

CONTENT MARKETING

Mapping content to the B2B
buyer journey

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IN THE BEGINNING

Let's begin by stating the blatantly obvious. Content has always been at the heart of marketing. And marketing, or indeed most anything, without content is...well...nothing.

So, Content Marketing seems an odd set of words. There was a recent article from a respected marketing professional entitled 'Content Marketing versus Traditional Marketing'. What is an advert if not a piece of content? We attended a seminar from a leading marketing platform provider about the growth of Content Marketing that made virtually no reference to offline marketing activities. But, what is direct mail if not a piece of content?.

This Marketing Insider sets out to provide a more comprehensive definition of Content Marketing. We should state from the outset that we don't believe all the questions have been answered but, like every new segment, it's evolving rapidly. Yet even in its (relative) infancy, there are still hugely impressive bottom line benefits to be realised from a well-designed and sustained Content Marketing programme.

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

Content Marketing is a new marketing discipline. It challenges your thinking when done properly. It forces you to ask hard questions about what you're saying, how you're saying it and who you're saying it to. Today, it is often seen as primarily an online activity. We agree with the Content Marketing Institute that it goes much further than that.

The Content Marketing Institute defines Content Marketing as::

"The marketing and business process for 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.

A content marketing strategy can leverage all story channels (print, online, in-person, mobile, social, etc.), be employed at any and all stages of the buying process, from attention-oriented strategies to retention and loyalty strategies, and include multiple buying groups."

Although we quite like the way they describe Content Marketing to non-believers:

"Your customers don't care about you, your products, your services...they care about themselves, their wants and their needs. Content marketing is about creating interesting information your customers are passionate about so they actually pay attention to you."

This second definition is more instructive. It's not new thinking to suggest that you'll be more successful if you understand your customers' needs and position your products and services to meet those needs. Content Marketing takes this thought one extremely important step forward.

Content Marketing not only flips focus from your company to your customers. It flips how we structure marketing activities.

Say you're about to launch a new product. Previously, you would create the messaging, design a marketing campaign, develop a matrix of the sales and marketing content you'd need to successfully launch, sell and support that product. All of which is still important.

Content Marketing doesn't get rid of any of this. Instead, it asks a fundamentally different question:

"If our target customers are spread along a definable buyer journey, what content do we need to give them to move them along their personal journey?"

If that question doesn't scare you, it really should. As Kipling never wrote: 'If you can keep your head when all around are losing theirs, you probably just haven't understood the scale of the problem'. Because, there are any number of imponderables built in to a fairly simple question - not least that people with what appear to be very similar profiles can react wildly differently to any piece of content (You're not even safe with kittens anymore!).

And, of course, you have the big B2B bonus. There are multiple decision-makers and influencers involved in most B2B purchases. All of which is ok if you can personalise the content to individual prospects and customers. Only, at the start, they don't really want to speak with you.

Does beg the question: if it's so daunting, why not stick with what's worked in the past?

The answer to that can be found at the end of the last paragraph. Your customers increasingly don't want to talk to you until they're ready. Marketing needs to be able to take the slack created as sales activities become less productive. Or, to put it another way, marketing has to help nurture the customer to the point where the sales team can do what they do best. And, that isn't a relentless round of cold calling.

Content Marketing can help flesh out this extended role for marketing but, as should be clear, much more care and consideration has to be given to the content that you're creating.

CYNIC'S SPOILER ALERT

We note with dismay conversations about 'fresh' as opposed to 'evergreen' content. All content has a sell-by date. Some longer than others. Brochures hang around longer than press releases. Blog posts stay more relevant for a greater period of time than tweets. So what? This is hardly a revelation. It's certainly no foundation for a strategy. If your Content Marketing thinking is mired at this level or people are trying to sell you services based on this type of conversation, our advice is to give up and go home. .

CONTENT MARKETING & THE BUYER JOURNEY

The thing about the concept of Content Management as it's widely viewed is that it's nice and discrete. There's a fantastic little department over there creating content for your web and social presence. Great! In our more extended definition things become a lot more messy.

