

# B2B Content Marketing

## Best practices for killer B2B content to drive engagement and conversion

**J**ust about every B2B marketer has content. But not every B2B marketer is necessarily doing content marketing.

"Blanketing people with junk isn't content marketing," says Chris Drury, president/chief creative officer, Drury Design Dynamics. "People are beginning to understand that they need a strategy."

"It comes down to creating relevant content that gets in front of the right people at the right time," says Doug Pace, vice president and COO of Bayshore Solutions. "You have to understand your consumer and what interests them—we want to capture those consumers higher in the buying funnel. Most of them don't even know that they are looking for your product, so you need to send them down the path you want them on."

"In the past, a company's resource center was where content went to die—it was old archived content that wasn't organized well, and not optimized for lead generation," says Hana Abaza, director of marketing at Uberflip. "Marketers are starting to pay

attention to making that learning center more robust and optimizing it for lead generation."

"On the B2B side, there are so many people who do hours of research before they make a call, so you want to be high in the consideration set," says Jenni

Walsh, director of digital marketing, Bayshore Solutions. "You need to have branding and content that will speak to their needs, with a strong call to action."

In many organizations, there are two tracks of thinking about how to approach the customer, notes Marcia Chithelen vice president, marketing strategy, BizMark. Corporate marketing is thinking big picture, with a global view of generating content to move into new spaces. At the product manager level, the content generation approach is more narrow and focused.

"Having content is important—but really understanding where your customers are is a big thing," says Ed Gillespie, executive director, BizMark. "You need to use it to tie your product to their larger corporate initiatives and position yourself to be part of the solution."



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## HOW B2B AND B2C BUYERS DIFFER:

**1. B2B buyers are not spending their own money.** An entrepreneur is typically spending his/her own money, but in mid-to large size firms, buyers are often purchasing with someone else's cash. Today, more than ever, a vendor needs to justify their role and their value, especially against competitors who will low ball their prices to get in the door.

**2. But, B2B buyers still want a deal.** While they do not lay out their own cash, they still want to show their boss that they made a great deal for the company. Presenting offers, a staple of great direct marketing, will serve you well here as you plan your marketing efforts.

**3. B2B buyers want to make the right choice.** Recall the famous ad campaign that stated "No one ever got fired for buying IBM." That thinking still is prevalent today. If you have a new, innovative product or service, it is often very difficult to get old-line companies to take a risk on trying something that is unproven. It boils down to human psychology. "If it is so good, why isn't so and so using this?"

**4. B2B buyers are more skeptical than ever.** Establishing credibility should be a key driver in your marketing messaging. While you want to focus on the prospect's needs and pains, you still must include enough pertinent information on your company so the buyer feels comfortable enough to meet with you face-to-face.

**5. B2B buyers do research before they choose.** Once you impress them, they will continue to research you and the firm. They have the same power at their fingertips as most consumers, the internet. Thus, make sure you have a compelling, relevant website; client testimonials on LinkedIn and other social sites; and that your sales messaging is consistent with your marketing strategies and tactics.

**6. B2B buyers want strong relationships.** In the majority of B2B transactions, the salesperson is the one who owns the relationship. He/she is the key cog to the company's reputation, expectations and delivery deadlines. On-going, professional communicators tend to fare well in B2B sales. They do not over promise, but rather work with their teams to gather information and intelligence prior to making bold commitments. —Grant A. Johnson, founder, Johnson Direct/Responsory

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## WHAT YOU NEED

Marketers must come up with a content calendar, to highlight what needs to get promoted at what point in the year, says Walsh. Companies need to have a clear focus on what content needs to be produced, who is responsible for producing it, how often it should be updated and what graphics are needed to make it pop.

"Most people understand the need for having copy and written content, but the powerful messaging that you can get across in a video or photo is important and should be included in any content strategy," she says.

