

A GUIDE TO

# CONTENT MARKETING

*Creating a Connection with Your Customers*



Content marketing is a proven marketing strategy that brings in new customers and keeps them coming back. Here's a guide for understanding content marketing and putting it into practice.



*Have you been hearing a lot about content marketing lately? If so, you're not alone.*

If you've been thinking that content needs to be a part of your marketing strategy, but don't really know where to start, we're here to help. We've gathered some resources and information to get you started, no matter what your goals or budget.

## **CONTENTS**

- 3** What Is Content Marketing?
- 7** Creating Content That Connects
- 12** Distribution and Monitoring

# WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

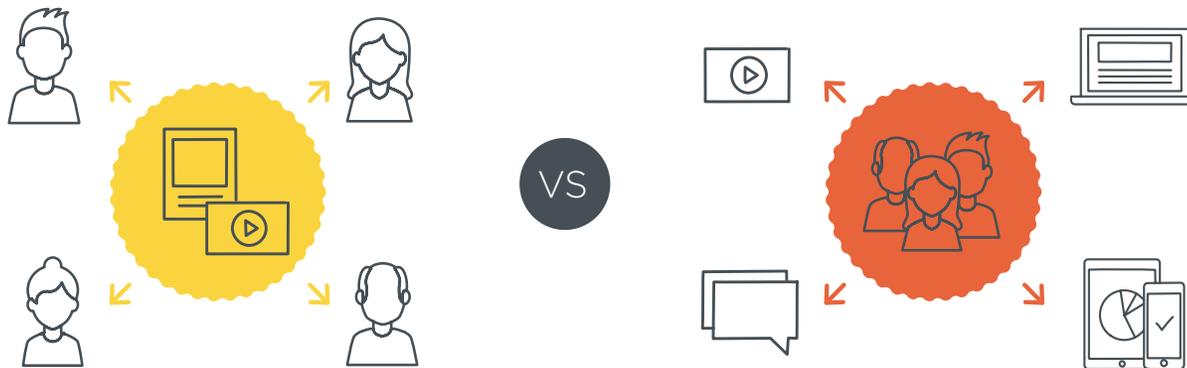
*At its most basic, content marketing is just what the name suggests: marketing built around content.*

But it can't be just any content: To be effective, content must be smart, useful and entertaining. It must draw in prospective and current customers and keep them engaged. In short, it must be content people want to consume, whether it's delivered in the form of blog posts, social media updates, videos or buying guides.

# BRING CUSTOMERS TO YOU

Traditional advertising is focused outward, meaning it tries to put your business in front of the customer by reaching out through commercials and print ads.

Content marketing is a type of inbound marketing:  
It's designed to bring customers to you.



When people come to you, rather than vice versa, they're a lot more likely to stick around. That connection leads to real, lasting relationships—and ultimately to higher sales.

“ We know that people are fast-forwarding past commercials, tuning out banners and hitting ‘skip ad’ as soon as the option appears. But people seem to have an unlimited thirst for smart content: things that entertain them, inform them and enrich their lives. ”

*Liz Buffa  
VP, Headline Studio at  
Advance Local*

# MARKETING THAT DELIVERS REAL RESULTS



**62%** | **3X**  
Less Cost | More Leads

Content marketing costs 62% less than traditional marketing initiatives, while generating about three times as many leads.<sup>1</sup>



**\$14+**

Brands that utilize content marketing save more than \$14 per customer acquisition.<sup>1</sup>



**82%**

82% of companies that blog see a positive ROI for their inbound marketing.<sup>2</sup>

# A TOOL FOR EVERYONE

You don't have to be a multinational corporation to excel at content marketing. In fact, it can be an especially effective way for small and mid-sized businesses to connect with customers. Consider that 71% of companies with fewer than 200 employees say content marketing is their main marketing strategy.<sup>2</sup>

Big benefits from even small efforts. Here are some key ways content marketing can help your company.



## **BUILD YOUR BRAND.**

Thoughtful and engaging content on websites, social media, mobile and other venues draws attention to the qualities about your company.



## **IMPROVE LOYALTY.**

Content marketing creates opportunities for meaningful, sustained interaction with your customers. Creating useful and entertaining content builds trust, which ultimately helps retain your customers' business.



