



GUIDE

**Guide to
content
marketing**

Why content marketing is the key to PR success



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy Hayward is managing director of Magenta Associates, and a communications specialist with more than 18 years' experience in a range of journalistic, publishing and marketing roles. She founded Magenta in 2011 after a journalistic career spanning a number of different titles including *FM World*, the award-winning magazine for the British Institute of Facilities Management, *Marketing Week*, *Financial Management*, *Soccer Analyst*, *Supply Management*, *Unions Today*, *People Management* and *Director*. She holds a Masters degree in journalism, as well as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' post-graduate diploma in PR.

Introduction

Traditional marketing is dead. Or so we're told. It's certainly had to adapt to the development of the digital marketplace as target audiences learn to switch off from press adverts, and ignore online banners and pop-ups. When surfing the Internet, users tend to search for specific information where they can access realms of free information; from sourcing a cleaning company to understanding the rudiments of the latest software programs.

But who exactly is delivering all that free content and how does it help their business?

You might not necessarily be familiar with the term content marketing, but if you work within the built environment, chances are you've come across it on numerous occasions. It could be that useful guide to procurement you read recently; the blog which explored the nuances of open plan office design or the article which described the benefits of Building Information Modelling (BIM).

A more formal definition of content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.

Or put more simply, content marketing is about communicating with your target market without selling them a specific product or service but instead concentrate on demonstrating your knowledge. If your business has expertise in a particular area, content marketing gives you the opportunity to use it to help achieve your marketing goals; reaching potential customers, retaining existing ones and increasing awareness of your brand, your products and services.

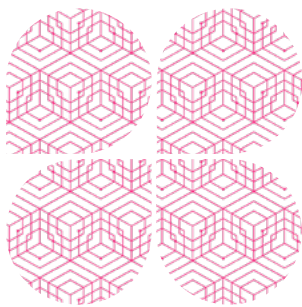


Providing users with valuable information helps to build up awareness and trust and makes potential clients more likely to feel confident enough to give you their business.

Content marketing is also massively useful to an organisation because the content produced can be used and reused across many channels: as a blog, as a feature for the trade media and even the basis of a speaker presentation at a leading event.

That's why content marketing should form the backbone of your strategic PR plan.

But before implementing a content marketing strategy, here's how you can maximise its benefits to your business.



So how can you deliver the best content marketing?

Getting started

For many businesses there's an understandable urge to communicate with potential customers and clients the fantastic service or product you supply, but no matter how enthusiastically this is presented, potential readers will not be so positive. Too many brands want to go out and say, 'look at our service it's so unique compared to everybody else, our people are amazing'; but to those on the receiving end this is simply boring.

Content marketing aims instead to offer top quality advice and a level of expertise for free as part of a promotional exercise. Being seen as a thought leader is a much better way of cutting through the noise and reaching a potential audience than straightforward advertising or media. But like any campaign, before you begin it's important to establish your marketing goal. Is it to raise general awareness of your brand? Reach a new target audience? Or help to improve the brand loyalty of your existing client base?

And you also need to determine how much time and effort you want to spend on content creation. Too many firms embrace the idea of producing a regular blog but neglect to equip it with the right resources to ensure it stays up to date. For potential clients, seeing a blog section on a company website that hasn't been updated for months, or even years, sends out a very negative message. So if you're determined to produce content on a monthly or weekly basis ensure you put a dedicated communication schedule in place.



If at this stage you're not prepared to meet a series of preordained deadlines on an ongoing basis, avoid regular content formats such as regular blogs or newsletters and focus on producing articles, guest blogs, case studies and guides on an ad hoc schedule.



Target audience

As with any other kind of marketing strategy you need to identify your target audience. Essentially they need to be those who would benefit most from your content. For example, within the built environment you might be able to share your expertise in interior design, real estate strategy, CAFM, preventative maintenance, contract writing, procurement etc. You'll then need to decide what level of content you'll deliver. Do you assume a strong knowledge base, or is it a beginner's guide to a topic? And what do you want your readers to gain from the content? A wider understanding of a subject? Or perhaps a 'call to action', e.g. address their risk management strategy.



Right kind of content

One of the greatest challenges in developing a content marketing strategy is coming up with fresh ideas, keeping it relevant with the audience and finding the right person within an organisation who can help to produce the content. There is always the danger of writing about issues where there isn't the internal expertise, so while a PR agency can help with ideas - their client must have the authority and the expertise.

And also keep in the mind that you might have a number of in house experts with a great deal of knowledge to impart, but they will understandably not always have the time or inclination to actually sit down to produce the text.

This is why you'll often require the services of a talented communications team to coordinate the production and delivery of the content. And the text must be approached as a piece of editorial, not an advertising brochure - which means avoiding mentioning the brand in every other sentence, but simply include a brief 'about the author' section with their company name and contact details at the end of the piece.

