

CONTENT MARKETING FOR YOUR B2B AUDIENCE

Hotsheets

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WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

In 1964, US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart declined to specify all that is—and is not—hardcore pornography, preferring the more real-world benchmark “I know it when I see it.” The same can be said for content marketing, but here are three attempts, taken from a [terrific 2016 post](#) by LinkedIn’s Jason Miller. Content marketing...

“...means creating and sharing valuable free content to attract and convert prospects into customers, and customers into repeat buyers. The type of content you share is closely related to what you sell; in other words, you’re educating people so that they know, like, and trust you enough to do business with you.” [Brian Clark](#)

“...is creating or curating non-product content—be it informational, educational, entertaining, etc.—and publishing it to contact points with customers to get their attention, to focus on the topic around your solution, and pull them closer to learning more about you.” [Sam Decker](#)

“...is all the marketing that’s left.” [Seth Godin](#)

WHAT IS A STORY?

Pick your poison: [Aristotle](#), [Campbell](#), [McKee](#)... A protagonist moves from the known world through challenge and adversity into a new, unknown world. Storytelling is not fibbing or fantabulating.

How does this relate to selling insurance? That would take a lot more than two pages to answer, but ponder this wonderful quote, for starters, from [Lewis Mehl-Madrona](#): Stores are “the powerful means by which...communities are formed and maintained, national identities are preserved, problem-solving skills are taught, and moral values are instilled. Stories get our attention and teach us things we will never forget.” Marketing at its highest, yes?

WHY SHOULD CONTENT MARKETING BE STORY-DRIVEN?

In January 2017, Edelman—the world’s largest PR firm—released this year’s [Trust Barometer](#), a 17-year-running online survey in 28 countries (and itself an excellent example of deep content marketing). This year’s findings contain a number of harrowing statistics, all pointing to a lack of faith consumers have in large institutions, including government, the media and business:

- 67% of countries surveyed are, writes CEO Richard Edelman, “distrusters (under 50 percent trust in the mainstream institutions of business, government, media and NGOs to do what is right), up from just over half in 2016”
- 37% of respondents rated CEOs as extremely or very credible, down from 49% last year. They ranked “a person like yourself” equal in credibility to an academic or technical expert “and far more credible than a CEO”
- 80% of countries surveyed distrusted the media. “In fact, 59 percent of respondents would believe a search engine over a human editor.”

How to bridge this growing trust gap? Customers — be they companies or end-use consumers — need communication that is credible, emotional, empathetic, generous, honest, human-scale, real, selfless, transparent and vulnerable. They need story.

HOW DO I WRITE B2B CONTENT MARKETING?

Story-driven business-focused content marketing is like all writing. Begin with an idea of interest to an audience. Understand why you’re writing in the first place. What need are you solving? Who will care? How will you tell the story to maximum effect? You’ll know you’re ready to write when you can answer with confidence the following questions:

- I know what the company I’m writing about does. I know how it does it. But do I understand why it’s in



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business? If you need a nudge, watch Simon Sinek's TED Talk, "[Start With Why](#)".

- Do I understand who my audience is? Do I understand what they need to know in order to solve problems they face? Grok that and the rest is easy.
- Can I position my audience as the hero? This is key. Writing in the Harvard Business Review, [Peter Guber describes this](#) as "Truth to the audience." He quotes film producer and UCLA dean Teri Schwartz: "Make the 'I' in your story become 'we,' so the whole tribe or community can come together and unite behind your experience and the idea it embodies."
- Is your story about a product or service? Then it's an ad, not content marketing. Is it about your brand's virtues? Begin again. Is it about your tribe and the intersection between their values and your own? Right track! Oh, and if it's a cleverly padded string of SEO keywords? Stop everything and re-read this from the top. (Though there's [nothing wrong with optimizing](#) your content.)
- Do you know where you'll publish? The Content Marketing Institute's latest report [B2B Content Marketing 2017: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America](#) surveyed over 1,000 B2B marketers, finding that 93% of them use email (i.e., newsletters) to push out content. This has repercussions, of course, for how the story is told, its length, and the complexity of the writing. LinkedIn came second, with 89% of all respondents (think white papers and business inspiration); then Twitter (77%), Facebook (76%) and YouTube (59%), each channel requiring its own idiom, audience awareness and paid-promotion budget.
- What will you do next? A brilliant piece of content is a good win for today, but the beast will be hungry tomorrow, too. Don't begin a piece of content marketing until you've put in place an editorial calendar, with deadlines, assignments and channel-specific social pushes lined up for the coming month(s). We use (and love) [CoSchedule](#). Whatever you select, use it!



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