## **INCREASE VISIBILITY.**

Search brings more people to company websites than all other avenues combined.<sup>5</sup> Content like white papers, blog posts and videos improves search rankings and gives customers a reason to visit your website.<sup>3</sup>



## **GENERATE SALES.**

In the end, sales are what you're after—and according to research from the Content Marketing Institute, more than half of content marketing consumers say content has a positive impact on their purchase decisions.<sup>4</sup>

# CREATING CONTENT THAT CONNECTS

Whether you're a store owner, an accountant, a healthcare provider or any other type of business, you can generate good content.

*Here's how...*



# THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE WANTS

If you're a small business owner, you're in a great position to create content, because you probably already know your local market better than anyone else. "The best content happens when a company really thinks about its customers' interests first," says Buffa.

*Use your knowledge to find new ways to engage your customer base.*



- Create a blog to give advice related to your industry.
- Make a video offering a behind-the-scenes look at your business.
- Post regular updates on the social media sites most used by your target demographics.

## Tricks of the Trade

These tools make creating, managing and delivering content easy.

- WORDPRESS** Use themes to create a blog or website.
- CANVA** Design graphics using ready-made templates.
- BUFFER** Schedule and manage social media posts across platforms.
- MAILCHIMP** Create and manage email newsletters and more.
- UNSPLASH** Access free, high-resolution photos you can use with your content.

# DEMONSTRATE YOUR EXPERTISE

One of the best ways to create valuable content is to share your insider knowledge with consumers. No one knows your business or region better than you, so make your insights available to others. “Establish yourself as the go-to source of good information and people will reward you with their business and loyalty,” Buffa says.

*There are endless ways to capitalize on your area of expertise.*



If you're a financial services company, have your experts offer advice about retirement planning.



If you're a caterer, create a list of tips for hosting the perfect dinner party.



If you own a bed and breakfast, make a video of local tourist attractions.



If you're in health care, send out healthy recipes in your email newsletter.



Content Marketing in Action

## MULTICARE HEALTH SYSTEM

Multicare Health System, a not-for-profit health care organization based in Tacoma, WA, has used content marketing to expand its reach and provide better care to its patients. Multicare's strategy includes blog posts, email newsletters, videos and social media, all connected with a carefully designed network.

Each campaign, explains Marce Edwards, director of media and digital communications, begins with a 500-word blog post. From that, shorter pieces are tailored for social media, each linking back to the original post. “Content is more powerful when it supports other content,” says Edwards.

One recent campaign, initiated to support a new breast milk bank, focused on educating people about the benefits of breastfeeding. A blog post, “6 great things about breastfeeding,” generated posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and included a call to new mothers to donate breast milk to the milk bank. It worked: Local moms donated more than 20,000 ounces of milk to help babies in need across the country.

# PROVIDE A MIX OF CONTENT

Many kinds of content can enhance your brand. Employ a mix to keep your audience interested.



## WRITTEN CONTENT

**WHITE PAPERS** are authoritative reports on an issue relevant to your industry.

**CASE STUDIES** show how a product or service works and how it might benefit potential customers.

**HOW-TO GUIDES** offer step-by-step solutions to problems customers might be facing.

**LISTS** are a great way to break down information into a helpful, easy-to-read format. For example, you might make a list of important questions to ask before buying a particular product.



## VISUAL MATERIAL

**INFOGRAPHICS** present information in a fun, visually compelling format, allowing viewers to easily digest data that relates to your industry or company.

**VIDEOS** allow you to get creative with your content and are great for consumers too busy to read through a big block of text. You can hire a professional to make a video or do it yourself.



## SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

**SOCIAL MEDIA** sites—like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—offer a wide range of opportunities to engage with potential and current customers. Social media updates can range from posting a photograph with a caption to giving a more in-depth update on your business.

## START SMALL—AND GET HELP.

Content marketing doesn't have to require a huge amount of time and money. Start small—with a blog, sponsored content on a local website, or an active presence on a social media channel—and build from there.

Find someone in your company who's interested in content and let that person get creative. You can also look outside your company for help. You may even outsource all of your content creation to agencies, who can also distribute it for you. Alternatively, you can hire freelancers for specific projects.

**50%**

of companies outsource some content creation, with writing and design being the biggest needs.<sup>5</sup>

The Next Steps

# DISTRIBUTION AND MONITORING

7

Average number of social media platforms used by content marketers\*



# DISTRIBUTING YOUR CONTENT

Once you've created compelling content, the next step is to get it out to your audience. "You may be writing terrific blog posts," says Buffa, "but if they're buried on your site, no one will find them."

*Here are some of the best ways to distribute your content.*

**LINK FROM YOUR HOMEPAGE** Don't rely on visitors to your website to find new material themselves. Highlight new and popular content in a prominent place on your homepage.

