



9

Steps to Top-Notch Content Marketing Strategy

MOWER

IT'S NO SECRET

If you aren't doing some form of content marketing these days, you're not really marketing.

As established channels mature and new ones emerge almost daily, the game is changing—and today, content is an essential component of any integrated marketing strategy. You know that to stay competitive, it's the smart next move. And perhaps you're among the legions of brands that are still dabbling—with a white paper here, a blog post and YouTube video there—but without the cohesive structure and systems that make content effective.

The good news is that crafting an organized, synchronized strategy—aligned with all your brand's objectives—is not as daunting as you might think. (But beware of anyone offering a one-size-fits-all solution.) Like anything worth doing, it all starts with commitment: to building a strategy, to planning and scheduling, to coordinating the resources to make it

work, and to convincing your executive management team to fund it.

After all, if you're really serious, your brand is about to become a publisher. Without a creation and distribution strategy—and the infrastructure to support it—you risk creating content that no one sees and wasting your company's time and money.

THAT'S WHY WE WROTE THIS EBOOK.

The following steps will help you in every phase: crafting a strategy to build higher affection, relevance and trust with your audience; coordinating a content creation, delivery and reporting structure; and convincing your stakeholders of the importance of content.

Here, in less time than a tedious meeting, you'll learn how to:

- Perform a content audit
- Clean your marketing database
- Know more about your audience
- Create buyer personas
- Take personas on the customer journey
- Align internal resources
- Develop an editorial calendar
- Activate your strategy
- Measure results



*“Content marketing
is the only marketing
that’s left.”*

- Seth Godin

THE CASE FOR CONTENT.

The benefits of content marketing are twofold. First, there's the ROI. Per dollar, content marketing produces three times more leads than conventional marketing. It attracts and engages your prospects—and with effective marketing automation, leads them down your sales funnel to boost conversion, cross-selling and upselling.

Second, content enables you to become a trusted friend. You can become someone your prospects and customers count on to provide relevant information that makes their lives and decisions easier.

Content is for every business—including yours.

While most of us are familiar with high-profile B2C content marketing efforts, B2B companies—both large and small—increasingly employ content strategies and, surprisingly, surpassed B2C companies in usage in 2013, according to a report from the Content Marketing Institute.

Not so surprising is the fact that, perhaps like you, most aren't satisfied with their current efforts. In fact, only 30% of B2B marketers and 38% of B2C marketers feel their content marketing efforts are as effective as they'd like. Why? In most cases, because they lack the focused, coordinated strategy and resources that produce more powerful content and lead to better conversion rates.

More importantly, you can see success with content. Begin by taking a look through the next few pages, and consider how the process will work for your organization. Be mindful of your resource realities and competing priorities. Maybe you can tackle it step by step. Perhaps team members can streamline various steps on parallel tracks. Or, maybe you'll need outside help. The critical thing is to see the big picture, then break it down into parts you can manage.

Embracing the shift to mobile.

Scaling down content for mobile is no longer enough. Today, half of all internet searches happen on mobile devices—and that number is expected to grow. That means it's time to start creating content for mobile first.

Want to learn more about how mobile should impact your content strategy? Check out a helpful article from *Forbes*, [10 Steps to Creating a Mobile-Optimized Content Marketing Strategy](#).

The background of the image is a close-up, blue-tinted photograph of a camera lens. The lens is the central focus, with its various rings and elements visible. In the center of the lens, a person's face is visible, smiling broadly. The overall color scheme is a deep, vibrant blue, creating a professional and focused atmosphere.

The 9 Best Content Marketing Practices

STEP 01

KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE WITH A CONTENT AUDIT.

You're probably excited to start your content marketing program—but first, it's crucial to discover a little more about your organization.

You could start by getting your key team members in a room to discuss your strengths as a company—and how you can use those strengths to improve the customer experience. Begin by asking yourselves:

- What strengths can we highlight through content?
- What stories do we have to tell?
- What topics do our customers consistently find compelling?
- What are our audience's pain points?
- How can we make their job easier?
- What questions come up in the buying cycle?

Then, see what key themes emerge from the exercise. This might even aid you in identifying your company's content niche. After all, your content can't be all things to everyone.

Building a brand in this dynamic digital age requires an entirely new approach. One that positions your brand not merely as a product or service, but as a friend. We call it Brand as Friend®. Think about it. Friends care about the things you care about. They say the right things at the right time. And, above all else, friends always deliver on their promises. By focusing marketing on three pillars of friendship—affection, relevance, and trust—we help brands develop that same kind of special relationship with audiences.

