

Leading the Pack

Using content and integrated marketing to stand out in a crowded B2B lead gen landscape

Everyone knows that a solid content marketing plan is essential to generating solid B2B leads.

The problem is...*everyone* knows that a solid content marketing plan is essential to generating solid B2B leads. And that means there's a *lot* of content out there.

"Early adopters to content marketing had the greatest impact but now everyone is numb with all the different messages they're receiving," says Ryan Gould, vice president, strategy and marketing services, Elevation B2B Marketing. "Everyone is getting flooded with content. It's hard to stand out and differentiate yourself."

Variety is key—today, marketers not only need to create content, they need to personalize it and have specific goals in mind. Create content with different audiences and platforms in mind, such as search or inbound marketing strategies, he says. "Content needs to be sharable and have the legs to do what you want it to accomplish."

Content needs to connect with all the different people involved in the often complex decision mak-

ing process. "Focus on creating an emotional connection," says Gould. "You need to look at B2B buyers in a way that connects emotionally not only with the initial contact but everyone in the process."

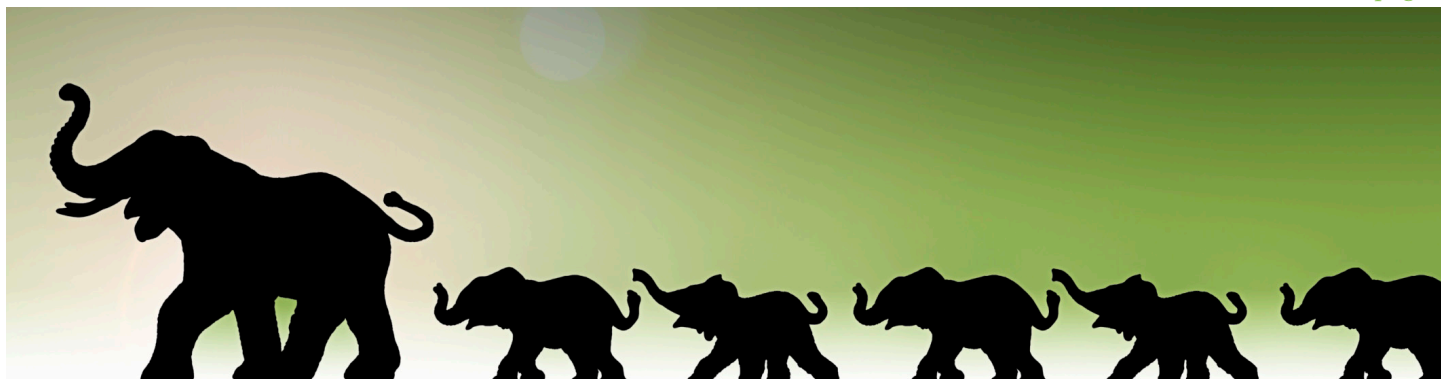
The more you know about your customer, the better you'll do when it comes to creating content that will address their buying criteria and show them why your organization is different, reasons Pat McAuley, vice president/account director, Mobium.

THE CHANGING FUNNEL

B2B buyers are doing more and more research before they identify themselves to a vendor as a potential lead. This means marketers must create more touchpoints for prospects to connect with them organically as early in the process as possible. "The more engaged and interested they are, the more they will want to provide their information," McAuley says. "Rich content will help move them through the sales funnel."

Elevation's customer LifeLock has successfully created content that is successfully engaging prospects

Continued on page 2



PULL IT TOGETHER

5 REASONS MARKETERS MUST START CURATING CONTENT TODAY



There's tremendous pressure to be part of "The Conversation" today. Marketers have a fear of missing out, and the stakes are high—if you're not present in the social and digital conversation, you're missing out on the chance to engage potential customers, turn them into

viable leads and grow your business.

The challenge is that there are rules for participating. As a brand, you need to be authentic, put your customer first and avoid the kind of sales speak that drives your audience directly to the "unfollow" button. These are the rules that have inspired the explosive growth of content marketing and, at the same time, forced marketers around the globe to become content strategists and producers overnight.

