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A Practical Guide to Building a Killer Content Strategy

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Introduction

Pick any day of the week and there's one thing that should always be on your to-do list: creating new content. Even if you're not the one creating, it definitely should cross your mind.

Companies used to create content only when it suited their internal needs – say, when they had a new product to promote. But inbound marketing forces you to give up that approach. Now you need to produce a constant flow of new content, from blog posts and social media updates to videos, ebooks, or webinars. This content serves in many ways: It improves search engine rankings, drives traffic to your website, and helps to nurture existing leads.

But constantly coming up with new ideas can be overwhelming. When inspiration dries up, you risk falling into two equally dangerous traps: If you stop creating new blog posts, videos, ebooks or other content pieces, you turn off a major source of new traffic and leads. And, if you panic and start pushing out content that's a bad fit for your audience, you risk attracting the wrong kind of visitor while driving away good prospects.

So how do you keep up? This ebook will help answer how by helping you build a content strategy for your business or organization.

Chapter 1: Know Your Audience

Build Your Buyer Persona

We called this ebook a “practical” guide for a very simple reason: you need to be practical. Before you begin writing and exploring different content types and formats, it’s important to understand who you’re writing content for.

To handle the demands of content creation, we have been told again and again to “think like a publisher.” Like publishers, inbound marketers must have a detailed picture of their target audience in order to create optimal content for them. Who are your ideal customers and prospects? What are their biggest concerns, needs, and interests? Where can you reach them – on search engines, social media, or blogs – and what kinds of content do they prefer? These questions will help you develop buyer personas.

Personas are fictional representations of your ideal customers based on data about demographics & online behavior, along with educated speculation about their histories, motivations & concerns.



Start developing personas by researching your existing customer base to identify the most common buyers for your products and services. You may have several different types of buyers, so give each one a detailed description, including name, job title or role, industry or company info, and demographic info.

For example, a community bank’s biggest customers may include small business owners and mothers managing the bank accounts for a family of four. In this case, the bank’s marketers might name these personas “business owner Bob” and “Mary, the busy mom,” and extrapolate details about their responsibilities, the typical size of their business or household income, what geographic region they’re in, and so on.

Based on those profiles, you can outline the pains, needs, and challenges of each persona by asking yourself several important questions such as:

- WHAT ARE THE **PROBLEMS** CUSTOMERS ARE TRYING TO SOLVE?
- WHAT DOES HE OR SHE **NEED** MOST?
- WHAT INFORMATION ARE THEY **SEARCHING** FOR?

Analyzing the path that prospects take on the journey to becoming a customer is a great way to get insights about the needs and challenges of your target audience. Using a marketing platform, or analytics, can highlight which search terms brought prospects to your site, how long they stayed on your site, which pieces of content they viewed, and which forms they've filled out. Such lead intelligence will help you make better decisions when identifying the characteristics of your ideal customers and ways to nurture your new prospects.



For example, in the case of our hypothetical bank, “Business-owner Bob” may typically be searching for merchant services such as accepting electronic payments and securing lines of credit. Once on the site, he reads articles about how electronic payments can improve cash flow and researches how lines of credit can fund ongoing operations. Based on that activity, his persona pains/needs/challenges would include managing cash flow, achieving cost savings, and offsetting the effects of a slow economy.

Chapter 2: Map Content to the Buying Cycle

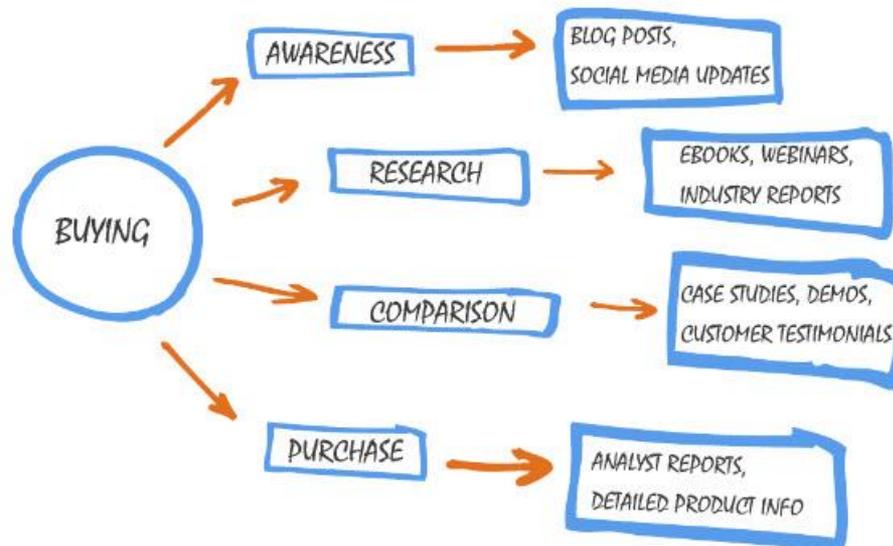
Identify Your Buying Cycle

Content plays a critical role in every stage of the inbound marketing process, from generating awareness about your company to helping convert leads into customers. But the types of content you should use to achieve each of those goals are often very different from each other, which means you need to ensure that you're creating content for every stage of the buying cycle:

