

IDEAS AT WORK

How Content Strategy Elevates Your Brand and Drives Growth

Takeaways

- A successful content strategy always comes back to a clearly defined plan
- Long-form content gives your team more options and flexibility
- Build discipline and patience to commit to the plan

In big letters on the wall of our offices, it states, “The mission of business is to help people.” It is the number one, foundational belief that governs everything I do in business.

That’s part of why I’m so uncomfortable with a lot of traditional sales tactics, the kind of “twist your arm” hard sell stuff that we’re all familiar with. To me, that feels like trying to trick somebody into doing something they don’t want to do, not helping them reach their goals.

On the other side, that’s what I love about content marketing – you’re giving people helpful information and building a relationship of trust. The end result of that is growing your business, but you’re doing it by helping people. This article shows how you can use content to achieve all kinds of strategic goals, and what pitfalls to watch out for. Give it a read!



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How Content Strategy Elevates Your Brand and Drives Growth

As your market becomes increasingly crowded and competition becomes increasingly fierce, one of the most effective tools in your toolbox is Content Marketing. Yes, digital marketing that drives clicks and conversions is important, but how do you make sure potential customers consider you in the first place?

High-value content – which covers anything from articles and blogs to videos, case studies, infographics, ebooks, white papers, podcasts, research reports, social media posts, and more – can help establish you as a trusted expert and keep your business top of mind when it's time for potential customers to buy what you sell.

But if you want your content strategy to work effectively, there are some things you need to keep in mind.



Planning Your Content Strategy

The most successful business leaders recognize that you can't just write an occasional article or blog; you need a content strategy, a clear purpose for what you're trying to accomplish. That starts with identifying your goal. You can use content for any number of purposes, including:

- **Creating brand awareness.** Content is an effective way to directly build awareness, especially when the brand, product, or service is fairly young.
- **Generating demand/leads.** Content can successfully build direct traffic to your website and indirectly convert that traffic to leads or sales, especially over prolonged sales cycles. And the more content you have, the more search engines will love you (it's a virtuous cycle).
- **Retaining existing customers.** Content keeps them engaged with the company; they continue to see value in having a relationship, which leads to future purchases.
- **Building credibility and trust.** Content burnishes both the company and its key players who are dealing directly with clients and partners.
- **Supporting the launch of new products and services.** In particular, using content to educate prospective customers about their features, benefits, and value can drive interest and utilization.

Even if you have multiple goals for your content, make sure you put them in a prioritized order for your overall strategy. You can find productive uses for just about any type of content depending on your situation and strategy.

Next you'll need to identify your target audience for a content strategy. Who are you trying to reach? What do they need? Where do you find them? How do you reach them? You'll need a robust distribution and promotion strategy to ensure that you reach them effectively.

You'll also need to think about your competitors. Who are the other voices in the marketplace that your audience is listening to? What are they saying and doing? And what are they not saying and doing? After all, you're trying to find out not only how you can fit into that marketplace, but also how you can stand out in it.

Finally, you'll need to consider how content strategy fits into your other marketing and sales efforts. Your content team and other marketing teams must collaborate constantly. What content can you create to support a new marketing campaign? What content will best support sales teams trying to bring a new product to market? Are there specific content needs that would help your service and retention teams? It requires constant communication to keep your messages consistent, and to efficiently cover your bases without reinventing the wheel for every major push.



Deploying Your Content Strategy

Of course, a sound strategy is essential, but so is the quality of the content itself. Your content must be interesting, well-produced, memorable, helpful, accurate, and engaging – the things that build trust in you as an expert. The more authentic it is, the more successful it will be at standing out. And in all cases, you'll want to have a clear call to action and/or links to other content.

One of the tactics we see being used successfully today is long-form content. Long-form articles, videos, and podcasts can be more personal, more engaging, and more compelling. What's more, they can easily be repurposed – broken into multiple, shorter pieces and/or put in multiple formats. For example, if you've got a long video, you can pull a short clip out and create short-form content and social media posts. You can transcribe it for a blog post or an article on your website. You can condense a 2,000-word article and/or excerpt it; now you have several 500-word pieces, along with some great quotes for social media.

What about your sales team? Good content can come before or after your sales team makes contact with a prospect, or both. If your content is designed to drive traffic and leads, then your sales team must be aware of what that content says, i.e., why the prospect raised their hand to say, "I'm interested." If your content is designed to support the sales team after they have talked to a prospect, then your content team must learn from the sales team about what concerns and desires were voiced by the prospect, so the content can lean into those topics.

Whenever you post content, make sure other people in your organization repost it or comment on it. Leverage your reach by having multiple people spread it throughout their networks. Consider boosting content with paid promotion on Facebook and LinkedIn. Remember, this is not *Field of Dreams*; just because you built it doesn't mean they will come. You have to promote your content as well as create it.

Defining Success

How do you define success? Go back to the goals you established at the outset. If your primary goal is raising awareness, then success is measured by how many people are actually seeing your content, how well they are engaging with you on social media, if they are subscribing to your e-mail newsletter, and other similar metrics. Are you ranking higher in search engines? Are you being mentioned more on the web (set a Google alert to find out)?

If your goal is to increase website traffic, you'll want to see higher page views and longer time-on-site. Measure whether visitors not only view the initial content but go from there to other parts of the site, register to receive emails, download an ebook, or take some other action.

We live in an age with a wealth of data; you have to know what matters, or you can easily get lost. Start with purpose and goal, then figure out which metrics are actually relevant to that goal and which are just noise.

Dangers to Watch Out For

There are several challenges you need to be aware of with content marketing. First, if you don't have a clear purpose, you can easily waste time and resources by creating content that doesn't fit strategically with your overall marketing and business plans. Or you might have different departments producing conflicting messages that will confuse your audience, or producing essentially the same thing, which is wasteful.



Another challenge we often see is impatience. This comes especially in converting traffic to leads or sales, which can take a while. You have to be patient, to fight through that initial period where you've put in money, time, and effort and you're waiting for results. Maybe your audience isn't ready to buy today, but in six months, after they've been engaging regularly with your content and they're ready to buy, you will be top of mind. The same goes for content strategy targeting your existing customers. Don't be in a rush to upsell them; instead, stay focused on solving problems and delivering high-value advice. It's fine to let them know about new products, services, and features, but remember that content strategy is value first, sales second.

A third challenge is lack of discipline. Strategies and plans will naturally change over time, but you must carefully guard your purpose through change. There are fads in the content world, and just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. A few years ago, platforms like Facebook notoriously pushed the "Pivot to Video," promoting short form video as the silver bullet for content strategy. Companies of all kinds abandoned their existing plans and followed the pied piper. But over time, many realized that these efforts didn't work. The "one-size-fits-all" approach didn't actually fit their strategy, and, worse, Facebook had even inflated the statistics (whether intentionally or by accident) that drove the trend in the first place.

In a world where everyone wants you to sing to their tune, make sure you have a strong sense of your own beat.

In Conclusion

Remember that the keys to success with content marketing are to have a clear purpose, understand your audience, deliver quality content, fit with your overall marketing and sales strategy, and exhibit patience and discipline. High-value content builds trust, and trust leads to happier – and more – customers.

If you're looking for help with your organization's content strategy, Tarkenton can help! Whether you're new to content and just getting started, or need to evaluate and revamp an existing program, our team is ready. [Contact Tarkenton today!](#)



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