Finally!

CONTENT MARKETING EXPLAINED

An eBook by Oktopost

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Introduction

With the advent of the Internet and digital media, as well as the fading influence of “traditional” media channels, marketers have blazed an entirely new path towards their target markets. The shift in paradigm witnessed by content marketing has also impacted the way in which people consume content and interact with brands. Digital channels such as e-mail and social media have become key areas for consumer research, consumption, and interaction.

In the mid-1960s, Gordon Moore, Co-Founder of Intel Corporation, predicted that the computing power of micro-chips would double every year - known as “Moore’s Law.” This prediction not only proved to be true for computing, but was equally applicable to technology's impact on other disciplines – including marketing, and specifically content marketing.

In this new world of content marketing, blog posts, white papers, webinars, case studies, and testimonials have replaced the “old world” traditional marketing tactics that used to dominate the field. With the changing winds of marketing tactics also comes a set of different resources, tools, and assets utilized by marketers to practice their trade.

Moore’s Law continues, and marketing is seeing an exponential growth in light of the technological power of the tools available. Without having a solid strategy to follow and adhere to, a modern day marketer can often find himself or herself lost in the bevy of new marketing platforms, content creation, and social media channels

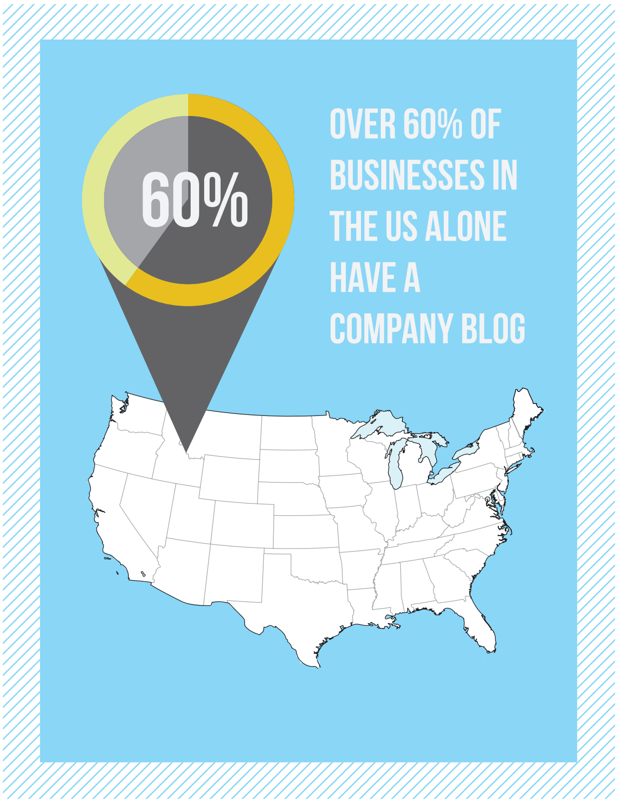
White papers, social content, e-mail, marketing collateral, and other forms of digital content will all be expounded upon in this eBook. Readers will gain real, actionable advice on how to fully leverage these types of content to maximize marketing efforts.

The following pages will act as a valuable resource for each and every content marketer, and serve as a guide for navigating the intricate world of modern content marketing.

Blogs

In the digital age of content marketing, a marketer's greatest weapon is blog writing. Whether writing for a company blog, personal blog, or guest posting on external blogs, creating original and engaging content is absolutely necessary.

While personal blogging can be a great cathartic exercise, marketers have also been able to leverage this channel to create unique and valuable content. In fact, over 60% of businesses in the US alone have a company blog.[1] While this statistic may seem impressive, it also indicates that nearly 40% of businesses – an alarmingly large number, do not have blogs.



Even for the most skilled of marketers, creating a constant stream of quality content can be a daunting task. It's important to fine-tune one's strategy at every step of the blog content creation process. A number of obstacles may hinder a marketer's ability to implement a robust blog management strategy. As a result, maintaining an active blog requires creativity, resourcefulness, patience, and time - lots of time.

The blog writing process must be streamlined from the initial idea phase all the way to overcoming writer's block. In other words, a marketer needs to be prepared for anything.

Ideas

Before actually writing, the first task is to come up with several original and creative topics for blog posts. At first, this might seem like a simple task, yet given the pressure to generate content on a weekly or even a daily basis, one has to eventually dig deeper to get his or her creative juices flowing – which can prove to be a major stumbling block.

Often times, a marketer needs to keep blog posts focused on a particular niche, market, segment, or demographic. This creates a situation where there are a seemingly limited number of topics to choose from for blog posts. Marketers are not born with the trait of being able to pull blog topics out of thin air – this skill is learned through blood, sweat, and tears.

Creativity is one of the prerequisites for a successful content marketer. However, even the most creative marketers need to employ tactics that will enable them to seek outside inspiration for blog posts.

A few sources exist from which a content marketer can derive inspiration for blog posts, which are outlined below.

Breaking News

Occasionally, there are news stories that grab the headlines, and once in a while, these stories are directly related to a certain industry. Knowing how and when to capitalize on a popular story is a crucial skill for content marketers, as it can provide a wealth of opportunities for content generation.

The concept of "newsjacking" refers to linking one's own product or service to recent news in order to increase visibility. This strategy can be highly effective for increasing the virality of content. Obviously, newsjacking needs to be done with a certain amount of discretion so as not to capitalize on inappropriate stories. Identifying ideal stories to piggyback on can be achieved by monitoring social channels - particularly Twitter's "trending" feature, and following discussion groups, blogs, news sites, and popular discussions around the office.

Common examples of news that can be leveraged for blog posts include:

Sporting events, politics, weather, tragedy*, recently publised research, changes in economic policy, comments from or actions taken by high profile figures, television series episodes or season finales, large companies going out of business, earnings reports, global economic shifts, and holidays.

*Utilizing a news story about a tragic event must be done with a certain level of tact.

Needs of the Target Market

Writing the right content, at the right time, for the right audience, is crucial to any content marketing strategy. To identify the best topics to cover in a given blog post, marketers must keep his or her finger on the pulse of their target market at all times.

