Content Marketing 101 For B2B Manufacturers

Everything You Need to Know to Build a Content Strategy that Works

PRECISION
marketinggroup

More and more of the industrial manufacturers we work with are embracing a strong digital strategy to meet their customers where they are: Online.

Content marketing strategy and SEO can be boiled down to this one fact: when our ideal buyers search for answers online, they will almost always take their business to the companies that appear prominently in search results.

Did you know that people typically engage with 9 sources of information before requesting to speak with a sales representative?

Search-friendly websites are generating the most digital leads. Period. And the best way to be found online organically is with strategic content.

Embracing digital content is a big leap for most industrial manufacturers. **In a study we completed of 100 random manufacturing websites**, 86% were not optimized for search.

The largest SEO rewards tend to lie with those that optimize their content first. In other words: There has never been a better time for you to prioritize content strategy for your business.

In this guide, we highlight the steps needed to develop a manufacturing-specific content strategy that sets your business apart from your competitors.

We hope you find the information helpful. And as always, we are here to talk through any questions that come up.

Now, let's dive into some of the basics of content marketing for manufacturing.

What is content marketing?

Content marketing represents the value of your brand through strategic content and messaging on your site. Content marketing is the entire online presence of your company. It is the image you portray to clients and prospects every time they browse your website, social channels, and digital product catalogs.

Content marketing most often encompasses the content you produce for your site pages, blog, downloadable content, social channels, emails, printed materials and any other copy you produce for marketing and sales purposes.

Why is content marketing important?

Content marketing is by far the most effective way to generate organic search traffic to your site. When you generate enough organic traffic your content becomes evergreen - contributing to new qualified contacts even as you invest in other digital initiatives - like paid search, social media, downloadable content, and more.

Do I really need a content marketing strategy? Or can I just start writing?

You absolutely need a digital content strategy. Without a strategy, you could be investing in content topics that have too much digital competition - in other words, you could be writing content that will never rank. Without a strong focus on keyword research, a targeted content direction, a regular cadence of promotion, and a strong writer (or team of writers), it is unlikely that your content marketing efforts will provide long-term value to your business.

DID YOU KNOW?

41% of Manufacturers said they have a **documented content strategy**.

My Product Isn't Sexy. Do I Still Need Content?

No matter what you manufacture - or how you do it - there are people out there looking for your solution. Taking the time to conduct research and develop a strategy helps you understand what they're searching for so you can position your product as the ideal answer to their problem.

One of our clients, **TriStar**, manufactures plastic bearings. There are thousands of people searching every month for how to use bearings in the best way. And how to prevent them from failing. You just have to find out what your ideal customer is looking for.

How to Develop a Content Marketing Strategy for Manufacturing

1. Know your buyer

You've probably heard about the importance of creating buyer personas. In fact, many of the manufacturers we work with feel they know their buyers so well that they skip the persona exercise altogether.

Skipping persona creation could be a critical mistake to your content marketing success.

Understanding your buyer involves more than making guesses at what you think they need. Take the time to truly understand your buyer by investing in several in-depth client interviews. Interviewing your customers at a granular level helps you understand:

- What pain points are they looking to solve for? What frustrates them about their job? - So you can write answers to the questions they type into Google every day while highlighting your product as the solution.

- What does success in their role look like? - So you can showcase how your product helps them be more successful.

- How do they get news/insights about their industry? What social channels or online content/forums do they engage with? - So you can make sure your content appears there.

- What key phrases, acronyms, and lingo do they use? - So you can make sure your content matches their tone and voice.

- What other technology solutions are they currently using? - So you can be sure to highlight the benefits of a fully-integrated solution.

- What questions do they have before buying? - So you can make sure those answers are readily available on your site.