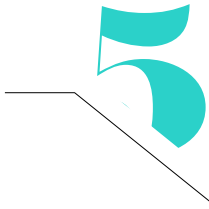


Content delivery

To some extent the channel you use to deliver your content will help to dictate the kind of content you produce. This means it might range from a top tips article to a case study to a white paper and be used and reused as an article in a magazine, a blog, on in a newsletter. We've produced separate guides to producing these different kinds of content which you can access here. www.magentaassociates.co.uk/insight/

The variety of use you can make of your content is one of the greatest advantages of this approach to media communications, as it can be adapted for each platform. However, what works for twitter might not work for LinkedIn, which is where expertise in terms of using a PR professional is important as they are paid to keep on top of all the different platforms. And however daunting it might feel at the time to produce a longer piece of content, for instance a white paper or a Good Practice Guide as published, once that data is out there, your brand will reap the positive benefits for months, or even years to come.





Measuring success

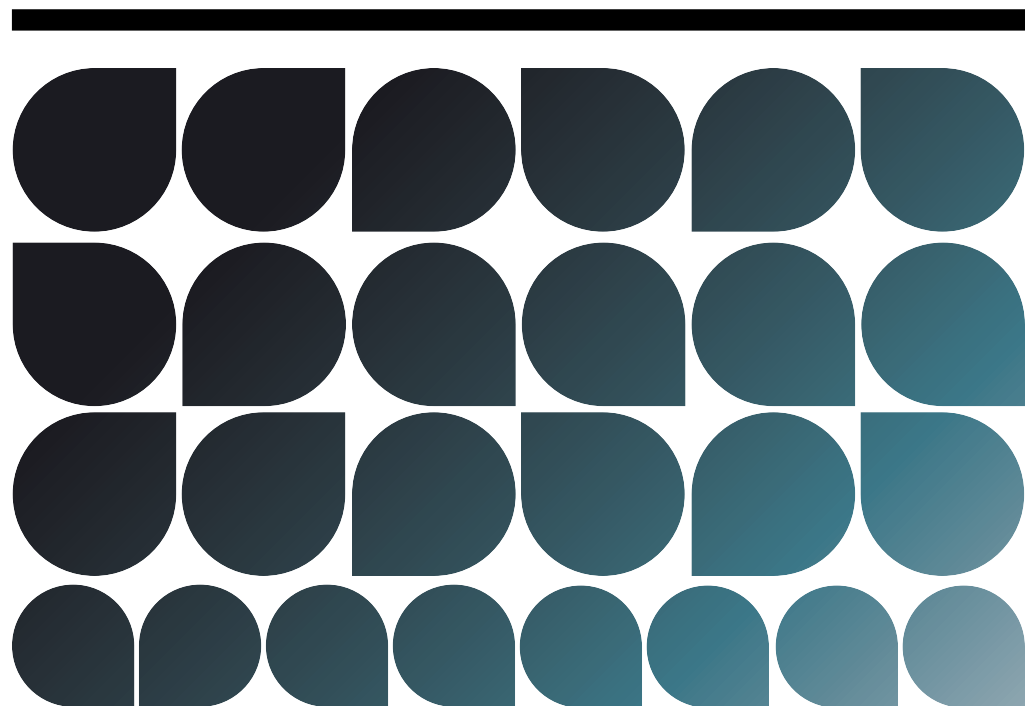
Convincing senior managers to adopt a content marketing strategy can be a challenge, as unlike press releases, straightforward advertising or mail shots it's a much less tangible approach to marketing. What you have to believe is that well written, informative and useful content gives your readers/audience something to think and talk about. Those who enjoy your content will tell others, via social media or even face to face at networking or conference events. This is what you're aiming for – a positive awareness of your brand, products and services, making it more likely that potential customers will choose you over the competition.

On a more tangible level, if your content is posted up onto your website, or there's a dynamic link from your thought piece on another site to your own – people are being driven to your site. This way you're directly reaching potential customers who will learn more about your company and your products/services.

Measuring your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) ratings is another useful way of seeing the impact your content is making in the digital marketplace. Because the likes of Google will show links to pages it considers relevant and authoritative, by producing readable and interesting content you're more likely to show up the next time someone types the relevant words into a search page. So that piece on creating an interesting business case for an office refurb you've produced will move up the SEO ratings and pull more and more potential clients into your orbit.

Content marketing can also be used for data gathering. For example, by posting up a white paper on your home site, promoting the white paper via social media and then asking those who click the link for some details before they can download the material. This then creates warm leads for their database.

Finally, if you're still unsure about the concept, consider this guide. This is content marketing in action. It forms part of a series of expert written media and communications guides for people to download, which not only provides you the reader with useful advice but helps us promote our brand.





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