Killer Content Marketing

How social data can help you build a winning content marketing strategy

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Content designed to educate your target market can be helpful to prospective customers well before they are ready to buy. By offering useful information, brands can help customers understand the factors they should be considering—as well as build trust by acting as an advisor. When the customer is ready to buy, the brand whose content helped shape their decision will be top-of-mind.

Great content can also be used as a “carrot” for attracting inbound leads. If prospective buyers know that your company regularly releases quality blog posts, they will return to your site more often. In addition, gated high-value content assets are an extremely effective tool for converting prospects to leads. High quality, relevant content on your website will also contribute to SEO, helping to drive organic inbound leads. According to a recent survey of B2B marketers, research reports, video, and webinars are the top three most effective content types for generating leads with the highest conversion rates.

1 Source: eMarketer, B2B Marketing - Are You Doing it Right?
2 Source: Ascend2, B2B Lead Generation to Increase Conversions: Strategies and Tactics to Optimize Performance
As customers move through your funnel, content is the medium through which your company establishes and nurtures the relationship. The right mix of content assets helps prospects learn more about your business and products and continues to build trust in your brand—ultimately leading to better retention and loyalty.

But planning and producing content is hard, resource-intensive work.

Gone are the days when content marketing was limited to the occasional blog post. Today, the most successful brands think about content as a key part of every customer experience—from news stories to customer service and support, packaging and shipping, and even how customers tell their friends about the brand.

As a result, content marketing budgets have ballooned in recent years. According to MarketingMag.com, content marketing will be a US$300 billion industry by 2019—more than double its size in 2015. The average marketing department currently spends 29% of their budget on content, with the most successful B2B marketers devoting at least 39% of their budgets to content.

Key challenges for content marketers include:

- **VARIETY**
  What content should you produce?

- **VOLUME**
  How do you produce enough content?

- **VISIBILITY**
  How do you distribute your content in the right places—and get it noticed?

- **VELOCITY**
  How do you get near real-time feedback that tells you what’s working and what’s not?

3 Source: Marketing Magazine
Your secret weapon: Social data.

In the past, marketers had to rely on gut feelings to decide what and how much content to produce, then use customer surveys or anecdotal evidence to gauge how well their content was received.

Primary Source Used by US* Marketing Leaders to Develope Their Content Strategy/Calendar, May 2017

![Data 44.8% Other 15.5% Customer Feedback 10.3% Departmental Direction 29.4%](chart)

Note: n=252; *primarily US-based
Source: BrightEdge, "The Future of Content Marketing: conducted by SurveyMonkey, June 20, 2017

Luckily, the days of hoping and waiting are behind us. Today, 45% of marketing leaders say that data is the biggest factor shaping their content strategy. With the right social listening and engagement platform, you can mine real-time social data for content inspiration, leverage multiple networks for content distribution, and pull analytics that provide instant feedback to help refine and optimize your content efforts.

4 Source: BrightEdge - The Future of content Marketing
The goal of content marketing is to develop a lasting relationship with prospects and customers. That means you need to think about your content marketing program as a process, not a deliverable.

Killer content marketing starts with the basics. The first step in any content planning process is to document the stages in your customers’ relationship with your brand, then identify how you communicate with them at each stage.
**ACTION ITEM:** Map your customer lifecycle

Think about each stage of your customers’ journey, then fill in the three most critical content touchpoints at each stage.

- **Discovering**
  - Potential content touchpoints:
    - News stories/PR
    - Sponsored content
    - Website
    - Partner marketing
    - Display ads
    - SEO
    - Blog
    - Facebook
    - Instagram
    - Video
    - Snapchat
    - LinkedIn
    - Sales collateral
    - Email newsletters

- **Considering**
  - Potential content touchpoints:
    - Conferences/events
    - Podcasts
    - Reddit
    - Hacker News
    - Meetups
    - Product documentation
    - Help Center materials
    - Customer service call center
    - User guides
    - Loyalty programs

- **Buying**
  - Potential content touchpoints:
  - **Onboarding**
  - Potential content touchpoints:
  - **Using**
  - Potential content touchpoints:
  - **Evangelizing**
  - Potential content touchpoints:

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**TOP 3 CONTENT TOUCHPOINTS BY STAGE**

1. Discovering
2. Considering
3. Buying
4. Onboarding
5. Using
6. Evangelizing
Fill your content pipeline
After you have identified and prioritized the ways you communicate with customers throughout your relationship, you can start figuring out which content assets you need to keep your pipeline full.

No two content marketing programs are identical. But the best ones share five key traits:

**CONSISTENCY**
Connecting with your audience regularly is the most important determining factor in the success of your content marketing program. Be realistic about the resources and energy you can dedicate to your program; publishing just one blog post or video a week (and doing it reliably!) will pay greater dividends than publishing every day for two weeks and then not posting for a year.

