



Everything you need to know about...

Content Marketing for B2B



Content Marketing

**“Creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action”
Chartered Marketing Institute**



costs
62% less
for **3x** the leads.¹

Do you really know the true power of content marketing?

Within the B2B world content marketing is also the art of using content to expand your business’s audience, strengthen and develop brand affinity, and ultimately drive leads and sales by appealing to other businesses.

But when it comes to the practical implications, there’s a much broader set of preconceptions, accepted truths and outright myths surrounding content marketing. These can get in the way of creating content and related strategies that actually work.

In this guide, we look at ways to overcome these obstacles and get your content machine tuned to perfection.

Content marketing in itself is not new. But the world in which it operates is fast-changing, and noisy. Your audience is inundated with messages through a huge range of media, and needs a good reason to pay attention to yours.

What’s more, they’re being targeted more precisely than ever before, so those messages are probably relevant, and therefore harder to filter. Even if they do sit up and take notice, it won’t be for long; attention spans are measurably shrinking year on year.²

So what does this mean for you? It means that the actual value of your content is absolutely crucial.

¹<http://tbt.to/9statd2243> ²<http://tbt.to/attnspn5>

What makes B2B content valuable?

‘Driving brand awareness’ is a huge driver for B2C and B2B marketing activities alike. But whilst this can seem to come naturally to B2C brands, corporate marketing has to work a lot harder to achieve anything like the ‘cult status’ or even desirability of some of the top B2C players.

However, that might not be as important as you think.

Your business audience is looking for answers, information, and results. Content that answers their questions, is easy to absorb, and looks good, ticks all the boxes.

So while brand awareness is important, action is even better because it’s measurable. Your click-throughs, downloads and conversations can be checked against those KPIs that you established at the very beginning of your campaign.

Valuable B2B content answers your audience’s questions and sets you up as a reliable source of good information, not simply a badge to display.

Your content marketing efforts should be led by a defined handful of people, with responsibility for keeping your strategy firmly on track.



The essence of a great content strategy

The essence of a great content strategy can be summed up in two simple pieces of advice.

The importance of working backwards

No matter how great your ideas, it's essential to match them up to a clearly defined objective. Start from the very end; your ultimate goal. What will success look like for this strategy? Can you identify two or three KPIs and the meaningful metrics by which to measure them by?

From this clearly defined aim, work backwards to your content. When (and only when) you can see a clear and direct link between the two, it's time to begin creating. It's this 'back-to-front' approach that makes it profitable to produce content.

Too many cooks spoil the strategy

A good content strategy takes into account the viewpoints and needs of stakeholders around the business. However, this inclusive approach has to be managed very carefully. Bearing in mind the importance of working backwards, how can you create content that matches up with the objectives of every department?

In short, you can't. Sales and marketing departments, for example, will probably have different ideas on key factors like tone of voice, and how long results should take. It's these differences that produce some of the myths around content marketing, and can easily dilute your vision.

Building relationships: take your time

A consistent approach to your content strategy will save you from joining the 59% of marketers who don't see a positive ROI on their content marketing efforts.³

Most content marketing will not generate results from one or two attempts. Remember that your audience will grow to trust you the more they see you interacting and publishing. It's this trust which will encourage their engagement later down the line.

For this reason, investing time and money into your content marketing over a quarter or two is highly worthwhile. You'll be building the kind of relationships which bear fruit later, but actually deliver on your KPIs.

70%
of B2B marketers surveyed say they are creating more content this year than they did last year⁴

The realities of 'getting it done' today

Producing high quality, purposeful content on a regular basis is no mean feat. And with many organisations stretched for resources, it can easily slip down the priority list.

One way to handle this common issue is to split your content into two types; **evergreen** and **ephemeral**. By taking some initial time to build a firm foundation of evergreen content, you can be sure of a constant resource to fall back on. This can then be supplemented by the most relevant ephemeral content for the right time and situation.



Ephemeral content

Ephemeral content, on the other hand, focuses on products, industry updates and other time-limited topics. It's this fast-churning content that can be most troublesome to keep on top of. However, it can often have the biggest engagement and you can extend its impact with a well thought out content calendar.



Evergreen content

Evergreen content stays permanently relevant to your audience. It often focuses on your services and broader messages about your company that don't change over time or can be easily updated to stay relevant. This is often white papers, 'how to' content, curated advice or case studies.

