

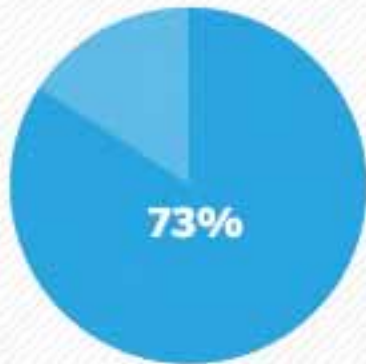
opentopic

Surprisingly Simple Content Marketing™

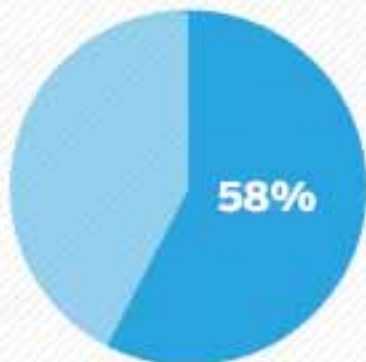
WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

(For The Efficient Content Marketer)

INTRODUCTION



73% of B2B content marketers are producing more content than 1 year ago



58% of B2B marketers planning to increase their content marketing budgets over the next 12 months


In this increasingly connected world, consumers are not only savvy and informed, they are also extremely busy. With significantly less time to filter information, consumers are more selective of the content they engage with, purposely seeking out sources that are useful and insightful, and can guide them in making educated decisions. In response to this increasing need, content marketing has become the preferred strategy to attract consumers and build long-term customer relationships.

According to Content Marketing Institute's 2014 B2B Content Marketing report, 73% of B2B content marketers are producing more content than they did a year ago, with 58% of B2B marketers planning to increase their content marketing budgets over the next 12 months.

The rise in content marketing can be attributed to the fact that it provides a more meaningful and useful way to engage customers - at a time when traditional tactics like brand advertising and direct response campaigns struggle to cut through the clutter.

{source: Content Marketing Institute 2014}

INTRODUCTION



However, while marketers are attracted to the potential of content marketing, many still don't quite know what it is and how best to approach it. And, while they know that compelling content plays a critical role in helping brands keep top of mind, many are daunted by the significant amount of time and resources required to develop original content on a consistent basis - especially those in organizations where resources are already tight.

So, therein lies the challenge—marketers know they need to employ content marketing, but the amorphous nature of the practice and the perceived cost of entry make it difficult to get started.

This white paper will help both experienced and non-experienced marketers understand what content marketing is, how to approach the content creation and curation mix as well as illustrate how great content marketing doesn't have to be complicated or expensive.

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF CONTENT MARKETING

{1895}

In 1895, John Deere launched the magazine *The Furrow*, providing information to farmers on how to become more profitable. According to Wikipedia, The magazine, considered the first custom publication, is still in circulation, reaching 1.5 million readers in 40 countries in 12 different languages.

Despite its recent surge in popularity, content marketing is not a new practice. Brands have been telling stories for decades to help attract and retain customers. (See John Deere's publication *The Furrow*, launched in 1895.) However, thanks to the changing expectations of consumers and the proliferation of new distribution channels, content marketing has more recently evolved from a nice-to-do practice into a must-have.

So, what exactly is content marketing?

The Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as "a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action." Put more simply, content marketing is the art of communicating with customers and prospects without selling, though still with the end goal of converting the customer.

How does one sell without selling, exactly? It's no wonder there's still quite a bit of confusion among marketing practitioners.

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF CONTENT MARKETING

{80%}

of business decision-makers prefer to get company information in a series of articles versus an advertisement. 70% say content marketing makes them feel closer to the sponsoring company, while 60% say that company content helps them make better product decisions.

{source: GfK}

The key to success in content marketing is to focus on the relationship. Advertising – even elaborate campaigns – can influence consumers, but that influence is more akin to a one-night stand than a long-term relationship. Content marketing is distinct from advertising in that it prioritizes value (useful information/entertainment) over instructions (direct brand messages/calls to action).

