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Words That Sell

How to (Vastly) Improve Your B2B Content Marketing

By: Lainey Mebust,
Kristeen Morales &
Emma Valentiner

Table of Contents

Introduction

Sales Funnel Content: The Ultimate Guide for Marketers At Every Stage

- Top of Funnel
- Middle of Funnel
- Bottom of Funnel
- Beyond the Funnel

B2B Marketing Assets Best Practices

- Whitepaper Best Practices to Ignite the Spark
- B2B Ebook Best Practices to Amuse & Engage
- B2B Case Study Best Practices: Real Results & Happy Customers
- B2B Webinar Best Practices for Marketers to Win ‘Em Over

Email Marketing Guide: Lessons Learned From 1 Million Emails

5 Things You Gotta Know When Writing For SEO

14 Content Marketing Tools That Make Life Easier (and Your Campaigns Better)

Bonus Chapter: Is Content Gating a Smart Strategy for B2B? A Conversation with Carro Ford

Bonus Chapter: B2B Content Marketing: Why Strategy Still Matters for SEO & Sales with Todd Lebo

Bonus Chapter: The Unconventional Approach to Programmatic Advertising

Introduction

In a recent study we published in partnership with marketing research firm, Ascend2, we found that 45% of B2B marketers surveyed rely on content or video marketing to drive successful lead generation campaigns. Content plays a vital role in a comprehensive marketing strategy - it's how prospects familiarize themselves with your brand and learn about your product or service offering. So it's worthwhile to get it right.

Of course, getting it right is one of the key challenges that most B2B marketers face every day. What's the best content for top or middle of funnel? When is a prospect ready for a whitepaper, and what should it include? What about case studies? Are those still important?

In this Ebook, we've gathered together our best content on B2B content marketing that answers all of these questions and many more. In the following chapters, you'll deep dive into the mindset of your prospects at each stage of the sales funnel - and what information you need to provide to move them through the funnel quickly. We'll also share the content best practices we've learned from years of syndicating B2B content for Lockheed Martin, Microsoft, IBM, Looker and others.

But wait! There's more! As a bonus, we're including three of our favorite episodes from our popular B2B podcast, The Green & Greene Show. You'll learn advanced strategies from industry luminaries that push your campaigns from amazing to where-is-all-this-revenue-coming-from status.

So grab a comfy chair, settle in and prepare to get inspired.

Sales Funnel Content

The Ultimate Guide for Marketers At Every Stage

Top of Funnel Content

Content marketing is all about timing.

To build long-lasting customer relationships, you need to get the right piece of content, in front of the right people, at the right time. Moving prospects down the marketing funnel (or the more current marketing cyclone) requires the right form of content. Particularly when it comes to top of funnel content.

You can't share a customer testimonial and expect your reader to be ready to buy, Johnny-on-the-spot. Like any relationship, your conversations should start small and work their way towards the deep end.

Your top of the funnel content (or ToFu), is the start of that journey.

Top of Funnel Content – Building Trust

At this stage of the funnel, your goal is to build trust and brand awareness. When it comes to content, the best way to build rapport with potential customers is to share value, no strings attached. **Top of the funnel content should be attention-grabbing, relevant, and useful to your audience.** Instead of brand-heavy sales pitches, offer knowledge, insight, and ways for readers to level-up their skills.

Unlike bottom of the funnel assets, ToFu content should dial in on your buyer's interests, without pushing your products or services on them. With top of funnel content, you don't want to come on too strong.

Instead, share consistent, useful, and ungated content with your audience. Doing so will position you as a thought leader, a go-to resource and a participating member of the community. This engaging and buyer-centric top of funnel content comes in many shapes and forms, let's break it down.

ToFu Blog Posts

Blog posts (like this one) are a great way to establish authority and build relevance in a short and snackable package. Articles can be easily shared by readers via social media and email, boosting your brand awareness. Best of all, you have creative liberty over the topics you write about giving you the freedom to position yourself as a thought leader on any subject.

ToFu Webinars

Arguably the most successful lead magnet of digital marketing, webinars are a great place to serve up value. Similar to a collegiate lecture, your attendees can participate as actively or passively as they like, with no pressure from sales. Providing free opportunities for viewers to learn new tools or skills will quickly build your authority.

One note about this method of content creation – webinars can take a significant investment of time and resources. You'll need to create a compelling presentation, drum up interest among potential attendees and invest in software solutions to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

Get the most out of your webinar investment by repurposing your content for blog posts, short social videos and email campaigns. And, of course, make any live webinar presentations available for later viewing so you can keep driving views long after the initial airing.

ToFu How-to Guides

Through step by step guidance, how-to guides can provide insight to solve industry problems, teach a new skill, or simply start a conversation. Successful content should be relevant to your audience without directly harping on your product or service, for example, "How to Attract Gen Zers to Your Blog."

ToFu Videos

Much like webinars, videos serve up value in a format as easy as pie. Successful ToFu videos can range from tutorials, on-demand skill-building webinars, and viral content. Videos are as easy to share as they are to consume – making them a great asset for brand awareness.

These types of content don't have to be huge investments. Don't get discouraged if you don't have a big budget to work with. As long as you've got great, helpful information to share, you can create videos to build brand awareness and visibility without busting the budget.

Simple pro tips? Use natural lighting if you can't pay for lighting or a professional studio and invest in a low-cost tripod to avoid a shaky picture. (Or lean your phone against a stack of books for a no-cost hack.)

ToFu Big Content

Big content includes anything that breaks the mold. Quizzes, free templates, infographics, and tools are all great uses of top of funnel big content. Providing a free resource or tool (like a subject line evaluator) is a great way to build authority with your community, offer something valuable and helpful, and keep your brand top of mind.

What Makes Good Top of Funnel Content?

At any stage of the funnel, great content is valuable, relevant, and straightforward.

Whether it's a video, blog post, or infographic, successful content should be tailored to the pain-points and interests of your target audience. Above all, make sure your content is clear. Ensuring your audience can understand the topic of your content as well as the value it provides, will give your content the best chance to resonate with potential buyers.

Top of Funnel Content – Why it Matters

At the end of the day, our goal as marketers is to build long lasting customer relationships. The top of the funnel is our opportunity to lay down a foundation of trust and build a solid reputation. As relationships mature, so should your content.

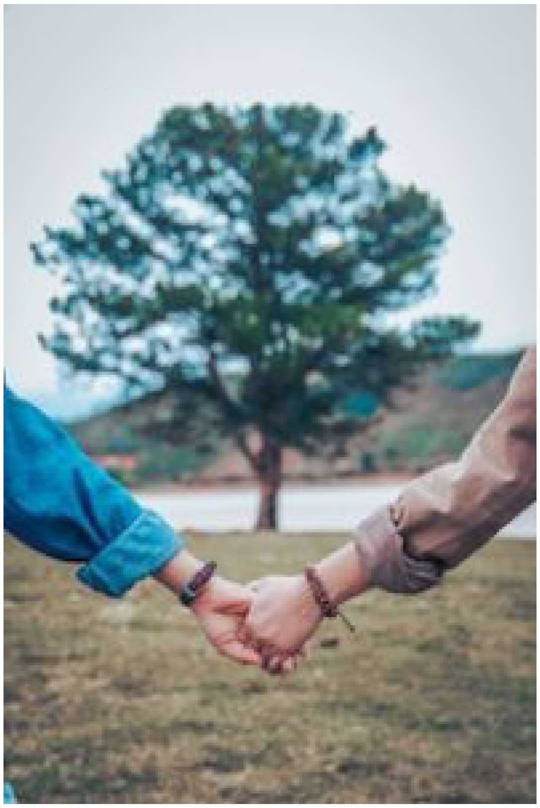
With each ToFu content piece, calls-to-actions can lead prospects to middle of the funnel content, and so on. As prospects migrate their way down the funnel, your content marketing strategies should follow suit with more brand-focused pieces.

When a prospect fully descends the sales funnel and finds themselves in need of a tool, product or service like yours, you'll be top of mind.

Middle of the Funnel Content

If the top of the funnel is the first date, middle of the funnel content is the courting stage.

In the relationship of lead generation, you're somewhere between your first dinner and meeting the parents. Bottom line, your relationship is developing.



At this stage in the funnel, your prospect is familiar with your brand and (thanks to some great top of funnel content) associates your name with trust and authority. Now is your time to flex your good traits, all without coming on too strong. *This delicate balance makes the middle of the funnel (or, MoFu) the most complicated stage of the buyer's journey.*

Middle of the Funnel Content – Time to Woo

MoFu is akin to an awkward dating show, where one candidate appraises 30 prospects for an engagement. With a wide net of interested leads who haven't been fully qualified, you can't properly target each one. As a result, you might lose some great candidates, and waste time on some bad ones.

At this stage of mid funnel marketing, your content should continue to educate readers while beginning to position your company as the player that's leading the game. Essentially, you want to master the tasteful brag. Not only do you want to subtly align yourself as the clear front runner, you want to provide information that allows a prospect to genuinely evaluate whether you're the right choice. Otherwise, you'll both endure some heartache (and a few wasted resources) if your new sale leaves you within the first few months.

MoFu Goals

Mid funnel content bridges the gap between awareness and commitment. As your prospects move their way through the sales funnel, they're beginning to associate your brand name with the solutions you provide. As their mentality changes, so should your pieces of content.

Your goal is to establish a problem that needs solving and convince your readers that you're the best org for the job. As you nurture these leads, enlist help from marketing automation tools to ensure your mid-funnel content reaches your prospects at the right time. To serve up the best courting content, we're breaking down the many ways B2B mid funnel content can take shape.

MoFu Case Studies

Case studies allow you to lead by example by showcasing the problems you can solve all through the lens of a consumer. Case studies typically focus on a challenge faced by your client, the strategy and solutions your company provided, and the successful outcome that followed. In essence, these bad boys are in-depth problem-solving guides. By editorializing real-world scenarios, you can demonstrate the power of your tool or service through the eyes of the customer. As an added bonus, you can repurpose case studies into infographics, blog posts, social media posts, and newsletter highlights.

MoFu Whitepapers

Whitepapers are the research reports of the marketing world. These robust reads are a great way to flaunt your value through original research. Compared to blog posts, white-papers take considerable time and effort. Your reader is going to expect niche expertise supported by rock-solid metrics. A great whitepaper gives readers answers they can't find anywhere else. To achieve this exclusivity, choose a topic that showcases a solution unique to your operation. Not sure where to start? Think about analytics you've gathered in-house, it's a sure fire way to provide data that no one else has.

MoFu How-to Articles: Product Edition

In the inbound marketing world, the middle of the funnel is commonly referred to as the evaluation stage. Here, prospects are considering whether or not they truly need a solution like yours. What better way to demonstrate your value to the industry than with an article that highlights your problem-solving skills, step by step. Compared to top of funnel how-to guides, these reads revolve around your product or service. Show prospects what you do and how you do it.

How-to guides give people a clear idea of what working with your product or service will feel like. Highlight your solution, emphasize the convenience, and demonstrate why it's best in class. For content creation inspiration, harvest ideas from your sales and customer success teams. Learn the most common questions coming from prospects and clients and use a how-to article to address each one.

MoFu Demo Videos

Demo videos allow you to show, rather than tell, prospects exactly how your product or service works. As the happy medium between educational and promotional content, these videos can serve existing and potential customers alike. Videos provide an easily digestible first-hand look at your product or service, your solution skills, and serve as training resources to improve your client experience.

Beyond Middle of the Funnel Content – Let's Get to Yes!

As your prospects progress to the bottom of the funnel, you've successfully convinced your reader they have a problem worth solving. (In case they didn't know it. And sometimes, they don't!) At this point, prospects are ready to settle down and commit to a purchase. *Before you introduce them to your sales team*, your next task is to make sure they're ready to purchase from you.

These types of content don't have to be huge investments. Don't get discouraged if you don't have a big budget to work with. As long as you've got great, helpful information to share, you can create videos to build brand awareness and visibility without busting the budget.

Simple pro tips? Use natural lighting if you can't pay for lighting or a professional studio and invest in a low-cost tripod to avoid a shaky picture. (Or lean your phone against a stack of books for a no-cost hack.)

Bottom of the Funnel Content

At the bottom of the content marketing funnel, things are getting serious.

You're in the final stretch of the buyer's journey and you're ready to pop the question. But, before you can ride off into the sunset sales agreement in hand, you have one last grand gesture left. Your prospect is ready to settle down and commit to a product or service, your last job is to make sure they're ready to choose you when they make their purchase decision.

