

Secrets To Successful Content Marketing

Content is the new currency in marketing. It has the power to drive traffic, to build instant rapport, to simultaneously nurture an infinite number of qualified but not-yet-ready-to-buy prospects.

Good content flows quickly and easily from organizations that are already, organically customer-centric. If you know your customer—who they are, what they care about, what they want—you have a limitless source of inspiration for new content to capture, cultivate and convert prospects into loyal, passionate customers.

This series of short articles was designed to help you conceive, create and leverage content for your business, brand or organization. We've organized this content into three parts:

- Content Strategy
- Content Creation
- Content Leverage

The potential for content is enormous. Done correctly, an effectively executed content strategy can mobilize and capitalize on your market potential at a fraction of the cost of traditional advertising, and with residual benefits. I hope this set of best practices helps get you on the right track to success.

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Content Strategy

Five Common Content Marketing Mistakes (And How To Fix Them)

Don't overthink your content marketing strategy. It's more important to have a bias for action and get rolling. That said, when getting started with content marketing for your organization or brand, there are a few things to make sure you've thought through up front. Here are five mistakes I see organizations making most often.

1. Not having a plan up front

Before you start any marketing activity (no matter how strategic or tactical), you have to know why you're doing it. What does success look like? How does this activity translate to immediate or eventual sales and revenue?

2. Writing for the company instead of for the customer

Too many content programs focus on new features, chest-beating on company milestones, and otherwise weaving strong product tie-ins into every new piece of content created. That content has its place, but your readers (customers and prospects) will gravitate towards content that independently provides value. What are your customer's issues? What do they need help with, right now? That's the content that will spread like wildfire for you.

3. Not encouraging and participating in two-way communication

Creating content isn't enough. To really accelerate your audience and impact, you must devote time to responding, commenting, engaging questions and so on. If you're just a one-way communication channel, even with good content, your prospects will go elsewhere for the interaction they crave.

4. Not promoting, aggregating and curating great content from others

It's not all about you. And frankly, you can drive significant audience volume (and accelerated awareness and positive brand impressions for your business) by simply aggregating and promoting great content from others. By doing this, you'll create awareness and interest from other content originators as well as demonstrate to your growing audience that you're filtering great content from numerous sources for them.

5. Only producing written content

Written content may be the core of your content strategy, but don't forget video. Or podcasts. Or short, embedded slide presentations. Or whatever other formats your audience naturally gravitates towards.

How To Blog More

Many people often ask me good questions about how to actually get more blogging done. Some of this has to do with simply setting aside and being disciplined about the time required to create good content. But there are other tactics you can use to jump-start that time to be more productive and efficient at driving more "shipped" content. Here are a few suggestions.

Write more ideas down. When you have an idea for good content, write it down immediately. Keep paper and pen close by, or use a service like Dial2Do to quickly record an idea that can be translated to text and email for review later. If you're like me, a good idea that sits in your head unrecorded for too long (and when I mean too long, I mean more than 15–20 seconds) gets lost to the next thought. The more you document, the more blog posts you'll have to choose from.

Keep a single, ongoing list of those ideas. I use Outlook Tasks, and have a category called "Pending Blog Posts." When I have time to write something new, I go to this list and find something to get started. Ideas are constantly coming and going from this list. Whether you use Outlook or Evernote or Moleskine, keep them somewhere together.

Ideas, then outlines, then drafts. Don't sit down and intend to write a blog post in one swoop. Start with the core idea, then jot down primary points and themes related to that idea. Sometimes this starts with nothing more than the title. Then it will eventually become a short bullet list of points you want to make. Eventually, you sit down and write the context and deeper context behind each of those points. By doing it this way, you produce the final post more quickly. Breaking new blog posts down into individual steps makes the whole process more accessible (and more likely to happen).

Write ahead of time. Don't write today with the intention of posting today. That's only going to make you anxious. Work on something today with the intention of posting later. Tomorrow, next week, whatever makes sense. By writing content in advance and setting it up to post later, you can also block time to write several posts at once. Take your ideas and outlines of primary points, and lock yourself in a room for a couple hours to bang out new content while you're focused and on a roll.

Use guest bloggers. You don't have to write everything yourself! Others you work with—peers, colleagues, partners, customers, etc.—can create content that's just as good, just as relevant, and just as magnetic to drive more

traffic and interested readers. It takes the full burden off of you, and will drive new people to your content from the original writer's set of channels and networks.

What are your tricks for producing more blog content? What tips do you have to help spark activity?

Six Tips To Increase Comments On Your Blog

Ever feel like you're writing and writing, and nobody's listening?