B2B marketers who blog regularly receive

67%

more leads than those who don't⁵

Content Marketing Case Study



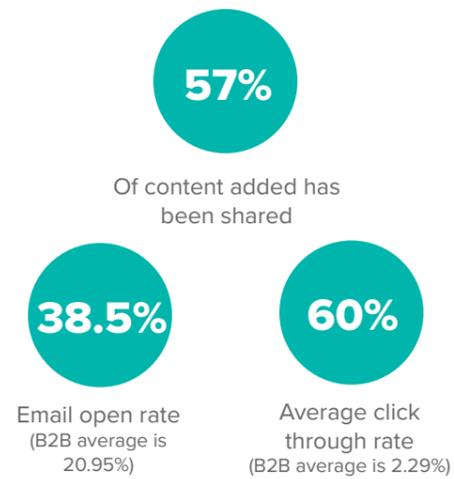
The mission

The client, a tier 1 IT vendor, wanted a way to encourage business partners to better share its content with their audiences online. The outcomes required were to increase mindshare and brand preference among those business partners for the vendor's solution, and ultimately drive engagement through social.

The TBT approach

TBT's solution was to create a website to act as a content marketing hub to make it easy for the business partners to share the content. The site curates all of the vendor's content and presents business partners with pre-written tweets and posts to share with their audiences. A personalised monthly email sent to business partners enables them to hand pick the content that is relevant to them and share it quickly and easily.

The results



The importance of your team

As with any strategy, the right talent is absolutely essential to make content work effectively. Or to put it more accurately, the right combination of talents.

Your most industrious blogger will probably be too busy researching to measure the results of their latest output. Likewise, analysts able to give detailed insight into your social interactions may not have the right skills to produce a video about your newest product. But together, they're a formidable content team.

Your strategy needs carefully defined roles and responsibilities. But if it falls to just one or two people, you might want to consider help from a specialist agency like TBT. It's one sure-fire way to cover all skill bases without a hefty investment in HR.

Team members you're likely to need include:

- Social Media Executive**
content amplification
- Designer**
content presentation
- Writer**
content generation
- SEO Analyst**
content amplification and continued analysis
- Third-party influencers from your industry**
advocacy and content amplification

Despite the obvious benefits, surprisingly only 35% of B2B content marketers have a documented content strategy ⁶

⁶ <http://bit.ly/2KLRCKd>

Producing content

Today's content marketing activity can seem incredibly sophisticated, especially where it's prioritised for investment. But no matter how large or complex a competitor's operation may seem, there are some fundamentals behind it that any company can follow.

Profile your audience

You should already have a strong image of your company's target audience. If it's not already documented, now's the time. Generate a handful of typical personae, with details about their social media preferences, available time to consume content, existing relationships, current professional challenges, and any other information that will help steer your decisions.

Listen first, talk later

As with any conversation, take a moment to gauge it before joining in. Once you've narrowed down your target audience, listen to them. What are they reading, watching and commenting on? What's made the greatest impact on them recently? Do they prefer eBooks, videos or short tutorials? This is incredibly valuable information.

Draw out your roadmap

Given how many possible components your content strategy could have, it's helpful to clarify them in a documented roadmap. This should include your aims, and who will contribute to achieving each one. Key stakeholders may only be needed for specific tasks, and are more likely to get involved if they're prepared in advance and understand the objective they're helping to meet.

⁷ <http://tbt.to/C0nv4n67>

Smartphone Conversion rates are up



64%
to their desktop equivalents⁷

You might want to consider:



Keeping design simple, with easy-to-read fonts and plenty of space

Ensuring the fastest possible load times by reducing image and file sizes



Publishing portrait-oriented video



Learn from past content

Content for your new strategy won't be the first you've ever published. So take a look back. What have you learnt from your past content endeavours? Is there a topic that really piqued interest in your online community? Did you forget to factor industry events or product launches into your calendar? Everything you've already done can contribute to building a well-oiled strategy this time around.