You could argue that, in a wider perspective, Content Marketing may not be synonymous with Marketing as a whole but certainly Marketing Communications. Which brings us to two words we thought had become unfashionable and we're now hearing again and again: silos and ecosystems.

We'll take silos first. The larger the company, the more marketing divisions you are likely to have. Like it or not, these are, to some extent, silos. They may share information with other areas of marketing and the wider business but they have a degree of autonomy. For decades now, organisations have been trying to break down the silos of information that stop them having a single view of their customer. At the same time, they have

been building up silos that stop them having a single view of their marketing and sales content.

We speak with companies that have just established their Content Marketing department. It sits neatly alongside other marketing functions like corporate marketing and product marketing. So, we ask, who creates the content for your next marketing campaign? Will the same people who are handling your online content be working on your direct mail and trade show content? Will your new Content Marketing function be removing content creation and development from your other marketing departments - leaving them as primarily strategy and implementation houses?

Bringing us on to ecosystems. The idea of the marketing ecosystem has been around a while. It is designed to coordinate messages and communication channels so that your targets connect with you across multiple touchpoints.

As we focus more on the buyer journey, the marketing ecosystem becomes important as your customers are using a whole range of touchpoints for a whole range of things. You could think of the marketing ecosystem as a large net that is spread out to capture as many people as possible and designed to drag them closer to the centre. It only retains those you are interested in and those

interested in you. As it nears the centre all that remain are real prospects and customers. At the centre is your marketing hub - usually your corporate website.

It's not a great analogy. It has more holes than the average net in fact but you get the point. We're creating an environment to gain our target's attention and start walking them through their buyer journey. We have to be aware of two things:

People will be caught in our net at different points on the buyer journey.

People progress along their own buyer journey at different speeds.

BUYER'S JOURNEY



CONTENT MARKETING & SALES ENABLEMENT



Figure 1: Mapping Content Marketing to stages of the buyer journey

There are different models to map a buyer journey but we prefer use three stages for simplicity: Attention, Consideration and Purchase. A Content Marketing programme needs to address each stage of the journey with the objective of aligning your message with the motivations of the buyer as they pass from stage to stage. (See Figure 1)

To go all Transformers: silos are the enemies of ecosystems when it comes to Content Marketing. It should be clear that there needs to be a high degree of content coordination if we are to accurately provide information that resonates along the buyer journey. There is nothing new here. This is simply brand consistency applied across a range of content types - but we need the messages to build and grow from each other.

This allows us to set a few rules for a Content Marketing programme.

To properly address all stages of the buyer journey, Content Marketing must:

Provide multiple content types across multiple touchpoints.

Understand one single content type will not effectively address one single stage of the buyer journey.

Move conversation with an individual customer from general to personal at the earliest point.

We'll take a moment to explain the second point clearly. It is not implying that if the person has no previous contact with your company then social media is the best way forward. That is patently

nonsense. We are more looking at content types than channels here. For the sake of discussion let's say there's entertaining, educational, informative, technical, sales and customer service content types. It may be appealing to say that at the very early stage of the buyer journey - where the buyer doesn't know they're on a journey yet - we ply them with entertaining content to build up positive brand association for later. Nice Infographic, anyone?

But that's not how people really work. I could easily take a look at sales literature of a product that, currently, I have no intention of buying. Any buyer will consume many types of content at each stage of their journey. That's quite an obvious statement. But, the conclusion may be a little more awkward: does this mean that we should be amended our communications and literature to provide sales messages relevant to different stages of the buyer journey? Google is certainly beginning to think that this is exactly how we should be structuring our corporate websites.

CONTENT MARKETING & LEAD GENERATION

There is one very clear purpose of a Content Marketing programme and that is to bring higher quality leads to your business. There has been a great deal of discussion on whether the focus on the buyer journey has assigned our sales funnel to history. That's for another time. But, we want leads.

