



# EFFECTIVE CONTENT IS STILL KING

A Guide to  
Content Marketing

WILEY

While the terms “content marketing” and “brand journalism” are hot today, the concept is really nothing new. In fact, companies like John Deere, Michelin and Jell-O have been using content as part of their marketing approaches for more than 100 years. John Deere’s publication “The Furrow” was introduced in 1895; Michelin produced a 400-page car guide in 1900; and Jell-O has been using recipes to sell its products since 1904.

Professionals who were at one time forbidden from doing traditional advertising (as attorneys do) have, like John Deere and Jell-O, long relied on content to help them get their names—and their products and services—in front of their target audiences. The difference today, of course, is that organizations today have far more opportunities to get their content in front of those audiences through both traditional and digital channels.

## What Is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is, as the words suggest, using content to market yourself, your company, your products or your services. The key distinction between “content” and “content marketing” is the purpose behind the content. Content marketing is done with the ultimate goal of generating a positive marketing impact for an individual or organization.

It’s important to note, though, that while marketing is at the basis of these activities, effective content marketing does not take a heavy sales approach. On the contrary, content marketing is more subtle than a sales appeal—and far more valuable to its recipients. That was true when John Deere launched “The Furrow,” a direct mail magazine filled with farming techniques and best practices, and it is still true today, 120 years later.

Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute, is widely credited with popularizing the term “content marketing.” In his most recent book, he defines the term: “Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

There are some key elements of this definition that deserve focus:

- ▶ **“Creating and distributing.”** That’s a big deal these days. Obviously content marketers must generate (curate or create) content, and, of course, they must also distribute that content. While this may seem like a simple concept, in reality it is *deceptively simple*. Why? Because in the digital world we now live in,

there is a wide range of options for content distribution. Each of these options, along with traditional ones, need to be considered and selected in some logical way so that each channel is effectively leveraged independently and in concert. We’ll take a look at those channels shortly.

- ▶ **“Valuable and compelling.”** One of the most notable evolutionary aspects of content marketing over the past decade has been the rapid move away from very generic content produced by such firms as Demand Media, which has seen its profits and position drop significantly since Google unleashed Panda, a major algorithm change, in 2011. With so much content now widely available, consumers in both B2B and B2C environments can be choosy—and, increasingly, they are. In this environment, companies that can provide “valuable and compelling” content will win the eyes and ears—and disposable income—of their target audiences.

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- ▶ **“Attract, acquire and engage.”** This is the marketing part of the content marketing definition. The creation and distribution of all of this content is done precisely to “attract, acquire and engage” customers. That’s what it’s all about. That last word is critically important. Companies that want to succeed over the long haul can’t be satisfied with single sales; they must actively “engage” customers over time both to ensure those customers’ loyalties (and continued purchases) and to generate the positive word-of-mouth that can lead to new customers.
- ▶ **“Clearly defined and understood market.”** To be successful in content marketing, *you must thoroughly understand* your target audience. You should not be attempting to sell to the masses—the days of mass media advertising and marketing communications are

rapidly coming to an end. Niche marketing is where it’s at. If you’re attempting to market to “women aged 25-55” (as many organizations are), you would be better served by segmenting that mass audience down into “clearly defined” segments that you can engage with through messages designed to specifically address their needs and interests.

- ▶ **“Driving profitable customer action.”** This is where the rubber meets the road. This is what content marketing is all about. If you aren’t “driving profitable customer action,” then all you have is content.

At this point, it should be clear. Content is not enough. Anyone can generate content. Not everyone can create effective content marketing.

## Which Forms Does Content Take?

As we’ve already noted, content marketing takes a variety of forms, leveraging the ability to communicate online through digital channels while still recognizing the value of traditional media to convey marketing messages.

- ▶ Content marketing is not a website.
- ▶ Content marketing is not social media.
- ▶ Content marketing is not a blog.
- ▶ Content marketing (despite “The Furrow’s” early success) is not a print publication.
- ▶ Content marketing *is all of those things*, and more, combined in some strategic way to achieve desired goals.

