

COLUMNS

ABCs of content marketing and why it matters to brands

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By **Dana Drissel**

So many people today have a preconceived idea of what content marketing is, but do any of us really know?

Content marketing is creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent information that attracts and retains customers. It is that simple.

The primary focus is to build relationships and equip buyers with the knowledge to make smarter decisions, and is not intended to hard sell them.

Customers need to know how products or services can add value to their business and drive profitability, which is where the importance of content marketing comes into play.

Once defined properly, people need to understand all other factors associated with content marketing in order to use it appropriately.

Who is using content marketing?

According to the Content Marketing Institute, nine out of 10 business-to-business marketers are using content marketing regardless of their company size or industry, while only 77 percent of business-to-consumer marketers are using it.

Eighty-percent of those B2B marketers have a defined content marketing strategy in place, but only 35 percent document it. Sixty percent report that they plan to increase their spending on content marketing over the next 12 months, of which they currently spend about a quarter of their marketing budget.

Where, within the marketing strategy, is it most successful?

Did you know that 77 percent of companies list in-person events as their primary tactic for distributing content marketing?

Interactive 3D product storytelling applications on touch screens and mobile devices allow customers to create their own buyers journey within a trade show booth, navigating how products operate together in a variety of real-world scenarios to solve their problems.

Marketers can better tell their product or solution story in a branded user environment by incorporating consistent marketing messages within these interactive digital experiences via relevant notes and sales materials.

Based on the Content Marketing Institute's latest survey, social media still lead the way with 92 percent of individuals surveyed leveraging it as part of their content marketing strategy, while 83 percent use newsletters and 81 percent

use articles on their Web sites.

Within that social media statistic, 63 percent of participants rated LinkedIn as the most effective social media platform for publishing content marketing.

Why are marketers investing in new content marketing?

Traditional marketing is becoming less powerful, interesting, accessible and useful to companies and prospects.

Traditional static marketing content such as videos, collateral and presentations fails to truly engage the customer and prevents them from being an active participant in the buying cycle.

Customers want to choose specific topics and information that pertain to their business challenges and, most importantly, drive that experience.

If customers are reading, comprehending and interacting with the meaningful content created, then it will elevate their experience and provide greater knowledge retention, which translates into increased usage and sales.

Creating that emotional connection to a company or product will not only draw in customers, but will also keep them coming back for more.

Therefore, interactive content is becoming the primary method of attracting customers because it allows them to navigate through relevant materials and explore as in-depth as they deem necessary.

When should new content marketing be developed?

In a 2014 survey, conducted by the Content Marketing Institute, marketers were presented with a list of 28 content marketing initiatives and asked to indicate which ones they were "working on now" versus "plan to begin working on in 12 months."

Marketers reported that they are working on an average of 13 initiatives now and are planning to begin working on an average of eight new initiatives this year.

Sixty-nine percent of marketers surveyed said they wanted to "create more engaging content" while 86 percent of businesses said they were also looking for ways to repurpose this content across new platforms such as mobile devices, tablets, Web and touch screens within the next 12 months without recreating or reformatting it in any way.

How will content marketing become more engaging?

The evolution of technology will make content marketing even more engaging because it creates an added layer of interactivity and involvement.

One way that marketers are targeting customers and creating this engagement is by using drip-marketing campaigns via marketing automation tools.

Drip marketing is a sequence of prefabricated email messages that are sent to contacts based on what their previous actions were, as well as the customer's needs, interests or preferences.

Essentially, they are "choosing their own adventure story" by clicking on the content that will solve their business challenges.

New innovative marketing platforms take interactive product marketing content and make it available cross-platform via mobile devices, tablets, Web, laptops and touch screens.

Prospects can now encounter the same information and engaging experiences everywhere, while corporations can save significant time and money by creating content once and deploying it seamlessly without recreating it or reformatting it for multiple platforms.

CONSUMERS CURRENTLY have the ability to interact with photo-realistic 3D products, view integrated marketing messages, engage with collateral, explore product options, and run virtual animations demonstrating product workflow and processes, all on mobile devices.

Customers are able to freely explore marketing content applications, which creates a unique personalized user experience allowing them to navigate wherever they please.

Overall, it does not matter what business you are in, content marketing is essential.

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