This can easily be done by identifying propinquity points – places where one's target market gathers for discussion, and taking notice of frequently asked questions and hotly debated topics. With this information, marketers can then formulate a blog post that will provide real value for their specific target markets.

Personal Experience

Each person has a unique personal story to tell, and a good marketer can harness life experiences and turn them into valuable, engaging content. While, in general, there's a tendency to keep personal and professional lives separate, when it comes to marketing, in many cases there are no better stories to tell than one's own.

Keep a List of Ideas

A marketer's creativity can often ebb and flow with time. As the above principles begin to be applied, marketers can find themselves having a long list of blog post ideas on a given day, but later on that week, find themselves at a loss for inspiration.

When a marketer feels a wave of creativity coming on, it's important for him or her to grab a pen and start writing. When the "lean" times come, and there is a dearth of creativity, it's extremely useful to go back to that list and find a relevant topic to cover.

Titles

Studies have found that a writer only has an 8 second window to capture a reader's attention.[2] Given the impatience of the digital content consumer, content marketers must include strong titles in their blog posts.

Below is a list of tried and true guidelines for creating an effective blog post title.

Numbers and Lists

According to the Content Marketing Institute, a title with a number in it is more enticing to a reader than one without.[3] Interestingly, using odd numbers will have an even greater effect. While one can only speculate as to why this phenomenon exists, it's possible that readers consider odd numbers indicative of better-researched and more valuable information.

"How-Tos"

Blog readers are generally looking to learn something interesting or solve a problem they are experiencing. Putting the phrase "How To..." in the title (the phrase "tips" also works) indicates that readers will actually learn how to do something, or improve on their current strategy.

SEO

When a search engine crawls a blog post, it looks for certain terms or "keywords" that can identify what the post is about. The goal of content marketers is to have blog posts appear at the top of the search results when the correct term is searched for.

After conducting research on a target market, one can utilize Google's Adwords tool to pinpoint relevant keywords to focus on. Adwords not only ranks the popularity of certain keywords, it also suggests similar ones that can be used. It's advisable to go after long-tail keywords that have less competition - but which are more hyper focused on a certain niche.

Urgency

A blog title's goal is to get the reader to keep reading. To achieve this, urgency should be used to capture attention. This is especially true when it comes to launching a promotion or trying to drive attendance for an upcoming event. In these situations, the difference between using a subject line such as "Our annual end of summer sale is next week," or "Only 5 days left until our end of summer sale begins!" can be huge. The first announces the sale in a dry and boring manner, while the second motivates people to get ready and be excited for the sale.

Be Provocative

Research shows that readers are often attracted to titles along the lines of "You're Doing it Wrong," or "Why You Are Losing Money."[4] For one reason or another, people respond more to the negative.

Keep in mind that all things must be done in moderation, and so marketers should be cautious not to cross the line from "risqué" to "inappropriate." At times, being an objective judge of this can be difficult, so it's best to get a second opinion.

Ask Questions

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it's also a great motivator for the average content consumer. Asking questions in the title of a blog not only piques the reader's interest, it also implies that the answer to the question can be found if the time is taken to read the post.

Clickbait

"You won't believe what happened next..." Though considered "cheap" and "cheesy" by many, utilizing cliff hanger-esque titles works. These "clickbait" titles have been championed by both Upworthy and Viralnova, and have been wildly successful. "Cards for Humanity," a recent "side-project" created by Centup – a startup that lets content writers collect donations for their content, found a 450% increase in website traffic after employing this tactic.[5]

> **"YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED NEXT..."**

As with all things in marketing, this must be done in moderation. The backlash from clickbait headlines/titles is gaining steam, but once again - numbers don't lie.

Writer's Block

Similar to other types of authors, content writers often find themselves unable to come up with new ideas for content. For a content marketer, "writer's block" can be a disaster, given that content creation is a primary responsibility of the job.

Google

Searching for keywords relating to a specific industry and/or target market is an excellent strategy. It enables marketers to see what keywords are most popular, which are less frequently searched for, and can also provide inspiration for content.

Social Listening

The social web is a great resource for determining what people are interested in reading about. Read a few articles on popular industry blogs, find the right LinkedIn Groups to join, or follow relevant lists on Twitter to learn what people are saying. Social listening should be part of every marketer's morning routine, and can be used not only to come up with new ideas, but also to curate valuable content for prospects and clients.

Take a Break

Everyone needs to take a break once in a while. Sometimes, the best way to cure writer's block is to stand up, walk away from the desk, and just do something else. It's easier to come up with an idea after clearing one's mind and disconnecting for a short while.

Keep a Running List

Humans tend to go through creative "spurts" in which they are overcome with ideas and motivation. It is in these times that a marketer must "seize the moment" and write out potential blog post ideas.

Just Write

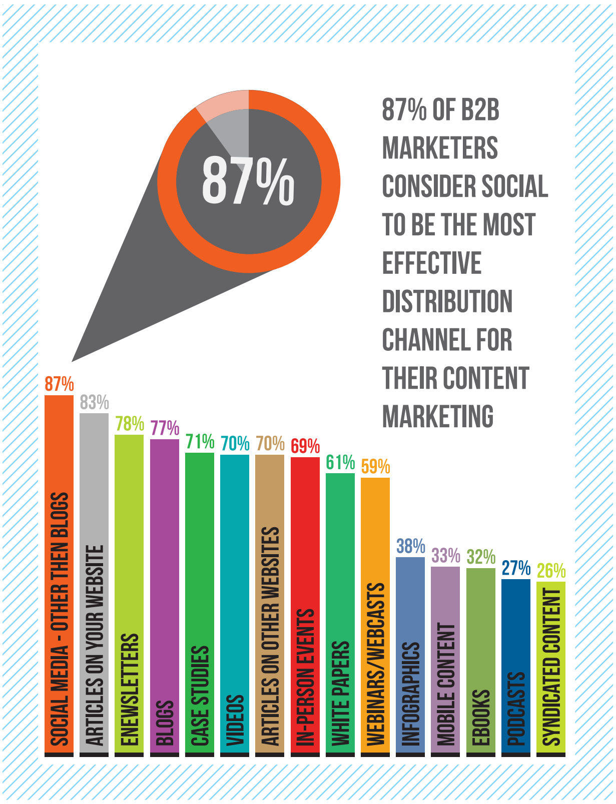
In nearly every college-level writing course, students must complete an exercise in which they just write – without thinking or planning. This exercise not only helps improve overall writing skills, but when it's difficult to come up with new ideas, bloggers can sift through what they have written and cull a coherent theme from it.