The good news is, any leads remaining in the marketing funnel are invested. Thanks to some carefully curated [top of funnel (ToFu)] and [mid-funnel (MoFu)] content, your prospect is open to commitment. Your job is to communicate what sets you apart from your competitors and convey your product or service as the obvious choice. At this point, it's time to lay it all out on the line with clear, concise, and to-the-point bottom of the funnel content.

What is bottom of the funnel content?

Bottom of the funnel content is straightforward. Your end of the road content should paint an honest picture of what you bring to the table and why you're the clear front-runner in the market. At this point, your prospects are looking for something that sets you apart from the masses. BoFu content creation should revolve around identifying your unique value and outlining exactly what it's like to be your customer.

What are the goals of bottom of the funnel content?

Bottom line, your BoFu marketing content is crafted to convert. Along with flaunting your unique value, BoFu content should stress immediacy. Convincing your prospect you're the clear front runner is only half the battle, as you near the finish line, you need to convince your reader it's time to pull the trigger.

What are some bottom of the funnel content examples?

When it comes to bottom of the funnel best practices, you want to craft content that answers your customer's final questions. As prospects make their way down the funnel, they're thinking through the logistics — what is it like to be your customer, how much would it cost, and what would it take to implement your product or service? Your BoFu content should tie up any loose ends in one easy-to-read package. So what are some clear and consolidated bottom of the funnel content ideas? Let's break it down.

- **Customer Reviews**

  When it comes to BoFu content, customer reviews are crucial. Reviews are worth their weight in gold when it comes to building customer trust. Hearing honest consumer commentary helps prospects put themselves in your existing customer's shoes. It gives them a sneak peek into what being your customer will feel like and what your long term relationships will look like.

  Customer reviews also play into the "influencer" buying behavior, if your product is well endorsed, you have a significant advantage. 93% of consumers report they look to customer reviews to guide their buying decisions, making your current customers one of your company's most valuable marketing assets.

  In order to capture rave reviews from your customers, it's important to create incentives, ask open-ended questions, and meet them where they are. Make it easy on your existing customers by giving them a few different channels to leave feedback. You can reach out to them directly with questions over email, over the phone, or direct them to a 3rd party review site like G2 Crowd, Capterra, and Glassdoor. You can even go the extra mile by giving your customers a glowing review before asking for one in return.

- **Customer Testimonials**

  Testimonials allow you to take your reviews one step further with a visual representation of your customer experience. Customer testimonials give your prospects valuable information without drowning them in sales pitches. Including stand out quotes, photos, videos, and copy written through the eyes of your customer makes for a valuable trust-building BoFu content piece.

To nail a top testimonial, it's important to ask a client after a recent win. A specific successful event will result in a fresh, genuine, and valuable testimonial. This shows prospects how your product or services shines in a real-world scenario. In addition, you can repurpose your customer testimonials into case studies and infographics directly addressing pain points of the market. Remember to make the process friction-free for your client, ask them which format works best for them — email, phone, or face to face — and meet them there.

• Comparison Table

Comparison tables allow you to clearly outline what sets you apart from your competitors. By lining up your product or services next to your fellow adversaries, your reader can quickly size up the competition and pinpoint your unique value. Your table can highlight specific product features, capabilities, or benefits (such as a live support team) that is provided by your company and not your competitors.

• Free Trials

By giving prospects a taste of your product or service with an expiring time window, free trials create urgency. Today, many shoppers prefer to test out tools first hand, rather than meet with a salesperson. A trial helps potential customers get familiar with your product or service and customer experience, all while creating immediacy.

Wrapping it all up

BoFu content is the sales pitch of content marketing. Your top, middle, and bottom-of-the-funnel content should always convey your unique value, but your BoFu content should stress urgency. At this point, your job is to convince potential customers that it's time to lock down a solution and you're the best choice on the market. Armed with engaging, motivating, and honest bottom of the funnel content, you'll convert prospective customers and win them for the long haul (cue wedding bells).

Beyond the Funnel Content

Beyond the funnel content and client retention go hand in hand.

Congratulations! You've made it through the marketing funnel from the first date (top of the funnel), to tying the knot (bottom of the funnel), and now you find yourself beyond the funnel. At this stage, you've successfully wooed your prospect to commit, now it's up to you to deliver on promises made in the courting stage. Beyond the funnel, your partnership is just getting started — so is your content. Once the honeymoon is over, it's time to use beyond the funnel content (BeFu) to strengthen relationships and keep customers happy for the long haul.

Why you should care about keeping existing customers happy

You've likely heard it before, maintaining an existing customer is easier (and cheaper) than winning a new one. Your beyond the funnel content is your best marketing for keeping customers onboard, transforming one-time buyers into repeat customers, and preventing subscription customers from canceling (hello, booming ROI). Bottom line, beyond the funnel content is all about client retention.

Onboarding Documentation

You've worked hard to lead your prospects to this point in the relationship, don't give them a reason to walk away just yet. A smooth onboarding and implementation process will start your relationship on a good note and set expectations from the get-go. Create startup checklists, tasks, timelines, and onboarding videos to ensure your client has everything in place to ramp up successfully.
Think of your onboarding process as the compass to set your newly won prospects on the right path. At the end of the day, you want your customer to derive the most value from your product or service (so they stick around) and that starts with a solid foundation. Crafting effective onboarding tools will make the adoption process easy for everyone at the company, not just your point of contact.

Support Articles

If your onboarding docs are the compass, support articles are the map. Much like onboarding, support articles are designed to help your reader navigate (and get the most use out of) your product or service. Product guides, how-to articles, feature glossaries, and knowledge bases serve as valuable beyond the funnel support content that shows your audience you're invested in their success.

Support articles provide a quick self-service option for your clients, ensuring they have the right intel at their fingertips (at any hour of the day). Product guides and support articles can even serve as the script to be transformed into tutorial videos and training webinars.

Webinar Training

The trusty webinar, a familiar tool that provides value at nearly every stage of the buyer's journey. Beyond the funnel, webinars can help you retain customers and build trust. At this point, you can hold live webinar trainings to offer product certification (aka an expert in your product), help customers level up their industry skills, or simply have their day to day questions answered.

Email Newsletters

Keep your relationship top of mind with bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly newsletters. You can use this opportunity to share new features, best practices, company updates, or relevant industry news. Newsletters establish a cadence of conversation that continues to engage and nurture relationships without doing too much (like drowning them in sales content).

As a training resource, you can use this channel to promote new webinars and links to existing support articles. Newsletters also serve as the perfect vehicle to sprinkle referral benefits — here you can offer discounted pricing, referral rewards, or even free support for bringing on new clientele.

Through the funnel and beyond

Beyond the funnel, your content shouldn't stop. Fostering existing customer relationships is just as important — if not more important — than starting up new ones. You need beyond the funnel content to build trust, set your customer up for success, and deliver on promises made in the courting stage (ToFu, MoFu, and BoFu). The good news is, beyond the funnel content can directly sweeten client retention, helping you keep customers coming back year after year.

B2B Marketing Assets

Best Practices

Whitepaper Best Practices to Ignite the Spark

In a social media-driven world where Tweets and Instagram posts are the most prominent and rewarding social currency, B2B whitepapers can seem like a marketing strategy of the past.

When thinking of whitepapers, your mind travels way back to the beginning of man, you picture a caveman clubbing another over the head, and you say something like *'how are white papers going to help me learn or introduce any new marketing tactics in today's world?'*

Well, LeadCrunch is here to help you create more persuasive and shareable whitepapers. So, let's change your thinking from the caveman clubbing each other over the head scenario to a group of cavemen who started the first fire and changed our way of living as we know it today.

Whitepaper is that fire, and refreshing Top of the Funnel content is going to ignite your business.

B2B Whitepapers Don't Have to Be Boring

To write high quality whitepapers, there is something you need to do first, throw out your pre-conceived notion of not getting personal, and try to appeal to the emotional side of your readers. Social sharing comes from an initial reaction to an emotional trigger. People will share your content when it stirs something inside of them, and they deem it shareable.

Indeed, B2B marketing is unique because every digital marketer is playing the same game, and you win that game by knowing your audience and leveling the playing field. In this blog post, we'll hone those skills and help you with writing whitepapers that are rich in content, but also create a relationship with your reader while promoting it effectively. Without further ado, let's get started with our **Best Practices for B2B Whitepapers**.

White Paper Content Ideas That Genuinely Engage

Arguably, content is one of the most important factors of writing a whitepaper that attracts an audience. Once your reader initially clicks, they expect content that is going to be thought-provoking, well-written, and precise. Finding a topic that will provide value and new information can be daunting.

To ensure people are going to read your whitepaper and you find a topic that triggers engagement, first ask yourself these questions:

- Has anything changed? Did you learn something new you didn't know or realize before?
- Are there a couple of broad categories you can narrow down?
- Have you researched Google, Quora, and Reddit to find the pertinent topics and information relevant to your audience?

After researching and finding a topic, and before you put your fingers to the keyboard, think about your specific B2B Whitepaper audience, and then follow this content writing process:

- **Explain:** respond to the question your readers need the answer to. Chat with your clients, ask your Sales Team, and find out what your audience really needs.
- **Call to action:** instruct your readers on how to act and give them the tools to do so. Once you know your audience well, you'll know what drives them and how to be of service.
- **Photos, graphics, or charts:** incorporate concise words broken up with relevant photos and charts to demonstrate credibility. We live in a digital age where we get what we want with a click of a finger, don't let your readers get bored – break up your lengthy whitepaper with other content.
- **Language:** use phrases and wording your readers know and understand. You wouldn't promote a Shakespearean sonnet to a 2nd grader, know who you're speaking to and make sure they can digest the information.

To create whitepapers that are absorbed well after they're read, you'll need to up the ante, and simultaneously take your marketing campaign one step further.

Quality Whitepapers vs. Good Whitepapers

Lead generation is the ultimate goal of a whitepaper – finding those prospects and keeping them. But how do you keep the audience that originally clicked, and even more difficult, how do you get leads to convert?

The proof is in the pudding or, wait, **the answer is in the whitepaper**.

A quality whitepaper has exclusivity. When resources are scarce, people want to gobble them up even more. Use your whitepaper to drive supply and demand. If you're offering something everyone has, use your whitepaper to push content that hasn't ever been seen before, this will make your reader feel like they are a part of a unique and 'never seen before' group.

For example, Mark W. Schaefer shares his insight in The Content Code, "...providing exclusive or limited access to content can create the perception of scarcity that can make the content move." This is important because it's no longer enough to have a good whitepaper, you need quality. Quality is what's finite, quality is the caveman with the first flame, and everybody is going to want it.

Your content should give them something they can't get anywhere else and make them feel remarkable because they are getting the inside scoop.

Find Your People: Promoting Your Whitepaper

Yes, the content is important, but how your prospect receives the content is crucial, the cavemen created multiple sparks before the fire was started.
Promoting or finding the channel or spark that your reader receives your content through can be tricky – with multiple platforms and content flying everywhere around you, the important thing to do is come up with a plan.

Here are some promotions suggestions:

- Create a **landing page** for your prospect, once the content is emailed, make it easy for them to see why they should download your whitepaper and opt-in.
- **LinkedIn** – you have a couple options here, but two of the most pertinent are sharing your whitepaper with a specific group or target audience and/or write your own article about your whitepaper and post it. Link your whitepaper and you're set, into the interwebs it goes.

- **Twitter!** I know, I know, but with it being one of the biggest social media giants, its integral to use it for your gain. Write a quick quip and share the link with the Twitter universe.

- **Video** – the way of the future. You knew about *The Avengers* or *Star Wars* way before the movie came out because of a teaser. Make a teaser video for the whitepaper you're promoting. I can't guarantee it will get as many views as a blockbuster movie, but I promise people will watch, and then want to learn more.

- **Email** – send your whitepaper through email or build partnerships with content syndication companies that can do this for you on a massive scale.

The Takeaway: Whitepapers Are No. 1

Whitepapers are number one in terms of which content businesses are promoting the most. Undeniably, content marketing has changed the way we think and includes a host of different mediums. A whitepaper can be the most useful channel for your business when written effectively, promoted on multiple platforms, and designed to make your reader feel valuable/smarter/more effective.

With our Best Practices for B2B Whitepapers, you can create successful whitepapers that reach larger audiences, are instrumental in the amount of leads generated, and ignite the passion in an otherwise boring and saturated whitepaper-world.

