



HOW TO PLAN FOR YOUR CONTENT MARKETING INVESTMENT

THE 12 QUESTIONS YOU MUST
FIRST ANSWER

A guide from

SPROUTCONTENT
The Business of Conversation™

You've dreamed of developing valuable content for your business and starting a conversation with your customers and colleagues. Perhaps you've even dipped your toes into the pool of content marketing yourself and now need to broaden your strokes. Or maybe you are working with a Content Marketing agency that doesn't quite meet your expectations.

The ROI of content marketing has risen 300% over the previous 3 years.

Source: Eloqua

Content Marketing isn't freestyle. It's a business lifestyle. But before you can be successful, you need to have a plan. You must take a hard look at your company and mission, know what your competition is doing and determine solid strategic goals before creating any content. Having benchmarks in place to measure results is essential. If you don't know how many people have viewed, downloaded or listened to your content, then you won't know what's working, and you're just treading water.

Don't dive into content marketing without answering these 12 questions first:

1. What is your overall marketing or sales strategy?

If you don't have an overall marketing or sales strategy, you can't develop a successful content marketing plan. Content marketing should not exist in a vacuum; it's just one piece of the marketing puzzle. All of your marketing efforts should work in tandem toward your ultimate objectives. Your website, blog, advertisements, newsletters, e-books, videos, etc. should present a cohesive front for your brand.

In 2012 Just 10% of attendees had a written Content Marketing plan, even though 100% are doing some form of Content Marketing.

Source: Content Marketing World Health Summit

2. How do you want this to change in the future?

Determine what has worked well for you in the past and don't be afraid to experiment with new methods to achieve your goals. That may mean making some changes to what you think actually matters in marketing. For instance, you may have worked hard last year on increasing your social media presence. But does the number of Twitter followers you have really equal business success? Perhaps you change your focus to promoting your latest e-book, in hopes of increasing the number of downloads. If someone is interested in your e-book, they are likely interested in doing business with you. The same probably could not be said for each of your hundreds or even thousands of Twitter followers. Remember, it's quality over quantity.

3. What marketing partners (agencies) do you currently have in place?

- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ PR
- ☐ Web Development/CMS
- ☐ SEO / PPC
- ☐ Other

Take inventory of what agencies are currently working for you and make sure their duties aren't overlapping. If you need help in new areas, research Content Marketing agencies that have experience in these fields. If an agency doesn't have the capacity to offer certain type of services, make sure they have relationships with preferred partners that can.

4. What marketing/sales tools are you currently using?

Can you rate their effectiveness?

Consider the tools you currently use to measure marketing success. Does your website have a Content Management System like HubSpot or WordPress that allows you to update content easily yourself? Do you use a tracking and stats tool to review traffic and referrals to your website? Are you using email-marketing solutions such as Constant Contact to help with your campaigns? All of these, plus many others, are available to help with your content creation and distribution.

5. Who is your competition?

Knowing your competition can help you stay one step ahead of them. Even if you know who your main competitors are, there are benefits to digging deeper. Find competitors on social media, notice guest bloggers on your favorite industry blogs, research authors of new books and pay attention to people making a splash on the speaking circuit. Competitive research can reveal what new products competitors have, what content they are creating and how they're ranking in the search engines. Use this information to brainstorm new ideas and be motivated to do things bigger and better than the competition.

6. What sets your company apart from others in your industry? Is there a unique aspect to your company that you use as a point of differentiation?

Crafting your story helps you pinpoint ways that your business stands out from your competitors. Perhaps you are family-owned, manufacture all of your products in America, have developed an easy solution to a common problem or have a unique way of interacting with your customers. Think about the passions your company is built on, and get excited to share that story with others.

7. What products/services do you offer?

This may seem like a no brainer, but if your team can't agree on your core products and services, it's time to go back to the drawing board in the boardroom. Make a list of what your company offers to consumers and how those products and services can improve their lives. That will help you determine how to best communicate your advantage to them and really carve out the most unique positioning.

8. What is your most successful offering?

Now that you have a comprehensive list of products and services, determine the top performers. Continue to concentrate on what has brought you success so far, but at the same time, identify additional products and services that have the most potential in the future. Focusing your efforts on those can lead to a new pool of revenue for your business.

9. How do prospects find you?

By knowing how people learn about your business, you can better target strategies for those avenues. It's all about working smarter, not harder. Are your prospects finding you through online search engines, word of mouth referrals, advertising, public relations or social media? Track this information and start looking for trends.

10 Do you have adequate measurement/metrics in place?

Metrics give the facts. You'll know how many people are interested in your content, what they are doing with it and whether or not they like it. Having a detailed analytics reporting system in place will help you determine which ideas should be replicated and what needs improvement. But this doesn't have to be complicated. There are effective, easy to understand systems, like Google Analytics, that can assist in measuring results.

“Measurement is the first step that leads to control and, eventually, to improvement.”

Source: Performance Improvement Expert H. James Harrington

11. Have you set benchmarks for content marketing goals?

Only you can define what a successful Content Marketing strategy looks like. Is it increased traffic to your website, X number of leads per month, or an increase newsletter sign-ups? It could be all three! But they are likely to be achieved with separate content to meet each goal. An important thing to remember is that each piece of content should relate to achieving a business goal. Throwing a bunch of content out there in hopes it floats is not a strategy. By setting specific standards, you can judge whether your content is meeting – or missing - the mark.

12. What are the profile/demographics/characteristics of an ideal client (who is your target audience)?

Content marketing is not one-size-fits-all. You should get as specific as possible in determining who you are trying to reach with your content. Creating buyer personas is a useful and strategic tool that helps you pinpoint your audience. From basic demographics to understanding their daily life and how they make buying decisions, truly understanding your customers and prospects will help you create content that fulfills their needs, throughout different phases of the buying cycle.

Conclusion:

Before you wade into an agency search or look for a content creator in house, start with an in-depth reflection on your business. You need to have the solid, consistent answers to these 12 questions before achieving success with Content Marketing.

Once you do, we can help your company swim laps around your competitors. Sprout Content works as your partner, acting as a sounding board for your ideas, proactively proposing new ideas and helping you create interesting ways of communicating your message to an audience who wants to hear it.

If you are ready to take the next steps with your Content Marketing strategy, take advantage of a free consultation with Sprout Content. Give us a call at 1-850-607-6981 or info@sproutcontent.com to schedule a chat.