

CONTENT MARKETING

THE SECRET TO ONLINE MARKETING SUCCESS

Today, content marketing is the key to establishing your company as a go-to resource in your field. Create educational items that are considered interesting and useful by your target audience, and turn your website into a resource center.



To effectively market your products and services, you cannot rely exclusively on marketing your products and services. You need to also market your specialized knowledge to demonstrate to prospects and customers that you are the expert in your field.

People do not choose to do business with you just because you have the right product at the right price. They choose to do business with you because of your specialized knowledge about the applications and best practices for the product. To be successful in the 21st century, you need to lead with this specialized knowledge in your marketing.

In other words, you need to become a content marketer.

Content marketing is the creation and distribution of relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage clearly defined target audiences, with the goal of driving action. Content marketing needs to serve as the

cornerstone of your online marketing strategy. Create educational items that are considered interesting and useful by your target audience, and turn your website into a resource center.

While this is a time-intensive endeavor, the benefits will far outweigh the cost. Your content marketing backbone should consist of:

- **Blog Posts** — Blog posts are insightful and timely web content that highlight important news, observations and other useful content. Readers of your posts are encouraged to share their comments, allowing for a two-way dialogue. Blog posts offer a great opportunity to keep your website current and relevant through short 250- to 500-word posts.
- **Articles** — By creating 500- to 1,000-word educational articles that demonstrate a best practice, you can showcase your expertise and demonstrate to your customers that you understand their needs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 118

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IF YOU CAN COME UP WITH ONE GOOD IDEA THAT YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL FIND VALUABLE, YOU CAN CREATE FIVE CONTENT TYPES BASED ON THAT IDEA.



➤ **Whitepapers** — Whitepapers are topical, educational reports or guides that are oriented toward a particular industry challenge, opportunity or best practice. Generally, whitepapers are five to 15 pages in length and allow you to demonstrate thought leadership on issues that are important to your customers.

➤ **E-books** — E-books are like whitepapers on steroids. They are lengthier than whitepapers, generally ranging from 55 to 100 pages in length, and present complex information in a compelling and entertaining way.

➤ **Videos** — If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth a million. Use online video to demonstrate a product, illustrate a best practice, allow customers to see your company behind the scenes, etc. Online videos do not have to be professionally produced — an inexpensive digital camera will work well. The key is to film content your customers will find useful and actionable.

➤ **Presentations** — PowerPoint or similar software can be used to create educational presentations oriented toward a particular challenge, opportunity or best practice. Presentations can be five to 50 pages in length, whatever it takes to make your point.

➤ **Webinars** — A webinar is a seminar that is conducted over the web that participants can easily view from their office or home live or on-demand. Most webinars include a visual slide presentation, as well as an audio broadcast that is accessed either over the computer or phone. Webinars should range from 30 to 90 minutes with some time allocated to questions and answers.

I know what you're thinking: "Bob, you're out of your mind! There is no possible way for me to create this much content. I'm too busy running my business." I hear this all the time when I present this concept. The good news is that it's not that difficult.

First, you don't need to create the content yourself. You can find many talented and reasonably priced writers on Upwork (www.upwork.com) or Guru (www.guru.com) to help you out. Second, you can produce many content items easily by embracing the concept of repurposing. If you can come up with one good idea that your customers

will find valuable, you can create five content types based on that idea. And, if you come up with one good idea per month and create five content items based on each idea, at the end of a year, you will have 60 valuable content items in your content marketing arsenal.

WHAT SHOULD YOU WRITE ABOUT?

The first, if not the most difficult, step in content marketing is figuring out what you're going to write about. If you've ever tried to write anything, I'm sure you've had episodes of writer's block — staring at the blank page for what seems like an eternity hoping for creative inspiration. Successful content marketers don't have this problem because they are always on the lookout for new and innovative content ideas. Put these tips into action and you won't have this problem either.

Follow industry news. The key to creating timely, relevant content is to be plugged into the latest news and trends in your industry. If you don't already, get in the habit of reading online publications and blogs in your industry. Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) can help automate this process by emailing you whenever industry news is published.

Monitor social conversations. What are people tweeting about on Twitter, posting on Facebook or discussing on LinkedIn? These social conversations can be a great source for content ideas. Follow LinkedIn groups, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages related to your industry. You can automate this process using services like HootSuite (www.hootsuite.com) to monitor social conversations.

Ask your sales and service people. Your salespeople and customer service people are interacting with your customers on a daily basis. They know your customers' needs, challenges and opportunities. Even if these people are not great writers, ask them for the raw meat of each content idea — I bet there's a treasure trove of ideas to be uncovered. A talented copywriter can turn their raw meat into a brilliantly written piece.

Ask your customers. To be effective, your content needs to be customer-focused. So, when brainstorming content ideas, why not ask your best customers for input? Conduct an online survey asking your customers to let you know their top challenges and questions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 120

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Eavesdrop on email conversations with customers. Now this may seem too "Big Brother" for some, but it is an effective way to understand the questions your customers have about your products, services and solutions. By setting up your email system to automatically "BCC" (blind carbon) your salespeople's email messages, you will be able to see the questions that are on your customers' minds, as well as the valuable answers your salespeople provide. By mining the information in these conversations, you will come up with countless content ideas.

Repurpose great content. This is one of my favorite ways of coming up with content ideas: Repurpose old,

good ideas in a new format. Did you write an article that got great feedback? Then write a 10-page whitepaper on the same subject. Film a short video blog. Create a webinar. Each good idea you come up with can be leveraged to create multiple content types.

Consider evergreen content. Evergreen content is content that stays useful for years with little or no need for upkeep. It can be referenced long after it was first created and still provides great value to the reader. What information or topics could you write about that will always be in season? **CS**

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