

VIDEO 1: WHY IS CONTENT IMPORTANT TO INBOUND?

Hi there, I'm Lindsay with HubSpot Academy.

Are you ready to learn about creating content with a purpose? Fantastic. There's a lot that goes into a high-performing piece of content, so let's dive in.

So why is content important to the world of inbound?

Well first, what exactly is content?

Content is the message your inbound strategy delivers. It's what you're trying to deliver to your visitors, leads, customers, and promoters. There are lots of different ways you can deliver that message: blogs, emails, landing pages, social media, and beyond. But without content, there's nothing to deliver.

In fact, without content, the internet would be empty. Think about how you use the internet. You go to a search engine, type in a question, and what you find is content.

Content has the very important job of pulling people from one stage of the inbound methodology to another. It plays an integral part in each and every stage.

Your content attracts the right visitors to your site, converts them into leads, nurtures them and helps close them into customers. It's also a big part of what delights them into promoters. Content is the fuel that that powers a successful inbound strategy.

In the attract stage, content is what your blog posts are made of. You optimize it using keywords and you share it using social media.

Content is also integral in the Convert stage. Content is what your website forms lead people to, and what your calls-to-action entice visitors to download. Content is what drives those visitors to convert into leads in the first place, because it's what they receive in exchange for their email addresses.

In the close stage, content is what builds the emails that your leads are opening.

And of course, content is what eventually delights customers into promoters. Personalized content not only educates them, it helps offer that outstanding customer service and outreach that creates promoters.

As you can see, content really is the fuel that keeps the inbound methodology running.

If you're convinced that you need content to successfully conquer the inbound world, jump into the next video where we'll discuss how to create content that will perform well.

VIDEO 2: HOW DO YOU CREATE REMARKABLE CONTENT?

Content is a critical part to your inbound strategy, but how do you create remarkable content? Remarkable content is content that makes people want to read, share, and come back for more. So, what makes a piece of content remarkable?

In those pre-internet days, the main factor that limited marketers was physical space. How big is my magazine ad? How big is my billboard? There was a limited amount of space. But now, thanks to the internet, space is basically unlimited. You can have an infinite number of pages, blog posts, and content offers.

But you might find that, even with all this content, it's much harder to capture the ATTENTION of your prospect. There's already a ton of content out there, whose will get the most attention? Which websites will people visit, and which offers will they download?

Now, instead of fighting for space, you're fighting for attention.

That's where having good content comes in, the kind that will capture your prospects' attention.

A lot of people are creating content, but few feel like they're doing it right. If you want to do it right, you'll need to start with a plan.

Here's an interesting stat - ONLY 44% of B2B marketers have a documented content strategy and ONLY 39% of B2C marketers have a documented content strategy. Surprised? That's a really small percentage of marketers that are putting together a documented content strategy. So, why not get ahead and start building out your own content plan and content process?

You can start by creating a series of processes to follow on a regular basis, focused on turning your organization into a content creation machine. The more content you create, the better -- with each piece of content, the process becomes easier and more effective.

Now keep in mind: building out a plan for your content creation machine does take a little more time than just jumping right in, but it will pay off in the end through the momentum you'll gain over time.

Typically a content process has 4 steps. Those steps are plan, create, distribute, and analyze. Then, take what you learned in your analysis and repeat it all over again.

Let's go through what each of those steps actually entails, starting with planning portion.

So you have your definition of content — simply put, content is information. But content is best defined by three things: its purpose, its format, and its topic.

First, what is the purpose of this content? Is the purpose to get more people to your site, or to get them to convert to leads? That's the big difference between these two. Content offers are a form of content that are typically gated by a landing page or behind a form. The purpose of a content offer is to convert visits to leads. Whereas your blog posts and website content is open access to anyone on the internet. The purpose of these pieces of content is to attract strangers to your website.

What are your goals and how will you use content to help reach those goals? Determine the purpose.

Once you have an idea about the purpose, think about the format of that piece of content. Content itself actually comes in many different flavors. It can include things like case studies, a video, infographics, a whitepaper, a calculator or worksheet, an eBook, a template, research reports, checklists, webinars, Slideshare decks, or whatever else you can come up with.

But what's the difference between all these formats? Well, not much. You could tell the same story with almost each and every one. How you choose a format to use depends on who you're creating content for, how much time you have to create it, and how much information you actually have to present.