B2B Ebook Practices to Amuse and Engage

Let’s get real for a quick minute.

You don’t need to write an ebook overnight. That’s just a lot of pressure. But consider, when writing an eBook, you don’t have to aim at being Hans Christian Anderson or the Grimm Brothers.

You can however establish yourself as a thought leader in your industry, and write something for an audience that will be almost as fascinating, circulated, and important as a beloved fairy tale. In fact, *you’re probably a lot closer to ebook author status than you think.*

We often think of B2B ebooks as being just an extended blog post, but let’s rethink that. You can reuse your existing content and turn it into something much longer and more compelling that the right people are going to want to read. An eBook is long-form content, often comprising many chapters and ideas, or blog posts that are repurposed and remodeled.

Together with sharpening your B2B marketing strategy, ebooks can boost sales through rebranding and undergoing a makeover, causing your written content to soar.

Let’s take your next ebook to new heights with this how-to guide on best practices for B2B ebooks.

Creating an Ebook – Beginning the Story

First, coming up with a topic or having enough research to fill an ebook can be a tough thing to do. Almost like Cinderella finding her glass slipper, it seems daunting and unattainable at first. But it doesn’t have to be. When you do find that amazing topic that’s sure to excite your readers, it’s more like… Aladdin finding the magic lamp. So, let’s work that magic to create your desired result, and ‘fingers crossed’, you won’t have to summon a Genie.

When writing a B2B ebook, an enchanting topic is one that will compel your target audience to read it. Maybe it’s addressing their everyday pain points. Or sharing actionable tips or strategies they can use in the real world to generate leads for their business. But where do you even start when it comes to that?

Here enters Prince Charming, otherwise known as Neil Patel, digital marketing guru. He wrote a piece called, [How to Generate 100 Content Ideas in 60 Seconds (Seriously)](). Neil helps businesses (and you) find the most relevant pieces of content to write an ebook about – but it doesn't stop there. He also provides you with the tools and keywords to propel your content to the top of most searches.

It's a pretty easy process, and you'll figure out what topics are searched for the most. Then incorporate, or focus on, those topics to give your ebook a boost and have your company stand out in the crowd.

Along the same lines, considering the point of view of your reader is important because it makes them feel valuable. Patel asserts, "Since consumers are generally more connected to one another than they are to a company, developing a business POV is a great way to market directly to customers and increase relatability."

Thinking about your readers as actual people, and not just the company as a whole, increases your ability to channel your inner oracle, and gear it toward that specific audience. In turn, your eBook will be helpful to your readers, and they'll feel like you're lending a hand, and assisting them in finding a solution.

Lighting fast pro tip: Do a Google search for your ebook topic and pay close attention to the 'People Also Ask' and the 'Searches related to' queries that appear on the results pages. Use these queries as a framework for your chapters, since they're closely related to the topic you're covering.

B2b eBook Success Stories – Confronting Dragons

Part of writing a popular b2b ebook is sharing a story that can be either heartwarming or display your success as a company. An interactive ebook can keep a reader's attention and garner credibility and respect. Be sure to include images, videos, screenshots, or gifs to illustrate your key points and break up the content. These types of design elements add that extra special something that makes readers take note. An engaging, hands-on approach grabs your reader's interest, which is important when you're asking them to commit to an ebook that is more than just a few pages.

On that note, in the LeadCrunch blog post, B2B Whitepaper Best Practices, we touched on using emotion to earn trust, and connect on a personal level. Indeed, by sharing a success story, you do just that. A solid example of this is in our great ebook, How to Win the Love of Sales. (We're biased of course, but it is a really insightful read for every B2B marketer.)

How to Win the Love of Sales utilizes this emotional strategy with real-life interviews that impact readers on a personal level while also sharing about company successes. It's an illustration of how ebooks offer insights to readers that you can't convey in the shorter format of a white paper.

Your ebook doesn't have to be a 'dragon is slain and a town gets saved' story, but it does need to demonstrate how your company, product or service is next level, and also keep that potential client motivated. This isn't a sales pitch – this is you offering them sound, sage advice with a dusting of, 'and here's why we're so confident in sharing this information with you'.

Promote Your Ebook – Hear Ye, Hear Ye

Because the written word and world of handheld paperback books are (unfortunately) becoming obsolete, it's important to appeal to your readers with a digital format. Undoubtedly, a mobile device can give your audience access to your ebook instantaneously. Social media is not only readily accessible, but also the most popular content marketing strategy, so it's easy to see that promoting your ebook is easiest on those platforms. It has the ability to make a piece go viral quickly – and even better, it's free.

Promoting doesn't stop there. Just like the evil queen enticing Snow White, a call-to-action will entice your readers into getting up off their seat to take next steps. Use language that persuades your readers into needing your business or trying your service, and make it unforgettable by adding visuals to offer that extra pizzazz. I'm sure you've seen those Netflix free-trial ads, and most likely have clicked. Use your call-to-action to lure your audience in, and take a bite of that proverbial not-so-poisonous apple.

Extra Tips For Launching a Successful B2B Ebook

Here's some useful tricks on how to capture your reader:

- Have a landing page where readers provide their contact information to get access to your eBook. Content gating can convey exclusivity and create a sense of urgency.

- Break it up with bullet points and visuals
- Use your website or social media to promote your ebook
- Offer a way to subscribe so your audience can opt in for future notifications on blog posts, new ebooks or other material.
- Make a video summarizing the most important parts of your ebook (great for a viral strategy!)

Comparable to a fairy tale magical ending, a well-written B2B ebook can fascinate and allure a reader. Like binge watching your favorite shows, people will want to keep waiting for the next episode – if it’s relatable, promoted to the right audience in a meaningful way, and offers some personal and insightful success stories.

Share with us! What’s the topic of your next B2B ebook?

B2B Case Study Best Practices: Real Results & Happy Customers

"It's alive! It's alive!" – Victor Frankenstein

History has given us many experiments and studies; often learning the hard way, colleges publish scientific papers regularly to prove or disprove hypotheses and theories – even Barack Obama wrote and published the most popular scientific paper of 2016. Within this type of content emerges real-life evidence of what worked, what didn't, and what falls in this gray area that needs further definition.

Within those scientific journals, a Case Study demonstrates the evidence behind the science. Essentially, it convinces a truth or new-found fact to the world. But here you are, reading this, wondering how scientific journals, Frankenstein, and Obama fall into your business scope. The answer to that question is this: a B2B Case Study can be just what your business needs to prove credibility, convince your prospect why your company is the best, and how it got there.

Indeed, people are more willing to believe what your business is selling if there's evidence behind it. After all, we are a knowledge-based society, and knowledge, my friend, is power.

Here are your B2B Case Study Best Practices, and how you can use this type of middle of the funnel content to put yourself on a pedestal and showcase your own success as a business.

But wait... What is a Case Study?

The *BMJ Journal* explains it as, "...a research methodology, typically seen in social and life sciences. There is no one definition of case study research. However, very simply... *'a case study can be defined as an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units,'*" but let's dive deeper into that concept, because writing a case study may come with a lot of questions, and this might be your company's first approach to research. A case study is an analysis of a real result your company achieved.

Some specific case study examples:

- A case study interview; interview an existing client on how your product helped them achieve higher revenue

- If you use a CRM, show findings and percentages on how your market grew or how you succeeded in implementing new tactics that helped that client succeed
- Q&A on how you run your marketing or strategy operations
- Case study control – have a group of people who didn't use your product and compare them to the ones who did. Leverage the great results to incentivize your prospect into needing your services to be better than the others.

These are just some of the case study ideas – get creative or leverage the brands you've used that have achieved a desired result thanks to your product or service.

Case Study Guidelines

Remember Frankenstein? How intriguing and exciting was it when the mad scientist finally created his 'monster'? As the audience watching the movie, or the reader turning the page, you felt a surge of energy and waited on the edge of your seat for what was going to happen next. Just like that, you want your Case Study to 'come alive,' and to not bore your reader.

Your potential customer reads dozens of emails a day. Give them a compelling reason to read what you've written, and the evidence to support your hypothesis. If you make it easy to digest, and simple to read, you've got a win. Save their time, and make it just long enough to be suspenseful, but also short and sweet. You can't go wrong with this marketing strategy.

Other Case Study Strategies: Problem – Action – Result

The advantages of a case study establish your leadership and expertise in your industry. It proves that you know what you're talking about, and gives your audience a reason to listen to what you're saying without brushing you off. As discussed in our [B2B Whitepaper Best Practices] blog post, creating a video of your Case Study is the way of the future.

Telling your story using this medium, and then sharing it on YouTube, lures your audience into watching something instead of spending time reading it. You can have your morning coffee while watching a 2-3 minute quip on a Case Study will deliver much better results than reading a long-format case study. Those scientific articles can be daunting, and not many of us have the time or energy to dissect a long piece of literature when trying to find a reputable service. Because video is the way of the future, it transcends the written Case Study, and resonates in your consumer's mind much longer. The results speak for themselves!

Fake News: Don't Lie to Your Prospects (They Can Tell)

To have customer success, it takes trust. A business B2B case study helps your prospect decipher what's real and what's not. You know how unreliable those deceptive weight loss ads are – your case study needs to help your prospect navigate what's real. They help your reader or viewer process the information, and it not only makes you more credible but it makes you more *likable*.

In a society that prides itself on emotional warfare, create that sense of safety and security in your reader – this can only be done if you offer them a solution that has worked. A recent *Think With Google* article, "From Promotion to Emotion: Connecting B2B Customers to Brands," asserts that B2B buyers are even more emotional than B2C buyers because they have much more at stake. They're aiming to please many people, some of them in positions of power, and often, B2B purchases can represent millions of dollars in expense. Earning their trust can benefit your brand, and make them more likely to buy.

Before You Start Writing a Case Study

Creating a case study that demonstrates your company's results can make other businesses want to use your services. By making it lengthy enough to cover the study and show your actionable results, while keeping it short, you are able to convey what you offer, build credibility, and create an emotional dynamic between you and your reader.

With these B2B Case Study Best Practices, instead of a monster, as the mad scientist so eloquently put, you will have created, "a masterpiece" worthy of your time and your audience's attention.

B2B Webinar Best Practices for Marketers to Win 'Em Over

Have you ever found yourself in the rabbit hole they call YouTube searching one tutorial after another?

I've been there too, and you discover that, you name it, it's been shared and seen on YouTube. Indeed, YouTube is used as a tool to promote pretty much everything. With tutorials spanning from makeup-how-tos to quick and efficient oil changes, it's easy to see how a person can learn at home with the extensive catalog of teaching videos that exist in the YouTube universe. But how can B2B marketers use this craving-for-knowledge to their advantage?

Within this over-saturated world of potential teachers, appears the elusive learning-based ninja – the Webinar. It exists like a B2B Case Study, to prove credibility, engage your audience and teach a valuable lesson. Interesting enough, as you offer your viewer expert insight on a subject matter they didn't really know much about before, you gain admittance into their work-life as a trusted advisor.

So let me humbly be your advisor in this scenario, and let's breakdown this not-so-often-thought-about, but important way of sharing your content. I invite you to B2B Webinar Best Practices.

What is a Webinar?

We know video is the way of the future, but how does a Webinar differ or become more informative than a popular how-to video? It's simple – a webinar educates a viewer on something they either needed more information about or didn't know anything about before. We search for these videos out of necessity, to be taught a lesson, and ultimately, to seek an answer to a question. Oftentimes, video can be the most valuable kind of content marketing – you have the ability to catch a viewer's attention because they instantly make a personal connection with you.

Popular Question: Do I need to use a dedicated webinar platform like GoToWebinar, WebEx or WebinarJam?

If you already have access to one of these services – a lot of enterprise clients already use these or similar communications tools – then go ahead, and give their webinar tool a try. They often provide helpful features like call recording, Q&A chat, and audience metrics. That said, it's not a requirement – particularly if you're just getting into running webinars. Try using Facebook Live or Google Hangouts for your first few webinars to work out any bugs before investing in a dedicated software.

Offering a Free Webinar

Like writing a masterpiece or weaving pictures together, your webinar becomes a powerful product for your business. When you offer this for free, your potential clients will feel like they are getting an exclusive lesson. You're able to answer what they need with a video that will get your company known, and your brand out there. People relate to video, and they feel connected as colleagues, or even better, as friends. It's important to keep this in mind when making this video – you are building unique relationships with a number of people based on a video you are creating.

Think about your past – I'm sure you'll remember those instructors or teachers or mentors who had the greatest impact on your life, and you can carefully craft your video to have your business put on that proverbial pedestal and be remembered as something inspiring and memorable.

