redrocketmedia
CONTENT MARKETING

ONE SOLUTION TO THE FIVE BIGGEST SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES

THE FIVE BIGGEST SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES

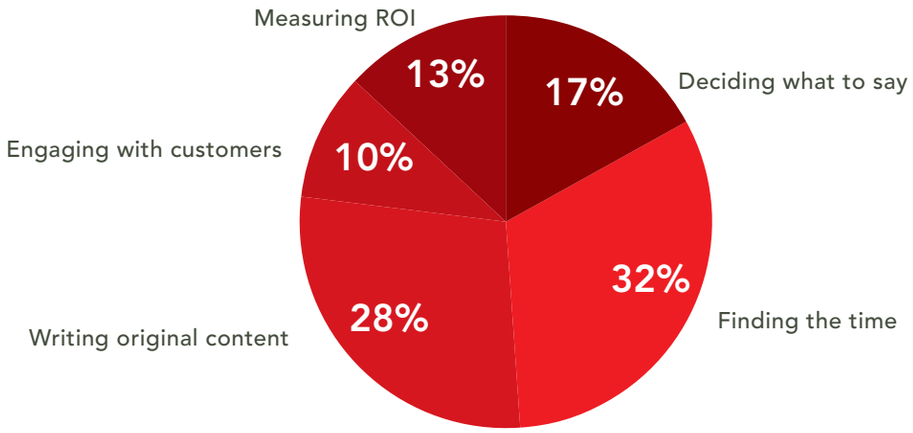
Studies show that, year on year, more businesses are recognising the value of social media and those that are already on board are yielding some really positive returns. 90% of marketers now indicate that social media is important for their business, quoting brand awareness, increased traffic to their website and improved search engine rankings as the main advantages. However, whilst the benefits are plentiful, few seem to achieve the dizzy 'brand' heights they strive for.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

The challenges businesses face when it comes to planning and implementing their social media activities can often seem insurmountable with very little return, especially in the early days, so it is easy to see why many social media efforts fall by the way side. One of the main problems with social media is that it is a continuous activity unlike many other aspects of marketing which tend to be task or campaign based. To achieve results, you need to be chipping away at it every single day, determining what messages you want to broadcast, writing original content which is going to interest your readers, taking time out to actually engage with your audience etc. Of course, that is easier said than done when you have a list of other deadline-specific marketing tasks looming on the horizon.

If you have already been down this route, believe me, you are not alone. We recently conducted a survey which revealed the five biggest social media challenges faced by those responsible for marketing:

5 biggest social media challenges



Red Rocket Media Social Survey November 2011

- Deciding what to say 17%
- Finding the time 32%
- Writing original content 28%
- Engaging with customers 10%
- Measuring ROI 13%

These results are not surprising. Social media is a time consuming and challenging job, however, it can reap very positive rewards for those companies that think differently about how they communicate with their customers.

In this white paper, we tell you how content can transform your social media marketing.

CHALLENGE 1. WHAT TO SAY?

Most companies struggle when it comes to finding their voice on social media, largely due to the somewhat haphazard manner in which it is approached. In the absence of an initial strategy, there tends to be three stages a company will go through:

ANNOUNCE

It is a natural instinct to post and tweet information about yourself or your company as you seek to tell the world about all the latest and greatest happenings within your business. However, any company that has been down this route soon realises that announcements soon dry up and none of your followers (and that's probably quite a small number in the early stages) are actually engaging with you.

RESPOND

At this stage, companies will start to respond to mentions of their brand name or maybe start contributing to conversations. This is a good first step towards interacting with your readers as long as you ensure that your comments are adding value to the conversation. If you notice that people are re-tweeting and sharing your comments, that's a good sign that you're on the right track.

ENGAGE

The majority of companies will remain at stage one or two but the forward-thinking ones will very soon realise that a more strategic plan is required. They will start to instigate conversations and position themselves as conversation leaders instead of participants. In order to do this though, you need to determine what it is that you are going to communicate: it needs to be interesting, add value to your readers and make them want to retweet and share it across their own networks. After all, one of the biggest benefits of social media is the speed at which information can spread and the reach you can achieve; you share it with your network, they share it with theirs and so on.

