

How to generate leads and attract today's prospects

Building Trust Through Content Marketing



Market*it***Write**

www.MarketitWrite.com

p 212.757.7572

e mail@marketitwrite.com

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Executive Summary

Today's world of online, instant gratification caters to both consumers and business buyers who have become increasingly hungry for information on products and services they can trust to solve their problems.

Consumers and business buyers alike have been besieged by nonstop marketing messages delivered via billboards, pop-up ads, email spam, and unwelcome telemarketing calls. In fact, these messages had become so pervasive they resulted in new regulation, including the CAN-SPAM Act and the National Do Not Call Registry.

The end result has been that traditional marketing methods are losing their effectiveness as potential buyers have gained easy access to a variety of online resources they have come to trust. Today's consumers are more likely to look to social networks and unbiased online product reviews for information. The type of information that provides solutions to problems without a sales pitch, much like word-of-mouth referrals have always done.

The recent economic turmoil and resulting strain on marketing budgets have forced both big and small businesses to re-evaluate traditional methods of lead generation in search of new approaches that offer improved returns on investment while strengthening brand recognition and trust. As evidence of this, TNS Media Intelligence¹ reported that total U.S. measured advertising expenditures declined by 14.3% in the first half of 2009 compared to the first half of 2008. Ad spending was reduced across traditional media channels, including TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. Only online display ad spending increased, by 6.5%. The trend continues today, confirmed by the results of a CMO survey in August 2013, in which participating CMOs projected an average increase in digital marketing spending of 10.1% and a decline in traditional advertising spending of 2.1% in the upcoming year.²

One alternative method of reaching prospects and retaining customers that has continued to grow is **content marketing**. This approach relies on providing information (content) that solves problems and builds trust with prospects and existing customers alike. Content marketing has become a means for businesses of all sizes to position themselves as experts in the products and services they offer, which strengthens the level of trust they enjoy with their target market. The result: improved lead generation, revenue growth and customer retention.

As traditional ad spending is losing focus, content marketing is gaining ground, as evidenced by the key findings of a 2013 LinkedIn survey of B2B marketers,³ which found:

- 82% of B2B marketers plan to increase their content production over the upcoming 12 months, 32% significantly so.
- 93% create original content from scratch.



- 71.3% chose lead generation as their number-one goal for content marketing.

This paper discusses the definition of content marketing, how it compares to traditional marketing, what to consider when developing a content marketing strategy, and how various new media and traditional marketing communications tools can be used to execute an integrated content strategy that builds trust, generates leads and grows revenue.

Finally, we'll take a look at steps you can take to help targeted prospects find your content. After all, any content you publish will not generate leads if no one knows it exists.

Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience — with the objective of driving profitable customer action.⁴

What Is Content Marketing?

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At its core, content marketing involves four key elements:

1. Creating and distributing **relevant and valuable content**
2. **on a consistent basis**
3. that establishes a level of expertise **that builds trust**
4. **with a clearly defined target audience**, whose needs are clearly understood.

What makes content marketing powerful is that by providing free, valuable content that helps your prospects solve problems or answers their questions without trying to sell to them directly, you will have highly focused, knowledgeable prospects. These prospects have already decided they can trust what you have to say. By the time they are ready to contact you, they're prepared with information about your company, its people, and its products or services. Such prospects are more than warm leads — they're ready to do business with someone they trust: you.

How Content Marketing Differs from Traditional Marketing

- **Content marketing is about providing valuable information and solving problems.** It is not about lauding the features and benefits of your products and services.
- **Content marketing is about creating free content your prospects might otherwise be willing to pay for and want to share.** When was the last time someone wanted to pay you for a brochure?
- **Content marketing is more about case studies and less about testimonials.** Consumers and business buyers have become skeptical

about testimonials as they have learned that some marketers paid for them.

- **Content marketing is more about pull than push.** Unlike traditional marketing, any call to action is very subtle and provides a benefit to the reader, such as a way to obtain additional free information, join in a discussion, or participate in a poll.
- **Content marketing is about making it easy for your prospects to contact you when they're ready.** It's not about insisting they do so right now to avoid missing out on something. They'll contact you when they're ready to do business.

“ Establish as a primary content marketing goal to become a trusted source of information for your target buyers. Trust is the all important element that can transform prospects who were initially skeptical into long-term customers who have faith that you can and will deliver results for them time after time.”