Social Content

What we now call "traditional marketing" consists of print advertising, branded magazines, catalogs, and direct selling. The modern-day marketer has adopted a completely digital strategy that deviates from these methods and focuses almost exclusively on digital content.

The "new" marketing content comprises

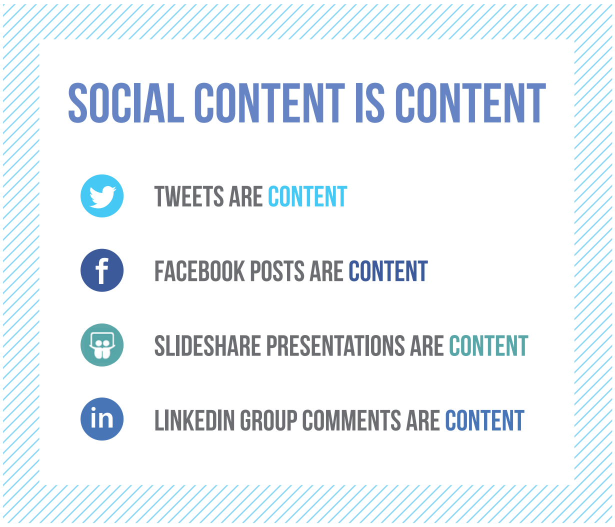
eBooks, white papers, blog posts, and webinars, and the Internet is considered the primary conduit for distribution. Moreover, the digital age has caused social media to be a fundamental channel for content distribution. In fact, 87% of B2B marketers consider social to be the most effective distribution channel for content marketing.[6]



Source: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

With the paradigm shift that content marketing has witnessed over the last decade, a new concept has now come into existence: social content marketing. tent, a Facebook post is content, and a discussion on LinkedIn is content. Whether it's a 140 character Tweet or a 25-page white paper, social content is now a concrete part of the marketing mix.

Following this logic, social message creation entails the same steps as traditional content creation. To successfully engage potential prospects and existing customers on social media, marketers must still define a target audience, analyze its interests, needs and unifying traits, and distribute content on a large-scale. In addition, the development of cloud-based social media management platforms gives businesses the opportunity to track, monitor, and measure social content activities in the same way as other marketing collateral.



When it comes to B2B, LinkedIn is by far the most widely utilized social media channel for both networking and lead generation. Beyond having the ability to connect with a variety of business professionals in different fields, LinkedIn Groups provide a valuable outlet for marketers to establish thought leadership. Content marketers have found LinkedIn Groups to be a particularly useful channel for content distribution. However, due to a lack of knowledge regarding social content marketing, they have encountered major stumbling blocks.

As of January 2013, LinkedIn introduced a policy that was later dubbed “SWAM” (Site Wide Automatic Moderation). This policy states that if a LinkedIn user’s post is blocked and deleted (or depending on who you ask, flagged by other Group members), all of that user’s posts will automatically be marked as “requires moderation” for each of his or her Groups . While this policy, in theory, was well intentioned, it resulted in major backlash.

Many legitimate marketers were finding themselves “SWAMd” even though the content they were posting was valuable and not spammy. There were also marketers who, due to sheer lack of knowledge, were practicing a “spray and pray” strategy when distributing content across Groups. These marketers were blasting out overtly promotional posts that provided no value to Group members. What these marketers could have benefited from is a better understanding of social content marketing.

When it comes to LinkedIn Groups, there are several tips that a marketer can follow to lessen his or her likelihood of being “SWAMd.”

1. Add Value

LinkedIn Groups are a place where like-minded professionals can discuss relevant topics and can be a highly effective source of lead generation. It is crucial for Group members to establish themselves as valued contributors. This can be achieved by asking and responding to conversations that are taking place in the Group.

One strategy for gaining respect is to introduce discussions that are completely focused on engagement, and totally void of external links. This type of posting strategy requires a keen ability to leverage social content marketing; a marketer has to make more out of less and convey a strong message with just a few words.

2. Don’t Sell (Directly)

As previously mentioned, 87% of B2B marketers use social media as a distribution channel for content.[7] While SWAM might scare marketers away from leveraging Groups as a conduit for their content distribution, this fear is not entirely warranted.

In order to fully leverage Groups, a marketer should share messaging that is relevant, while also coupling it with valuable social content. The message within a post will be the deciding factor for whether members will click through to the content, and most importantly, determine if it will be flagged for SWAM.

When it comes to content marketing on LinkedIn, the most important rule is: avoid self-promotion. If a marketer is able to share valuable content and compound it with great social content, the chances of getting "SWAMd" are low.

3. Read the Rules

Most LinkedIn Groups provide a list of rules, either in the “Group Rules” section or within the overall description of the Group. Read these rules carefully. If, for example, the Group Rules state that posts should not include links, then focusing on posting purely engaging social content is advisable.

4. Make it Relevant

Similar to reading the Group Rules, a marketer should conduct further due diligence by reading the Group's description before posting to it. Additionally, taking time to thoroughly read through previous posts in each Group - as well as the reactions to them, can offer a better understanding of the type of content that is most appreciated.

B2B E-Mail Campaigns

E-mail campaigns remain an effective way to acquire customers, given that most of the modern workday still revolves around the inbox. In 2014, ExactTarget found that 95% of online consumers use e-mail, while 91% of consumers check their e-mail at least once a day.[8] With all of the hours devoted to our inbox, (13 per week, according to the Mckinsey Global Institute),[9] it's no surprise that e-mail marketing is vital to the B2B funnel, especially when it comes to nurturing prospects over long periods.