It's all about the long haul; by providing valuable, tangible information on a consistent basis, a brand can become a trusted resource. That type of relationship is far less vulnerable to competitive interception.

BIG BRANDS EMBRACE CONTENT MARKETING

Some of the world's biggest brands are now making considerable investments in content marketing:

Subway Subway's Fresh Artists series invited filmmakers to develop stories around breakfast sandwiches.

Lego broke the mold with its funny and informative LEGO movie, which critics are calling "content marketing at its finest".

Coca-Cola enlisted the help of Ridley Scott to produce an 8-minute animated film starring the iconic Coca-Cola polar bears.

Dove's social experiment, "Real Beauty Sketches," created significant buzz by exploring how women view their own beauty in contrast to what others see.

As illustrated by the powerhouse brands listed above, big budgets and content marketing go very well together. In fact, to support the rising trend, creative and PR agencies are now incorporating content marketing in their offerings and hiring industry-leading editors to run publications for their clients. Likewise, agencies specializing in "Branded Content" are popping up around the world, many with close ties to the entertainment industry.

But content marketing isn't solely the domain of big brands and big budgets. Mid- and smaller-size companies can leverage content to engage and acquire customers – without having to spend substantial dollars and resources.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

Remember that the role of content marketing is to create and distribute valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience. That doesn't mean that content marketing has to be complex or even expensive. The good news for brands with smaller budgets and even tighter resources is that content marketing can be surprisingly simple – and affordable.

To that end, here are a few things to consider:

1. You're probably already doing it

While it's only in recent years that 'content marketing' has reached critical buzz, the fact is it's not an entirely new practice. Chances are, you're probably already engaging in content marketing in some form of another. Here are some common channels you may already be using to distribute content:

Newsletters: Newsletters in particular are one of the most common, yet unrecognized content marketing channels available. Traditionally considered a corporate communications tool, many marketers don't put newsletters under the content marketing umbrella. However, newsletters are specifically designed to help inform and educate consumers, and are incredibly useful in helping companies share content on an ongoing basis.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

According to an internal review of The New York Times digital strategy, the publication lost 80 million homepage visitors--half the traffic to the nytimes.com page--in two years.

The decline in visits through website homepages means that marketers need to find new ways to invite customers in through the 'side door'. Compelling, useful content does just that.

Social media: You don't need to be a social guru to know that tweets and posts that exclusively promote your wares are not effective in the social media landscape. By sharing content that informs, entertains or provides a service to your customers, you're more likely to build a productive following.

Blogs: Blogs are another example of a channel that can suffer if the information shared is always company-centric. Create posts that relate to the current conversation in your industry and – even better – ignite discussion.

Websites: Your website may be your digital storefront, but that doesn't mean customers will walk in through the front door. Today, it's up to marketers to create and share relevant and discoverable content to help consumers find them online. By providing your audience with information that supports the research phase of purchase consideration, you can hook consumers early.

Microsites: It's often said that every company needs to act like a media company today. As part of this movement, more companies are launching microsites that address topics that intersect with their offerings in order to build relationships with their target consumers. (For example, a company that offers an line of pre-packaged organic school lunches might create website dedicated to healthy and efficient lifestyles for parents.)

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

The key to content marketing effectively for these channels is to provide information that prioritizes your customer's needs over your products.

Here are just a few samples of the kind of content that can be distributed across all and any of these channels:

- > Thought leadership articles
- > White papers
- > Infographics
- > How-to-guides (other than how to use your product)
- > Videos (e.g. Vine)
- > eBooks
- > Presentations (e.g. Slideshare)
- > Webcasts and podcasts
- > And more...