There are three questions you should ask yourself before you post something on social media:

1. Is it interesting and entertaining?
2. Does it add value to my readers?
3. Will they want to share it across their networks?

In order to stand out from the masses of information in circulation, you must be able to answer 'yes' to all three of these questions, especially when you consider what happens on the Internet in just 60 seconds:

- 98,000 tweets on Twitter
- 695,000 status updates on Facebook
- 694,445 queries on Google
- 60 new blogs
- 100 news accounts on LinkedIn
- 13 hours of content are uploaded to YouTube (says YouTube employee)

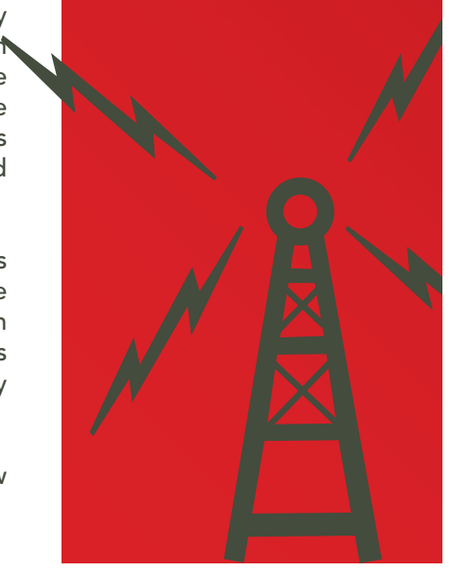
That's a significant amount of content for people to sift through when they are trying to filter out the nuggets of information which are actually of value to them. In fact, if your broadcasts continue to add to the 'noise' as opposed to the nuggets, it's more than likely that you will be 'un-followed' and 'un-liked' as opposed to growing your audience.

Think differently about your voice

Clever companies think differently about the content that they publish on social media; they devote as much time and attention to it as they would to the content of a brochure or newsletter. It is planned and considered, not random and irrelevant.

They use content to position themselves as experts in the industry, a credible source of information which enables them to build relationships with their readers long before their services are actually required.

Later in the white paper, we explain how you too can do this.



CHALLENGE 2. FINDING THE TIME

Lack of time: biggest social media challenge

This is often quoted as the biggest challenge with social media as there never seems to be enough hours in the day to devote to it. Creating a regular supply of high quality, engaging content is an extremely time consuming job, especially if you want to reap the rewards only a well thought-out content marketing strategy will yield.

There is much more to social media than just publishing the odd blog and linking to it from Twitter (although that is of course a good starting point). You need to be actively engaged with your prospects across all of the main social media platforms, through your blog, blog comments and even guest posts. For all of these you need high quality content and that takes a serious amount of time to produce.

Many marketers don't actually schedule in time for social media, as they would for, say, an email campaign and consequently it tends to sit in the adhoc section of their to-do list week after week. It's something that you know you need to do but never seem to get round to doing. Also, using social media as a marketing tool is probably a strange concept to many companies who just aren't used to 'chatting' with their prospects and customers in this new, informal way. Therefore, spending even one hour a day on it, especially in the early days when you seem to spend more time working out how to do it than actually doing it, can seem like a waste of your valuable time.

On top of taking time to actually publish content, it is also important to take time to listen to what's happening around your brand on social media. What are people saying about your services or products? Whether it's good or bad, social media can provide an invaluable insight into how your brand is perceived in the market place. Never before has this kind of information been so readily available to marketers, yet I bet if I were to say to you "here are two extra hours in the day", not many of them would end up being spent on social media. The majority of people would probably allocate that time to tasks with imminent deadlines which of course is a completely natural thing to do.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that no matter how much time you have and how much you want to create a strong social media presence, unless you have a dedicated in-house social media team, you are generally going to need to pull in expertise from elsewhere to ensure that it happens and you succeed.

CHALLENGE 3. CREATING ORIGINAL CONTENT



With the launch of Google's latest algorithm update, known as Panda, never before has unique content been so important. Panda was introduced to penalise websites which duplicate content from other websites as opposed to creating their own. It came about due to the increasing number of companies (often referred to as content farms) which were publishing significant amounts of low quality content solely to drive traffic to their websites and increase online advertising revenues. As a result, unique content has once again been thrust into the limelight and is highly rewarded by the search engines who favour it in their organic search results.

