



How to brew the perfect content marketing plan

WHITE PAPER

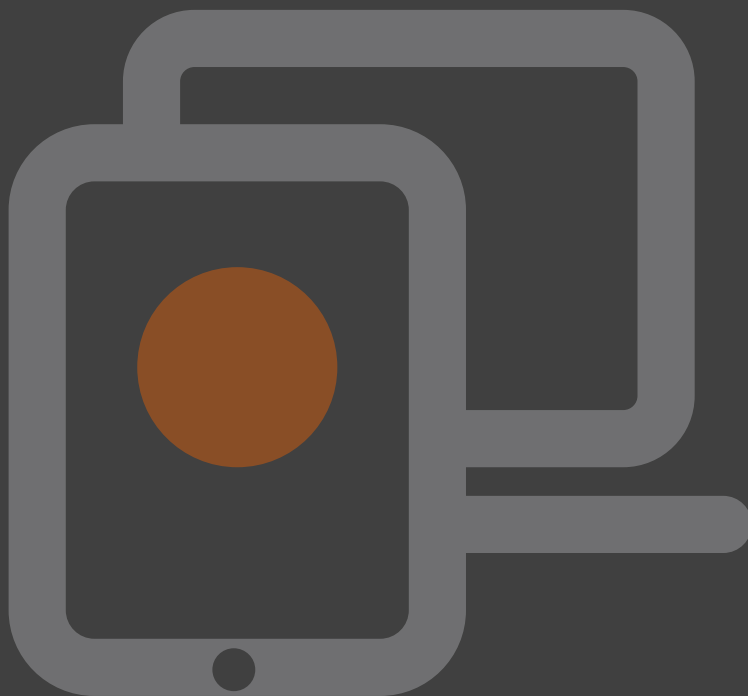


There's no question about it, content marketing is today's marketing. It's what everyone in the marketing world is talking about and has been talking about for the last couple of years. And with good reason: within one broad banner, content marketing encompasses almost every aspect of marketing, client engagement and brand promotion.

It makes sense, then, that content marketing has been touted as the “must have” strategy for businesses, and many have jumped on board the content marketing train. According to [Hubspot](#), content marketing generates three times as many leads as traditional marketing but costs 62% less. Furthermore, companies that publish at least 16 blog posts per month average 3.5 times more traffic than those that post four or fewer.

However, it's not always as easy as just starting content marketing and having instant success. As many marketing teams might have discovered, content marketing is not an “instant gratification” activity, with 51% of marketers saying their content marketing efforts are only somewhat effective. It takes time to build momentum, and without a strategy it is easy to get lost in producing lots of content without direction, and not seeing the kind of results you've been assured will come your way. You might lose motivation after several months of hard work and seeing little or no success from your extra efforts.

But with the right strategy in place content marketing is extremely effective, as long as you create and execute a strategic content marketing plan. Creating brilliant content in a variety of forms (e.g. blog post, infographic, video) and marketing the content on your website, blogs and social media sites offers a relevant and cost-efficient way to connect and communicate with a highly-targeted audience.



The first step in content marketing: Set your goals

It is common for people embarking on their first content marketing journey to jump right into content creation. You've had a brainstorm, come up with some ideas for blog posts and infographics and you want to get creating.

But you need to slow down and take a step back; rushing into content creation leads to unfocused and ineffective material which, in turn, will not generate the results you are aiming for. To make sure your content marketing is successful, you need to start by setting yourself goals.



Decide what you want to accomplish

Before you jump straight into content production, stop and think: What do you want to achieve here?

High-quality content serves three purposes: it positions your business as an authority or thought leader on your subject matter; it attracts readers and keeps them engaged by providing them with information that is valuable to them; and it helps your site to rank well in search engines, in turn, leading to more visitors to your site and increased visibility of your brand.

When creating content, you need to remember that this is why you are creating content and think about what you're trying to achieve with it. It's important to decide what you want to accomplish before you decide how you'll accomplish it. Therefore, start by setting some content marketing goals. Goals will give you purpose, focus and direction and help ensure you achieve what you set out to achieve.