- Who is involved in the buying process? - So you can target content to every role.
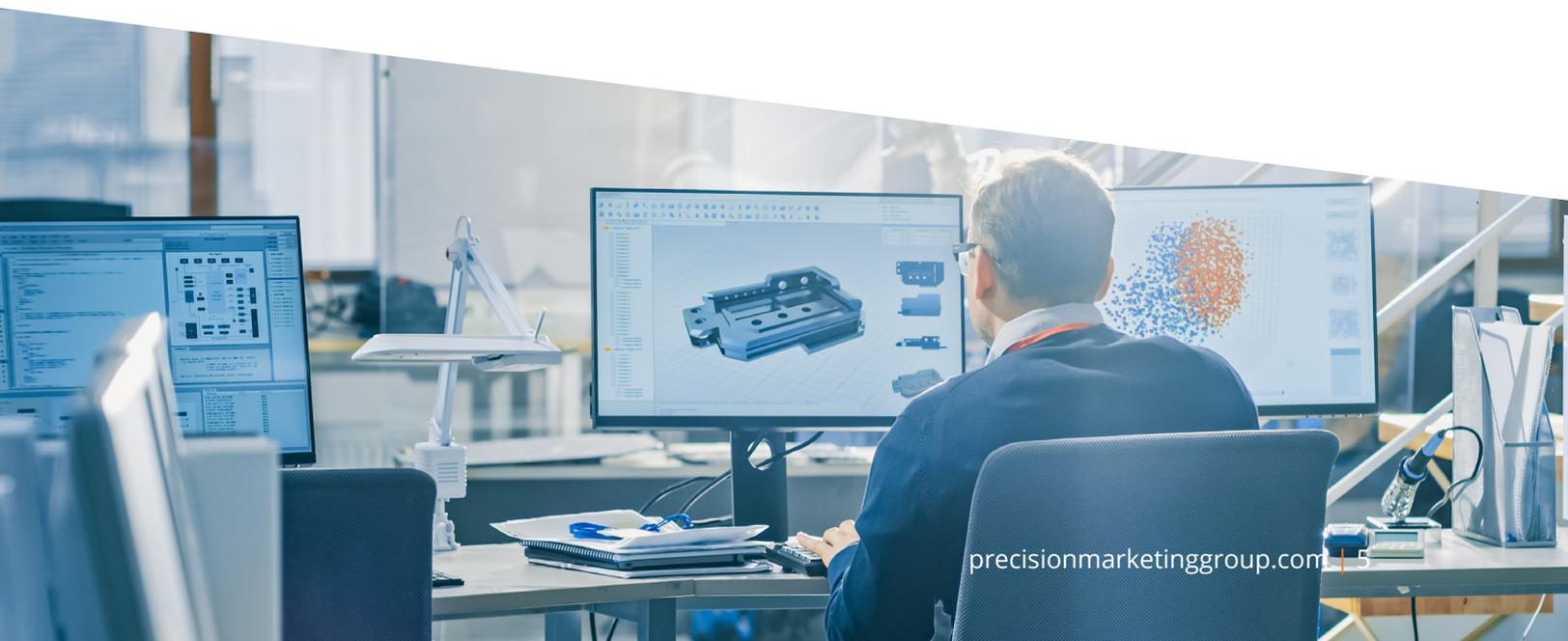
Example Buyer Persona for a Design Engineer

Pain Points	• Reducing long term product maintenance costs • Creating a lighter weight product • Optimizing materials while reducing cost
Success Looks Like	• Increased production volume at a lower cost • The ability to develop and improve processes across the entire plant to streamline production and onboarding of new employees • Meeting - and exceeding - key performance goals every month
Industry Insights	• I Subscribed to (but not particularly following) **IndustryWeek**, **Plant Engineering**, and **Reliable Plant**. • Checks LinkedIn occasionally but is mostly in email or on the shop floor throughout the day.
Key Phrases and Acronyms	• Agile manufacturing, plant automation, reducing bottlenecks, warehouse optimization, warehouse automation, order fulfillment, quality control, plant organization, manpower, line staff, process management.
Other technology solutions / Certifications	• SalesForce CRM • SAP • Six Sigma Certification
Questions Before Buying	• What are the total costs? • What are the change management considerations? • Will there be any downtime? • What is the ROI? • Can we talk with an existing customer? • What kind of support is there? • Can we talk to a live person if something goes wrong? • What is the competitive value?
Pain Points	• Reducing long term product maintenance costs • Creating a lighter weight product • Optimizing materials while reducing cost

Each persona you target has a unique perspective and each has an influence in the decision-making process. But there is no one-size-fits-all message for the entire group. Just as engineers may not be concerned about per-unit pricing, manufacturing buyers may not be familiar with the differences in specs from one product supplier to another.

That's where your content strategy comes in. You can tailor messaging to get your ideal buyers the answers they need -- and leave out the fluff.