1. **Awareness:** The prospect gets acquainted with your brand or realizes they have a need for your product/service.
2. **Research/Education:** The prospect identifies the problem and researches potential solutions, including your product or service.
3. **Comparison/Validation:** The prospect examines the options and begins narrowing the list of vendors.
4. **Purchase:** The prospect decides who to buy from.

Map Your Content

Next, identify the types of content and channels that work best for each stage of the buying cycle. Of course, your prospects may engage with certain channels throughout the entire buying process, such as reading blog posts or following your brand on social media. However, marketing studies have shown that certain types of content play particularly important roles at specific stages of the decision-making process. Here's a suggested mapping of buying stage to content type:



Chapter 3: Build an Editorial Calendar

Setup Your Editorial Calendar

Once you've built your buyer persona and mapped your content around that persona's buying cycle, it's time to figure out when and where to share the content you will be ultimately creating. An effective way to do this is to create an editorial calendar. An editorial calendar is like a roadmap for content creation, showing you what kind of content to create, what topics to cover, which personas to target, and how often to publish to best support your inbound marketing strategy. Here are some suggested steps for creating yours:

1. **Create a Google calendar or spreadsheet to record your editorial plans.** While in an ideal world you should be planning for the next three months, that goal is oftentimes easier said than done.
2. **Work backwards from your marketing goals to guide your plan.** Look at how much traffic, how many leads, and how many customers you are aiming to generate during the timeframe of the editorial calendar — whether that be a week, month, or quarter. Analyzing your previous marketing efforts can help determine how many pieces of content you typically need to reach those goals.

3. **Fill your calendar with specific dates and publishing tasks**, such as updating blogs or social networks daily, posting new videos or podcasts each week, publishing an ebook or hosting a webinar each month, and so on. For each date, list the topic, the title of the piece, and the target persona. The goal is to create a good mix of content types, topics, and personas to make sure you're covering your various audiences.
4. **Note the SEO keywords, the stage of the buying cycle, the calls-to-action, or other inbound marketing goals that each piece of content must address.**
5. **Make note of important dates or external events that are good hooks for specific topics or types of content.** For example, retailers could highlight major holidays such as Christmas, Halloween, or Mother's Day and plan content that fits with the seasonal theme. B2B marketers could note important industry trade shows they plan to attend, and schedule blog updates, recaps, or videos generated at the event.
6. **Look for opportunities to repurpose content.** For example, the publication of a new whitepaper or research report could generate several weeks' worth of blog posts that each share details or small nuggets of data from the complete report.
7. **Create separate tabs for each kind of content you publish, such as blog posts, webinars, ebooks, videos, etc.** That way, you can make sure you're publishing enough of each kind of content, and spreading that content appropriately among your targeted personas and stages of the buying cycle.

Setup Your Editorial Calendar

By the end of this process, you'll find that you've filled up most of your calendar with detailed plans for content. This should prevent you from spending hours each day planning your content by providing you with a content calendar that you simply follow.

If there are a few holes, that's okay. You want the flexibility to capitalize on news or hot topics as they arise over the course of the year. For those weeks when you can't find the inspiration for, say, another blog post, calling up your calendar will give you a great visual reminder of what you've covered already and what you're planning to cover next week or next month, so you can at least narrow down your options.

Conclusion & Summary

With the information and resources provided in this ebook, you should be ready to start developing your own content strategy and begin cranking out some killer content. Here's a quick summary of the important points we covered:

- Use behavioral and demographic information about your prospects to develop buyer personas based on their interests and needs, then target your content accordingly.
- Map your content to the buying cycle of your customers to ensure that you're creating content that works best for your readers based on which stage they are in.
- Create an editorial calendar to build a detailed schedule for creating and publishing content.
- Find new ways to come up with creative content topics that are relevant, helpful, and fun for your readers, and keep a backlog of these ideas so you always have some on hand when you're ready to create new content.

More Resources

The Bonanno Group Digital Marketing was founded in 2005 and has helped hundreds of businesses better leverage the internet to help achieve their business goals.

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