Of course, you can use Content Management to enhance brand perception. That could even be a goal for your programme but it is really a means and not an end. The end will always be leads. The only real measure of success is ROI.

In fact, in its 2016 B2B Content Marketing benchmark report, the Content Marketing Institute states that lead generation is the key concern for most of the companies surveyed (85%) with new sales a close second (84%)

Now, we've got pretty good at lead generation. We've worked extremely hard on developing great buyer personas and we've created amazing lead scoring systems that help us track and manage the development of a lead to sales.

All these same disciplines have to be applied to Content Management. And, therein lies the rub. You see the work we have done on lead generation has really been aimed at the stages on the buyer journey where the lead has pretty much decided that they need a solution and are on the look-out. Our first task is to capture their details and then to guide them as quickly as we possibly can towards a sales contact.

The problem is that the buyer journey starts when the lead doesn't know they have a need.

It's all those non-leads that you 'forgot about' when you were focused on driving the others down your funnel. The ones that were marked as 'another email in six months' if they were on your list at all..

Yet, there are two inescapable facts you have to deal with:

Most people - including the vast majority of your future customers - are currently in the earliest stage of the buyer journey.

Most people will spend most time in the earlier stages of the buyer journey for any purchase decision.

As Content Management really came about as one means of reaching out to customers earlier in the buyer journey, it is important that all Content Marketing efforts form part of an overall lead generation programme. And, this is a big issue.

At the moment, there is no end-to-end solution that can handle the entirety of the buyer journey as far as we're aware. Instead, we're faced with using a series of separate tools - many with overlapping functionality. We have social media management tools, Content Marketing publishing platforms, Marketing Automation solutions and the inevitable CRM.

Add to this the Data Management Platforms (DMP) that are helping make sense of Big Data (the stuff we've been shoving in databases for decades and now realise it's not only supermarkets that can use it!) and the situation becomes quite complex... and confused. For example, many people are not completely sure what a DMP actually is.

Let's just say that the integration between all these solutions is not stellar (although it is getting better at a rate of knots). It is certainly not seamless.

And, it's not necessarily the technology's fault:

Each tool does its function well and has a growing amount of integration with others.

Even where there is native integration, it is difficult to apply a single lead scoring system across all solutions and handle hand-offs between solutions.

It takes a bit of thinking to apply lead scoring concepts from sales and marketing automation into social media distribution. And visa versa.

An example to illustrate the last point. We're very happy to assign points for selected behaviours. The lead downloads a white paper. They spend a certain amount of time on a group of pages. Everyone's happy. But, what about a lead that writes a very positive blog about an area important to your product or service. How do you score that as part of an end-to-end lead generation campaign?

Content Marketing and lead generation have to go hand-in-hand otherwise we will undermine some of the purpose of our Content Marketing activities. It is very informative to notice that the Content Marketing Institute's 2016 report showed that, whereas website traffic had been the key metric for measuring Content Marketing effectiveness for the last six years, this year it was sales lead quality. That requires us to have an end-to-end view of how we initiate, develop and deliver 'sales ready' leads to the organisation.

At the moment, we have to accept that will involve some manual manipulation.

SO, WHAT WORKS?

Well, that's the ten million dollar question. The answer needs to be broken into two areas: strategy and content types.

Let's start with strategy. Going back to the Content Marketing Institute report, there was one amazing finding. Less than one third of companies surveyed said that they had a documented Content Marketing strategy. We can't imagine ever talking to a company, asking to see their marketing plan and being told that 'No, we've haven't written it down. It's just all in our heads.' What's that about failing to plan and planning to fail?

Perhaps, in light of this result, it's not so surprising that the amount of companies that believe their Content Marketing was effective has reduced from 38% to 30% between 2014 to 2015 (Shockingly, over half of the organisations didn't know what Content Marketing effectiveness even looked like!). It is almost impossible not to get a sense that

many organisations are embarking on Content Marketing because they think they have to rather than as a strategic initiative to enhance their marketing function.