Popular Question: What if speaking at a live event makes me nervous?

One of the great benefits of hosting a webinar is that it doesn't require tremendous public speaking skills. Talk to your webinar audience like you would to a colleague or friend. They're attending to learn something of value from you – something you're already an expert on – so take some deep breaths and have fun with it.

Use Your Webinar to Provide Viewers with Expert Education

There's multiple training resources you can find on YouTube – to make yours stand out, offer it on LinkedIn. In a world where we can Skype or Zoom Call our clients, video makes things intimate and personal. We are able to email, call, or text, but video will put a face to your name and help people remember who you are. Fostering this relationship early on with an educational training will help answer questions while having your viewers get to know you.

Instead of a quick call or a PowerPoint slide deck your prospect sees often, they are able to get a real you, often in real-time, right in front of them. (Though, if you're looking to scale and reach thousands of people with a limited time investment on your part, you can offer 'live' webinars that are actually just replays.) And even more appealing, you can write a kick-ass script, and prepare for your webinar giving the best information in the most relevant and eloquent way.

Picking a Topic For Your Webinar

As with any content you are promoting, whether it be a White Paper, eBook, or Case Study, choosing a topic that is relevant to your viewer is ultimately the most important. In a recent Forbes article on hosting webinars and online talks, writer Paul Heald asserts, "think about the staying power you'd like for your content. If your goal is to develop content with a long shelf life, you're going to want to include foundational information, focus on broad industry trends or offer a unique or unconventional point of view."

Indeed, no matter what industry you're in, you'll want a topic that pertains to most of your audience while retaining its *staying* power. In addition, I know we've all been subjected to those boring educational videos that have us nodding off, so get dramatic – no need to pull out your Superman costume, but some compelling scenarios or illustrations can do the trick. However, if you really want to get dressed-up, here's a tip: try something like the B2B Wizard, or the LeadGen Wonder Woman. Or just wear a really unique hat (which is also a great conversation starter at your next B2B conference.)

Popular Question: There are already plenty of webinars in my industry, what can I do to provide information they won't find from one of my competitors?

Use what you got – namely, the good folks already following you on your social media channels – and ask poll questions to see what topics they'd be most interested in learning about. You'll have a chance to engage with them, get their real-time feedback on the topics they're curious about – and by seeing who responded to your poll, you'll have a list of people ready-made to when it comes time to promote your webinar.

Making a List, Checking it Twice

Just like a poignant documentary, a Webinar will take extra development and planning to fill this B2B void – it takes combining answers with a unique filming angle and a sense of wonder. So complete this checklist below, and you'll have yourself a Webinar that makes waves:

- A compelling topic – answer those niche industry questions that nobody has a solution for, or throw a new spin on an existing topic that needs a little dusting-off or resuscitation.

- An amazing speaker – think of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" or FDR's "A Date Which Will Live in Infamy" speech. Both were extremely powerful and left a lasting impact. Whether it's yourself, or a colleague, have someone that has a speaking power that truly resonates.

- Consider the Format – whether it's a Q&A, guest-driven, or it's just you, knowing what your audience will be most receptive to is crucial in this process.

Webinar Promotions Tips (And What to Do Post Event)

To make this a truly effective marketing channel, make the most of your effort. Post event details one week out on all your social platforms to start generating webinar registrations. If possible, create a custom landing page for your webinar that shares all the specifics so it's easy for attendees to share with their own networks. (And while you've got their attention, double down by sharing a few of your existing content marketing resources they can enjoy before the event.)

- 24 hours out, send reminder emails to your registered guests with a short 'teaser' text on some of the key takeaways they'll learn by attending.

- Post-event, send follow-up emails to say thank you for attending, while also offering any additional tips you didn't cover, or a link to the webinar slides or video transcript so they'll get use out of your presentation for months to come.

Now that you have these best practices for B2B webinars, start working on that award-winning script, or watch some how-to videos to start generating your own creative ideas. Remember, being a teacher isn't easy, but it will leave a lasting impact, and your viewers will trust in what you're selling and be eager to build a lasting, professional relationship.

Email Marketing Guide

Lessons Learned from 1 Million Emails

Email marketing can be unpredictable.

With no tried and true formula for success, email marketing strategies that work for one company might flop for the next. So how can we learn from our peers and competitors when it comes to the email marketing experience? Well, the findings of others serve as the perfect launch pad for testing.

In this post, we're rounding up our top findings and everything we've learned along the way in the wild world of email marketing.

Don't make assumptions.

If there's anything to take away from this post it's to never make assumptions. When it comes to crafting email marketing campaigns we can have a gut feeling, a hunch, an educated guess — but nothing holds merit until it's been tested. Email marketing is all about continually improving your message, how? With bonafide AB tests — where two (or more) variants are tested against each other, sent out to recipients at random to determine the most successful subject line, messaging, send time, you name it. Luckily, the most popular ESPs (email service providers) like Constant Contact or MailChimp have AB testing baked right into the platform.

Use a large enough sample size.

To get an accurate result in an AB test, you need a big enough pool. We recommend a ballpark of at least 1,000 email contacts, allowing you to test each variant against 500 people. Not sure how big your sample size should officially be? You can always use a calculator to dissuade any uncertainty before sending emails and gathering data.

Think outside the box.

With the average person receiving over 120 emails a day, it pays to stand out. We found that witty approaches to subject lines work wonders. Our unorthodox subject line — "Does your engagement suck?" — performed a whopping 10% higher than its competing (slightly less salacious) variant. To pull off this colloquial, catchy, and off the cuff subject line, you need empathetic email copy, something along the lines of "don't sweat it, you've got options" or "it's not your fault." After catching their attention, follow up with great email messaging that positions you as an ally, an expert in the field, and a resource.

Segment from the get-go.

You've likely heard it before — when you try to appeal to everyone, you appeal to no one. For this reason, segmentation is key. If you can't email everyone on your list individually, segmentation is the next best step. At the end of the day, email is a tool for communication, sending out a mass email to your list is not effective for striking up meaningful conversations. Plus, segmentation can help you personalize your email messages.

Personalized emails really work.

Personalized emails perform better. We found that including the readers first name in the subject line increased the open rate by 9%. Including your recipient's job title, company name, alma mater, and pretty much any additional information you can collect will make your message more human. It reminds the reader there's someone on the other side of their inbox.

Nail the opt-in.

At the end of the day, we're all recipients of email. We know first-hand how frustrating spam can be, which is why you need a true opt-in. A healthy list is not only the right thing to do, it's better for engagement, deliverability, and your sanity. If your reader isn't expecting your email in the first place, there's a low chance they'll open and a high chance they'll flag you as good old spam. Nervous about deliverability? Take time in your email to remind your readers why you're reaching out to them, how you have their email in the first place, and always give them a chance to unsubscribe and opt-out.

Be honest, friendly, and genuine.

In the B2B space, there's no time to beat around the bush, your emails need to quickly offer your reader something refreshing — value. Identify what it is you're offering in your email and why your recipient should care. Sometimes the hardest part is communicating what you bring to the table. When it comes to reviewing copy, remove any repetitive sentences or ones that don't offer value. Keep it short, simple, and sweet.

Don't forget to test the email send time.

[Your email send time matters](). We found the highest open rate across all emails on Tuesday between 7:00 am and 8:00 am, and the highest response rate Fridays between 11:00 am and 12:00 pm. Emails sent at off-numbered times (like 7:21 am or 7:48) out-performed emails sent or scheduled at the five, ten, and fifteen-minute mark (like 7:30 or 7:45). Sending on off-numbered times makes your message feel less automated and robotic (even if it is scheduled) and you stand out from every other sender delivering messages at that 15-minute increment.

Other proven successful send times include 10:00 am when folks are catching up on late morning emails, 8:00 pm when people are checking their inboxes before bed, and 2:00 pm when people are likely back from lunch trolling their inboxes for a distraction.

Test, review results, repeat.

Once your test comes to a close and you've identified your winning variable, your work isn't quite done. Email marketing is a continuous game of optimization. With an endless combination of messaging, subject lines, recipients, and send times — the testing possibilities are endless. That being said, not every test will be successful. A low performing email is a great way to figure out what doesn't work.

Now go forth and optimize.

At the end of the day, email is a vehicle for conversations. We're all here trying to send the right email, to the right people, at the right time. Finding what works best for you and your audience requires consistent testing (and a sprinkle, ok a heaping spoonful, of optimism). What works for one company, might not work for you but we can all learn a little something from the experience. Our competitor's findings serve as the perfect starting point for our own testing endeavors. So go forth, get testing, and start sparking conversations that build real relationships.

5 Things You Gotta Know

When Writing for SEO

If you're a business with a website, there's no way around this - SEO is a really valuable skillset to develop. The argument made by a lot of SEO agencies is that it's the only way to deliver 'free', reliable organic traffic. Which isn't entirely accurate.

SEO, like any other part of your content marketing strategy, requires an investment of time and resources. It's valuable, but it's not necessarily 'free'. And doing it well demands a smart, considered approach. Admittedly, it's easier to buy paid traffic for your most valuable keywords - and a lot of B2B marketers choose this route over the longer play of SEO. But when you cut your paid ad spend, all that traffic dries up instantly. With SEO, you'll have a reliable source of organic traffic that doesn't rely on feeding money into your ad manager every month.

In addition, B2B's reliance on PPC means that there is a lot of organic traffic up for grabs - you just need to do the work to stake your claim in the SERPs. Visitors that find your site through search engines tend to be more engaged - they bounce less, view more pages and stay longer. All to say, it's very much worth your effort to get a good grasp of SEO fundamentals and incorporate them into your digital marketing campaigns.
There are three key areas of a comprehensive SEO campaign - promotions, optimization and content development. This article will focus on content development - how to create content that ranks well for keywords that are relevant to your business. This is part (light) technical know-how and part creative problem solving. And if you get it right, it can be an incredibly powerful way to bring high-quality prospects to your site.

1. Keyword Research

I won't dive down the rabbit hole on keyword research here. You already know it's valuable, and there are plenty of resources available to help you nail down your strategy. Here are two I recommend:

- How to Woo Google
- Backlinko's Keyword Research Guide

It's worth dedicating a solid afternoon to determining what your industry's high-value keywords are, because it will inform everything else you do after (and how successful you are at doing it). Plus, in doing your research, you'll discover gaps in your existing content strategy that can help inform next quarter's editorial calendar.

2. Page Elements - What Goes Where

When writing for SEO, there are specific page elements that the Google algorithm weighs more heavily when deciding what you should rank for. By including primary keywords and related terms in these elements, you're helping the Google crawler understand what subjects you're talking about on your page and website. That's basically the crux of SEO - helping Google know what your area of expertise is, and providing useful, engaging content for people looking for information on that topic.

Side note: No one knows - save for Google engineers - just how heavily they weigh each of these elements, but it's best practice to incorporate these into your content strategically.

- **H1** - This is a neon sign that tells Google what you're talking about. There should be only one on each page. This is non-negotiable.

- **H2, H3, etc.** - These headers are good places to include related terms, and those 'People also ask' queries that pop up in Google search results. Do not use headers to 'style' your content as that can cause headaches down the road and it confuses the crawler.

- **Page Title** - What appears in the Browser tab when someone is on your site. Your primary keyword should be included here. No more than 60 characters please.

- **Meta Description** - Lots of people skip out on this and it's a lost opportunity. Create a unique meta description for every page of 160 characters or less, and include your primary keyword. This is a good opportunity to give people a reason to choose your content over a competitors.

- **Emphasis** - As with headers, bold and italic fonts are frequently misused to 'style' content. Use these strategically by including your target keywords and related terms as additional clues for the crawler.

3. Semantic Search/Related Terms & Entities

I mentioned 'related terms' pretty frequently in the section above, but if you're new to

SEO, you're likely wondering what these are and why they matter. Related terms are words that you'd likely use if you're talking about any given subject. If your primary keyword is 'baseball', the terms you'd likely use in talking about baseball might be:

- Batter
- Pitcher
- Base
- Outfield
- National pastime
- Innings
- No hitter
- Sports

You get the picture. Related terms are simply extra clues to Google about your subject matter. You can easily find these by doing a Google search for your primary keyword, and seeing which common terms are being used by the current Page 1 rankers. Then, just work them into your content - being mindful to include them in those key page elements whenever possible.