Understanding your buyer is the first and most critical component in the research stage. Everything you find out in persona research helps to inform your overall keyword and content research strategy.

KEY TAKEWAY

Successful content marketing begins with an analysis of your buyers, followed by choosing the ones you want to target, and tailoring your research and messaging accordingly.

2. Research Your Target Keywords & Content Topics

Now that you have a better understanding of what is actually important to your buyer (remember, don't assume you know what is important to them) it's time to begin your research.

What is Keyword Research?

Keyword Research is the strategic identification of terms that your target buyers are typing into Google so that you can design content that answers their questions in the best way.

Keyword research combines your knowledge of your target buyer with backend SEO data - such as search volume and competitive difficulty percentage - so you can choose to write content about keywords that will drive the most qualified search to your site.

Let's Review Key Terms:

- **Search Volume:** Shows you the number of searches for a particular keyword, on average, over a one month period.
- **Competitive Difficulty Percentage:** Shows you on a scale from 0 - 100% how difficult it would be for you to rank for that term. This is generally derived from an aggregate of SEO data that shows the number of search results for the term, the number of inbound links (or other sites) pointing to ranking content for that term, and more. This metric may vary depending on the tool you use.

A good rule of thumb is to aim for a difficulty percentage that's less than 60%.

Important Note on Keyword Research

Oftentimes, we work with manufacturers that only research terms related to their particular product or solution. That is a big problem when it comes to generating new organic traffic. If you are only providing content for your "bottom funnel" searchers, you are missing out on all of the folks that are in the research or consideration stages.

For example, an air hose material manufacturer might include keywords such as:

- The best air hose materials
- Rubber air hoses
- PVC air hoses
- Polyurethane air hoses

Those are all great terms if your buyer already knows they need a new air hose. And if they already know what material is best for them.

However, chances are your buyer is searching for things like "how to prevent air hose punctures" first.

Having content that answers their pain point questions will establish you as a trusted thought leader and is a natural way to generate online authority and new leads.

How to Pick Keywords to Research

There are several methods and strategies when it comes to performing keyword research. After 15 years of developing digital strategies, here are some of the best ways we've found to generate keywords.

First, create a "brainstorm list" of a bunch of keywords that you'd like to perform more research on. **Don't be afraid to add lots of variations here.** You may think you know what will perform best in Google but time and research will tell. We've started research projects with more than 500 keywords in the past. The more the merrier.

1. Use SEO tools to evaluate what your site ranks for already: chances are that you have some organic traction on your site already that spans beyond your brand name. We use tools like SEMrush to see what you rank for already and build on that momentum

2. Use SEO Tools to see what your direct competitors are ranking for already: competitive insight is critical to making sure your content stands out. Seeing what they have traction with can be an enormous advantage.

3. Ask your customers what they would type into Google to find you: It may seem strange but it works. Trust us. Use your persona research to truly listen to customer pain points. Then ask your customers how they would frame their problem in a Google search. You might also consider asking your sales reps, service reps, and C-Suite team what problems they would type into Google to find your company as a solution.

4. Use Keyword Suggestion tools: There are a lot of amazing suggestion tools to help you brainstorm keywords. Some of them are free. Others are paid. All of them can provide critical insight into keyword variations to help you develop a targeted strategy. Check out:
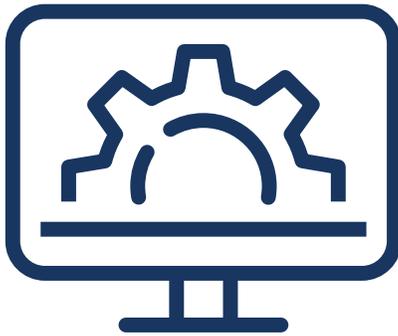
Google's Keyword Planner

Answer The Public

Keyword Tool

LSI Graph

Moz Keyword Explorer

Spyfu

SEMrush Keyword Magic Tool - This one is our personal favorite as it provides the most robust actionable data all in one place.

Once you have your list of keywords, you're ready to determine which ones to target with content using critical SEO metrics.

Obtain Search Volume and Key Metrics

There are several methods and strategies when it comes to performing keyword research. After 15 years of developing digital strategies, here are some of the best ways we've found to generate keywords.

The next step is to identify keyword metrics including:

- Monthly Search Volume: How many times is this term searched per month?
- Keyword Difficulty Ranking or Percentage: How hard would it be to rank for this keyword?