But as the effort and cost of original content production takes its toll on marketers' budgets and bandwidth, it becomes clear that not every company can afford to produce and share original content at the rate it takes to effectively engage audiences online. As a result, content curation—the process of finding and sharing relevant third-party content—has emerged as not just a viable alternative, but also a scalable one.

Here are 5 reasons you need to start curating today:

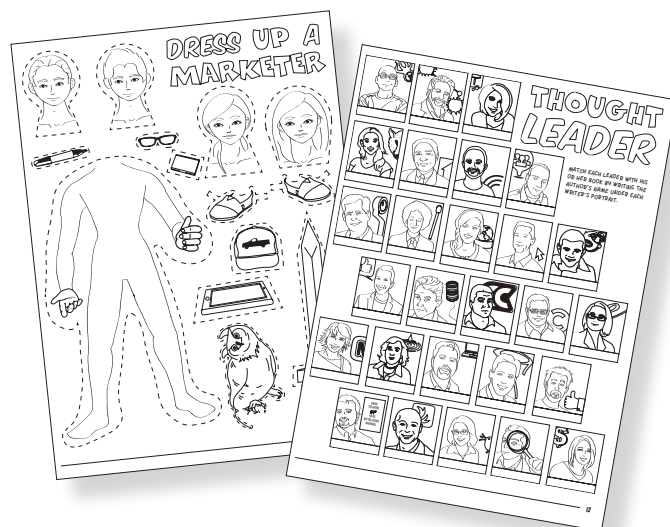
1. Curated content is a great way to engage customers.

Let's face it. Your original content is great, but it's still your content. And as much as we may hate to admit it, our customers know that your great, insightful and forcibly objective report on [Topic X] is ultimately designed to influence their purchase. Curated content comes without original content's baggage. By sharing third-party content in addition to your own content, you're providing your customers with objective information that they'll be more inclined to favorite, comment upon and share.

2. Cadence is critical.

When was the last time you tweeted? How many blog posts have you posted this week? And what about that newsletter...? The fact is, marketers are juggling too many digital channels these days and, like so many Tamagotchi, they die when you don't

Continued on page 3



Marketo created a coloring book PDF to engage prospects and let them have a little fun with the brand.

Continued from page 1

earlier in the process. "Especially in the tech space, there can be a lot of complexity relating to channels and resellers," says Gould.

"Content is still a pain point—and it's not just the ability to produce content. After all, it's the rare person that hasn't figured out that if you don't have content, you can't make demand gen work right," says Howard J. Sewell, president of Spear Marketing Group. "Right now, the challenge is quantity over quality."

"There's just a volume of really bad content out there," he continues. "The challenge is discovering whether different formats or topics make your content stand out from the rest. Everyone has the 'five key tips to whatever' and is wondering how they make to make their five tips stand out from the next guy's."

What type of content works best? That depends, of course, on where a prospect is in the funnel. Things like infographics that are easily sharable work well in the early stages, but will not necessarily ultimately drive a purchase, says Sewell.

"Marketers are always looking for the next whiz-bang shiny thing to make their content stand apart," says Sewell. "Ultimately, it comes down to the content itself and the subject matter. We have clients producing ebooks and whitepapers that are working really well because they are on point and topical. But I'm amazed at the content out there that is just pabulum. At the end of the day, if the content doesn't speak to our audience, it doesn't matter how many flashing lights are on it."

WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

The top of the funnel is the fun part, says Sewell, and in some ways that can be the easiest part to

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

feed them consistently.

Curated content helps relieve this stress by providing a steady stream of relevant content that you frame and use to feed your channels. And, a “well-fed” channel helps keep you top of mind with your customers.

