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Best Practices For Your Content Marketing Program



Today content marketing is a critical component to your overall marketing strategy. The primary objective is to create, optimize and promote content that's timely, valuable and easily digested by your business's target audience.

This guide is designed to highlight what we have found to be the four most prominent best practices for a strategic, practical content marketing program.

As you continue reading, we'll focus on 4 key areas of content marketing in today's business climate:

- Content Marketing Strategy, Plan and Audience
- Distribution Channels, Formats and Access
- Quality, Consistency and Audience Focus
- Results and Engagement

Plus, this best practices guide provides "5 Next Steps" in each area so you can gain the traction you want and see real results quickly!

Ready? Let's go!



CONTENT
MARKETING

photos

1

Create a Content Marketing Strategy, Plan and Audience Analysis

The best marketing and business decisions are guided by a strategy and plan, and your content marketing is no exception. Your content helps you engage with your target audiences, 'get found' online, build credibility and thought leadership, and convert readers to customers – why would you leave that to chance? Understanding your audience and developing a content marketing plan will help you to stay focused and use your resources most effectively.

Start by setting goals.

Why are you putting the effort into content marketing? Are you looking for ways to attract and convert new leads? Do you want to engage customers in a more compelling manner and provide a level of service they have not previously received? Are you looking to become better known among the press and industry influencers to help you reach other marketing goals you have, such as speaking at conferences or securing a regular guest writing spot?

Take the time to think through your goals, and be as specific as possible. This exercise will affect the messages you send, the metrics you track, the vehicles you use and much more.



1

Create a Content Marketing Strategy, Plan and Audience Analysis

Be sure you understand your audience.

To create content that resonates with your target audience, you need to have a detailed description of who they are and what they care about. Remember there are many different types of people who will consume your content. Determine all of the content consumers that are important to you and learn as much as you can about what they're reading, where they're reading it, and what they care about. Your content will have a better chance of being consumed – and responded to – if it appears where your target audience congregates. **Take the time to research your markets' media habits.** Are they reading the local paper, following blogs, or shopping on mobile devices?

Some of your content consumers will be very familiar with your organization and not require a series of introductions and explanations, while others may be engaging for the first time and need more details. Make sure your content speaks to consumers at various stages of the relationship. And use links in your content to drive the reader to other information that is important to them.

Think about who owns the content in your organization – and how it will get written.

One person does not have to “do” all the content marketing, but one person should lead the effort and be responsible for making sure the planning, delegation, execution and measurement happens.

Your content owner is critical for keeping people engaged with your content marketing efforts; your content creators are the ones who have to ‘get it done.’ **An effective content marketing program requires both subject matter experts and content creators.** One common mistake is assuming that your subject matter expert has the time or writing chops to create the content. Instead, have a skilled copywriter or technical writer to interview them and then write the content. These people do not have to be employees, so feel free to get a little creative when seeking out experts and content developers.

1

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Some people are great at social media and can be charged with tweeting, Facebook and blogs. Others are better at developing in-depth pieces so let them focus on white papers and newsletter articles. Match the content creator's strengths with the topic and format and you'll see speedier production times and better results.

Which leads us to the content plan and editorial calendar...

Creating content gets a lot easier when you pick a few ideas for which you can develop various pieces and explore different angles. Brainstorm some overarching topic areas you want your company to be well known for – no idea is a bad one – and then break those “big ideas” into smaller chunks of content that can be used in various ways.

A great place to begin your brainstorming is with the list of keywords and phrases you want to be found for via organic search. The best content marketing is well optimized so it shows up where your target consumers are searching. Identify your list and keep it fresh with regular updates.

A very common roadblock in content marketing is finding the time to actually create the content. **You can conquer this obstacle by auditing what you already have created and brainstorming ways to repurpose it.**

Now take the next step and create compelling titles for each of your ideas (large and small) and put that into a calendar with creators assigned to it. Now your content creators won't spend hours wondering “what should I write about?”, and your content owner will have a more detailed schedule to guide his or her efforts.



5 Things to Do Right Now to Improve Your Plan & Strategy

- 1** Identify what your organization wants to accomplish with content marketing. Be as specific as possible.
- 2** Create a detailed persona of every target content consumer you want to reach that includes demographics and anything you know about their needs, likes and content consumption habits.
- 3** Identify the person who will lead your content marketing program.
- 4** Brainstorm a list of 10 potential ideas for which your organization could produce content. These can serve as the starting point for your 4-6 themes for the year.
- 5** Explore your network – and have others do the same – to identify potential subject matter experts in your field and content creators that may add value to your program. These people may be inside or outside of your organization.