The truth is that it is very simple to set out the process of turning what is increasingly looking like loose, unstructured marketing activity into a repeatable and measurable strategy:

Develop an overall marketing plan that includes Content Marketing.

Develop a range of (as comprehensive as possible) buyer personas.

Develop a documented Content Marketing strategy and plan (with attached budgets).

Create a Content Marketing team with clearly defined responsibilities.

Develop a documented Editorial Statement.

Develop a comprehensive editorial calendar.

Develop metrics to enable clear measurement of effectiveness.

Hold regular/frequent meetings of the Content Marketing team.

Continually assess the progress and effectiveness of your content and strategy.

The list is quite long so we're not about to go through each stage in depth but rather what we'll do is pick out areas of particular importance.

The Need for Buyer Personas

A buyer persona is a detailed profile that represents an actual, real life group of target buyers. It is sometimes confused with the established idea of a target market. The difference is that while defining a target market concentrates solely on demographics - such as location, turnover, company size - a buyer persona covers demographics and then layers over 'soft' elements - such as common interests, motivations and expectations of the specific buyer.

The good news is that you already have the knowledge to create highly accurate buyer personas. They are your customers. By examining the relationships you already have you will gain insight into what makes an ideal - or disastrous - customer for you. Armed with your buyer personas - you are likely to have a handful - you can begin to examine the channels they use and how and when they like direct engagement with you.

Documenting your Strategy

Put simply, you are going to struggle to gain or maintain a consistent level of momentum or success behind your Content Marketing without a written strategy plan. The strategy should include:

A clear set of goals for your Content Marketing.

A mapping of these goals against wider business objectives.

A clear understanding of your audiences and the channels they use.

A mapping of content against channel.

A statement of the roles and responsibilities of the content team, including methods and processes for developing content.

A statement of the sign-off and distribution processes for content.

A statement of the content architecture (with tone of voice).

A statement of the methods, tools, metrics and KPIs used to measure effectiveness.

A statement of what represents success (tied to ROI unless there is a very good reason not to).

This strategy document must be circulated beyond the content team to everyone you expect to be involved in your Content Marketing. It should be the document by which the senior management are convinced of the need to invest in the area and have something by which to assess its progress. But, remember, like all plans, this is a living, breathing document. It has to be continually assessed and amended as your content needs or business objectives change.

The Editorial Statement & Calendar

Marketers spend a great deal of time defining the brand, its values and how this is projected to target customers. The same is not often true about the content those brands are producing. The best we have created in the past are detailed tone of voice documents that set out how our message is to be delivered. As content is obviously the core of Content Marketing, it is worth spending a little time to bring this type of brand analysis to how and why you are producing content.

In essence, your editorial statement will set out to clearly articulate five key areas:

What your organisation stands for.

Who you are trying to reach and why.

What you have to say to them.

How you are going to reach them.

What your content will accomplish.

So why is an editorial statement useful and when is it used? We've all been brand guardians at some point so we will be aware that there needs to be control. When we are struggling to find good content or content that we think will be sufficiently compelling it's easy to think any content is good content. It's not. Quality will always trump quantity. But quality content that doesn't reflect the brand - or worse - could be detrimental to the brand and must be eliminated.

The editorial statement will give a document where editorial content can be judged. Think back to that

tone of voice document. You can say 'our customers are highly intelligent, successful business people'. You can't say 'our customers are useless'. This becomes even more important when you are dealing with curated content. Not all content that covers an area of interest for your prospective audience will reflect well on your brand.

The editorial statement will also act as a co-ordinating document for your content team - especially if you are bringing in content creators from across your organisation or even outside it - it will provide an understanding of what is and isn't acceptable when creating and developing content for your Content Marketing efforts.

CYNIC'S SPOILER ALERT PART 2

It's time to address storytelling. Well, the area has the word 'content' in it so adding the word 'story' seems quite natural. But potentially misleading. The theory would go that you're been creating content for years that's really just a bullet set of features and benefits. We need to get into the story. Not the what or how but they why of what you do. All well and good. But your goal hasn't changed. You still have to deliver the correct messages at the correct time. In a universe of ever-expanding content where you are fighting for recognition simply adding to it with 'honey trap' entertaining content may not be the best way forward. Content is only good content when it achieves your business strategies. .

