

An introductory guide to

CONTENT MARKETING

How to Attract Prospects, Convert Leads and Engage Customers Using Content



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Tim is Vice President and Director of Digital Innovation at circle S studio and has nearly 15 years of marketing experience. With a hybrid blend of skills in communication, strategy and analysis, he leverages technology to help clients strengthen the online presence of their brands, deliver measurable results and grow their business.

In the fast-paced digital world, his insatiable appetite for learning serves him well, allowing him to stay on top of the latest trends in web design, inbound marketing, content strategy, social media, search engine optimization, marketing automation and emerging technology. Tim is a long-time champion of the power of developing and distributing relevant content across a number of digital channels to attract new prospects and engage existing customers.

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO CONTENT MARKETING

INTRO

**THE MARKETING LANDSCAPE
HAS CHANGED**

PAGES 1-4

chapter

01

**MAKING A BUSINESS CASE FOR
CONTENT MARKETING**

PAGES 5-9

chapter

02

DEFINING CONTENT MARKETING

PAGES 10-15

chapter

03

FOUNDATION & DISCOVERY

PAGES 16-19

chapter

04

STRATEGY & PLANNING

PAGES 20-23

chapter

05

CREATING MAGNETIC CONTENT

PAGES 24-30

chapter

06

**MANAGING THE CONTENT
MARKETING MACHINE**

PAGES 31-35

END

**CONCLUSION & ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES**

PAGES 36-38

INTRO

**THE MARKETING
LANDSCAPE
HAS CHANGED**

THE MARKETING LANDSCAPE **HAS CHANGED**

One of marketing's primary responsibilities has always been to communicate and promote products and services to prospects in hopes that they will buy them.

In times past, it was all about reaching them as many times and in as many places as possible. Brands were built and sustained almost entirely on promoting your products and services to prospects by interrupting them with brand-centric messages in hopes of making a sale.

But times have changed and the web is responsible. In his influential book *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, author David Meerman Scott first explained this changing landscape: "Prior to the Web, organizations had only two significant choices to attract attention: buy expensive advertising or get third-party ink from the media. But the Web has changed the rules."

There is nothing novel about content itself. Every company creates content, but content marketing is using content for a distinct marketing purpose.

Content Marketing is No Longer Optional

Any business that wants to get found online, differentiate their business, attract prospects, convert leads, engage their audience and ultimately grow their business needs to **get serious about content marketing**. This eBook seeks to help you understand what content marketing is, why it is valuable and how to get started using content to market and grow your business.

“You can **buy** attention. (advertising)

You can **beg** for attention from the media. (PR)

You can **bug** people one at a time to get attention. (sales)

OR

You can **own** attention by creating something interesting and valuable and then publishing it online for free. (content marketing)”

- David Meerman Scott, Author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*

THE OLD WAY TO DO MARKETING



Turning up the Volume

Before the Web, if you could “out-yell” the competition, you had a reasonable shot at making the sale. The old way of marketing was all about creating as much noise as possible, winning the shouting match with your competitors and finding new and creative ways to invade prospects with your messaging. And consumers of the past made purchase decisions based primarily on a company’s advertising. Marketers controlled the information and the conversation.

THE BETTER WAY TO DO MARKETING



Turning Up the Value

The new way of marketing is about doing, rather than just saying. Clark Kokich, in his book *Do or Die*, puts it this way: “In the past, you could simply turn up the volume if you wanted to get your message across. Today, you have to turn up the value. You have to give consumers something they actually prize in order to have them pay any attention to you.”

So if consumers are not going to take your word that your company or product is the best, why not prove it to them through engaging content that they might actually find useful?