Entities are closely related to related terms, but they're nouns - people, places, things. Common entities in baseball could be:

- World Series
- Nolan Ryan
- Fenway Park
- New York Mets
- Topps baseball cards
- George Steinbrenner

Again, work these into your content where relevant.

Related terms are important because of Google's focus on 'Semantic search'. Their aim is to provide their users with the best possible fit to their search query. So they're looking for as many signals as possible to determine what you're talking about, and how relevant it is to the query. Check out this article from Search Engine Journal for more details.

4. Internal Linking & Anchor Text

A lot of SEOs spend a fair bit of time building backlinks - that is, getting other websites to link to their content. Yes, this is an important piece of the puzzle - I won't discount it. The more relevant external links you have, the more likely it is that Google will see you as an authority in your niche and rank you accordingly. That said, it relies on other people providing you with these valuable links.

In contrast, internal links - links that point to other relevant and helpful content on your own website - are entirely in your control. What other content do you have published on your site that you can reference in a new piece of content? Maybe it's a product page, or a case study. Take advantage of work you've already done and get some extra mileage out of it by including links in your new content.

With every new article or page you add to your site, include 5-10 internal links to your own content. Not only does this help your SEO, but even more importantly, it encourages visitors to further engage with your site. And people who are engaged with you are that much more likely to buy from you. You'll also want to be mindful of your anchor text - the text that you're using as the hyperlink to the other site content. You completely control this too, so use the primary keyword for that target page as anchor text to give Google yet another indicator of what that page is discussing.

5. Creative & Technical Writing

Great SEO-friendly content is a combination of good writing and technical know-how. That's the grand trick - you have to include the necessary keywords, using the technical elements, in the right places - while still making it engaging and reader-friendly. (Because if no one is reading and using your content, all the best SEO hacks in the world aren't going to help you rank.) A good tip on doing this well is to write your content, then revisit it to include any keywords and related terms you may have missed. If you're writing an article on your subject matter that hits the recommended length of 1000-1200 words, you've naturally included many of the related terms in your first pass.

Last tip - don't be afraid to update and improve old content. If you're struggling to get a Page 1 ranking for an article, see what things the current rankers are doing and adapt accordingly. If all your competitors are including video, that's a good sign that you should incorporate video too. If long-form content is popular in your niche, maybe you need to expand on some of your earlier work so you have a better chance of showing up on Page 1.

The great news about all of this is that you can't 'break' anything. If you make some changes and you're not seeing any improvement in rankings positions after a month or so (roughly the amount of time it takes to see new rankings positions settle), revisit your effort and see what other things you might be able to do. It might take a little longer to see movement on some competitive keywords, but once you've gained a Page 1 showing - and see the related increase in organic traffic - it'll be well worth the effort.

14 Content Marketing Tools & Resources

That Make Life Easier (and Campaigns Better)

- Backlinko
  Brian Dean's Backlinko is a Go-To knowledge hub for all things SEO.

- Ubersuggest
  From Neil Patel, Ubersuggest's suite of tools provides an unbelievable amount of data - for free - to improve your SEO and content campaigns.

- Portent Content Idea Generator
  The antidote for writer's block. This free, user-friendly tool will inspire you and have you LOL-ing.

- Moz
  Improve your SEO fast. Moz has an awesome learning center, produces the beloved 'Whiteboard Friday' video series & offers a suite of helpful tools.

- Moz Chrome Plug-In
  The "All-in-one SEO toolbar for research on the go" from Moz delivers on its promises. High-quality metrics to inform your marketing campaigns.

- Grammarly
  Typos and grammatical errors are a huge no-no in professional copy. You don't need to hire an editor, just install this free writing assistant.

- Canva
  Free, high-quality design tools for people who aren't graphic designers but want their content assets to look top notch.

- Subscribers
  A simple software that allows visitors to subscribe to your blog with the click of a button so they don't miss future posts. (And you get recurring visits!)

- Buffer
  A social media scheduling tool so you can promote your winning content, and easily collaborate with your team on content initiatives.

- Upwork
  Expand your team with talented freelancers in a range of disciplines - including writing, admin, web development and more.

- Google Analytics
  To fine tune your campaigns, you need to know how your content is performing with your site visitors. Implementing Analytics is a must-have for any website.

- Page Analytics Chrome plug-in
  See real-time metrics and how site visitors engage with your website with this free Google plug-in.

- Unsplash
  Free, beautiful, royalty free stock photos

- CoSchedule's Headline Analyzer
  Write better headlines. This tool simplifies the process of creating engaging titles.

Meet the Authors

Lainey Mebust

Lainey Mebust is a marketer, word nerd, and Oxford comma enthusiast. As the resident Email Marketing Specialist at LeadCrunch, she's all about bringing the right message to the right people at the right time. With over six years in the industry, B2B is her jam. When it comes to marketing, she believes in the power of keywords, testing, and authenticity. After years in the tech world of San Francisco, she left the zip-up hoodies and puffy vests and brought her expertise to America's finest. When she's not whipping up click-worthy content, you can catch her chasing waves that she doesn't know how to surf (yet).

Kristeen Morales

Kristeen Morales is a Client Success Manager and CopyWriting guru at LeadCrunch. She is passionate about understanding people and helping them succeed in any way possible. Kristeen coaches clients on best practices, and crafts appropriate initiatives to help customers achieve their desired outcomes. She is HubSpot certified in Content Marketing, Lead Management, and Email Marketing. She has spearheaded OnBoarding initiatives and continues to train new-hires in her field.

Kristeen demonstrates the ability to quickly understand the customer voice and company mission, and continues to create a highly-tailored and positive brand interaction. She is an avid writer, publishing content for LeadCrunch as well as a photo-documentary for the University of California, Los Angeles. She resides in beautiful, sunny San Diego, enjoys traveling the world with her sister, and is determined to find the best burrito.

Emma Valentiner

For 15+ years, Emma Valentiner has been writing a lot of copy - for inbound & outbound marketing campaigns, mass-market consumer products, tutorials, customer support documentation, websites, national publications and at least three indie rock records.

As SEO Manager at LeadCrunch, Emma is responsible for orchestrating a multi-pronged SEO campaign - no easy feat in the ultra-competitive B2B industry. She also oversees an enthusiastic, talented team of writers providing clients and prospects with useful, engaging content on B2B content marketing and next-gen demand generation strategies. And in her off-time, she's hard at work on that fourth indie rock record.

Bonus

Is Content Gating a Smart Strategy for B2B?

A Conversation with Carro Ford

In B2B demand generation, content gating is a highly popular strategy for capturing leads. According to Jeff Zabin of Starfleet Media, over 80% of B2B content is gated, requiring either form-filling (i.e. providing personal information) or registration to access.

Done well, content gating can generate a reliable source of quality leads for your pipeline. Done poorly – like gating too much of your content, or gating content too early – will reduce your pipeline, hinder your abilities to develop customer relationships and absolutely tank your demand gen efforts.

How can you use a content gating strategy without alienating great prospects, or gathering false information?

The topic of gated content best practices came up recently in an interview with Carro Ford, the author of The Smartass Marketer's Handbook. Carro is a long-time B2B content marketing strategist for tech companies like Lexmark and Xerox, and she ran her own content and PR firm for years.

Our conversation about content marketing took off when we got to gated content. She offered a thoughtful framework for thinking about this aspect of B2B content strategy. Carro sees the disadvantages in gating so much of our content without approaching it from a strategic standpoint. "It can easily become a method for a company just to capture bad data. I think, most of the time, that's what happens."

She avoids those disadvantages by considering the motivations of prospective customers. At what point do they have enough trust to give up their information? The right content gating strategy attracts prospects and encourages them to share their real information.

Build a winning content gating strategy by asking and answering the 5 Ws: who, what, when, where, and why.

When Content Gating Doesn't Work

According to Carro, a poorly implemented content gate strategy can waste budget, alienate prospects and yields data you don't want and can't use. A lot of that bad data is false right out of the gate. Consider this, how many times have you given false or incorrect data to get past a content gate on a site you didn't know or trust?

Carro says, "It can be intentionally bad information. When people give you their name as 'Mickey Mouse' or they go with inflated titles, it's very suspect."

To stop getting bad data, you have to stop gating content indiscriminately. You have to ask yourself when a content gating strategy is the right addition to your overall B2B demand gen campaign.

When Content Gating Does Work

Content is ready to gate when it meets these conditions:

- You know exactly how you're going to use the data you gather.
- The prospect has already spent enough time in the sales funnel to trust that your company can provide them with a good solution.
- The content value is high.

Hard Stop: If you don't already know what to do with the information you're gathering with gating, what's the point?

Carro says, "Do you have a process in place for what you're going to do with it? If you don't, you may actually get a perfect form-fill, but if it's just going off and sitting somewhere in your form-fill metrics folder, it's not going to help at all. It's just a waste of time. So, you've got to have a strategy for your data and how you're going to use it."

Content gating needs to happen at the right time for your potential customer. Per Carro,

"As you get lower into the bottom of funnel, where people are more serious, that might be a good place to put some gated content out there. They're more willing to work with you if they're that far along."

You're also primed for a content gating strategy when you have high-value, unique content to offer – like sponsored research, proprietary market data, webinars and design guides.

Carro says, "We get people, of course, to register for those. To me, that's a sort of gated content. Or a design guide that's very detailed and lengthy. Very high value. I don't think people mind giving you information for that."

Who? Content Gating & Knowing Your Buyer Personas

Who are your ideal buyer personas? Speak to your sales team so you have a deeper understanding of who exactly you're wanting to sell to. Who do they really want to talk to? Whose pain points can your company solve? Whose data are you trying to capture?

Carro advises, "Reach out to your sales team. Ask them what questions they get asked over and over again. If they could put questions in their customers' mouths, to bring out a differentiation, what would they want to ask? If you can nail those down, even if it's just a couple questions for each of the three stages, and focus content on that, you will make a difference."

Use the "perfect lead" profile you get from sales to create content that is useful to that persona.

"To be useful, you have to know what problems your customers are having that you can solve. Then write about it in a way that helps them understand the problem and figure out what to do about it," Carro says.

Knowing what questions to ask and how to answer them will give you further clarification on when it would be most effective to use content gating in a buyer's journey.

"Focus on answering the questions your customers have at each stage of the buyer's journey. If you can figure out what the questions are and their answers, you'll keep engaged with the customer, and you'll make a difference in their journey."

Consult your Analytics and find out what website visitors are searching for. Who is hitting up your web page, and what information are they looking for? What are the concerns, pain points, and hoped-for solutions that the perfect qualified lead is seeking?

Answering those questions will help you understand who to gate.

Why: Provide A Compelling Reason at the Gate

If you give the right content at the right time, the prospect may initiate contact on his or her own. If the prospect stalls or obfuscates, it's likely you're not offering valuable content, or they think you're being pushy.

Leads have their own timeline and won't submit to your content gates with accurate information before they're ready. Carro recommends not gating the content necessary to begin the customer relationship.

She says, "I think that there are some things that are important and almost imperative to gate, but there's far more stuff that I would not bother gating because I think it gets in the way of a relationship on that journey more than it helps."

Nurturing the prospects with valuable and useful content will make them more amenable to giving up their info.

When you build up that trust, prospects will be more willing to give you the information you need to turn them into leads that sales is looking for.

What Content to Gate and Where to Do It

Carro's advice is that you should only gate content at the bottom of the marketing funnel when the prospect will talk to sales.

What kinds of content should you use in each stage of the sales and marketing funnel?

- **Top of the Funnel Content:**

Carro shares her thoughts on the types of content that will interest a lead in moving closer to a well-planned gate: "Case studies, how-to articles, blogs, infographics, videos. I never even mention my company's name or products specifically. It's more practical advice, useful, listicles, or checklists for your buying team, things like that. I think if you can keep serving that up to a buyer as they're going through a process or a buying team, you're going to build up a perception of being someone who gets it, and someone who's a trusted partner."

- **Middle of the Funnel Content:**

Drive interest with content unique to your company. Think of a topic in your industry that you have all of the answers for and own it. Carro said, "It may be relatively down the long tail content, but if you own the best resource on that, as far as Google can tell, you're going to be picking up good eyeballs on things which may turn into leads."

Carro doesn't call it "pillar" content, she calls it "anchor" content, content that anchors your prospect in the funnel. Anchor content is intriguing to the solution-searching prospect who is now primed to interact. Carro explains, “If you can send people you would normally gate, perhaps, to a page like that, where you give them a variety of good content, they may be more likely to stay there, stay with you. Instead of forcing them to form-fill to get that content, maybe ask them to complete a short survey or register for a newsletter or a blog or something. You can get some insights into their problems.”

