



**Creating Marketing Content
with Your Eyes Open:
7 Ways to Uncover What Really
Matters to Your Audience**

CLAY | INTEGRATED
MARKETING
SUPPORT

Overview:

Creating marketing content can be scary because it requires a substantial investment with no guarantee of ROI. Because of this, some marketers just close their eyes and jump in, hoping they will learn what works (and what doesn't) along the way. Unfortunately, creating content for content's sake without a sound strategy focused around audience needs will quickly prove to be a waste of marketing resources.

In this paper, we will explain why it is critical to approach content marketing with your **eyes wide open** so you can deliver exactly what your audience is searching for when and where they need it. We will also outline seven ways that brands can ensure their marketing content does what it is supposed to do—connect on a deeper level to support customers and potential customers throughout the buyer's journey.



Introduction:

Marketing was once a practice almost exclusively focused on promoting products and services. It has since evolved into a practice that educates, informs and supports potential customers to gain their trust. This shift in approach has been largely positive, but it is not always consistently applied in the area of content marketing.

Too often, rather than creating high value content that helps customers make buying decisions, marketers create content that is nothing more than a thinly veiled sales pitch. Customers who are searching for educational materials, expert opinions, or honest assessments of their challenges are instead met with self-serving sales materials that do little to impress them or instill confidence. Understanding your prospects on a deeper level can prevent this “Wrong message. Wrong time.” behavior and improve your quality of content moving forward.

Honest Conversations: Connecting Versus Selling

It’s difficult to pinpoint the exact year, publication, or thought leader that changed the way we think about advertising today, but it almost certainly came on the heels of the digital marketing and social media revolution. Suddenly brands around the world were trying to “join the conversation” and be seen as industry thought leaders. Businesses began cranking out marketing content as fast as they could, often “borrowing” ideas from other people’s writing or choosing topics for their keyword value rather than their value to the reader.

A decade or so later, not much has changed. Although it is now second nature for marketing teams to create blog posts, white papers, infographics and more on a regular basis, most marketing teams still lack a clear strategy for content creation. In fact, as many as 63% of businesses don’t have an actual content





strategy. That means that no one is taking the time to decide which messages will resonate with target audiences or what might spark an ongoing exchange of ideas.

Some marketing teams think they are strategic because they regularly brainstorm a list of blog topics and then have a writer or writers tackle them one by one. The problem here is that there usually isn't much planning behind this approach, so the team does not know:

- **At which stage of the buying process this content will be relevant**
- **How target audiences would most like to consume such content, if at all**
- **How these topics will complement or connect with existing content**
- **Whether or not the suggested topics have already been addressed by competitors and, if so, how effectively they did it; and**
- **What they want readers to do after reading the content**

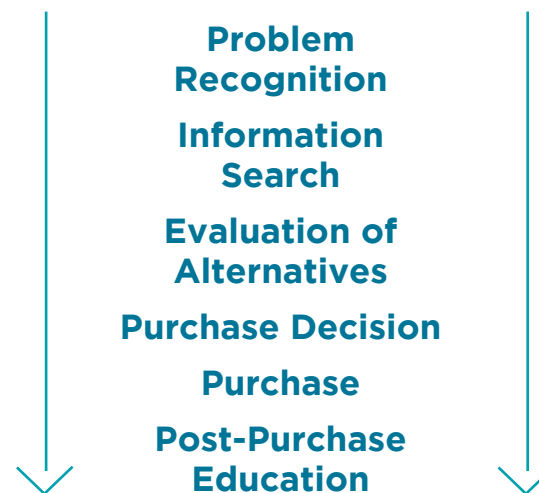
Answering such questions takes time, but not answering these questions is a recipe for churning out content that falls flat.

Creating Content with Your Eyes Open: 7 Audience-centric Tips

A true content strategy should take several things into account, including what messages will be used for which audiences; how each piece can be reused or extended to streamline marketing efforts; and the CTA of each piece, i.e. what readers should do next and how the response will be tracked.

Many of these questions can be answered by defining the messaging that will be used at each stage in the buying process (shown below). Content that addresses your prospect's real challenges but has nothing to do with your product offering is most useful for top-of-the-funnel audiences, while product-specific content is most effective at the bottom of the funnel when prospects are ready to buy.

The Consumer Buying Process



TACTICS

Tactics by Purchasing Stage

Problem Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase Decision	Purchase	Post-Purchase Evaluation
Trend reports	LinkedIn article or blog post	Sales cheat sheets	Case studies	Customer support materials	Questionnaires and surveys
eBook or email blast	Fact sheet on data center workload assessment	Fact sheets on key services	Demo or "What You Can Expect" Fact Sheet	Email blasts or eBooks with supportive information (reinforce that buying was the right decision)	Data mining
White paper	Website	FAQ on website if needed	Sales materials	Invites to events or webinars if available	
Blog posts	Business briefs	Questionnaire	Testimonials		
Paid advertising	Blogposts about relevant conferences	Presence at relevant conferences	White paper		
Surveys	Paid advertising	White paper			

TIP 1

42%

of B2B content marketers are actually talking to customers to understand their needs when it comes to content (CMI & MarketingProfs)

To understand what types of messaging and content will help, inspire, and connect with customers and potential customers at each stage of the buyer's journey, marketing teams need to do a little homework.