Schedule, and pace yourself

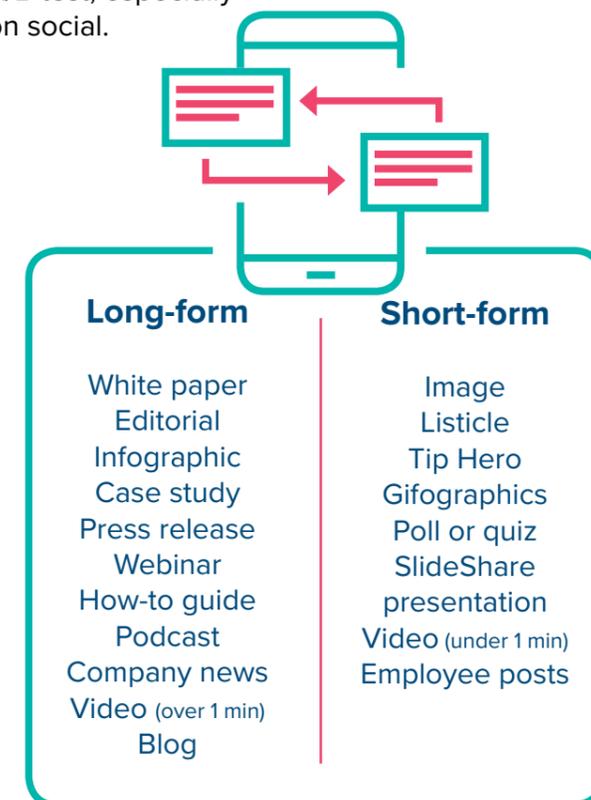
Create a content calendar that's managed by one or two people, but shared business-wide. This will help pace your output, and highlight any 'dry spells' where you may need new content. It also helps stakeholders understand when their contributions will be needed.

Be prepared to act fast!

Not every piece of content needs advance planning. Major industry events, for example, cause a rush in social activity that you should certainly exploit. React with genuine, short insights and references to your related products or services.

Don't over-produce

Think quality over quantity. A condensed line-up of high-quality content will be much more memorable and impactful, achieving your aims more effectively. That's not to say you shouldn't A/B test, especially on social.



Don't forget: GDPR!

If your content is gated, you will be collecting personal data. Make sure you've considered this in your privacy policy.

GDPR requires that consent is at the heart of personal data that you collect on a website. Some of this is obvious stuff, like making conditions clear and not hiding the terms and conditions for consent (you're probably doing this anyway), but to ensure you're proofing your forms for the GDPR world use a double opt-in. This ensures website visitors do not give their consent by accident. This usually involves a regular consent form and the next step is where an email is sent and a link needs to be clicked.

Promoting content

Getting your content out there, working, striking up conversations and driving leads, is the truly significant part of your strategy. Without a well thought-out distribution plan, your brilliant new content will never have the chance to reach its full potential.

Choose a medium that gets you noticed

You have an ever-increasing plethora of media at your disposal. Instead of sticking to safe options, consider what might happen if you diversified your communication methods. Striking imagery, teaser videos or a clever short copy campaign might give your content strategy the energy it needs to encourage fresh interest.

Of course, that decision needs weighing against your audience profile. But no matter your industry, there is certainly a broad trend towards watching more and reading less.

Open up your reach

As well as the type of media you're using, think carefully about where and how that content is going to travel. What route will give you the greatest exposure? A combination of options might work best, depending on where and when your audience is most active.

Direct email campaigns may seem to be a spinier choice with the advent of GDPR, but managed well, and sent to the right (opted-in) people, they can still pay dividends.

Direct email campaigns may seem to be a spinier choice with the advent of GDPR, but managed well, and sent to the right (opted-in) people, they can still pay dividends. But, 'legitimate interest' is also one of the defining factors on whether it's ok or not to send an email, but can you prove it? Take a look at the guidelines here.

Direct mail has found a new lease of life in the post-GDPR world thanks to legitimate interest. Direct Mail is not covered in the PECR (Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations) so is a safer bet in certain circumstances.

Organic social promotions can deliver longer-term engagement from those committing to follow you, likely to be your end goal when building a brand.

Paid social promotions make short-form content instantly visible in the right people's social feeds, and can act as a campaign 'hook'. The ROI on paid social is generally much higher than organic social (as you can specifically target), but for best results your strategy should encompass paid and organic elements to give your content the best chance of good reach and engagement.

Paid search listings will boost your content to the top of relevant searches, helping you target people who are actively looking for your products, solutions or thought leadership.