You may also want to include the following metrics in your research:

- Search trends over time
- The CPC (cost per click)
- The number of **SERP features** appearing for that term
- And the number of search results

KEY TAKEWAY

The ideal keyword to target is one that has a moderate monthly search volume and a low competition metric. This means a targeted content piece is likely to rank and contribute to significant qualified traffic. Depending on your solution, there may be a lot of organic competition. So it's especially important to research a lot of variations to identify the best opportunities to drive traffic with the same investment in content.

Keyword tools like SEMrush and Google Keyword Planner can help you get these metrics and export them easily.

Here's an example from SEMrush's Keyword Magic Tool:
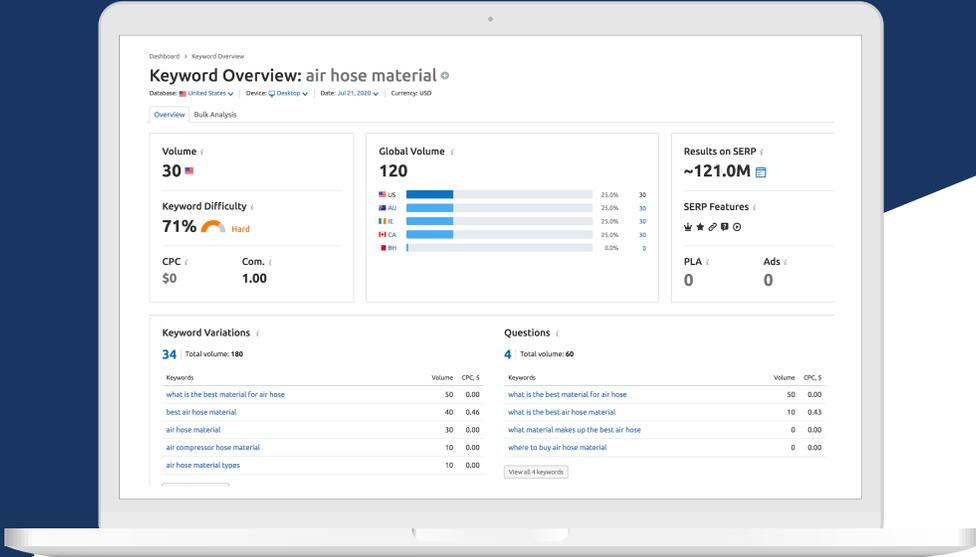
Once you've identified keywords that are a good fit to write content for based on the quality of the search term, organize them by topic in a new tab on your spreadsheet. For example, let's say you specialize in materials for air hoses. Here are some keyword terms that might be a good fit for a content piece:

Keyword	Monthly Search Volume	Difficulty 0 - 100%
Air hose material types	10	0%
Air hose material	30	71%
Air hose maintenance costs	10	0%
Air compressor maintenance	390	58%
Air compressor hose materials	10	0%
What is the best material for an air hose?	50	72%
What causes compressed air hose failure?	10	0%

Now, let's take a look at these numbers.

First, let's compare the first two options - "air hose material types" vs "air hose materials". Your instinct may be to optimize your content for "air hose materials" as it has 3x as much monthly traffic. Here's the problem: That particular term has a difficulty rating of 71%. That means, a lot of other sites are optimized for that term. Instead, it may be better for you to optimize your content for "air hose material types" -- even though it has less monthly traffic, it's extremely easy to rank for.

That means, the percentage of traffic that actually comes to your site from the search engine result page could be significantly higher.

When choosing keywords, we must always try to balance the return (traffic) against the difficulty rating. Remember, an approachable difficulty rating is about 60% or less.

In this example, "Air compressor maintenance" is an enormous content opportunity because of the large amount of traffic and a difficulty rating of only 58%. That par͠ ͠ar term is just begging for a "Complete Guide to Air Compressor Maintenance".

You're a manufacturer and your time is limited. So you may wonder: Why would I write a post about maintaining an air hose if that's not what we do? We sell air hose materials. The answer to that is two-fold.

1. By providing helpful, relevant content to your target buyers, you establish trust and topic authority with them.

2. By providing helpful and relevant content to Google, you are more likely to rank for related terms (like "what is the best air hose material") via topic authority.

