



Content Marketing

Introduction

You've just heard someone mention "content marketing" and you get the idea you should already know what it is, but you're too embarrassed to ask anyone. Congratulations, this article is for you

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What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is another means for providing information to customers and audiences, but it serves a lot of purposes within the realm of digital marketing. In simple terms, content marketing is the creation of collateral and other informational materials, and the distribution of them through various online networks. And above all, content marketing should create some kind of action. A CTA, or call to action, is usually found at the end of any piece of content. If the content worked, then ideally your reader will do what you ask, whether it's to click through and send an email, or just read another article.

Content marketing—or at least *good* content marketing—needs to be a lot of things. First, it has to be informative and relevant to the person you're serving it to. You want them to interact with it, be engaged by it, and find it helpful. Maybe it solves problems for them. Whatever it is, it needs to mean something to the reader.

Second, it has to serve some kind of goal. Maybe businesses use content just to raise awareness of their brand. Others use it to establish themselves as thought leaders in an industry by sharing insights they've gleaned from the work they do. Or you're trying to show up on page one of search engine rankings when your ideal customers are looking for help. You get to define what goal you're trying to achieve with the content you're creating. It takes trial and error, but content marketing pushes you forward.

Third, it really helps if the content you create is entertaining—at least on some level. You're asking people to engage with what you're creating, and we love to be entertained. If we're being educated while being entertained simultaneously, all the better. Make your content something people really want to watch or read, and you'll find it usually performs better.

Why Content Marketing?

Perhaps more important than understand what content marketing is, is

understanding why content marketing is important to your business. First we need to understand the four steps of the buying cycle:

- 1. Awareness. Prior to awareness a customer may have a need, but they are not aware there is a solution.**
- 2. Research. Once a customer is aware there is a solution, they will perform research to educate themselves. For example, a car buyer will try to find out what different types of cars exist, and which one will fit their needs.**
- 3. Consideration. At this point the customer starts comparing different products from different vendors to make sure they're getting a high quality product at a fair price.**
- 4. Buy. Finally, the customer makes their decision and moves forward with the transaction.**

Traditional advertising and marketing is great when it comes to the second two steps. Content marketing taps into the first two stages of the buying process by raising awareness of solutions and educating consumers about a product they may have never considered before.

At my own company we've used content marketing to grow more than 1,000% over the past year. Potential clients find our content, find value in it, and by the time they contact us they're already convinced they want to work with us. We don't have to engage in any high pressure sales tactics, it's merely a matter of working out details, signing an agreement, and getting started. The trust that usually needs to be built up during an extensive sales cycle has already been created before we know the potential client exists.

The return on investment for content marketing can be phenomenal if executed correctly. We haven't spent a dime on our own content marketing, or even that much time. 95% of the success we've experienced with content marketing can be traced to a handful of articles I've written, adding up to perhaps 20 hours of work.

Content marketing also provides additional benefits in that it supports other digital marketing channels. It provides additional content for social media marketing and contributes to SEO efforts by generating natural inbound links and building up good content on your website that gets found in search engines. In fact, for many companies the bulk of their SEO efforts should be focused on content marketing.

How Do I Get Started?

There are many firms that offer content marketing services, often paired with SEO or PR. If you're simply too busy to do it yourself and aren't ready to manage it in-house, then hiring a firm may be your best option. But if you

want to jump in and do your own content marketing the easiest way is to start blogging. It will likely be hard at first, but the more you do it, the better you'll get at it. Following tips from websites like [Copyblogger](#) you'll quickly learn how to craft content for your website or blog that will engage readers and turn them into customers or clients. But while technically good writing and the right headlines can help, it's not the key to creating great content that is the best form of content marketing.

Great Content

If you've ever slogged your way through reading a piece of marketing and only finished reading because you had to, then you've experienced bad content marketing. When I speak to companies about content marketing I tell them that content is good if they genuinely want to read it. Content is great if they're willing to pay to read it. If you want to see great examples of content, just look at what you've paid to read, watch, or listen to lately. If you watched The Lego Movie this year, you saw one of the greatest examples of content marketing to date. Oh, you thought they made that movie in order to sell movie tickets? Think again. That was a 100 minute toy commercial, and rather than using a DVR to skip it you paid good money to watch it. Is it any coincidence that [Lego recently leapfrogged Mattel](#), the creators of Barbie, to become the largest toy company in the world? You may not have the budget to make a feature film to promote your company, but you can still give potential customers valuable information.

The #1 Secret of Content Marketing

Add value. That's the secret. It's not really a secret at all. We've already talked about it throughout this piece. Although when you look at some of the marketing companies engage in you wonder if they're purposely avoiding the obvious. We skip advertising when it provides little to no value. If you want to learn about advertising that doesn't get skipped, find a skateboarder and ask him if you can watch him look through a skateboard magazine. You'll see that he spends as much time looking at the ads as he does looking at the articles and photos. Or check out [The Berrics website](#). Much of the content is advertisements, but skaters don't skip these videos, they watch them just like they watch the other videos, because they're getting the value they want--good skating. As a skater I'd like to say skateboard companies pioneered content marketing decades ago, but I know they were only doing what came naturally, and selling more product was secondary to the fun of creating videos and magazines. If you want to hire someone onto your marketing team who understands content marketing intuitively, hiring a skateboarder might not be a bad step.

If you're not sure how you can add value through content marketing, ask your

existing customers what kind of content you can produce that would be helpful to them now, or would have been helpful to them when they were looking for your product or service. They'll tell you.

How Can I Learn More?

Read Joe Pulizzi's excellent book [Epic Content Marketing](#). I started reading it after I wrote this post and it confirmed and expanded what I already knew about content marketing, with much more detail than I could ever go into here. Something Pulizzi emphasizes which I originally left out was the importance of focusing on producing mobile-friendly content, since smartphones are becoming the dominant way in which most of our customers access content. Also read Michael Hyatt's Platform, mentioned above. Frequent websites like those of Content Marketing Institute, [Ragan](#), Copyblogger, Michael Hyatt, and [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) and sign up for their email newsletters. It won't take you long to become not just familiar with content marketing, but an expert.

Most companies are not doing real content marketing...yet. That's why you'll have an advantage if you jump in. Let me know how it goes.

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