chapter

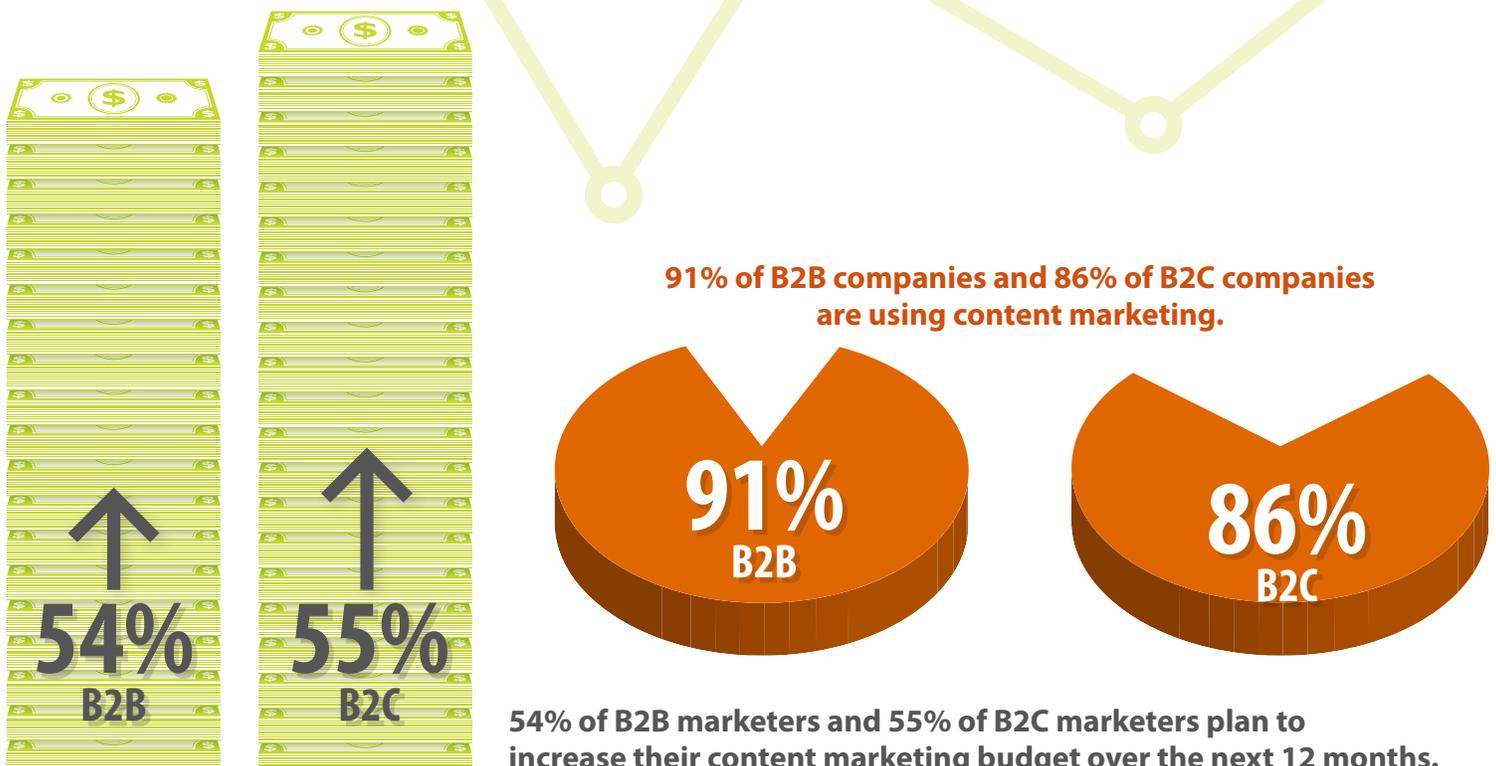
01

MAKING THE CASE FOR CONTENT MARKETING

MAKING THE CASE FOR CONTENT MARKETING

The case for content marketing begins with two foundational truths: the web has forever changed how people make purchasing decisions, and traditional, interruption-based marketing is no longer enough for today's savvy consumers.

In comes content marketing. According to recent reports from the Content Marketing Institute, 91% of B2B companies and 86% of B2C companies are using content marketing. And 54% of B2B marketers and 55% of B2C marketers plan to increase their content marketing budget over the next 12 months. Why? Because content marketing (done right) is more than just hype, it differentiates and gets results.



Source: 2013 B2B/B2C Content Marketing Benchmarks-North America: CMI/MarketingProfs

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR HAS CHANGED

Over the past few years, the way people shop for products and services has fundamentally changed thanks to the explosion of digital media, social media and the web. Prospects—whether B2B or B2C—are smarter, savvier, more educated and far less likely to believe that you're the best just because you say you are. Today's consumers want to make that determination on their own.

Your prospects are going online to search for information about what you sell, and it doesn't matter whether you sell coffee makers, haircuts, mortgages or construction services.

Consumers today search Google (more than 100 billion searches per month worldwide), read blogs and online reviews, follow influencers on social media and consume as much content as they can before making a purchase decision.

And the bigger the purchase, the more extensive and thorough the research will be. Providing content in the form of blogs, case studies, whitepapers, etc. will help you get found online by prospects looking for products and services like yours, at the exact moment they are interested.



PEOPLE DON'T LIKE BEING “MARKETED” TO



Let's face it, people have become conditioned to ignore, delete, fast-forward, unsubscribe to, closeout and send to voice mail traditional interruption-based marketing messages.



And they've gotten far too savvy to base their purchase decisions solely on your advertisement or list of features and benefits.



That's what makes content marketing so engaging; instead of simply pitching your products and services, you deliver valuable information and subject-matter expertise that makes your prospects more



educated, more likely to view your company as subject-matter experts, and ultimately more likely to buy from you.

SEARCH ENGINES HAVE EVOLVED

With your prospects searching online, the way to make a sale and close deals is getting found when they search for you or what you sell. Optimizing your website to rank high in organic search engine results is obviously the goal. But ranking high in search results can no longer be achieved through meta-tags, keyword stuffing and other antics. The key to search engine optimization (SEO) success can be defined in two words: quality content. Creating quality, context-driven content for your readers, prospects and customers will ultimately help you improve your search engine rankings and help prospects and customers find you online.



COMPANIES LACK DIFFERENTIATION

What differentiates one company or product from the next? If what your competition sells is described in the exact same terms that you use and has the same basic features and benefits, how does a prospect choose between two seemingly equal choices? **Most industries are plagued with “me-too” marketing that does more to equalize than differentiate.** This leaves prospects to make purchasing decisions based less on tangible contrasts and more on intangible factors beyond the control of the companies involved. Content marketing done right can help you stand out from all the me-toos in your industry and demonstrate your unique selling proposition by providing educational and informative content that people find valuable and useful.

DIGITAL ENABLES BRANDS TO BE PUBLISHERS

“As brands, we become the media.”

- Brian Solis, Author of *Engage: The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate, and Measure Success in the New Web*

In today’s digital world, anyone with a good story to tell can attract an audience online. Technology has forever changed the media landscape—and in doing so it has enabled companies to publish their own content in the form of blogs, video, articles, websites, eBooks, whitepapers and a plethora of other digital formats. Email and social media allow companies to reach their audience directly at relatively minimal costs and effort. And the conversation isn’t just one-way either; prospects can speak directly to companies and engage in a conversation.

chapter

02

DEFINING CONTENT MARKETING

DEFINING CONTENT MARKETING

The term “content marketing” has been thrown around a lot recently. But what is all of the hype about? How is it any different than traditional marketing? Marketers have always had content— isn’t it really just another word for communications? This chapter aims to demystify the subject and give some insights on what makes it so different and so valuable.

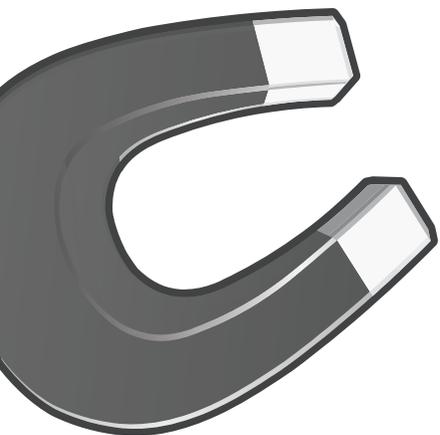
“What if, instead of buying attention, we create content that is so informative, valuable and compelling that it positively affects the lives of our prospects and customers and makes an impact on our business?”

