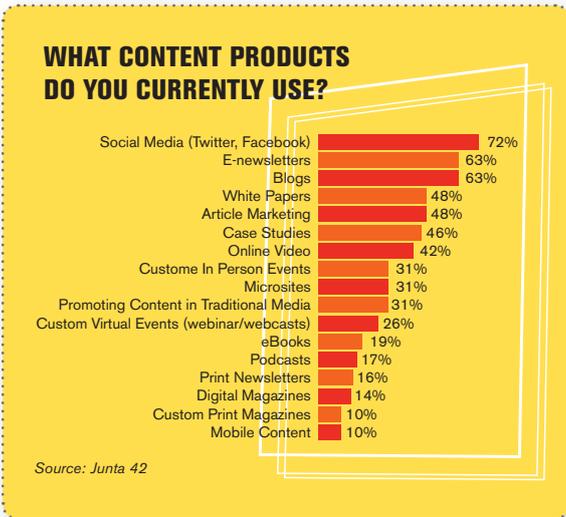


HOW WEB CONTENT IMPACTS THE BUYING PROCESS AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE.

Content marketing is fast emerging as an integral part of a balanced PR strategy. As a complement to more direct marketing and sales, it offers a softer approach by sharing free, informative content intended to attract audiences over time. The principle is quite simple: rather than selling, give your customers the information they need to help them buy. But what are the keys to a successful content development strategy? No one, of course, has all the answers, but the following tips and guidelines aim to provide a solid starting point. The rest is up to you.



Ranking of most relevant communication channels, according to PR professionals (%)

First things first: what is “content”? The answer is that nearly anything can be quality content, from short Twitter posts and lengthy white papers to film and images. And if the thought of generating “original content” sounds intimidating, don’t forget that new content can come from just about anywhere. Whether it’s a transcribed interview or a presentation repurposed as an article, remember that most communications create new content – it’s often just a matter of repackaging and redistributing it to a new target audience.

From interruption to engagement

Traditionally, most marketing methods rely on interruption techniques to attract and persuade consumers. In the world of mass media this usually means advertisements injected into the constant stream of television programs, radio shows and news publications. Designed to make the most impact possible in the shortest amount of time, this approach is notoriously costly, both in terms of production and media space. At best, its results are unproven. Worse still, it can alienate potential customers with unwanted information and gimmicky ad campaigns. It should come as no surprise then that these formerly captive audiences are migrating increasingly away from mainstream media and onto the Web.

On the Internet, consumers aren’t looking for a sales pitch. Sometimes they want specific information. At other times they might just be open for interesting general insights. Content marketing addresses these needs by delivering compelling, high-value information, expertise and a reliable introduction to your company’s product or service. From blogs and articles to video tutorials and free reports, informative content creates trust and credibility, as opposed to unsolicited exposure and interruption. It’s about relationship building, not just a one-off marketing pitch.

“IN TODAY’S ONLINE WORLD, YOU ARE WHAT YOU PUBLISH. EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING BUILDS TRUST AND CREDIBILITY, LEADING TO STRONGER CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS.”

First, you’ll have to give your audience what they’re looking for. Then give them a reason to keep coming back for more. Do this well and your customer base will become far more receptive to direct contact in the future, whether through newsletters, mailing lists, or other subscription services.

Here are just a few tips to get you started:

1) Build a following: Gaining relevant exposure on the Web is about building a community of followers, and this takes time. Start by studying your customer base. What topics interest them most? And what unique insights does your company have to offer? Give your readers valuable information. Entertain them. And always keep them eager to learn more.



2) Develop your areas of expertise: Take a good look at your industry. What are the major trends and where are they heading? Do customers truly understand what you're selling? The more you can inspire and inform, the more attention you'll gain. A real thought leader can't be ignored.

3) Borrow from other industries: Don't let the pressure to be "creative" slow you down. Set your competitors aside for a moment, and look to other industries for fresh inspiration. If you can adapt what already works in another context, why reinvent the wheel?