Better yet - strategic content creation will enable you to provide your readers with the next buying step. "If your air hose repeatedly fails despite regular maintenance, the material may be to blame. It may be wise to invest in air hose material that is designed to keep pressure consistent for years. Learn how to choose the best material here." And insert a link to your product page.

This example is why completing the research phase is so critical before developing new content.

You want to be sure you are investing your time and effort into creating content that will drive traffic to your site instead of getting lost in the digital mix.

Choosing the right SEO research tool

Investing in the right SEO tool can make a huge difference in streamlining your research phase. Here are some of our favorites for their insights and ease-of-use:

- **SEMrush**
- **Moz**
- **Ahrefs**
- **Spyfu**

Alternatively, you can work with an **outsourced marketing team** to conduct this research and develop an initial content strategy for you. In the long-run, outsourcing your research may be cheaper than investing in a dedicated platform; especially if you don't plan to use it regularly.

3. Complete a Competitive Analysis

No content strategy is complete without a comprehensive competitive analysis. Even if your product is extremely niche, there is value in running competitive analysis on highly-related product sites. SEO tools like SEMrush and Spyfu are invaluable when it comes to competitive analysis.

If your competition is doing better than you online, you can use a two-pronged content approach:

1. Attempt to rank for keyword and topics that your competition doesn't rank for or

2. Try to steal their existing ranking with better, more helpful, targeted content

What to include in a manufacturing competitive content analysis:

- Top keyword terms
- Top performing content
- Paid keyword terms
- SERP features and opportunities
- Organic ranking history and trends
- Syndicated or paid content partnerships
- Inbound links

It's also valuable to see what your competitors are doing on social channels - especially Facebook and LinkedIn. You should have a pulse on your competitor's email and nurture efforts, as well.

While it's never a good idea to copy what your competitors are doing, insight into their organic performance and other content marketing efforts can help inform a strategy for YOUR business that outperforms theirs.

For more content tips, check out this **researched-backed guide.**
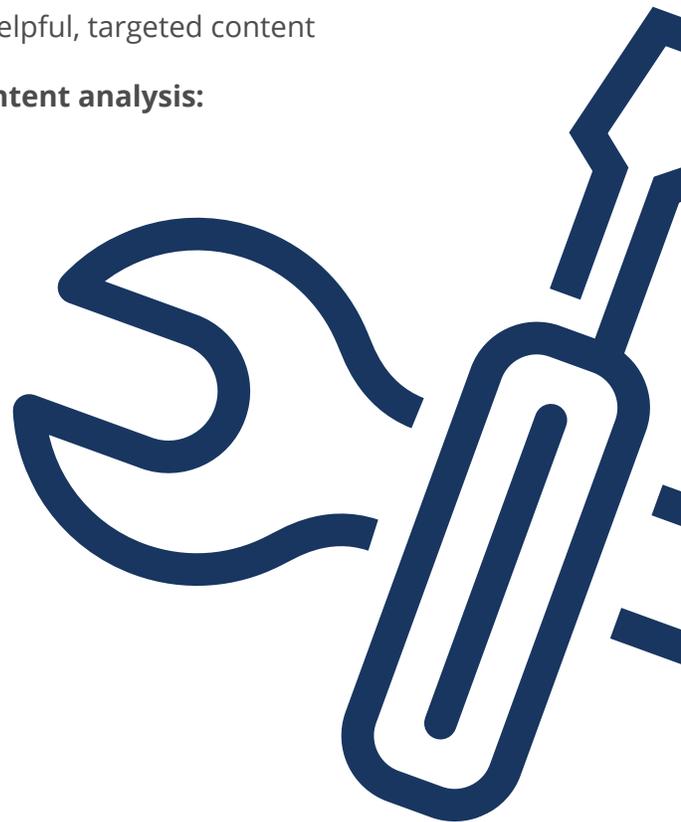
4. Create an Editorial Calendar

If you have the bandwidth to do so, creating a thoughtful editorial calendar is the best way to make sure your content has a strategic direction with a content goal in mind. Your editorial calendar should focus on content that supports the topic authority of your site.

What are topic clusters?

A topic cluster is the strategic organization of your website into a group of related content so that a visitor can easily navigate among related topics to have their search query fully answered. This structure solves for both site visitors and Google.