— Newt Barrett, Content Marketing Today⁵

Developing an Effective Content Marketing Strategy

The purpose of a content marketing program is to build trust with your prospects and clients/customers by educating them throughout the buying process. Essentially, you teach them. They learn to trust you; they make a purchase. You build this trust by showing your audience how they can solve a problem, which questions they should be asking, and what pitfalls they should watch out for. All of this takes place before they ever contact you.

Any content marketing strategy must include a few basic elements to be effective.

1. Know Your Target Prospects

When it comes to content marketing strategy, knowing your prospects is much more than demographics and understanding buying habits: You need to know about the types of problems and challenges they face. You also need to know the types of solutions they want and where they are likely to look for answers they can trust.

While understanding your target market has always been important, it is even more important in a content marketing campaign. You cannot possibly create the kind of content your prospects will value and want to share if don't know who they are and where they go to find solutions. Also, you don't want to spend time and money producing content for an audience that has no need for your products or services.

2. Know Your Solutions and Your Expertise

Before you can create and distribute your content, you need a clear focus on the types and breadth of solutions you will offer. You want to understand which problems you'll solve, and you'll want a clear picture of how you can solve them. In short, you'll want a complete understanding of your strengths and the expertise you have to offer.

Without fully understanding where you excel and how you can solve your prospect's problems, you risk creating content for the sake of creating content, which will not build trust. In fact, doing so could backfire, and you could risk losing the prospect forever.

3. Provide a Consistent Stream of Useful Content

One way to help build trust is to be consistent. Another is to not only provide timeless content, but also to track developments in your area of expertise. In addition to understanding your areas of expertise, you need to commit to building upon that expertise.

An effective content marketing strategy doesn't mean you should publish a slew of content and then wait for things to happen. You need to continue providing valuable insight to your prospects. You need to keep them informed of advancements in your field and of new ways to solve old problems. You also need to know what new challenges your customers face as time goes on and how best to overcome them.

As an example, blogs are often used in a content marketing strategy. A common question that arises is, "How often should I update my blog?" There is no hard and fast answer to that question, except that you need to be consistent. If you commit to three blog posts per week, try to maintain that level of commitment. Your prospects will come to expect it of you, and when you meet their expectations, you establish reliability in their minds.

Being consistent builds trust — the very essence of any content marketing program.

4. Make It Easy for Prospects to Contact You

Once your prospects have developed a level of trust in your company through your content marketing program, they'll want to contact you. When they do, they'll be ready to consider becoming your customers or clients. There is no better lead than a prospect who is ready to do business.

Part of your content marketing strategy needs to include easy ways for prospects to contact you once they're ready. Eliminate any barriers to making contact or conducting a transaction. Include easily accessible online product, company, and contact information. Also, make it easy for prospects to share your content with their contacts, colleagues and friends.

A comprehensive content marketing strategy may completely replace traditional advertising and marketing methods you've used in the past. Or it can supplement traditional campaigns. By comparing the results you achieve through traditional methods against those achieved through a content marketing program, you can fine-tune your marketing mix to your full advantage and maximize your return on marketing investment.

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Communications Tools for Content Marketing

When it comes to executing a content marketing strategy, a variety of tools are available that allow your prospects to interact with your message and allow you to measure your results. Unlike traditional direct mail campaigns, which can take weeks or even months to determine their effectiveness, most online marketing communications tools provide nearly real-time data on campaign performance.

The marketing communications tools you use to publish and distribute content will largely be determined by your understanding of your prospects and where they are likely to look for the information you can provide. You should select as many tools as you feel are necessary to reach your target prospect: the persona of your ideal customer discussed earlier.

The marketing communications tools discussed here are not intended to be all-inclusive. Today, the possibilities are nearly endless. You'll recognize many of these tools and likely have even used some of them in previous marketing campaigns. Here, they get a new focus for the purpose of delivering valuable content to your prospects without the expectation that they will immediately pick up the phone and contact your company. Remember, a content marketing program takes time to deliver results because it's all about building trust.