86%
of today's B2B
marketers use both
paid and organic
social promotion⁸

Measuring results

So you've put the work in, published some great content and watched the engagements build up. It seems to look good, but how do you measure what impact your activity has really had with its intended audience?

Go right back to your original KPIs

Stay focused! Your well-planned content strategy should have KPIs that were defined at the very beginning to help you unlock the true value in the results you report on.

Make good use of content tools

To extract information and create reports, there's a huge variety of wallet-friendly tools readily available online. You don't have to make a huge investment either. Most will let you use a free basic account, which is perfectly adequate for early-stage or simpler campaigns. Want to schedule content and better manage a social calendar? Try Hootsuite. If you're looking for influencers or content analysis. To analyse topics or see the reach on your content there's BuzzSumo, Sprout Social and many more. Conduct keyword research for the best chance of good SEO with SEMRush, KWfinder or in Google AdWords' Keyword Planner.

When your content marketing efforts go heavyweight, it's certainly worth investing in the more comprehensive packages that these platforms provide, or in a more bespoke enterprise-level system.

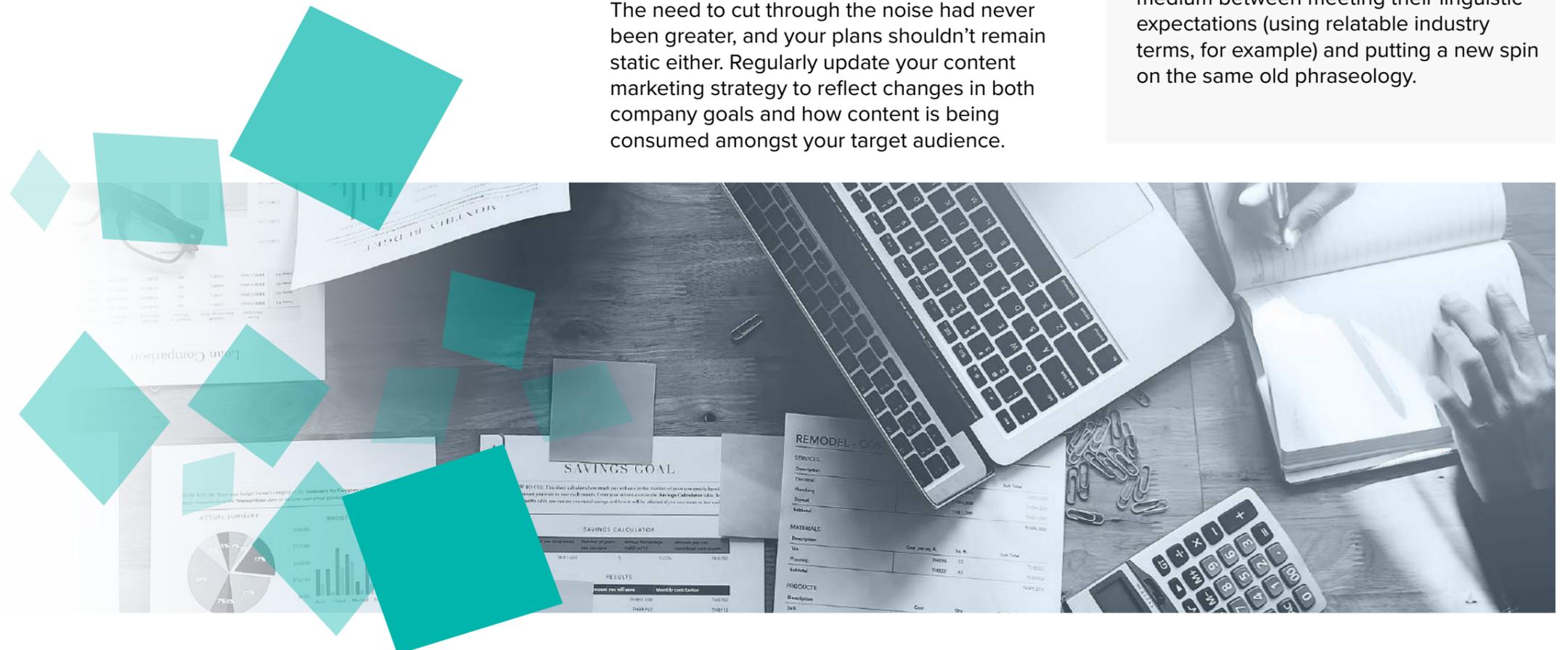
This will give you the best possible visibility over – and control over – all aspects of your content.

