

# SEVEN STEPS to Content Marketing

As the traditional models for advertising and influence shift online, organizations must become their own publishers. Marketers have a new imperative to create compelling content that reaches their audience, educates them and directs them to action. Here are SEVEN tips to execute content marketing like a pro.



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IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE RULES THAT GOVERN TRADITIONAL B2B MARKETING HAVE FALLEN ON HARD TIMES. BASICALLY, WE'RE EMERGING FROM A THREE-PARTY SYSTEM – COMPANIES, ADVERTISING AGENCIES AND MEDIA – WHERE EVERYONE HAD AN ASSIGNED ROLE. IN THE SIMPLEST SENSE: COMPANIES MADE PRODUCTS. AGENCIES CREATED ADS TO PITCH THOSE PRODUCTS. MEDIA DISPLAYED THOSE ADS TO A TARGET AUDIENCE. AND SINCE EVERYONE WANTS TO MAKE AN INFORMED PURCHASE, THERE WAS PLENTY OF EDITORIAL BETWEEN THE ADS.

Organizations are investing in content marketing because it is proving to be a valuable tool in attracting prospects and bringing them into an educational conversation.

Today, there are still three parties, but the roles are changing. It's precipitated by the great migration online. People are shifting their media habits to the Internet and dropping off the radar and subscription lists of traditional publishers without leaving a forwarding address. This has created a challenge for marketers. The media channel they once relied on to reach their audience is shrinking in both size and relevance.

Yet, there's still a way to reach them – in fact, a more direct way. They're reorganizing around online media channels and social networking sites where industry education is becoming a conversation to which many new voices are contributing.

Companies can now publish straight to their target audience. When they embrace this opportunity, it's called content marketing.

#### THE RISE OF CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing is the creation and sharing of high value, useful information to generate sales leads, grow brand awareness and initiate an educational conversation with your audience.

Organizations are investing in content marketing because it is proving to be a valuable tool in attracting prospects and bringing them into an educational conversation. According to several recent studies, content marketing is claiming up to one third of B2B marketing budgets and investment is on the rise.

## NEW GAME, OLD RULES

While content channels may be changing, the rules of the publishing business are not. If marketers want to get content marketing right, they need to follow the very same rules that guide the best media companies.

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Traditionally, media offered several valuable services to marketers. They identified a target audience and gave marketers the ability to understand their needs and preferences. They provided an address to reach them. They crafted great stories and shared valuable knowledge to keep everyone engaged around important issues and form a thriving community.

### Tools of the trade

Content marketing thrusts companies into the competitive business of publishing. Their content has to be high value for people to offer their contact information in exchange for it.

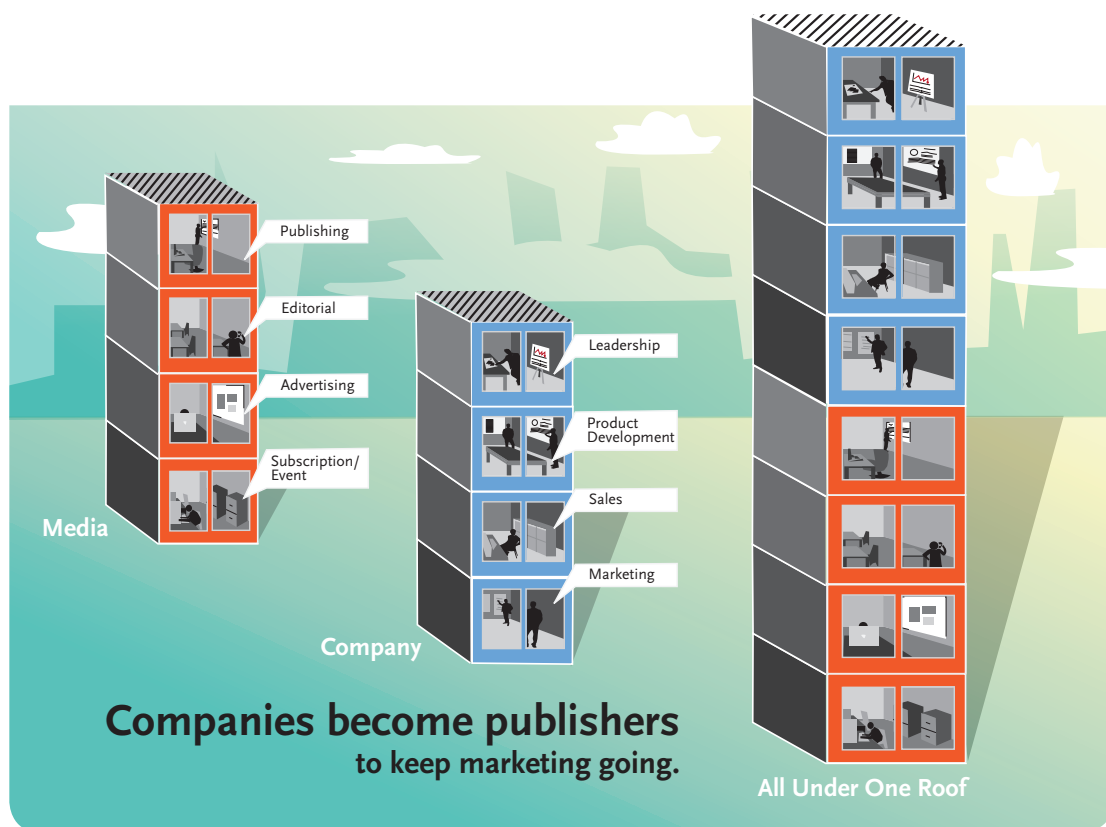
With content marketing, companies need to bring publishing talent, skills and practices together with product development, sales and marketing. Here are seven of rules of the publishing trade that every content marketer should live by.