Picking the best format for your content is all about your personas. The information contained in the content is what helps people achieve their goals, and the design is what makes it easily digestible or accessible by your personas.

Think for a moment. Is your persona a visual learner? Then maybe consider using an infographic. If you know they read blogs on a regular basis, maybe a blog post would work. If you have a particularly valuable piece of content, maybe it belongs behind a form.

The final element of a piece of content is the content topic. What are you writing about? Figuring out a topic for your content is one of the most important parts of content creation, and sometimes it be the hardest part - but it doesn't have to be.

To easily come up with the best topics for every piece of content you create, there are just 2 things you need to know. These two things are the keys to creating remarkable content. They are - your buyer personas (who you're trying to reach) and the buyer's journey (what content will be most interesting or helpful for them).

Knowing who your personas are and where they are in the buyer's journey are the keys to developing a killer content strategy. In order to create remarkable content, you have to tailor it both to your personas and where they are in the buyer's journey.

The best content is the kind that your buyer personas want to read, share, and come back for.

If you do these 2 things, you'll be perfectly poised to create remarkable content that will transform your inbound efforts from passable to outstanding.

Buyer personas are who you're trying to attract, convert, close, and delight—this is your ideal customer. Your persona is who you're creating content for.

Great content is educational. Your ultimate content goal is to solve your persona's problems, and you can do this through education.

You can identify topics that matter through keyword research - what you want to rank for, internet forums, popular industry news, sales and support frequently asked questions, your personas' goals and your personas' challenges. The first step to creating content that resonates with readers is gaining a better understanding of who your readers are, especially the ones you want to convert into leads and customers. When you know who they are, you can create the right content that perfectly suits their needs.

And what about the buyer's journey? How does that play into remarkable content?

Well, how you should define remarkable content is that remarkable content is solution-based, not product-based. Remarkable content isn't about YOUR business or YOUR product, it's about your potential customers; the problems they're having, and the answers they're searching for.

In order to provide a solution, you have to understand the problem. The buyer's journey will help you do this.

The buyer's journey is the active research process that people go through leading up to making a purchase. It's like the buying process or marketing funnel you may be familiar with, but it's from the buyer's perspective.

The buyer's journey is made up of 3 stages – awareness, consideration and decision – and they depict the buying research process. First they identify a problem or opportunity, then they investigate solutions, and finally, they decide on a way to solve their problem.

So why should this matter to you, as a content creator?

Well, when creating content, the buyer's journey is important because it can help you refine what your content is about while helping you create content that is relevant to their place in the buyer's journey.

What content is appropriate in each stage of the buyer's journey?

It all comes down to what your content is about and how it's positioned. Is your content focused on the problem your buyer persona is experiencing? That would be an awareness stage piece of content. If your content is more about the solution to a problem, than it would be consideration stage content. As for the decision stage, that's when you begin to create content about your product or service.

As you can see, you want to be creating content for all of the different stages of the buyer's journey.

There are specific formats of content that tend to perform better in different stages.

For example, in the awareness stage when a prospect is experiencing and expressing symptoms of a problem or opportunity, the content assets listed are appropriate for the awareness stage because this content helps educate your buyer persona -- not on your solution, but on your buyer persona's need or problem. Analyst reports, research reports, eBooks, editorial content, expert content, whitepapers, and educational content are all great content formats for an awareness stage piece of content.

In the Consideration Stage, the prospect has clearly defined and given a name to their problem or opportunity. The content assets in this stage should speak directly to the solutions that can help solve their needs, bridging the gap between educational assets and product or service

information without involving your brand. That's why expert guides, live interactions, webcasts, podcasts, videos, and comparison whitepapers work so well for this stage.

Finally, in the decision stage, the prospect has decided on their solution strategy, method, or approach and is making a decision. The assets in this stage require more direct action from the lead. They are ready to make a purchase (now that they know about their problem and have determined an ideal solution), so it's time to show why you're the best of the best. Content in the decision stage will be focused on your own product and service and you can do that using formats like vendor or product comparisons, case studies, trial download, product literature, and live demos.

There are so many opportunities with the different types of content that you can create! Now keep in mind, an eBook won't always be an awareness stage piece of content. You can determine where your piece of content fits into the buyer's journey based on the topic not the format.

