



Content Marketing: What's Old is New Again

“Content Marketing is the Only Marketing Left”

– Seth Godin

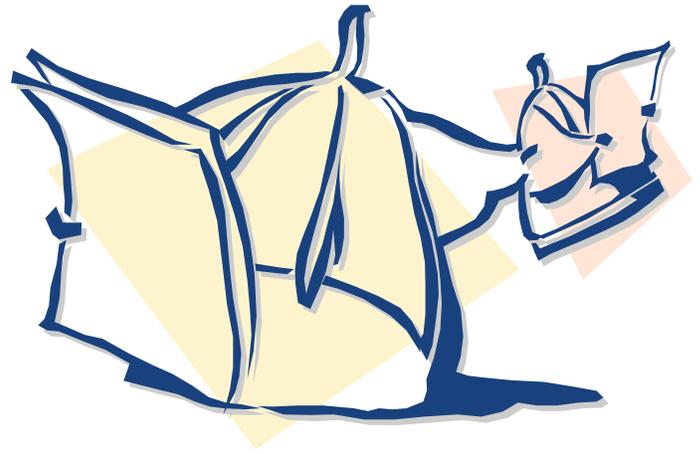
Content marketing is certainly not new. It is generally accepted that one of the first businesses to use content marketing effectively was John Deere in the late 1800s. In 1895 John Deere started publishing the magazine titled *The Furrow* in order to provide farmers with a resource of practical information that would increase their success. At the same time, it helped establish John Deere as the expert on all things related to farming. The magazine is still printed today in 12 languages and distributed in 40 countries.

For the same reason, companies both large and small are now embracing the concept of content marketing to deliver practical and relevant information to their customers. The emphasis on useful and relevant information means that customers and prospects are becoming increasingly sensitive to bias and deceit, demanding transparency from businesses. Rather than relying on advertising alone, customers are reading reviews and comments of those who have a personal experience of the product, service, or the business itself – often without knowing much about the reviewer.

All this leads to the need for today's businesses to adopt a new marketing strategy. Content marketing consists of focusing on creating and distributing information that a specific target audience will find pertinent and engaging. Rather than emphasizing the features and benefits of a product or service, content marketing is communicating without direct selling. It is providing information that educates your customers and prospects so they can make better buying decisions. It is giving control to customers rather than businesses.

Make Sure Your Content is Worth Reading

If you are in the early stages of implementing a newsletter or other periodic communication with your customers or prospects, you may find yourself focusing on developing the mail list, gathering information about



your company, and deciding on a layout. We agree that these are important, but we also suggest that you focus on developing content.

To do this, put yourself in the mind of your target audience. Develop a list of general topics to include on a regular basis, and think about where you can locate good content. Are there credible sources within your company or organization who could be regular contributors? Can you subscribe to industry magazines as a source of research and statistics?

No matter what topics you decide to use as content, be sure you engage the reader by making the content interesting and relevant. The more information you provide, especially information that readers perceive as being educational, the more interesting the content will become and the less overt your sales message will be.

Best Practices of Content Marketing

Successful content marketing is built on a foundation of well-written copy that covers topics of interest to the target audience and also follows the rules of grammar and copyright law. The best content will; be useful to the target audience, be unique in some way from what others are writing on the topic, use a writing style with which the target audience is comfortable, be fresh and appealing,

advance a conversation, use good grammar, and will honor copyright law.

- **Useful content.** Remember that the goal of content marketing is to build trust and confidence among a target audience by attracting and keeping their interest. Do you know what those interests are? Can you define them in the context of the products and services your business or organization provides? If not, then the first task is to study the individuals you are trying to reach. Conduct surveys, ask for feedback, and try sample topics until you can define their needs and desires.
- **Unique content.** To ensure that readers continue their interest, a successful content marketer must do more than compile relevant information from other sources. You will need to add something – facts and figures, personal anecdotes, a new perspective – that will intrigue your readers.
- **Writing style.** Your writing style is *how* you write rather than *what* you write. Depending on your topics and audience, you may use any of these styles: narrative (describes a personal experience based on a real event); expository (conveys information or explains something difficult to understand); or persuasive (tries to convince the reader to accept a point of view or take an action). Within each of these styles, you can use grammar and sentence structure to strike a conversational (written like you talk), formal (follows all the rules of grammar and syntax), or entertaining (humorous or fun) tone.
- **Fresh and appealing content.** The best way to keep content fresh and appealing is to write what you know. Find topics in areas where you have some expertise. Not only will it be easier to write, but you will find it easier to offer unique insights or perspectives.
- **Advance a conversation.** Good content advances the reader's knowledge of a topic. Avoid rambling, repeating yourself, and adding words, phrases, or sentences that add nothing to the content.
- **Use good grammar.** Misspellings, run-on or incomplete sentences, misuse of words, and other grammar violations will cause your audience to pay more attention to the mistakes than to the content. Proofread vigorously and edit ruthlessly.
- **Honor copyright law.** If you are using information from other sources, give appropriate credit, and use quotation marks to indicate when you are using another writer's words.

Some Amazing Opportunities in Print

When it is time to decide how to distribute the content, all media channels should be considered. In his book, *Epic Content Marketing*, Joe Pulizzi lists seven reasons why print is an excellent option.

