

Content Marketing Essentials



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I. Introduction

For companies doing business online, content marketing is the great equalizer. A small startup that produces great content can gain a high-profile presence that is the envy of larger competitors. So businesses of all sizes need to embrace content marketing or risk being left behind.

This guide is designed to give you the knowledge and inspiration you need to develop a robust content marketing program. In addition, it can serve as your implementation guide — a checklist to keep your program on track at every stage of development.

The guide provides explanations of the concepts that give content marketing its power and scope. It includes a bit about the history and coming-of-age of content marketing. And it maps out the concrete steps you can implement daily to position your business for online success.

We hope you'll enjoy it. And we urge you to implement what you learn at each step of the process.

Let's get started!

II. Reinventing the Sales Funnel

At Content Marketing World 2014, Andrew Davis spoke about the "Moment of Inspiration" (MOI) where you invite your customers not only to try a product or sign up for your newsletter, but also present an initiative or cause to inspire them. to become your loyal customer.

From MOI to ROI

What is a moment of inspiration? It is a message inspired by the context.

Let's say you visit a website and see raw cookie dough in the header, would you be inspired to research how to make the perfect Christmas cookie? Most of us would ignore the image and keep searching. But if you see a picture of freshly baked cookies on a beautiful, festive plate - you might start thinking that you need those cookies and that festive plate. That's a moment of inspiration.

So you look for cookie recipes all over the internet. Finally, you find the perfect one. But where can you get that festive plate? Of course! You go back to the website where you saw it and realize it's an online shop with a holiday sale. That very plate can be yours! So you buy it.

Is your search complete? No, the journey has just begun. You think, Is there anything else I need? Then you search that website for things you might need. You were inspired to buy a product, and then you started looking for more. In fact, maybe you went further into the sales funnel by signing up for a newsletter to follow the sales and bonuses — all because a picture inspired you.



The Inspiration Funnel

Andrew Davis spoke about the four secrets of MOI:

- Build suspense using a story
- Foster inspiration
- Drive empathy
- Harness emotion

Those four triggers are great ways to get consent, gain email leads, and create a loyalty loop. So think like a Hollywood director who wants to create a great movie. You can't reveal everything all at once. You have to create a trail of breadcrumbs (poster, teasers, trailers, specials) leading to the big picture (film).

Driving Prospects to Your Product

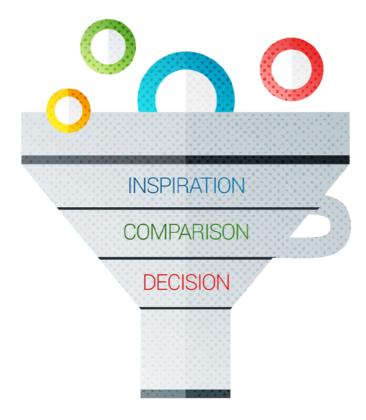
Here's a simple campaign that could drive leads: 1) You tweet about your new blog post. 2) The blog post leads to an article about an authority, which mentions a whitepaper written by that person. 3) You offer to send the reader the whitepaper in exchange for their email address. 4) After they sign up for the whitepaper, your sales page pops up, or a follow-up email goes out with offers of more content or products. Social media is also content marketing.

How Does the Content Funnel Work?

Most of us think of the funnel as a sales tool. But as a content marketer, you can get inspired by the funnel and analyze each stage of your customer lifecycle to learn what works and what doesn't.

Inspiration: At this stage (the top of the funnel) people become aware of your brand. They notice you on Google, Yelp, or Pinterest. As they look through your website, what do they see? Do they see content that educates and motivates them? Or do they see products being forced on them? At this stage of the journey, you need to build trust, deliver clear messages, provide testimonials, and motivate with clear-cut content. (Instead of raw cookie dough, give them the final product baked on a beautiful platter.) This is the place for humor, character, and simple content, such as resource pages, FAQ's, infographics, and social media posts.

Comparison: In the next level of the funnel, the prospect evaluates options and chooses where to get the product they need. This is your opportunity to educate prospects: offer a whitepaper, link to a blog article, invite them to a webinar, show a case study, or link to a product pricing comparison sheet. Make sure you provide a clear view of the pros and cons, answer their questions, and give them a reason to stick around.



