



the
marketing
pod

The Marketing Pod guide to...

Reaching your target audience with content they'll care about



What is content marketing?

Welcome to the Marketing Pod's guide to content marketing.

Before we begin to describe our tried and tested methods for creating truly valuable B2B content, it may be useful to try to define exactly what 'content marketing' means:

"A strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience"

The Content Marketing Institute

Content marketing has been around for a while now. It's endured beyond its status as 'latest industry buzz word' and is a method that continues to evolve over time, as the platforms and formats available to us broaden and change. The objectives of content marketing will be very familiar and, just like any other marketing approach, gaining an in-depth knowledge of your audience will be a vital first step.

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Familiar goals, new techniques

All marketing activity, whether B2B or B2C, will have three common goals:

To reach your target audience

To know your prospects

To convert your prospects into sales or to renew existing customers

Whilst the goals are nothing new, how you work towards them is something which is continually evolving. Marketing is no longer about a monologue, with brands relentlessly pushing messages out to their clients. In our noisy and crowded marketplaces, businesses must work harder to create an authentic dialogue with their target audience, with the focus always on providing useful, relevant and targeted information.

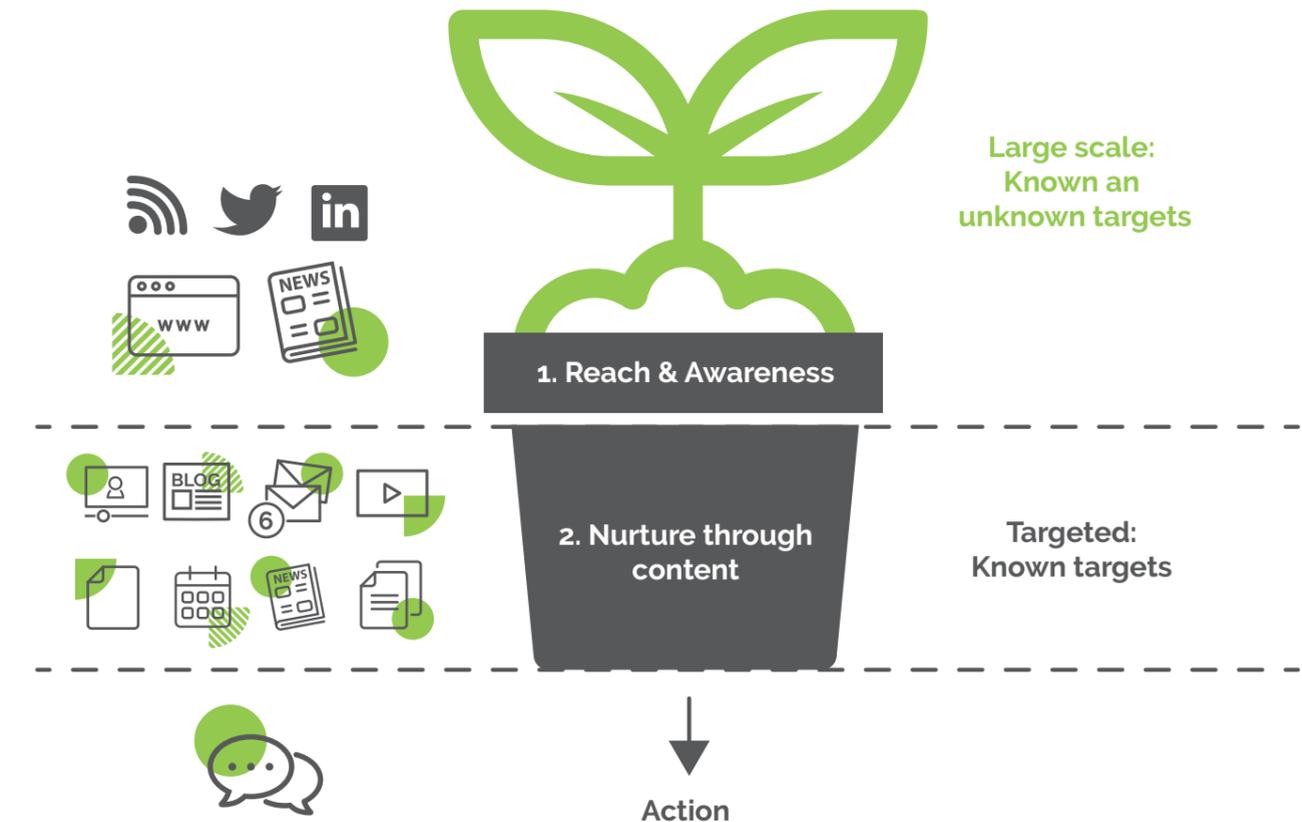
As a result of this deeper relationship, content marketing has become an integral part of the marketing mix; with marketers seeking to diversify their delivery methods to ensure not only that their message makes an impact through originality (increasingly difficult!) but also that it reaches the audience in a way that will resonate strongly with them. Images, video and sound are now as important as copy and some conversations will take place in real time, or across multiple channels simultaneously. The opportunities for reaching your audience have grown, but so have the challenges. Many businesses fail to make the most of the opportunities available because they don't truly understand how content marketing fits within the sales process.



