

Content Marketing 101

Traditional marketing methods are becoming less and less viable in today's competitive market due to advanced technology. Today's consumer is more tech savvy than ever and gets bored easily. Consumers are more informed than ever on products and services they want via various distribution channels. Traditional methods are becoming boring and outdated and not interesting to the today's highly informed consumer. This in turn leads to low conversion rates, decreased website traffic and lower ROI (on a company's marketing spend).

Companies are seeking ways to implement new, creative and fresh marketing strategies with the primary goal of positioning their company and executives as experts in their industry. This not only increases a company's overall credibility, it also shortens the sales cycle. The most effective thought leadership campaigns use content marketing to educate readers (potential clients, media, industry experts, etc.) about a company's area of expertise.

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is a targeted marketing strategy that involves creating insightful, engaging and interesting written content with the goal of creating customer loyalty and increasing opportunities for future business. An effective content marketing strategy will engage its targeted audience with relevant information leaving them better informed and interested to find out more.

Content marketing can include a variety of tactics including but not limited to:

- Articles published in high-profile publications
- Blogging
- e-Books
- Webinars

Content marketing is not a direct sales tactic; instead it is a two-way communication between a business and its target audience. Similar public relations and social media, content marketing is not directly designed to sell a product/service. However, it can have significant effect on brand awareness and can be highly effective at positioning a company as an expert in their field. Though these activities cannot be directly linked to an increase in sales, they can significantly decrease the length of the sales cycle, making it a highly effective marketing medium -- especially for start-ups and companies working in a highly competitive market with high supply. By improving the public's understanding of who a company is and the product/service it offers, content marketing is a great avenue to increase a company's credibility and brand recognition without the significant costs associated with more traditional marketing methods.

To create an effective content marketing strategy here are four tips to get you started:

Embrace the Blog

Hosting a blog and sharing content on your website not only allows your customer to understand your position as an experienced insider, but it is also the easiest and most effective method of driving traffic to your site and increasing your SEO ranking. Every time a new blog post is added to your blog, the search engines scan your site, which immediately leads to a boost in your search ranking.

Create a weekly blogging schedule and post on the same days every week, so your followers will know when to visit your blog to read your new posts. For even greater consistency and brand recognition, you should cross-promote your blog through your company's social media channels.

Promote Through Social Media

Social media is one of the best mediums to use to post and share your content. It is an integral component of your content marketing strategy. Almost everyone has either an i-phone or smartphone – and tied in with either Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and so much more.

Implementing a social media schedule will help your business maintain its competitive edge while ensuring that you are offering interesting and unique content on a regular basis. The more views your post receives, the more it will be shared, commented on and enjoyed by both new and existing customers. Scheduling your posts to ensure the greatest exposure to your followers can make or break the success of your social media strategy. Scheduling tools like [Hootsuite](#) will enable businesses to share content at the time of day that it will make the biggest impact.

Drop the Sales Pitch

Effective content marketing minimizes the need for a sales pitch. In the event a company does choose to promote their company within their content, its content marketing strategy will not be effective. Most consumers are highly distrustful of advertising messages; so the moment your content becomes promotional, readers are likely to lose interest. Customers visit websites and social media channels to learn insightful information about a business' area of expertise, not to experience a hard sell (or even a soft one!). Provide customers with the information they are will find meaningful and interesting.

For example, a hotel can use content marketing to increase repeat site visits from potential customers, increasing brand recognition, brand loyalty and increasing direct bookings in the process. In order to do so, the hotel would need to make their website (and blog) a destination for consumers to find out valuable travel tips (including topics like: how to save on your upcoming hotel stay, etc.). Because readers keep coming back to the site to learn from your content, they will be more likely to remember your hotel and visit your direct website (instead of the OTAs) when they are booking their next hotel stay in that destination.

By providing information versus using your content to sell, you are giving the customer time to develop trust for your company, before receiving your sales messages. If your content continues to be engaging, informative and relevant to the targeted audience, the customer will remember your company and come back to make a purchase when they are ready to do so.