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Get in the Content Marketing Mindset with these Three Exercises

By: Kim Tidwell

Although you may not be familiar with the term “content marketing,” you’ve certainly experienced it in your consumer life. Think of the last time you purchased something. Did you read online reviews, peruse an article about emerging technology in the product category or bookmark a blog post that listed a handful of things to look for when purchasing the product? If so, you experienced content marketing firsthand. Content marketing is not just a buzz phrase; it is a fundamental shift in how we market our businesses and sell our products. Rather than interrupting our customers by trying to reach them at various points in their lives through traditional marketing, content marketing seeks to put relevant and engaging information in front of our customers as they embark on researching and buying our products and services online.

First, why should you care about content marketing? The buyer journey has fundamentally changed. For B2B companies, your savvy prospects engage in a long period of research on your company and your competitors long before your sales team is aware of them. In fact, buyers can be [90 percent of the way through the buying process](#) before they make contact with your company! The key to reaching customers in today’s buyer journey is to help your prospects make an informed decision, through relevant information that answers their questions – not only about your product, but the category as a whole. Online content (blogs, social media, video, white papers, webinars, etc.) is that key. According to a June 2014 survey by [Demand Gen Report](#), 75 percent of buyers relied more on content to research and make B2B purchase decisions in 2014 than they did a year prior. Also from that study, the types of content buyers used to make those purchasing decisions were: white papers (78 percent), case studies (73 percent), webinars (67 percent), e-books (58 percent), videos (58 percent) and infographics (52 percent).

For companies of any size, embarking on and executing a long-term content marketing strategy can be daunting. It is a long process. Developing a healthy content marketing operation that generates leads for your company requires participation from everyone in the organization; it takes a long time and requires a consistent stream of new content to maintain. However, even if you are not ready to hire a content marketing team, there are things you can do right now, as an organization, to think like a content marketer.

Here are three exercises to help you think like a content marketer:

What questions are your customers asking?

The buyer journey is simply a series of questions that must be answered. Content can answer these questions. However, first you have to find out what those questions are. The most valuable feedback for this question will come from your customer-facing teams. Interview your sales team to find out what questions your customers have been asking at different stages of the buyer journey. Ask members of your customer service team or the IT help desk about client questions or concerns that come up routinely. You should also talk with your top clients to ask how they came to their purchase decision with your company. What starts to take shape after this exercise is a pattern of customer concerns that can help inform what you “talk” about online, both on your website and also in future content and social media.

Who is doing a great job of talking about your industry or product category?

This is called “thought leadership.” An essential part of starting to think like a content marketer is to identify who is doing a good job of addressing the customer questions and concerns you determined above. What industry blogs or websites do you respect? Who are the consistent and helpful contributors to LinkedIn industry groups? In any industry, there are people and companies



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that, when they speak, people listen. Who are those entities in your industry? Follow those leaders on social media and subscribe to their blogs or newsletters. This requires a bit of participation and monitoring on your part, but the more you participate and observe what's happening in the digital universe of your industry, the better informed you will be when you embark on your own content marketing journey.

What is your customer searching for on Google?

In 2014, Google saw more than [4 million searches per minute](#). All four million of these searches were questions. Put yourself in your prospects' shoes. If you've been through the first exercise, then you already have a list of client questions you can use to start your search. Conduct an experiment: take one of the key customer questions and plug it into Google. If your company comes up on page one of the search results, wonderful! If not, then put that term on a list of keywords and phrases to research. The key to good content marketing is that it addresses your prospects' questions in the way that they ask, not in the way you speak about your company or product. In this exercise, the goal is to see where your company is already doing a good job (in this case, residing on the first page of Google search results), and the areas where your company could use some work. After all, if you are not on the first Google search results page, you might as well be invisible. The second part of the exercise is to brainstorm related terms, phrases and wording for the key phrases that relate to your company. When you complete this list, decide which key phrases your company should focus on. What you'll end up with is a list of topics that will inform your future content development. Need a future blog topic? Refer to that list.

Content marketing may seem like a daunting process, but as you can see above, there are foundational steps you can take to put your organization on the right path. The key to thinking like a content marketer is to think like your prospects. With the three exercises above, you can start to develop a content marketing mindset.

About the author

Kim Tidwell is an independent contractor and account manager with Edge Marketing, Inc. She has over 15 years of experience with brand development, retail product development and both outbound and inbound marketing. In her spare time, she loves to run in Austin's hill country, and enjoys cooking and yoga.



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