

**Content Marketing:
From Hello to Sale
and Back Again
Content Equals Money**

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Introduction

If you know absolutely nothing about content marketing, welcome! Then again, if you've been around the block a few times, this guide is loaded with plenty of resources, information, and helpful advice; we think you will learn something, too! Our original intention was to create a guide that could walk you each step of the way through the content marketing process. And we think that's exactly what this guide does. From before you ever meet your customers, to making those first sales, and then repeating the process over again – we detail it all for you right here.

“Content marketing is a commitment, not a campaign.” - Jon Buscall

Getting Started

What is Content Marketing?

Outbound Marketing

Content marketing (also known as inbound marketing) is a completely different perspective on business to customer (or business to client) relations. Traditional (or, outbound) marketing talks to customers. Telemarketing, TV ads, direct mail, cold calls... these are all forms of talking to a customer. They're not engaging, they certainly don't inspire a conversation, and they're not relational at all.

Inbound Marketing

Content marketing has nothing to do with this approach. Content marketing, on the other hand, is relationally driven. It focuses on talking with customers, not to them. However, it's not just about talking with customers. Good content marketing holds a conversation with everyone who's interested in listening. As a business that uses content marketing, you provide your audience with information that is relevant to them and valuable – whether they become customers or not.

Content Marketing in Action

If you sell coffee mugs, for example, you could create a blog about coffee, educating customers about different growing regions and brewing methods. You could provide free podcasts that interview coffee roasters and baristas. Maybe you share an Infographic that demonstrates different methods and facts related to keeping coffee hot. Whatever you choose to do, the point is to keep things *relational*. You are engaging in a conversation – not pushing your product 24/7.

If you're wondering what's in it for you... a lot! When you implement a strong content marketing strategy, your audience comes to see you as an authority. When a blog reader decides he needs a coffee mug, who is he going to turn to? You!

In 2012,

9 out of 10
businesses
marketed
with

CONTENT
MARKETING

[Content
Marketing
Institute]

You've demonstrated plenty of knowledge about coffee mugs and all coffee mug-related things. Plus, you've been friendly, informative, and eager to share your knowledge.

Quick 4 Point Strategy

The content marketing geniuses over at [the Content Marketing Institute](#) have a handy four-point strategy known as the [B.E.S.T. formula](#). They break content marketing down into these four processes:

Behavioral: Your content marketing should leave your customers with no questions about what you want them to do.

Essential: The information you share should be of value to your customers. No fluff!

Strategic: Content marketing isn't something you do "on the side." In order to be effective, your content marketing efforts have to be considered integral to your bottom line.

Targeted: You have to know *exactly* who your efforts are targeting. It might take some time to figure out, but the sooner you can do so, the better.

Of course, we'll be going into much more detail about content marketing in this paper. However, you can always refer back to the B.E.S.T. strategy anytime you feel like your content marketing efforts are getting off track!

Implementing a Content Marketing Strategy

It's important to remember that your content strategy is going to be multifaceted. While running a blog is one of the most common approaches, a blog is just a piece of the larger puzzle.

Your content marketing strategy could include:

- Blogs
- Infographics
- Videos
- White Papers
- eBooks
- Social media profiles/pages
- PPC advertising
- Podcasts
- Email newsletters

90%
of B2B
marketers
do some
form of
content
marketing
whether
they
realize it
or not.

[Blueglass
Interactive]

How do you possibly begin? Well, we suggest you take a look at one of our most loved resource pages, [How to Create a Content Strategy](#). One of the best ways to get started is by beginning a blog (it's easy to do this for free or cheap), posting regularly, and sharing those posts on social media profiles. Once you get going with your blog and social media, you'll have the foundation to branch out into more sophisticated/advanced forms of content marketing!

Choosing the Right Social Media

Assuming that you want to kick off your content marketing strategy with a blog – one of the most common and effective ways to get going – your next step is going to be finding the right social media outlets for disseminating your blog posts/content. One of our favorite bloggers, Renée, has a great post on [social media, engagement, and the sales funnel](#) that we highly recommend. In it, she discusses which social media channels might be right for you.