To complement the editorial statement is the editorial calendar. Anyone that has had any involvement in publishing customer newsletters and magazines will be well aware of the concept. Content Marketing is, in essence, very similar to publishing in that it is really the coordinated creation, development and dissemination of information. The same rules apply:

Establish your editorial team.

Develop a range of content ideas.

Develop the content itself to an agreed timetable.

Institute a thorough checking and sign-off process.

Produce a comprehensive distribution plan.

Distribute the content to an agreed timetable.

The schedule should set out the types of content that you will use and the channels by which it will be distributed. This will include content created by the content team, content created elsewhere in the organisation, curated content covering areas of interest to your customer and third party content that you have commissioned yourself (either paid for or submitted).

Selecting the Right Content Tactics

Which brings us neatly to the many content tactics that are available to your organisation from websites to eBooks to in-person events and everything in between. In the 2016 benchmark study, the Content Marketing Institute looked at common tactics used and asked about the

effectiveness of these tactics. The results of the non paid-for content tactics is shown in Figure 2.

The results suggest that organisations are finding it more difficult to achieve the effectiveness they are seeking from their Content Marketing efforts. For example, although almost all respondents used social media content, less than 50% believed it was effective. Similarly blogs are very popular but organisations don't believe they are as effective as they would like.

On average companies use 13 different content marketing tactics according to the report. Again this may be expected for organisations that don't have a documented strategy, less than a third think they are effective at Content Marketing and most don't really know what Content Marketing success would look like.

There appears to be an element of shooting fish in a barrel. There's so many in there, let's give them all a go. In lieu of a more mature area or the internal discipline to create a solid structure for Content Market, it's going to be difficult not to employ a 'suck it and see' approach.

In fact, this approach may not be as dumb as it sounds as we can't be sure which content is going to resonate and which channels are going to work hardest for any piece of content. It is easily possible to identify content tactics that will loosely correspond to stages on the B2B buyer journey. (See figure 3). You just need to measure what is effective and what isn't.