Begin reporting early on

Building regular reports into your schedule can be both revealing and useful. It will help you identify successes and demonstrate progress to key stakeholders as your campaign moves along; encouraging participation and buy-in.

Frequent insights will also make clear where content is starting to fade and needs a refresh. It's better to understand this early on so that it doesn't impact budget allocation later on.

So, what should you choose to measure? The list of things you could report is practically endless, but whatever you choose make sure it relates to the right goals. For brand awareness you should be thinking about engagement rather than volume of posts. Look at time on page, bounce rate, page depth etc. For demand generation you need to focus on conversions, so look at conversion rate and exit rate to determine how people are completing your goals.



Tell a consistent story

Aspects of content marketing remain consistent over time. The need for careful targeting, for example, and the importance of a consistent brand tone are essential.

But it's also a marketing approach that develops new trends quickly; trends which, adopted with care, can make your content marketing strategy even more fruitful. Opposite are a few top tips on great storytelling.

Making it count

Remember that 'Story' doesn't have to imply long-form content, either. The shortest video or text can be creatively loaded with information. Whatever direction your content takes, it's the authenticity and relevancy that counts most. Get to the heart of your audience at the right stage with content that speaks directly to them. The need to cut through the noise had never been greater, and your plans shouldn't remain static either. Regularly update your content marketing strategy to reflect changes in both company goals and how content is being consumed amongst your target audience.

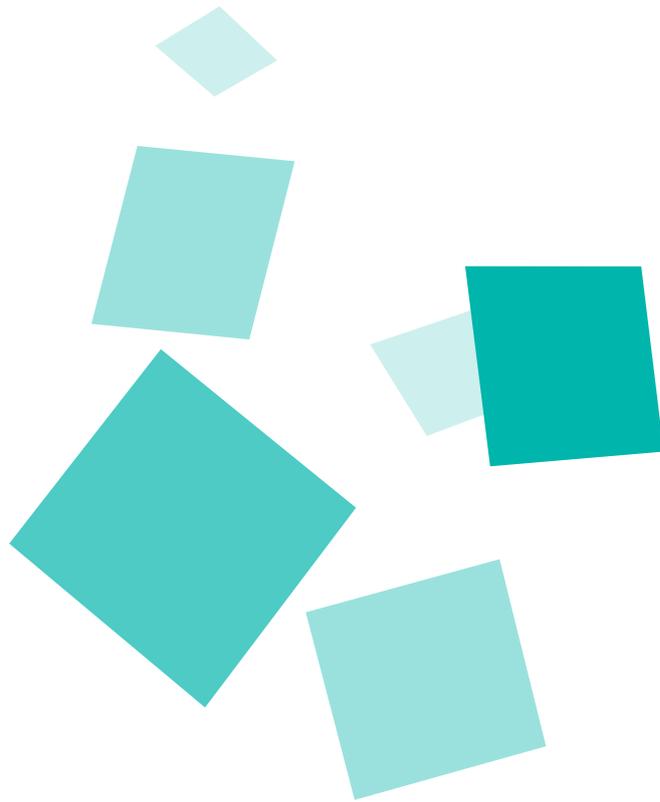


Top tips for storytelling

Make it about someone else. Talking about yourself too much rarely wins friends, and the same goes for B2B content marketing. Focus outwards to build stories around customer successes, industry happenings or even personal employee achievements.

Deliver a punchy ending. Ultimately, you want your reader (or listener, or viewer) to come away inspired with a new piece of knowledge. End your narrative by relating it to a key message, wrapping it up in a memorable takeaway package.

Talk your audience's language. An unexpected tone of voice can cut through other B2B content to get your story noticed. Ideally, find a happy medium between meeting their linguistic expectations (using relatable industry terms, for example) and putting a new spin on the same old phraseology.



There are many facets to an integrated content marketing program and we've helped clients such as IBM, Dell EMC, Lenovo, HPE and NVIDIA get their content marketing strategies working hard to deliver the results that matter.

We'd be happy to help you too.

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to speak to one of
our team.