At the very least, be sure your company is using Facebook and Twitter. You also might want to consider Google+, Pinterest, and YouTube. Beyond those big five, social media decisions will probably only apply to less common niche markets. However, your social media presence is completely worthless if you aren't engaging! Remember, this is *inbound* not outbound marketing! Your Facebook page won't do you any good if you don't consistently post material that meets the B.E.S.T. formula.

Once you get the ball rolling, don't miss out on [How to Develop a Content Strategy](#). This page is chock full of resources and links that can help you build momentum.

Finding the People Who Love You: Your Future Customers

So, you might be wondering, "How do I actually *find* these people who might be interested in my blog?" *That's* the million-dollar question. It's not an overnight process, and you've got to be dedicated to the task. However, it's not as daunting a challenge as it may first seem to be.

“Think like a publisher, not a marketer.”
- David Meerman Scott

Finding People

If you're selling something of value, then there *is* a market for your products. It's your job to find it! Considering how many people are using social media these days, chances are good that a large part of your market is out there on Facebook, Twitter, and in other online communities. Finding these people on your own is possible, but hiring a skilled, technical firm to do it for you will probably yield better results, and involve a lot less stress! Firms like [Lotame](#) and [OwnerIQ](#) can help you out with this. Also, [this article](#) from Blinq Media CEO, Dave Williams, can answer a lot of your questions about finding customers online!

Getting More Info from the Contacts You Have

However, if you've already been in business for a while, you probably have your own database of email addresses. Whether you have addresses for previous customers or just people who have expressed interest in your company, you need to put this data to work! You might see a name and an email address. But, the truth is – you're holding gold, and don't even know it!

Jay Baer has created [an extremely helpful blog post](#) that can help you make the most of these email addresses!

Here's the short of it:

1. Dig up more information on the email addresses you have with services like [Flowtown](#) and [Rapleaf](#).
2. Ask your customers what social media platforms they use.
3. Use social media links in your emails, and then track who clicks what.
4. Get *sneaky* with Gmail. (Just go read his post for more on this great trick!?)

Google Analytics

If you aren't using [Google Analytics](#) on your website, it's time to start! This tool is free, incredibly powerful, and will seriously change the way you view your website. Essentially, Google Analytics allows you to track who's visiting your site, how they're getting there, what paths they take through your content, the time they spend on each page... are you starting to see how valuable this tool is?!

78%
of people
believe
businesses
who
provide
custom
content
want to
build
bridges.

[TMG Media]

CEM blogger Andrew – our go-to tech guy – has a great blog post on how to [gauge your best referral traffic](#) in Google Analytics. But don't worry! You don't have to be a super technical person to figure this stuff out. It's definitely worth a quick read through at the least.

So, remember... your customers are out there! Tracking them down shouldn't cost you an arm and a leg. And, if you already have a stockpile of email addresses, you can find a lot of your customers out there in the world of social media on your own! Gather up all the information you can, and then start targeting!

“ I do not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information.”
- David Ogilvy

Lead Nurturing

Once you have the basics of content marketing under your belt, it's time to start thinking about lead nurturing. Lead nurturing is a fundamental part of any business, whether you're using inbound or outbound marketing. It's a sales and marketing technique that comes down to giving the *right* people the *right* information at the *right* time. [See this page](#) if you want a little more information on what lead nurturing is all about.

Before we dive into lead nurturing, remember to [start small](#). Lead nurturing *can* get complex. But, just as it is with anything else, it's important to keep small and attainable goals in the beginning. Once you start experiencing some success with one lead nurturing strategy, you can expand, adding a few more to your repertoire.

Engaging Potential Customers in Conversation

Before you start up a lead nurturing strategy, double-check yourself here: are you targeting your blog toward the right audience? Remember, lead nurturing starts by talking to the *right* people. If the audience you're reaching out to doesn't stand the remotest chance of ever turning into customers, then no amount of lead nurturing is going to reach them!

How Do I Know?

So, how do you know if the people who are trafficking your site are doing so intentionally? Well, you should always turn back to Google Analytics. Look at your bounce rate and site paths. How's your site time? If people are spending a lot of time on your site, clicking through multiple pages, chances are they *want* to be there.