- **Bottom of the Funnel Content:**

When the customer reaches this stage, they’re leaning into making decisions. They’re so close, and now they trust you. This is where you put up an easy-open gate to get to the good stuff: webinars, eBooks, sponsored research, etc.

Keep this simple with an email opt-in for gated content. Don’t get greedy by asking for too much information, too soon. All you need is a contact name and email address.

Carro says, “Just keep it to the bare minimum of a name and an email. I think that helps you capture more contacts. Then you can always put those people in a nurture program and capture additional information about them.”

Useful Always, Gated Maybe

Carro ultimately believes that marketing is spending too much time on gating and not enough time on providing useful content. “It’s all about making it useful, not making it gated. I think sometimes we spin our wheels and overthink the gating piece.”

Content that is more confusing than useful is being gated and that can drive prospects away. They filled out a form only to be rewarded with logo-filled infographics that are too complex to decipher. Prospects are after answers to real questions and needs.

Complicated content doesn’t help your team either. Don’t overwhelm your team, sales, and especially not the prospect with overblown content like complicated infographics. Keep it useful, easily digestible and actionable.

When your gate captures the perfect qualified leads that sales wants, Carro recommends, “Provide sales with the right content as they take this lead and continue a conversation with them. They’re out there toughing it out and we really need to do a better job helping them.”

Carro leaves us with these thoughts on B2B content strategy:
“Make the content useful, make it answer good questions, and don’t gate all of it.”

Check out the full podcast interview for more of Carro’s insights on a killer B2B content marketing strategy.

Bonus

B2B Content Marketing

Why Strategy Still Matters for SEO & Sales With Todd Lebo

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:07.9] ANNOUNCER: Live from the city with the most perfect weather ever, San Diego, California, all the way to the gleaming shores of Jacksonville, Florida, it's the Green & Greene Show. Here are your hosts, Dave Green and Jonathan Greene, goofing off instead of working, while unlocking the mysteries of demand gen. The Green & Greene Show is brought to you by LeadCrunch, which creates B2B look-alike audiences.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:37.6] JG: Uh-oh. It's Green & Greene Show time. Prepare yourselves. I'm Jonathan Greene, obviously. I'm here with the Sultan of Sales, the Commissar of KPI. We've got Dave Green. I've also got Todd Lebo. He's here to talk about some fresh, smoking hot, right-off-the-presses research. You will be a complete fool if you don't sit and listen to this. How's it going, fellas?

[0:00:59.6] TL: It's going great. Thank you for having me.
Introducing Todd Lebo, CMO of Ascend2, AKA 'The Man'

[0:01:03.4] JG: It's my pleasure. Todd, if you don't know, is a partner and the chief marketing officer at Ascend2. He's been doing marketing and content for 20 or more years with names like MarketingSherpa, Kiplinger, and the National Institute of Business Management. We're not talking about some old scrub content marketer. We're talking about "The Man" is in the house.

[0:01:27.1] TL: You got the old part right.

[0:01:30.6] JG: Well, welcome. Listen, I took a look at this thing and I was surprised at some of the stuff that I saw actually. I was surprised to find that SEO was the lowest primary objective for content marketing and brand awareness was the highest. What do you think about that?

[0:01:47.6] TL: It's interesting. A couple thoughts on, a lot of times, how people rank things. Sometimes, I think, if they're having a hard time moving their SEO, they just don't prioritize it high, because maybe they haven't had a whole lot of success with it before. I always encourage people. Just because it's difficult doesn't necessarily mean they need to shove it to the end of their priority list. I think, sometimes, that might be one of the reasons. I mean, SEO has got to be up there higher, because you can have the best offer, the best product, but nobody knows about you. You're not going to have a whole lot of sales, unless you have the guru over there, Dave, selling your things.

[0:02:29.7] JG: You should all be so lucky. Personally for you, what are the biggest takeaways from that research? Guys, if you don't know, I dropped a link to this research product down in the description. Go ahead and click on that. They're charging the low-low price of your e-mail address for it. Totally worth it. I can vouch for a fact that they don't spam you or any nonsense. Just go ahead and grab that. What were your biggest takeaways, Todd?

The Relationship Between Engagement & High Quality Sales Leads

[0:03:00.6] TL: Well, okay, a couple of things I thought was when we looked at it. This is all about engagement. How do you get people involved? How do you get them starting to talk about your company, get involved in your content? We're looking at that. When we looked at the challenges, and I think it really aligns a little bit with what you guys really are good at, but it's improving sales quality leads.

David, I know you and I have done research in the past. Anytime you talk about lead generation, you talk about quality and this balance that people have on quantity versus quality. You can just see here that aspect of, "We need people to engage with us and our content," but it has to be in these stages where you're getting higher quality sales leads for your sales guys. Yeah, that jumped out right away. I don't know what you thought, Dave, looking at it, but that was one point that I saw.

[0:04:08.7] DG: Yeah, I love this benchmark research. Todd, you and I have been involved with benchmark research for since before you started with Ascend, back in the MarketingSherpa days. As long as I can remember, there has been a high priority on improving lead quality for demand gen marketers. I think they really struggle with it, because they also have somebody whipping them saying, "You've got to get to a certain volume."

[0:04:42.7] TL: Right.

[0:04:43.4] DG: Those two things usually come into conflict a little bit.

[0:04:47.5] TL: Yeah, it's funny. We're here a day away from the end of the month, and I always feel at the end of the month, the quantity tends to rule. Everybody, at the beginning of the month, is talking about quality and, "Oh, we need to have higher quality leads." Everybody's somewhat patient at the beginning of the month. By the end of the month, all of a sudden, it's like, "Well, why don't we have X number of leads?" I mean, we're creatures of habit, but I don't know, Dave. I know you're more closely tied into this, maybe, than I am, but that's what I see.

[0:05:22.1] DG: Yeah, yeah. Actually, it gets really crazy at the end of a quarter.

[0:05:27.5] TL: Yeah, it can. You used to have hair before the end of the quarter.

[0:05:34.8] DG: Todd, what has your research shown about ways where content marketing can actually help with driving higher quality leads?

Understanding Content Needs For Every Stage of the Funnel

[0:05:46.0] TL: Yeah. There are a couple of things we see. One is determining what type of content you need at different stages of the funnel. For example early on you might need to just educate people on the fact that there is a problem they need to solve, or that there's a need for a product. You don't necessarily need to tell them it's your product yet, but you need to make them realize that they have a problem, and that's certain type of content. Benchmark research can be really good for that identifying what the problem is.

Then, you start getting into that aspect of, "Well, what are the solutions?" building trust with your brand, and maybe some case studies and things of that nature, looking at the type of content you need at various stages and all based on trying to build trust. That was one of the data points that we saw on the data. I'm going to look to the side, because I have the data over here, but it was asking what type of content is most trusted by audiences. For example, number one was researching case studies, infographics, photos, blog posts, it goes down. You really should download the report to see all the data, but you're building that trust, getting people comfortable with you. Then, as they do, they're going to take that next step and talk to a salesperson and hopefully purchase.

[0:07:24.0] DG: Yeah. I think we're in an age of distrust with folks. You see, part of the rise of social media is just to be able to have a way to go ask somebody besides the vendor what they think, the rise of these review sites like G2 Crowd and Software Advice. There's so much hype out there that trust is really breaking down, and it's easy for people to exaggerate. I think that's one of the reasons that they're ranking benchmark and case studies higher. What have other people said about this? Who do you know that's actually used this darn thing and having success with it? It's actually not a very surprising outcome. It makes total sense.

[0:08:08.8] TL: Dave, when we used to work together at MarketingSherpa, they had this great vision. Early on, they knew that to really grab the attention of marketers, it was all about case studies, but case studies with the marketer. You're not with the vendor, but with the marketer. Getting them up there and talking about the nitty-gritty. What do the numbers say? What did they do? How do they do it? How did it work? What were the challenges along the way? All those things. You can probably go through your products and some of the questions that you get from your customers and start using that as the basis for some of the content you create, answering those questions. By the time they get to your site, they've probably done a lot more research about you than you're controlling. Yeah. I think you have to adapt.

[0:09:10.6] DG: Yup, absolutely.

How Should You Measure Your B2B Content Marketing Campaigns?

[0:09:13.0] JG: In looking at a couple of the key outcomes of your survey, I think I've found a misalignment, or at least it appears to be misalignment to me. Leads generated is sourced as a top metric. This is how people are measuring their content marketing. The top objective is brand awareness. Is there a misalignment there in the way that marketers are approaching content marketing, or at least measuring it, in your opinion?

[0:09:39.5] TL: There probably is. I think a lot of that has to do with maybe comfort level. Brand awareness has always been a challenge to quantify. I think, for example, leads generated is the important metric and it's also something you can easily quantify. I think sometimes that goes into play. Brand awareness is always a tricky metric to get your arms around. We are finding more and more that marketers are sucking it up and trying to get metrics that are maybe a little bit more difficult to bring together but are very revealing. They reveal, I think, maybe what's really working for a customer or for client.

[0:10:31.9] JG: Yeah. I love what you said a minute ago, because we spend a lot of time trying to consult with people and counsel people on aligning in their content marketing efforts with the various stages of the funnel. I think your response was pretty intuitive. You simply take whatever questions you're getting from people at various stages of the funnel and just answer them with content and then curate it back to the market at large. That's probably a pretty good starting point for strategy.

An Easy, Actionable Tip From the Sales Lion

[0:10:58.6] TL: It is. I remember a case study by Marcus Sheridan, The Sales Lion. He had a pool company. He realized that he needed more content marketing to generate high-quality leads. He just went out to his salespeople and said, “What are the top five questions that we get from customers?” After he put all that together and made this top 10 list, he wrote his first 10 blog posts addressing those, and everything went from there. Just applying logic and information you have hopefully at your disposal with your analytics and with your marketing and sales professionals.

[0:11:44.4] JG: How can you tell when it’s working? This is a question that I get a lot. People want to know, “My content marketing, is it working, or is it not?” presumably with some mechanism other than lead generation. I tend to think that people don’t ask that question if their content marketing is generating a ton of leads. If it’s not, how else can you look at this thing to see if you’re skinning the cat correctly?

[0:12:08.8] TL: There were no injuries to cats in the making of this production. Well, it’s interesting. For example, this week, one of my clients came back and they ended up doing multiple programs with us. The metric they were looking at was a multi-touch, recurring revenue. To them, they’re a software company. Their model is recurring revenue. They were, I think, wise enough to look at multiple touches, not just looking and attributing the revenue to the first touch of a lead coming in, but looking at the eight to 10, 20 touches that that lead had, attributing revenue to those various touches.

How Your Business Model Informs Your Revenue Attribution

That gave them, I think, a much clearer picture of the success of the program. I think you really have to look at your business model. We don’t like to make things complex, but I think we do have to start getting a little bit more complex in looking at multiple touches, the journey that somebody goes through to make a sale. Until we get there, until we go through the hard work of figuring that out, I think we’re always going to have the danger of making bad decisions; first decisions on how this campaign worked. You might find out later it didn’t work as well as you thought, and maybe other campaigns worked better. I don’t know if I’m talking in circles, David, but I think those are some of the things I’ve been seeing with just adding layers to your analytics.

[0:14:01.9] DG: No, it makes perfect sense. We’ve actually talked quite a bit about the funnel and attribution here with different guests. I think one of the things I learned from one of the guys that you and I both know, John Powell, is it’s like that old carpenter thing: cut once, measure twice. Marketing is like that. You have to measure it from a number of different angles, sometimes, to really get clarity on what’s happening and why it’s happening in order to be able to even ask the right questions.

I think, sometimes, in our rush to make sure we’ve checked the box on 14 different things we ought to do, we don’t always take the time to slow down and just measure things and ask ourselves why.

[0:14:47.7] TL: Right. Sometimes we're a little bit too quick to judgment.

[0:14:51.4] DG: Yup.

[0:14:52.8] JG: Again, I'm looking at the survey. I don't want to give away all your cool stats, but it doesn't seem like content marketing is waning. I've heard a lot of talk about peak content and this and that and the other, and how the internet had become so dense with content, that it wasn't worth doing anymore. Looking at your research, a vast majority of people say that they're going to either moderately or significantly increase their content marketing spend. Put on your futurist hat for a minute and tell me what this is going to look like in a couple of years and how we can prepare ourselves for it.