**CREATE AN EMAIL NEWSLETTER** People who have already signed up to receive emails from you are more likely than any other group to check out new content. Create a regular email newsletter, include links to new content in your emails, and ask subscribers to spread the word.

**CONSIDER SPONSORED CONTENT** Think about websites your customers are likely to frequent, and consider paying to sponsor content on those sites. People are more likely to read sponsored content than to click on more traditional ads.

**USE SOCIAL MEDIA** Link to new content from social media, so that all your followers are aware of it. Tag people or companies who might bring attention to your post, and encourage them to share the content with their followers as well. Respond to comments as quickly as possible to make your audience feel appreciated.

**REPURPOSE WHAT YOU MAKE** Design content that can be used in several different formats so that you get the most for your efforts. Take bits and pieces of blog posts and distribute them on social media, or collect several posts as the basis for an ebook.



Content Marketing in Action

## DAVINCI ROOFSCAPES

DaVinci Roofscapes, a roofing materials company based in Lenexa, KS, earned a 2015 Internet marketing award from the Construction Marketing Association. DaVinci's content marketing succeeds because the marketing team knows its audience—both contractors and homeowners in the market for a new roof.

According to Kathy Ziprik, a consultant who works on content marketing with DaVinci, the company aims for a mix of fun and information. A blog post might offer a list of installation tips from a technical expert or feature a Q&A with a satisfied customer. Photos posted on Facebook might show close-ups of roofing details.

DaVinci's team uses a mix of distribution channels. They link to blog posts from the company's main page. And they post frequently on social media, including how-to and before-and-after videos on YouTube, where they have their own channel. "Since our audience is mostly 35 and older, we post on Facebook more than Twitter," says Ziprik.

# MONITOR YOUR EFFORTS

You want to make sure your content is doing what you intend. There are many easy-to-use tools available—often for free—such as Google Analytics and bit.ly to help you monitor your content marketing performance.

*These are some key metrics to watch.*



## REACH

monitors the number of people who view your content and where they come from. Metrics in this category include page views, unique visitors and the geographical location of visitors.



## ENGAGEMENT

measures whether your audience takes action after viewing your content, and in what ways. This category includes click-throughs and comments.



## CONVERSION

reveals if the people who view your content are converted into prospects or paying customers. Included in this category are unique visitor conversion, return visitor conversion and cost per conversion.



## SHARING

shows who is sharing what, to whom and where. This metric is especially useful for social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

# CONTENT MARKETING **DO'S AND DON'TS**

*Content marketing can be a powerful tool for your company—but only if you use it strategically.*

## DO

- ✓ Produce original content that informs and entertains.
- ✓ Highlight your expertise in your industry and region.
- ✓ Use a variety of distribution channels.
- ✓ Start small and find help.
- ✓ Monitor what's working.

## DON'T

- ✗ Assume traditional marketing strategies are enough.
- ✗ Think content marketing is only for bigger companies.
- ✗ Forget who your audience is.
- ✗ Bury your content on your website.
- ✗ Say things you'll regret on social media.



## ABOUT ADVANCE 360

Advance 360 is part of Advance Publications (Advance), one of largest privately held companies in the US. Advance is a 100-year-old media company that reaches more than 500 million consumers each month.

Advance's portfolio of businesses includes the #1 news and information companies in multiple US markets throughout the Northeast, Northwest, Midwest and Southeast; Condé Nast (*Vogue*, *GQ*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, and *Wired*); Reddit; and American City Business Journals. Advance also has extensive interests in cable television, digital media properties, and has made direct investments in a broad range of leading technology, media and marketing companies. The most recent addition to the Advance portfolio is 1010data, a leader in big data discovery and data sharing solutions.

As one of the largest media groups in the U.S., we have access to a team of award-winning writers, editors and designers at our in-house content marketing agency, Headline Studio.

By combining our comprehensive digital solutions and superior audience targeting capabilities with the powerful content of Headline Studio, we can create campaigns that engage audiences, increase your brand's visibility and deliver results.



Learn more at [advance360.com](http://advance360.com)

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/08/pitch-content-marketing-power-to-boss/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stateofinbound.com>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.brightedge.com/sites/default/files/Cracking%20the%20Content%20Code.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.the-cma.com/about-us/why-customer-publishing>

<sup>5</sup> <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2013/11/dos-donts-outsourcing-content-creation/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2016\\_B2C\\_Research\\_Final.pdf](http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2016_B2C_Research_Final.pdf)