Do a content evaluation:

With so many channels now available to help create and deliver great content, it's hard to know where to begin. However, the most important first step in tackling content marketing is to take inventory of what content already exists, what channels you're already leveraging as well as what's missing. This will help determine your content marketing budget, goals, and how to efficiently augment your current program.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

2. It's not all about creating content

There's a misconception that marketers need to rely heavily on creating original content to effectively engage with prospects and consumers. However, content creation can be incredibly time-consuming and resource heavy.

In addition, it seems that no matter how much content is produced, it's never enough – consumers want more. Because many marketers have to deal with different verticals, geographies, audiences, and levels of expertise, they need to create fresh, high-quality content that's relevant for each segment. However, creating that content is nearly impossible for one person or even a small team to handle.

Recent studies have shown that a lack of staff resources, budget, and content creation expertise are the most significant barriers to implementing an effective content marketing strategy. These obstacles have inspired more marketers to engage in content curation as a core part of their content marketing strategy.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE



Content curation often refers to “identifying, locating, filtering, organizing, and sharing content that is relevant to your target audience.” It allows marketers to leverage existing content - from reliable, third-party sources - without spending valuable time and resources on developing it themselves.

Curation increases the opportunity for engagement; instead of sharing one new piece of content per week or month, you can share a few per week, or even per day This significantly helps keep brands top of mind with consumers. It also provides a service to customers who don't have the expertise or ability to find the most relevant content related to the products and services that interest them.

A recent study from Convince & Convert reveals that when it comes to clicks, curation wins the day. Posts hyperlinking to third-party sites generate 33% more clicks than those linking to owned sites.

When developing the most impactful content marketing campaign, it should not be a creation VS. curation conversation. The best content marketing strategy should incorporate the most appropriate mix that supports your organizations' specific needs.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

{BEST PRACTICE TIP}

When you share third-party content on the web, it's important to give credit to your sources, including links back to the main source.

Also, adding your own insight helps drive the discussion forward.

The same study shows that more progressive content marketers are using a content mix that is only 65% created, with the remainder being 25% curated and 10% syndicated. Depending on your budget and your content creation resources, you may find it easier to lean more heavily on curated content.

3. Content marketing is a long-term commitment

One of the biggest myths of content marketing is that it provides immediate benefits. Unlike traditional advertising, which can reveal immediate results, it can take time (often as long as six months) to start seeing real results from content marketing. However, instead of immediate gratification, marketers can enjoy long-tail benefits such as bringing in new leads from content that may have been published years ago. This is an impressive return on investment and one that keeps giving for a substantial amount of time.

Successful content marketing requires patience

Because the ultimate goal of content marketing is lasting, continuous engagement, it requires a long-term commitment. Content marketing may take longer to convert leads, but over time, it significantly drives down conversion costs.

CONTENT MARKETING CAN BE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE

The good news for marketers looking for a slightly faster return on investment, is that content curation can be used to significantly cut down on costs, resources, and most importantly, time. By curating content, marketers can reap those long-term benefits more quickly and efficiently.

While content marketing can, in fact, be surprisingly simple, you have to do the necessary legwork, research, and planning to reap the most considerable long-term results. Done correctly, content marketing can be one of your most significant returns on investment. For example:

American Express now attracts millions of small business owners to its stories on OpenForum.com;

Red Bull currently reaches over two million people a month with its informative magazine.

POWERFUL TECHNOLOGY = SIMPLE CONTENT MARKETING

While one could argue that great content marketing is the result of good people and even better processes, an equally important factor is investing in the right technology. As part of the research and planning process, choosing the right content marketing platform is critical to creating simple content marketing.

The best platform will help engage and acquire customers, streamline operations and eliminate the need for additional content marketing resources. Here are some important considerations:

Content Discovery: The right platform should allow you to find meaningful content from different sources and give you the ability to control/refine searches;

Curation: You should be able to easily evaluate, read, and watch all within the platform, as well as easily select, reject, and package content for each channel;

Distribution: The platform must support distribution across multiple channel types (newsletters, social, Wordpress, etc.) – and make it easy to package content for each;

Analytics: The right platform should allow you to evaluate the performance of all content and channels.