Img 1. The Content Funnel

Decision: The bottom of the funnel is where your prospect becomes your customer. If they have been inspired and educated, they have a reason to purchase your product. Now that they understand how your product fulfills their needs, they'll want to know even more. So prepare in-depth content to make their choice clear. At this stage, you might offer a whitepaper in exchange for their email address. Then follow up with coupons, offers, webinar invitations, and other bonuses. This is where content marketing meets email marketing.

Getting Inspired to Do More

Creating great content is a great responsibility. So focus on the whole picture, not just the articles, whitepapers, and tweets you create. You're selling the product and the brand, so consider the entire shopping process, from the top of the funnel to the bottom.

With inspirational stories and suspense, you can capture more leads. Start thinking like a Hollywood director and create content for every stage of the funnel.

III. Content Marketing for B2B and B2C

At some point, it became clear that the traditional approach to marketing no longer worked. With ever-growing and fiercer competition, promotional campaigns based on discounts began to lose their shine and effectiveness.

Marketers began to think: There has to be some other way to differentiate us from our competitors. Something that will persuade prospects to choose us instead of other solutions. How can we help them arrive at that conclusion. other than simply telling them we're better or cheaper? How can we sell without selling?

The answer was pretty simple. To affect audience behavior, you have to educate, entertain and inspire. You must provide valuable, useful content and leave the decision to them. If you earn their trust, they'll choose you. That's what content marketing is all about.

The Beginning of Content Marketing

Some say John Deere was the original content marketer. In 1895, the company started publishing a magazine for farmers called The Furrow – a resource to educate customers on how to be more effective in their business. The logic was simple: if the business thrived, the customer would buy more equipment. And if their success were all due to John Deere, they'd look no further.

This approach hasn't changed much. Content marketers provide great resources, tools, advice, and knowledge, so they will be the preferred provider when the buyer decides to purchase.



Img 2. John Deere replica toys photo from the Furrow Magazine, December 2014

Content Marketing in Action

How can you use content marketing in your company? It depends on your business and industry. For some, the content marketing approach may appear obvious and natural. For others, it requires more effort and brainstorming prior to launch.

Get to know your target audience — their questions, doubts, and concerns. You may already have these questions in the back of your mind. If not, conduct research by asking directly, surfing the web, or joining discussions in forums.

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Once you discover what they want to know, create useful resources, such as:

- Whitepapers
- Industry reports
- ✓ Videos
- Podcasts
- Articles
- Blog posts
- Excel spreadsheets
- Templates
- Answers to FAQs

Of course, creating content is one thing, but distributing it is another. Often, this may be the most difficult task. So find out what channels your audience uses (social media, discussion forums, YouTube, search engines, etc.) and provide answers through the most popular ones.

Still wondering how to use this concept for your benefit? Let's look at two examples from B2B and B2C to see how two different businesses do it.

Business to Consumer (B2C)

IKEA is a perfect example of a multinational B2C company that knows how to use content marketing. They serve millions around the world, selling convenient, easy-to-assemble furniture in many designs. Let's take a look at their program.

1. The IKEA catalog

If you've ever been to IKEA or planned to shop there, you've seen their catalog. IKEA packs it with hundreds of pictures of products arranged in rooms that are carefully designed to be appealing. Each product has its own place and looks great. If you don't know what would look good in your room and need inspiration — IKEA's catalog is the answer.

IKEA knows how popular their catalog is. In some countries, the 2015 catalog promotion included clients who entered photo booths to have their photo on the cover. Imagine the lines of people waiting for photos.



Img 3. IKEA 2015 animated catalog cover photo

2. Augmented reality app

Seeing a product in the catalog is great. But having it in your home is a different story. Will it fit? Will it look good next to the TV? You no longer have to wonder. Just use the IKEA augmented reality app that goes with the 2015 catalog. It shows you how your favorite piece of furniture will look in your room, saving you the time and expense of visiting their store.

Perhaps if you had visited their store, you'd have purchased more products. But IKEA seems to prefer providing better service and avoiding returns and refunds for the products that don't fit your home.

And happy clients tend to return to the store more often.



