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THE GET REAL GUIDE TO B2B CONTENT MARKETING

THE GURUS SAY ONE THING. YOUR RESULTS SAY ANOTHER. IT'S TIME TO GET REAL ABOUT WHAT REALLY WORKS IN B2B CONTENT MARKETING.

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN LIVING UNDER A ROCK, YOU'LL KNOW THAT CONTENT MATTERS IN B2B MARKETING.

But for many, the words they hear at the conferences and on influential blogs don't match up with what they're seeing in their businesses.

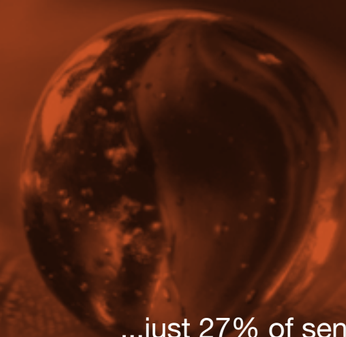
Let's take an example analysed by Mark Higginson in an article for Econsultancy. He focuses in on Amex's Open Forum — a much praised hub of insight and advice for small businesses. Their top post gets 17,346 shares — impressive. Until you realise that the average for their other 1,300+ articles is just 200 shares.

Of course, if that was an isolated incident, there'd be little to worry about.

A ONE OFF? SADLY NOT



FOR EXAMPLE, LET'S LOOK AT THE FACT THAT, ACCORDING TO RESEARCH BY FORRESTER...



...just 27% of senior marketers strongly agree that they're seeing satisfactory business value from content marketing darling Twitter (Forrester's Q1 2015 Global Social Relationship Platform Wave™ Online Survey).

Or take research from Vanson Bourne that shows that while 94% of IT marketers use social and 71% are planning to spend more on it, just 20% of IT decision makers use social to shortlist potential vendors.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

WHILE THE LATEST MUST-DO ACTIVITY CHANGES, SOME THINGS DO NOT.

The overall objectives for B2B content have remained remarkably consistent in recent years. Technology Marketing's B2B Content Marketing Report for 2016 shows the top priority as Lead Generation (55%) followed by Brand Awareness (38%) and Customer Acquisition (37%) — though, interestingly, Revenue is a poor 9th on 22%. Other research has reported much the same thing year on year.

So why is there such a mismatch between objectives and results?

WELL IT COMES DOWN TO A FEW THINGS — FOUR TO BE PRECISE

STRATEGY ISN'T BEING APPROACHED IN THE RIGHT WAY, LINKING MARKETING TO THE WIDER BUSINESS REALITIES. THERE IS INSUFFICIENT CUSTOMER-FOCUS (IN A WAY THAT WILL LEAD TO INCREASED REVENUES AND SHORTER SALES CYCLES). TOO MANY BRANDS SUFFER FROM POOR DIFFERENTIATION IN THE MINDS OF THEIR PROSPECTS. AND TODAY'S APPROACHES TEND TO PRIORITISE CONTENT OVER MARKETING (AND ARE TOO OBSESSED WITH THE LATEST BRIGHT SHINY TACTICS).

MARKETING SUCCESS = BUSINESS SUCCESS

WHILE SO MUCH OF THE POPULAR DISCUSSION AROUND MARKETING TODAY FOCUSES ON WHAT MARKETERS ARE DOING (SOCIAL, CONTENT, ABM ETC), TOO LITTLE TAKES TIME TO GROUND IT IN WHY THEY'RE DOING IT.

Or if it does, it tends to focus on the outcomes of individual activities (how many shares something got).

The reality, of course, is that marketing is a function of the overall business. Its role is to add tangible value. This can mean a number of things — growing brand, depositioning competitors, engaging investors, launching products — but ultimately they pretty much all come back to increasing or accelerating revenue.

This means that any content that doesn't link to the wider marketing strategy and to delivering tangible business results will always be ineffective in the eyes of senior management.



ANY SUCCESSFUL CONTENT MARKETING APPROACH WILL HAVE CUSTOMERS AT ITS CORE

LET'S FACE IT, CREATING EMPTY, NAVEL-GAZING MATERIAL IS A GUARANTEED DIRECT ROUTE TO FAILURE (EVEN THOUGH A DISTRESSINGLY HIGH NUMBER OF BRANDS WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER STILL DO IT).

So focusing on the customer will always make good business sense.

But it is one thing to reflect what customers find interesting and another to tie their interests and objectives with yours. So while many businesses churn out "interesting" top 5 listicles that may generate some clicks (sometimes lots of clicks), they're failing to move the prospect towards a sale.

WHAT WILL YOU TEACH YOUR CUSTOMERS?

RESEARCH FROM CEB HAS CLEARLY SHOWN THAT BEING ABLE TO EDUCATE CUSTOMERS ABOUT THEIR OWN BUSINESSES IS A FUNDAMENTAL MARKER OF SUCCESS IN B2B.



Those that manage this out-perform all others by a staggering margin. So when we talk about being customer-focused in B2B content marketing, we mean helping the customer achieve their key real-world objectives in a way that has a direct line to how your business makes money.