2

Decide How You Will Make Content Available

If you took the time to really understand your audience and plan your content, this next step should be very easy. As you proceed with the planning process and decide who you're writing for, 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? Is your content best delivered as a short, compelling blog post that you tweet about? Or should you create an explainer video that you post to YouTube or Vimeo?

Select the distribution channel that reaches your content consumers **where they are already active online** and a format that delivers the information in the manner that is easiest to consume. **The best content will be delivered in multiple formats, using several different distribution channels.**

We suggest choosing one to two new formats to try in the next month, measure the response and then determine which media makes the most sense for your target market. It's likely you will never use all of your options, but start with the ones most effective for your goals. Just as your content consumers value various distribution media, they will also respond to a variety of formats. **And remember, one great topic can be published in several formats to appeal to your diverse audiences.**

A final best practice for this section is to provide several levels of accessibility for your content. Be generous and make sure you have a set of content that is "free" – on your site, no log in or form required. **For more valuable information, or more in-depth information, you can ask for a certain level of engagement from the reader, such as a short form with First and Last Name, Company Name and Email Address.** If your business is based on selling expertise and knowledge, perhaps you will have some proprietary, educational items or analysis reports that people can buy. The key point here is to match the accessibility of the content with its value to your audience.



5 Things to Do Right Now to Improve Your Distribution, Format and Accessibility

- 1** Select the one new distribution method you want to add to your content marketing program.
- 2** Choose an existing piece of content to see how you can adapt or refine it for this new distribution method OR work the channel into your next new content piece, e.g. turn a blog entry into three status updates on your company Facebook page.
- 3** Select the one new format you want to add to your content marketing program.
- 4** Choose an existing piece of content to see how you can publish it in a new format OR work the new format into your next content piece, e.g. take a customer story and turn it into a newsletter article.
- 5** If you do not have a blend of free, action-required and saleable content available, take something you already have and give it a new accessibility, e.g. turn a white paper you have been selling into a web page on your site that gives the top 3-5 points for free (while marketing the white paper as an additional Call-to-Action).



3

Document Standards and Write From the Audience's Perspective

Consistently creating high-quality, audience-focused content is the greatest challenge most organizations have when it comes to implementing their content marketing program. You will be a step ahead of many people if you have assigned an overall owner and then topics (and a schedule) to various content creators. But you still need **documented standards and a final review** to make sure all the pieces that come from your organization are consistent and present an image that aligns with your overall brand goals.

For example, we know that if you're a heavy Twitter or Facebook user and you're working to engage your audience, posting once per week is not enough. But we have also found that most small and mid-sized businesses cannot keep up with a daily publishing schedule and, as a result, their content delivery is inconsistent.

Considerations for the quality, consistency and audience focus of your content:

The individual who has created a piece of content should not be charged with proofing it. Make sure everything you publish receives a "fresh eye."