Regardless of which marketing communications tools you use, integration provides even more power and is important for keeping your message and your mission consistent. For example, you may include email newsletters in your content marketing campaign, providing valuable insight to your prospects without directly selling to them. As part of your strategy, you may also create a free e-book — or an entire series. You can examine a topic or problem in your email newsletter and include a link to download a white paper or e-book on the same topic. Such integration communicates to prospects that your expertise is not one-dimensional and further builds their trust in you.

Also, you may want to include other tools not discussed here if you want to combine a content marketing strategy with a traditional indirect or direct marketing strategy. For example, you may create banner ads or TV or radio promotions to spread the word about publications in your content marketing program.

Basic Tools

Basic marketing communications tools used in content marketing require less time and money to launch and maintain. Perhaps you're already using some of these tools but need to increase the return on your marketing investment. Following are the fundamentals of successful website, newsletter and article campaigns.

Website Content

If you already have a website that gets traffic, you have a readily available source for publishing content.

If you already have a website that gets traffic, you have a readily available source for publishing content. Traditionally, websites have been used to showcase products and services and provide testimonials of clients and customers.

While you will probably be able to keep most of your website content in place — at least that which doesn't conflict with your content marketing strategy — creating additional content that educates, relates to your prospects' problems, offers solutions to those problems, and showcases your company's expertise can help build trust with prospects and existing customers alike.

You may also decide as part of your strategy to build and publish one or more micro sites — separate, but interlinked websites established with the specific purpose of providing useful content you want to deploy as part of your content marketing program.

Email Newsletters

Online newsletters and other forms of email marketing have compounded the problem of inbox overload. However, creating (or re-creating) an online newsletter can still be an important element in a content marketing program if it delivers information your audience values instead of a sales pitch. Refocusing your newsletters to meet the information needs of your audience will result in higher open and click-through rates and fewer opt-outs.

Not only are online newsletters more affordable than print newsletters, but the response time is also shorter, results are easier to measure, and data is available almost instantaneously. Once you have meaningful data on your email newsletters, you'll be able to quantify your success and gain insight about what is (and isn't) working.

Bylined Articles

If expert status, or thought leadership, for yourself or your company is your goal, an effective way to accomplish it is to write and distribute bylined (“free reprint”) articles. You only write them once, but each can be picked up by multiple websites, ezines, and newsletters worldwide. This tactic translates into more traffic for your website and more prospects in search of solutions to their problems.

Using interesting, informative articles to position yourself or your company as a thought leader draws attention to the power and potential of your business, setting you apart from the competition. Another benefit of publishing bylined articles is the fact that you can recycle them. Many distribution sites like www.ezinearticles.com offer free reports that document metrics like the number of times articles were read, published elsewhere, voted on, commented upon, etc. When reports indicate you've hit a hot topic, tap the niche further by re-writing that content (at least 40% unique) and refine it to meet the needs of your target prospects.

More Advanced Tools

These tools include some that may end up being the most powerful tools in your content marketing program: blogs, white papers, e-books, web videos, and podcasts. These tactics demand a greater investment, but they also generate larger returns by connecting you with your target audience and keeping you in the forefront as a trusted authority.

Blogs

In its 2011 State of the Blogosphere⁶ survey of more than 4,114 bloggers, Technorati, the leading blog search engine, reported that of the corporate bloggers who participated:

- **64% reported greater industry visibility** as a result of their blog
- **70% blog to share their expertise**
- **52% blog to attract new clients**

In its 2012 *B2B Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends*⁷ research report, the Content Marketing Institute reported a growth rate of 27% for blogging as a marketing tactic compared to its 2011 survey. The data supports the fact that blogs can be an important part of a content marketing strategy.

As blogs have gained credibility with the business community, many have shifted from “homespun journals” to a professional-looking, authoritative source of information. One of the biggest challenges facing blogs is getting found. Even companies that handle their own blogging activities seek help in promoting their blogs, which may include search engine optimization, as well as promotion through social media and networking sites. Just as making it easy for prospects to contact you is important in any content marketing strategy, encouraging readers to share and comment on blog posts is important in getting your target audience to visit your blog.

As you begin building your blog, consider these three factors:

- **Hosting.** You can host a blog on a free hosting service, such as WordPress or Blogger, or you can host it yourself, separate from or integrated directly into your existing website. A free blogging service

63%

of participating corporate bloggers report greater visibility as a result of their blog.

can be a good temporary solution, but in the end, hosting the blog on your own domain can help establish additional credibility as a trusted resource while giving you full control over your blog and its content.