Importantly, this will often mean actively trying to persuade customers to stop doing what they're currently doing and start doing something new. Or it will mean showing them fundamental issues in their businesses that they may be currently unaware of. Or it will mean helping them get unstuck from a situation holding their businesses back.

ATTENTION SPANS ARE GETTING SHOR... OOH, LOOK, A CAT IN A BOW TIE

CUSTOMERS TODAY, HAVE FRIGHTENINGLY SHORT ATTENTION SPANS. THEY'RE BUSY. THEY HAVE NEVER-ENDING TO-DO LISTS AND NOT ENOUGH TIME.

As a result, they probably don't spend a lot of time thinking about the intricacies of a new ERP system or VoIP provider except when they're in the final stages of a buying decision. This means that it has never been more important to develop a strong, differentiated brand. (Check out the Get Real Guide to B2B Differentiation for more on this.)

Creating meaningful differentiation means that in that limited time a customer thinks about solving a particular problem, they're more likely to think of you.



BUYERS WILL ASSIGN MORE IMPORTANCE TO THINGS THAT ARE EASY TO RECALL

IT'S NOT ONLY THAT CUSTOMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO THINK OF YOU IF YOU HAVE REAL DIFFERENTIATION, THEY'RE MORE LIKELY TO THINK BETTER OF YOU TOO.

This is a cognitive bias known as the availability heuristic. So, if a customer is starting to research how to fix a problem in their business, they will gravitate to sources of information they can easily bring to mind.

This may be a media outlet: *Didn't The Register run and article on that recently?* Or it could be a contact: *Didn't Sarah put in a marketing automation system last year? I wonder what she thinks.* Or it could be a vendor: *I've heard a lot of businesses like mine use Marketo, I'll go check them out.*

While 'brand' has become a somewhat unfashionable area of marketing, having a strong, distinctive brand has never been more fundamental to success. Whereas in the past, this would often be around elevating key attributes, today, it's those brands that are associated with being the most knowledgeable, helpful and human that tend to stand out. That is, those brands creating the right kind of content.

TOO MANY PEOPLE GET MARKETING STRATEGY MIXED UP WITH EXECUTIONAL TACTICS

IT'S WHY WE SEE SO MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NEED FOR A SNAPCHAT STRATEGY, A CHATBOT STRATEGY, A VR STRATEGY.

Let's be clear: **these are not strategies,** they're at most tactics or simply media options.

Marketing strategy is the process of identifying meaningful business outcomes, making hard choices about what to focus on and outlining a broad course of action to achieve those outcomes.

Strategy is not about deciding how to best use social media, or whether to create videos instead of how-to guides, or how to structure a lead nurturing programme. These all come later (if at all) when the core strategic foundations are in place.

So when you read articles on B2B content marketing that start with the need for an editorial calendar, big red warning lights should begin flashing in your head. There are too many 'comprehensive' guides that pay little or no attention to content as part of a wider programme with tangible business objectives. They're all about the activity rather than the outcome.

GETTING REAL ABOUT B2B CONTENT MARKETING



THE RIGHT CONTENT MARKETING DONE IN THE RIGHT WAY, WORKS. IT BUILDS BRANDS, CREATES DEMAND AND ACCELERATES SALES.

What's more, it can achieve all this without the need to play the long game that so many pundits claim — why run a marathon when you can sprint?

Thing is, once created and structured in the right way, this content can keep on performing week in, week out. What begins as a targeted outbound demand generation campaign can seamlessly become an inbound source of additional traffic and leads, or an on-demand triggered nurture programme.

And, by tracking results — qualified leads, pipeline, sales velocity rather than likes, shares, visitors — and running low-risk tests, you can continually tune your approach over time.

7 KEYS TO REAL-WORLD SUCCESS

SO WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CREATE THE RIGHT KIND OF CONTENT MARKETING? START WITH THE FOLLOWING SEVEN AREAS:

01

Be clear about what success looks like in business terms and the role marketing and content can play in delivering it

02

Focus on what really matters to customers within your sphere of influence (not what you wish matters to them) — don't get side-tracked chasing clicks that will never turn into revenue

03

Develop highly actionable personas — it doesn't matter that the buyer is called Sue and likes Zumba, it does matter where she sits in the buying process, what she really needs to fix and what's a deal-breaker for her

04

Create cycles of content focused on the sales funnel — think campaigns first, triggers second and air cover third

05

Focus each piece on the next behaviour you want to see from a viable prospect

06

Invest in great writing that talks to customers in their language, not jargon-filled business-speak

07

Measure and track everything, create low cost experiments, adapt and refine for increased results

While this is by no means the whole picture, it does provide a foundation for B2B content marketing that delivers against the real-world demands of the business. It means that you can more closely tie your content marketing activities to actual results. Ultimately, it means you can create the kind of marketing that engages both customers and senior management.

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WE SHOULD TALK

If you're already investing in B2B content but not seeing the return you need, the good news is there are a ton of ways to improve its performance. Of course, sometimes it can be difficult knowing where to begin.

We start with coffee and a chat (or tea if you prefer). Your place or ours, no PowerPoint, no big sales pitch – just an open conversation about the challenges you face. Then, if we can help and there's a good fit, we'll go from there.

Drop us a line at hello@consideredcontent.com and we'll set up a time.