# How CONTENT MARKETING is changing the B2B MARKETING LANDSCAPE

vantage|point
insight. ideas. impact.

marketing | advertising | branding | digital | public relations

***Content marketing continues to gain traction in business-to-business (B2B) companies and for good reason. This ebook will discuss:***

- ***what content marketing is***
- ***how the current B2B landscape reflects this discipline***
- ***its impact on public relations***
- ***how we can use content marketing effectively to impact business***

## DEFINING CONTENT MARKETING

We all may have an idea of what content marketing is, but this definition of content marketing from the Content Marketing Institute does the best job I've seen of capturing the details of this tactic.

> ***"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." – Content Marketing Institute***

Let's unpack this definition a bit further. First and foremost, content marketing is a ***strategic marketing approach*** — not just haphazardly posting items to your social media feeds or occasionally creating a whitepaper. You need a clear sense of what you need to accomplish and how your content will move you closer to meeting your objectives.

Secondly, your content must benefit a ***clearly defined audience.*** Go beyond merely demographics here or just listing audience categories. In order for your content to have the greatest impact, you need to understand each audience's wants, needs, interests, questions, concerns and pain points and be able to clearly articulate how your product or service fits into their lives.

Finally, your content must be ***valuable, relevant and consistent*** — but to whom? To your clearly defined audience. What do we mean by each of these characteristics?

- **VALUABLE –** The people who read your blogs or watch your videos must get something worthwhile out of it. They should come away feeling like they've been aided, educated or entertained.

- **RELEVANT –** Your content must address the audiences' wants, needs and interests that we defined earlier. You want to demonstrate that you are the trusted expert they can turn to for answers.

- **CONSISTENT –** This is both consistency of schedule — creating on a regular ongoing basis — and consistency of voice, tone and style, which will help your targeted audience get to know your company and your brand.

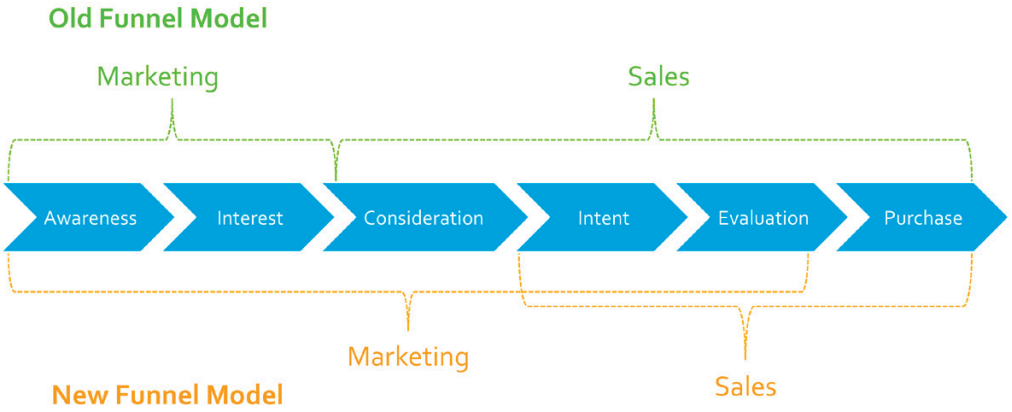
## CONTENT MARKETING AND THE CURRENT B2B LANDSCAPE

Understanding what content marketing is, it's not surprising to see that the current marketing landscape reflects this focus.

Below are the four most important factors for buyer's willingness to engage with a vendor, based on responses to a B2B buyer's journey survey from LinkedIn.

*Source: "B2B Buyer's Journey," LinkedIn*

The answers that ranked second and third in popularity — "is a subject matter expert/thought leader" and "provides valuable consultation, education or tools" — can be directly supported by content marketing.




*Sources: Web.com Small Business Forum, Forrester Research, Dealer Source Group*

Whereas the old funnel model shows the transition of responsibility to the sales team after the interest phase, the new model has marketing and sales overlapping, with marketing playing a more significant role in the process.

