

Content Marketing Made Easy

Why You Need It / How to Do It



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By Susan Crossman

Chapter One: Content Marketing? What Does That Mean, Anyway?

Back in the days before digital content marketing had ever been invented—in fact, before the internet had even been invented—I was a marketing copywriter for a marketing firm. I wrote brochures and sales letters, newsletter copy and advertorials. I laboured over the structure of my press releases and worked hard to bring zest to my bus ads. The marketing firm I worked for had a lot of clients and they all seemed to need a lot of marketing materials. The company was growing by leaps and bounds and I was grateful for the chance to make a living doing what I loved. It was a challenging job, however.

Sometimes the Writing Genie would favour me as soon as I sat down at my computer and other times I would stare cluelessly at my monitor wondering if I should change careers. Where do all those words go when you need them in a hurry?

Deadlines screamed at me with frightening regularity and in the early days of my initiation into marketing, I concluded that a marketing firm can be a scary place for someone who likes a quiet environment, especially if The Boss has stress management issues. I survived, however, and, somewhere around the time I left that company to start a freelancing business, the Internet was invented and changed the game forever.

The point is, marketing is nothing new. Hundreds, if not thousands of years ago, people were looking for ways to market their products and services. They wanted to make a sale and, in order for that to happen, they needed a method of sharing the news about what they were offering, preferably in

a way that had the people who needed what they were selling sit up and take notice.

When I search the term “marketing” online today, a total of 1.86 trillion results show up; 295 million of them are definitions of what marketing is. That’s a lot of definitions. In my own search for understanding, I’ve waded through ponderous, academic, scientific and homespun explanations that have actually failed to enlighten me about the nature of this massive beast. For a long time I thought there was something wrong with my own understanding, that I couldn’t grasp something I was actually making a living at doing. What’s more, every business person I meet knows that their company “needs some marketing.” But what are they really asking for?

I took solace from the conclusion I came to and I invite you to take comfort in this wisdom as well: very few people actually know what marketing is.

What Is Marketing?

So I’ve developed my own definition and it was as true in the days of the first radio broadcasts as it is in the age of digital communication: marketing is the process of starting conversations with the people who know they want what you are selling. The conversations themselves are what sales is about.

You might start those conversations today at a networking event or a trade show. You might start those conversations by handing out brochures, business cards, newsletters or key chains. You might also start those conversations through your website, Twitter feed, Google + page or your blog. There are unlimited opportunities out there for starting conversations with people. But you want to make sure that you put your time, money and energy into starting your conversations primarily with people who might want what you are selling. And you want to make sure that the information you are giving

them is the kind of information that might encourage them to talk to you.

And that’s where your business might need help.

While you have been focused on handling the thousands of details that go into making your business successful, that one other issue, the one about marketing your company online, has been twisting in the wind somewhere beyond the back door of your place of business. Somehow, while you were knee deep in refining your product line, developing your manufacturing processes, managing your sales staff, and doing whatever it takes to build your business to where it is today, you missed the memo that anxiously reminded you that you needed to develop an online marketing strategy that leverages the power of the internet to create more sales.

It’s Not Too Late

There are many aspects to online marketing today and the field is in a continual state of evolution: what’s current and effective today is going to change. As content marketing strategists, writers and project coordinators, me and my team help tell the stories that will start conversations that lead to sales for our clients. It’s a process that lends itself to a lot of finetuning as we learn about the distinctions that will help our clients get more leads and generate more revenue. And it’s really fun to watch a project take shape. The key task is to build a strategy around the unique aspects of the business’s product, service and ideal customer base. And tell the company story with authenticity and enthusiasm across all channels.

There are other methods of online marketing that are effective as well, such as paid search and pay per click campaigns, website development projects that include conversion strategies and conversion architecture, and more. But, in my opinion, without strong content that posi-

tions you as the hands-down choice for the businesses and people you are here to serve, your other online marketing efforts are doomed.