It is likely true that no two organizations’ marketing mixes will look exactly the same. Decisions about what forms to generate content in should be made with both a specific audience and desired objectives in mind.

Importantly, companies should avoid making assumptions about who is engaging with various forms of media. Statements like “millennials don’t read newspapers,” or “baby boomers aren’t engaged in social media,” or “*everybody* is online these days” may be true, or they may not. Pew Research Center released its [Social Media Update 2014](#) in January 2015, and its findings may be surprising.

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### FACEBOOK USERS

Among online adults, the % who use Facebook

	2013	2014
All Internet users	71%	71%
Men	66	66
Women	66	66
18-29	84	87
30-49	79	73
50-64	60	63
65+	45	56

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet Project. [View the full study.](#)

The study measures the use of five of the most popular social sites (from most popular to least popular: Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter).

Those who believe that content marketing is all about engaging audiences through these “big five” social media channels will find that they’re missing the mark, at least with some segment of their audience. Similarly, those who believe that Facebook is a millennial-only tool are likely to find the age breakdown statistics produced by Pew equally surprising.

Who would have guessed that 56 percent of the 65+ audience was using Facebook in 2014? And that's precisely the point. Content marketers shouldn't be guessing who is engaging in any of the various channels they may

choose to leverage to achieve their marketing goals. They should know for sure.

There are many forms that content marketing may take:



No doubt, you could add to this list. And, by the time you're reading this, there will be a number of other channels that could be added to the list. Content marketing is continually evolving, offering more and more options for organizations to get their messages in front of a vast array of audiences. That can certainly be a good thing. The move from mass to niche marketing means that

companies can be very specific in their messaging, increasing the odds that their content will resonate with those audiences and compel them to some desired action.

The proliferation of options, though, can also present challenges, as content marketers determine which combination of tools and tactics will best serve their needs. There is no doubt that this is a rapidly growing field.

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## How Big Of a Deal Is it?

The Content Marketing Institute publishes reports on trends in [B2B](#) and [B2C](#) content marketing. Their 2015 reports indicate that, in both arenas, the adoption of content marketing is strong and continuing to grow.

	B2B	B2C
Percentage of respondents using content marketing	86%	86%
Change in content creation over last 12 months	Significantly more (27%) More (43%)	Significantly more (26%) More (43%)
Predicted change in content marketing spending over next 12 months	Significantly increase (9%) Increase (46%) Remain the same (32%) Decrease (2%) Unsure (11%)	Significantly increase (9%) Increase (50%) Remain the same (26%) Decrease (2%) Unsure (13%)
Top three goals for content marketing	Brand awareness (84%) Lead generation (83%) Engagement (81%)	Customer retention/loyalty (88%) Engagement (88%) Brand awareness (87%)
Top three types of content used	Social media (other than blogs) (92%) eNewsletters (83%) Articles on website (81%)	Social media (other than blogs) (93%) eNewsletters (80%) Articles on website (78%)
Top three metrics of success	Website traffic (63%) Sales lead quality (49%) Higher conversion rates (48%)	Website traffic (62%) Sales (54%) Higher conversion rates (39%) SEO ranking (39%)

2015 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends—North America [B2B](#) and [B2C](#) reports. [Content Marketing Institute](#)

While there are differences in the approaches that B2B and B2C content managers take, there are similarities as well. The biggest differences, according to research by the Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, are in the following areas:

- Use content marketing: B2B (86%); B2C (77%)
- Publishes new content daily or multiple times per week: B2B (42%); B2C (48%)

In all other areas, though, responses are statistically the same. Both use an average of 6-7 social platforms, 3-4

paid advertising methods to promote their content and are working on an average number of 13 initiatives.

Whether your company produces widgets, provides a service or supports a cause, it's unlikely that content marketing is not currently on your radar screen to some degree. And, in truth, *all* organizations are engaged in content marketing to some degree—whether they know it or not! As we've already noted, content marketing is really nothing new. The key, though, is to use content *strategically* to achieve desired goals. The right combination of tactics can minimize costs (both in terms of staff/contractor time and budget dollars) and increase results.