Alongside this responsibility shift and hybrid effort between sales and marketing, we also know that the customer has much more control, with the ability to research and access information about a brand without its direct involvement.

This shift means that more and more frequently, the buyer's journey is starting online. According to the Web.com Small Business Forum, "some 68 percent begin with search engines, 40 percent start at the vendor website and 25 percent start their search inspired by an email from a peer or other trusted source."

Additionally, in a recent survey, 74 percent of business buyers told Forrester they conduct more than half of their research online before making an offline purchase.

As part of that decision making process, we are seeing an increased role of content marketing and the success B2B companies are realizing with its implementation. These are just a few of the myriad of facts that help to validate content marketing practices:

- **85 PERCENT OF B2B MARKETERS** reported that the number one benefit of social marketing is generating more business exposure. *(Social Media Examiner)*

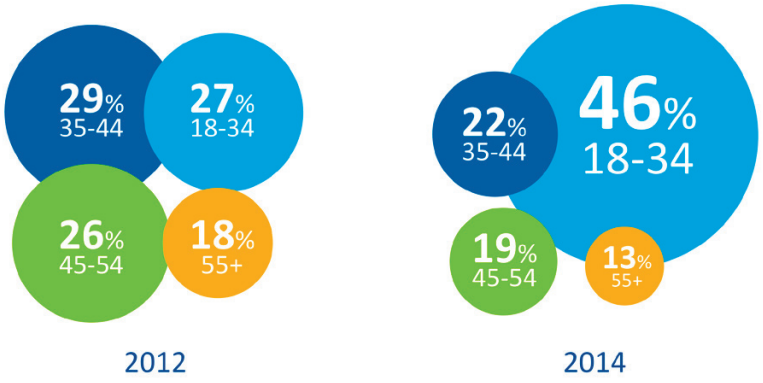
- **67 PERCENT OF BUYERS** rely more on content to make purchasing decisions than one year ago. *(Demand Gen Report)*

- **B2B MARKETERS WHO BLOG** generate 67 percent more leads per month than those that don't. *(SocialMediaB2B)*

- **81 PERCENT OF B2B DECISION MAKERS** use online communities and blogs to help make purchasing decisions. 74 percent use LinkedIn, and 42 percent use Twitter. *(Marketing Think)*

Some of this increase in the use of content marketing tactics correlates to the demographic shift of the research role.

In just two years, from 2012 to 2014, the percentage of millennials (18-34 year olds) serving in a B2B researcher role, increased from 27 percent to 46 percent.




*Source: Google/Millward Brown Digital, B2B Path to Purchase Study, 2014*

Although not all of them are making the final decision, their role as researcher does make them a key influencer to the buying process.

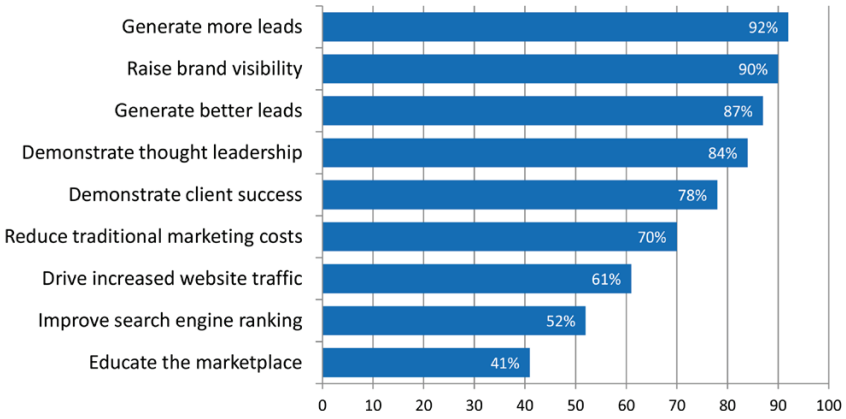
If you're not marketing to this group, you likely need to re-evaluate your strategy, taking into account millennials' familiarity and comfort with digital tools and how this influences the ways that they conduct research.

# IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTENT MARKETING

Knowing what we do about the current landscape, B2B marketers are using content marketing to meet a host of objectives. According to a recent survey of B2B marketers, the top objectives include:

- To generate more leads and better leads
- To raise brand visibility
- To demonstrate thought leadership

**What are your company's primary objectives for investing in content marketing in the first place?**




*Source: Starflight Media, 2015*

As marketers are developing their strategy to address their objectives, they have a growing toolbox to choose from.

## CHANNEL EXPLOSION

**< 1990**
TV
Radio
Print
Display
Events
Direct Fax
Direct Mail
Telephone

**1990s**
TV
Radio
Print
Display
Cable TV
Website
Search
Online Display
IM
Email
Events
Direct Fax
Direct Mail
Telephone

**1999**
TV
Radio
Print
Display
Website
Search
Online Display
Paid Search
Landing Pages
Microsites
Online Video
Webinars
Affiliate Marketing
IM
Email
Events
Direct Fax
Direct Mail
Telephone

**2000s**
TV
Radio
Print
Display
Website
Search
Online Display
Paid Search
Landing Pages
Microsites
Online Video
Affiliate Marketing Webinars
Blogs
RSS
Podcasts
Contextual
Wikis
Social Networks
Mobile Web
Mobile Email
SMS
IM
Email
Events
Direct Fax
Direct Mail
Telephone

**2016**
TV
Radio
Print
Display
Website
Search
Online Display
Paid Search
Landing Pages
Microsites
Online Video
Affiliate Marketing
Webinars
Blogs/RSS
Podcasts
Contextual
Wikis
Social Networks
Mobile Web
Behavioral
Social Media & Ads
Virtual Worlds
Widgets
Twitter
Mobile Apps
Geolocation
Pinterest
Vine
SnapChat/Poke
Apps/Push Notifications Group Texting
Social DM
Voice Marketing
Mobile Email
SMS + MMS
IM
Events
Email
Direct Fax
Direct Mail
Telephone

*Source: ExactTarget*

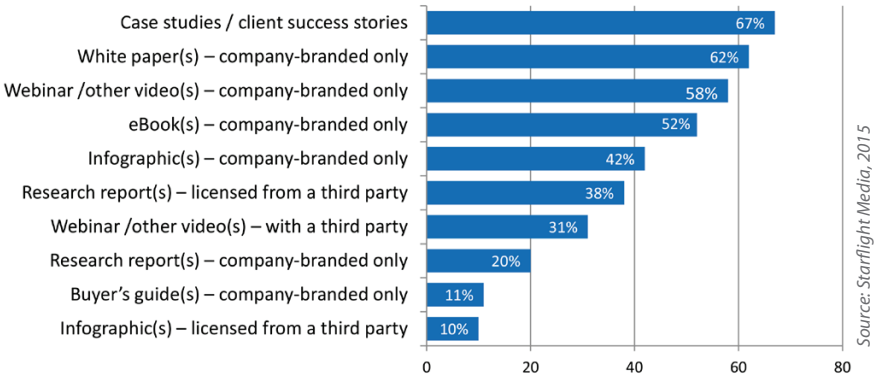
Before 1990, the marketing options were limited: traditional print and broadcast media, events and direct mail.

Now, with the exponential growth of the Internet and self-publishing options, companies can pick and choose the most effective tools to reach their target audiences with custom messages.

So which tactics and dissemination channels are being used the most?

We'll start with tactics.