Source: Matt Barby
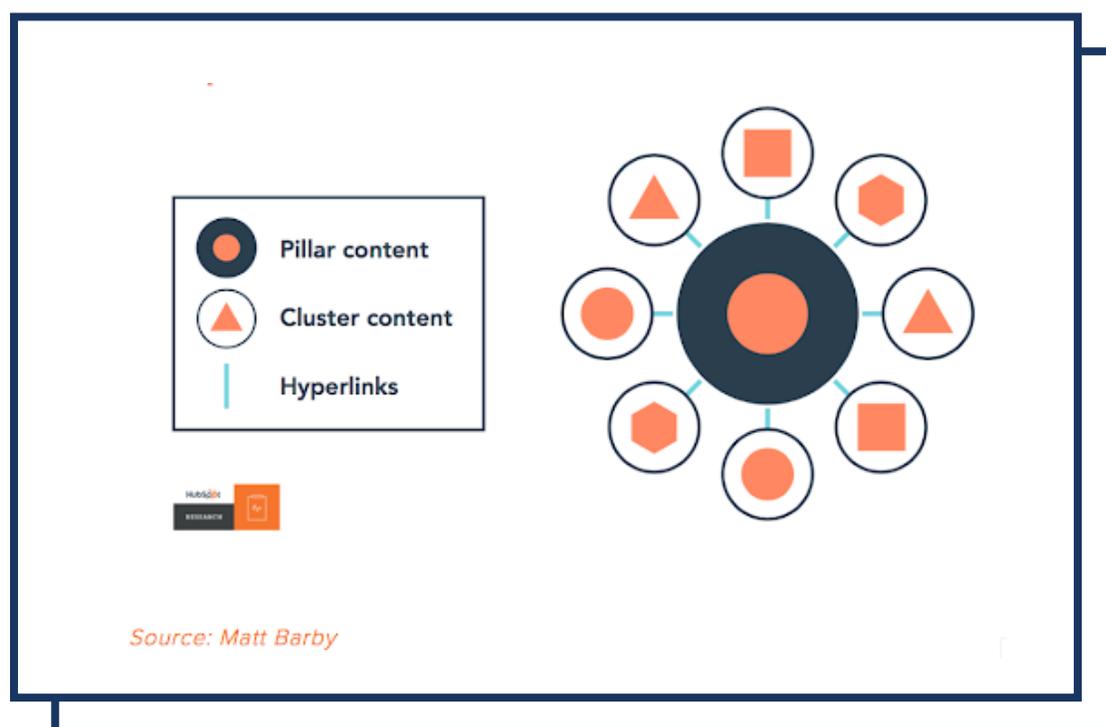
What are the elements of a topic cluster?

1. The Pillar Content Piece

Pillar content exists at the center of your topic cluster, representing the hub of your theme or "topic" to which other pieces of related content are connected. Your pillar content should provide a high-level overview of your entire topic. For example, if your topic cluster is about dogs, your pillar will likely include abridged sections about the evolution of dogs, the different types of breeds, obedience training styles, diet tips, and where to adopt a dog in your area. It doesn't need to be a 10,000-word research document, but it should supply enough valuable information and substance to leave a curious reader with a well-rounded understanding of your topic.

2. Supporting Cluster Content

Cluster content is in-depth, insightful, and comprehensive coverage of high-level topics you mention in the pillar content piece. For example, a cluster content piece may be an infographic of the history of dog evolution from the first recorded dog in history to today. Each of the high-level topics in your pillar should eventually have its own thorough piece of cluster content to support the pillar. Cluster content can come in a variety of formats. Not all cluster pieces have to be blog posts. A piece of cluster content could also be an infographic, downloadable content offer, video, webinar, or quiz.

3. Hyperlinks

Each cluster content piece should link to and from your pillar content piece. The hyperlinks act as spokes on a wheel, helping both search engines and visitors understand that all of these content pieces are related to the theme at the hub. You should also link cluster pieces together whenever it makes sense to do so.

Implementing an effective topic cluster strategy drives higher-quality traffic to your website and creates valuable conversion opportunities via organic search.

Use your editorial calendar to ensure you're filling in content cluster gaps and building topic authority on your site.

Does pillar content for manufacturing really work? Yes. Time and time again we have seen pillar content for our clients significantly outrank the competition. **Here's a great example.**

Learn more about **Pillar Content and Topic Clusters here.**

5. Write and Optimize Your Content

It's important to have a great writer on your team that not only understands your industry and persona but has a strong understanding of how to write content for SEO as well. That's because simple changes to structure, formatting, wording, and organization can make a huge difference when ranking organically.