“Content is king.”
- Bill Gates

Also, you should use [SEOMoz](#) to determine what key search terms are drawing visitors to your site. Once you figure out what phrases people are typing into Google to get to your various web pages, you can start using that information to your advantage! Going back to our coffee mug example... If people are searching “how to keep my coffee hot” to get to your blog, how would your content marketing efforts be changed by this knowledge? Perhaps you would run a weekly column that makes strong use of this key phrase. Maybe you could even create a resource page on this subject! SEOMoz and other sites can help you learn this information, and capitalize on it.

Your Site Isn't the Only Hangout

While your site may be where the sales happen, it isn't the only place to engage with customers. Remember, content marketing is a two-way street. Sometimes, you have to go out to where your customers are. Your customers are probably hanging out in a lot of different places online. Of course, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms have already been covered. However, don't forget about product review pages, forums, question-and-answer sites, and more.

If your product is for sale on Amazon, for example, it might be worth your time to monitor the reviews customers write. If someone is enthusiastic about your product, thank them for the review. If a customer is angry about something they bought from you, engage with them publicly to show your desire to fix the situation. Sites like [Quora](#) can be great places to answer questions about your industry – especially if you're a B2B company. By developing a presence on Quora, you can engage with potential leads, and demonstrate your authority!

Back to Your Site...

If you really want to engage potential customers, take just a minute to read why it's so important to [say hello to strangers](#). If you do, you have much better chances of exchanging information in the first thirty days of meeting a potential customer. Don't miss out on this critical time! Once you've connected with a customer, don't forget that you're involved in a relationship. It's called lead *nurturing* – not lead *amassing*.

“ Traditional marketing and advertising is telling the world you're a rock star. Content marketing is showing the world you are one. ”
- Robert Rose

If you're really interested in learning more about lead nurturing, we recommend Marketo's [Definitive Guide to Lead Nurturing](#). But, for now, don't miss these key points from the guide on how to know when a customer is ready to engage with sales:

- Has your prospect visited high-value pages that contain pricing and contact information?
- How have they responded to your marketing techniques?
- What search terms did they use to find you? Did they use more search terms once on your website?
- How often does the prospect visit your site? What pages do they view?

Hopefully, by now you're seeing how crucial Google Analytics is for serious content marketing! Of course, analytics aren't everything. Your sense of intuition and ability to relate with others will *really* be the determining factor in deciding whether or not a customer is sales-ready!

But, you don't have the time to focus your "sense of intuition," determining whether every single customer is or isn't sales-ready. Fortunately, there's an app (or several) for that! Consider using [Lead Grader](#), a free app from Lynton Web Solutions, or try HubSpot's [Lead Management](#) program.

Lead Scoring: An Essential Practice

Lead Scoring Basics

So, once you have a decent idea of who's interested, who's not, and who's still on the fence, you want to hone in on those who are ready to bite. This practice is known as lead scoring. Lead scoring is a way of assigning a (more or less) objective value to potential leads. Eloqua – which is a great resource for all things marketing-related – has a nice little [guide to lead scoring](#). Here's what you really need to know:

- Lead scoring is cost-effective because it prioritizes your sales team's efforts, focusing on customers who are far more likely to buy.
- Good lead scoring needs smart sales/marketing **people**, an agreed-upon and understood **process**, and useful **technology**

1/3

of global
B2B buyers
use social
media to
engage
with their
vendors.

[Social Media
B2B]

- Remember that it's highly unlikely a lead got all of their information about your product/service/industry directly from you.
- Focus on **who** the lead is, and **what** they've done on your site.

The Eloqua guide is a terrific resource. Do yourself a favor and check it out for more detailed information on lead scoring. As a last note on basics... remember that lead scoring brings sales and marketing together. It's critical that [both teams understand](#) your terms, qualifications, and objectives.

The Importance of Formal Lead Scoring Practices

You might be thinking that this lead scoring business sounds like a lot of work. While it definitely takes some commitment to get the ball rolling, once you have a system in place, the benefits are huge. The Marketing Sherpa reports that lead scoring efforts [increase conversion by 79%](#). You can put yourself *way* ahead of the crowd by practicing some solid lead scoring techniques.

