

INTRODUCTION

One of the more recent business services to arise out of engagement is Content Marketing, which refers to the use of informative, useful information, entertainment or games in communications with customers, distribution partners or other audiences rather than the traditional emphasis on using communications in business to sell, train or inform.

Content marketing arose during the pre-Internet era in the form of “advertorials” provided by media to sponsors who wanted the opportunity to address information specifically related to their area of business in the publication. Organizations also created videos and road shows to attract prospects by providing useful information or entertainment.

During the Internet era, the use of Content Marketing has grown exponentially because marketers have discovered that effective content can:

- Enhance website “stickiness” by providing useful, how-to information like you find on the websites of leading hardware retailers and other service-oriented organizations
- Improve organic search engine results by creating content relative to a specific brand
- Enhance the value of social media strategies by giving people more reasons to engage or share information
- Improve customer, distribution partner and employee engagement by giving people the opportunity to gain recognition by having their own content published
- Generate free exposure by creating a communication vehicle that goes “viral”

Content marketing is the use of any type of content to attract and build relationships with prospects and customers. Content can consist of news, features, how-to information, profiles, photos, videos, games, music, business theater, etc. It can include distribution through any type of media, including print, email, social media, video, live events, broadcast TV or radio, aimed at both customers and prospects.

STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL CONTENT MARKETING

Here are some of the critical steps to developing a Content Marketing strategy:

- 1. Vision.** What are you specifically trying to accomplish with your content marketing? Is it to get people to opt in, respond to offers, optimize search engine results, become better informed, share information, visit your website more often, increase trust? What are the important performance measures?
- 2. Audience.** Who are the people you need to target? In what formats are they most likely to consume content? What type of content will likely attract them? Chances are you’ll come up with a combination based on different types of audiences.
- 3. Assessment.** What is the current state of your content marketing strategy? What content do you have available? What types of content have proved effective in the past? What is the best media for your audience, given how they interact with your organization (computer, smart phone, etc.)? Who do you have on staff or via other resources that can create the content? Ideally, these resources have expertise in your field.
- 4. Type of content.** What type of information will be of greatest use to your audiences? Is there news or how-to information you have from which they can benefit? Are there games, theater, music that will have a special impact on your customers? It’s no easy task to identify content that will engage customers. What content do you want to make sure you *do not* include? A major fast food company got stung when a content provider posted on its website advice for holiday tipping precisely when the company was embroiled in minimum wage protests.
- 5. Which media make sense?** Technology has significantly lowered the production costs of all media, but there is also a valuable time and resource component of one medium versus another and how best to combine media for different types of people. See Chapter 14 for more information on different options.
- 6. How will the content be marketed?** How should the content be integrated with your website, social media, event strategies, etc.? How can you leverage other marketing to make people aware of this content?

7. Integration with other engagement strategies. How will your communication efforts support other parts of the organization that may wish to communicate with your audience? Can their needs create opportunities to make your communication more valuable? How can communications continually reinforce the key marketing proposition?

8. Measurement. The Internet and social media provide unparalleled ways of measuring engagement in terms of how many people visit sites, how long they stay, what they do, how often they come back, etc. Customer Relationship Management makes it ever more possible to measure participation in live events or telephone interactions.

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CONTENT SKILL REQUIREMENTS

One of the obstacles to Content Marketing is the lack of experts who understand how to merge traditional content with marketing.

Traditional journalists think like reporters or how-to article writers and have to be reoriented towards understanding the audience of the organization and the specific goals of the effort. Traditional marketers often don't know how to stop selling - providing objective, useful information is not in their makeup or training.

These folks have to be reoriented toward providing useful information, engaging entertainment, games or user-submitted content that has a benefit to the consumer as well as to the sponsor.