If you're not getting a lot of comments, it may feel like you're talking to an empty room. But oftentimes, you do have the traffic and readership, but aren't doing a few simple things to encourage faster, easier and more frequent commenting by your readers.

And with more comments, you'll show new readers that there's an active community on your blog, increasing overall traffic, new readers and repeat visits as a result.

Here are a few basic tips to get more of your readers to participate.

1. Allow comments and make them prominent right after the post

I still meet bloggers who don't have comments enabled, or don't realize that their comments are disabled. This is basic, but do me a favor and check.

2. Use a cross-platform service like Disqus

Lowering the barrier to entry is key. Some blogs require login to comment. That's a high bar and will discourage participation. At minimum, let people make comments with a simple name and linking URL. Better yet, let them use a common blog commenting and profiling tool such as Disqus. Thousands of blogs use this service in particular now, and help those commenting to link their thoughts across blogs. Fast, easy, branded. These services will also often alert commenters when someone else has responded, which further encourages them to come back and continue the conversation.

3. Moderate comments (if you must) after the fact

Occasionally you might find commenters go over the line. If they're being libelous or profane, by all means take the comments down and block them. But when blogs require moderation before something is posted, you lose the instant gratification effect of letting the commenter see their words immediately on the page. Many readers will retweet or share your story only after their own name and comments are added (so others see that as well). If you require moderation, you lose a lot of that traffic and pass-along.

4. Ask questions to invite conversations

How often do your blog posts end with a question? How often do you proactively invite opinions or disagreement from your readers? You don't need to do this every time,

but asking questions will help convert more lurkers into responders.

5. Send new posts to specific people and ask for their reaction

Oftentimes when I write something new, I'll send a link to the post to people I know specifically will enjoy it and/or have an opinion or rebuttal. Sometimes I'll do this to people I know have a different opinion, and encourage them to share their perspective in the comments. Great way to spark the discussion.

6. Be your most active commenter

You don't need to respond to every post with "I agree" or "thank you", but if someone shares an opinion and you have a response, share it. Let your commenters know you're listening and appreciate their time and perspective.

What other advice or best practices would you share with other bloggers? What's working for you?

The Three Types Of Content You Need To Be Successful With Social Media

Social media is nothing without content. The content—what you say, how you say it, where you say it—is at the heart of a great community engagement strategy.

And there really are just three types of content you need to focus on to be successful:

Planned/Proactive Content: You need an editorial calendar, something that plans out for the next several weeks (even months) what you want to say. You won't stick to this calendar exactly—you may skip a week, flip stuff around, add ideas, etc. But if you don't plan what you want to say, there's no way you can string together a narrative that tells the story you want to tell. Without planning and executing content based on a predetermined strategy, there's no way you'll be able to consistently stand for something that engages the right audiences, the right prospects, the right customers with your business or brand.

Start with your customers. What do they want to hear, what are they interested in, what are they seeking. You'll write about that. Then think about how that content manifests itself into a handful of themes, or common threads of content. As you build your editorial calendar, plan for different angles or approaches to helping your customers solve or address issues related to those themes. With this approach, you'll quickly become an expert and go-to resource for value-added information that draws prospective and current customers closer to you.

Impromptu/Reactive Content: There's no amount of planning in the world that can prepare you for the story that will show up tomorrow. The issue in your industry that will dominate your headlines. The customer problems

that didn't exist yesterday. These are immediate opportunities, often where little to no other content exists, that become an instant and highly-valuable opportunity for you to address, write about and own a topic that is at its peak of interest among your customer and prospect community. You need to have your ear to the ground daily to know when and where these opportunities come up. You need to be ready to quickly create and publish content (written, video, audio, etc.) that quickly becomes part of what everyone's reading, how they're addressing the latest news, and what they're sharing with others on how to deal with it.

Participatory Content: You're not the only one creating content intended for your target audience. Plenty of others are doing it too. In these cases, they've created an anchor of content that will drive a mini-conversation. In these cases, it's your job to lend your voice to the fray. Become an active part of the conversation. Not as a seller, not as a vendor. As a peer.

No matter how much proactive content you create, the majority of your online community-building will be participatory, even reactive. But the more you participate, the more people see you out there creating value, the more they see you're helping them succeed independent of what you're selling, the more they'll gravitate toward you to learn more.

Social Media Editorial Calendar Template

A great way to be more proactive and frequent in publishing new content is to start with an editorial calendar (see below). It doesn't have to be complicated or take a lot of time.

Just start with a handful of themes that are relevant to your audience, and list them down the left-hand side of a spreadsheet. Then, over the course of the next few weeks (listed across the top of the spreadsheet), identify 1–2 specific topics you'll address and write about that week.