[0:15:27.8] TL: I see the trend continuing. The trend we're seeing is definitely that marketers are seeing it's not about making mass quantities of content, but making more targeted or higher quality content and probably repurposing things in a strategic way. I think there was that point where it's just about getting as much content out as possible.

Now we're realizing that that's just a lot of white noise.

If you can have your stamp on something, whether it be maybe a cool research study that's helpful for your audience or some case studies and how-tos to really clarify not only what to do, but how to do it, and you're putting it very strategically in that funnel, that's where content marketing is going is really getting them aligned to the various stages of the sales process.

Even having multiple funnels. For example, here at Ascend2, we sell a lot to agencies and we sell to software companies, beta companies, marketing technology firms. It's really a different sales process. The needs and what they're looking for are very different, and we have to break out our content and our marketing to them in two distinct ways and really look at what we're providing each audience. I think that's like that aspect of really segmenting what you're doing and having that deeper plan than what we had before.

[0:17:22.2] JG: Sure. What do you think, Dave? Deeper plans, yay or nay? Do you like this strategy thing, or what he's trying to do?

Content Strategy, Home Buying & Construal Theory

[0:17:33.4] DG: I think we don't spend enough time on strategy. I definitely don't think we spend enough time trying to understand our customers and the questions they have at the different stages of the funnel. If you think about anything that you buy yourself that's a considered purchase, the questions you have at the beginning are very different than the ones you have later on. Think about the last car you bought or the last house you bought.

Let's just take the case of a house. You start by thinking. What do you get for a certain price range? What neighborhoods might be attractive? Those are the big questions. Then, when you get down to the house, it's like, "What's this neighborhood look like and do I like the layout?" They're just different questions that you don't bother with at the beginning, until you've narrowed it down.

I think, no matter what you're looking at, you start thinking about the different questions that people are asking as they make progress, you can start to generate content that aligns to those questions that they're going to have at different stages. I think we call it the construal level theory.

[0:18:45.1] JG: Yeah, we did an episode on that. If anybody's watching and you're interested in that, we did a whole Green & Greene episode on that. Go dig through the video tab on our Facebook page and find it, because we nerded out with John Powell on that topic extensively, whom you've already referenced once today. Real smart guy. Had a very interesting perspective on construal level theory.It's a fancy way of saying what people need changes depending upon where they are in the process of becoming a buyer. You think of it like a mental journey. You can set up mental gas stations along the way for them to fuel up and continue that journey. That's what the basic idea of construal level theory is in a nutshell.

[0:19:31.8] DG: Hey, Todd. I want to ask you about integrating benchmark research into your content marketing strategy. Obviously, you guys have a vested interest, but I think it's really just a fantastic idea. What are your thoughts about where to do it, why to do it?

Why Research is Good for Rapid Growth in Brand Awareness & SEO

[0:19:50.2] TL: Sure. Why to do it? We'll start with start with that one probably. I think there are two different places where research really works well. One is that branding and early on, for example, something like we were looking at today on content marketing where you're trying to first develop the why it's important, what's going on, and trying to really engage people early on. Research is really strong in that area. The second place I think it's really good is whenever you are trying to distinguish yourself from the competition.

When we've looked at other people in the industry, we benchmark here compared to our competition. You're looking at maybe a Forrester-type report or a Gartner report where you're showing and actually proving the fact that you're the best at doing X compared to your competition.

Then the how. I would say, a lot of times, what we find is and what we try to work with our partners is just making sure that they maximize the value of the research. What I mean by that is you do a research study, you gather data, you create a report like you can download from us. Then, not everybody consumes content like that. A lot of times, a webinar or a live Facebook is a great place to take that research and then also digest it in that format, an infographic maybe.

A lot of times, research is really good. We talked about how difficult SEO can sometimes be, but media, they'll cover research. If they cover your research and provide you backlinks, that's a very powerful way to increase your SEO, increase your brand awareness, that trust factor. Trying to get third parties to cover your research can be fantastic in that area. I'm attaching it, then, to my PR efforts as well. Then, of course, attach it to leads by having maybe some of it gated, so people can download it, but you can start incorporating that conversation into your sales process.

For example, if I'm a salesperson, trying to engage Dave with my services, maybe I say, "Hey, Dave. We just did this research. Thought of you as a leader at LeadCrunch and here's the report." It's a non-threatening way to start that conversation, to reengage Dave. As compared to, "Hey, Dave. It's been 30 days. Why haven't you purchased from me?"

I think there are a lot of different ways you can take that research and start just thinking about how to multiply it. As marketers, I think one of the things we see that can be a challenge is sometimes we just move on to the next project too quickly. We leave a lot of unused opportunities on the table for what we currently have. I think there are a lot of different ways to break it up, but those are some things that we've seen.

We just had some of our research featured last week by MarketingProfs. We've had it featured by Forbes and people like that. You get all kinds of great SEO juice from that, and just recognition. I've gone to conferences and people are like, "Oh, yeah. I just read your research report." Right away, I know that we have overcome at least one hurdle of maybe trust and recognition. Those are some of the things that we find with the research.

[0:24:03.8] DG: Yeah, that point of sharing research and getting backlinks, that was something that we got a lot of when you and I used to be at MarketingSherpa. We'd send that out to various thought leaders. My goodness, lots of people would reference that. You can still find in Google searches references to benchmark reports that MarketingSherpa did six, seven years ago even.

This is stuff that has a long shelf life and a lot of appeal for that topic that we started with, organic traffic and SEO and how to do it well. Those backlinks are really critical, and I think this is a key compartment for that.

Pro Tip on How to Build Industry Cred Fast

[0:24:44.4] TL: A matter of fact, one little tip I'll give for free that really works for us. I have a list now of I would say 20 or 30 thought leaders and media companies that are important to our industry, to my industry. When we do research, I will send out personal e-mails to those thought leaders and media companies. Half the battle is just getting in front of them. Getting front of them. I know that if some of those companies, like last week, I said about MarketingProfs, when they featured us, I can guarantee that within 30 days, there'll probably be a good 20 to 30 other bloggers that reference that research, because they're going to the thought leaders in their industry to get ideas. My thought is if I can get a couple of those influencers to feature it, it's going to trickle down very quickly. That's been a great little thing that's worked well for us and for a lot of our clients as well.

[0:25:54.6] JG: Guys, we've been discussing the content marketing engagement report hot off the presses yesterday, Todd Lebo and Ascend2 just released that, and he was nice enough to come on and talk to us. You can download that. We have the link in the description. Highly encourage you to do that. Their research is always on point.

We've got time for maybe a couple more questions, Dave. Do you have any burning desires you want to ask your man about there?

SPORTS

[0:26:21.2] DG: Yeah, who have you got in the NBA finals, Todd?

[0:26:25.8] TL: I'll do the easy Golden State Warriors, man. In five.

[0:26:31.1] JG: In five, you say. Those guys can shoot the rock. Have you ever seen anything like that in your life?

[0:26:35.2] TL: I know. It's crazy. You've got to defend them from half court.

[0:26:39.0] DG: Just Todd in driveway.

[0:26:41.8] JG: Yeah, defending Steph Curry from the parking lot. You've got to press that guy when he gets out of his car.

[0:26:47.8] TL: Exactly. Well, it's funny. We're talking about strategy and it's fun to watch them play, because their offense is like an orchestra. It's pretty cool to see.

[0:27:02.6] DG: All the non-NBA fans now are having a little bit of throw up come in their mouth. I thought this is going to be demand gen and content marketing. What's this about?

[0:27:14.3] JG: It's about whatever I say it's about, Dave. It's my show and you will listen to every word that I say. No, I'm just kidding.

[0:27:25.0] TL: I'm sure we can blame a Green(e) on this show. I mean, it's two-thirds of the opportunity there.

[0:27:31.7] JG: Yeah. All right, I think we're done. Todd Lebo, it's always a pleasure. Thank you for coming on.

[0:27:34.2] TL: Okay. Thank you, guys.

[0:27:36.8] JG: Guys, you're silly and ridiculous if you don't download this report. Just figured I'd mention it one more time. That being said, I'm going to play the music and we will catch you on the flip-side. It's been real.

[0:27:48.3] TL: It has been. Take care guys.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:27:55.9] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for tuning in to the Green & Greene Show by Lead-Crunch. Green & Greene think differently about B2B and are starting a movement to transform demand gen. If you have ideas for topics or would like to be a guest, send an e-mail to david.green@leadcrunch.ai. If you'd like to find more customers, visit our web-site to talk to one of our demand gen guides, www.leadcrunch.com.

[END]

Watch the video episode of this interview here.

Bonus

The Unconventional Approach

to Programmatic Advertising with AI

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.1] ANNOUNCER: Live from deep in the heart of Galveston, Texas all the way to the gleaming shores of Jacksonville, Florida, it's the Green & Greene Show. Here are your hosts, Dave Green and Jonathan Greene, ready to unlock the mysteries of scaling demand gen. The Green & Greene show is brought to you by LeadCrunch, which has reimagined how to find B2B customers at scale.

[INTERVIEW]

Dave Comes Clean With the Audience

[0:00:23.8] JG: Dave Green.

[0:00:26.8] DG: You know, we have been dishonest with our audience, Jonathan. I am no longer in Galveston.

[0:00:36.0] JG: I know.

[0:00:37.0] DG: I am now in beautiful San Diego, and all you people in the other parts of the world can eat your hearts out because you don't have the best weather ever.

[0:00:45.7] JG: It is. It's like I get off the plane in San Diego and my body automatically feels better. No humidity, it's ridiculous.

[0:00:55.2] DG: I have actually started to age backwards now. It's incredible.

[0:01:01.6] JG: We're going to have to have new intro music made. I kind of want to get a hypeman, too like a hip hop: "The Green & Greene show, what? Yo!" Something like that. Have a little something for the kids, I guess.

[0:01:15.7] DG: Yeah.

AI in Programmatic Advertising & Rad Results

[0:01:17.0] JG: Anyway, we're going to talk about programmatic advertising today, and specifically, we're going to talk about artificial intelligence in programmatic advertising. We have done some experiments and the results are pretty rad, so we might want to just go ahead and throw that out there. What do you think?

[0:01:35.8] DG: Absolutely. Just to clarify, you know, AI has been used in programmatic in order to do bidding. This is using AI to do targeting, which I think is way more important.

[0:01:50.6] JG: I think it's way cooler anyway. Everybody has this problem. Unless you're using a very specific ABM list, you sit down at your computer terminal to do top-of-funnel programmatic display advertising for awareness campaigns the top of funnel and the targeting options that are available to you are somewhat uninspiring.

With your general stuff that most people use, like the Bombora segmentations and stuff like that, you have general programmatic data. This is, as far as I know, the first real true artificial intelligence application of targeting for top-of-funnel programmatic, which is how it's conceptually meant to work.

Instead of doing all that segmentation and stuff, you would just bring a list of your best customers and we would feed that list into our artificial intelligence machine, and it would go out and find the data, algorithmic commonalities between those companies that you had success with already.

Then it applies that to a large data set, in this case, the universe of B2B businesses and in North America, not necessarily B2B which is businesses in North America. It compares that data set of businesses in North America to the algorithmic pattern that you developed from your best customer list, and it returns a list of people to whom you should market based on those you've already had success with. That's pretty freaking cool if you think about it.

How Gartner Helped Us Key in on our Real Target Audience

[0:03:34.5] DG: Not to get too technical because, you know, part of my audience is in California, where they might not really get it but… my point is that, to build lookalike model is when you put your best customers in there. They're doing kind of what a sales person would do. They're going out and looking at sites and looking for keywords that are unusual which seem to be indicative and part of this profile of customers.

What's close? We do this for ourselves and did it on this experience and found that, if the customer had the word "Gartner", for example, the technology giant, that tells you what kind of CRM to get and stuff like that, it was a good indicator. Why? They're licensing content probably from Gartner and they tend to be good prospects for us.

I don't think that even our best sales guys would have necessarily come to that kind of a nuanced conclusion, and every company is going to be different. That probably has nothing to do with what's important to you, but there probably is a key to all of those sides from which a really good sales person could say, "Yeah, these guys look like they're a good prospect." That's sort of the essence of that modeling.

We have other kinds of models, too, but I just thought, in this case, that was the type of model that was used. I thought it was so different than, "Give me all the people that are this size in these industries." You know, that's like trying to cut bread with a river rock. It's just not very precise.