1. **It Grabs Attention.** We are all getting less mail these days, so what we do receive really stands out.
2. **It Focuses on Customer Retention.** Historically, companies have used print to stay in touch with their customers after a purchase has been made.
3. **There are No Audience Development Costs.** Content marketing newsletters typically target existing customers, so it's not necessary to develop a mailing list.
4. **What's Old is New Again.** Since marketers have been using so many other media channels recently, print is being sought again because it is now non-traditional.
5. **Customers Still Need to Know What Questions to Ask.** It has been said that the web is where we go to get answers, but print is where we go to ask questions.
6. **Print Still Excites People.** The printed word is still perceived as more credible than what appears on the Internet. It is generally felt that if it is in print, it must be important.
7. **Print Lets People Unplug.** More and more people are choosing to spend less time online and reading print instead.

Let Us Help You Perfect Your Content

If you are having trouble finding a writing style or the time to create content, let us help. We may have someone on our staff who can assist, or we can provide a recommendation for a copywriter, editor, photographer, or other professional to augment your efforts. One of our services is to help our customers develop and execute an effective marketing plan, so let us go to work for you. Call us at 513-248-2121 if you have questions or would like to arrange a convenient time to talk. Let us help you become the expert in your field.

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

words

Active voice: a sentence construction in which the subject of the sentence performs the action expressed in the sentence.

Content marketing: providing information that is of interest and relevant to a target audience in order to attract attention and engage buyers.

Copyright: the exclusive legal right, given to an originator or an assignee to print, publish, perform, film, or record literary, artistic, or musical material, and to authorize others to do the same.

Copywrite, copywriting: the art and science of writing words to promote a product, a business, a person, or an idea.

Copywriter: a person who engages in copywriting.

Fair Use: a doctrine that defines when copyrighted material can be used without permission or paying royalties.

Interruption marketing: a negative advertising term referring to marketing communications that interrupt customers' activities. Telemarketing, spam, pop-up, and banner ads are examples of interruption marketing.

Market segment: an identifiable group of prospects who share one or more characteristics or needs. Market segments generally respond in a predictable manner to a marketing or promotional offer.

Passive voice: a sentence construction that uses the object of an action as the subject of the sentence. In other words, whoever or whatever is performing the action is not the grammatical subject of the sentence.

Pull system: in marketing, a system that describes the relationship between the business and the consumer. In a pull system, the customer controls the interaction by seeking products or services that are “pulled” from businesses.

Push system: in marketing, a system that describes the relationship between the business and the customer. In a push system, the business controls the interaction by “pushing” products and services at the customer.

Style guide: a set of standards governing the writing and design of documents. Implementing a style guide promotes uniformity of style and formatting. Also known as a *style manual* or a *house style* (if developed for a specific organization).

Swipe file: a collection of sales, marketing, and advertising material known to be effective or of interest. Used by writers to generate ideas.

Target audience: A specified audience or demographic group for which an advertising message is designed.

T H E I D E A

A Guide to American English Writing

The best-known guide to American English writing is *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. Known as *Strunk and White*, the book was first written in 1918 by Cornell University professor William Strunk, Jr. In a mere 43 pages, Professor Strunk presented guidelines for what he termed “cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English”, eight elementary rules of usage, ten elementary principles for composition, “a few matters of form”, and a list of commonly misused words and expressions.

Upon Strunk's death in 1946, Macmillan and Company commissioned the American writer, poet, and *New Yorker* columnist E.B. White to revise the book. His first revision was published in 1959; it updated and extended Strunk's original sections and

added an essay and a concluding chapter called *An Approach to Style*.

White published two more revisions in 1972 and 1979. The fourth edition in 1999 included a forward by White's stepson Roger Angell, a glossary, and an index as well as editing by an anonymous editor. The most recent release (2005) is based on the 1999 text with added design and illustration, all contained in only 105 pages. A Fiftieth Anniversary Edition was published in 2009.

The Elements of Style remains the most popular and often-required guide to popular use of American English. It is readily available in bookstores and online.

C
O
R
N
E
R

Content Topic Suggestions

If you're finding it difficult to find topics, we offer these suggestions:

- **Interview an expert:** Find someone within your company or from the outside to provide an expert opinion on a topic of interest.
- **Use guest articles:** Ask an expert in a complementary field to write an article.
- **Share your knowledge in "how-to" articles:** Providing answers is a great way for businesses and organizations to keep in touch with their customers or members and to reach out to prospects.
- **Generate a numbered list:** Everyone loves a numbered list. Use any number you want, from small to large.
- **Answer reader questions:** Invite readers to submit questions or topics of interest.
- **Simplify a technical issue:** Explain a technical topic in simpler terms so it is easily understood by the reader.
- **Case study:** Describe a customer problem and show how to solve the problem.
- **Community service:** Describe a community project or donation made by the company or organization and its staff and members.
- **Employee profile:** Provide information about an employee that shows why he or she is outstanding in their job performance.



How can I improve my proofreading skills?



Proofreading – the process of reviewing text for grammatical errors – requires knowledge of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. It also requires a technique for uncovering potential errors. Here are a few:

- Read whatever you have written aloud. You may hear an error that you did not detect while reading.
- Read the words you have written from the end to the beginning. This will allow you to pick up redundancies and spelling errors that you neglected to catch.
- Ask someone else to read your text for grammatical errors, then make a list of those errors. Use the list to determine whether you make common errors or whether yours are unique.

- When you understand the errors you are prone to making, look for them in subsequent writing.
- Buy a style guide, and keep it handy when you proofread.

If you have time, put what you have written aside for 24 hours, then return to it. Read it over with a fresh eye and a clear head. If you find something you missed earlier, make any needed changes, and run another spell check. Then give the document one more careful reading. Proofreading is a vital step in the preparation of any document.

questions and answers