PEOPLE WHO PUBLISH CONTENT TEND TO FALL INTO TWO CATEGORIES:

Curators seek out information from several sources, filter out all the really useful nuggets and channel it back out amongst their networks. Whilst they are useful portals of information, they channel traffic towards the original sources of information, promoting those authors as the experts in the industry.

Creators go one step further: they influence our thoughts. They keep abreast of what is going on in their particular field then reproduce it but with an additional layer of their own wisdom or intelligence. They drive traffic to their own content, positioning themselves as the experts in the industry.

Most businesses are curators: they re-tweet and share bits of information which they believe their readers will find interesting and valuable.

Forward-thinking businesses become creators: as experts in their field, they publish information which adds value over and above what is already in circulation.

This can be a very powerful tool when it comes to distinguishing your brand from those of your competitors.

Of course, to create high quality content, you need professional writers. In the absence of these, many companies initially turn to their marketing or PR staff, after all they are accustomed to copy writing on a daily basis, but that's where these companies go wrong.

Content that thrives in a social media environment needs to be entertaining and tell a story which, as a general rule, aren't skills regularly practised by marketers or PR professionals: Their strengths lie in self-promotional, branded content and, as you'll find out later in this white paper, this type of content won't propel you to social media stardom.

Also worth mentioning before we move on is that the Panda algorithm uses artificial intelligence to identify quality content as well as original content. It is able to determine a site's trustworthiness, speed and design as well as track how soon a visitor leaves after having first landed on the site; a sure reflection of how valuable their visit has been.

So not only are your prospects and customers demanding original content but now the search engines are too.



CHALLENGE 4. ENGAGING WITH CUSTOMERS

A question we are often asked is: once you've decided on the content for your social media, how do you get people to engage with it? After all, there is little point in investing time and money in creating unique content if it doesn't inspire people to re-tweet it, share it, comment on it etc.

There are 2 elements to social media:

- The broadcast element
- The engagement element

As we have already discussed, the broadcast element involves planning what to say and creating original content. The success of the engagement element depends largely on the level of commitment that your company is willing to make.

For example, you've got a great piece of content to publish:

Option 1

- **You publish it on your website**
- **You link to it from your social media platforms**

Option 2

- **You publish it on your website**
- **You link to it from your social media platforms**
- **Employees re-tweet it, like it, share it and forward it amongst their own networks**
- **You comment on the posts, inviting opinions from others**
- **You write a blog about it, linking to the article and encouraging comments at the end**
- **You post supporting articles or images (images are great for attracting comments)**

As long as the content is entertaining and adds value to the reader (that is absolutely key), all of a sudden, it has sparked engagement and has extended its reach 10 fold.

Furthermore, the personality of your company has a chance to shine through and it is this personality which really helps push the engagement aspect of social media marketing to the next level.

Readers feel welcomed into your business as they get to know you a little, opening the door to deeper, more trusting relationships.

Build deeper, more trusting relationships with your readers

CHALLENGE 5. MEASURING ROI

In order to measure ROI, you need to define your social media objectives and it is surprising how many companies fail to do this. Whether you want to increase brand awareness or drive traffic to your website, you need to ascertain what it is that you want to achieve in the first place.

With social media, it is also important to differentiate between your short and long term objectives as the metrics used will differ.

After all, there is little point trying to attribute sales to your Facebook activity after just a few weeks given that it can take months, even a year, to build up relationships with your readers (as with any networking arena).

THE WRONG WAY

Let's firstly look at where many companies go wrong, that being the metrics they use to measure ROI.

We are programmed to measure marketing success by the number of leads it generates and sales it ultimately leads to which is why so many companies automatically apply these metrics from day one. However, given that it can take time to attribute sales to social media (it is a nurturing process), they are not necessarily a good indication of how well your social media activities are performing in the short term.

It is also likely that, if your objective from day one is to generate sales, the messages you are broadcasting will be the wrong type. For example, to generate leads, you generally need to publish content which encourages people to submit their email address but unfortunately people are not usually willing to give you this information in the early stages of the buying cycle. Therefore, your content will only serve to put people off engaging with you as opposed to encouraging interaction.