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is about creating a substantial body of content related to your business and the needs of your ideal clients and sharing it through online platforms such as your website and your Linked In, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Google+ profiles. You want the content to tell your company story authentically so that it generates trust, credibility and likeability for you, and calls upon your viewers and visitors to take another step in a growing relationship with you.

Your online content is informational rather than blatantly “sales-y.” And it has at its heart a real respect for potential clients, acknowledging that they might want to do a lot of research before they are willing to engage in a conversation with a potential supplier. It builds trust and authority for you amongst your ideal customers and it also supports your relationship with them. In providing helpful online content, you are positioning yourself as a valuable resource for people who need what you provide.

If you do this well, human visitors and search engines will reward your efforts and you will generate greater revenue as a result.

Did you know that some statistics estimate that 80% of all business transacted involves the internet in some fashion? And that up to 80% of business decision makers prefer to get company information in a series of articles rather than an advertisement? Many people report in surveys that content marketing makes them feel closer to the sponsoring company, and that company content helps them make better product decisions.

Doesn't it make sense that you'd better have a very strong presence online if you want to be competitive? There are two ways to look at content: branded content that is strictly helpful, such as magazines about topics of interest in your industry or recipe booklets related to the product or equipment you manufacture; or content that relates to your business and the stories you can tell about it.

Red Bull Has This Figured Out

Red Bull is an energy drink company that runs something called the Red Bull Content Pool. It stocks more than 50,000 photos and 5,000 videos about sports, culture and lifestyle. The company makes the material available to their 4.8 million subscribers which tend to be TV stations, platform providers and cinema distributors.

Why do they do that?

Does the content they provide proclaim the benefits of drinking Red Bull, the beverage? NO! But it says reams about Red Bull as an adjunct to a lifestyle. You can check this out for yourself at: <https://www.redbullcontentpool.com/content/international>

Red Bull realizes that content marketing is all about informing and even entertaining people without working too hard at selling them. The theory is that providing lots of valuable information will demonstrate to their target audience that they are experts in their field (in this case, an active lifestyle) and that they are so aligned with their target audience's needs and interests that they will, of course, resonate with the Red Bull product. Red Bull is the drink for people who push the envelope of physical activity and so people will, of course, buy their beverages.

Red Bull is a large corporation with enormous amounts of money to throw at their content marketing strategy. But

you can get involved with content marketing, too, to the limit that your budget will allow. And the more ways you can find to do this, the bigger the profile you can develop, and the more you can stand out in a crowd of other people offering what you offer. If you do this well, you will make it obvious to anyone looking for the product or service you provide that you are the ONLY choice in the field and your competition will fade into the background by comparison. And you will generate more revenue as a result.

That doesn't mean that it's time to give up on that quaint old-fashioned habit of meeting people face-to-face. Your own unique process of making a sale still stands. It's just that your content marketing efforts will give your prospects more opportunities to get to know more about your company and what it can do for them. It supports your sales team and any other marketing you do. People might meet you at a trade show or networking event, and like you on first impression. But as I mentioned earlier, if they are remotely interested in doing business with you, they are going to see what they can find out about you online.

So first of all, you want to HAVE material available that routes directly to your company, and, secondly, you want the material people find online about you to share positive and consistent messages about your business.

Action You Can Take Today:

Take an inventory of your existing web presence. Do you have:

- A website that is less than three years old
- A blog that you update regularly
- A company newsletter that you send out regularly
- A social media presence
(Twitter, Facebook, Linked In, Google+ Instagram)
- Five or more professionally produced videos
- A press outreach program
- Five or more case studies on your website
- Five or more articles about your products or services
- A white paper that prospective customers can download
- A desire to improve your online presence

Your Score:

- 10 checks = You've got this handled
- 5-10 checks = You have some work to do
- 3-5 checks = Is it time to develop a strategy?
- Less than 3 checks = It's not too late!