- Joe Pulizzi, Author of *Get Content Get Customers: Turn Prospects into Buyers with Content Marketing*

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

The Content Marketing Institute defines it as “a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

Content marketing can best be described in simple terms as a pull strategy, as opposed to a push strategy. Instead of shouting your self-focused messages with a bullhorn to prospects over and over, and louder and louder, you actually attract prospects to your business using engaging, customer-focused content as a magnet.



WHAT'S OLD IS **NEW AGAIN**

The core concept behind content marketing isn't a new idea; in fact, smart companies have been "content marketing" for more than a century:

1895

John Deere launched a magazine called "The Furrow," which is still around today and published worldwide for more than 1.5 million farmers in 12 languages and in 40 countries.

1900

Michelin developed a 400-page guide that helped drivers maintain their cars and find good lodging for road trips.

1904

Jell-O created and distributed a free recipe book that contributed to more than \$1 million in sales by 1906.

1913

Burns & McDonnell, a Kansas City engineering firm **launched "Benchmark" magazine** covering a broad range of trends, topics and engineering disciplines. It's still produced today.

1930s

Proctor and Gamble began radio "soap operas" with brands such as Duz and Oxydol.

1982

Hasbro partnered with Marvel to create a GI Joe comic book to "promote" their toys.

Source: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/02/history-content-marketing-storytelling/>

See where this is going? These companies understood that storytelling is much more appealing to their audience than simply pitching products and services, and they are still around to prove it. **At its core, content marketing is about providing customers and prospects alike valuable, relevant and share-worthy information that informs, educates and keeps them connected and engaged with your brand.** Contrast that with most branded content out there that merely talks about features and benefits of products and services.

SORRY, IT'S **NOT ABOUT YOU**

Here is the simple truth: most prospects and customers aren't interested in your company, your mission statement or your accolades. So what do they care about? Naturally, they care about **their needs**, **their interests** and **their businesses**. Content marketing is about publishing information that focuses on the prospect and customer and what they are actually interested in, as opposed to talking about your company and what you sell.

DIFFERENTIATE **BY DOING**

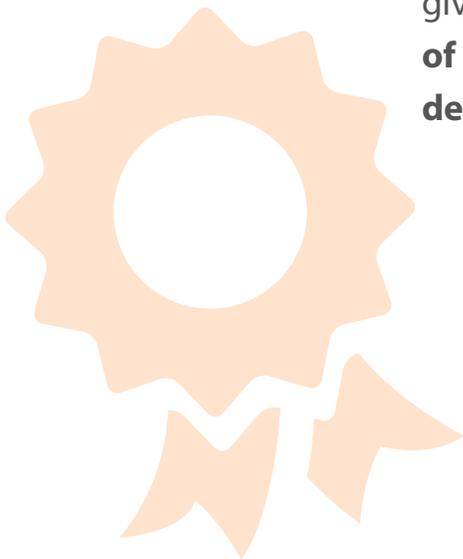
According to Roper Public Affairs:

80% of business decision-makers prefer to get company information in a series of articles versus an advertisement

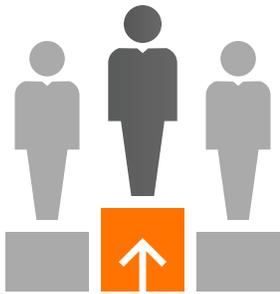
70% say content marketing makes them feel closer to the sponsoring company

60% say that informative company content helps them make better product decisions

Companies send out information all the time, but content marketing gives your prospects information they want and value. **Instead of saying how amazing your company is, content marketing demonstrates it by doing.** This is not only effective, it's also logical.



THINK LIKE A LEADER, LEAD LIKE A THINKER



Content marketing provides you with the opportunity to show that you're the expert in your field. Consistently writing informative blog articles and sharing industry news and best practices on social media channels demonstrates that you are the knowledgeable, go-to source in your industry. And by creating magnetic content, you are helping your target audience learn something, while building thought leadership.

IT'S MORE THAN JUST LEAD GENERATION

Content marketing is incredibly effective for attracting new prospects, generating leads, nurturing leads as they move through the buying cycle and converting leads into paying customers. But content marketing's usefulness doesn't stop at the point of sale; it extends far beyond sales and business development.



A quality content marketing program continually engages your audience throughout the entire customer lifecycle. That means that you don't stop engaging once you've closed the deal. Continue to show your knowledge and expertise and keep adding value to the relationship.