**PERSONALITY**
To build trust with your audience, you have to be yourself. Define your company’s voice and tone ahead of time to ensure that your content conveys a consistent, authentic personality—regardless of which team member produced the materials.

Social data can help you shape your brand’s voice by showing you what your customers already respond to. For example, if you notice that they tend to comment on and share research reports—but they ignore memes—perhaps your brand’s voice should skew toward a serious tone.

**RESPONSIVENESS**
Connecting with your audience regularly is the most important determining factor in the success of your content marketing program. Be realistic about the resources and energy you can dedicate to your program; publishing just one blog post or video a week (and doing it reliably!) will pay greater dividends than publishing every day for two weeks and then not posting for a year.
VOLUME
You don’t need to produce a firehose of content to get your audience’s attention—but you should produce enough that you can be a regular presence in your key channels. If your team is resource-constrained, try investing in just a few pieces of marquee long-form content that you can break into smaller pieces and repurpose over time.

VARIETY
Different people learn in different ways. By including a range of content types in your content marketing mix, you can cover your bases and help prevent content fatigue for your customers.
ACTION ITEM:
Create a balanced content mix

Keeping your content pipeline full sometimes means you have to get creative about new topics. Social data can help you generate an endless supply of ideas. For example:

• If lots of people on Twitter are asking for product recommendations within your category (e.g. “What’s the best mid-priced Android smartphone?”), it could be an opportunity for you to create an infographic that shows how your product stacks up against competitors.

• When you’re running out of ideas for blog posts, try exploring the social profiles of influential people in your sector. What type of content do they share? What gets the most interest from their audience? Use this information to spark new ideas for your own content program.

• Pay attention to what your audience complains about. For example, if your company makes custom-fit outdoor gear and hardcore hikers are posting lots of Instagram pics of their blistered feet, you might consider developing a campaign around how comfortable your boots are.

In the chart on the next page, brainstorm content assets of various sizes and types that will help your customers during each stage of their journey.
Content assets that would benefit your customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMALL</th>
<th>MEDIUM</th>
<th>LARGE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. social posts, single-stat infographics)</td>
<td>(e.g. blog posts, data sheets, conference talks)</td>
<td>(e.g. research papers, product videos, user conferences)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE 1: Discovering</th>
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<tr>
<td>STAGE 2: Considering</td>
<td></td>
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<td>STAGE 3: Buying</td>
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<td>STAGE 4: Onboarding</td>
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<td>STAGE 5: Using</td>
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<td>STAGE 6: Evangelizing</td>
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Once you have an idea of what content you want to develop, how do you make sure your messages hit the target?

21st century humans are noise-filtering machines.

The average person is bombarded by as many as 10,000 marketing messages a day—and that’s on top of the hundreds or even thousands of social posts we see from friends and colleagues.

Most of us skim over the vast majority of the content we see without noticing it. We’ve learned to ignore most of what we see so we can focus on the business of daily life.

The content that does break through is:

✓ RELATABLE.
  Great content sticks with us because we understand how it applies to our own lives.

✓ NATURAL.
  Great content feels personal. Make sure your content assets convey your brand’s personality in a natural way—otherwise customers will immediately tune it out.

✓ TIMELY.
  Whether a piece of marketing is long-planned or created on the fly, great content adds to the larger conversation. Keep your finger on the pulse of social discussion to ensure that you release your content at the right time.

✓ SHAREABLE.
  Even the most genius content marketing won’t reach much of an audience unless people share it with their friends or colleagues. If you give people a compelling reason to share your content—for example, by providing useful tips they can use right away to improve their results—you can both increase your reach and add a layer of social validation that enhances trust in your brand.
04 | HOW TO SUPERCHARGE WITH SOCIAL

Social media can be a rich source of inspiration, repurposable content, amplification, and feedback for content marketing programs. With the right technology platform to help you make sense of millions of daily posts, you can use social data to:

- **LISTEN** to your audience to understand what they care about
- **LEARN** about your competitors
- **SOURCE** the best user-generated content
- **CONNECT** with the right influencers for your brand
- **MEASURE** the results of your content marketing initiatives
- **REFINE** your content strategy to optimize your spend
LISTEN AND LEARN

Ensuring that your content is relevant to your audience means you must listen to them constantly—and there’s no better source of timely, authentic data on what people care about than the conversations they’re having on social.

The right social listening platform can help you improve your content programs by turning millions of data points into meaningful insight in real time. It can help you understand fast-moving conversations, discover and track trends, and set alerts so you can easily identify when your content goes viral.

Here’s how to use social listening and ad hoc search technology to help build your content marketing program:

- **Explore audience behaviors and interests** around key search terms or social images
- **Set up social listening queries** to automatically monitor ongoing discussions that are relevant to your brand
- **Freely research your brand, industry or any topic** across 200B+ conversations going back up to 13 months to understand historical trends
- **Easily segment and study audiences** to define customer personas, inform your content strategy, and make your brand voice more relevant
- **Track your brand’s social perception** to better understand how your campaigns and product launches impact it
- **Configure automated alerts** so your team gets notified instantly about potential real-time marketing opportunities
SOURCE AND CONNECT

Producing enough compelling content and getting that content distributed effectively are two of the biggest challenges facing content marketers. Social data transforms both of these challenges into huge opportunities.