What's your aim for developing a content marketing strategy in the first place? Why do you want to produce content? What will it add to your business? Know your goals before you start planning and producing to give your content focus and clarity. The biggest mistakes companies make, especially those just starting out, is creating content for the sake of creating content. Everybody else is doing it, so you should too, right? If you proceed with this attitude you're probably not using your content effectively and you will be wasting time on efforts that aren't delivering results for you.



Set concrete, achievable goals

An effective way to set your goals is to create a series of specific milestones for yourself under one overarching goal. If you only have one general goal, like "get more traffic to the website", your efforts can become chaotic, unorganized and unproductive. But if you set yourself a series of measurable and achievable goals, you can focus on meeting them one at a time.

It can be difficult for marketing teams to measure success of their content marketing efforts, particularly in B2B industries like law or financial services. This is because unlike a sales team, it can be tricky to set monetary targets to hit. But you can set your own targets to benchmark against. Be as specific as you can and name ideal outcomes. For example, your main goal could be:

- Deliver 20 new marketing qualified leads each month to our sales team.

You could then have smaller milestones, that will assist you in achieving your main goal. For example:

- Post three pieces of content a week on our blog
- Get ten interactions on social media posts a week
- Publish one infographic every two months
- Create and promote two downloadable resources each month

Working towards little milestones like this instead of focusing on big goals is a lot less daunting for those embarking on a content marketing path and it helps keep you focused. The milestones you set should be achievable and when you hit them, team morale will be boosted, encouraging you and your team to stay focused and on track to achieve that main goal.



Three steps to understanding your audience

So, we've established that content marketing is an incredibly effective way to connect and communicate with a highly targeted audience and that the first thing you need to do when creating a content marketing plan is to set yourself some content marketing goals. What's next?

The next step is vital to the content marketing process: understanding your audience. Frankly, if you don't understand who your audience is, know what motivates them and how they relate to your product or service, then there is little point in doing content marketing in the first place. So where do you start in identifying and understanding your audience? As a marketer, you've probably already built a good picture of who your audience is and will hopefully have created buyer personas for your audience. For effective content marketing, you need to look at these personas in much greater detail. We suggest you start your buyer personas from scratch if you are embarking on your first content marketing journey.



Do your research

A common mistake marketers make is creating personas based on their own discussions of who they think their customers are and what they're likely to care about. This might reflect years of knowledge and experience and can certainly be a starting point in the buyer persona process but, in reality, these points are nothing more than assumptions and shouldn't be the basis of who you are targeting your content at. You should take time to truly understand your customers, use real data and statistics to develop factual personas that truly represent your audience. Only then can you fully integrate personas into your content strategy.

To do this, you should consider doing some or all of the following:

- Interviewing existing customers
- Speaking to your sales team and customer service team
- Surveying prospects and customers
- Research customer databases to identify customers
- Evaluate web analytics reports
- Use keyword research to identify topics of interests
- Monitor social media activity



Personalize your audience

Once you have analyzed your findings, you can begin to create buyer personas to personalize your target audience. Give your personas names and faces and include information like their personal details, goals, challenges and why they would love your business. This will help you and others in your company relate to your personas and therefore think of them in future business processes. If possible, it's ideal to have specific personas for every person involved in the buying process but if you are time shy you can start with two or three key personas and build on them over time.

When creating buyer personas for a law firm for example, different practice area law firms will have different personas. A family lawyer might deal with 46-year-old Bob, the owner of a construction company in Springfield going through a divorce with his wife Elaine and fighting for custody over their two children. An intellectual property lawyer might deal with companies or individuals with several different buyer personas in one case. For example, if a company is seeking legal advice about another company stealing their product idea, the lawyer might need to deal with the company's CEO, their in-house legal counsel or the administration assistant. It's important to create personas for each of these people involved so your content can be catered to each potential persona.

The more detailed you are with your buyer personas, the better. So when you're creating Bob from Springfield include his wife and children's names, what he likes doing in his spare time, what he thinks about certain things, what he wants to do in the future. Making your personas seem real and relatable will remind you and your team members to link back to them at all stages of your content marketing plan.