**Which, if any, of the following content assets has your company put to use in the past 12 months?**

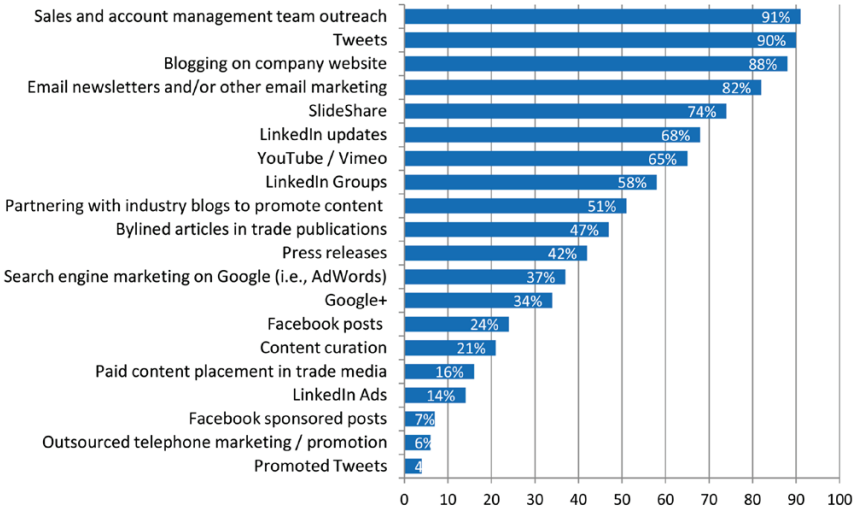



Assets included in this graph are ones created by the company or leveraged by them but created by a third party. We see that, generally speaking, content that is company-branded is more widely used, and the top three most common assets are case studies, whitepapers and webinars/other videos.

At VantagePoint, we're validating the effective use of these tactics with our own clients. We're seeing case studies leveraged as a way to reach current and prospective customers with applications in a real world setting and have increased our production of videos significantly due to their effectiveness and popularity with a variety of audiences. Additionally, webinars have been a prime way to garner leads and demonstrate thought leadership on a particular industry topic or challenge.

This same study also looked at which distribution tactics were used to generate leads, which as you recall, was a leading objective companies were looking to address through content marketing.

**Which, if any, of the following content distribution tactics has your company used over the past 12 months to generate leads?**

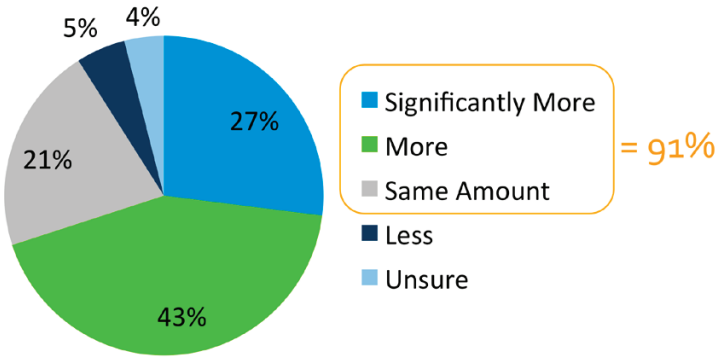



*Source: Starflight Media, 2015*

The top tactic is sales and account management team outreach, which has been a viable approach for decades, but no. 2 and no. 3 may be a bit more surprising.

With this support for content marketing in the marketplace, B2B companies are taking note, demonstrated by the results of this Content Marketing Institute study.

**Change in B2B Content Creation over Last 12 Months**




*Source: 2015 B2B Content Marketing Trends – North America: CMI/Marketing Profs*

Of the people surveyed, 91 percent were now creating the same or more content than they were a year previously — which means the landscape is getting more crowded and just creating content doesn't make you stand out anymore.

## CONTENT MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

With the addition of all of these tactics that companies can leverage as part of their content marketing strategy, the approach to public relations (PR) has shifted as well.

As the Council of Public Relations Firms observes:

> ***"The role of PR within B2B organizations has shifted from simply disseminating news to sharing insight relevant to core constituencies."***

This is even more obvious as we break down the various PR components by looking at the previous mentality and how it compares to today's mentality.

| | Old Mentality | Today's Mentality |
|---|---|---|
| Audience | Journalists | Journalists + Influencers |
| Channels | Traditional media | Traditional + owned media |
| Content Type | Press releases | Press releases + ebooks, whitepapers, blogs, videos, etc. |
| "Searchability" | Not a consideration | SEO considerations |
| Measurement | Ad value equivalency | Outcome measurements |

### AUDIENCE

Trade media and other journalists continue to be important to brands seeking earned media, but the number of others who have the ear of our audiences has increased significantly in recent years.