Let's look at an example of how a company created content for each stage of the buyer's journey.

This example is from a HubSpot partner agency. The ultimate goal this agency is hoping to accomplish is to get people to purchase their website design services. But they can't just go in for the kill right away.

First, need to have content that's addressing a problem their buyer persona might be facing. This is where they should provide educational content to help prospects educate themselves about the overarching issues, root problem, or potential opportunity at hand.

In this case they recognized that their buyer persona has problems with website conversion rates, so they created this blog post to educate them on the topic.

Now that people understand a little bit more about website conversion rates, how it they can see improvements, and what some benefits of optimizing your website might be, they're ready to start learning some more of the specifics of a solution. In this case the solution is redesigning a website. This happens to be a service that the agency provides, but you'll see that this eBook is about themselves. It's about 9 steps to redesign your website. That's what this consideration stage content does. It provides educational content to help prospects learn more about the solution to their problem, opportunity, or issue.

It's not until the decision stage that prospects are ready to hear about the actual service offerings. Think about it like this – in the awareness stage, they may not have even known that website redesign was a possibility. In the consideration stage, they probably didn't know if a redesign was

right for them, let alone what they might need. It's only when they're educated about the issue as a whole that they're ready to hear about actual services for purchase. The decision stage is where you provide content and resources that help prospects learn more about and choose your best solution for their problem.

Now, keep in mind, you're still in the planning process. Like I said, there's a lot that goes into the planning portion of the content process.

To tie this all together, try using a worksheet like this one here. This is a concepting worksheet that you can use to tie all of the components of planning - purpose, format, and topic together.

Fill this out so your piece of content will be created for a specific persona, topic (or keyword), buyer's journey stage, format and content structure, and start developing a working title for the piece of content. One area that was skipped over, "How will this help your buyer persona?" Take the time to always address this question when you're creating a piece of content. If you can't answer this question, then you might not be planning a remarkable piece of content. Remember, you want to create content that will help your buyer persona. Every time you want to produce a piece of content, start by asking yourself: who does this help? If the answer is anyone OTHER than your persona, go back and really think through why you're creating this content, on this topic, in this way.

Here's an example of how the HubSpot agency partner could have filled out this worksheet for the different content they're creating. Let's pretend that Business Beth is their buyer persona and something that interests Business Beth is redesigning websites. That will be the topic for this piece of content. We'll skip the buyer's journey for now. How will this help Business Beth? Well, Business Beth needs help with knowing what a redesign of a website looks like, how it will benefit him/her, and what type of a commitment a redesign will be. Since they could answer that question and that they know this will help the buyer persona, they're on their way to building out a remarkable piece of content.

In this case the content will be an eBook and will be structured as a How-To. By knowing all of this, 9 Steps to Redesigning Your Website will be the start to this piece of content. But what about the buyer's journey? Do you remember where this fits in the buyer's journey? Give it a second.

Right! It was consideration stage, because it was focused on a solution not the problem of improving conversion rates.

Now that you have an idea for what you're going to create, the next step is to actually produce that content, transforming those ideas into reality. Your content doesn't have to be lengthy or elaborate, you just have to set a plan and follow it.

It all comes down to transforming your ideas, your plans, into real content assets to attract, convert, close, and delight. But don't forget, you're not just trying to create content, you're trying to create remarkable content.

There are a few best practices to keep in mind as you begin creating a piece of content. And most of these are good news! Especially if you're wearing many hats in your role.

Always focus on mapping content to your personas AND where they are in the Buyer's Journey. This part is covered in the planning process, but be sure to create a piece of content with a buyer persona and buyer's journey stage in mind. The more specific your content, the better. Yes, broad content can cast a wider net, but specific content is going to attract qualified visitors and leads - those more likely to become customers.

Second, less is more: your personas are probably just as busy as you are—make it easy for them to consume your content. This is GREAT news! Don't go creating that 50 page eBook or 2 hour webinar. Remember, this content is for your buyer personas. Focus more on covering the topic in full than creating a lengthy piece of content. You'll buyer personas will thank you.

Next, keep it educational, not promotional. Remember, it's not until the decision stage of the Buyer's Journey that your product should be mentioned. Your website pages are pieces of content that are great for the decision stage. It's those content offers and blog posts that should be focused on education and the beginning part of the buyer's journey.