Content marketing within the sales funnel

Where does content marketing sit within the sales funnel? The answer is simple: end to end.

Content marketing can be used when you are trying to increase your reach and raise awareness among both known and unknown prospects, through mass-scale channels such as PR and social media. At the other end of the funnel, content like blogs, newsletters and emails can be useful for building brand loyalty and making sure that your existing customers remain engaged with your messages.



Where will your content feature?

Content without a content strategy is a wasted opportunity. The variety of content available to audiences is still growing and ever-more integrated, with personalisation and ABM also shaping the way content is used.

The best content is shaped around a particular audience as part of an integrated strategy. Perhaps your latest one-to-many campaign will begin with an e-shot about an event, the output of which will be distributed through blogs, which contain videos, those videos ending in links to white papers.

Whatever form your content takes, it should be appropriately modified and distributed across all of the channels and communications that you have identified as suitable for your target audience. This ensures that you can deliver a clear and consistent message to your target audience.



Top Tip

Whilst there is a diverse range of methods for sharing your content, simply distributing it widely won't guarantee that it will be successful. Every piece of content you create must meet three key principles:

- ✓ It has to be relevant
- ✓ It has to be timely
- ✓ It has to be engaging

Relevant, timely, engaging

94%

use social media

87%

use e-newsletters

84%

use blogs

83%

use videos

82%

use case studies

79%

place articles on their own website

75%

use photos

74%

use events

71%

use infographics

52%

use white papers

Using content to activate the sales funnel

The key to activating the sales funnel is creating content that is relevant, timely and connected. Put simply, you need to create content that your audience cares about.

Although the decision-making process is more objective within the business space than in the B2C space, the decision makers within any business are still people. In today's world, business professionals have increasingly busy schedules, which means that their attention spans are limited. So if your content isn't relevant, or if it doesn't help them, your message will not cut through the noise.

A well-developed plan is a vital tool and will ensure that your message resonates with your audience despite their lack of time, limited attention spans and the multiple messages surrounding them. Poor content is simply white noise that will be ignored but strong, relevant content that lands at the right time allows the sales funnel to be activated.

Developing engaging content

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, truly creative and original content can set you apart from the crowd.

If you are struggling to know how to begin, there are a series of practical steps that you can follow as you begin your journey to more compelling content.

Top Tip

Content marketing, when done well, will feed your sales funnel by:

- ✓ Increasing awareness, and in turn increasing your profile. For example, by boosting SEO.
- ✓ Moving people onwards through the funnel. This will also improve your prospect knowledge and increase your engagement with your audience as you can garner data via content opt-ins.