The problem is that subscribers are receiving an increasing number of e-mails over time. Based on the calculations of Return Path, 416 commercial messages a month to be exact![10] This means that marketers must optimize every detail of their message to engage target audiences. Regardless of whether a brand is a B2B or B2C, marketers must remember that e-mails reach actual people. People will always prefer to connect to a brand whose "story" is engaging and relatable. E-mails should be written in a personalized, clear, and concise manner; after all, they only hold the reader's attention for a few seconds!

Before delving into best practices, it's crucial to highlight that the quality of one's contact list is a huge contributor to e-mail marketing success. E-mail databases that grow organically will always trump purchased lists. These run the risk of damaging a brand, sending unsolicited e-mails to prospects, or worse – violating a provider's terms of service. Opt-in lists take more time to show results, but in the long run, will pay off with higher conversion rates.

Examples of B2B E-mail Campaigns

Depending on a business' objectives, e-mail campaigns can be used to increase brand awareness, encourage product usage, and boost conversions. Below are just a few examples of ideas, each of which should be customized based on marketing goals. One point to keep in mind is that a growing number of people read e-mails on mobile devices, so it's best to create responsive messages that can be easily viewed on any smart phone.

E-mail campaigns should always be targeted towards specific groups of users, based on segmentation analysis, to ensure that messages are reaching the right people. For example, an existing customer should not be receiving a welcome e-mail, just like a new prospects - who is unfamiliar with a brand or its product, shouldn't be receiving an e-mail about advanced features.

Additionally, each e-mail should be A/B tested based on variations in sending times, the sender's e-mail, subject lines, text, visuals, and calls-to-action. This enables marketers to determine exactly what resonates best with their target audience and optimize wording and visuals going forward. Certain users may find designed e-mail templates with colorful visuals and call-to-action buttons most appealing. However, others prefer plain-text e-mails with a short message and hyperlinked call-to-actions more relatable.

Continuous testing is the backbone of any successful e-mail marketing program, as it measures not only the impact, but more importantly, the behavioral preferences of one's customers.

Below are several examples of e-mail marketing campaigns.

"Getting Started" Campaign

This kind of campaign aims to introduce prospects to a service or product, educate them about the brand, and teach them how to leverage the offering.

First, decide on the length of time during which the user should be "nurtured" and how many e-mails should be sent out. Regardless of the product or service that's being sold, every subscriber deserves a welcome e-mail. Following the initial welcome, create a series of e-mails where each one focuses on a single idea or strategy.

For instance, when promoting software, encourage users to register for a demo or show them the best way to use a feature. Later on in the drip campaign, offer best practices, send case studies, or share valuable content that will motivate them to move down to the bottom of the funnel.

Weekly Product Tips/Best Practices Campaign

This type of campaign is targeted at existing users, and is meant to familiarize them with tips and tricks for getting the most out of a service. Send out a weekly e-mail with a short explanation and include screenshots or visuals of how to carry out the recommendation. Alternatively, offer advice that is outside the scope of the service, but relates to the industry at hand and can help improve work strategies.

For this kind of campaign, if possible, create unique e-mails containing personalized tips based on each user's behavior. According to ExactTarget, personalized recommendations in e-mails can increase sales conversion rates by 15-25% and click-through rates by 25-35%.[11] Likewise, break down the customer lifecycle into key events, determine which steps have the highest drop-off rates, and implement e-mail marketing that motivates customers to take a specific action.

Upcoming Event Campaign

Create e-mail campaigns that announce an upcoming event, and send them approximately 2-3 weeks in advance to give a heads-up. Test out a designed template versus a plain-text e-mail, and follow it up with a personal reminder. In addition, remember to send an e-mail the day before the event as well as on the day itself

Promotional Campaign

A promotion or discount can serve two purposes – remind existing users that a company has their best interests in mind, or give prospects who are still deliberating the extra push they need to convert. In either case, e-mails should be sent to both groups to ensure they are aware of the offer. Include clear information and calls-to-action on how to claim the offer as well as contact details in case questions arise.

Best Practices for E-mail Composition

First and foremost, e-mail recipients care about receiving actionable tips that can help them improve their work, overcome pain points, and take full advantage of the product or service. Whatever one's strategy is for e-mail marketing, the most effective way to reach out to audiences is by segmenting them - based on buyer personas and consistent measurement of results.

1. Sender First, then Subject

The first goal should be getting the recipient to open the e-mail. Although most of us automatically think about the subject line, the "From" line is just as important.

Many people will dismiss e-mails received from a generic address, such as "info@" or "contact@," unless they are specifically expecting to hear from that company.

Use a personal e-mail in the "From" line, but make sure the e-mail body and graphics are aligned with this. If using an e-mail template, this strategy won't be nearly as believable.

If an e-mail is in plain text, there's a much better chance the recipient will feel that it came from a person and not a marketing automation platform.

Also, the name of the sender should be consistent with the signature and contact details at the bottom of the e-mail text.

2. The Subject Line Secret Sauce

The subject line must be relevant to the content inside the e-mail being delivered. For example, when promoting a webinar, the reader should clearly understand this from the subject line. Avoid uncommon words, make it concise, and keep special characters to a minimum in order to avoid having the e-mail flagged as spam.

Quick tips for the subject ine:

• Keep it short and human-sounding. Subject lines should not exceed 50 characters.

• Use little punctuation (e.g.: periods, exclamation points, etc.).

• Capitalize the first letter of each word, but not all of the letters in it.

• Use power words that capture attention (e.g. free, results, easy, discover, amazing).

• Make sure the subject line directly relates to the content of the e-mail.

3. They Opened the E-mail, Now What?

E-mail content should answer two questions: 1) Why am I reading this? 2) What do you want me to do? The text needs to provide value and the ability to let the reader quickly perform the desired action. In other words: don't make the reader over-think. Making the user experience as simple as possible is crucial to maximizing e-mail conversions.

E-mail Body Text

Quick tips for the e-mail text:

• The content must fulfill the promise of the subject line to create trust and credibility.

• Write as if addressing one person – and not hundreds. If the e-mail is from a person (and not the team), write in the first person, and don't switch from "I" to "we."