These influencers may be bloggers, analysts, industry experts or others who are trusted by potential buyers in a particular industry or market segment. Like journalists, they are important because they can help spread our messages and give them credibility.

### CHANNEL

While traditional media is still influential, we also have the opportunity to disseminate content via owned channels, such as blogs, where a journalist doesn't serve as the gatekeeper.

We've found that owned media can even help strengthen relationships with the media by demonstrating knowledge and expertise.

### CONTENT TYPE

Press releases used to be the industry standard to share information about a company. While they are still a viable option for disseminating newsworthy

announcements, the ways to communicate with audiences continues to grow: blogs, ebooks, infographics, videos, slide presentations, etc.

Now, it's common for one story to be turned into forms of content to match the preferences of the entire target audience.

### SEARCHABILITY

There was a time when PR pros didn't think about search engine optimization at all and were hyperfocused on direct contact to media. Then, they overcorrected and for a period of time press releases were being written to drive up rankings through strings of keywords.

Today, there is a balance. SEO continues to be an important goal of PR, but today, it is achieved with quality, relevant content and earned back links from domains that have authority.

### MEASUREMENT

The old ad value equivalency, or AVE measurement, has fallen out of favor — this is a practice that uses advertising rates to calculate the value of editorial coverage.

AVE is being replaced by outcome measurements, such as: website traffic, leads, social engagement, search rankings, reputation and revenue.

This transition means we're using technology more frequently to determine the true impact of PR efforts and spend.

PR remains an important way to build awareness, influence reputation and promote thought leadership, but with the growth of content marketing and its intersection with public relations, the overall approach has had to change.

## KEYS TO EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING

So how do we make sure the content we're creating is effective? Let's step through seven keys to creating the biggest impact using content.

### 1. ROOTED IN STRATEGY

As we discussed in the definition from Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is a "strategic marketing approach" that should be based on a comprehensive strategy. These eight questions can help get you started:

**What business goals can be supported by content marketing?**
These goals will help you address what you want to accomplish with content marketing, such as brand awareness or lead nurturing. From there, you identify the measurable objectives and develop the tactics that need to be executed in order to meet those objectives.

**What keywords do you want associated with your brand, product or service?**
Content marketing allows you to leverage the connection between your company and these terms, which is especially critical in SEO.

**Who are you trying to reach?**
You are likely trying to reach multiple audiences and influencer groups. It is critical to understand these various personas — including their roles in the buying cycle — to create impactful content.

**What are customers looking for from your content?**
Having a better understanding of the answers, solutions and information your audiences are seeking from you allows you to create content that will provide value and resonate with them.

**What action do you want them to take?**
With content marketing, it often makes sense to work backward — identifying what you want the end user to do and creating the piece of content around that desired call-to-action.

Looking forward to the execution phase, there are three additional questions that help ensure the great content you're creating is accessible, scalable and positioned for long-term success.

**Where will you house content?**
Having a single "hub," such as a blog or page on your website, enables customers and potential customers to easily access content.

**How will people find your content?**
Without dissemination channels, your content won't have the impact that it could. Driving traffic through social media, public relations efforts and owned channels such as customer newsletters significantly increases the reach of your content.

**How can we support ongoing content development?**
Content marketing is not a campaign to be turned on and off, and the biggest obstacle to overcome is typically a lack of content. Identifying sources of content — both internally and externally — that can contribute on a continual basis will help alleviate this issue. For example, one of our clients identified several subject matter experts within their company whose expertise aligned with their messaging platform. We are now using those individuals as sources of content as part of their integrated marketing and PR strategy.

Answering these questions will help build the framework of a strategic approach to content marketing.

At VantagePoint, we conduct an in-depth discovery process, which we call a FasTrak session, with our clients very early on in our relationship to uncover these answers and work with them to build their content marketing strategy.

### 2. ADDRESSES DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONTENT CONSUMERS

Within the world of B2B buyers, a research study by CMO Council identified three types of content consumers:

- **RESEARCHERS** want the broadest content, such as new industry reports and trends impacting the market.