The right social content platform can help you augment the content you produce in-house with content generated by your brand’s biggest fans. It can also help you contact and develop relationships with these fans, who can amplify your message to their own followers.

Here’s how to use social publishing and engagement technology to source user-generated content and engage with influencers:

- **Find and curate authentic viral consumer social images** and videos in a single view to bolster your content pipeline and provide social validation for your brand
- **Secure permission** from consumers to use their visual social media in campaigns using automated approval request workflow and tracking features
- **Find influencers** whose voice, preferences, and audience profiles can lend credibility to and amplify your content
MEASURE AND REFINE

Social conversations move fast—which makes them the perfect medium for getting rapid feedback on your content marketing so you can adjust and improve.

The right social analytics platform gives you access to both current and historical data so you can look back and understand the impact of long-term campaigns. It should also provide sophisticated, granular metrics and unified dashboards that let you compare results at a glance.

Here’s how to use social analytics technology to measure and refine your content marketing program:

- **Get real-time intelligence** so your team can respond quickly with relevant content.
- **Track how your branded content generates engagement over time** to benchmark success of your content marketing across paid, earned, and owned activity and optimize your advertising spend.
- **Compare reach, share of voice and impact** of your brand against your competitor’s brands and track the changes over time.
- **Use image analysis to parse visual content** and gain insights into why content is performing well.
Action Item: Cover your content strategy basics

Weaving social data throughout your content planning, production, and distribution processes can help you develop better content, connect more effectively with customers, and generate higher conversion rates.

However, using social data isn’t a strategy by itself. Make sure you have these key content strategy elements in place first:

- **A Map of your Customer Lifecycle.**
  A simple diagram that outlines the journey customers take as they learn about your company, buy your products, and tell others about them should be the starting point for your content strategy. This document can also help ensure that sales, marketing, and customer success teams are on the same page—and keep everyone’s focus on the customer.

- **Customer Personas.**
  Social data can enrich your understanding of your core customers and stakeholders, but you must start with a clear picture of how those people interact with your organization at each stage of their journey, as well as what motivates them to deepen their relationships with your brand.

- **A Realistic Editorial Calendar.**
  Be honest about your team’s bandwidth and resources. Only a content production schedule designed to optimize both consistency and quality will allow you to successfully connect with customers and prospects.

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### Obstacles to Achieving Content Marketing Program Goals according to Content Marketers Worldwide, June 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing in-house creative talent</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website or digital infrastructure</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning the internal team</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational silos</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational buy-in</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Skyword, “Inside the Content Marketing Continuum,” Jan 22, 2018
CHOOSE THE RIGHT SOCIAL DATA PLATFORM

More than 3 billion people worldwide use social media. 500 billion new Tweets are sent each day, more than 40 billion photos have been shared on Instagram, and Wordpress users alone publish more than 86 million blog posts each month. That’s a lot of social data!

It’s also why you need a single, powerful social data platform that supports your content marketing strategy end to end—from trend discovery to content sourcing to analytics.

Look for a unified social platform that allows you to:

- **Monitor social conversation** across channels on an ongoing basis
- **Surface opportunities, content, images, and influencers** in real time through ad hoc searches
- **Quickly extract insights** that give you context on any conversation
- **Manage content and relationships** across channels at scale and in a single view
- **Gain visibility** into the performance of your real-time marketing efforts across brands, channels, and markets
ACTION ITEM: Technology checklist

- Integrated social listening, publishing, and analytics across earned, owned, and paid channels
- Ad hoc market, trend, and topic research capabilities
- Full, unlimited access to historical data
- Automated monitoring and alerts
- Support for multiple user roles and flexible content approval processes
- Multi-channel campaign planning and publication
  - Flexible, customizable analytics dashboards
- Visual search and curation tools
- Influencer identification tools
- Real-time competitive benchmarking
- Integrated workflows for requesting permission to use user-generated content
- APIs to connect with your customer support, CRM, and business reporting systems
Social data is the key to building out killer content marketing programs that are relatable, natural, timely, and sharable.

The key to unlocking the power of social data for content marketing is a unified platform for listening, research and analytics.

Sysomos empowers marketers with hundreds of global brands to easily search, discover, listen, publish, engage, and analyze at scale across earned, owned, and paid media, the Sysomos platform drives both insights and action.

Learn more at sysomos.com.
REFERENCES

1 Source: eMarketer, B2B Marketing - Are You Doing it Right?

2 Source: Ascend2, B2B Lead Generation to Increase Conversions: Strategies and Tactics to Optimize Performance

3 Source: Marketing Magazine

4 Source: BrightEdge - The Future of content Marketing