• Do not overuse "I", "we" and "us". Use "you" and "your" twice as much.

• Avoid long blocks of text – use short paragraphs or bullets to organize each idea.

• Use non-promotional wording, and make sure the e-mail benefits the reader by giving away free content or sharing best practices.

• Include "social proof" by referring to case studies, client logos, or even testimonials.

• Always include an e-mail signature with contact information (phone, e-mail, website).

Visuals

Quick tips for e-mail visuals:

• Use colorful and visually engaging images to capture the audience's attention.

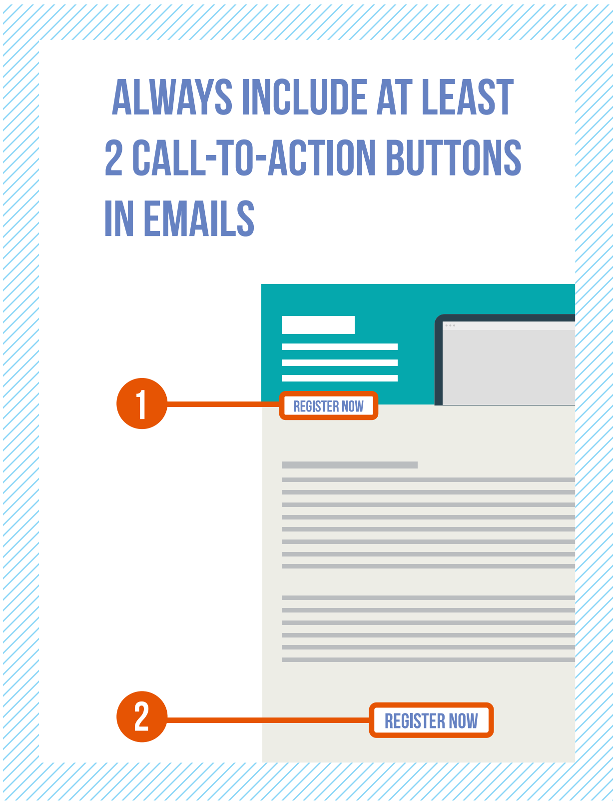
• Graphic style must be consistent with the the brand's website, landing pages, and ads.

• Avoid generic images and use visuals that offer a "preview" of what is being offering.

Calls-To-Action

• Use designed buttons (46 pixels squared minimum) instead of plain-text hyperlinks.

• Have at least two easy-to-find calls-to-action: one at the top and one at the bottom.



• Tell the reader what to do (e.g. "Download Now") but avoid using the word “Submit.”

• Use calls-to-action for one purpose only. Don’t have one to download a webinar and another to sign up for a demo. Users are less likely to convert if they have to choose.

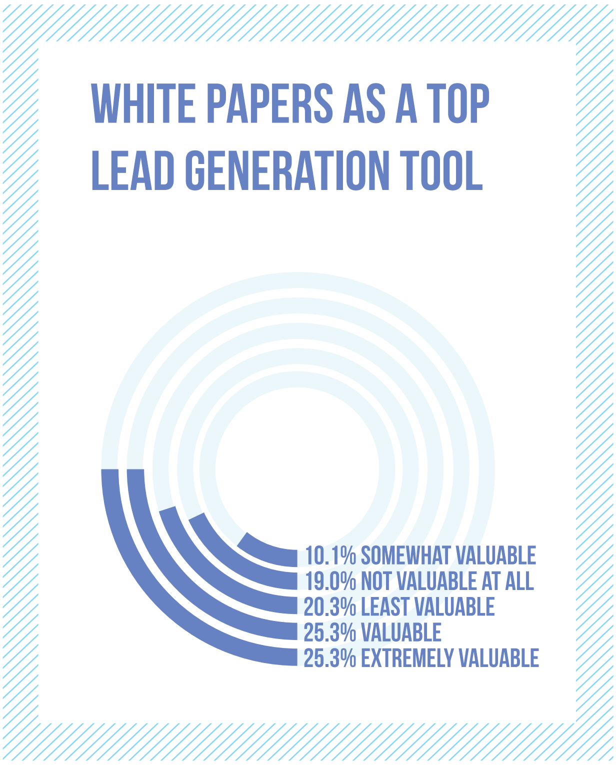
White Papers

Although content marketing comes in diverse formats, a Business.com report from August 2014 found that white papers are ranked as one of the top two types of content for B2B lead generation.[12] Moreover, upwards of 50% of those surveyed responded that white papers are a “valuable” or “extremely valuable” source of leads.[13]

White papers provide neutral, non-promotional analysis of a trend or concept to a targeted audience in which a problem is presented and solutions are provided.

As a rule, white papers tend to be significantly longer than most other content, such as blog posts or case studies, and provide more in-depth information and educational value. Publishing a white paper that adopts a persuasive approach can generate sales, build credibility, and encourage readers to look into a company’s offering.

This type of content requires substantially more research, time, and resources than other types - making it crucial to consider a number of best practices and guidelines prior to beginning the writing process.



Source: Business.com

Structural Elements of a White Paper

Before writing a white paper, create an outline of its structure. This will make it easier to allocate different chapters to members of the team, assess the estimated length of the document, and provide a better idea of how to tackle the project on a high-level.

The first question to ask is: What problem is being addressed? Writing a white paper that only discusses a trend or explains a subject matter is pointless. The document needs to bring attention to a problem or pain point that target audiences can relate to, propose at least one actionable solution, and indirectly promote the benefits of a product or service without openly advertising it.

Once the problem is identified, start planning out the white paper. First, decide on the approximate length. It shouldn't be too short (for example, 3 pages isn't long enough to provide sufficient value) or too long (chances are that a reader's attention will wane around the 20 page mark).

Cover Page

The cover page should include the title of the white paper, which must clearly communicate the problem at hand and refer to the benefit that's in it for the reader.

Cover page checklist:
- Full title of the white paper
- Name of the company
- Company logo
- Graphic design with a professional feel
- Date of publication (optional)

Introduction

This introduction should not exceed 1-2 pages, and must highlight the problem and provide a general description of how it will be solved. In addition, it's best to include a brief executive summary of the topics that will be covered, so the audience knows what to expect going forward.