The link between content and nurturing prospects is well established -

Today, nearly three out of every four (74%) UK content marketers ask their audience to subscribe to an e-newsletter.



Step 1: The WHAT

Putting the customer at the heart of your content doesn't mean losing sight of your overall business objectives. It's important to always be delivering against these objectives, and to make sure the content works towards what you are trying to achieve.

WHAT are your objectives?

Perhaps you are working towards some of the below:

Brand awareness?

Profile build?

Content Subscribers?

SEO / Web traffic?

Attendees?

Lead nurturing?

The delivery mechanism of your content will differ depending on your desired outcome, so it's important to clearly identify what you would like to achieve upfront. Successful content planning will be dependent upon a thorough understanding of what your business will define as success, and how it will be measured.



Step 2: The WHO

Once you have a firm grasp of your objectives, the next step will be to identify your target audience. Getting a clear oversight of the people, or "clusters" of people who you hope to engage with your content will enable you to map out what is happening in their world.

You should aim to have oversight not only of what is relevant to their business and to them as a professional, but also to get an idea of what will appeal to and resonate with them in a personal sense. Retaining the knowledge that you are speaking always to individuals, to people, will ensure you achieve cut through in an overpopulated marketplace.

Step 3: The BUILD

It's time to move away from traditional, demographic based segmentation. Think about the individuals that make up your audience: their world, their work, their business, what outcomes they are looking for. Some points you might want to consider:

What are your audience's key issues in their world today?

This will include their world of work – and what impacts their business, their function, their results.

What are their pain points?

What creates issues for them, what needs resolution?

What is their role?

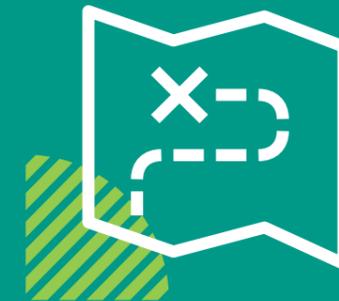
This is about getting beyond the job title to understand what they are dealing with on a practical level every day. As well as understanding the key themes of the sector they work in, it can be helpful to have an insight into what is happening within that organization's sphere of interest. For example: is there a legislative change, a disruptive new entrant, or an evolution of processes that could affect the way your audience do their jobs?

MOST IMPORTANTLY - How will your content help with your audience's pain points? If it doesn't, it may just become more marketing noise.

At every step of your journey, it's also key to consider the tools and tactics.

The question you must ask, is how do your audience prefer to receive their information? Keep this always in mind as you work through your content plan.

Once you have your objectives and audience in your sights, you can begin to map out how content and people will fit together, and begin to build strategic blocks of relevant content. The result of this will be the creation of a visual 'content map'.



How to begin:

Start with a blank sheet of paper. On the right hand side add in blocks for your audience's pain points, using everything you have learned from step two. Here is where you break down what's happening in the world of your audience right now. Include key times and dates, important issues and factors, and other influencing elements.

Next, on the left hand side list your offerings in terms of support, your services, things you can inform and educate on. This is not about listing your products, but more about carefully dissecting how those products deliver a service to your audience – what do your products 'do' for them.

It's vital to remember that your products and services exist to fulfil a genuine need, and this is the point at which you must return to that need and comprehend it in full.

Finally, draw a line from the blocks on the right to those on the left; connecting the need with how you can help. Some blocks may have several lines, some may only have one.

Now you have the building blocks of a customer-centric content marketing plan – driven by your audience's agenda, not yours - identifying key blocks of content which add real value and insight to your customers' worlds.

Step 4: The HOW

Now you can begin...

As your customer moves through the sales funnel, different types of content will be more appropriate than others, and better support what your customer needs. For example, during the initial awareness building stage or when researching an issue; white papers, expert advice, and blogs all help to enrich that customer's understanding – and whoever provides them can be seen as a supporting expert in that area.