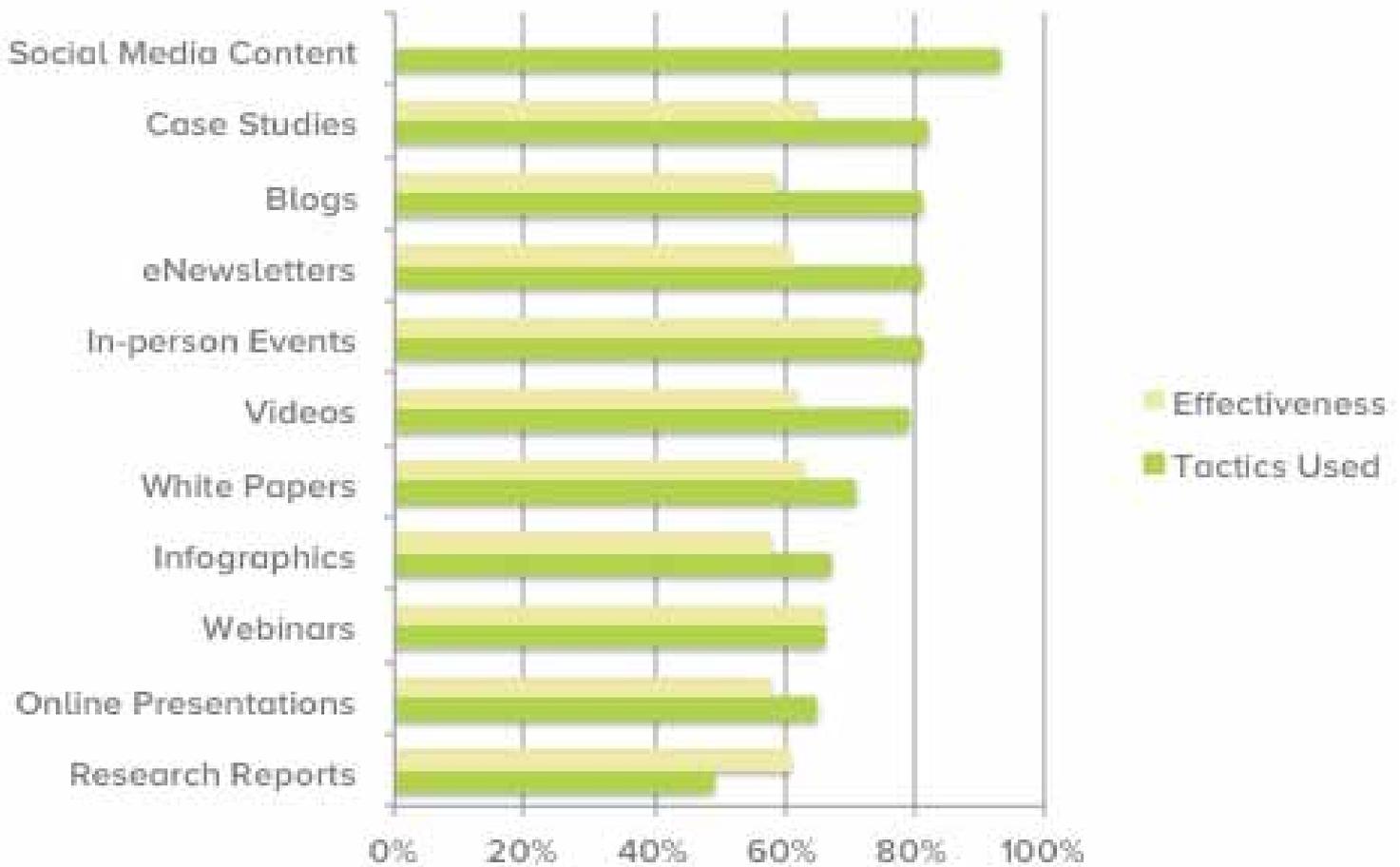


Figure 2: Usage and effectiveness of Content Marketing tactics

But, each organisation's marketing need are different and one size will never fit all. You need to have a clearer understanding of who your audiences are and how you can create content that will meet their requirements. That means investing time and money to do a bit of research.

Planning and research are going to help ensure that, over time at least, you are right more times than you're wrong about the content and tactics to use. You can listen in on conversations that are already happening and learn where the people

you want to attract are, how they respond and what they respond to. Then you can hone your Content Marketing strategy accordingly.

For a quick rule of thumb, the less time you spend in planning and research, the more you're going to have to spend in metrics and measurement. We've seen Content Marketing without a proper strategy described as simply setting your fleet of ships afloat and hoping that one of them hits dry land where you wanted. If that's what you're doing, your going to need a damn clever sat nav!

BUYER'S JOURNEY



CONTENT MARKETING & SALES ENABLEMENT



CONTENT TACTICS



Figure 3: Mapping content tactics to stages of the B2B buyer journey

MEASURING SUCCESS

According to Content Marketing Institute reports, creating engaging content has always been the key challenge for B2B organisations. But, this year, it was almost surpassed by the need to understand the effectiveness of content with the measurement of ROI from content marketing activities not far behind.

The first trend suggests that content marketing is maturing. As marketers understand more about how to use content to drive quality leads and sales, we all want to be clear on what works well and how it can be replicated or improved.

However, it is the focus on ROI that is more important. In the end, the legitimacy of any business activity will come down to how much more revenue you've generated above what you spent. For Content Marketing, this is tricky.

There is a truth about many marketing disciplines that is particularly true about content marketing: it is a marathon not a sprint. You may be lucky and see immediate results from your Content Marketing efforts but it is almost impossible that they will be

consistent and sustained. Instead, Content Marketing is cumulative and, executed effectively, grows over time.