All of these elements can be incorporated into an integrated strategy involving PR, LinkedIn, case studies, webinars, whitepapers and more, says Pace. "If you can take off the gloves and say you'll give away the secret sauce, you'll be seen as an expert and that will drive awareness."

A key element is knowing the purpose of the content you are creating, says Gillespie. "Even if it is just a tweet or a video or an infographic, why are you putting it out there? Understand your objectives. Think in terms of having content that is relevant to [different parts] of the buying cycle."

The challenge is to optimize the experience for your customer, and how to become a more agile content marketer, notes Abaza. Marketers are increasingly looking to marketing automation solutions to figure out ways to generate leads from premium content like whitepapers and webinars without having to ask IT to create a new landing page every time they want to test something.

## ROI IMPACT

Of course, knowing *who* you are targeting is essential. Bayshore spends time with clients creating buyer personas centered around individual customers, what they are after and what drive them emotionally, says Pace.

In the past, many marketers didn't have the infrastructure to accurately measure the impact of their content marketing efforts. That has changed, influenced greatly by increasing pressure from the C-suite on marketing to prove their value to the bottom line.

"We need to identify which pieces of content are converting into leads. How many of those leads turned into sales calls? Then how many turned into customers? To put the pieces together, you need to have the right technology in place," says Abaza. "It's all about having the right tools that will give you metrics to incorporate into your client marketing system."

Marketing automation is a big piece of the puzzle for many marketers when it comes to tracking the performance of content, as are tools like Google Analytics or the app BuzzSumo, which lets users type in a keyword or domain name to see what content is performing well for that topic, or the social media channels content is being shared on.



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# The Big Day— And Beyond

Using content to create excitement before, during and after an event

**F**or many B2B marketers, content marketing is a major component of their strategy to drive event attendance and engagement. The big trick is keeping people engaged not only before and during the event, but after as well, notes Chris Drury, president/chief creative officer, Drury Design Dynamics.

Video can be a great tool to get attendees excited before an event. “They need to look at it and see what they would get out of it—you want to get people energized and excited,” says Drury. “You need to give them the flavor of the event. Show them what the event is like. Are there the networking opportunities? Will the learning experience be what I need? Giving people a point of view into the event—if you can, bring them into the event virtually.”

Blogs posts from people inside the organization or from industry influencers can help create buzz for the event, which can be pulled into social channels to increase the volume and create a dialogue.

When marketers go into an event, they need to have a plan, he notes. A dedicated team should be tasked with creating and developing content from the event to help extend the life of the relationships that are being built on-site. “For big events, social media typically drops like a brick two days later,” he says. “You need to use the event to build content and community.”

After the event, the “big voice” of the event might not be needed any more. Use content to continue the conversation with smaller voices, perhaps related to specific product lines, research or social interactions. “Build the community while you are live and on-site so the conversation continues as an organic thing, and then build that into your ongoing plan,” says Drury. —BNV



## BEST PRACTICES

**Offer people the content they *actually* want.** “Don’t just post anything,” says Chris Drury, president/chief creative officer, Drury Design Dynamics. “People will just tune it out. It has to be the right content for the right audience.”

“Rather than just saying ‘here it is,’ teams on the client side need to organize content marketing around what people want based on their role or their industry,” he adds.

Also, Drury, notes, give people a choice as to the channel or format of the content they receive. The fact that they love your podcast doesn’t automatically mean they want to read your whitepaper.”

**Repurpose your content for different events, channels and needs.** Content is a valuable resource, so don’t waste it. Repurpose your information as many ways as possible to get your information out via different funnels, says Jenni Walsh, director of digital marketing, Bayshore Solutions.

For example, says Walsh, if one of your executives are speaking at an event, put out a press release, and write five to 10 different social media posts promoting the session. Then take pictures at the event and write a blog post recapping the discussion and feature that on your website.

When creating content, look at all the evergreen possibilities of the information, and how you can syndicate it through different channels, she adds. If you write an article on some research now, maybe you can spin an infographic out of it a month later. At the end of the year, update the story with new tips.