Img 4. IKEA Augmented Reality App

3. IKEA home tour

In the IKEA Home Tour, a team of IKEA employees travels throughout America helping consumers design their homes and choose furniture to fit all their needs and desires in a limited space.

On their YouTube channel, you can follow the journey to see how they plan and execute these projects. You'll also see how happy each customer is when they return home and see a complete makeover they thought was impossible.

4. Much more

IKEA does so much that it's difficult to list everything. You may have heard about their easy-to-follow assembly instruction manuals, how-to-build videos, IKEA share space, First: 59 website and Pinterest board. Although the printed catalog eats up most of their yearly marketing budget, they cover other communication channels to meet customer needs and preferences.

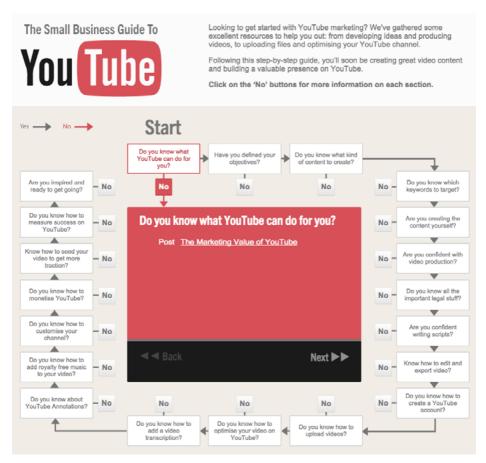
Business to Business (B2B)

Perhaps less flashy and less frequently mentioned on the news, great examples of content marketing come from B2B companies also, John Deere aside, let's take a look at a few modern examples on the Web.

The Small Business Guide to Google+

Google+ is the second-largest social network on the Web. If you're running a business, you can't ignore its power and reach. Because of its link to Google Search, Google Maps, and YouTube, Google+ is a great place to connect with your target audience and make your business more visible.

Google gathers tutorials from across the Web in The Small Business Guide to Google+. It covers frequently asked questions and topics, presenting comprehensive information in an easy-to-digest format.



Img 5. The Small Business Guide to YouTube from Google

And not just for Google+. They provide resources for YouTube, Google Analytics, Google Webmaster Tools, and Google AdSense. These resources help users get started with Google products and promote their business on the Internet. If you have a small business or do all of your marketing in-house, this is a great place to start.

Of course, Google isn't the only B2B company offering great content to customers. Moz offers an interesting series of videos called Whiteboard Friday. In it, they answer frequently asked questions and teach various topics, such as "Getting Branded Searches Right" and "How Can Mobile SEO Help My Non-Mobile or Local Business". Currently, there are over 150 videos on their YouTube channel, and as it seems from comments on their recent post, their audience wants more of their content.

If you research your industry, you'll find more examples of approaches to content marketing. When you discover knowledge gaps, that's the time to act.

IV. Social Media and Content Marketing

In the previous section, we talked about how to implement content marketing in B2B and B2C businesses. But what do you do with all those content marketing campaigns? Do they magically gain customers for your business? No, they don't. You need to flip your content marketing coin and see that the other side is social media.

But don't get content marketing and social media confused. They aren't the same thing.

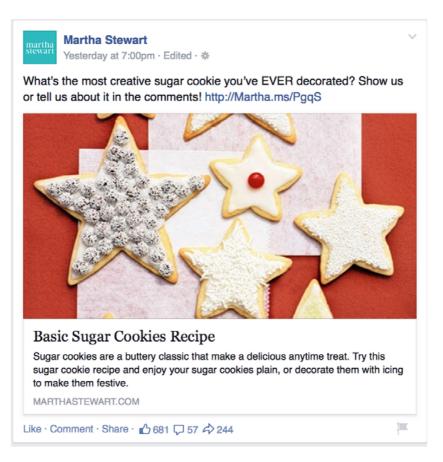
Despite what some marketers think, social media and content marketing need to work together to maximize the potential of what you are selling, giving, or offering to prospects. Jay Baer, the author of Youtility, made a great analogy: "Content is fire, and social media is gasoline." With that in mind, let's jump in.

Persuading Customers to Click and Share

For social media to attract prospects, you need the right content and the right strategy. In the first section, we spoke about the moment of inspiration and learned that it is important for your content to provoke something — a moment that will stick with the reader and drive them back to your brand. To do that, we need to take that content and move it to social media.