Finally, focus on the informational part of the content first, worry about design second. Prioritize writing great content over making that content look nice. Yes, content like infographics rely heavily on design, but if it wasn't for the content that infographic wouldn't exist.

And there you have it! The content creation best practices. Always focus on your persona and the buyer's journey, keep it short, keep it educational, and worry about design last.

At this point, you'll be giving yourself a pat on the back. Not only would you have planned out your piece of content, you would have also created it.

Not so fast, this step is extremely important to the content process and is, actually, often overlooked. The third step in the content process is distribution. Your content is only as good as your content delivery. Delivery makes content relevant. You can't just create content—you also need to be sure it gets out into the world.



There's a huge misconception with content creation. Most think that after you create a piece of content (whether it's a blog post or a content offer), that you just hit the publish button and all these visits and leads will just start coming in. If you're lucky, that might be the case. You can't just assume that people you find your content, you'll need to promote, or distribute, that content.

Think of it this way...

Spend as much time on content promotion as you did with creating a piece of content.

You've worked really hard and spent a lot of time building out that remarkable piece of content. Make sure to spend the time to give it the love and distribution that it deserves.

You might find that even with all this content it's much harder to capture the ATTENTION of your prospect. Remember, it's the issue of fighting for attention rather than space. People have limited attention spans, so you need remarkable content to reel them in. That content needs to be shared with the world in a way that helps you achieve your business goals.

How do we make distribution more effective? There's a certain way you want to leverage your content through distribution. The right distribution technique gets the right content in front of the right person at the right time.

Your content can be a powerful tool to attract visitors, convert leads, and so on, but you have to distribute it to help it actually achieve those feats.

Use your website pages and business blogs for not only content, but to also host the different content offers that you've created. Landing pages will act as that gatekeeper for your content offers.

Social media is a fantastic tool to use when promoting your content. There are many different social channels you can use, so keep your buyer persona in mind and think about where they might be spending their time. Use a social media scheduling tool to help you save time.

Calls-to-action can be placed on your website to entice your website visitors to download or request your different offers.

And use email to let your prospects know about the exciting new pieces of content you've created.

All of these methods work, you just have to be promoting continuously. If that eBook is still relevant 6 months after you created it, promote it again!

Think of content distribution as a way to maximize the shelf life of your content. Amplify that content. Don't make the mistake of getting a lot less engagement than you should for the amount of time you're spending on creating content.

The next step in the content process is analysis.

Just like every other aspect of an effective inbound strategy, you need to analyze your content's efficacy in order to get the most out of it. Are you creating content on the right topics? Is it in the correct formats? Is it being distributed in the right ways?

Knowing the answers to these questions can help you be more effective moving forward. Before washing and repeating, make sure what you're doing is working. Why did it work? Why didn't it? Use that insight to create better content moving forward.

- What are the metrics to consider when analyzing content?
- Number of visits - how many views did your content have
- Leads generated - did your content offer convert leads? How many? Did it reach your goal?
- Social proof, share-ability - did anyone share your content on social media? How many? Is it getting re-tweeted or re-posted?
- Inbound links - are there any outside web sites linking to your content? This could help build authority to your website and your content.
- Content performance by author - Is one content author performing better than another? Should they be creating the majority of content in the future? Or are there certain tips they follow that's worth sharing with your other content creators?
- Content performance by topic - Do your buyer personas prefer a certain topic that you're covering? Continue writing about that content!
- Content performance by format - Is there a certain format that is performing better than another? This can also give you insights on your persona. If they don't seem to be coming to your webinars, maybe that's not the right content for your persona and you should test something else out.

Last but not least, don't forget to repeat! Repeat what's working well for you and stop doing things that just don't seem to be clicking. One important thing to remember about inbound marketing is that it's all about testing things out and seeing what works well for you. Every industry is different! Take what you learned from each piece of content help create more effective down the road.

Continue repeating this content process and learning more about the content your buyer personas consider remarkable.

Quite the content process, right? Remember, building out a plan for content creation does take time, but it will pay off in the end through the momentum you'll gain over time.

VIDEO 3: TOOL WALKTHROUGH

View the user guide or additional resources on the class page for a text version and instructions on how to use the tool.