POWERFUL TECHNOLOGY = SIMPLE CONTENT MARKETING

Other key considerations:

Is the platform easy to use? Remember, you want a solution that supports and simplifies the process of content marketing—it shouldn't be taxing.

Does the platform integrate with other tools (e.g., your newsletter platform)? No marketing initiative is an island and content, in particular, needs to easily integrate in your operational workflow.

Can the platform scale with your needs? In the spirit of keeping it simple, you may start with just a couple of topics for your business. Over time, the number of topics you want to address can grow, and the platform should be able to support that. That might even include supporting content discovery in other languages, if that's relevant to your business.

FIVE STEPS TO GREAT CONTENT MARKETING

Ready to kick the door down and get started content marketing? Listed below are five high-level steps to help you:

- 1. Take **inventory**** of what content you already have and what you can leverage. Already creating a monthly newsletter, blog or consistently engaging in social media? Great – you're already well on your way.
- 2. Decide on a **budget**.** Before you can really decide what you can do, you have to decide what you're willing to commit. And that isn't just a matter of money: Make a budget that includes the time commitment you're willing to make as well.
- 3. Developing a content marketing **strategy**** is an absolutely crucial part of the process:
 - Determine what your goals are in content marketing.
 - Think carefully about who your audience is: What they want and need, and where they're seeking their answers.
 - Choose which formats and platforms to focus on. Focus on where your audience is.
 - Find the right creation/curation mix; select the best platform to meet your specific content marketing needs.
 - Create a schedule for specific pieces of content you plan to develop over the next 3-6 months; be sure to cross-promote in relevant communities.

FIVE STEPS TO GREAT CONTENT MARKETING

4. Refine your plan, as needed, to meet budget requirements

- Predicting how much time and effort something will take is hard to do before you get started. Check back in half way through the project or quarter and adjust as needed.
- A strategy is extremely important to have, but always remember that it can be changed. If you can't keep up with what you've planned, you need to decide whether you're willing to invest more time and money, or adjust your creation/curation mix.

5. Track what's working

- When refining your strategy, be sure to focus on tactics and platforms that provide the best results. For example, keeping track of newsletter distribution and which days or times work best in terms of open rates, will be very important. Also, be sure to keep track of what types of content (both curated and created) deliver the best response and adjust accordingly.
- Making that determination can take some time. You might not have much of an idea of what's working, or why, until you've been at it for a few months.

CONCLUSION

While content marketing is continuing to evolve, it's clear this valuable trend will only become more essential. If anything, content marketing will become such a conventional term that it will just become "marketing." While we are just scratching the surface in terms of its potential, marketers need to get smart about how to embrace content marketing correctly and efficiently.

For marketers looking to make the leap, the most important thing to remember is that great content marketing can be simple and cost-effective. Marketers who can find the best combination of content curation and creation will produce sustainable customer relationships and the most impactful, long-lasting results.

This white paper was brought to you by **opentopic**



Opentopic makes it surprisingly simple for marketers to engage and acquire customers with a steady stream of meaningful content. Opentopic's easy-to-use content marketing platform reduces the time it takes to discover and distribute meaningful content across the web, including websites, blogs, newsletters and social media, and generates results for marketers, such as a 350% increase in click-through. To learn more about Opentopic visit www.opentopic.com or email contact@opentopic.com.

RESOURCES

Forbes, "Content Marketing is a Long Term Commitment not a Campaign"
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnhall/2014/04/13/content-marketing-is-a-long-term-commitment-not-a-campaign/>

Convince & Convert, "Is Content Marketing a Necessity for your Brand?"
<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-media-strategy/is-content-marketing-a-necessity-for-your-brand/>

Convince & Convert, "New Research Finds the Curation vs Creation Sweet Spot"
<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-media-measurement/new-research-finds-the-curation-vs-creation-sweet-spot/>