Companies use social media as a means of communication — a place where customers can share thoughts and exchange ideas, a platform for spreading news and information. But many brands forget that social networks are a great place to begin content marketing campaigns, a place where you can gain twice as much as you share.

More recently, we've seen brands use social media in order to engage with customers and drive them back to their website for content. Take a look at Martha Stewart's creative and engaging post:



Img 6. Martha Stewart creative post

It created buzz, and it provided a link people could click to go to the Martha Stewart website for content. This is a great way to combine social media and content marketing. A good CTA gets people to buzz on Facebook or Twitter and also gets them to click your link to find out more. What are some great CTA's to link back to from social networks?

- ✓ What is your most useful tool in marketing? Here is our list of 10 best tools k>. number 7 is especially good!
- ✓ Take a look at your email marketing strategy and compare it to our guide "The Perfect Email Marketing Campaign." < link>
- ✓ We looked into what is best in marketing. Have you? <link>
- ✓ Share the buzz about new online trends with your marketing buddies. Tag them in the comments below. <link>
- ✓ How did you prepare your business for the holidays? Share with us in the comments below. Then check out our guide. <link>

Create an environment where readers are comfortable commenting and sharing, and where there's room for questions. What tools are they talking about? What's best in marketing? I wonder what they advise doing around the holidays? These are questions a potential Facebook fan might have that would persuade them to click your link. What's behind the link? Your website, blog post, or landing page inviting people to a webinar or download link for your new whitepaper.

Doubling Down on Content Sharing

Now you've hooked your Facebook or Twitter fans. They are responding and clicking. But once new content is shared on your Facebook page, old posts aren't as visible. Once a tweet is tweeted, it dies within an hour. This means valuable content needs to be shared more than once.

Leo Wildrich from Buffer has created a list of 9 Best Social Media and Content Marketing Tips, No. 2 was Share Content More Than Once. With each re-share. retweet rate increased an average of 75%. How can you use this statistic? Here are four ways you can keep your content around and buzzing:

- 1. Research what time your customers are most social on Twitter. Pick two times a week when they are most active. Use one day to share new content and the other day to remind them of something you shared previously.
- 2. Use Facebook ads and promoted posts to make sure your content doesn't disappear within a day or two.
- 3. Twitter Ads are an easy way to recirculate your content. Every content strategy needs to include using this tool to share important content. Twitter Ads are no longer a social media tool to lure people into signing up to your list. They are a marvelous content marketing tool for sharing blog posts and whitepapers.
- 4. Use social media platforms in your campaigns. Whether you use a community management agency or tools like Insightpool, you can take your content to the next level by emailing interesting content to subscribers. If the content hits its target, they are likely to forward it.

All-in-one Calendar For Content and Social Media

Your social media and content marketing team should always be coordinated. It's not about creating a last minute post on Facebook or rushing a content piece. Create a calendar where you can see what content you are posting:

- Dates for publishing new whitepapers
- When you are conducting your webinars
- ✓ Plans for a series of special blog posts
- E-book or premium content offers

Include the dates in your social media calendar. Create a strategy with great calls to action, links to inspiring content, and ads on Twitter and Facebook.

On both calendars, plan to share your content more than once, especially on days when customers and prospects are most active on social media. Identify what speaks to people. Jot down CTAs that engage the influencers and segmented audience. Keep track of what works and what doesn't.

A/B Testing Your Content

With social media, it's not just about posting. It's also about optimizing. Take a look at the engagement rate on two posts from Martha:



Img 7. Martha Stewart post - engagement levels pt. 1

Although there are many likes, the overall statistics don't seem as great, once you compare them to a linked post with a good CTA like this one:



Img 8. Martha Stewart post - engagement levels pt. 2

Why did we use this as an example of A/B testing? For brands with frequent posts, like Harper's Bazaar, photo posts are better. They don't look cluttered, and they drive readers to their website for the fashion scoop. But a brand like Martha Stewart focuses on valuable content — a single blog post or landing page that's not full of scattered information — that is more valuable for linking.

A Powerful Combination

Take a moment to go through what you're posting on social media. Find your voice. See what types of posts produce good conversion rates. Then begin posting content. Whitepapers, blog posts, and webinar invitations are more likely to be noticed if they are a part of your social media strategy.