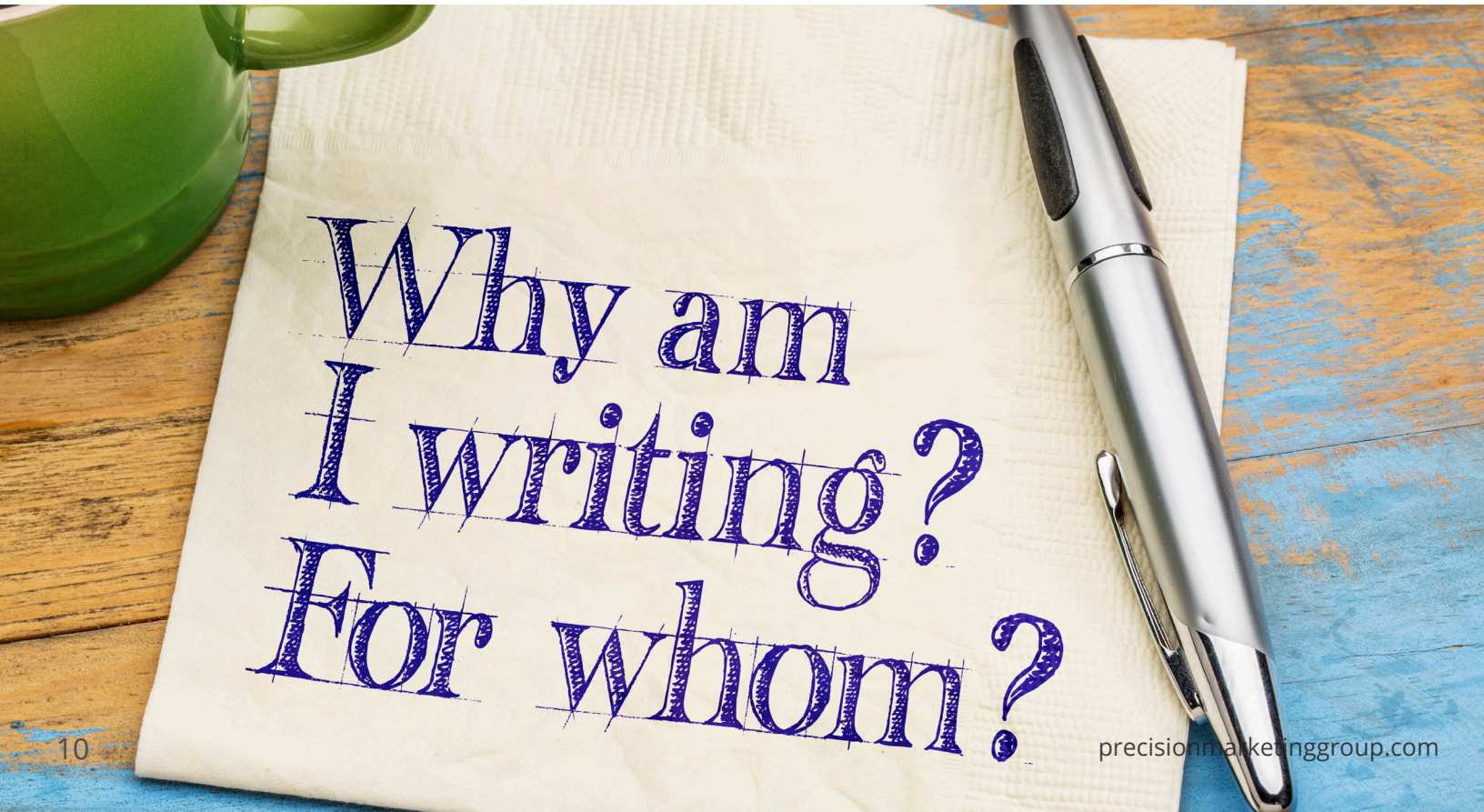
Your content should have a personality that is reflective of your organization's unique style, and all content should communicate a consistent tone. You are writing to make a connection with your audience so think about:

- **Writing in the second person, talking directly to the consumer** – "you" is the most powerful word in the English language!
- **Making sure your content is accessible to your target consumer while respecting their educational level.** Don't try to sound important by using lofty language. Most newspaper content is published at an eighth grade reading level. This does not mean the writing is not professional, it means it is understandable and accessible to a wide variety of people.

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Document Standards and Write From the Audience's Perspective

- **Making the content about your audience and their needs and not about you and what you sell.** Sure, the ultimate goal of your content marketing is to drive sales, but the primary content marketing goal should be to provide valuable information, insights or entertainment as a way to engage your target audience. Once you've developed your target buyer personas, creating content for them becomes easier.
- **Including references to popular and current events into your content.** Events like the Super Bowl, a TV show finale or a celebrity break-up can provide a nugget on which you can build something.
- **Encouraging further engagement by making sure your content includes links to other pieces you've produced.** The hub of your content marketing program is your website, so use that as a focal point for links. And when you make the connection with your audience and receive a comment, be sure someone in the organization is prepared to respond in an appropriate and timely manner. Content marketing is intended to create a dialogue; if you just put "stuff" out there and never respond when your audience engages, then they know you're not really interested in a conversation.



Why am
I writing?
For whom?

3

Document Standards and Write From the Audience's Perspective

- **Engaging your existing customers to help support the messages you are delivering through the use of testimonials and case studies.** This third-party credibility helps make your offerings, and their value, much more tangible. Encourage clients to comment, share, post and review so they can bring new audiences into the fold.
- **Creating a simple sheet that outlines how your company name and various products, services and departments are punctuated.** You can turn to the Associated Press Stylebook to make decisions on how to handle other words – like website or web site, for example.
- **Using widgets and social media icons** with the content you produce to make it easy for your consumers to pass it along, which will drive your credibility and traffic. And remember to ask your readers to “share it if they like it!”