3. You aren't actually a media company.

Despite the fact that marketers are under pressure to engage like a media company, the simple fact is that most organizations aren't built to support the development of content at scale. It's easy enough to create an occasional blog post, but that's not enough to put a dent into “The Conversation.” Sure, you can grow your team and/or enlist external support (assuming you have the budget), but that leads up to the next reason:

4. It will save you money.

It's simple. Content curation is cost effective because you're tapping into content that's already available—and waiting to be shared—online. Remember, content creators are sharing their articles, videos and infographics because they want them to be seen. And you can support that mission by furthering their reach. (Just always remember to follow basic guidelines that include citing the source and linking to the original piece.) Curated content gives you the opportunity to exponentially increase your output and engagement opportunities without driving up your budget.

5. Your competitors are curating.

If you look closely at your competitors' newsletters, social feeds and blog, you'll see that a lot of that seemingly original content is actually commentary on third-party content. They know that finding the right content and sharing it with additional insight is a move right out of Sun Tzu's *The Art of Thought Leadership*—if that existed, of course. So while you may be struggling to think of new angles for sales-free sales content, your target customers are learning to rely on your competitors for the bigger picture.

While some marketers are struggling to be a part of “The Conversation,” others are curating their way to ownership of “The Conversation.” That's ultimately where you win with curation. It ensures your business becomes so inextricably linked to your space that when your customers are in the need real, related information, their first instinct is to turn to you and your digital channels. Like any marketing initiative, it doesn't happen overnight, but it will happen.

—Christian Jorg, CEO, Opentopic

Continued from page 2

measure. But for companies looking to drive ROI, sometimes the middle of the funnel can be easier to improve. Many marketers still aren't leveraging marketing automation and other technologies to design programs that will perform best to generate demand and leads. “Lead gen has become more about the lead lifecycle than just about feeding the beast at the top of the funnel.”

“B2B prospects are adept at dodging marketers until they are ready to connect,” says McAuley. “They're connected with colleagues and peers and gather information and do their own research without ever talking to a salesperson, because everything is online.”

Obviously, an age-old challenge is budget and manpower, says McAuley. “Setting up systems to generate, nurture and convert leads through a long sales cycle is not only costly but can be outside the range of experience for marketing folks.”

For some B2B organizations, distribution channels can present a problem because a distributor may have the first-hand connection with a customer, meaning the marketer is a step removed. And on a granular level, says McAuley, it can be tricky to get prospects to opt-in to receive messages so the lead can be captured.

Energy solution manufacturer Landis+Gyr found that many of their prospects weren't necessarily dubious about the capabilities of their meters and other products, but whether they would be compatible with any new technologies that debut in the future.

“This [equipment] is a huge purchase, so companies wanted to make sure that what they purchased today wouldn't be quickly outmoded—‘future positioning’ was a big concern,” says Dave Cannon, vice president, creative technology, Movéo, which works with the manufacturer.

To address these fears, Landis+Gyr created a quarterly e-zine that focused on a variety of topics for the markets they served. That content was also parsed out in whitepapers, articles and in other formats to reach a wide audience of prospects via email, social media, search and other channels.

A content focused microsite, BeFutureReady.com, also helped engaged potential customers with the brand, and helped grow the company's database. “We found that people who were engaged with the content were much more qualified visitors than those who weren't exposed to thought leadership,” says Cannon. “And Landis+Gyr do a good job of keeping it consistent and predictable. It isn't easy to wrangle subject experts, but it's been a pretty big win because [their audience] feels they understand what they are up against.”

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

Attribution in lead gen is a challenge for some, but it all comes down to having a clear understanding of how all your marketing elements are working together. “The challenge is to find that integration and see the value of what [everything] is doing and how we are executing in our environment,” says Gould.

Knowing what moved the needle is essential, says McAuley. “Some companies will generate tons of leads, but they have no way to track and gauge the effectiveness of those leads and they can’t follow through to make the process worth it.”

“It can be hard to understand the weight of each thing in your marketing mix,” says Cannon. “Many people look at last click conversion but there are things in the middle.”

“We’re seeing a lot more harmony between sales and marketing, as they [come around] to the idea that their needs are similar,” says Gould. “Sales needs smarter and more qualified leads, and they have to rely on marketing to understand the needs of the customer.”