Worth pointing out here is that your prospects are now spending up to 80% of the buying cycle doing their own online research before they will even entertain speaking to a sales consultant. Social media is about interacting with those readers *before* they get to the point where they are selecting potential suppliers.

THE RIGHT WAY

Particularly in the short to medium term, you need to be looking at other metrics:

Organic search results

As we mentioned earlier, the Google Panda algorithm looks for websites which continue to produce original, quality content and can demonstrate an authority in the industry. If you are publishing content and linking to it from your social media sites, your website will be continually indexed by Google who will rank it favourably in the search results. This is an excellent metric by which to measure your social media activities.

Content engagement

Despite what many companies think, having lots of followers or fans is not necessarily a good indication of your social media success. What's important is how many of them are actually engaging with your content. High quality content thrives in social media environments, sparking high levels of likes, share, re-tweets, comments etc. It is these metrics that you should be measuring. Panda also favours this kind of activity when returning search results so this, in turn, will help to enhance your organic search results.

Brand engagement

Are people talking about your brand? This is a really important measure for new businesses striving to get their brand name out there. An ideal way to keep track of this is to set up a Google Alert with your company name as this will alert you to any mentions. This is also a good way to keep abreast of any negative mentions of your brand so that you can react accordingly.

Sales (longer term)

Naturally, you are going to want to put a monetary value on your return from social media at some point but keep in mind that you need to give yourself time to develop relationships with readers before you are going to see results. With Google Analytics, you can tie traffic sources to 'goals' (such as download conversions) which enables you to track if particular sources are actually resulting in sales.



The ROI of social media is that your business will still exist in five years*

*(Source: Erik Qualman's Socialnomics video)

In the short term though, instead of looking at your sales week to week, ask yourself: are the sales this week greater than this time last year? Is the web traffic this week greater than the same week last year? If you can see an upward trend this will give you confidence that you're on the right track.

THE SOLUTION : CONTENT MARKETING

Despite the social media challenges we have discussed in this white paper, there is no doubt that social media is now one of the most powerful tools in a marketing professional's tool box.

It allows you to connect with your audience on a much more personal level and influence their thought-processes long before they make their purchasing decisions. Companies that don't embrace social media are effectively foregoing the chance to get to know their customers for up to 80% of the buying cycle: that leaves a very small window of opportunity to convert a prospect into a customer.

So the big question, how do you overcome these challenges and ensure that your social media activities drive returns to your company? The answer is content marketing.

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

- Editorial-based content; It must tell a relevant, valuable story. Must be informative, educational or entertaining.
- Marketing-backed; The content has underlying marketing and sales objectives that a corporation, association or institution is trying to accomplish.
- Behaviour-driven; Seeks out to maintain or alter the recipient's behaviour.
- Multi-platform (print, digital, audio, video, events); It can be, does not have to be, integrated.
- Targeted toward a specific audience; If you can't name the audience, it's not content marketing.

(Source; Joe Pulizzi/Junta 42 Content Marketing)

Content marketing involves publishing topic related information through your website and social media platforms which solves problems for your readers as opposed to selling to them. It should be original and commercially-neutral.

Examples include:

- Industry news
- Evergreen articles eg. how-to guides, checklists and resource documents
- Blogs
- White papers
- Microsites
- Videos

This may sound a rather alien approach to many marketing professionals but, given that consumers are now spending up to 80% of the buying cycle researching online before they even engage with a supplier, companies that adapt this way of communicating with their readers will enjoy considerably greater social media success.

By publishing valuable, thought-leading information, they position themselves as experts in the industry and the obvious choice of supplier further down the line.

one complete solution



HOW DOES CONTENT MARKETING PROVIDE THE SOLUTION?



Let's revisit each of the challenges in turn and explain how content marketing can help overcome each one:

WHAT TO SAY

Content marketing will ensure that you always have something to say on social media. For example, if you are a travel company that specialises in trips to Australia, you might publish news about the Australian tourism industry or evergreen articles such as '10 things to do in Sydney'. This kind of content empowers your readers with knowledge and positions you as an expert in your field.

They might follow you on Twitter or sign up to RSS feeds from your website, then, when they decide to book a trip, you will no doubt be forefront of mind.

Of course the other huge benefit of publishing industry news is that news never runs out which means you'll always have something to say.