Did you know that optimizing your headers as questions and answering them concisely and strategically makes you more likely to rank for Featured Snippets? For more tips on ranking, **check out this article.**

If you don't have an SEO writer, don't panic. Here are some of the best tips when it comes to writing for SEO.

General Recommendations on Writing for SEO.

1. Google search your keywords first - In order for your content to rank, you need to write something that's better, easier to understand, or in a different format than existing content that ranks for your same term. For example, if the top blog post for your keyword contains 10 tips, try writing 15. And make sure they're really awesome and helpful tips.

2. Write content that really helps - Don't focus on word count. Focus on writing the best possible piece of content. Make sure it's really helpful. Write it as if you were helping a good friend in your industry with their problem.

3. Optimize your content for your target keyword - That means, choose a keyword (or a small group of highly-related keywords) to optimize your content for. You don't have to "stuff" keywords in. Only add them if it's natural. But in general, the key areas to optimize with your target keywords are:

- Page Title
- Header tags
- Body copy
- Meta description
- And image alt text

4. Include links to related content - You can increase your rank by linking your content to other related content pieces on your site. These can be other blog posts, whitepapers, product pages, or external resources (other sites) about your same topic. This helps Google understand what your page is "about". And, it's also a great start to developing a Pillar Content strategy.

Then, send the draft to a friend or family member outside of your company. Ask them if it's easy to understand. Ask them if they have a clear direction on what to do as a next step (download a product spec sheet, contact you for a consultation, etc.)

Content promotion is just as important as content creation. Make sure you have a strategy to regularly promote your content throughout your site and digital channels. That includes:

- **Internal linking:** link to your newly published post in older, related posts. Internal linking is really important to your content's success.
- **Publish on social media:** And not just once. Schedule your post on Facebook for 6, 12, and 18 months from now so your content gets attention for months to come.
- **Share with your email subscribers:** Include your post in a one-off email to your subscriber database. Or, include a link to it in your email newsletter.
- **Content syndication:** If you have a great relationship with other sites or industry magazines, submit your content to appear in other places to expand its reach.

Content Ideas for Manufacturing

A lot of manufacturers we work with don't have a dedicated content team. With that in mind, here are some ideas you can use to create new content for your site with minimal investment:

- **Repurpose sales presentations:** The stats, figures, slides, and more might be useful blog content for searchers looking for a solution. Sales presentations can often be repurposed as an ebook or downloadable content offer as well.

- **Industry FAQs:** What questions do your sales and service teams answer the most? Compile these into a helpful FAQ page on your site.

- **Customer Interviews:** Ask to speak with a customer about their experience with your product or service. Then, convert that into a helpful case study.

- **Ask your industry friends for quotes on trends:** Then, compile them into an expert guide (with quotes) to trends in your industry. This kind of content does really well on LinkedIn, too.

- **Product FAQs:** Chances are that your decision-stage searchers have questions about your product. Make it easy for them to get those answers with an ungated product FAQ or overview video.

- **Review your existing blog or downloadable content:** Historical content optimization is the best way to take advantage of existing momentum on your site. This is a great use of time if you've completed keyword research but don't have a lot of time or budget to write new content. Here's a guide that outlines **how to optimize historical content.**

If you have a bit more budget to spend, here are some great ideas to invest in a digital strategy for B2B Manufacturing.

How to Use Content for Digital Lead Generation

It's not enough to write awesome content and let it fly out into the digital universe without a second thought. You should have a strategy to monitor and track the results for the content you create. Metrics like organic views over time, time on page, number of CTA clicks, and number of customers generated can all provide insight into how your content is performing as a lead generation tool.

And these metrics can help you decide what to focus on in the future.

If a particular topic is a top-performer, build on that momentum by giving your visitors a targeted "next step" that can also generate leads for you.

What does 'gated' content mean?

Gated content is content that is 'hidden' behind a form. The form usually asks for personal contact information before a visitor is able to download it. These forms are used to generate new leads for sales.