- **Content.** Like any element used in your content marketing program, your blog content needs to reflect your subject matter knowledge, and it needs to be presented professionally to build trust. As mentioned, you also need to make it easy for readers to interact with and share your blog content. A skilled content marketing partner can help you with any of these aspects to make your blog the best it can be.
- **Frequency.** While the most common rate of posting reported in Technorati's survey⁶ is 2-3 times per week, consistency is more important than focusing on a specific number of posts. Posting on a consistent basis helps you meet your readers' expectations and promotes a sense of reliability.

White Papers and Special Reports

When there's too much information for an article or blog, but not enough to warrant writing a book, the medium you're seeking is known as a white paper or special report. Typically three to 10 pages in length, white papers provide the reader with insight into an industry or business or discuss solutions to a problem. These reports also serve as excellent lead generation tools and can be a vital part of a content marketing program when used to disseminate valuable, free information and not used as a sales pitch.

But what is a white paper, and why is it such an effective expert marketing tactic?

The term itself is derived from the phrase "white books," official publications offered by national governments. Now, however, they're used in marketing campaigns worldwide. Long popular in the IT sector, white papers have branched out into every industry. Created to shed light on a specific position or solution to a problem, white papers have emerged as high-impact marketing tools that key decision makers regularly rely on for justification of new product or strategy implementation.

The 2012 *B2B Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends* report cited earlier revealed that 51% of content marketers used white papers for content marketing.⁷

Free E-books

Offering free e-books to provide valuable information to targeted prospects is another great way to build trust. E-books do not involve printing and binding expenses. Also, e-books can be published online for immediate availability, unlike books published using traditional methods, which can take months to reach their readership.

Free e-books are offered in a wide range of lengths, from 15 to 150 pages or more. They can consist of entirely original content, may include free reprint articles from other experts in your niche, interviews with experts in your

industry and more. Ultimately, free e-books provide information in more depth than a white paper and can be effective in building trust and thought leadership.

The possibilities are endless. No matter your industry, product or service, your free e-book must address a real or perceived need that only you can satisfy. Again, target your ideal prospect and provide information that provides insight into, or solves, their problems. Make it easy to contact you by providing your contact information throughout the e-book, but keep in mind you are not pressing for a sale. You are building trust through valuable content.

According to a report released in April 2012 by Pew Internet,⁸ 74% of e-book users surveyed read e-books at least occasionally to research topics that specifically interest them; 24% use e-books for this purpose daily or almost every day.

As you develop a promotion strategy for your e-book, don't forget about one of the most powerful distribution methods at your disposal: e-book directories. Some of these directories provide free listings, while others charge a fee. A few appear below, but many more are available.

Resources:

- www.free-e-books.net
- www.manybooks.net/contact-authors.php
- www.eBookdirectory.com
- www.eBook2u.com

Web Videos and Podcasts

Free web videos and podcasts (sometimes collectively referred to as “webcasts”) are a great source of information, and because web video and MP3 players have become explosively popular, these marketing communications tools can help get your message into the hands of thousands of target prospects quickly. Web video publishers, like YouTube, make it easy for subscribers to share videos and, where permitted by the owner, embed them into their own websites and blogs and share them through social media outlets such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. And, of course, you can also use web videos and podcasts on your own website and blog.

Like any other tool in your content marketing program, web videos and podcasts should answer questions and solve problems for your ideal prospects. This educational approach will be appreciated by your prospects and helps build trust.

Web videos and podcasts are tools for which you should consider getting professional help to create polished products with high-quality video and sound.

An agency that handles web video and podcast production can also provide scriptwriting and voice-over services so that your videos and podcasts reflect your professionalism.

Getting Your Content Found: Search and Social Media

You can publish all the content you like, but if your targeted prospects never see it, you'll have nothing to gain, and your content marketing program will not deliver the desired results. Recent statistics confirm that search engines and social networks are important outlets for reaching prospects:

- According to a joint study by comScore and GroupM Search,⁹ when beginning their navigation toward a purchase, 58% of consumers start with a search.
- 31% of consumers say their top motivation for using social media in the purchase process is to get other people's opinion.
- 64% of consumers say they are likely to follow a brand post-purchase, and in doing so, feel more connected to a product or company.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Because today's buyers rely so heavily on search engines throughout the buying process, optimizing all Web-based content used in your content marketing program for search engines means your prospects will be more likely to find it.

