

CONTENT MARKETING / THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Building Trust with Content: A Priority for B2B Marketers

by Don Knapp
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When a customer trusts your company, it means they have confidence in your solution and in

the relationship itself. Trust is always earned. And in the present political and social climate—where trust in key institutions is eroding like never before (<https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>)—this business fundamental takes on new significance.

As a B2B marketer, you already believe in the power of content to drive sales and nurture buyer trust at each step of the buyer's journey. But to build meaningful trust in today's fractured environment, you must think beyond the transaction, beyond

the buyer's journey. Your digital content must establish trust in new and deeper ways.

Forrester's 7 Levers of Trust

At Tendo, we were reminded of the role content plays in building trust after several of us attended Forrester's B2B Summit North America

(<https://go.forrester.com/event/b2b-summit-north-america/>). A fascinating session, "Building Trust: The B2B Imperative," outlined seven levers of trust (<https://go.forrester.com/blogs/trust-is-your-business-imperative/>)

that companies should invest in to build and maintain trust with buyers:

1. Accountability
2. Competence
3. Consistency
4. Dependability
5. Empathy
6. Integrity

7. Transparency

Forrester explored how these seven qualities can give organizations a competitive advantage by decreasing buyers' sense of risk. We loved this framework and Forrester's high-level session got us thinking about how marketers can activate these levers. We have some ideas and—big surprise—they're all focused on content.

B2B Content Strategies for Building Trust with Customers

As you build out your content strategy, assess which levers of trust matter most to your

organization. Think about trust from your customers' perspective:

- What does it take for them to consider you worthy of their business?
- What aspects of trust are most important to maintaining a long-term relationship?

Every piece of content you develop is a building block of trust. Consider these content approaches—14 in total—to convey

the seven levers of trust. Some of them draw from existing B2B content marketing best practices, while others take a new or broader approach beyond the buyer's journey.

Trust Lever #1: Accountability

Public relations and crisis communications specialists understand accountability as taking responsibility when things go wrong and communicating how you'll make it right. But marketers can also communicate a sense of accountability to the customer as well as to communities and society as a whole.

- **Respond to customer needs:**
When describing your products and solutions, for example, explain how you have responded to customer needs over time and adapted your offerings. Show that you're listening and will continue to listen.
- **Take a stand, communicate values:** Invest in thought leadership content from your

executives. Articulate organizational values and speak frankly about major societal challenges and how “doing the right thing” goes beyond the bottom line.

- According to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer (<https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2021->

03/2021%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer.pdf), business has emerged as the most trusted institution (surpassing government) and 68% of survey respondents believe that “CEOs should step in when the government does not fix societal problems” and take the lead on change,

holding themselves
accountable to the
public.

- In the wake of the
George Floyd protests
of 2020, prominent
CEOs
(<https://techmonitor.ai/leadership/strategy/big-tech-ceos-george-floyd>)
—including Cisco's
Chuck Robbins and

Intel's Bob Swan—spoke out. Their communications strategies connected the dots between new commitments and long-time company values, all of which engendered trust in their followers.

Trust Lever #2: Competence

This is a big one, obviously. Your content needs to make a convincing case that your

offerings solve real problems and deliver exceptional results.

- **Tap third parties:**

Traditionally, marketers showcase online reviews, third-party analyst reports, and customer testimonials to tell the story of competence and capabilities, since those voice are more trusted by prospective buyers.

- **Be genuinely helpful:** Position your company as a trusted expert by creating top-of-funnel content (<https://tendocom.com/blog/9-things-to-know-about-top-of-funnel-content-tofu/>) that addresses buyers' questions and describes innovations and best practices—without pitching your product. That's the essence of modern SEO

content. Then increase brand awareness by participating in industry conversations via forums, webinars, and guest articles that show customers you are truly invested in your industry.

