THE EXPERTS GUIDE TO CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing is a phrase you might not have heard of this time last year, yet it is now deemed to be one of the most effective online marketing techniques in a marketing manager's tool box and is set to explode in 2012. As the hype around it continues to increase, many companies will no doubt be wondering what it's all about, how it works and why they should be doing it. If you're one of them (and believe me you're not alone) then this guide is for you.

To help us explore each question, we have enlisted some of the industry's finest:

WHAT is content marketing? by Michelle Hill @RedRocketMedia

WHY you need to be doing content marketing, by Jeff Bullas @jeffbullas

HOW to address content marketing, by Joe Pulizzi @juntajoe

WHERE to do content marketing, by Ann Handley @MarketingProfs

WHEN to do content marketing, by Lee Odden @leeodden

WHAT by Michelle Hill

So, I'm kicking off proceedings with the often asked 'what is content marketing?' question. Let's start with the formal definition, given by the Content Marketing Institute:

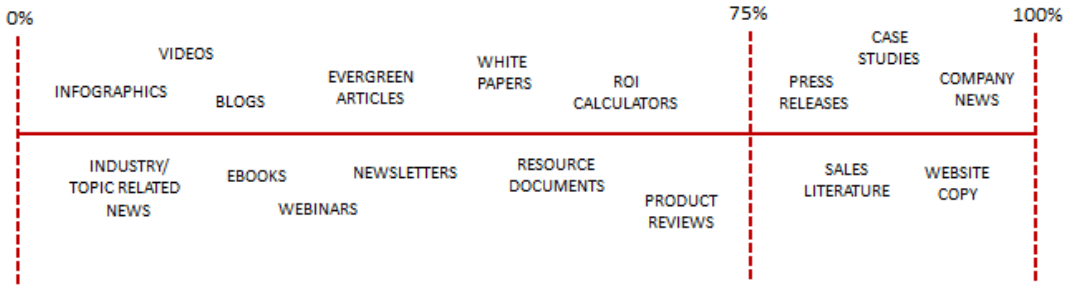
> *"Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."*

Content marketing provides your audience with commercially-neutral information which is educational, tells a story and provides a solution to their problems. Unlike traditional marketing such as press releases or brochure copy, it is not self-promotional and, therefore, may seem a rather alien way of communicating with your prospects and customers.

The illustration below shows the various types of content required by your prospects and customers as they move through the buying cycle. Due to the masses of information available on the internet, they are now able to do their own research online which means they generally aren't ready to engage with your sales people for the first 75% of the buying cycle.

In that first 75%, they don't want to be sold to, they want to be educated: they are looking for solutions, not providers. Content marketing allows you to effectively connect with those prospects whilst they are in that crucial phase of the buying cycle.

Typical buying cycle content requirements



Isn't content marketing the same as copy writing?

No, copy writing is self-promotional ie your company sales brochure or a press release about a new product you are launching. As with content marketing, it plays a vital role in your marketing communications, however it generally isn't effective until the latter stages of the buying cycle when your prospects are starting to research suppliers.

Examples

Let's demonstrate some of these using a leisure centre as an example:

Industry/topic related news
They might publish news articles about the latest fitness trends to hit the industry or up and coming sporting events.

Evergreen articles
Once a month they might publish a longer article such as 'how to train for a marathon' or '5 tips to get fit for summer'. Or they might publish 'healthy eating' recipes.

White paper
Once a quarter they might bring together their evergreen articles to create a valuable resource document.

Videos
A short video of one of their fitness instructors demonstrating the basic moves of Zumba.

WHY by Jeff Bullas

Jeff is a consultant, coach, mentor and speaker and works with companies and executives to optimise their online presence. Jeff's blog has over 100,000 hits a month and is read in 115 countries worldwide. He has consulted to the top Australian internet companies including Telstra, Optus and Vodafone.

Jeff says…

"If you want to get serious about marketing for your business or organisation, the foundation of any focused effort is having great content to publish and promote that informs and educates. Content marketing, also known as inbound/pull marketing provides an extremely effective alternative to interruption marketing such as telemarketing, cold calling and traditional advertising that pushes messages "at" you."

"The secret behind content marketing that is published and promoted on social networks including blogs, Facebook and Twitter and other social media channels is attracting loyal tribes of readers and viewers. This allows you to attract and pull customers to you that will engage, read and then buy."

"Coca Cola, whose ads have delighted consumers for decades, has decided to move from 'Creative' excellence" to 'Content' excellence as they transition into the era of 'distribution technologies' that provide greater connectivity and consumer empowerment than ever before. The ultimate goal….to create 'Liquid content'! They see the future of content as the 'matter' and 'substance' of brand engagement and conversation. This is quite a change for one of the leaders in consumer marketing."