3

Document Standards and Write From the Audience's Perspective

- **Including the words your audience will use when conducting online searches**, so you will show up where they're searching. Identify your keywords and use them (but don't overuse them) in all content.
- **Applying information design techniques** to your content (use of images, bullets, layout and formatting). These simple changes will make your content much more digestible for the reader. The best content in the world will not be successful if it is not user-friendly.
- **Leveraging every piece of content you produce to get the greatest ROI.** Have a plan for repurposing content before you create a piece so that it can be recycled and re-promoted along the way.
- **Including Calls-to-Action that are very specific and drive desired actions** so you can lead your consumers into a lasting, productive and profitable relationship with your organization. Encourage them to learn more, download a resource, participate in a contest, ask or answer a question, share an experience – and the list goes on!



5 Things to Do Right Now to Improve Your Consistency, Quality & Audience Focus

- 1** Assign an editorial owner who will be charged with creating a quality control process for all content, including a proofreading practice and style guide.
- 2** Have a frank discussion with your content marketing team to decide on the tone you want to convey in your content, the problems you solve for people and the types of valuable, audience-focused content you can publish.
- 3** Review current material for the information design component. If you're not satisfied with what you see, consider bringing a graphic design professional into the mix to raise the level of presentation.
- 4** Review all content you are producing for appropriate Calls-to-Action, so you make it as easy as possible for your audience to take the desired action.
- 5** Invest in securing customer testimonials and developing customer stories for your content marketing.



4

Measure, Track, and Tweak

If you've already taken the time to set specific goals for your content marketing program *and* you've invested in executing the activities to meet those goals, now it's important to track your progress along the way. 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're considering a content marketing format or distribution method that is not so easily measured, think about another option that you can track.

Measuring results of your content, however, will not be enough if you don't make refinements and adjustments based on your findings. Only then will you be able to nurture a productive content marketing program that delivers real ROI to your organization.

Considerations for measuring, tracking and tweaking your content marketing program:

- **Deciding which metrics are most valuable to track**, and the process you will follow for both tracking and responding to findings.
- **Choosing a platform to invite online reviews** (if applicable to your business). These reviews can help drive search engine traffic, as well as provide third-party credibility to your business.
- **Creating content that encourages people to not only consume your content but also to engage with it.** Even if they say something negative – which you should respond to respectfully and honestly – it's better than saying nothing. Strive to engage your readers and have them publicly share your content on your behalf.
- **Staying focused on driving quality leads.** Your content marketing must drive quality leads to your business to be worth the effort. While some leads may not buy right away, they are qualified prospects ready to be nurtured through continued content marketing. Keep refining your program to achieve this goal.

5 Things to Do Right Now to Improve Your Results

- 1** Revisit your content marketing goals and match each one with a metric you will track to measure success and make refinements.
- 2** Decide how often you will track results – monthly, quarterly, etc. – and during these sessions, create an action plan to refine content based on the results.
- 3** Decide if online reviews would be beneficial, and choose one venue for driving them.
- 4** Identify the content that has generated the best response from your audience, decide what made it work, and use a similar approach with new content.
- 5** Review how many qualified leads your content efforts have generated in the past month or quarter. See which content led to the leads and plan to create more of it.



A good content marketing program takes work. It's no wonder why so many companies are still putting off developing a content marketing program. But by following these techniques and tips, you can stand out from the crowd. After all, when you're creating content with the primary goal of helping your prospects instead of selling your brand, you are more able to actively engage those prospects, build trust and credibility, and produce useful information that won't just add to the noise.

Why wait? Start building your own content marketing program today and see the difference you can make for your business!



About Us

Could your company benefit from some great marketing? Precision Marketing Group, LLC offers topnotch outsourced marketing services to B2B organizations, with a focus on inbound marketing that drives qualified leads. As a HubSpot Certified Platinum Partner, PMG has the capabilities to serve its clients with the absolute best in integrated marketing strategies and services that deliver real business results.

Of course, our team of experts enjoys providing B2B marketing strategy and execution to companies of many different sizes and types. Mixing it up keeps life interesting! However, we've found our sweet spot to be teaming up with privately held businesses with a complex sale – most often, companies in the manufacturing, technology and professional services industries.

Interested in receiving your own B2B inbound marketing assessment? Send us a message or call today! For more information, visit PrecisionMarketingGroup.com or contact us at **508.656.0291**.

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