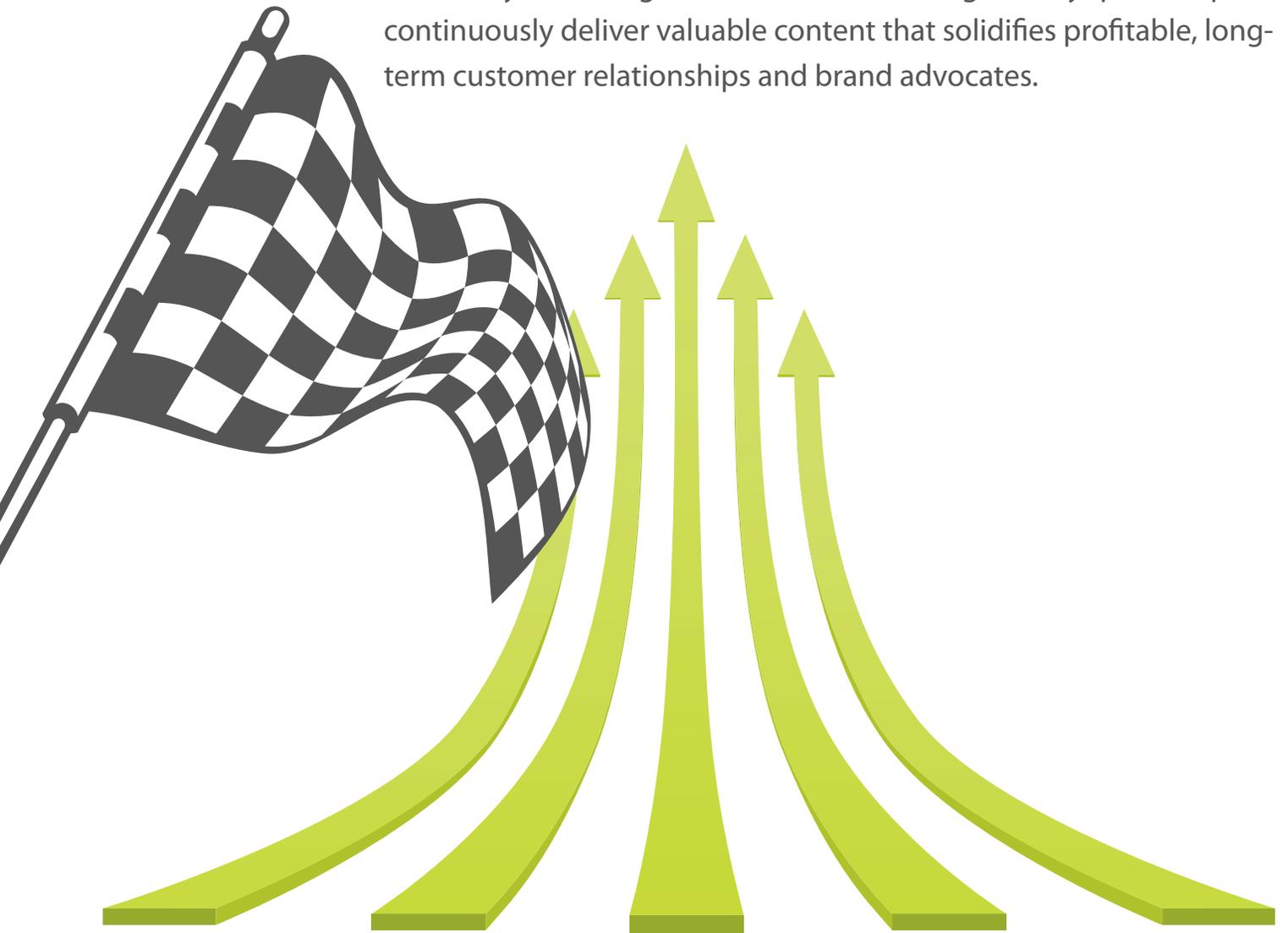
KEEP 'EM COMING BACK (And They'll Bring Their Friends Too)



It's a known fact that it's easier (and cheaper) to sell to an existing customer than it is to convert a new one. This only further reinforces the need to engage your customers with the goal of upselling and generating repeat business. And don't underestimate the power of word-of-mouth. A quality content marketing program (combined with a quality service or product and outstanding customer service) leads to passionate brand advocates who do the selling for you.

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Ultimately, the end goal of content marketing is really quite simple: to continuously deliver valuable content that solidifies profitable, long-term customer relationships and brand advocates.



chapter

03

FOUNDATION & DISCOVERY

DOING WHAT MATTERS **BEGINS WITH THE WHY**

Don't just jump into content marketing because you or leadership thinks you need to. Sure it's getting a lot of hype these days, but don't just be reactionary. Be purposeful—stop and ask **why** you want to start in the first place.

Identify Your Strengths and Play to Them

You're trying to establish thought leadership and showcase why your company is different (and better) than the competition. But content marketing doesn't establish your differentiators, it only emphasizes them. So you need to identify what your company's greatest strengths are and play to them. Your content needs authenticity; only cover topics about which you are knowledgeable. And, most importantly, the topics in which your audience is interested.

Understand Your Audience

To be successful in content marketing, you must understand your target audience: their wants, needs, interests, etc. The better you understand your audience, the more relevant and valuable your content will be to them. One of the best ways to determine the topics to cover is by identifying the problems or questions your prospects might have and answering those questions through content. Buyer personas can be especially helpful in this process.

PUT A FACE TO YOUR PROSPECTS

Buyer personas ensure your content marketing efforts are focused on speaking to the right person with relevant and valuable information. They essentially help you see them as real people and gain insight into the way they think and behave and help you identify their wants and needs.

Ask yourself these questions to help you define your personas:

- Who are your target customers?
- What are their interests?
- Where do they go for information?
- How do they prefer to consume that content?
- What formats and media do they like most?
- What are their pain points?
- What objections do they have to buying your product or service?
- What would make them excited about your product or service?
- What gaps in information are they lacking that your content can fill?
- What problems can you help solve for them through content?



CHOOSE YOUR (KEY) WORDS WISELY

Once you've developed personas, the next step is to spend time conducting keyword research to uncover the language your audience uses to search online for information related to your products or services. Traditional SEO recommendations have focused on keywords with high popularity and search volume. But not only are those keywords incredibly competitive, they are often far too broad. **Today's consumers are typically asking questions and seeking answers or searching for something much more specific** such as "best vacuum cleaners for pet hair" instead of simply "vacuum cleaners." So be sure to consider what terms your audience will actually be using in a search and create content that provides answers to the questions your audience is asking and give them the information they are seeking.