The following 7 tips offer a helpful guide for uncovering what matters to your audience(s) and translating it into content that provides solutions.

1. Understand Your Audiences' Pain Points and Major Challenges

Only 42% of B2B content marketers are actually talking to customers to understand their needs when it comes to content. (CMI & MarketingProfs)

As discussed, the challenges a prospect is facing will vary depending on where they are in the buyer's journey. So, how can you uncover what those challenges are without making assumptions? Here are some ideas:

- **Conduct a roundtable with your current customers to explore how and why they chose your product or services and what their initial problems were when they sought you out**
- **Create an AdWords campaign that highlights a variety of challenges and measure the response to each one**
- **Listen in on social media or chat rooms to find out what problems people are having**
- **Look at your competitor's online reviews to uncover issues that you are not currently addressing in your content**

TIP 2

3 types of prospects:

1. Those looking for information to solve a problem
2. Those who have settled on a solution and are deciding who they will trust to provide it
3. Those who have a deep knowledge of your products and service

2. Ask Your Prospects What They Really Want or Need From a Vendor

There is no better way to learn what's on your customers' minds than to simply ask. Surveys are great ways to do it. Your marketing team can't possibly send surveys to everyone they would like to hear from, so think in terms of the information you need most. For instance, you might choose to create a survey for each of three types of prospects: those looking for information to solve a problem; those who have settled on a solution and are deciding who they will trust to provide it; and those who have deep knowledge of your products and services (i.e. former or current customers).

Best Practices for Conducting a Successful Survey:

- **Keep it short**
- **Offer an incentive for completing it**
- **Speak your prospect's language**
- **Avoid yes or no questions**
- **Ask some open-ended questions in addition to multiple-choice questions in order to prevent your own assumptions from tainting the process**

TIP 3 & 4

Your call to action is one of the easiest areas of marketing to experiment with, and you can glean hard facts from how people respond to different iterations

3. Stay Current with Industry Trends and Publications Outside of Your Bubble

Knowing what is being said in top industry publications, websites, and blogs can tell you a lot about what's on your prospects' minds. It can also help you formulate a unique perspective to create thought-leading content that really resonates. Stepping outside of your usual reads and online resources to see what else is out there can keep your finger on the pulse of industry news.

Another benefit of staying current with industry trends and talking points is that you will begin to see a pattern in words and phrases that are being used more often. You'll know right away if your go-to messaging is outdated or may be missing the mark with your audience.

4. Experiment with Your CTA

Your call to action is one of the easiest areas of marketing to experiment with, and you can glean hard facts from how people respond to different iterations. Think back to the three types of prospects we discussed earlier: information seekers, comparison shoppers, and former or current customers. Choosing three separate calls-to-action for each of these prospects would result in nine, unique calls-to-action that can be tested, tracked, refined and perfected over time. Imagine what you can learn from when and how people choose to respond.

TIP 5 & 6

84%

of people expect brands to produce content that entertains, provides solutions, and produces experiences and events
(Meaningful Brands)

5. Check Out Google Images and YouTube

More and more, people are performing image and/or video searches in addition to their basic web search, and the results often lead them back to someone's website. It's not just helpful to know where prospects are being led when they do image searches for common industry phrases; it's imperative. If your competitor owns an image link from pictures of products you also carry, you should too.

Videos are similar in this way. A competitor who posts how-to or demonstration videos knows what matters to your prospects. Monitor which videos are the most popular, and you've tapped into something that your target market wants to know more about.

6. Create Interactive Content

84% of people expect brands to produce content that entertains, provides solutions, and produces experiences and events. – Source: Meaningful Brands

Interactive content is fun for your prospects because it allows them to share something about themselves. Quizzes, polls, games, and interactive contests involve your prospects in your brand in a positive way while giving you access to information about those interacting with them.

Through interactive content, you can learn things like:

- **Where your prospects search for industry information**
- **Where they are in the buying cycle**
- **How serious they are about buying**
- **What problem they are trying to solve**
- **How tech-savvy they are**
- **Their level of comfort with innovation or where they are on the adoption curve**

TIP 7 & CONCLUSION

7. Get Social in a New Way

If your brand has never been on Instagram, get on Instagram. If your team has never tried SlideShare, see what industry-related content you might find there. You don't have to be on every social site, but you should challenge your team to think outside the box.

Many companies limit themselves to LinkedIn and Facebook and would have no idea how their industry is being represented on other sites nor what prospects' are responding to. Getting out of your comfort zone can help you see another side to your prospects lives that will help you write more targeted content.



Conclusion

Content marketing is meant to enhance your prospects' understanding, challenge their preconceptions, and provide them with solutions—even when those solutions have nothing to do with your business. Content that can do all that does not come from siloed brainstorming sessions. It comes from encouraging your marketing team members to keep their eyes, ears, and minds open to what your customers, potential customers, and industry leaders are saying. And when your team responds to what they hear with valuable, expert insights, it will make your brand look like the smartest brand in the room.