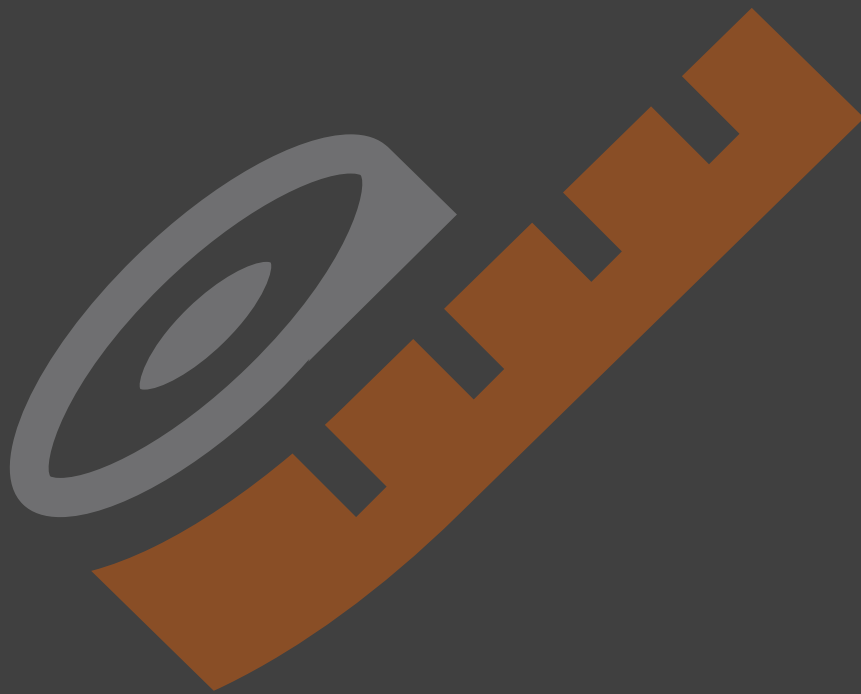


Always keep your personas in mind

Once you've created your personas, you can use them to create content that is going to be relevant to the persona at each stage of the buying cycle. Creating buyer personas isn't a quick task you can complete on your morning commute; you should spend a decent amount of time researching and creating them. Often buyer personas can lack depth and as a result just aren't that useful because people still don't really understand who their audience is. Once you've created your personas, keep using them as a reference tool when you are creating content: would your personas find what you're creating interesting? Is it relevant to them? Does it teach them something they would want to know? Always keep your personas in the front of your mind. If your personas lack depth or if you forget to use them, you will create generic, ineffective content which does not assist in moving customers down the path to purchase.

Before beginning your content creation you must know who your audience is but also remember you will only know so much; what you're doing is new and so some of it will be trial and error. Don't forget to listen to your audience, they will tell you what works for them and what they want more of. Consistently update your buyer personas as you get to know more about your audience and publish your personas around your company; it's not just marketers who benefit from having a clear picture of their audience. Remember that content will be different for each persona; so one blog post will not be suitable for three different personas and you shouldn't try and make it so. If it is, your content would be unfocused and not achieve the goals you originally set for yourself. So create detailed, factual and realistic buyer personas and make sure you think of them at all stages of your content marketing plan.





The final step in content marketing: Measure your success

You've invested a significant amount of time and money into your content marketing initiatives so, as with all marketing activity, you need to measure the effectiveness of your efforts in order to evaluate a return on your investment. The first thing to keep in mind is that content marketing is a long game; it will take time and consistent effort before you begin to see any significant results. This makes it all the more important to track and measure your efforts from the start to help you notice slight patterns and improvements that will allow you to tweak your efforts and will inspire you to keep going. It can be a slow process and a lot of hard work but if you thoughtfully create and execute a content marketing plan, it can be extremely effective.

The benefits of content marketing reach further than lead generation and sales; it also helps to increase client engagement and brand awareness. You need to track the success of your efforts so you can see what's working and what's not. The great thing about content marketing is flexibility; you can test a type of content or idea out and if it doesn't yield the results that you expect then try something new. As long as you have your goals in place and ways to measure the success of your content marketing efforts then you can have a lot of freedom with it.

Success is different for every business and the metrics you use to track your progress will depend on what you're hoping to achieve with your content marketing. You should go back and look at the goals you set at the beginning of your content marketing plan. If your goal was to increase lead generation, you know that you should be measuring leads as your metric. Content marketing isn't always this simple to measure, however. Using leads as a metric is perhaps one of the most straightforward, but there are several other factors to consider too that are just as, or even more, valuable.