Trust Lever #3: Consistency

Do you consistently deliver great results? As buyers get to know your brand, remind them of these achievements, but also take a broader view of consistency:

- **Communicate regularly via key channels:** Consumers are more likely to spend money (<https://www.marketingdive.com/news/90-of-people-buy-from-brands-they-follow-on-social-media-study->

says/577882/) with brands they follow on social media. Be part of the conversation with consistent posting that builds familiarity and trust over time. Communicate consistently via other customer-preferred channels as well, with regular emails and blog posts.

- **Create a consistent content experience:** Is your content's

voice and tone consistent
across channels and formats?
Does your website
information architecture
organize content consistently
and make it easy for visitors
to find what they need? A
positive content experience
(<https://tendocom.com/glossary/content-experience/>)
helps to subtly build trust,
familiarity, and confidence.

Trust Lever #4: Dependability

Tout your track record of dependability. Your messaging should emphasize that you will help customers solve their challenges today—and are at the ready to help address new ones down the line.

- **Share a variety of success stories:** Show how companies of all stripes depend on you. Analyze your library of case studies—and your logo wall of prominent customers—to

ensure that they are adequately diverse, with examples of customer wins across industries and businesses of different sizes.

- **Highlight dependable people:** “Business-to-business” is ultimately “people-to-people,” so use content to spotlight your dependable employees—from executives and sales reps to product

engineers and customer success agents—that are all ready to assist. Quote your company advocates in blog posts, share their headshots and bios in articles, and feature them in videos.

Trust Lever #5: Empathy

People trust companies that are genuinely invested in their success. Find ways to make an emotional connection with your content, building rapport and relatability.

- **Capture the voice of the customer:** Speak the customers' language and use their phrasings in content that vividly describes their pain points and challenges. You want them to say, "Yes, this company gets me," and to understand that you want to help. The best content creates these authentic connections.

- **Get personalization right:** To make a genuine connection with a customer or account, leverage one-to-one personalization whenever feasible. Instead of generic messaging, create emails or presentations that show you took the time to understand someone's priorities and challenges because they matter to you. Account-

based marketing scores its
biggest wins this way.

Trust Lever #6: Integrity

A reputation for integrity and authenticity is hard-earned. Protect and burnish your company's integrity with content that speaks the truth and conveys company values. The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer found that businesses gain the trust of customers when they act as a “guardian of information quality.”

- **Check facts and cite sources:**
Too many marketers make

unsubstantiated claims or repeat statistics they found on other websites.

Companies with integrity take fact-checking seriously and understand its role in building long-term trust.

- **Avoid fearmongering:** There's a difference between messaging that creates a sense of urgency and necessity for a product

versus messaging that deliberately exaggerates fear and uses gimmicks to win the short-term sale.

Trust Lever #7: Transparency

Informed buyers demand transparency about everything from pricing to internal processes.

- **Communicate the how and why:** In blog posts and videos, share the background and rationale for key

decisions on product launches, changes, and discontinuations. To build trust, give buyers a window into your process and corporate strategy.

- **Create rich “About” pages:**
Make it easy for buyers to learn everything they can about your company. Create an About section of your website that humanizes your

history, values, leadership, work culture, and corporate social responsibility. (Bring the same transparency to your privacy page, by the way.)

Where Does Trust Fit Among Marketing Priorities?

Do most marketers care enough about building trust with customers? Hard to say. In the June 2020 edition of the CMO Survey (https://cmosurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The_CMO_Survey-Highlights-and_Insights_Report-June-2020.pdf)—at the height of the pandemic—marketers reported that their customers’ top priority was “trusting relationships,” even more than the number two priority, “superior product quality.” But in the February 2021 CMO Survey

(https://cmosurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The_CM_O_Survey-Highlights_and_Insights_Report-February-20), those two priorities swapped places, with less emphasis on trusting relationships.

While our collective hair isn't on fire like it was in 2020, there is still a scarcity of trust in the world. Businesses can help to fill that void, and marketers can contribute by investing in content that builds trust beyond transactions.

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#1 takeaway: Content is driving the buying process for your prospects (more than ever before).

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