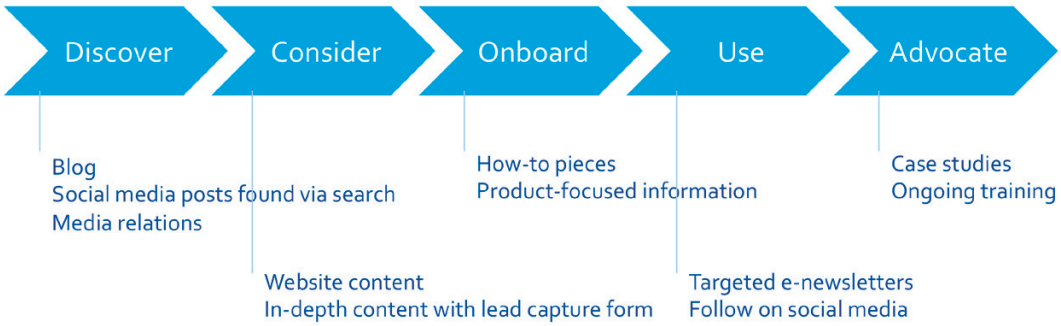
- **INFLUENCERS** seek thought leadership content and summarized content, such as infographics.

- **DECISION MAKERS** tend to come in at the end of the process and want to stay informed through research and analyst commentary. They also want quick access to the data they need to make a good decision.

To be most effective, make sure you create or share content to suit all three.

### 3. MEETS NEEDS THROUGHOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS

As customers move through the sales funnel — from visitors to leads to customers to promoters — the goal is to provide value at each stage along the journey. An integrated approach to public relations, social media and content marketing will enable this to happen.




This graphic offers some examples of the types of content and interactions that can occur at each stage. Many companies are focused on providing value at the beginning of the relationship, but the "use" stage is a key opportunity to strengthen your brand reputation by adding value and enhancing the customer experience to drive them to the ultimate goal: serving as an advocate for your brand.

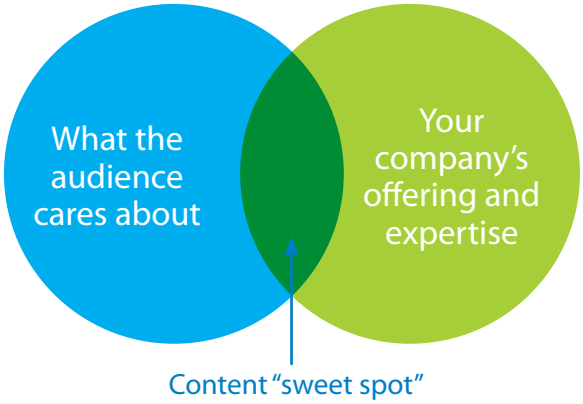
### 4. IS INTENTIONAL

Content shouldn't be created without a purpose. The most effective content has these characteristics:

- Focuses on needs, wants and interests of audiences

- Provides "help" over "hype"

- Answers questions and offers solutions




Additionally, identifying your company's "sweet spot" — the area where what the audience cares about and your company's offering and expertise intersect — is important to making your content intentional.

## 5. DRIVES SEO

SEO, or search engine optimization, continues to play a key role in content marketing.

Search engines are focusing on offering the best user experience possible, which means sites that offer relevant information garner the most visibility.

Algorithms continue to change, but we know that fresh, quality content continues to be rewarded.

How do you create content with SEO implications in mind? Here are a few tips:

### Create for a specific audience

Your content should be geared toward particular audiences to increase the chances of it appearing for related searches. This can be done by:

- Answering problems that your target audience may search online
- Aligning your products and/or services to their unique needs
- Grabbing their attention using specific topics, keywords and recommendations