At each step of the sales cycle, they will engage with information in different ways and your content can become more tailored to their requirements – fully understanding the specifics will help you to decide which channel to use, and which content format is most appropriate. For example, is an email or a product brochure more relevant at this point in time?

Top Tip

Talk editorial instead of adverts; blog copy instead of e-shots; testimonials, Q&A and case studies, instead of features and benefits.

Cut out all irrelevant or unhelpful information – content marketing at its best is a dialogue.

Don't rush forward through sales stages either – avoid cutting to decision and action when your customer is purely at the awareness stage.

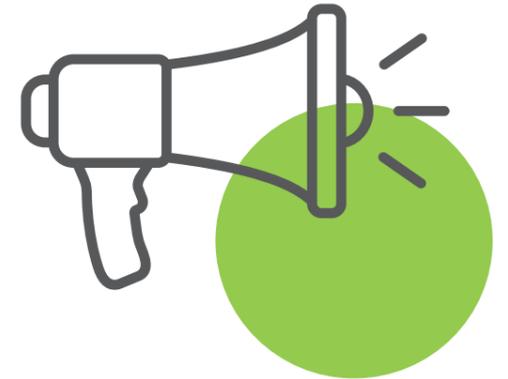
Once you have identified which stage your customer/prospect is at within the sales funnel, and which channels your audience engages with, it's time to move to implementation and execution of your plan.

Varying types of information carry more weight when they appear in different channels or are presented by varying influential people or organisations.

Top Tip

Don't be blinkered. Think to the left and right of the issue: consider who else is talking about it. Can you comment, help, support, disagree? In what format? Where are people going for information? Can you take the conversation to a new level or different platform?

Please see our chart overleaf.



Varying types of information carry more weight when they appear in different channels

The chart below provides a useful breakdown of how it is possible to meet customer needs through a range of different content types.

Structuring your plan

The benefits of content marketing depend upon clear objectives and timely delivery, so it's concerning that when surveyed, **42% of businesses** admitted that they don't have a documented content marketing plan.

BUYERS STAGES	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION / NURTURE	DECISION / ACTION
Behaviour/Actions	Expect that a problem or opportunity exists	Have defined the problem or opportunity	Know their plan of action for solving a problem or creating an opportunity
Research	Looking for information that confirms their expectations through non-promotional, neutral content	Searching for the best plan of action to solving a problem or creating the opportunity	Finding testimonials, benchmarks and data that help to support their decision
Content Method	eBooks eGuide White papers / PR Expert advice Educational blog content Industry research Analyst reports	Comparison sheets Webinars Events Video chat or podcast Expert guides	Vendor comparison sheets Product brochures Case studies Free trials Demos Assessment Consultation

Top Tip

When documenting content plans, a spreadsheet is a good place to start. Begin by listing the days/weeks down your rows, then head up each column with the following:

Macro activities - events that are going on in your audience's world

The theme - what message are you trying to portray?

The type of content - blog article, white paper etc.

The title of the piece

The author - who is accountable for producing the content itself?

The call to action - what do you want your customers to do as a result of reading this content?

Promotional channels - Facebook, LinkedIn etc.

KPIs - what does success look like for this piece of content? Could be number of subscribers, leads etc.

To conclude

By combining your output from steps 1, 2 3 & 4, you can now create a well considered content marketing plan.

Your plan can be short, medium or long term – but always remember, the world changes, so don't think too far ahead! Being responsive to the changing needs of audiences is where content marketing comes into its own; reactive content is just as strategically important as planned content.

A 90 days rolling plan is a good place to start. Your plan can be built out from there at a macro level, but within a 90 day timeframe you can realistically address your audience's direct sphere of interest and provide real time, helpful information.

Need expert help?

The Marketing Pod can help your business to plan, design and deliver compelling content.

To find out more about this, as well as our full range of marketing services, visit www.themarketingpod.co.uk, or email hello@themarketingpod.co.uk



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