On top of that, this was an internal experiment, and Jonathan, if you didn't know this, it's like he's not just a black belt, but there's some darker color after that in digital. I was thinking, "Well, this is going to buy us a test." It's got to be done for the average Joe. Jonathan was way ahead. He actually outsourced it to an agency that did all the creative and didn't put all the Jonathan magic to it and just to make it like what everybody else would get.

Jonathan, do you want to walk people through the experiment and what the results were?

[0:06:40.0] JG: You make a fair point not to espouse the idea that I'm like some sort of magenta belt or something, I don't know.

[0:06:48.5] DG: You are.

Jonathan Runs an Advertising Experiment

[0:06:49.9] JG: I don't know what the next color would be, but anyway, the point is that I'm good at digital, so if I just ran my creative against somebody else's creative, I would win nine times out of 10. I've been doing it for so long, so I didn't do that. I set the test up and I held static the creative. I had the creative display banner ads generated by an agency so they were identical. Roughly identical number of impressions, that's really hard to hold static, but we held static budget. We held static bids, everything that we needed to do.

This is a head-to-head test between two targeting segments which is what we wanted to get at. I took the LeadCrunch-generated artificial intelligence look-a-like audience segment for our business, for LeadCrunch. I took our best customer list and submitted that to the AI. The AI spit out a list of lookalikes to go after and then I used LiveRamp to append cookie and device ID to that and hung it in TradeDesk. Then we ran a head-to-head against a typical top-of-funnel targeting segment, like the Bombora segment that we use, which is essentially a segment of advertising and marketing executives in North America.

This is what a lot of people do with their top-of-funnel demand generation. This is a proxy for what most marketers would do right. I ran that for 30 days and came up with the results.

… and Shares the Results of Using a Lookalike Audience

We ended up getting a 285% lift over the control with that particular experiment, which is tremendous. I mean, that's three times the click-through rate in terms of the click-through rate. That's everything to do with targeting. The creative was identical between both targeting segments. That initial experiment was very successful. We're very excited about potential here. That's what we did.

Define Best Customer

[0:08:59.6] DG: Yup. You know, just so people know, best customers is kind of an amorphous term, and you can actually be very precise with your definition of a best customer. These could be best customers for a product in your product line. These could be big spenders. They could be from a segment of the market that you want to go after.

However you want to define best customers, we can use the same approach and find people to look like that side of best customers. I think the possibilities with this are really spectacular, and I'm pretty excited. I think you're just getting started. There's a whole series of tests you're going to be doing around this same framework over the next several months.

[0:09:47.5] JG: Yeah, absolutely. You can categorize marketers into buckets, in a sense. At the low end of the spectrum, you have people who are sort of upstarts and would grab a general targeting Bombora-style segment and run that. They don't really know what else to do, so that's the initial test. If that's you, if you're just getting started in programmatic, come to us. Our targeting is going to revolutionize what you're doing.

More sophisticated people who have the skills to go out and curate an ABM audience, for instance, are using traditional programmatic-plus layered data, like maybe Discover-Org or something. I want to test against those audiences next and see what the list looks like for our artificial intelligence against an ABM list.

I suspect we will still get a lift. I don't suspect it will be 300%, but it may be 150% or something in that range in terms of improved click-through rate, even over ABM list. If that happens, obviously, we'll be very excited to go to market with that.

[0:10:57.4] DG: Incredible story, Jonathan, incredible success. Is there anything else you think the audience might want to know? I have one thing, but I'll defer to you.
Real Talk on Artificial Intelligence for B2B

[0:11:11.1] JG: Listen, not all artificial intelligence is created equal. A lot of people are throwing the word around, you see it on just about every B2B services website now. If somebody is claiming that they have artificial intelligence, you need to research what they mean. Predictive analytics and what we're doing are not the same thing.

We have devised a completely different way of analyzing businesses that includes but does not hinge upon programmatic data. This is like an entirely new way of looking at things, and it's not been done. Our artificial intelligence really is intelligent in a way that most people cannot approach.

I think it's an important point of differentiation.

[0:11:59.0] DG: Yeah. By the way, I think the word "artificial" is the operative word in some of the artificial intelligence claims and I agree. I think you have to really peel the onion on that and find out exactly what they mean and how they're doing it.

You know, they may have some wonderful application of artificial intelligence, but I think it has become such a buzzword, it's being grafted onto everything, whether it applies or not. Even small services business that don't have the data scientists or a programmer on staff are going to be using artificial intelligence now, I just saw one yesterday.

The thing that you've done, for anybody who is trying to do programmatic advertising, I thought was really interesting, Jonathan. I wonder if you could just take two minutes, but it's the idea that, often, you're not driving somebody to a landing page with a lead capture form.

That's not the objective, but you're trying to educate them a little and cooking them and following them with other ads that ultimately get them to convert. Can you talk a little bit about that philosophy? I thought it was really fascinating the way you were doing that, and I suspect other people might find some value in learning about the thinking behind it.

Top of Funnel vs. Middle of Funnel

[0:13:20.3] JG: Yeah. From a strategy perspective, people spend an awful lot of money at the extreme top of funnel, trying to get a lead capture, which if you think about it, is really more of a top-middle of the funnel position activity. I didn't think of lead capture as more of a middle-of-the-funnel activity.

Top of funnel, all I want to do from my strategic perspective is to begin to familiarize people with my brand and how my product operates, what the value proposition of the brand is and what our specific operates are. I think that, especially when you're launching a new or a revolutionary product, people are not quite ready. The value is not there yet for them to exchange their data for whatever it is that you have behind your lead gate.

The only way to move them to the point where there is going to be an appropriate value exchange is to begin by having a conversation, by curating information that's interesting and moving. There's no burden to it, so people can engage when they learn about your brand and then, look, when people click through my programmatic ads, they land on a story. It's a page called "A Tale of Three Marketers". It's illustrated, it looks like a cartoon, basically, but it's about this marketer named Jen who is having a very specific problem that all marketers can relate to. You hit this landing page and you get engrossed in the story and you find yourself clicking through.

The hero of the story ends up being the artificial intelligence that we have available and what it could do for Jen. Her problems are like, "I can't prove my ROI," or, "My targeting sucks," or just, "My sales team hates my leads."

[0:15:07.0] DG: Hey, Jonathan, there is no one in the audience who has experienced those kinds of problems.

[0:15:12.4] JG: Yeah, right. I bet you every one of them has at least one of those problems right now. I know I do, and everybody does as well.

Anyway, the point is I'm familiarizing. I'm telling a story. I'm engaging people rather than converting them. When you get to the point of conversion, I don't know what everybody here pays for brand leads, somebody who has decision-making authority and who is well-indoctrinated on the brand and who is ready to buy, but by the time I'm done with my nurture process right now, it's costing me $72.

I'm looking at my Facebook, $72 to capture brand leads and give them to the sales team. That's fantastic in the B2B space. Most people are probably paying a multiple of that, I imagine. That's because of this top-of-funnel-like nurturing engaging strategy.

[0:16:01.0] DG: You do have the people who are fooled by volume and by very inexpensive leads because that's what they can measure, the cost per lead, and that's how they think they're extracting value from the spend.

If and when they're able to close the loop, not in every case but in most cases, sales quickly learns that those aren't worth following up with and there's no ROI whatsoever. It's actually even more negative because you wasted sales capacity which is very expensive on something that doesn't convert.

[0:16:36.8] JG: Yeah, I should clarify those $72 leads are people who are actually saying, "Let me talk to sales."

Why Conversation Leads Are a Truly Valuable Metric

[0:16:44.0] DG: Yeah, we have a nomenclature here we use. Nomenclature is a big word for a phrase. We used to distinguish between leads that really just introduce themselves and are willing to give us some information about themselves in exchange for a white paper or whatever, and then we get people who we believe are ready to talk to sales.

That's a much smaller subset, we call those ones conversation leads because that kind of describes, in our mind, what people do. I know there's all the Sirius Decisions lingo out there about NQLs and SQLs, but I always liked language, and this comes up with something that's easier to remember and descriptive of what it does for these stages.

[0:17:33.8] JG: Yup. Best to just keep it simple. I tested this targeting technology at the extreme top of funnel for that sort of awareness campaign. I suspect that, when we get to the middle of funnel with the same technology, we're going to find that the conversion rates in terms of lead capture are higher as well.

It makes sense. Think of it this way. You can start with the Atlantic Ocean, trying to catch a specific kind of fish or you can start with a stock pond. We're starting with the stock pond, so it's much easier to catch the fish that you want to catch.

[0:18:08.0] DG: Yeah, there's also another benefit. If sales people have to go find people who will buy it from them, their bias is towards people who will buy, not whether the customer is going to be a good fit. Yeah, there are really professional sales people who will, in fact, steer people in another direction when it's not a good fit, but a lot of sales people don't.

The downstream problem with that is that your customer service department or customer success team is getting a lot of grief from the customer because they're unhappy with the decision they've made. It's hard to really build a robust business if you're leaking customers out the back end, and so you're doing something to try to find out, "What can I do to replicate more customers that tend to be happy with us?"

That's a really under-appreciated part of demand generation. Rather than, as you said, trying to boil the ocean, really getting very focused and very targeted, I've always found that, in a lot of aspects of life, focus matters a lot. Whether it's getting your product portfolio focused, the way that Apple did when Steve Jobs came back and took more than a hundred products and reduced it to three or four, or targeting your audience in a more precise way, focus really does help with efficiency.

[0:19:45.6] JG: Absolutely. That's it, you know. That's what we wanted to talk about today, but I wonder if anybody has any questions. There are a few people on, you go and drop them. We'll give it a minute or two. I guess while we're doing that, Dave, parting thoughts? Anything else?

[0:20:02.2] DG: Here's a question. They're asking why we don't wear hats.

[0:20:07.0] JG: Man, listen, I make this look good.

[0:20:12.4] DG: A polished man.

[0:20:14.2] JG: No. Look, I got the sides tightened up not long ago. Beard looking robust, it's fluffy but soft. Feel this, it's like…

[0:20:23.4] DG: I'll take your word for it.

[0:20:28.3] JG: It's fantastic, I don't need a hat.

[0:20:30.3] DG: All right folks, thanks so much.

[0:20:32.5] JG: All right, no questions, we're done. It's been The Green & Greene Show.

Get yourself some top-of-funnel programmatic advertising mojo. Give us a call; we'd be happy to help you.

It's been real, we'll talk to you next time.

[0:20:46.5] DG: Bye.

Watch the video episode of this discussion here.

About The Green & Greene Show

Hosted by marketing experts Dave Green and Jonathan Greene, this popular weekly podcast tackles the real challenges of B2B marketing today. From demand generation to content marketing to improving alignment with Sales, Green & Greene share hard-won insights and battle-tested strategies - and have a great deal of fun while doing it. No sugar-coating, just real marketing strategies that work.

View our complete episode archive here.

LeadCrunch[ai]

Who We Are

The Problems We Solve

Despite technology advancements, even the best marketing teams get very low conversion rates throughout the funnel. Plus, most marketing teams must argue constantly to get revenue credit for marketing influenced leads. Conflicts with sales over lead volume and lead quality are never ending.

These problems stem from B2B complexity. B2B buying behavior involves multiple stakeholders, evolving buying criteria, and an elongated consideration cycle. The sales and marketing tech stack has thus far only increased this complexity.

Our Experience Design

We think differently about how to find and grow lasting B2B relationships. Scaling relationship development with Artificial Intelligence (AI) necessitates a data model that describes the B2B ecosystem. The data must not be a snapshot in time but a network of everchanging people, ideas, and companies. Mere firmographic models are too inaccurate and simplistic.

Scaling relationship development also means analyzing not just your hand-raisers, who convert infrequently, but your ideal customers. With such profiles, AI can predict who will buy and their buying capacity and buying longevity, not just who will respond.

Because the B2B ecosystem is constantly changing, your marketing model must learn continuously, too. The LeadCrunch always-on AI platform adapts to competitive threats, ideas that are changing market perceptions, and changes to your solution portfolio and business strategy. This continuous learning means tightly integrating content marketing with audience targeting, delivering a stream of proactive insights, and feeding outcomes back into the platform to improve targeting and insights.

Above all else, the design must simplify the complexity and make marketers the new maestros of shareholder value.

Our Services

We make it easy to pilot our AI-driven B2B marketing system. No complicated tech stack integrations. No long-term commitments. Only pay for qualified leads who engage with your content. We can also nurture the leads with your content, identify additional personas within an account for your sales team to engage, or even engage and nurture those additional personas in each account. Each lead is multi-touch verified and guaranteed to meet your campaign criteria and contain valid data.