

Content marketing: what it is, and why you should be doing it

By Anna Malczyk

22 May 2012

It has become increasingly clear that the most effective way to gain your customer's attention is to earn it. Rather than needing to sponsor 'traditional' media channels, digital distribution channels such as blogs and YouTube have made it possible for brands to become content creators themselves.

In essence, content marketing is the process of *creating and sharing something awesome* - entertaining, engaging content (text, photos, video, audio, interactive) that promotes the brand in an indirect way.



Social media, which many brands already use, enable content marketing on a useful and sustainable scale, which in turn grows the audience for your brand. Brands are cottoning on - 60% intend to increase their content marketing budget in the next year.

The content can be created, curated or user-generated. Brand-created content is usually what people mean when they refer to content marketing. It requires the most investment but potentially reaps the greatest rewards.

Source:
executiveconsultingservices.net
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Your content should *tell a story*: about an event, about your principles, about a person. Customers don't care about your latest product, but they do care about the awesome township school initiative or music festival you're sponsoring. That's what makes content

marketing so powerful.

Technology provides an unparalleled way to spin amazing tales in new ways. High-quality content doesn't have to mean skyrocketing costs - the web and related technologies have made creating slick web videos, insightful blog posts, funky infographics and informative podcasts affordable.

For content marketing, it is not enough to create ordinary press releases, keyword-laden articles and automated retweets - you need *valuable, amazing editorial content*. That's because real content marketing success relies on sharing - people need to "like", upvote, share, promote and rank your media, so that more people see it and its reach spreads.

Media creators have been trying to define what makes content successful and are refining the process slowly - it's easier said than done, but brands need to start building up these skills to ensure future success.

Why content marketing?

Content marketing is important for many reasons.

- It positions the brand as a trusted expert and source of reliable information and entertainment. This can be used to improve the company's public relations.
- It humanises the brand - people want to hear from people, not impersonal business entities.
- Users want valuable content, not adverts - content marketing lets you give something back to your community and raises your esteem in their eyes.
- You gain insight into what customers want from you by analysing their interactions with your content.
- Valuable content boosts your SEO efforts - the more people share and link to your content, the better. This should be a long-term strategy for establishing the brand and building relationships and consistency.

Does it really work?

Online magazine *Salon* found that publishing 33% fewer posts and dedicating the saved time to creating amazing articles [increased their readership by 40%](#). This shows the power of dedicating yourself to content quality over simply flooding fans with content - and that's for a brand where content *is* the product.



More for less – Salon's content strategy has shown amazing returns.

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Content and social media in harmony on the Red Bull website.

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Red Bull is the undisputed master class in content marketing.

From [extreme sports clips](#) and [musical showcases](#) to [celebrity blogs](#), the Red Bull Media House has a holistic content strategy that positions it as a cutting-edge youth brand without ever mentioning the words "Red Bull" or "energy drink".

Over 300 million YouTube views later, the strategy is so successful that access to the content portal is marketed as a feature, for example in its [mobile partnership with Cell C](#), where customers can buy Red Bull-branded phones.

Content marketing strategy 101

To succeed as content marketers, brands need to *reposition themselves as publishers* as well as service or product providers. But it's also not enough to just produce content and put it out into the world - you need to focus on getting your strategy right.

Content marketing is not a one-off campaign, but an on-going process and a mind-shift for the way the brand markets itself. You need to distribute, promote, monitor, measure and optimise your content as part of a holistic strategy.

Content marketing relies on the existence of a community - if nobody's around to see your awesome video clips and share your fab photos, then they're pretty pointless. Your social media profiles are where your community will congregate, so that's where you need to start applying your strategy.

Being effective here relies on:

- Knowing your audience
- Timing
- Creating and sharing appropriate content
- Responding and engaging

If you're sharing college drinking games with your middle-aged realtor audience at 3am, or share some tasteless religious videos over the Easter weekend, you're not doing it right. And if you make mistakes like this, you'll end up chasing your audience away - and developing a really terrible reputation.

If you're going to do content marketing, make sure you do a lot of research upfront - and take the time to make something awesome before you share it.

For more:

- Bizcommunity Search: [content marketing](#)

For More list added at 10.06am on 23 May 2012.

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Born in Poland, Anna Malczyk swapped an icy future for one in sunny South Africa. Fast forward to 2012 and that move has paid off: Anna is the latest addition to the Cape Town Quirk Education team (www.quirk.biz/courses/home) as a knowledge officer. Contact Anna on tel +27 (0)21 462 7353, email her at anna.malczyk@quirk.biz and follow @annamalczyk on Twitter.

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