### Sound natural

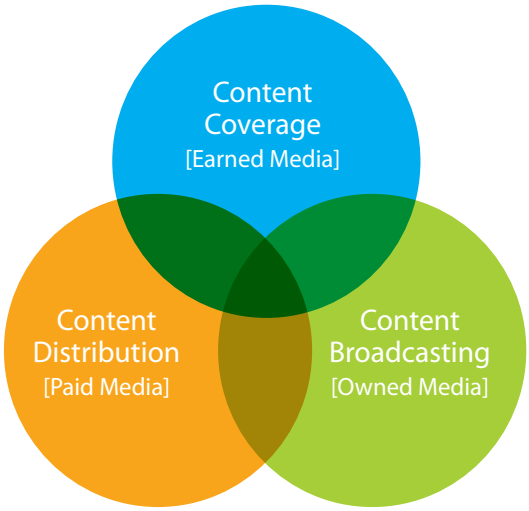
Strings of nonsensical keywords are not effective, both in terms of SEO and readability.

### Incorporate long-form content

Algorithms look at co-occurrence to help deliver the most relevant results to users. Co-occurrence is the frequency in which terms or related groups of words appear in a given material. Long-form content allows content marketers to naturally implement co-occurrence without sounding redundant.

**Include high-authority references**
When you create content, be sure to include references from high-authority sources — high quality websites that are well-respected in the industry, like those from government and research organizations. These references boost your credibility not only from an SEO standpoint, but also in the eyes of the reader.

## 6. UTILIZES A VARIETY OF DISSEMINATION TACTICS




Once we've created quality content, we need to make sure people see it. Using owned, paid and earned content promotion helps drive different audiences to the assets.

**Owned Content Promotion**
Owned content promotion, or broadcasting, is the act of pushing content out from the original source through channels that are controlled by a brand.

In most cases, the audience viewing the promoted content is already familiar with that brand because they are opt-in consumers of those channels.

*Examples include: social media posts, RSS feeds or blog subscriptions and email newsletters*

**Paid Content Promotion**
This distribution method entails paying to leverage media channels in order to reach new audiences with content offerings.

Like traditional advertising, a brand does not own the channels on which it promotes its content with paid content distribution. Therefore, a brand "rents" channels by paying to access them for a certain period of time or number of clicks.

*Examples include: sponsored articles or newsletter content and sponsored social updates*

**Earned Content Promotion**
Earned content promotion, also called digital PR, is the process of utilizing outreach efforts to convince third-party publishers or influencers to engage with

content and share it through their own channels. Like with content distribution, the goal of digital PR is to reach a new audience with a content offer but on an earned, not paid basis.

Building relationships with influencers takes time, credibility and consistency — and valuable content certainly helps in the process.

*Examples include: news coverage, editorial coverage, retweets/reposts and content syndication*

### 7. CAN BE MEASURED AND QUANTIFIED

Measuring content allows you to determine the content and dissemination channel's effectiveness and make adjustments along the way to improve your results.

Depending on your objectives for content marketing, there are several key performance indicators, or KPIs, that you can track and measure.

- Views and reach
- Shares and other engagement
- Traffic generated by the content
- Share of voice ratio against competitors
- Leads generated
- Content path journey completion rate
- Conversion rate for email sign-ups, blog subscriptions or other requests for information

## MEASURING IMPACT

So, if we execute content marketing effectively, what can the impact be for your company?

- Increased brand awareness with an opportunity to educate about your company and your industry
- Attracts new visitors through search
- Provides fresh content to search engines, which positively impacts SEO

- Supports trusted thought leadership position by demonstrating expertise and allowing you to activate your brand through subject matter experts that serve as brand ambassadors

- Capitalizes on B2B marketing trends and meets changing needs of B2B decision makers

- Generates material for sales team and channel members, with the potential to create "warm leads"

And the bottom line (and bottom dollar) is that content marketing can help drive business forward and provide an efficient return on investment — over time producing three times more leads per dollar spent when compared to other traditional marketing disciplines.

*VantagePoint is a nationally recognized marketing and advertising agency where keen insight and fresh ideas blend to positively impact your business. We provide integrated marketing, advertising, branding, digital, and public relations solutions, with a special emphasis in foodservice. For more information, visit www.vantagep.com.*

vantage|point
insight. ideas. impact.

80 villa road . greenville, sc 29615
864.331.1240 . www.vantagep.com