So, there is little point focusing on ROI as your key metric three months into the your programme. A minimum amount of time for analysing Content Marketing's ROI performance would be at least 12 months. Currently, very few – if any – Content Marketing programmes have been in operation long enough (say 5-10 years) that they have enough historical data to make firm conclusions on how well they have performed.

That is not say that ROI should be ignored. The opposite is true. It should form the basis of how you will measure success from the outset.

You should have a clear view of what ROI you want to achieve from the activity. If you aren't sure what a realistic ROI would be at the beginning then you could simply look at the ROI you are currently receiving from other marketing activities and project that Content Marketing will do slightly better than current activities. After all, if it's going to do worse, what's the point of doing it at all?

The key is to revise your top line measurements as the programme progresses and you begin to have real data with which to interpret what is achievable. You never know, you might find you'll be revising your ROI projections upwards.

Online marketing has introduced a level of measurement that has simply been beyond the ability of offline activities. Page views on websites may be similar to a print advert's 'opportunities to see' but it is difficult to create an equivalent to shares and likes. The result is that we can now measure pretty much everything – and the Internet is afloat with any number of excellent tools that let

us do it (Although the same problems of integration that exist with end-to-end lead development exist here as well).

Content Marketing expert Jay Baer suggests that there are four types of Content Marketing metric (See Figure 4). This starts with metrics surrounding individual consumption of content and progresses through content sharing into lead generation and finally sales. It is presented chronologically but it has to be applied iteratively.

In fact, using the Content Marketing Institute's report, the consumption and sharing metrics will give us a handle on content effectiveness. It lets us know what content and what channels work. The lead and sales metrics begin to give us a view of ROI. Other industry commentators suggest other metrics that can be added to give a more sophisticated picture but, for the vast majority of organisations with their Content Marketing programme still in relative infancy, it is better to keep things as simple as possible...

CONTENT MARKETING METRICS

CONSUMPTION	SHARING	LEADS	SALES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Analytics Website traffic Open rates Other actions taken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommends Likes Forwards Quantity & quality of sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads generated Lead quantity Lead quality Cost per lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales Closed Deal size Repeat business ROI

Figure 4: Types of metrics available for measuring Content Marketing success.

IN THE END...

The sales funnel is dead. Long live the buyer journey! Well, that may not be entirely true but it does demonstrate why Content Marketing is becoming more and more attractive. The sales funnel is really something you do to your customers. Whereas the buyer journey is something they do themselves.

If all the change in terminology does is to refocus content creation from delivering messages more suited to your internal business to messages constructed to address customer needs, it will all have been worthwhile.

However, there are real gains to be made through Content Marketing. It should create a more immersive environment where a customer meets your brand in many environments and in many situations – not necessarily sales. As customers spend most of their time in the earlier parts of their buyer journey then working on brand awareness and brand associations will be as important as providing knowledge of products and solutions. Although both are not mutually exclusive. Get it right and, over time, Content Marketing will begin

to deliver higher quality leads at a lower cost. You just have to ensure that you measure everything to develop a clear understanding of the effectiveness of your content while maintaining a firm view on the ROI your programme can deliver.

But you must be aware that it is not easy. Content Marketing is not yet a fully mature marketing discipline. The Content Marketing Institute reports that almost 90% of B2B organisations have some form of Content Marketing programme in place. Yet, less than a third believe they are effective at Content Marketing. So it is essential that you spend a good deal of time working out exactly what benefits your investment will actually bring and building a sound strategy to make it happen.

About The Garret

The Garret is a creative B2B marketing consultancy that helps organisations build a positive understanding between them and the people who matter to them. We are content specialists. We create polished and persuasive content to address each step in your customers' buying journey.

Visit: thegarret.uk

About Marketing Insider

Marketing Insider is a series of white papers and positioning articles covering the latest marketing trends and techniques. It is designed to help you understand how these developments can benefit your B2B marketing campaigns.

To find out about other white papers in the Marketing Insider series, visit thegarret.uk/stuff

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