LET SUBSTANCE BE YOUR GUIDE

The topics of expertise that you identify in the discovery process, combined with buyer personas and keyword research should drive the **who** and **what** of your content creation. Remember, develop content that fits with each persona and nurtures leads as they move through the stages of the customer cycle. (See Chapter 5)



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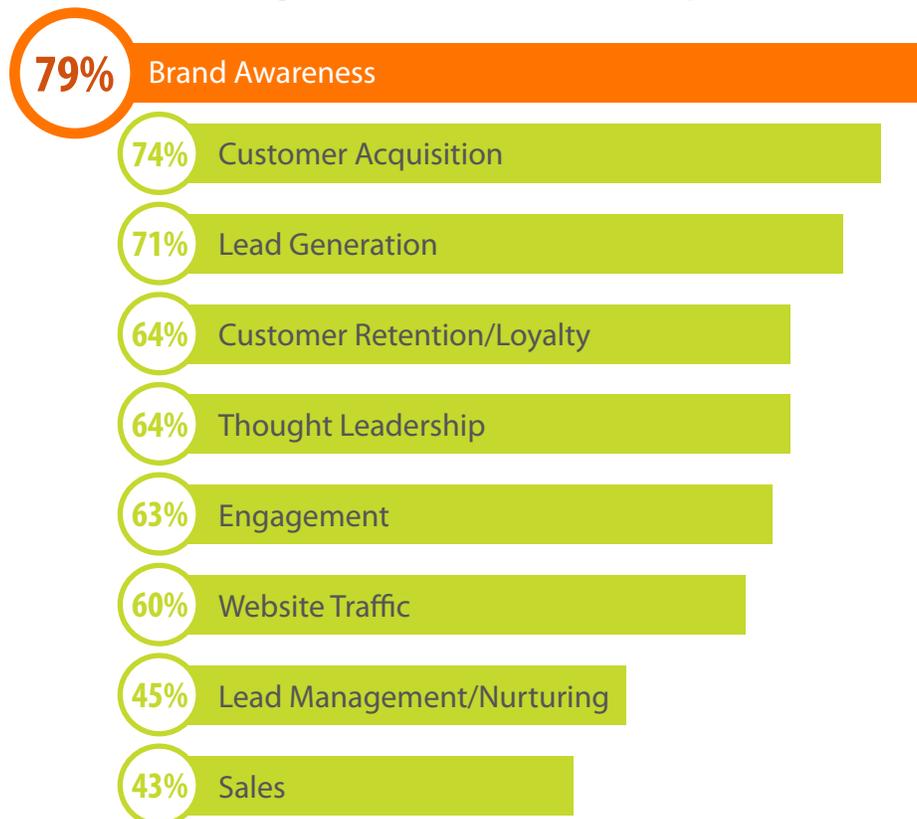
STRATEGY & PLANNING

DEFINE YOUR OVERALL GOALS

At the onset of any content marketing initiative it is absolutely essential to determine your overall goals for the program. These might include:

- Increasing web traffic
- Building awareness
- Developing thought leadership
- Establishing credibility
- Attracting new customers
- Educating and informing prospects
- Nurturing and converting leads
- Improving customer service
- Boosting upsells and repeat business
- Creating brand advocates

According to a 2013 survey, brand awareness, customer acquisition and lead generation remain the top content marketing goals.



Source: 2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks-North America: CMI/MarketingProfs

ESTABLISH METRICS FOR MEASURING SUCCESS

Once your goals are established you need to determine the metrics you will use to measure the success of your efforts. These Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) shouldn't resemble your goals, but rather they should be specific and quantifiable.

Here are some basic metrics to consider:



Website/Landing Pages

- # Page Views
- # Visitors
- # Inbound Links
- # Form Conversions
- # Mobile Visitors



Blog

- # Visitors
- # Comments
- # Subscribers
- # Mobile Visitors



Ebooks/Whitepapers/Reports/ Guides/Case Studies

- # Downloads
- # Social Shares



Webinars/Events

- # Sign Ups
- # Attendees



Videos/Slideshows/Photos/ Infographics

- # Views
- # Social Shares



Social Media

- # Followers/Likes/+1s
- # Shares/Mentions/
Retweets/Likes/Pins
- # Clicks
- # People Talking About
This (Facebook)



Email

- # Subscribers
- # Opens
- # Clicks
- # Forwards
- # Mobile Readers

chapter

05

CREATING MAGNETIC CONTENT

IT'S ABOUT SHARING **NOT SELLING**

Remember, content marketing is all about adding value by sharing relevant information that informs, educates and guides your prospects and customers.

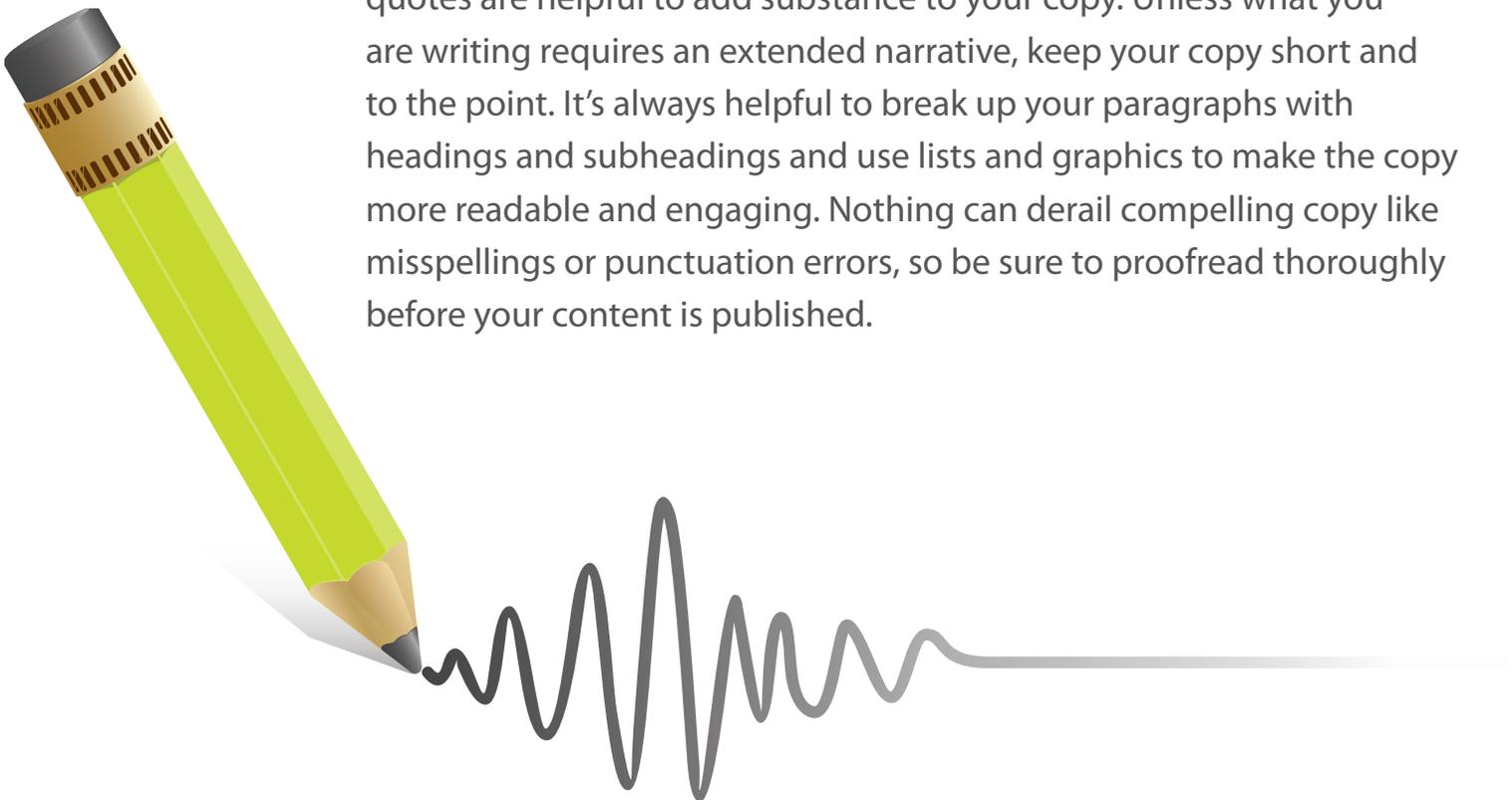
At the same time, it positions your company as a valuable and reliable resource for information, which is one of the best selling points a company can have.