Even if you don't follow the calendar *exactly* every week, I guarantee this will help you feel more confident and prepared to get something published.

		Month 1			Quarter 1			Month 2	
		Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
7	Corporate Theme								
8	Contact Theme								
9	Company News (PR)								
10	Industry Calendar								
11	Subject Theme 1								
12	Subject Theme 2								
13	Subject Theme 3								
14	Subject Theme 4								
15	Subject Theme 5								

Download the template at: www.heinzmarketing.com/resources/free-resources/

Content Creation

How To Identify And Create More Dynamic Content

Great content is built with three things in mind—what they want you to know, what they want you to think, and what they want you to do.

Dynamic content does all three of these things, with a focus on the third component—driving action.

Dynamic content should stir your emotions, and make you want to do something. This isn't just direct-response we're talking about. Dynamic content can make you forward an article to 10 friends, change the way you think and/or act, and impact long-term behavior—both yours and those around you.

Dynamic content, in short, makes you want to do something about it.

Look through the content you've created recently, and the content on your plate in the near future. What is its purpose? What do you want from the audience? How can you adjust the topic, the tone, the approach or the message so your readers do more than just read and think.

Get them to act.

Three Questions All Content Must Answer

I think we all generally understand and accept that content needs to do something. It needs to speak to and influence an intended audience or else it's really a waste of everyone's time. This applies to a wide range of content in a variety of formats—Web pages, whitepapers, blog posts, videos on YouTube, etc.

But it strikes me that, although content can be audience-centric, it's not always complete. Well-designed content is built by answering three questions:

1. What do I want people to see, hear and/or learn?
2. What do I want people to think?
3. What do I want people to do?

Notice the progression of audience understanding and action here: Awareness, interpretation, response.

That doesn't always mean a direct response call to action. But if your audience reads or experiences your content and moves on without any change in perception or behavior, I'd argue something was missing and your content didn't work.

10 Proven Sources Of Blog Post Inspiration

Few people argue with the value of creating regular content—more prospects, more Web traffic, more thought leadership and a better-educated set of prospects are just a

few of the benefits regular bloggers enjoy.

A primary hurdle I hear from many would-be bloggers is content inspiration.

So where do you find new blog post ideas? The answer is all around you. Experienced bloggers will tell you that they're bombarded with possible blog topics. Their challenge isn't finding topics, but choosing the best on which to focus.

Here are the ten sources of blog post inspiration I use most often. Some I do actively seek out, but all of them take very little time and produce an ongoing source of inspiration and content.

Customer questions. Every day you're answering questions from customers and prospects—via email, phone, in-person, and in your social networks. Inherent in many of your answers is the subject-matter expertise that people want from you. Every time you answer a question, it's a potential blog post. Think about it.

Stuff you read. Doesn't matter what you're reading. Books, other blogs, magazines, even advertisements. What's your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? What's your take? Blog post.

People you disagree with. Someone says something in a meeting you think is wrong. Why do you disagree? Blog post. You read about a business or business leader who prioritizes something you think is taking them down the wrong path. Blog post.

Your customer-facing teams. If you're not on the daily front lines with your customers, someone at your organization is. Your sales team, customer service team, support team. What are they hearing from customers? What issues are affecting their lives or businesses? What's keeping them up at night and getting them up in the morning? Blog posts.

Trade press. You don't have to read everything. Just flip through the magazines, scan the online headlines. You'll find news stories, features, opinion pieces, trends, quotes from other thought leaders. Just keep asking yourself: What do I think of this? What would my customers think? How could I help my customers understand or navigate this issue?

Conferences, panels and Webinars. I come back from conferences with pages of potential blog posts. Not just from the speakers and panels, but from the trade show floor, the sales and marketing techniques other exhibitors use to try and woo me, and the new people I meet.

Twitter hashtags. Take a keyword relevant to you, your business or your customers. Put a hashtag in front of it,

and do a search on search.twitter.com. See what other people are talking about, right now.

LinkedIn Answers. Find the topics and sub-topics most relevant to your business and customers, and sign up for daily email summaries. It's like getting a whole list of possible blog posts in your inbox every day.

The news. Scan MSNBC.com. Have the local news on in the background as you make dinner. I can't remember the last time I read (or even scanned) the Wall Street Journal without coming up with at least 3–4 topics to blog about.

Things you see that are dumb. Other people's marketing. Management mistakes. Examples of inefficiency or thoughtlessness or lazy execution. Some people don't know better. Help them get better.