Don't duplicate efforts—do a hardcore content audit.

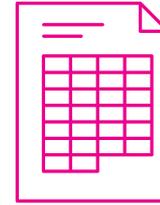
Now it's time for some serious house cleaning. Look back on the past months and years and identify the content your company has already produced.

Chances are, you didn't even call it content at the time. So pour through your hard drives, your website, your press releases and even your cabinets. You could come across useful assets such as newsletters, blog posts, articles, case studies and photos or videos, any of which might be used (or effectively repurposed) as intriguing content.

Then create your content inventory.

No, spreadsheets aren't the most exciting part of content production—but later, you'll be glad you did one (or more). They're especially helpful if you're migrating content from the web.

This will be the one place you'll catalog all your existing content assets. Be critical and weed out anything outdated or unlikely to elicit your prospects' real interest. And keep your inventory simple by labeling items with titles, URLs, downloadable files and content relationships.



CREATE YOUR OWN CONTENT
SPREADSHEET

[DOWNLOAD>>](#)

STEP 02

CLEAN YOUR MARKETING DATABASE.

Want your prospects to listen when you talk to them? Better yet, want them to respond or even slip into an extended conversation?

Of course you do—so you'll have to speak to them the way they prefer.

It may seem basic—and it is—but essential data organization will go a long way in creating this new, conversational friendship. With a clean marketing database, you'll ultimately be able to identify your audience, what kinds of content they like and when they like to get it.

If your data is already truly buttoned up, proceed. If not, follow these points to start cleaning your database:

- Get all your data in one place.
- Bring all your contacts over—including those from your Rolodex.
- See if any data sources are no longer needed or require updates.
- Locate any duplicate data points and consolidate them.

- Delete excess data that you wouldn't use for marketing purposes.
- Review your database structure.
- For example, decide if you need one list or segmented ones based on specific campaigns.

Consider opt-ins.

Finally, think about where and how people already enter your database—and how they might sign up to receive your new content. Are they currently signing up through your website, landing pages, advertisements or social media?

To prevent problems going forward, make sure that your opt-in fields are the same across the board. You'll save yourself future time and frustration in cleaning your database! Also, make sure all your opt-ins tell people what they will receive in return for giving you their data.

STEP 03

KNOW WHAT YOUR BUYERS CARE ABOUT.

You can't read your prospects' minds—but with some simple tricks, you'll get pretty close. And knowing more about them is essential to delivering content they'll consider worth reading (or watching).

Understand your audience.

What websites or forums do your prospects visit? How do they interact there? What do they enjoy doing? What are they talking about? What kinds of content do they share? Whether simply listening or joining in the conversation, you'll be rewarded with the richest insights into their interests and mindsets.

With Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest and Instagram, it's easier than ever to know what your prospects are thinking.

And while this exercise is essential to establish content topics and ideas, you'll quickly see why it will also be an ongoing part of your marketing regimen.

Get closer with keywords.

Keywords are a critical way to make sure your prospects find your content—and that it's highly relevant to them.

Begin by thinking about what people would search for on Google to find your content. Then, use a keyword tool like Google AdWords Keyword Planner or Wordtracker to see how “competitive” those keywords are. Including relevant keywords with low competition means your content will appear higher in search engines—helping more people find it.

READY TO TEST KEYWORDS?

Check out these two helpful tools:

- [Google AdWords Keyword Planner](#)
- [Wordtracker](#)

STEP 04

CREATE BUYER PERSONAS.

How well do you really know your audience(s)? Yes, you assuredly have more than one.

You might have a general idea, but creating buyer personas is a proven way to truly drill down and understand each of their characteristics, desires, motivations and more. So, after this exercise, everything you produce will speak directly to these personas.

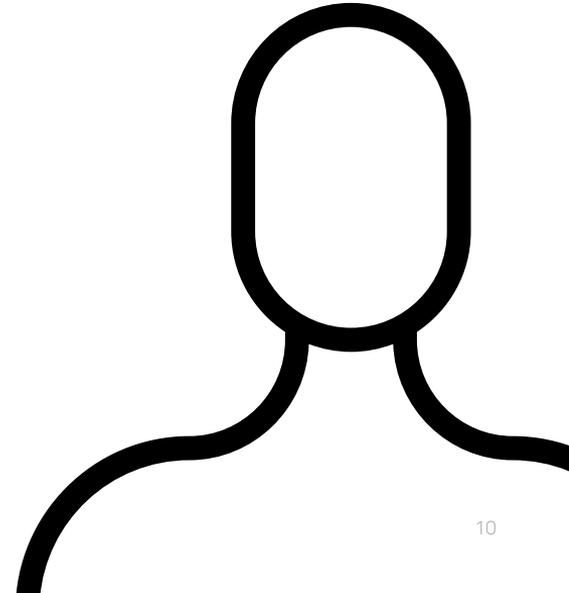
Use what you know.