To recap the elements of the introduction:
- Definition of the trend/concept
- Identification of the problem
- Executive summary
- Recommended solutions

Chapters

The number of chapters really depends on the subject of the white paper, but ideally it should be at least three. Each chapter can be labeled with a prominent header and contain several sub-headers within it. These can be distinguished by a different font size, color or italics.

What each chapter should contain:
- An explanation of one specific aspect of the problem and a unique solution to it.

- Detailed examples and actionable advice – not just general ideas or descriptions.

- Non-promotional language that takes an objective stance and educates readers.

- Data and research, either from internal sources such as case studies, or from 3rd parties (give credit): academic institutions, analysts, industry reports, or thought leaders.

- Multiple visuals that lend support to claims and solutions, such as: images, graphs, charts, diagrams, tables, or other illustrations.

Conclusion

The conclusion should reiterate the problem that was initially introduced and provide a summary of the key solutions discussed. It should not simply repeat what was said in the introduction in different words; this page can introduce a strong statistic, a powerful quote, or a few final thoughts that tie up the white paper.

Endnotes

When writing the white paper, keep a running list of all the different sources referred to in the text. This can save valuable time by making it much faster to compile the endnotes pages.

Also, links to any online sources that were cited should be included so readers can quickly refer to them for more information. Before publishing the document, click on each link to check that it actually redirects to the correct destination.

End Page

This page is relatively similar to the cover page, and should contain:

• Name of the company
• Company logo
• Company contact details (website, e-mail, and phone number)
• Simple graphic design with a professional feel – avoid using large visuals here

Guidelines and Tips for White Paper Content

Aside from structure, there are several other helpful recommendations to keep in mind when publishing a white paper.

Headers and Footers

To make it more visually attractive, have a designed header and footer on each page. This can be as simple as the name of the white paper up top, and the page number and or company name/logo on the bottom. Each page must have consistent styling.

Gated Content

White papers can be published as gated content to generate leads. This can be acheived by creating a customized landing page for the document where users provide contact details in exchange for access.

File Format

The recommended format for white papers is PDF. Publishing the document in this format makes it easily accessible to the majority of readers - both online and via e-mail.

Language

Since white papers are more formal than other types of content, use the third person instead of first person throughout the text.

Avoid pronouns such as “I” or “we” to maintain a professional, business-style tone throughout. Using widely recognized keywords is encouraged, but not industry jargon or acronyms that will make it difficult for readers to understand the text.

Above all, promotional or sales-y language or wording should be kept to a minimum. Although white papers aim to build credibility for one's brand which can ultimately generate sales, their primary goal should be to educate readers - not directly sell to them.

Layout

Use short sentences. Run-on sentences or excessively long paragraphs make it hard to keep a reader focused and interested. Keep the paragraphs short and mix it up with bullet points, numbers, and visuals so the content is engaging and easy to scan.

Case Studies

Case studies serve a range of purposes – from academic research, to corporate proof, and thought leadership. The focus here will be on case studies which show how a brand helps clients reach goals or results via usage of certain products or services.

Case studies are an excellent way to demonstrate the unique value proposition of one's offering, and show concrete data to back up these claims. The Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs found that 73% of marketers use case studies, while 65% feel they are an effective tactic.[14]

As buyers increasingly conduct research independently through social media and vast online resources, case studies have become crucial to content marketing efforts. They offer solid data on customer success, provide real-life examples that resonte with prospects, and cite credible "social proof."

> **"CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS (89%) AND CASE STUDIES (88%) ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING TACTICS"**

Source: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

A 2013 survey published by B2B Technology Marketing Community, a LinkedIn Group Partner, cited that case studies (88%) are considered the second most effective content marketing tactic, with lead generation being the primary objective.[15]

4 Steps to Laying the Groundwork for Case Studies

Step 1: Choose the Right Client

The first step is to choose a client who best represents the advantages and benefits offered by the product or service. The company should already have an established relationship with the brand and at least a few months to familiarize itself with the offering.

Most importantly, the company needs to provide powerful data to support all of the case study's claims. The best clients to approach are ones considered to be "power users" or "ambassadors" of a brand, who know the ins and outs of the product, and love using it.

Step 2: Select the Most Relevant Participant to Interview

A successful case study is largely dependent on selecting a relevant and knowledgeable expert to interview. Writing a case study without sufficient quotes, data, or detailed information is extremely difficult, and will fail to provide readers with tangible value.

Pinpoint an expert who has hands-on experience using the product or service, has been at the company for a substantial period of time, and is an expert in his or her particular field.

Step 3: Write a List of Detailed Questions

The questions will be based entirely on the type of client, the service offering, and the length of the case study.

The list should be written in advance, and can either be sent via e-mail, asked in person or by phone. Keep in mind, the questions should not limit the interviewee to "yes" or "no" answers - they should be open-ended to extract as much information as possible.

Additionally, ask the interviewee to provide any data or resources that can add credibility to the case study, such as statistics about usage of the product and how it improved work strategy, output, or profits.

Here are a few examples of basic questions to ask: ([X] = name of company/product):

- ✅ Provide a 1-2 paragraph description of your company. Include details such as the year of establishment, field of expertise, flagship products, target audience, and geographic areas of operation.
- ✅ What are your [enter relevant sector] goals?
- ✅ What [enter relevant sector] pain points does your company face?
- ✅ When did you start using [X]? Were you using a similar product previously to meet your needs, and if so, why did you switch?
- ✅ How does [X] help you overcome the challenges your company faces?
- ✅ What specific features/functionality/services do you find most helpful?
- ✅ Cite and describe several best practices or helpful strategies you've implemented when using the product or service.
- ✅ Provide a description and clear data that show how [X] contributed to your goals.
- ✅ Provide two quotes on how [X] has helped your company achieve its business goals, increase profits, and save time.

Step 4: Analyze the Information

After the questions are answered, add the content to the research that's been compiled and narrow it down to what matters most.

When analyzing the data, extract the numbers that best represent how the product has helped the client. Also, make sure to identify the client's goals, pain points, challenges, needs, and the solutions implemented.