FINDING THE TIME

Content marketing removes part of the broadcast element of social media ie. working out what to say and frees up your time to focus on the engagement element. Of course, there is still the issue of actually writing original content which in itself is a hugely time consuming job.

The only way you can remove this element is to either recruit an in-house brand journalist - not generally a realistic option for most companies - or outsource to a content marketing agency.

Due to the cost implications of hiring an in-house brand journalist, most companies choose to outsource this element of their content marketing to a specialist content marketing agency. They will provide you with a regular supply of content which can feed automatically to your website and social media platforms. In doing so, this frees you up completely to focus on the 'engagement' aspect of social media marketing ie. the personal messages which truly reflect the culture of your business and help you develop longer lasting relationships with your customers.

CREATING ORIGINAL CONTENT

When you step away from the confines of your own brand, there is suddenly a whole new world of subject matter for you to talk about and, even better, people are actually interested in what you have to say.

Content marketing, whether that's industry news, blogs, evergreen articles or webinars, puts your prospects and customers right at the heart of the information you publish.

By stepping into their shoes, it ensures that you are providing solutions to their problems as opposed to bombarding them with endless marketing messages which they are not yet ready to absorb.

ENGAGING WITH READERS

Content marketing offers the perfect platform to connect with and encourage interaction from readers. Valuable news and advice spreads like wild fire on social media: people re-tweet it, share it and comment on it, propelling your brand and wisdom far and wide. Not only that but, as you are the originator of the content and it is housed on your website, every time someone shares your content, another inbound link to your website is created. This drives traffic to your website and signals to the search engines that it is a valuable site worth returning in their search results.

MEASURING ROI

Content marketing gives you a basis to track your social media activities effectively, ensuring that it is driving measurable results to your business. For example, if you tweet and post about your products and services, you are unlikely to engage readers and therefore you have nothing by which to measure the success of your social media activities. On the other hand, if you publish a blog offering expert advice to your customers helping them to overcome a particular problem, your readers will comment on it, re-tweet it and share it across their networks, providing you with plenty of metrics to track activity and demonstrate return further down the line.

RED ROCKET MEDIA

Working with Red Rocket Media will help you overcome your social media challenges. We specialise in building audiences for our customers through highly effective content marketing. We help them think differently about how they communicate with their target market and provide them with quality, industry-related content which meets their customers' needs

Our services include:



NEWS CONTENT



EVERGREEN CONTENT



SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT



STRATEGIC CONTENT MARKETING



MICROSITE MANAGEMENT

Successful content marketing relies on informative, entertaining articles which not only tell a story but also seek to influence the reader's behaviour. This is a highly developed skill.

Our in-house team of journalists are all professionally trained and qualified. They are not copywriters; they are brand journalists, with an eye for a story and the ability to present it in an informative and entertaining way. They are skilled at keeping abreast of the latest trends, producing content which creates high levels of engagement; people read it, forward it and share it.

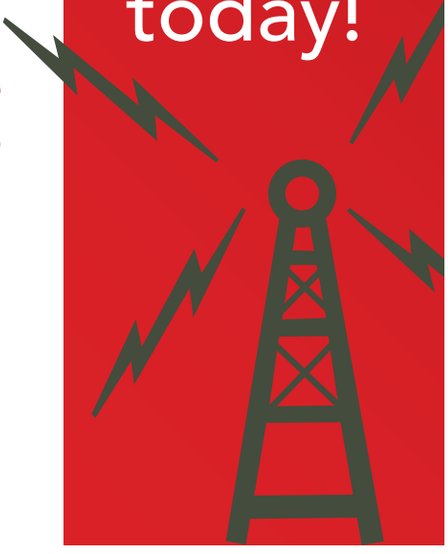
REQUEST SAMPLE PACK

It won't be long before more and more companies realise the enormous value content marketing can bring to their business and what a vital role it plays in securing the success of their social media activities. Take action today and request your free sample pack.

We are also offering a free initial consultation to anyone who has downloaded the white paper so contact us today to arrange yours:

Visit www.redrocketmedia.co.uk
Call 0845 658 3334
Email msoutar@redrocketmedia.co.uk

take action today!




BUILD AN
AUDIENCE