Feeding Potential Customers the Leads They Want

Alright, so you're scoring your leads, pushing your content marketing efforts at full throttle... isn't it time to make a sale yet?! We're getting there! Hang on just a *little bit* longer, and you'll be ready to sell the socks off your customers. Just a couple more points now...

Gathering Those Last 'Who' Details

Though you are thinking of these people as **customers**, it's important to remember that before they are customers they are **your content consumers**. While they're still just consumers, it's time to ask these [20 questions](#) by Barbara Gago at the Content Marketing Institute about **how they consume content**. While you may not ask each and every one of these questions, they provide a good foundation for you to consider before you start throwing more information at your potential leads.

Reeling Them In

It's likely that you're already familiar with some lead nurturing techniques from a customer's perspective. Have you ever looked at a product on Amazon.com, only to receive an email about it

“ Basically, content marketing is the art of communicating with your customers and prospects without selling.”
- Content Marketing Institute

five days later? Of course, it's no coincidence! This is strategic lead nurturing at work. (For more on Amazon and content optimization, see [this CEM blog post](#) by Ben.)

Also, you might have noticed that when you visit some web pages, you'll see a widget that informs you which of your Facebook friends 'like' the page you're viewing. What you're looking at it is probably [Facebook Connect](#), an extremely valuable tool for pairing your lead nurturing and content marketing efforts.

Reeling Them In: Friends Are Bait

The truth is, people are more likely to trust their friends than they are to trust you. Sorry, it's not your fault! This fact of life *can* work to your advantage though. Customers are influenced by their peers and by "thought leaders." "Thought leaders" are basically Internet personalities with large followings, and distinct voices. For some wonderful information on Social Commerce and Psychology, see [this blog post](#) by Brian Solis. (Seriously, if you aren't clicking on anything in this paper – *this* post is one you won't want to miss!)

What You Need to Know About Friends

Solis reminds us that **81%** of customers receive advice from their friends and family members on a social networking site before they make a purchase. See how critical Facebook Connect and those other tools are for effective lead nurturing? It's so essential that your business is taking social media integration seriously. If you don't think you know what "serious" means in this sense, we'd like to point you over to the Web-Strategist's [10 Criteria of Social Business Maturity](#).

The Web-Strategist emphasizes the importance of social sign on technologies like Facebook Connect and OpenID. And, it's easy to see why the Web-Strategist places so much stock in these technologies. Solis tells us that **50%** of shoppers have made an online purchase because of a recommendation on a social media network. Convincing, isn't it?

27%
of B2B
leads are
sales-
ready
when first
generated.
Lead
nurturing
is
essential!

[Marketing
Sherpa]

The Levi's Model

Levi's is a great example of peer influence and social media integration at work. In another post, the Web-Strategist shows (using plenty of screen shots) [how Levi's led the corporate world](#) in social media integration. Main points:

- Levi's makes you feel like your friends are shopping with you.
- You don't have to log-in/register to be engaged.
- The site's visitors do marketing *for* Levi's – voluntarily!

And, the best thing about all of the benefits Levi's experiences is that *your* small business can experience them, too! You can nurture your leads through social media in the same exact ways that the big corporations do.

SEO-
generated
leads
have the
highest
lead-to-
close rate
at

15%

[Econsultancy]

Making the Sale Through Content Marketing

Now that you've found your leads and nurtured them adequately, it's time to unleash the sales team. Yes, for your small business, *you* may be the "sales team" just as you are the "content marketing department," product creator, and the "warehouse department." But, once you get going with smart lead generation/nurturing techniques, you might be able to hire people to do everything else while you run the show!

Content Marketing and Buying

This statement is obvious, but you might be surprised how many small businesses neglect this critical point... your content marketing efforts have to link back to the 'Buy' button. Duh, right? However, it's surprising how difficult some companies who are new to the content marketing world make it for customers to get from point A to point B. Remember, the ultimate goal of content marketing is to sell your product. Sure, there are a lot of other benefits and mini-goals along the way, but selling is what counts!