Using your existing prospect knowledge (and what you've learned in step 3), set aside a few hours for a persona development workshop. Trust us, it's time very well spent. Bring in your key team members—or, if possible, even members of the groups you're trying to reach—and sketch out the segmentation details of each group, including:

- Demographics: Age, gender, location, income, education, occupation, marital status
- Psychographics: Beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, values, personality, interests
- Pain points
- Everyday concerns
- Hopes, dreams, aspirations
- Barriers to overcome before buying from you

Build your personas.

After you discover the information you need, it's time to craft personas. Give each one a name, and assign the segmentation data you discovered to each of them. Going forward, consider how each piece of content you produce will elicit your desired results for each persona.



STEP 05

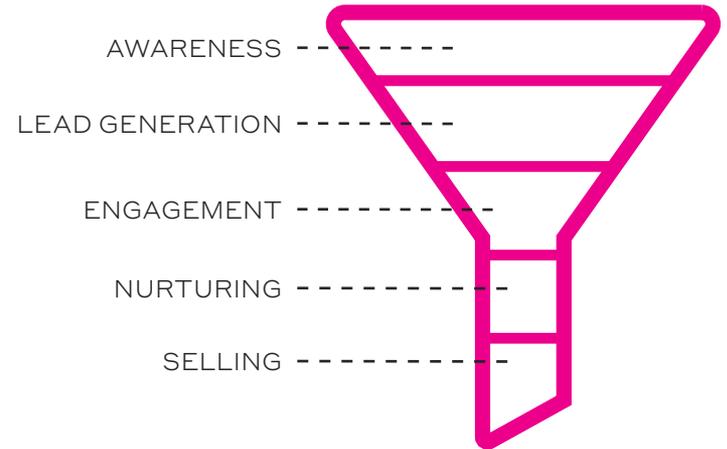
TAKE YOUR PERSONAS ON THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY.

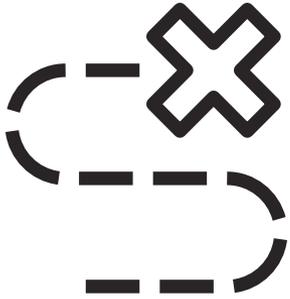
Now it's time to learn what really makes your prospects tick.

Taking your personas along the customer journey will not only help you determine which types of content they're most likely to prefer—and the best channels for distributing it to them—it better positions you to begin creating content that truly makes their lives easier.

Consider prospect stages.

First, think about your customer journey and what you'd like your target to do. While the path isn't always linear, using a funnel can help you map out the steps you want that customer to take to reach the goal, whether it be conversion, sharing, etc.





Awareness

Messaging goals: Spark interest in your brand, tell a story that matters to your customers, educate them on a specific topic and address their pain points.

Potential content: Blog posts, web articles, press releases, videos, podcasts, webinars, employee stories and presentation decks.

Lead Generation

Messaging goals: Capture prospect information and start a conversation.

Potential content: White papers, ebooks, landing pages, emails and analyst reports.

Engagement

Messaging goals: Build a customer profile, illustrate your expertise and develop a rapport with your audience.

Potential content: Online tools, self-graders, polls, surveys, comparison tools, more videos, social media posts, industry-specific education content.

Nurturing

Messaging goals: Establish your brand as a trusted advisor and potential partner.

Potential content: Emails, case studies, research reports, workbooks and utility-based resources.

Selling

Messaging goals: Start integrating your sales messaging, help them make the decision.

Potential content: Brochures, sell sheets, buyers' guides, pricing sheets, customer testimonials, FAQs, training materials and implementation guides.

REMEMBER:

In content marketing, you must build trust with your prospects before you can begin to sell to them. Building that trust starts by delivering quality content that addresses their concerns and resolves their issues.

STEP 06

ALIGN YOUR INTERNAL RESOURCES.

No one ever said content marketing was easy—but with the right input from the right people, it definitely can be easier. To be successful, you'll need to get your team (and perhaps other departments) up to speed on the strategy and how they might contribute or support it—from the IT department to the sales team, to subject matter experts who may act as thought leaders and content contributors.