**Look at the content you have, and target accordingly.** People are busy today, and in many cases, says Drury, shorter is better, especially when it comes to video. “People like things targeted, they like to get nuggets of information and then get out. Cut it up, and make it shorter and more serial-like.”

Doug Pace, vice president and COO of Bayshore Solutions describes the process as looking at your content as a story with chapters. “You can reuse chapters in different channels.”

The right content length differs, depending on your audience and their needs, says Ed Gillespie, executive director, BizMark. Traditionally, larger companies have more of an appetite for longer content to help them prove their business case to the C-suite. Small business owners, on the other hand, are pressed for time and might gravitate towards quicker bursts of information.

“Clients ask us over and over, things like ‘should this whitepaper be four or eight pages?’ Our stock answer is that it should be as long as it should be and not one word longer,” says Marcia Chithelen vice president, marketing strategy, BizMark.

**Know when to gate—and when *not* to gate.** If you’re going to gate something, make sure that it has value to the customer, says Hana Abaza, director of marketing at Uberflip. Otherwise, what’s the point? “There’s some purists that say if its top of funnel, you should never gate. But if it is incredibly valuable, like an ebook or something, then it is worth gating.”

Of course, if you do gate content, make the process as painless as possible for your customers and prospects, says Abaza. “Sometimes the experience [to get to the content] is brutal, and you end up sacrificing conversion rates.”

“The trick is to make sure the tease pays off,” adds Chithelen. “It’s frustrating to download something that isn’t what you thought you would get.” —BNV



# Social Climbing

## Crafting content to connect on LinkedIn and other channels

**C**ontent marketing that connects with audiences in a measurable way is essential for B2B social success, especially on LinkedIn.

"Marketers need to remember that just because something is content doesn't mean it is content marketing," says Rebecca Lieb, an industry analyst specializing in advertising media at Altimeter Group. "Content strategy is needed. You need to know what do you want it to achieve? Do you want it more inquires for your business? Are you trying to showcase executives in your company as experts in your field? There are a variety of things LinkedIn can be use for and you need to know what you want to accomplish."

Originally, LinkedIn was built more around HR and recruiting. "There wasn't a lot of thought leadership there, but now there's a lot of promote content with high profile people, similar to what American Express did with Open," Lieb notes.

B2B marketers who want to create successful content for LinkedIn and other platforms must avoid talking about themselves and concentrating on pitching their product. Rather, they need to create interesting and engaging content that is fun and challenging.

"Remember that content marketing isn't advertising and be transparent," she says. "It isn't a hard sell, it is about being interesting, informative and compelling—write as a journalist or a storyteller would, not a marketer."

Of course, Lieb says, measurement is key, and that can be troublesome for marketers. But what's the best way to measure content marketing ROI?

"We've seen some really strong examples of how

to do that," she notes. "Eloqua, for one, decided they wanted their content to be read by quality leads who had a title of vice president or above."

Eloqua achieved this by creating ebooks and whitepapers and then tracking who was downloading and reading those materials. The company was able to attribute several million in revenue to these efforts.

As marketers get better at creating models to govern how online content is measured and organized,

the C-suite is starting to understand the value of content marketing. Lieb notes that she recently spoke to someone at Goldman Sachs who said their brand group had been renamed the brand and content marketing group. "So we're starting to see it formalized in company structures."

There are three types of marketing content—content that entertains, content that informs and educates, and utility content, like apps, mortgage calculators, diet programs and restaurant finders.

The lines dividing how B2B and B2C marketers uses content get blurred more and more every day.

For example, says Lieb, a B2B company that sells mainframe computers created a YouTube channel to showcase a program that was a parody of "The Office." It was an episodic serial that was informative and entertaining, and a fun way to promote the computers.

Consumer brands, meanwhile, are crafting very educational content. A shoe manufacturer might create content informing people on things they need to know when buying an athletic shoe, such as what to look for when you need extra arch support. **! —BNV**