# 1

## DEFINE YOUR EDITORIAL SCOPE

One of the challenges of content marketing is deciding what to say that hasn't already been said. Take supply chain consulting. You can bet that every theory and every value proposition on this topic has been articulated somewhere – whether that's in the pages of a trade publication, a white paper by an industry leader, a Webinar, a blog post or in dozens of other communications.

When content becomes a critical part of what a company produces, it needs to be differentiated in the knowledge marketplace – just like your company is carefully positioned in the business marketplace. To accomplish this, you first need to conduct a content analysis survey across your competitors and media sources. Next, inventory your company's own knowledge base. Then, indentify where you have the opportunity to say something meaningful and new.



Ask yourself questions like these.

- What specific knowledge do you have to share that can advance the conversation on key industry topics?
- Do you have any original research or financial analysis to share?
- Where can you find on-the-ground experience?
- What issues are you tackling through product development?

The goal is to find a list of topics that sync with your company's key messages and marketing objectives, then attack them like a reporter would. Write about them. Talk about them. Blog about them. Call up a video crew and start making news.

Your audience won't see a lot of value in reading content that presents a generally accepted idiom as your own revolutionary idea. Instead, advance their perspective on an important issue by sharing knowledge that only you possess.

## 2 FIND AN ANGLE

Just about every content marketer faces a serious temptation. They want to weigh in on the big picture topics and share powerful, transformative ideas. They want to talk about revolutions, evolutions, changing landscapes and new realities. However, most decision makers in business today understand big picture concepts just fine. For example, that better supplier relationships lead to healthier profitability, or that turning data into knowledge leads to insight.

Your audience won't see a lot of value in reading content that presents a generally accepted idiom as your own revolutionary idea. Instead, advance their perspective on an important issue by sharing knowledge that only you possess. Think case studies, survey data, financial analysis and other hard facts or insights. This is exactly how media operate. No reputable reporter wants to cover an idea that's already been aired unless he or she can present a significant update on it.

### **Make your ideas immediately implementable.**

No one's interested in leading an enterprise-wide transformative process that takes years to implement with a great risk of failure. So don't

write about one. You need to deliver how-to information that is immediately useful. And if you're going to showcase a proprietary internal process, show the logic behind your thinking so that your readers can benefit even if they never do business with you.



### **Develop an editorial calendar**

All media develop a 12-month calendar of planned editorial. Marketers need to create one as well based on their annual marketing plan. For each campaign focus, ask yourself: What new light can we shed on the topic? Got a big push in Q2 on data security? Maybe it's time to conduct a survey to discover where leading companies stand on implementing the right security measures.

## 3 BUILD A NEWS TEAM

Once you have determined your editorial scope and focus, you need to build a staff. Who's your editor-in-chief? Who are your reporters, editors, columnists, producers and guest experts? Look for people who have real insights to share and new information to break. Here are some key considerations.