You may need to be proactive and intentional about using some of these sources at first. But once you build the habit, it'll become natural. The day you see or read something and automatically think to yourself, "wow, that would make a good blog post," you're in.

The Three Elements Of Every Good Story

What story are you telling your customers?

Ardath Albee has shared the three components of any good story (including the story you're telling your customers and prospects). That story needs:

- A Hero (that's your customer)
- A Villain (that's the problem or pain they're addressing)
- A Mentor (that's you)

These elements have been core components of effective storytelling for centuries. So tell me:

- Are you making clear that your customer or prospect is the hero?
- Have you clearly articulated who or what is the villain? Does your customer or prospect see that villain as well?
- Does your customer or prospect trust you as their mentor to vanquish the villain?

10 Tips For Writing A Great Press Release

As a pseudo-news story, a press release is an important marketing tool for businesses seeking to gain publicity through the media (in addition to driving awareness and traffic from across the Web). Writing a great press release is challenging, but can pay off with both increased media interest and online sharing of the content through social media sites and blogs.

Here are ten tips for writing press releases that grab the attention of journalists and reporters.

1. Develop a boilerplate

Press releases often contain a brief paragraph that describes your company, known as a boilerplate. This information helps journalists familiarize themselves with your business, and adds to the professional presentation of your media release. Boilerplates are usually placed at the end of the body of the content, before the contact information.

2. Stick to newsworthy content

Also known as a media release or news release, make sure that the content in your press release is really newsworthy. You need to convince the reader that your information is news and not marketing copy. Remember that reporters are not interested in promoting your latest product or service; they want content that is news.

3. Answer the five "Ws" and how

Write your press release like a news story. Your headline and first paragraph should include the most important facts and figures, followed by supporting information. Be sure to answer who, what, when, where, and why, as well as how, in your press release. It can be helpful to brainstorm the answers to these questions when developing a rough draft or outline for a media release.

4. Avoid technical jargon

Remember that your target audiences are journalists, bloggers, and other media members who may not be experienced in your industry. Use plain language when describing technical terms and processes that can be understood by the public, because reporters are unlikely to spend time researching complicated concepts and ideas to interpret the meanings for their readers.

5. Use quotes from real people

Newspapers and media outlets love to use quotes, so make sure to use quotations from a spokesperson who is available and willing to conduct follow-up interviews. Never invent a fictitious person to attribute quotes to in a press release.

6. Write 400 words or less

The purpose of a press release is to generate interest from the media, and inspire journalists and bloggers to contact your company for more information. Keeping your content short and to the point makes it more likely to be read and shared through blogs and social media. Reporters are busy people, and they do not have the time to read lengthy articles in search of their next story.

7. Use perfect spelling and grammar

Nothing undermines the credibility of a press release quicker than misspelled words, incorrect grammar and just plain poor writing. Use a good word processing program, and have another person proofread your release before publishing.

8. Create a headline

Once you have completed your press release, create a short and interesting headline that both grabs attention and tells the reader what your press release is about. Writing the headline after the content is complete is a good idea, because writers can develop a headline that fits the story instead of trying to fit the story to a headline.

If possible, keep the headline short enough to be shared on Twitter along with a link to the story. Press release headlines are normally written in full capital letters, rather than simply capitalizing the first letter of each word.

9. End the article with ###

The end of a press release is usually signified with three hash marks, or number signs, placed below the boilerplate

and above the contact information. Using these symbols will increase the professional appearance of your release, making it more likely that professional journalists will find your information credible. Alternatively, some writers use the symbol “-30-” or “-end-” to tell the reader the release is ended.

10. Include contact information

The final bit of information following the “###” symbols should be a one or two-line statement inviting journalists to contact your company for more information. This is the place to include the name, title, phone number, and email address of the media liaison for your business.

Content Leverage

Using Content To Improve SEO, Attract Customers and Capture Leads

I've been asked many times how best to use an existing set of content to drive more natural search traffic and, ultimately, lead capture. Here's an edited version of the advice I give.

For maximum SEO value, the content needs to be hosted on your domain. It needs to be organized in a clear, discoverable way (there are some basic SEO best practices for how to do this based on site architecture, mega tag work, keywords in the URL, etc.).

Many companies worry about how discoverable this content is from the home page. Navigation discoverability from the home page actually isn't as relevant for SEO as making sure Google can see the pages clearly. If Google can see them, they'll send traffic directly to those subpages no matter how buried they are on the site. If you have Google Analytics or CoreMetrics or some other good tracking tool on your site, you can probably get a good indication of which content is already driving natural search traffic today.