How to Write a Case Study

Below are a few best practices to review before writing the case study:

• Develop a uniform template or design for all case studies going forward.

• Keep the title short but descriptive (up to 10 words) and include the client's name.

• Use easy-to-read formatting. Avoid long paragraphs and include lots of bullets points.

• Include real numbers. This is most effective way to show social proof and credibility.

• Don't generalize. Explain exactly which features helped and how they were used.

• Include several customer quotes, preferably in the client's own words.

• Use a range of visuals such as graphs, charts, images, or photos.

• Ask the client to review the case study for accuracy and to provide approval.

• Add references if necessary when referring to statistics, data or quotes.

QUICK CASE STUDY TIP: USE MULTIPLE EXAMPLES OF CLIENT DATA TO SHOW THE SUCCESS ACHEIVED

Introduction and Background

The introduction should set the stage for the rest of the case study. It can include background information on what the company does, a short description of the problem being addressed, and a panoramic view of the solutions. Regardless of the format, the introduction should be accompanied by visuals – for example, the company's logo and other relevant images.

Description of the Problem

Next, provide a clear description of the problem the client is facing. Cite a list of challenges and discuss their particular industry needs. The challenges should be general enough so that other similar prospects can easily relate to them.

Analysis and Solution

Now that the reader understands the problem, the subsequent section should analyze the challenges and offer a distinct solution for each one. This can be achieved by highlighting unique value propositions and focusing on how certain features, capabilities, or services enabled the client to overcome the problem.

Most importantly, back up all of the claims with hard data. Present it in easy-to-read and visually appealing graphs, charts or even screenshots, and emphasize how incredible the results turned out. All of the numbers provided should be visibly connected to a particular benefit the customer reaped.

Depending on the data, marketers may be able to show what the numbers looked like before and after the service was implemented. This section is also ideal for including client quotes, which will make the information presented much more personal.

Benefits and Takeaways

In the final section, provide insights the reader can take away and summarize the recommendations. The takeaways should directly relate to the solutions that were cited, while stressing the benefits of the particular offering. This is also a great place to include a customer quote or testimonial.

Contact Details

At the end of the case study, include the company name, logo, and other details (e.g. website address, phone number, e-mail, and social media pages).

Marketing Decks

While blog posts and white papers are effective forms of content marketing, being able to not only write one's story, but also present it visually, is an excellent way to engage a target market. Presentations don't necessarily need to be given in person - more often than not they can be e-mailed or done "live" online and accessed at any time.

As with other types of content, decks need to be educational – and also entertaining. As a marketer, the focus when creating a deck should be on answering two questions: What is the one key message I want to convey to my audience? What action do I want my audience to take after reading the slide deck?

After deciding on the topic and objective, the next step is to map out the number of slides the presentation will contain. Then, develop an outline with the chapter headers, and write a few words on each slide that can be elaborated on later. This skeleton will provide a general understanding of what the presentation will eventually look like.

Promotional Decks

Sales decks are used to provide a brief introduction to a brand, products and services, or even to highlight a specific feature. In most cases, the deck should be no longer than 10-15 slides and include a cover slide with the title, logo, and company name. Additionally, a final slide with a brand logo, website, contact information, and social buttons can be added.

Introductory Deck

Before drilling down to features and services, prospects often want to learn about the company and the team itself. An introductory deck should be short and provide high-level background information.

Basically, it should state when the company was established, a brief history of its growth, geographic locations, divisions, and a short description of its offering. In addition, it can include short bios of top executives, a description of the business model, and highlights of the road-map.

Capabilities Deck

After making initial contact with a potential customer, whether via phone or through e-mail, he or she will often ask to be provided with a packaged description of the service's benefits and features. The solution is to have a solid and well-designed capabilities deck on hand.

Keep the deck short and use it to highlight the value proposition and key features or services offered. Provide a clear, easy-to-understand description of what the company does and include impressive data from case studies or other social proof in the form of client logos and testimonials. A sales deck should serve as a "take-away" for clients, which can also be shared with team members and management.

Feature Spotlight

Creating a feature deck is a helpful way to emphasize how one's offering stands out from the competition. If a company offers a product with a flagship feature, an entire slide deck can be created to highlight it.

The deck must include at least several screen shots, images depicting the feature, or even an embedded video. This will provide a genuine understanding of how the feature looks, feels and operates.

Non-Promotional Decks

As opposed to the category above, these decks are aimed at establishing thought leadership and sharing actionable recommendations with the audience -rather than directly selling to it. Non- promotional decks can also be used to boost brand awareness – but should not be overtly salesy in any way.

Apart from using a logo on the cover, closing slide and possibly in the footers, as well as- citing the company's contact information and website at the end, this deck should only contain engaging and valuable content.

Best Practices or Tips Deck

If one's brand is considered an expert in a particular field, or is aspiring to become one, a best practices deck can be a great way to educate the target audience. Avoid long blocks of text, and create slides that contain large and engaging visuals with one or two sentences each that drive the point home.

It's better to have a large number of slides that can be easily scanned than a shorter slide deck packed with text that people won't want to read through. If possible, reference examples that illustrate best practices from actual work experience and results attained.

Marketers can also indirectly promote a brand by using examples from their own work strategy that can help prospects.

Industry Research

Identify an industry trend that supports the business and create a slide deck based on internal or 3rd party research. It's best to use internal company data as a means to indirectly promote the brand without making readers feel they're being sold to.

Incorporate colorful visuals such as pie charts, graphs, and other images that illustrate the data. If external data is used, make sure to cite all of the sources and include links to full versions of references.

Webinar or Lecture Deck

With these decks, the "little text, lots of visuals" rule is extremely important, since the audience should be listening to the speaker and not devoting its attention to the slides. Longer decks are often best – as long as each slide incorporates lots of imagery and can be shown quickly.

Another strategy is to create a short deck with one main multimedia asset on each slide, such as a short video or audio clip. When brainstorming about what to say or include in slides, remember that people are more likely to listen if the slides are presented as a story rather than a list of facts.