**How can you leverage existing content and authors?** Identify who is already writing white papers for sales, bylines for media, articles for company newsletters and other content. Not only do you probably have an internal press corps ready to harness, but also existing content that can potentially be published.

**Who are your company's spokespersons?** Find out which executives are regularly interviewed by media, as well as those who present at tradeshows and in front of major customers. Then assign internal reports to interview them or record their presentation as a foundation for valuable content.

**Where do you have feet on the ground?** Some of your best contributions will come from sales reps with access to customer stories. Think of them as eye-witnesses who can share what they see.

**What technical know-how do you possess?** Another source of content is sales engineers who have solved tough technical problems and can share their expertise. Look also for internal experts who have developed measurement tools, industry practices and other practical knowledge

that can be broadcast outside your company.

**Who's in your larger network?** No editorial staff is complete without a list of guest contributors – industry insiders, analysts and other experts. Reaching outside your company is not only a way to build greater credibility, but a solid excuse to network more closely with important influencers, connectors and customers.




**HONE YOUR EDITORIAL VOICE**

While companies have always created white papers, product demos and other types of content as key sales tools, this does not necessarily mean they have engaged in content marketing. The difference comes down to speaking with an editorial voice instead of a sales voice, producing a news story rather than an infomercial.

Look at the image below. It depicts how a fictional company “InSite” tends to speak to its audience. The message is quintessential corporate speak and is so vague that it could be easily applied

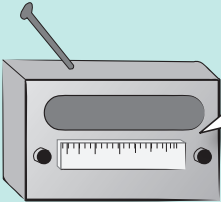
If content marketing represents a company's venture into publishing, then it better sound like the real deal. If it's just thinly disguised corporate speak, an audience will shun it.

### Journalist as translator



**Company:**

“InSite turns information into actionable insight to help today's companies connect with customers, increase their competitive advantage and improve their bottom line. It's changing the way business gets done.”



**Journalist:**

“InSite categorizes the millions of documents that companies produce – things like business plans, invoices, email correspondence – and makes them electronically searchable. So when someone inside the company is on the hunt for a specific piece of information, it can easily be found. It's a process called enterprise search. According to Forrester, the enterprise search software market totals \$3 billion and is expected to grow by 15% this year.”

to thousands of companies without anybody noticing. Now read the media's interpretation and you can see why it was so important for media to play the role of translating corporate speak into human language.

### Sound check

If content marketing represents a company's venture into publishing, then it better sound like the real deal. If it's just thinly disguised corporate speak, an audience will shun it. Companies that want to get it right need to be their own filter.



## 5 CRAFT YOUR CONTENT

Another aspect of developing a compelling editorial voice is content packaging. Any publication can be crammed with words – densely written articles broken up with stock photography. What makes a publication readable is not just good writing, but engaging layout and creative design that brings key messages sharply into focus.

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- **Make your content inviting and accessible.** You're not writing a treatise. Make it a quick, easy read. If you need more than 2,000 words, segment your paper into digestible insights.
- **Don't bury your lead.** Get your key points across right away and in the right places. Write as if your audience reads only your title, opening paragraph, subheads, pull quotes, captions and closing paragraph. Deliver a Webinar as if your audience will tune out in 10 minutes.
- **Let visuals sell your story.** Sometimes words are simply not powerful enough to convey a complex idea or bring your perspective to life. That's why publishing is also a visual medium. Make sure you work with designers who have editorial experience or sensitivity and can translate your message perfectly and make it compelling from cover to cover.

## 6 BUILD A DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

Beyond providing insightful editorial, the core role of the media is to provide a channel to targeted communities. When companies take on the responsibility of content marketing, but they also need to distribute it.

The easiest place to start is in your marketing department. Essentially, content marketing is an aid to lead generation. Many companies already offer high value content like white papers and case studies as an incentive to respond to a sales campaign. If you want to gain greater payback on content marketing, though, you need to develop a much broader range of publishing channels. Here are some tested ideas.

- **Develop an email marketing platform.** Email is the primary distribution channel for content marketing. Fortunately, most organizations already have an email platform like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp up and running and connected to their marketing database.
- **Build landing pages to host your content.** Place your content on a landing page where you can capture contact information. That way you also avoid sending unsolicited file attachments which people may be afraid to open.