Don't hesitate to use ads and repurpose great content. Give your posts and offers a second life. Think of people you could reach out to with your content. Create new subscribers segments and relationships with influencers who could forward your content to their followers.

Social media can be a powerful part of your content marketing strategy.



V. Storytelling for Engagement

Content marketing is no longer just about the funnel, the ROI, or the campaign. Content has become a point of sale that needs the coordination of all of the channels in order to capture the customer. Resources, funnels, and strategies come to down to one simple element — storytelling. Nothing draws people in like a good story, so why not use storytelling to pull in your customers? Engage with your audience the same way an actor would tell a great story on a stage.

When a customer begins to fall back, pull them back with your story, your realness and heroic adventures of how your product overcame the odds. Why? Because people love to be a part of a story. They love to see something real and say that they had a part in its success. Remember a great Frank Underwood quote Kevin Spacey mentioned during his Content Marketing World 2014 keynote: "There's no better way to overpower a trickle of doubt than with a flood of naked truth."

That insightful quote is why we're going to take Kevin Spacey's three rules for creating great content (conflict, authenticity, audience) and place them in the five plot points of a great story.

Exposition

In order to build trust and set the stage for your story, you need to lay down the foundation. Every plot line begins with an exposition. The characters are introduced, their relationships are laid down, and the protagonist and antagonist are exposed. But to take a page from House of Cards, we're not going to lay everything out.

Why? We want to be a great storyteller, so we need to leave some things out to build up suspense.

- 1. What are your customer personas?
- 2. What can your content offer?
- 3. How does your content benefit the customer?

These three questions lay the foundation for Spacey's three points. Jot down your answers and think about how you can use this information to start a story that gets to the right customers and leads to greater ROI.

Inciting Incident

You know who you are speaking to and what their expectations are. Now you need to create a spark that will get people to seek your content. Remember that if you know what story you want to tell, people will begin to follow. That's why you need to lay the groundwork with an exposition.

Ask a question to create an engaging moment, involve social media and email marketing, or spread the word about a webinar, new e-book, or upcoming whitepaper.

Don't give away all the key details and sell out the entire story. Instead, induce curiosity by sending small messages, short info. Think of it as your very own "coming soon" poster at the movies.

Rising Action

Your customer is now at your door. He saw the "coming soon" posters and wants to pick up what you offered. Will he be surprised by the same openings, quotes, and slogans he sees everywhere else? Or will this customer become your loyal customer because of the great story waiting in your content?

Be real. Take a note from Spacey's example of the VW Beetle that made a breakthrough in advertising by simply stating the truth: "Yes, I'm cheaper, more economical, and squeeze into any space I want!" Spacey continued, "The truth? Face up to it. Consumers appreciate this authenticity." You can't bring in more customers unless you can be a real brand. No one wants content from a faceless business with old-school slogans and promises of "HASSLE FREE" solutions — everyone does that.

Consumers are well aware that every brand hits a bump or two. Just like with TV shows, they expect characters to have a dark side, a REAL side. Share your trials, give advice from your own experience, and tell you story as it is. Transparency is the ultimate connection builder.

Climax

Once you've connected, you need to take the consumer and turn him into a loyal customer. Nothing gets people involved like making them the hero. Your content isn't about you, it's about the success your content brings to your customers. The best way to bring a story to a climax is to engage your audience and present a conflict — customer stories.

Let your customer tell others how he or she succeeded in their business thanks to your content. Make room for the authenticity that can flow from their stories.

People want something that they can relate to, and case studies or customer success stories are the perfect way to create engaging content.

Falling Action

To guote Kevin Spacey, "The audience doesn't care about the platform--they care about the content." People want to be able to "binge watch" as much as they want. Promoting content goes a long way. But instead of focusing on all sorts of different platforms and ways to reach customers, focus on what you bring to the table.

Create places where consumers can find your content. If you offer webinars, create a .tv page. Are your e-books available for Kindle? Is there exclusive content that only some people can reach by logging in? Sharing singular pieces of content on social media is great. But also give people a platform where they can catch up on previous content. If people can catch up, they are also more likely to share. Binge watchers like to get others addicted as well!