Ten reasons "WHY" you should do content marketing

1. Positions you as a thought leader
2. Positions you as an expert and leader in your field
3. Improves search engine results – Google loves fresh, new content
4. Creates an online asset
5. Educates, informs and entertains
6. Works 24/7 even while you sleep, year in, year out
7. Provides content that can be shared easily and globally
8. Creates loyal fans and followers
9. Creates engagement and builds relationships with prospects
10. Creates 'Liquid' content or online buzz and virality: content so contagious it cannot be controlled. This is the purpose of Content Excellence.

Jeff concludes…

"Consider your online content as important as the bricks and mortar assets that you own. If Coca Cola sees content as the foundation for its future marketing strategy then the time for content marketing has truly arrived and should be considered in your future plans!"

HOW by Joe Pulizzi

Joe is a leading author, speaker and strategist for content marketing. He is founder of the Content Marketing Institute and SocialTract. He writes one of most popular content marketing blogs in the world and is co-author of Get Content Get Customers and Managing Content Marketing.

Joe says…

Before understanding how to implement a content marketing program, it's important to know what content marketing is not:

It's Not About the Campaign
Content marketing is not campaign driven like most marketing and PR campaigns. It's a promise that never ends. It doesn't start and stop. Content marketers develop a relationship with customers and prospects by providing a never ending stream of solution-driven stories.

It's Not About the Most, But the One
Businesses naturally want to target the largest possible audience. Makes perfect sense. We did of course grow up as part of the mass media revolution. So it also makes sense that that we want to create content targeting as many people as possible. That is where mistakes are made. We don't want to create content for everyone. Brands need to develop content so niche, so focused that they become the leading experts in the world in that niche (yes, this is publishing). That's content that makes an impact, that's shared, that delivers for the brand.

It's Not About Us
This should go without saying, but it is still the biggest mistake that brands make. We think that our products and services are so amazing that, if we talk about them in compelling ways, our customers would want to hear about it and share it. We are wrong. Our customers don't care about us, they only care about themselves. Our content has to reflect that.

Our Content Is Not Good Enough
Your content competition is everywhere. It's the 3,000 messages a day that hit our customers. It's our direct competitors. It's trade magazines and websites. It's Google. It's the blog down the street. To cut through the clutter, our content has



to be the best. This will only become truer as time goes on. Good enough is not good enough anymore.

It means hiring journalists. It means finding those internal staffers that have a nose for the story. It means going to where the stories are: in operations, in sales, in customer service and where our customers are hanging out online, in print and in person.

Our Greatest Assets Are Employees
Great stories are all around us. How do we harness the power of storytelling within our employee base? Are we setting up processes for them to share their expertise with customers and prospects on a regular basis? When we think about the next celebrity endorsement or series of interviews, are we thinking about employees or someone else?

Who Owns the Content?
In some way, all departments own content, but someone has to take charge. The political battle is underway right now. Who becomes the chief content officer? Who owns the customer story? Marketing and PR departments are evolving rapidly, moving to a story-first mentality. They are becoming more like publishing departments every day. In most cases, just inserting a content owner won't take. Too many in the organization will fight against that. The battle has to start from within. It has to start with you.

The Nine Steps to Content Marketing

Although there is no silver bullet when it comes to content marketing, I've found that it's best to look at content marketing in these nine steps:

1. The Marketing Goal – What are you ultimately trying to accomplish for the business? (see this post on Content Marketing ROI)
2. Define Your Audience – What are the buyer personas you are targeting with the content initiative?
3. Know the Informational Needs – What are the pain points your customers are struggling with?
4. The Secret Sauce – How do those pain points line up with your expertise and product areas? Remember, we ultimately have to see positive impact on the business.
5. Where Is the Content? – Before you start creating content, we need to know what content we already have, and then map that content to the content segmentation plan so we know exactly what content we are missing. This is also helpful in determining how we can "re-imagine" or repackage the content we currently have for our different buying groups.

6. Where Are Your Customers? – Where are they hanging out online? Which groups do we need to get active in? Are their opportunities in print and in person initiatives?
7. Choose the Content Tactics – Now we can start to determine which tactics make the most sense to fund, resource or partner (here's a comprehensive resource of 42 different content options).
8. Develop the Content Calendar – Plug those tactics into a content calendar that makes sense for your different audiences. Remember, think like a publisher.
9. Execute Back to the Objective – Make decisions on measurement, sourcing, tracking, reporting. Continually refine the plan. Assign a Chief Content Officer (go here for a Chief Content Officer job description)

Joe concludes…

"Overall, if we want to attract and retain customers, we need to take our sales hats off and put on our publishing hats. We need to think and act like publishers…like journalists…and we need to do it now."