## Best Practices in Content Marketing

Ian St. Clair, content manager at [Clicks and Clients](#) in Englewood, Colorado, says content marketing is about three things: “Quality. Quality. Quality.” High-quality content improves the user experience, which plays right into Google’s hands, boosting the odds that websites will rank high in search.

“Content marketing is about creating something unique that potential customers and people cannot find anywhere else,” says St. Clair. Clicks and Clients has used blog posts to engage its audience. Those posts have served as a starting point for other activities, he says. “Once I started putting the emphasis on quality content for our blog in January, other opportunities started to emerge. We started getting offers to write on contributor sites, and they are still coming. We have seen the subscriptions jump on our blog as well.”

“One of the best ways to build trust with people when it comes to content is they feel as if you know the subject and are passionate about it,” says St. Clair.

Importantly, though, he notes: “Content marketing is a marathon—it’s not a sprint. It takes a lot of hard work to build that trust with people to the point they come back again and again.”

Ben Landers is president of [Blue Corona, Inc.](#), a marketing firm with offices in Maryland and North Carolina. When the firm first launched in 2008, says Landers, “we generated more than \$400,000 from a single piece of content.” He shares how they did it:

“We took an early client success story and, with the client’s permission, turned it into a massive, 30-page tell-all case study. We had it professionally printed and bound, and then we direct mailed it to nearly 500 hand-picked prospects,” Landers recalls. It was a strategy that didn’t resonate with some. “The owner of the printing company we used told us that we were idiots,” he says. “He suggested sending tri-fold brochures, but I get dozens of mailers like this at my office, and I throw them out without even a glance. I wanted to send something that would have a real impact—something that, if people actually read, they’d go, ‘Man, these guys are serious!’”

That publication was just the beginning. Landers’ example illustrates how content can, and should, be multi-purposed to achieve maximum results.

“We sent the piece out, at a cost somewhere in the range of \$10-12 per. Simultaneously, we turned the piece into about 35 blog posts, mini online case studies, and a series of emails. We sent all of it out in stages—direct mail first, then published blog posts sequentially (driving people to them with SEO and pay-per-click ads), and then we started calling and emailing people. By the end of the year, we’d done more than \$400,000 in revenue, with all of it being traced back to content related to our case study.”

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“Dare to be brave” is his message for others. “Ignore conventional wisdom. Use your own data. Do your own tests. Make your own data-informed conclusions,” Landers says.

Of course, big brands haven’t been blind to the benefits of content marketing. Their bigger budgets often mean that they can really push the limits in terms of creativity and production value. A recent campaign produced by [Toyota](#) and [BuzzFeed](#), a social news and entertainment company, for example, is using native advertising to generate interest in vehicles among millennials.

Toyota is BuzzFeed’s largest auto partner to date, and together they’ve pioneered some really cool initiatives, including BuzzFeed’s first ever [Spanish-language quiz](#) and a popular [“Would You Rather” quiz](#). Quizzes have been a big hit for BuzzFeed, and they are an important part of its content marketing arsenal. Most recently, [Toyota Corolla’s First Car vs. First REAL Car](#), a two-minute branded video, achieved more than one million views in less than two weeks. It’s a great example of how organizations can effectively engage younger audiences through **mobile** technology.

These are just a few of the many, many example of ways that B2B, B2C, for-profit and nonprofit—virtually *all* organizations—are effectively making use of content to market their products, goods, services and causes.

**In the 21st century, content truly is king!**



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## About the author:

**LIN GRENSING-POPHAL** has written on topics ranging from health and wellness, to relationships, careers, profiles and HR-related topics, to marketing communications and social media. She's written books, articles, white papers, reports, newsletters, e-letters, brochures, web sites and blogs. Innately curious and passionate about learning new things, she enjoys the challenge of a new assignment and

the excitement of uncovering interesting facts, opinions and statistics from a variety of sources and weaving them into copy that resonates with a specific target audience.

In her "day job," Lin—whose "real name" is Linda Pophal, owns and manages a communication firm—Strategic Communications, LLC.

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