Gated content still has some value in the SEO world. Just make sure it's high-va... to warrant the exchange of information via a form. Examples of digital lead generation content might include:

- **Basic subscription form:** subscribing to a newsletter or blog is still a great way to generate more leads for your site.
- **An industry white paper:** studies, research, how-to guides, expert advice, and more. You can also bundle several related blog posts together and offer it as a downloadable content piece in exchange for some basic information from your visitor
- **Case studies:** make some of your best case studies gated so that you can follow up

  with buyers at this stage with more helpful and relevant information.
- **Free advice:** like evaluations, consultations, and more tend to perform well -- as long as there is value there and it's not just a salesperson selling. Really listen to your prospects and try to be helpful.
- **Digital experiences:** such as digital trade show booths, interactive product content, product brochures, and more

Gated Content vs. Buyer Enablement

Most buyers - especially in the Millennial generation - want information on-demand without interference from a salesperson. Many buyers also feel frustrated when critical product information is hidden behind a form that asks for personal information like last name and phone number.

We are seeing many manufacturers un-gate product information to make the buying process easier for their buyers. And in the long run, it seems to be working. If you make the paths to talk to sales easy, buyers can reach out when they're ready for that next step. This prevents your sales reps from inserting themselves into the buying process too soon - which can create a lot of friction and frustration. Most people don't want to be sold to. It's less work for your buyer AND for your sales reps -- it's a better buying experience for all.

For more on buyer enablement, **check out this post.**

Moving From In-Person Marketing to a Digital Strategy

If there's one thing we learned in 2020, it's that companies that invest in a strong digital content presence can expect to outshine competitors. When the Modex Trade Show was canceled due to concerns related to the Coronavirus, our client Kardex Remstar was left wondering -- how can we still highlight the benefits of our product?

A digital trade show booth was the answer.

By recreating their booth online, Kardex was able to highlight:

- Key product functionality and benefits - with targeted video content
- ROI - with a user-friendly ROI calculator
- Client success stories - with quotes and case studies from some of their customers
- On-demand information - like product FAQs, brochures, educational content, and more

All from a single site page. Even though the event was canceled, interested buyers could navigate the entire trade show experience online.

The best news? This page now exists in perpetuity for prospects to visit at any time, making it a valuable sales tool for future digital trade show events.
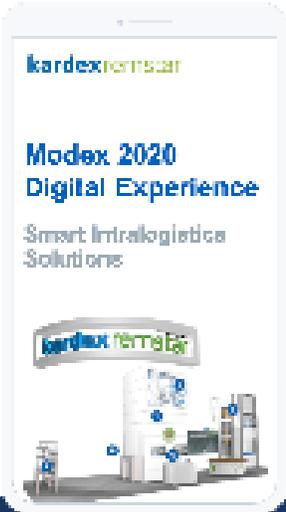
The Future of Content Marketing for Manufacturing

Here are some stats from a recent analysis of content marketing for manufacturing.

- 65% of manufacturing marketers say their organization is much or somewhat more successful with content marketing compared to one year ago.
- Almost half (48%) of manufacturing marketers report their organization has a small (or one-person) marketing/content marketing team serving the entire organization.
- 64% of manufacturing marketers outsource at least one content marketing activity; content creation is the activity they're most likely to outsource (87%).

Content marketing is a large investment in time, resources, and - depending on your staff size - dollars. But the ROI can be huge.

Our client Kardex Remstar saw a 40% increase in business growth by working with our team to develop a targeted content marketing and digital strategy for their global site.

One trend that's here to stay is an increase in investment in content marketing in the industrial manufacturing landscape. Especially as trade shows and events budgets get reallocated for safety over the coming months and years.

Getting ahead of the curve online is instrumental to your success. And it all starts with knowing your buyers and doing some research.

Our best advice?

Start soon. Start today.

PRECISION
marketinggroup

About Us

Could your company benefit from some great content marketing? Precision Marketing Group, LLC offers top-notch outsourced marketing services to manufacturing organizations with a focus on strategic SEO research that drives qualified manufacturing leads.

You do lean manufacturing. We do lead manufacturing.

As a HubSpot Certified Diamond 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.

We partner with a lot of B2B industrial manufacturing clients. That means we have the know-how on what will work for your business. And what won't.

Interested in receiving an assessment of your current content marketing landscape? Let's talk about where your strongest content opportunities are. Visit **PrecisionMarketingGroup.com** or contact us at **508.656.0291**.

CONTACT US