60% Why do you follow a person or organization?
Because they share relevant content.

Source: 2010 What Makes an Influencer Study. Vocus/Altimeter Group

WRITE **COMPELLING COPY**

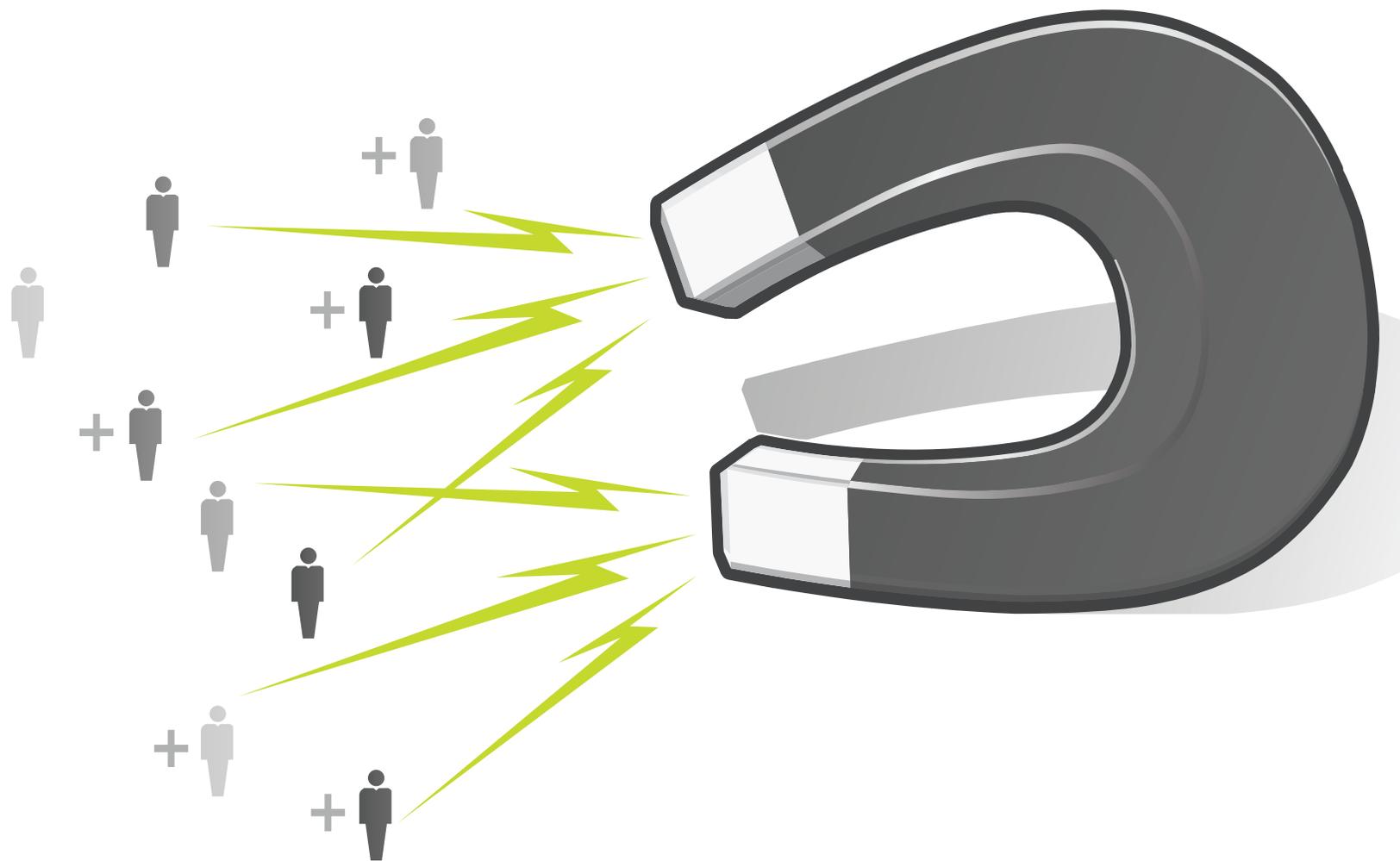
It goes without saying that your content needs compelling copy to be magnetic. Do your homework first; **compelling copy is not full of fluff, it's full of interesting information.** Statistics, research and quotes are helpful to add substance to your copy. Unless what you are writing requires an extended narrative, keep your copy short and to the point. It's always helpful to break up your paragraphs with headings and subheadings and use lists and graphics to make the copy more readable and engaging. Nothing can derail compelling copy like misspellings or punctuation errors, so be sure to proofread thoroughly before your content is published.



