

How to Develop a Content Marketing Strategy



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What is Content Marketing?

The term “content marketing” refers to the creation, publication, and promotion of original online content that is targeted to a certain audience. The goals of content marketing include attracting attention, boosting brand visibility and credibility, generating or converting leads, engaging with users or customers, and expanding the customer base.

An engaging, informative, thought-provoking piece of written content can achieve all these goals at once—so can a video or a podcast, or even a social media post. All these things fall under the umbrella of content marketing, and they are all instrumental in your business’s marketing strategy.

Building a Content Marketing Strategy

When done well, content marketing looks effortless. It delivers a slew of benefits for a business all at once and does so in a way that is graceful and not overly self-promotional. The truth is, no matter how graceful they appear, all content marketing campaigns that operate on this level are the product of significant planning, research, and hard work.

On the following pages, we have outlined the basic steps that go into building a content marketing strategy from scratch.

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STEP 1: SET YOUR GOALS

You might have several goals for your content marketing campaign. A good content strategy can have a domino effect, from bringing readers to your site to inspiring purchases to building viral attention for your brand online. However, the goals you set right now shouldn't be so macro. Instead, look at your motivations in more granular terms.

What kind of change are you most motivated to bring about for your business? What products or services do you want to promote? Who is the audience you need to reach? How will you measure these goals to determine if your campaign has been effective? It goes without saying you want to achieve a higher Google rank and increase sales but answering more specific questions will help define your goals regarding the parts of the business they will benefit, who they will target, and how you can accomplish them.

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STEP 2: START CREATING BUYER PERSONAS

The goal-setting process should include a discussion of who the target audience is for your campaign. This step is focused on fleshing out the things you know about that audience so you can craft content to suit their wants and needs. Ultimately, you want to have a thorough understanding of who your audience members are and what motivates them before you start writing a single article or shooting a video.

This part of the process may differ depending on who you identify as your target audience. If you are targeting a demographic you have targeted in the past, you might already have personas prepared for that audience. If you are adding a completely new group of people to your target audience, or if you are expanding your existing demographic (whether to include new geographic areas, age ranges, interests, or something else), you might need to conduct market research using surveys, focus groups, demographic tracking, and other resources.

Each buyer persona should include a semi-fictional character based on the type of person you are trying to reach. This persona should have bullet point demographic details (age, gender, location, level of education, income) and other more analytical components, including that person's goals, their pain points, their day-in-the-life routine, and how they search for information about new products, services, and companies. The more detailed your personas, the better-equipped your writers will be to create content that meets their needs.

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STEP 3: CHOOSING A TYPE OF CONTENT

Most businesses focus on the written word for their content marketing strategies, but it's important to understand 1) there are other directions you can go with your content, and 2) those other directions might be more effective, depending on the situation.

There are no one-size-fits-all recommendations here. Your industry is going to be a factor, as will the goals you've set and the buyer personas you've created. For instance, if your research showed you your target audience appreciates easily-digestible content, then white papers or longform articles might not be the right choice; you might be better off investing in short videos or podcasts. If your audience likes something a bit more formal or substantial, putting together an eBook might be an ideal fit.

If your goal is to create something that generates a huge number of social media shares or link clicks, it's hard to beat infographics. Visual content gets cited and shared repeatedly because it conveys information quickly and uniquely.

Ultimately, your content strategy will probably consist of a mix of content. Maybe you need different strategies to target different buyer personas, or maybe you have broad goals for your campaign and the longer timeline necessary to complete them. Either way, there's nothing wrong with trying out different formats and then reassessing what works once you have metrics to provide some insight.

Remember certain pieces of content can be repurposed in multiple different formats. You might have a how-to post on your blog that could work equally well as a video, or you might be able to group a series of blog posts into an ebook that provides a more in-depth look at a topic. These overlapping strategies can help you widen the reach of your content marketing campaign with minimal extra effort.

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STEP 4: MAKING A SCHEDULE

It's important to start your content marketing campaign with a schedule that is manageable and realistic. Every business has a different idea of what "realistic" means. For instance, in accounting firms, there are times of the year when professionals are naturally busier (such as around tax time) during which content generation would go on the backburner. Analyzing your business schedule and recognizing those peaks and dips throughout the year will help you craft a content marketing schedule that is reasonable and achievable.

If your content is related to a specific product or service, then you also need to consider the natural sales cycle for that product or service. In the case of accounting firms, for example, if you are promoting your tax preparation services, you are going to want that content out there at least a few months before Tax Day. You want to publish your content at the right time so you are in a good position to capitalize when your prospect is looking for the service you offer.

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STEP 5: CREATING THE CONTENT

For many businesses, this step involves partnering with third parties. Hiring professional writers, videographers, animators, or designers to craft articles, videos, or infographics might make the most sense. There can be value in having someone in-house take the lead: for instance, a video or podcast featuring the owner of your business—and putting their insight and advice front-and-center—is a smart move for building brand authority and credibility.

You will need to determine the best course based on what your business does well. If you have a marketing team with strong writing or design chops, then you can save money by creating your content in-house. There is the added benefit of having people who know your business intimately putting together content that highlights the products or services you provide. If you are hiring third-party companies or freelancers to handle your content strategy, make sure to provide detailed briefs outlining what you want from each article, blog post, or infographic. The more information you offer, the better your chances of getting the piece of content you wanted.

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STEP 6: MEASURING YOUR CAMPAIGN

You've planned; you've researched; you've scheduled; you've created content; you've published it; you've shared it with your followers online. Now, finally, you can breathe a sigh of relief. You're done—right?

Not quite. Funnily enough, the hardest part of content marketing for many businesses is the aftermath, where they must measure everything. In a perfect world, you'd be able to publish your new blogs or videos and then enjoy a feel-good end credit roll. To be successful, you need to continue to pay very close attention to how your content is performing and how your audience is reacting to it.

There are many ways to measure a content marketing campaign. Looking at Google Analytics and assessing pageviews and other metrics is important. Assessing social media traffic (likes, shares, retweets, comments, new followers, etc.) is, too. You'll want to keep an eye on completed conversions and how your conversion rate changes. Eyeing things like bounce rates and dwell times on your content pages is also important, as is assessing changes to your Google rank for certain keywords.

If you followed every step of this guide, you should be well-prepared to measure your campaign. Why? Because you set SMART goals, and part of the SMART methodology is your goals must be measurable. By knowing exactly what you wanted to accomplish with your content marketing campaign, you will also know exactly how to measure the success of different pieces of content. Don't forget, you built measurability into your goals!

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Measuring your campaign can do a few things. First, it can tell you if you met your goals or not. If you did, great! If you didn't, you need to assess what happened. Maybe your buyer personas were off, or maybe the content wasn't as strong as you thought. Failing to meet a goal is a signal to reassess.

Second, measuring your campaign can tell you which pieces of content are performing best. By paying attention to which content formats, topics, lengths, and styles are getting the strongest response from your users, you can tailor future campaigns so they are similar to those content examples. Measuring content campaigns in this fashion—and learning the lessons metrics teach—is how most content marketers get better and better at their jobs as they go.

Conclusion

As you can see, effective content marketing campaigns don't take shape overnight. The process is more like building a house: laying out the blueprints, getting the permits, building the foundation, and then constructing on top of it.

It's a complicated, time-consuming, and sometimes tedious process. However, when executed correctly, the process can be incredibly rewarding, leaving you with an asset that you can leverage into future growth and prosperity. By using the strategies laid out above, you will be able to avoid building an unstable house of straw and instead construct the luxury high-rise of content marketing campaigns you need to move forward.