

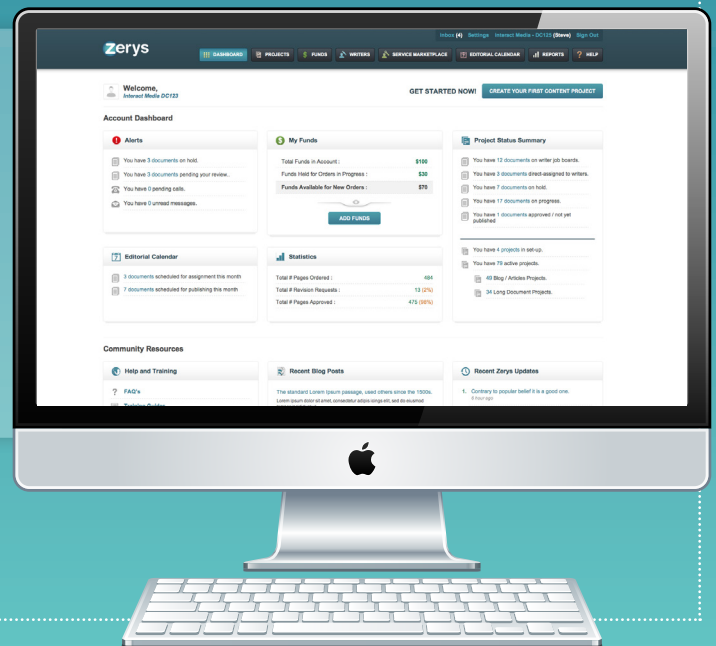
What Is Content Marketing?

(...and why your business should be doing more of it!)

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Why Outbound Marketing is O-U-T

Not long ago, when marketers needed to add new leads to the top of the sales funnel, their only choice was to go out and find them.

Trade shows were attended, telemarketers were outsourced, and contact lists were purchased and emailed to again and again... and again. These types of “outbound” marketing techniques were often expensive and rarely effective, but the constant pressure to generate new leads left marketers with few other options.

Fortunately, those were the old days. Today, the new school of marketing is rooted in inbound, and it’s causing many dated marketing practices to become a thing of the past. Marketers no longer want to buy, beg or bug their way into the lives of people who may never even purchase their products. With inbound marketing, companies can instead focus on helping potential customers find them, rather than the other way around.

Outbound Marketing is Interruptive Marketing

The fact is, traditional outbound marketing tactics simply don’t work as well as they used to. New technologies like pop-up blockers and do not call/email lists make it harder to get through to buyers the old fashioned way. Now more than ever, potential customers have the power to choose the messages they receive, and they have little tolerance for being interrupted with unwanted requests.

Inbound Marketing is Informational Marketing

The new school of inbound marketing aligns itself with the way today’s buyers access information. The concept is simple—if customers prefer to search online for products and services themselves, then marketers should make it easier for those people to find their businesses in the process. This allows customers to learn about a company on their own terms, without being turned off by pushy, old-school marketing methods. Best of all, by providing the value those customers are looking for, marketers can more easily convert those engaged visitors into quality leads, which are more likely to be nurtured into opportunities for their sales teams.

The question is, how can inbound marketers make it easier for buyers to find their businesses while also providing the value those customers are looking for? The answer is content—and lots of it. Believe it or not, it’s been estimated that **today’s B2B customers go through 70% of the buying cycle on their own, before ever speaking with a sales rep.** This means that in order for inbound marketing to be successful, marketers need to generate enough quality content to keep customers engaged and moving in the right direction.

Outdated Outbound Marketing Techniques



Cold Calling



TV Commercials



Radio Commercials



Trade Shows



Email Marketing

So, What IS Content Marketing?

Content marketing is the process of using content to educate and engage a company's target audience of potential customers.

From an inbound perspective, content marketing is centered around the creation, publishing and promotion of custom content placed on carefully designed and tested landing pages. With this style of marketing, the emphasis is shifted away from selling to focus more on helping a particular segment of people.

