

# METROWEST BUSINESS

## [ WRITE ON THE MONEY ]

### Content marketing freshman style

My firstborn starts high school today. Like any student starting at a new school, she will be thrust into an intense social experience where she will meet, greet and engage with many



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new audiences, including administrators, teachers, coaches and classmates, among others.

Though Alison will not be aware that she is doing this, she will be leading a content marketing program similar to those of many professionals and companies. And like those individuals and organizations, she will be successful if she follows these four best practices of content marketing.

► No. 1: Have a plan and know your audience

While Alison will not create an official content marketing plan, she knows instinctively that she needs to make new friends in high school, and that will be a primary goal in the first few weeks. Her words and actions – her content – will be driven by this goal as she attends class, goes to soccer practice and socializes.

Like other new students, Alison will also take time to analyze her audience – her classmates and teammates – to see how they like to be engaged with. Just like a company does, she'll identify the individuals whom she is most likely to connect well with over time and then initiate interactions to engage them.

**Business tip:** Understanding your audience and developing a content marketing plan helps you to stay focused and use your resources most effectively. For professionals and companies, your content helps you engage with your target audiences, get found online, build credibility and thought leadership and convert readers to customers – as long as you understand your audience.

► No. 2: Be strategic about distribution, format and accessibility

As companies plan their content and consider who they are writing for, they are wise to think about the best way to deliver that information. Is the content best delivered as a white paper available on your website after completing a short form that you announce in your newsletter? Is the content best delivered as a short, compelling blog post that you tweet about? Or should they create an educational video to post to YouTube?

Alison, like every student, has a variety of content distribution methods available to her – from Facebook to email, instant messaging to texting, phone calls to face-to-face meetings. As she embarks on her high school years, she'll discover that some friends love to text while others opt for Facebook chats. The adults in her life will be more apt to choose phone calls, emails or even – gasp – face-to-face conversations. Knowing these preferences will allow her to connect most effectively with a variety of people.

**Business tip:** Choose the dis-

tribution channel that reaches your content consumers where they are already active online. Choose a format that delivers the information in the most easily consumed manner. The best content will be delivered in multiple formats and using several different distribution channels.

► No. 3: Maintain quality, consistency and audience focus

Consistently creating high-quality, audience-focused content is the biggest challenge most organizations face in their content marketing program. Companies that have assigned an overall program owner and then topics (and a schedule) to various content creators will be a step ahead of their competition.

This year's freshmen are the sole owners of their content management programs, so it falls to them to make sure they present a consistent personal brand to peers, teachers and coaches. If Alison wants to become known as a good friend, conscientious student and hard-working teammate, her words and actions will have to reflect those goals on a regular basis. Her content will also have to resonate with her audience, so if punctuality is a sticking point with a coach, for example, then she has to be early to practice.

**Business tip:** Make sure your content marketing manager documents your company's style standards and does final reviews before pieces are published. This will ensure that your organization consistently presents a high quality image that resonates with your audi-

ence and aligns with your overall brand goals.

► No. 4: Respond to engagement levels and overall results

Companies that have invested in setting specific goals for their content marketing programs and executing the activities to meet those goals are wise to track their progress along the way, to see what is working – and what isn't – with their target audiences.

Alison and freshmen like her will take note of what types of content get desired responses with their varied audiences. If they're smart, they will do more of what works well and less of what doesn't.

**Business tip:** The beauty of most content marketing vehicles is that they offer clear tracking metrics. You may want to measure the number of blog comments, Facebook "Likes" or white paper downloads you receive, for example, and that is easy to do. If you are considering a content marketing format or distribution method that is not easily measured, think about another option that you can track.

I'll probably get in trouble for even mentioning Alison in this column, but now that she's in high school, she can handle it. Best of luck to my number one daughter, may you make wonderful memories in your new school.

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