Once you have the traffic, you need to think about what you'd want that person to do next. If the content represents a prospective customer farther back in the decision process (i.e. just educating themselves, learning about the factors at play in what later will become an active decision, etc.), then the call to action might be to subscribe to an email newsletter. Something "light" that gets the prospect registered and doesn't require high commitment, but gives you direct access to communicate with them moving forward, profile them down the road for more active offers, etc.

However, if the content they're seeking is clearly closer to the decision point, you can more directly upsell with calls to action directly into your lead gen engine with better results. To drive even greater discoverability of your content, use a network of social media and content discovery tools (StumbleUpon, Digg, etc.) to help make the content easier to find.

I'd also consider building a content network directly with partners, bloggers and anyone else who speaks to your target audience. Give them co-branded pages on the site featuring the same content, so that they share those links with their own networks. The more inbound links you have to the site, the better your SEO value and the more natural traffic Google will give you in addition to those links.

As far as overall content triage and creation, you want to map that both to your understanding of the buyer timeline (way back, before they're actively looking), as well as what

relevant topics and keywords are already being used by searchers on Google. You need to map content to search volume, and ensure there's a certain keyword density of those terms in the article itself.

How To Revive Dormant Newsletter Subscribers

With any email, newsletter or nurture campaign, there's going to be a sizeable portion of your list that just doesn't respond. They don't click, they rarely if ever open. So how do you get them to become more active again? The answer is more complicated than just a set of reactivation tactics.

First off, **make sure they're dormant and not dead**. And make sure you regularly clear out the dead.

Very few newsletter or nurture marketing managers actively clean their databases of regular hard-bounce addresses. If an email hasn't been delivered to a particular address for several sends in a row (meaning you get a hard-bounce back from the recipient's server), it's best to take that email out of future sends. Too many hard bounces will tell Internet service providers that you're a possible spammer, and can get the rest of your emails blocked.

Also, **don't assume that dormant means no value is being delivered**. Just because I didn't click doesn't mean I don't want the next issue. Just because I didn't engage this time doesn't mean I didn't appreciate a heads-up on whatever the content was. What if I was just too busy today? What if I really want that sweater but don't have any money until next payday?

Depending on the nature and objective of your email campaign, the quantity and quality of impressions you generate by putting another permission-based email in someone's inbox may be enough. At least for now. I assume that you, too, get plenty of email newsletters and don't read them all. Don't click on them all. Probably don't even open them all. But you definitely want to keep getting them, and there's a branded, contiguous relationship that still exists there. A healthy portion of your "dormant" subscribers are getting the same value from you today.

Of course, for those recipients who truly aren't paying as much attention, there are a few tactical things you can try as well.

First, consider changing the domain, IP address or even email service provider from which you're sending. These changes can make the email appear different to the hosting server, and can either help with deliverability or get that email out of the spam filter where it's been languishing for several issues now.

Also play with how the email appears to the recipient when first received in their inbox. Is the “from” name and address inviting? Are you using the same subject line over and over vs. highlighting some content that drives more opens?

Consider these and other more active/aggressive tactics for a segment of your list that you think might be dormant. If active subscribers already have you on their safe sender list, there’s no reason to switch up the domain or IP address on them. But by testing these and other tactics on a subgroup of potentially dormant subscribers, you may find a mix of strategies and tactics that increase engagement and performance of the entire list in short order.

The Difference Between Publicity And PR

Seth Godin has spoken about this before, and it bears repeating.

Publicity is very different from PR. They’re related, but different in their execution, objectives and value to your brand and organization.

More Information About Us

About Matt Heinz

Matt Heinz is the Founder and President of Heinz Marketing Inc. Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

Contact Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing Inc.
8201 164th Ave NE, Suite 200
Redmond, WA 98052
877.291.0006
www.heinzmarketing.com
acceleration@heinzmarketing.com

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Publicity is about getting coverage for yourself. It’s about pushing your story, your agenda to the masses. It’s not necessarily a bad thing. Publicity for a political candidate is critical. For a new movie or TV show, important. But publicity is mostly about me, not you.

Effective PR is about telling stories—unique, compelling stories that attract people to you. PR isn’t about you, it’s about the broader connections, trends, innovation and value being created in the ecosystem in which you work and operate.

Successful PR can be as much if not more about your customers and partners as it is about you. Your role as the implied enabler of success, your role as the originator and owner of the story, gives you the credibility and leadership you need to further your own agenda in a more authentic way.

Again, both are fine and in many cases both can be leveraged in parallel. Just make sure you understand which is which as you plan and execute.



8201 164th Ave. NE, Suite 200
Redmond WA 98052
Ph. 877.291.0006
www.heinzmarketing.com