DON'T UNDERESTIMATE DESIGN

While your content needs compelling copy, it won't be magnetic without excellent design.

The two go hand-in-hand and the worst thing you can do is spend all your time and energy writing great content, only to throw together the final product, with little attention placed on design. **You have a few seconds to make an impression and keep people engaged, so poor use of fonts, colors, whitespace, graphics and calls-to-actions will negatively impact the success of your content.** If you don't have the skills or resources to design something great in-house, hire someone to do it for you.



USE A VARIETY OF CONTENT FORMATS

One of the keys to success is using a variety of content formats in your mix. Varying the types of content you use can help you address the format preferences of your audience and also meet their needs at every stage of the customer life cycle.



Blog Posts – Articles posted on your blog that speak to topics related to your industry and areas of subject matter expertise.



eBooks/Guides/Whitepapers – Electronic documents that focus on a specific subject or topic to educate an audience. eBooks and guides tend to be more visual with graphics and charts.



Landing Pages/Microsites – Web pages that promote a premium content offer, such as an eBook or a webinar, and contain a form to capture prospect information in exchange for the content. Microsites are small-scale websites developed for a temporary purpose such as a project or event.



Infographics/Images – Visually stimulating images containing graphics, text and statistics intended to convey complex information about a certain topic. Use these to communicate trends and research, or visualize a process.



Videos – Short 2-5 minute videos related to your industry or a particular topic. These can be useful for quick tips, sharing best practices, walking prospects through a process, or for product demonstrations.



Webinars/Podcasts – Virtual seminars related to a specific industry using webinar software such as GoToWebinar or WebEx. Webinars usually run between 15 minutes and one hour long. Podcasts are similar but are audio only and can be easily downloaded from your website.

[continue >>](#)

USE A VARIETY OF CONTENT FORMATS

...continued



Seminars/Events – Speaking engagements and other opportunities to present valuable industry and subject-matter information to a target audience can be a helpful tool for building credibility and thought leadership.



Presentations – Use your PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi presentation from a webinar or seminar as another form of digital content by generating a PDF or by uploading to a site like SlideShare for additional consumption and sharing.



Emails/eNewsletters – Email can be used to promote a webinar or eBook, announce a new case study or a series of emails that are triggered after someone fills out a form on your landing page.



Research Reports/Case Studies – Create reports that convey the results of research you've conducted and an explanation of the implications. Case studies or customer success stories should communicate a real-life situation to prove success.



Articles – Writing an article related to your industry that conveys subject-matter expertise, lessons learned, best practices or a forward-thinking concept published in a magazine, journal or on a website.



News Releases – These are no longer just for the media—write news releases that appeal directly to prospects and customers, incorporating keyword-rich copy and links to landing pages or other content. They can be distributed online via services like PR Web.

DEVELOP PREMIUM CONTENT FOR LEAD GENERATION



Premium content can be a great lead generation tool. Gate it behind a form on your website or landing page and require some basic prospect information in exchange for the whitepaper, eBook, guide or other content. Best practices suggest you should spend some time and resources developing at least one new piece of premium content every two to three months. **But remember, if a prospect is going to give you their contact information, they are going to expect to get something of value in return.**

MAPPING CONTENT ALONG THE CUSTOMER LIFE CYCLE



AUDIT AND RENEW EXISTING CONTENT



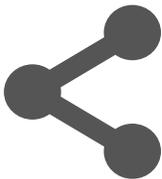
It is likely that your company already has information that can be used as a **starting point** for creating new, customer-focused content. But you'll need to inventory what you currently have in place, review it for quality and analyze it for usefulness.

REPURPOSE CONTENT



If you're challenged to create content, why not find ways to repurpose content? Turn your webinar into a series of blog posts or your eBook into a presentation. **There is no reason to start from scratch if you don't need to.** Content that is heavy with statistics and research can get old fairly quickly. So, always look for opportunities to update previous content when you are repurposing.

CURATE AND AGGREGATE CONTENT



One of the ways to continue to provide your audience with magnetic content is to curate from other sources. **Finding and sharing content (especially on social media) from other industry sources can show your company to be a valuable resource for information.** There is so much information out there for your audience to consume, so focus on sharing the best and most pertinent information. Not only will you provide them a great service, you'll build thought leadership at the same time.

Give Credit Where Credit is Due

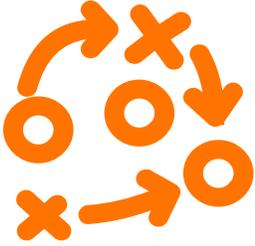
Be sure to always cite, ideally through a link, the source of your statistic, quote, summary or graphic. If you have any doubts about whether you are allowed to use something, contact the author to make sure.

chapter

06

**MANAGING
THE CONTENT
MARKETING
MACHINE**

DEVELOP A GAMEPLAN



Your gameplan includes all the components we've covered thus far—the strategy and planning, the content you'll create—plus how you will share your content, and ultimately, how you will measure success. This becomes the basis of your content marketing machine and your strategy for winning.

CREATE A ROADMAP

Create a quarterly roadmap (or publishing schedule) to help you plan your program and keep you on track. Use the roadmap as a guide to what topics you are going to cover, what channels you'll be using, who will be responsible for writing and editing and the schedule for publishing your content. But don't get too detailed or granular in your planning; rather use the roadmap as a guide and leave room for adjustments along the way.



