High Impact Marketing That Gets Results, Kolah, A, Kogan Page

Crowdsourcing for Dummies, Grier, D, John Wiley & Sons

Valuable Content Marketing, Jefferson, S, and Tanton, S, Kogan Page

The Language of Leaders, Murray, K, Kogan Page

Whiteboard Selling, Sommers, C, and Jenkins, D, John Wiley & Sons

The B2B Marketing Content Marketing Cookbook, Marketecture

B2B Marketing resources

Content Marketing Benchmarking Report

Infographics Best Practice Guide

Direct Mail Best Practice Guide

Thought Leadership Best Practice Guide

About B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

Magazine: The essential monthly guide to B2B marketing, with a key focus on best practice guidance, plus monthly features looking at current trends, regular research and profiles.

Awards: The showpiece event for brands and practitioners, attracting over 800 people. Former winners include a host of top-tier B2B brands, including Cisco, Dell, Fujitsu, IBM, KPMG, Nokia, O2, Oracle, Orange, SAP, Thomson Reuters, Vauxhall UK, and many more.

Research and reports: A library housing the best in B2B practice, in-depth practical guidance and research into specific channels or industry issues.

Training: Comprehensive, integrated and flexible training programmes enabling client-side and agency marketers to boost their skillsets and confidence, improve their effectiveness and increase impact on their brand.

Events: Highly-focused events and training sessions aimed at helping marketers hear and learn first hand from the experts in order to hone their skills.

Membership: Become a member and receive all research and reports for free. You will also receive exclusive invites to members-only networking events, get discounts on training seminars, workshops and conferences and receive a subscription to the monthly magazine. There are different levels of membership available so please call +44 (0) 20 7269 6592 to find out more.

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0) 20 7438 1370

STAY ON TOP OF THE MARKETING EVOLUTION

Corporate membership

B2B marketers have never had to be so multi-skilled, multi-tasked, and accountable to business objectives. Marketers need up-to-the-minute research, knowledge and insight to ensure they are not left behind.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
A full portfolio of professional content and training so you can mix the way you keep up with your professional development.

INSIGHT
It's not easy when the rules change so rapidly, B2B Marketing membership will keep you informed, up-to-date and connected with the latest research and news that matters to you.

B2B MARKETING MEMBERSHIP

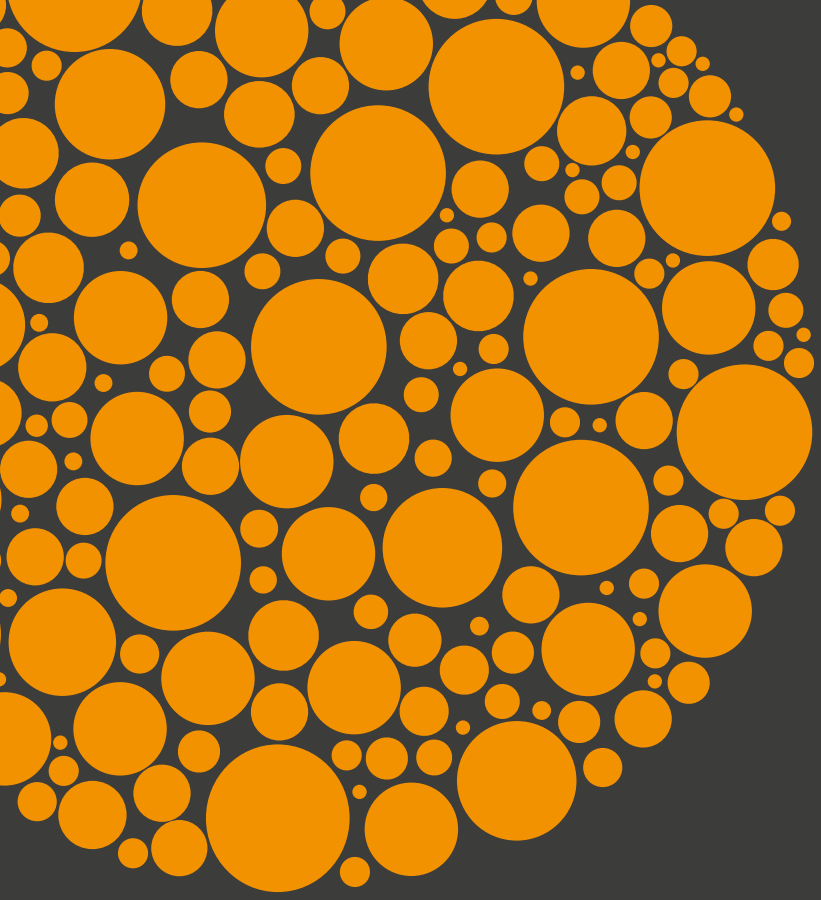
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B2B Marketing members have access to independently approved benchmarking results and reports. Match your results with your competitors to support on-going success.

TIME-SAVING RESOURCES
B2B Marketing membership delivers relevant content directly to you when need it.

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B2B Marketing members have the unique opportunity to share ideas, insight, and connect with like-minded individuals, both on- and offline.

Join us today

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