Cliffhangers

Spacey underlined that Netflix was a great choice for House of Cards, because they didn't need to shoot a typical pilot. The show was able to unfold over the course of the season. Characters entered and left. The plot line was given room to breathe. Why is this example important to content marketers? Because it proves that more important than CTR or ROI is the journey itself.

As you look through the plot points, you may notice that the story focuses on a specific individual. This means that you can create customer profiles and start creating content for specific audiences. For example, you could create a content series with each installment focused on one particular customer or one particular problem that any customer could face. This goes back to our exposition: if you know what you have, who you are speaking to, and what you want to achieve, the story will start to unfold on its own!

VI. Starting a Content Marketing Program

Now that we all agree on the importance of content marketing, it's time to get started implementing it in your business.

You may have already tried some of the most popular tactics like publishing a blog, organizing webinars, communicating via social media and writing whitepapers and tutorials. If you have — that's absolutely great! You're one step closer to achieving great ROI through content marketing. But without a clear plan on how to use those tactics and what you want to achieve, you may not be working up to your full potential and may be leaving money on the table.

That's when a strategic plan comes in handy.

As has been said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." A documented strategy isn't absolutely essential, but it is useful for allocating resources efficiently and managing content effectively. So we've listed the steps for developing a content marketing strategy that your audience will fall in love with.

Step One: External Analysis

Research what other companies (competitors and influential thought leaders in your industry) are doing with content marketing and how they are performing.

Analyze the tactics and strategies others have tried: what they write about, channels they use, number of social media followers, engagement levels and frequency of interaction, topics, and distribution methods.

Write down the good and the bad practices of competitors and influencers. You can emulate and build upon the good elements. The bad practices are gaps in the market — Opportunities (see Img. 8 for SWOT matrix) you can fill by producing and distributing better content. The good ones are the Threats, which you will have to tackle to come out on top.

For example, if you see that influencers are investing in a particular communication channel and neglecting another, it may be that one hasn't been effective in the past. If you lack the time or resources to analyze every channel, it's safer to go where others have gone.



Ima 9. SWOT matrix

Remember your target audience — the existing and the ideal. It's useful to create customer personas, so you know who your clients are, what they do, what they like, and how they act. This will help you choose the most costeffective tactics and channels to deliver the value they expect.

Make sure that your objectives are s.m.a.r.t. — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic (and relevant) and time-bound. Otherwise, it will be difficult to develop your budget and spend it wisely.

Step Two: Internal Analysis

Next, analyze your business, looking for Strengths and Weaknesses. Be objective and measure your capabilities, resources and constraints. They will help you meet the opportunities and threats you found in the external analysis.

Take a look at the tactics and methods you've used in the past and note what performed well and what didn't. Are all the channels necessary? Maybe some aren't cost-effective. If so, is it because your target audience isn't using them? Or is it you who hasn't utilized them effectively? Do you have the necessary skills and resources to give them a second try or explore new solutions? You can't be the best at everything. Your task is to achieve the best results given your capabilities and constraints.

Step Three: Define Objectives

Now that you know where you stand compared to your competitors, define the objectives you want to achieve in the next 3 to 9 months and longer.

Go through the channels you've noted as important and determine the amount of traffic and conversions they generate. Map out how you want to improve these figures by the end of the period.

Step Four: Choose Tactics

List the tactics you found in steps 1 and 2, noting how time-consuming and complex they are. Ideally you want to use all of the marketing tactics and communication channels you think are valuable. Constraints may prevent that, but you can still achieve great things.

Analyze how effective your tactics have been in the past and project their potential for moving you closer to your objectives. Rate them by importance and leave channels that don't generate sales or engagement.

Take Facebook, for example. Although you may not be using it effectively for generating website traffic, it may be important for answering audience questions.

Step Five: Set budgets and Time Frames

Schedule specific campaigns and project their outcome. Remember new product releases, major developments in your company, and changes in the industry, so your campaigns are relevant and create maximum buzz. Your tactics may need to be adjusted or postponed, and that's the point of this step. You need to act within constraints, measure your performance along the way, and verify whether you've met your objectives.

Step Six: Take Action

Now you have a plan in place. If your analysis, proposed tactics and objectives, and budget has been approved — get to work!

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