There are two metrics you should consider measuring: consumption and behaviour. Consumption measurements are all about the number of people consuming your content, whereas behaviour measurements track people that take action after consuming your content. Each of these categories has a number of factors you can track; for example website traffic is a consumption measurement, while subscriptions to your blog is behavioural. Not all of the metrics will be relevant to your businesses objectives but if you use a combination of the ones that are, you can get a rounded view of your performance.

It is up to you to choose the metrics that you think will provide the most insight for you, but to get you started here are four metrics that are a good place to begin:



Traffic

By creating content and distributing it to your audience you hope to drive quality traffic to your website which will hopefully convert to leads and ultimately sales. Measuring an increase of organic traffic from the search engines to your website is a worthwhile method of determining whether the content you are creating is engaging enough to draw traffic to your website.

Measuring your web traffic is essentially a vanity metric; it doesn't really matter how many viewers and views you have if they're not doing anything on your site and are not enjoying your content. But measuring traffic does give you an idea of which content your audience enjoys the most, which pages of your website get the most hits (and, importantly, which get the least) and what you content should continue to create more of.



On-site engagement

Once your content starts driving traffic to your website, take a look at the on-site engagement that the traffic has generated. It's one thing to drive traffic to your website, but if that traffic doesn't engage with your content then you need to evaluate what you could do differently. Look at the traffic that each piece of content is driving and focus on the bounce rate, time on site and pages per visit of those particular visitors.

You can look into whether traffic generated from content marketing is typically more engaged than traffic from other sources by looking at what they do once they've landed on your page. How long do they spend on it? Do they click onto other pages on your website? Do they bounce off your website more or less often than other generated traffic? Ask these questions to determine if your content marketing efforts are driving real value to your business.



Social interactions and engagement

A metric that allows you to better understand whether your content is a success with your online audience is the amount of quality social interactions each piece receives. This can mean shares and likes on social media as well as comments on your blog. The key word here is "quality" interactions; remember that engagement isn't always positive, so it's important to consider sentiment alongside volume of engagement to make sure your content isn't getting negative feedback.

By monitoring the gross amounts of tweets, retweets, likes, shares, comments, mentions and more, your business will be able to see what content was well received, on what platforms and by what users. A high level of engagement in terms of comments and social interactions suggests a high level of relevance of your content and audience participation. Identify types and topics of content that have performed particularly well socially to help you in deciding what you should focus on creating more of in future.

Lead generation



The most valuable metric to monitor when it comes to your content marketing efforts is number of leads. Generating a certain number of leads per month is perhaps the metric that most directly impacts the bottom line from a marketing point of view. These leads will have voluntarily given you their contact details to you in exchange for access to some of your content and by doing so they have consented for you to market to them (and at a later stage, to be contacted by a sales person). You need to define what constitutes a marketing qualified lead for your organization as the goal posts can change. It could be anyone who has filled in any form on your website. Or it could be more complex, for instance someone who has visited the website more than three times in a week and has downloaded two case studies.

You should measure which forms and sources bring in the most leads. Is it social media, organic traffic or perhaps PPC? In addition, evaluate which types of content encourage the most numbers of form-fills. Even simply providing a newsletter subscription form is a good metric for content marketing measurement. It's likely that if someone is signing up to your newsletter after viewing your content, they liked what you had to say and found your content to provide interesting and relevant information and they want to know more about you.

Remember: Dig deep and don't give up



Understanding and presenting these performance metrics is important for your entire team and for your management but it will only offer so much insight. These metrics are key and tell you how you are doing, and they should give you insights to what is working and what isn't. These metrics won't tell you why but you can dig deep and look at each piece of content individually to see where you can make improvements. Remember, it will take time before you begin to see significant ROI. But if you continue to follow and implement your content marketing strategy, you will build brand awareness and client engagement and eventually you'll be able to match sales to your content marketing efforts.

In conclusion:

Content marketing is a slow and steady process which demands patience and hard work. There may be times in your content marketing journey that you will doubt the worthiness of your efforts but stick with it because your determination will pay off. Set your goals, take time to understand your audience, choose quality over quantity for your content and then continuously measure your success; and you will begin to see the advantages that content marketing can have on your business.