By researching the needs and interests of potential buyers, marketers can generate content geared specifically for those personas. The more quality content a company creates, the higher the likelihood that those resources will be found by prospective customers. While the ultimate goal of content marketing -- as with any marketing initiative -- is to create more sales opportunities and help drive revenue, a well-planned strategy can also increase brand awareness, boost website traffic, spur social and email marketing campaigns, and position companies as influential thought leaders in their fields.

Modern Content Marketing Techniques



Landing Pages



White Papers



How-To Videos



Blogging



Infographics

The Many Faces of Content Marketing

Inbound marketing content can come in many formats, such as articles, blog posts, whitepapers, e-books, how-to videos, infographics and more. Savvy marketers understand that different people consume information in different ways, and utilizing a variety of content styles and channels can enable brands to reach wider audiences.

Different content types also allow marketers to generate more assets by repurposing the same information in fresh new formats. For example, data from a research report or survey can be repurposed as a visual infographic, summarized in a blog post, and discussed in a podcast. Using multiple content types in this way is key to creating a well-rounded inbound marketing strategy.

Content Marketing Isn't a New Concept

Of course, using content in this manner to attract new customers is nothing new, and while the two terms are often used interchangeably, content marketing is not limited to online and inbound strategies alone. The truth is, any business that has ever used a piece of content to engage with a group of potential buyers has technically practiced content marketing, and these examples go back further than some might think.

For instance, **companies like John Deere and Michelin began creating non-promotional print magazines and guides for customers over 100 years ago**, and those brands are obviously still very relevant today. Strategies like these have evolved over time, with new examples of content marketing popping up every decade since. Today, the advent of the Internet and other technological advancements have empowered more companies to leverage content to grow in exciting new ways, but the same "helping, not selling" concept still applies.

Content Marketing Begins with a Solid Strategy

So how does content marketing work? It all begins with developing a strategy to create lots of content, as the more resources a company generates, the more likely they are to attract new customers. Of course, quantity alone isn't enough, as not every type of content is effective for inbound marketing.

To draw more people to their company's website, marketers need to first understand the needs and concerns of their customers. The content created should align with these issues to help solve the unique problems of the company's target audience. With this in mind, each content item generated should have a strategic purpose.

Content that answers key questions is an excellent way to earn the trust and respect of potential customers. This also places an emphasis on quality, as content that promises to help solve a problem but doesn't deliver will only end up turning off the people who find it—hardly an effective strategy for converting new leads. For this reason, it's important to remember that while lots of fresh, unique content is important, it also needs to provide real value for the people who find it.



Two Types of Targeted Keywords

Short tail keywords: short, general phrases that have a high search count/competition, but get more general visitors.

Example: landscaping

Long tail keywords: longer, specific phrases that have a low search count/competition, but get very targeted visitors.

Example: organic lawn care in Cleveland

The Importance of SEO

While creating lots of quality content is perhaps the most important component of effective content marketing, it's not the only factor to consider. Search engine optimization (SEO) is also integral to making that content easier for people to find and drive more inbound traffic back to a company's website. Keyword research is essential to ensure all content is optimized for the highest possible search engine page ranks. **(Note: While there are many tools available for effective keyword generation, some of the most useful—such as Ubersuggest and the Google AdWords Keyword Tool—are 100% free.)**

Catchy, well-written titles are also important to capture people's attention and encourage more clicks. A clever headline can often be the difference between a new visitor and a missed opportunity, so it's important for marketers to take the time to write titles that are truly compelling.

Publishing Your Content

Once content is created, titles are written and keyword optimization is complete, it's time to publish that content for the world to see. Today's marketers can post content to their own company webpages or blogs, as well as external websites to extend the reach of their messaging. In fact, many successful inbound marketers now partner with popular websites to publish syndicated content and guest-written articles in multiple places across the web. After all, each content page a brand publishes is another opportunity to draw more people back to its websites.

Producing lots of quality content in this manner on a regular basis enables companies to become a trusted authority in their industry, keeping audiences coming back to their sites often and increasing lead conversion rates of those visitors.