Start by asking (and answering) these important questions:

- How will different departments support or contribute to our program?
- What people and processes will we use to create (and repurpose) content?
- How can we effectively use thought leaders and internal knowledge to produce content?
- Are there changes required to our IT infrastructure?

Now is the time to bring others in on the conversation. Decide who it makes sense to have in the room for these discussions—potentially department heads, executives, content producers and IT staff.

Making friends is no small job.

Content is a huge responsibility—not a tack-on role. Depending on your company's resources, you could assign roles to existing staff, hire a full-time content manager or editor/writer or employ a staff of freelancers. Alternatively, you might decide to hire outside experts to help get your program off the ground, create consistent, high-quality content or even manage day-to-day distribution and metrics.

NOW IT'S TIME TO SET SOME DATES

STEP 07

DEVELOP AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR.

The idea of creating tons of content at one time can be overwhelming. But once you've planned that content out over time, and can pin it to a schedule, it's significantly less stressful.

Why create an editorial calendar?

An editorial calendar organizes the themes, objectives and interactions behind all your marketing initiatives. It maps out the timing and overlap of specific campaigns and keeps the production and publication of all content assets on track. And, of course, it becomes your coordination and distribution bible.

How it works.

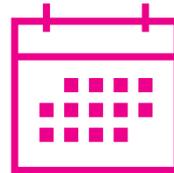
To make your calendar most effective, you'll want to identify your product arcs, theme arcs and important events. You'll organize your content campaigns around these key initiatives, beginning with larger content pillars.*

Don't forget to reuse your content! When you're planning your calendar, always think about new ways to

repurpose your larger pieces of content. For example, you can break content pillars like ebooks into smaller chunks, including blogs and videos. Plus, you can use channels like email and social media to promote the larger pieces.

How to get started.

To start your editorial calendar, download the free editorial calendar template. Then, see how your topics and content ideas play out on a schedule.



CREATE YOUR OWN
EDITORIAL CALENDAR

[DOWNLOAD>>](#)

**Content pillar: A large content piece that can be broken into smaller pieces of related content.*

STEP 08

ACTIVATE.

All the tools in this ebook lead to the real payoff: a content strategy that permeates the channels important to the audience you need to reach and delivers measurement and calls to action that align with that strategy.

A sustained, and sustainable, content strategy delivers different types of content to audiences, varying their experience and consumption of the content. SiriusDecisions states that up to 70% of B2B content goes unread.

Keep these four concepts in mind when activating your content marketing program:

Develop quality content.

While this may seem obvious, it is quicker to create a lot of content as opposed to fewer, stronger pieces. Marketing automation technologies make it easy to value quantity over quality.

Find a comfortable cadence.

Content marketing campaigns can run in a tight time frame or spread out over months. Learn the frequency of distribution that resonates with your audience.

Maximize all pieces of content.

The best content marketing programs take one piece of content and express it across platforms. Can that blog post use an infographic? Does your copy translate into a SlideShare? Did you embed video from your YouTube channel into your email marketing?

Direct your audience to a strong landing page.

Whether you need to capture an email address or a piece of business, well-designed landing pages work. HubSpot offers 31 examples of powerful landing pages [here](#).

You've developed a strategy, identified your audience, reviewed assets and activated your content marketing program.

So how did you do?

Let's find out.

STEP 09

MEASURE.

Measurement is only as good as your ability to know WHAT to measure.

Most consider attributable sales the most valuable result of a content marketing program. But the support structure to drive those sales is just as important. This is what measurement should look like and success should feel like:

Sales

You've identified your customer, engaged them with great content, and turned them into a real lead. Now they are ready to buy. Congratulations!

Leads

Before they become customers, you need to turn your audience into leads. This is where compelling, cross-channel content uses a strong call to action to drive the audience into sharing information with you, and getting them into your lead funnel.

Engagement

Your audience is liking, sharing and commenting on your content. This amplification is critical to making the content work within your campaign.

Consumption

Email opens are at or above your benchmarks, page views are up, videos are watched. The most basic of measurement metrics, consumption, shows which pieces of content appeal to your audience—and which do not.

THAT'S IT. YOU'RE READY!

Now you should have a better feel for the comprehensive game plan required to manage a successful content marketing initiative. Get started on the nine steps you've just learned, and you'll be well on your way to becoming a friend your customers can relate to and trust.

It's a big job. If you ever need help, we're here for you.

MOWER

Learn more about [Mower](#) and our [Brand as Friend](#)® approach to content marketing. Every day, we help brands like yours build more affection, relevance and trust.

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