4) Stay current: Many companies make the mistake of focusing solely on long-term projects such as web films or case studies. But don't forget: a quick news alert or short blog post about a hot, trending topic can reach your target audience in new and surprising ways. This is also great for search engine optimization.

5) Tone down the sales pitch: Although it may seem obvious, if there is one rule in content marketing, this is it: Don't oversell. Content marketing is a long-term project – push too hard, too soon, and you risk driving people away. Think of yourself as the editor of a free newspaper. Inform first. Build your readership. Then make your sale.

When people want to buy something, the Web is almost always the first stop on their shopping trip. Content marketing supports the sales process in numerous ways.

SMART PUBLISHING

The tools you use to publish are as important as the content itself. Whether it's a simple PR newswire or a comprehensive news exchange site, you'll need to be sure that fresh content is published quickly, frequently, and in all the right places. In addition to targeting your usual publications, choose a publishing tool that increases exposure in as many of the following channels as possible:

- RELEVANT WEBSITES
- SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
- BLOGS
- NEWS AGGREGATORS
- SOCIAL NEWS SITES

How to get your message heard

The old forms of storytelling are dying fast. By some estimates, the number of newsroom jobs in the U.S. has dropped by as much as one-third in the last decade alone. More than just a trend, this is a dramatic upheaval in the way people consume news and information. For PR and marketing professionals, this is an opportunity to reach out to target audiences by taking on the role that journalists once occupied. To do so effectively, you'll need to make the leap from thinking like a salesperson to thinking like a storyteller. This means elevating research, finding new angles, and writing in an engaging, entertaining way. It also means freeing up your staff and colleagues to become effective storytellers in their own right. Although there are endless ways to do this, the following guidelines can be helpful to keep in mind:

1) Tap your in-house expertise: Whatever you choose to publish, your own content writers may not have the expertise needed to credibly address complex issues. But there's a good chance someone else within your company not only has the knowledge, but is eager to tell about it. Talk to your product developers, engineers and salespeople. Find those who are most knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and set up a system for them to brief your writers and content developers.

2) Develop editorial guidelines and calendars: Proper editorial guidelines are essential to ensuring consistent and professional content publishing. Establish research sources. Define the right tonality and type of content for each of your media channels. Set a publishing calendar with a balance of breaking news and deep analysis. The more content developers you have, the more crucial these guidelines will be.

3) Talk to journalists: Every publication, media channel and website knows its readers. And every journalist is under the pressure of deadlines. Good relationships with editorial staff or even a quick chat with a journalist can provide invaluable insights into which angles might make a good story. Learn to appeal to their audience and you'll not only get more media traction – you'll also help journalists do their jobs, which is bound to pay off in the long run.

3 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE CONTENT:

1. STOP CREATING AND PUBLISHING CONTENT FOR YOUR CEO

2. START CREATING AND PUBLISHING CONTENT FOR YOUR CUSTOMER AUDIENCE

3. REMEMBER: CONTENT IS PERSONAL

4) Use a former journalist: Can't write like a journalist? Then why not hire one? As more and more print journalists move into other fields, you may be able to tap into their expertise directly, either on a freelance or full-time basis. PR, marketing, or corporate journalism: call it what you will, some writers just have what it takes to engage readers and turn them into paying customers.

5) Brainstorm often: Business changes fast. And the Web moves even faster. Rather than focusing solely on long and infrequent strategic meetings, put your heads together regularly for quick, even informal, brainstorming sessions. Ten or twenty minutes a week might be all it takes to spark great new ideas and keep your content development rolling at a quick and effective pace.

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MyNewsdesk makes it faster and easier for companies, journalists, bloggers and opinion leaders to gain relevant exposure – on their own terms. For more tips and advice on how to make use of effective content marketing, visit www.mynewsdesk.com



The News Exchange Site is a place where company content can be exchanged on users' terms – guaranteeing that interested readers are seeing your story.