WHERE by Ann Handley

Chief Content Officer at MarketingProfs.com and author of Annarchy, Ann is a veteran of creating and managing digital content to build relationships for organizations and individuals. She is the co-author of the best-selling *Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business*

Ann says…

At this point, most companies have dipped their piggy toes in the content marketing waters: a recent study conducted by MarketingProfs and the Content Marketing Institute found that a whopping 9 out of 10 B2B marketing organizations used content marketing in 2011. http://www.marketingprofs.com/charts/2011/6539/2012-content-marketing-benchmarks-budgets-and-trends

We've also all by now absorbed the basic principle that effective content needs to Solve or Share, and Not Shill (as C.C. Chapman and I write in *Content Rules*(www.contentrulesbook.com). Your content should solve a problem, address a challenge your audience faces, educate them, or engage them emotionally. (Through humor, maybe.) And it shouldn't just try to sell them stuff.



But figuring out the “what” won’t get you across the finish line. You also have to consider the “where.”

So, you’ve been producing a lot of great stuff—how-to articles, infographics, videos, webinars, podcasts, blog posts and puppet shows, maybe—where should you publish it?

The answer to that question, of course, depends on what you are trying to accomplish, and with content marketing, people are generally looking to accomplish one of three things:

- Increase site traffic
- Generate and nurture leads
- Reach new audiences

How do these objectives influence where you publish? Let’s consider your options.

Your company website (or blog)

Regularly adding fresh, relevant, keyword-rich content to your site should improve your search ranking. So if your primary goal is to increase site traffic, publish content to your own site and reap the SEO benefits of whatever content you produce. Publishing content to your own site can also increase the time people spend on site once they’re there, and work to get them more engaged with you and who you are.

If you are using content to generate leads—by requesting an email address and contact information in exchange for a white paper, for example—you probably want to publish the white paper to a web property you control because that’s where you can set up your access gate. (The one exception to this is SlideShare, where PRO account holders can use the site’s LeadShare service – for a fee – to generate leads right from within the platform itself.)

A microsite

Consider setting up a separate site built around the relevant topic. You should clearly state that your company is sponsoring the site, and even leverage your main site’s SEO juice to boost the independent site’s search ranking, but you’ll build credibility by keeping the perspective neutral and focusing on the broad issues, not your products (talking about your competitors and even allowing them to contribute content of their own can help with this). A great (and tasty) example of this is the Grilled Cheese Academy, a microsite published by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board.

Newsletters

When it comes to nurturing leads, a newsletter can serve as a great way to deliver for your content and offering unique newsletter content (that can't be found on your own site, for example) is a great way to build your list.

Syndication or guest-posting

A great way to broaden your reach is to contribute content to third-party sites that have already built their own audiences. Many sites are constantly looking for fresh, pipin'-hot new content and will be happy to publish your work if it meets their editorial goals, speaks to their audience, and is well written. MarketingProfs is an example of a site that features guest articles and posts on a regular basis.

Social platforms

Does it make sense to use social media platforms to exclusively host your own content? Sometimes. (See SlideShare notation, above.) But generally, it's far better to use a site or a blog you own and control as your content hub. After all, you wouldn't build a house on rented land. So why would you build your content strategy on a site you don't own, either?

WHEN by Lee Odden

Lee is CEO of digital marketing agency TopRank and author of the extremely successful TopRank blog which was ranked the #1 Content Marketing Blog by Junta42 in 2011 and the #2 Social Media Blog by Social Media Examiner, amongst others.

Lee says…

When should you start with content marketing? Today's online marketing is a race where the stakes are high, competition is tough and it's becoming increasingly difficult to create a sustainable, competitive advantage. Consider these questions to help you answer, "When content marketing is right?" for you:

1. What's the right time to understand who your best customers are? Who are your "worst" customers?
2. When is it a good time to know what your prospects and customers care about and why they buy?
3. What triggers your prospects to discover, consume and engage with content that inspires sales, social shares and referrals?

4. Does having no content plan really mean you're planning to fail?
5. If you don't tie your SEO, social media and online public relations efforts together in a way that's manageable and efficient now, will you wait until your competition does?
6. When will you need a community of supporters to help promote your content, provide you with new content and serve as an on-demand focus group?
7. When is it a good time to create more efficient and effective means for journalists and the media to use your content in their news stories?
8. When is the right time to measure which content messages are working, which are not and to gain actionable insights that will improve overall marketing and PR performance?

The questions above get at some of the core principles and benefits of content marketing. Online marketers rely on channels like email, online PR, search and social media to generate awareness, leads and sales. Content is at the core of all those means of communication and without a strategy that coordinates content planning, creation, optimization, social promotion and measurement, companies are simply guessing and getting lucky with their current online marketing efforts.

Lee concludes…

Without planned content designed to attract, engage and inspire action with prospects, customers and industry influentials, companies may find themselves looking in the tail lights of their competitors in the distance. Why wait to start the race when you can get a head start with content marketing today?

GET STARTED!

So now you all know the ins and outs of content marketing and you want to get started.

At Red Rocket Media, we have a team of qualified journalists who can provide you with a fresh supply of high quality, original content that your audience will enjoy reading and want to share. Whether that's topical industry news (perfect fuel for social media) or longer evergreen features (ideal for using in your blog), the content we provide will get people talking, sharing and coming back to your website time and time again.

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