Content marketing is a necessary part of addressing, cultivating and growing a business network.

- **Feed Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networking sites.** These are free, opt-in distribution channels engineered for user-generated publishing, and they come with built-in subscription tools. Tap social networks to continually gain new friends, followers and contacts. But don't overuse them, or people will begin to ignore your message.
- **Issue press releases to drive readership.** Why not announce the availability of your content over the newswire? This is content marketing's equivalent of mass marketing, and press releases today support live HTML links to your Website.
- **Pitch your content to bloggers.** Bloggers are another way to distribute your content online. They are always looking for great ideas to share and will usually point their followers to the original source.
- **Host Webinars.** Some people would rather tune into a 60-minute Webinar over lunch. Reach those people.
- **Leverage events.** Promote your content at tradeshows to drive booth traffic or showcase it at a private event like a road show or roundtable. Events are also great places to capture content such as field surveys or customer testimonials.
- **Buy paid links on major search engines.** This is a great way to capture qualified prospects that are searching for education on your key topics. You even see media doing this today as a way to win back old subscribers and find new ones.
- **Partner with media, analysts and industry trade organizations.** While many of these groups are losing some of their legacy influence, others are still relevant. Look for ones that offer lead generation or content distribution as a legitimate service. That can range from white paper campaigns and editorial supplements to Webinars and co-sponsored events.
- **Make it viral.** If the content you produce has real educational or entertainment value, you can assume that your existing subscribers will pass it along to their colleagues and peers.

**7 FOSTER A COMMUNITY**

At the end of day, what a media company is building is a community. If a magazine claims to be the trade publication of record for the network security industry, what they mean is that they are the center of a professional network. They educate that audience. They bring them together at



Content marketing offers companies the opportunity to deliver greater value to their customers and prospects – not only products and services, but real education that matters to them.

industry tradeshows. They make it possible for professionals in their industry to meet and introduce them to vendors that can help make them successful.

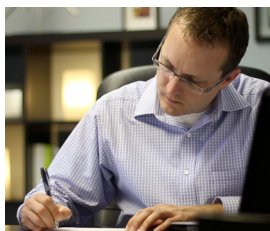
Businesses also have a network – their customers and prospects. Content marketing is a necessary part of addressing, cultivating and growing a business network. Here are some ways to achieve that.

- **Own your beat.** Content marketing isn't a one-off proposition. It's about finding topics you can own, about which you have real expertise. Develop these topics for your audience. Stay committed to them and publish on them regularly.
- **Have a series mindset.** Producing an ongoing series will keep your audience tuned in and help create a loyal following. You want your audience to stay engaged over time, to subscribe, to follow. If they check in at mid-point, you want them to back up to earlier stages and always anticipate what's next.
- **Encourage interaction.** Emerging media channels are social networking sites built to support real-time conversation across a group of individuals. They're designed to initiate a conversation, elicit a response and engage in a continuing dialogue. And that's a major goal of content marketing. Ask for and publish your audiences' perspectives. Enable a larger conversation to develop.

- **Be an industry resource.** In addition to helping you gain sales leads, content marketing has a longer term value. It can elevate your overall brand, establishing your company as a source of valuable, credible industry education. Consulting firms have done a great job at this. For example, when a company like Deloitte or KPMG comes out with a new industry survey, media report on it and businesses and organizations cite the report's key findings in their own content. It's a legitimate contribution to an industry's overall knowledge that keeps their audience coming back for more.

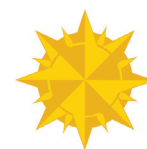
## THE LAST WORD

Content marketing is a powerful tool that has staying power. It's a way for companies to truly begin speaking with a credible voice that doesn't need to be translated and that can spark a direct response. Content marketing offers companies the opportunity to deliver greater value to their customers and prospects – not only products and services, but real education that matters to them.



### About the author

John Severance is an award-winning writer, producer and content marketer. He spent years pitching media stories and contributing editorial to a wide range of print and online publications. John is a partner/senior director with Sheffield Marketing Partners and works with B2B companies to help them implement content marketing programs that produce business results. You can reach John at [jseverance@sheffieldcompany.com](mailto:jseverance@sheffieldcompany.com).



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