PUBLISH AND PROMOTE

What good is great content if nobody knows you have it? **Your website acts as the hub for your online marketing efforts**, and most of your content will reside there in some form. But promoting through various social media channels can play a big role in encouraging the sharing and distribution of your content as well, while driving website traffic and increasing engagement overall.



It's fundamentally important to **cross-promote your content as much as possible** in order to maximize its reach and influence. For example, you can share your blog post on social media channels, promote your eBook on your blog, and use email to showcase your latest case study—all of which send prospects back to your website.

OPTIMIZE FOR SEARCH



The key to SEO success is creating quality content.

But, in addition to quality content, you should make sure you're following basic best practices for SEO. Consider your target keywords as they relate to page titles, URLs, ALT tags, internal and external links for blog posts, landing pages and website content. Ultimately, your end goal is to attract an audience and have your content consumed and shared by prospects and customers alike.

One of the best ways to boost your website traffic and improve your SEO is through blogging. Writing on niche topics provides more value than just writing a general blog post. It gives you something to talk about and promote on social media, and it provides you the best avenue to create keyword-rich, context-driven content (and lots of it).

MAKE IT MOBILE-FRIENDLY

Mobile devices are becoming the primary Internet viewing device, so it's vital that your website, your emails and all other forms of content are optimized for mobile. **Your content needs to accommodate the multi-screen world we live in**, so that every user, no matter their device, has the same great experience.



LISTEN AND RESPOND

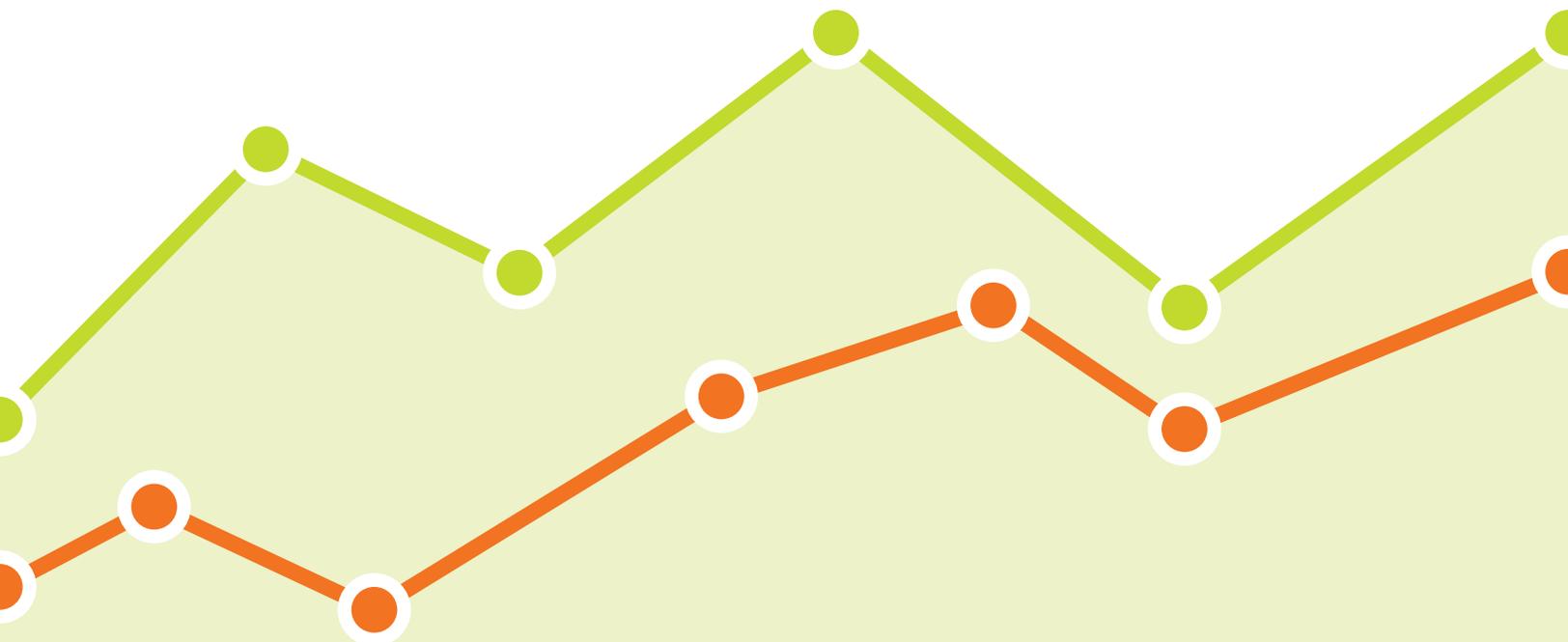


It's not just about publishing magnetic content; it's also about listening to what your industry, prospects and customers are saying.

Following influential leaders, companies and media outlets in your industry is an important part of staying on top of what's going on. Responding to your audience is also critical, so closely monitor your blog, social media channels and email and respond appropriately.

MEASURE SUCCESS AND REFINE

Gone are the days of launching a campaign and waiting months for an indication of results. Today, analytical and measurement tools allow you to track activity in real-time, so **your content marketing efforts should be approached with an agile mentality: constantly testing, measuring, tweaking and refining as you go along.** Use the KPIs you identify to create a dashboard of metrics (visitors, page views, form submissions, downloads, forwards, opens, click-throughs, likes, retweets, etc.) and track your progress daily.



END

CONCLUSION & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

COMMIT TO THE **LONG HAUL**

Content marketing is a marathon, not a sprint.

It's not a quick fix to boost sales in the short term or something that you can jump in and out of and expect to get results. **If your company is going to take up content marketing as part of your overall marketing strategy, you have to be patient and willing to commit for the long haul.** You also have to be willing to experiment, try new things and be able to accept occasional failures. Building thought leadership takes time, but you will start to reap the **benefits and rewards** of your efforts.



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Are You Inspired?

LET'S TALK

To learn more about our content marketing services and monthly packages, contact us today for a free consultation.



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