Customers Are Already Searching for Your Product

As mentioned previously, the content being created needs to communicate real value to customers.

The beauty of inbound marketing is that visitors are already in “active buying mode”, in that they’ve taken the initiative themselves to find a solution to a problem. In other words, these people have already begun the buying cycle by simply using a search engine to find information that can help them.

This creates a tremendous opportunity for inbound marketers. Consider these statistics:

product-specific webpages can be created and optimized to attract people looking for specific solutions, while blog content can cover more general topics to increase brand exposure with more potential buyers.

Non-Promotional Content Establishes Thought Leadership

This type of non-promotional content is critical to establishing thought leadership, in which a brand becomes

In 2012, strategic communications firm Fleishman-Hillard reported that

89% of consumers used search engines to research purchasing decisions.

52% of consumers say that content like blog posts

have impacted their buying decisions in the past, according to Braffton.

Provide Variety in Your Content

The popularity of search engines has never been higher, and sites like Google, Yahoo! and Bing now receive billions (billions!) of searches each month. With so many potential customers looking for product and service information online, it’s up to inbound marketers to A) create the content they’re looking for and B) make it as easy as possible for them to find.

To this end, effective inbound marketing requires companies to generate a wide variety of content, creating multiple ways for new customers to discover them. For example,

an influential voice within its particular market. Tips and advice, innovative ideas, and commentary on news and industry trends are all examples of thought leadership content. Customers find value in organizations that not only provide quality products and services, but are also a trusted source of industry knowledge and information. By building influence in this way, marketers can help ensure that their brand is the first one potential customers think of when it comes time to buy -- even if it’s long after those individuals first visit the company’s website.

Content Marketing is the Future of *All* Marketing

With each passing year, organizations continue to allocate more of their marketing budgets toward content and inbound strategies. Increased website traffic and improved SEO remain the primary goals (and measurement criteria) for most companies, as content continues to be a powerful tool for boosting awareness and exposing brand messages to fresh audiences.

The more content types an organization invests in, the more marketing channels it can take advantage of beyond their own company websites. Videos can be posted to YouTube and shared via email, podcasts can be published to iTunes, and webinar presentations can be uploaded to SlideShare. In this way, a well-planned content strategy allows businesses to extend their reach in ways that were never possible with traditional outbound marketing methods.

Get People More Engaged With Your Brand

That being said, the benefits of inbound and content marketing extend well beyond new visitors alone. Quality content not only helps businesses reach new audiences, but also keeps those people more highly engaged with their brands. For example, consulting firm ContentPlus has cited interesting content as one of the top three reasons why people follow brands on social media, adding fuel to the argument that content is the key to successful social marketing.

Of course, more engaged visitors also lead to more qualified business opportunities. As mentioned previously, content marketing is a great way for companies to establish themselves as thought leaders in their respective fields, creating an authoritative presence that today's customers respond to. It also enables businesses to build trust with their target audiences by sharing valuable content designed to help them solve real problems (and there's no

denying that customers tend to spend more money with brands they trust).

Inbound Marketing Gets More Leads

This is why inbound marketing has quickly become a preferred strategy for lead generation. Quality content has proven to drastically increase website conversion rates, enabling marketers to quickly grow their contact databases for both current sales opportunities and future lead nurturing campaigns.

In fact, Social Media B2B reports that B2B organizations with active blogs generate an average of 67% more leads than those who don't practice any type of content marketing. That number alone should be enough to convince most businesses to get with the content marketing program. When you factor in that **inbound leads typically cost as much as 60% less than those generated via outbound strategies** (according to Hubspot), then the decision to invest in content marketing quickly moves from "interesting idea" to "no-brainer."

“Content Marketing is the ONLY marketing left.”

– SETH GODIN

Conclusion

At the end of the day, content and inbound marketing solves problems not just for companies, but for customers as well. By better serving their target audiences with truly valuable information and resources, organizations today can build trust with potential buyers, encourage loyalty with existing customers, and develop deeper, long-lasting relationships for years to come.