The role of the demand gen marketer has changed significantly, says Sewell. “I really think there’s a talent crunch out there—marketing has become so much about technology and we’re seeing marketing departments struggle to build what we call a modern demand gen engine. You really need people who are creative, strategic and can even program a little HTML.”

Marketers need to remember that influencers

are extremely important to connect with in the early part of the lead and demand gen process. “You shouldn’t focus too much on the decision maker and lose sight of the influencer—there needs to be balance. After all, an admin might be tasked with finding a particular service,” says Cannon. “Of course, the cost per lead goes up with the

more people you’re trying to reach and there might be more waste.”

New leads are important, but don’t forget the names that are already in your database, adds Cannon. Maybe the timing wasn’t right when a lead was initially generated, but that doesn’t mean you should give up on those leads forever. “Clean up the names you have and refocus.”

CHANNEL CHANGING

Everyone is getting 30 to 40 emails a day, which means marketers must stand out in the inbox. “Are you providing the potential customer something that works with specific goal?” says Gould. “It goes back to personalization, and tying [your email message] back together with other content in PR and branding and making it more holistic.”

People are waking up to the idea that they have to be thought leaders, notes Sewell. “Taking people at any stage of the selling cycle and engaging them in a consistent stream of value added education is something that comes up all the time.”

For many B2B marketers, the role of email in the lead nurturing process comes in once the prospect has raised their hand and opted-in to receive communications. “One of the most exciting things with predictive modeling is that we can build lists for clients looking at criteria like social behavior, because a lot of companies can’t depend on inbound exclusively. They need to be proactive.”

Marketo, a partner of Spear, used a downloadable PDF coloring book to connect with email recipients. “It was a little off the wall, but it’s not just about reaching people who are ready to buy your product. It’s about engaging with marketers and getting them to take notice and share socially and develop a group of people you can nurture.”

Direct mail is still relevant in B2B, but often in conjunction with email and other campaigns such as customer audience advertising on Facebook. For example, says Sewell, someone wanting to target CTOs at financial organizations could use direct mail as part of the mix in a drip marketing effort over weeks or months. “On a cost-per-lead model, it’s still tough,” says Sewell. “You just have to pick your battles.”

Likewise, search isn’t always the slam-dunk it once was. “Paid search is a huge channel, but we’ve got clients in hugely competitive categories,” he says. “One was facing \$30 to \$40 cost-per-click. It would take an act of God to prove that ROI.”

Programmatic advertising is starting to eat into search budgets, and can be effective in reaching



Energy product manufacturer Landis+Gyr uses quarterly ezines to educate prospects about the longterm value of their products.

Continued on page 5

the right person in the right job function, Sewell says.

"You need to cut through the noise and align to market needs," says Cannon. "Enewsletter sponsorships do well for us because of that reason—they're focused, so we know we're getting in front of the right people."

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL

While it is useful to creating engagement, Gould notes that many marketers are having a hard time adopting social media for lead gen. On the flip side, search engines place a significant value on social.

"Focus on finding the right communities for your audience," says Gould. "Posting on Facebook just for the sake of posting on Facebook isn't as effective [as identifying] brand advocates."

Blogging has become a bit of a stale word for some, but the evidence is there, says Gould. "Businesses who engage in active blogging and create communities are seeing success. Content needs to resonate—those who focus on sales collateral [in their blogs] are missing out on an opportunity

to tell a story that will connect with and engage a potential customer."

"For a long time, blogs were the province of the PR team," agrees Sewell. "People were just posting up trade show info and press releases, but now, they're executing on the full potential and building blogs that are very lead gen oriented with followable, downloadable content. We have clients who show a 700% ROI on social because they're designing blogs in such a way that they're driving an actionable, measurable, response."



Beth Negus Viveiros
Managing Editor, Chief Marketer
bnegus@accessintel.com
@CMBethNegus

ABOUT CHIEF MARKETER

The Authority on Measurable Marketing: Our mission is to seek out the best in measurable marketing intelligence—and then analyze, summarize and organize it for marketing and C-level executives.