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the process of telling search engine spiders or "searchbots" what your content is about and avoiding roadblocks within your pages and site architecture that can prevent searchbots from finding it. Whether you hire a professional agency to produce content for your program, produce it yourself, or use a combination of both, content that is optimized for search will enjoy a significant advantage over content that has not been optimized properly.

Social Media Promotion

Another promotional tool to consider in promoting your content is social media. While blogs are a substantial part of today's social media world, popular online communities like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter also offer attractive content marketing opportunities. Demographics are available for each social community, making it easier to determine which networks hold the most promise for your campaign. By joining and interacting within these communities, you can effectively promote your company's content.



When you use social media as part of your content marketing program, the goal must be to promote your content, which can place your business in a position of thought leadership and build trust with your ideal prospects. You should not directly promote your products and services, as doing so in many social networks can result in being shunned within the community and being seen more as a spammer than a trusted resource.

Both search engine optimization and social media are important in getting your content found. They can be used in conjunction with many of the marketing communications tools discussed in this report. A content production or copywriting agency that also offers SEO and social media services will eliminate the need to hire separate specialists to promote your content. The other benefit of using an integrated marketing communications agency (one that can produce and promote your content under one roof) is that efforts to promote your content will not conflict with the larger goals of your content marketing strategy.

Taking the Next Step...

The past several pages have covered a great deal of information on content marketing and how you can use marketing communications tools, coupled with proven promotion techniques, to execute your strategy. Engaging in a content marketing program will establish your company's expertise and build trust with your ideal prospects, as well as with your existing customer base. A content marketing program takes advantage of the fact that people are seeking trustworthy information. They want a source they can trust — a rare commodity, given that most people do not trust advertising, the government, or even news media like they used to. Once you establish yourself or your company as that trusted source, your target audience will want to contact you to do business. The best prospect is one who has already decided to trust you and is ready to buy.

As you set out to execute a content marketing strategy, keep these key points in mind:

- 1. Prioritize.** A number of these steps will build upon each other. Your best bet is to understand fully the type of content your prospects want and where they are likely to search for it. Prioritize the topics you want to cover and decide which tools you want to use to get the information into the hands of your target prospects.
- 2. Identify your strengths and weaknesses.** Decide which areas you can cover with your own resources and which will require outside help. Attempts by in-house staff to execute portions of your strategy in which they have no experience can waste time and effort, failing to deliver the results that professionally produced and promoted content can achieve.

Once you establish yourself or your company as that trusted source, your target audience will want to contact you to do business. The best prospect is one who has already decided to trust you and is ready to buy.

- 3. Consider workloads.** Supplementing your staff or placing your entire campaign in the hands of a skilled content marketing partner can deliver content and build trust at a much faster pace than handling the campaign internally, where staffers are already busy with the day-to-day tasks of operating the business.
- 4. Spread the word.** Your ideal prospect has to find your content for it to succeed in establishing trust. Promoting your content by increasing its search engine visibility and mentioning it within social networks are two of the many effective ways to get your content in front of your target audience.

Conclusion

Today's consumers are seeking information they can trust to help them make informed decisions. You can fill this need by planning and implementing an effective content marketing program. But you will need to have patience: building trust does not happen overnight. It requires knowing your ideal customers, their habits, and where they turn for information. It requires the consistent delivery of valuable information, and it requires promotional effort to get that information in front of your market. Do that, and make it easy for your prospects to contact you once they are ready, and you'll be well on your way to content marketing success.



About the Author

Mistina Picciano offers more than two decades of experience in marketing and corporate communications. As president and founder of Market it Write, she leads an integrated copywriting agency that positions B2B clients as industry leaders.

In a former life, she managed one of “America’s Greatest Brands” as vice president of communications at Guardsmark. Mistina fueled the firm’s print-based content marketing campaign for nearly a decade before taking the entrepreneurial plunge in 2004.

As a public speaker, Mistina educates business owners on improving communications and creating integrated marketing systems. She is a former board member of New York Women in Communications (NYWICI), where she still maintains active membership. Other professional affiliations include the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), ASIS International and the Mystery Writers of America.

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