Relate what is being said to personal examples from work strategies or case studies and touch on pain points that will resonate with people in the audience.

10 Quick Tips for Marketing Decks

Each company must tailor its decks to be consistent with overall branding, graphics and messaging. However, there are still a few guidelines that can be followed to improve decks and ensure they are as engaging.

• Insert a company logo on the first and last slide, and in each of the slide footers.

• If the deck is for a client, include your company logo and the client's logo on the first slide, as well as in the headers or footers.

• Use consistent styling and colors, but not the same kinds of graphics repeatedly.

• Search images on websites with a creative commons: Flickr, Compfight, or Photo Pin.

• Keep it to one idea per slide. The text and visuals must speak to the same concept.

• Use quotes, internal or 3rd party data, or testimonials that support key messages.

• Reiterate key points at the end of the deck to drive the messaging home.

• Include contact information, a website address, and social buttons on the last slide.

• Save the file as a PDF and not a PowerPoint, given that PDFs are much more accessible.

Repurposing Content

Regardless of whether a company is small or large, its marketing team is responsible for generating substantial amounts of content on a daily or weekly basis.

For most companies, the resources and time available to create this content are limited, and marketers feel pressured to constantly write new blog posts, eBooks, and presentations to keep audiences interested. This challenge can be tackled by repurposing content; basically, deconstructing it and then changing its format.

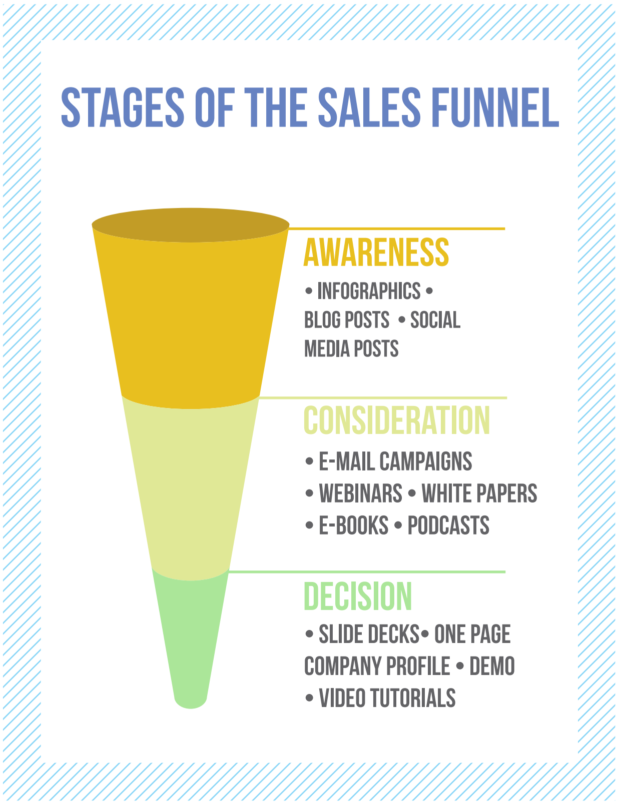
For example, a webinar recording can be transcribed and divided into several blog posts. These can be used to easily put together an eBook. Not only will this result in more content, but the various formats can also reach different target audiences based on three marketing funnel stages: awareness, consideration and decision. In each stage, people have distinct information needs and search for certain types of content to fulfill them.

Awareness (Top of the Funnel)

For this stage, content can be repurposed into lighter formats that are easier to consume. This can offer readers who are not yet familiar with a brand or industry a high-level introduction of what the brand does, its messaging, products, and services.

Consideration (Mid-Funnel)

Audiences at this stage seek content more frequently. They can often be prospects who require more details on the product or service and seek to understand the unique value proposition and what distinguishes the service from competitors.



Decision (Bottom of the Funnel)

At this point, any content provided needs to offer drilled-down, detailed information on the company, products and services. By now, the audience is knowledgeable about the brand and needs content that will give it the final push to make a decision.

How to Repurpose Content

Step 1: Start With One Item

As mentioned above, start with a substantial piece of content that contains lots of text, such as a webinar or a white paper. The more material there is to work with, the easier it will be to repurpose it into multiple formats.

Step 2: Break it Down

Hold a brainstorming session and compile a list of content formats which can be created based on the original item. Here's a list of several ideas to start with:

- Blog posts
- eBooks
- White papers
- Case studies
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Infographics
- E-mail campaigns/newsletters
- Social media updates
- Slide decks

Step 3: Revise and Reformat

Once a marketer has decided exactly which types of content to break the original item into, it's time to modify and adapt the text. The content should be revised to match the audience segment and the specific format.

For example, a webinar recording should not be transcribed word for word if it's being turned into a blog post. The language should be revised to make it less formal and easier to consume, so the audiene can quickly scan and read through it.

Step 4: Publish and Distribute

Cross-promotion is the key to effectively maximizing the visibility of the newly generated content. Whether promoting the content across multiple social networks, a company website or blog, in guest articles or on any other online source – it needs to reach audiences to make an impact.

The distribution channels should be suitable for that specific content, meaning that formal, technical content most likely won't be promoted using Facebook posts.

Conclusion

The shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing – and most recently, social media marketing, has completely revolutionized the way the modern content marketer functions. With new tools comes the requirement of learning new skills. The daunting challenges that face today's marketer have caused many to dig their heels in and insist that doing things the "old way" still works, and that new tactics are just a fad.

Like all paradigm shifts, the one being seen in marketing today has left many marketers ill prepared. While fully embracing new marketing strategies may seem an overwhelming task for some, the reality is that these new tactics are, in many ways, quite similar to the old ones. Content marketing is, and always will be, about providing valuable content to prospects.

A marketer establishes thought leadership via content. When the time comes for a prospect to make a purchasing decision, that person will intuitively know which company to go with as a result of the content's impact.

It is clear to anyone who does a thorough evaluation of the marketing landscape that traditional marketing precepts are no longer the be all and end all. Neither, too, can a marketer totally discard the tried and true practices of yesteryear. What is needed is a holistic marketing approach that draws from the entire range of the marketing spectrum.

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Finally:
Content Marketing Explained

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