Make the A to B path easy. Every blog post should end with a [strong call to action](#). Move your customers toward the sale. Of course, every single piece shouldn't drive after the hard sale. But, every piece of content should at least point to more content. And, eventually, some of that content *will* be pointing to a sale.

Enticing & Incentivizing

If you know anything about human nature, you know that people sometimes have to be pushed and prodded along. Writer Jeff Goins has a great story over at his blog about how he

“Content doesn't interrupt, it attracts.”
- AdAge

[gave away his eBook for free](#). Note, Goins is not selling a product with a free eBook. The eBook *is* his product. Of course, it's not the only thing he sells. But, by enticing customers (offering a free eBook) through his various content marketing efforts (primarily Twitter and his blog), Goins was able to expand his customer base, see an increase in sales, and even achieve notable Amazon.com rankings.

For an even more inspiring story of how enticing and incentivizing can lead to sales, check out [this post](#) from CEM founder Amie Marse in which she explains how Eloqua VP of Content Marketing Joe Chernov used four free guides to influence \$2.5 million in annual recurring revenue booked in 2010. Woah! As Amie points out, though we don't know Chernov's budget, the principles of content marketing work on a sliding scale. That's to say, if you spent 5% of what Chernov spent, you could add \$125,000 to your bottom line! Quite impressive, isn't it?

Time to Sell

At this point, you're probably ready to dive into sales! Remember that lead generation, nurturing, and scoring is an ongoing process. Not only are you continuing these practices with potential leads as you begin the sales cycle with old leads, but you're also nurturing leads with your current customers who might be interested in *other* products and services your company offers!

Let's back up just a little bit, and head into the world of sales and content marketing!

Sales

Content marketing changes the face of *everything*. If you know a lot about traditional sales, some of your knowledge will carry over to making the sale with content marketing. However, remember to reference our discussion of inbound v. outbound marketing.

Just as you were talking *with* the customer back in the early stages, you're still having a *dialogue* – even as you approach the sale. Don't throw off your friendly content marketing hat at this

“All the SEO in the world can't make up for poor content.”
- Andrew Kaufman

point! It's important to retain your inbound principles through and through. As you go through the sales stage, you're still focusing on providing valuable information that the individual/business *needs*.

We would highly recommend that you read [7 Ways That Inbound Marketing Revolutionized Sales](#) before proceeding through this guide. This to-the-point blog post will help give you the right perspective on the following content!

Nearing the Sale

Keep in mind what buying stage your customer is in as you deliver content and information about your product/service. The more detailed you are in analyzing your customers' needs and behaviors, the more you'll come to realize that there are truly an infinite number of buying stages. No two customers are going to be alike when it comes to what they know about your product, how they know it, why they want it, etc. Generally speaking, as your customer moves through the sales funnel, you'll want to give them more and more valuable information.

How Does the Sales Funnel Progress?

Great question! Essentially, there are three main stages of the sales funnel: web traffic, convertible traffic (your leads), and customers. Let's look at this question with some help from [Digital Sherpa](#).

Web Traffic: At this stage, you simply want to provide information that is valuable to your visitor *and* demonstrates your knowledge/expertise: blog posts, FAQs, maybe even a video that explains who you are and what you do.

Convertible Traffic: These people are interested; they're coming back for more; they're clicking around your site; they're spending measurable time on individual pages; they're ready to go! This is the point where you get them on your email newsletter. You send them targeted messages. Perhaps you even offer free consultations. Things are getting more personalized and tailored at this stage. You're learning *who* exactly they are.

70%

of local
businesses
use
Facebook.

[Jeff Bullas]

Customers: Your efforts have paid off and produced a customer. Great! Now, it's time to figure out what made it possible. How did you take this web traffic to the customer stage? What lessons did you learn? How can you optimize and streamline this process in the future?

Trouble Turning Leads into Customers? Try Gamification

Earlier we talked about enticing and incentivizing. Gamification is very similar, but it's more reward based. Gamification techniques include giving customers discounts, coupons, specials, free consultations, and more. However, gamification rewards are usually a bit more limited, reserved for those who actually *consume* your content – not just any Internet passerby. This is the stuff you save in your back pocket for when you need just a little something extra to make a content-consumer a customer.

What does gamification look like? Here are a few examples:

- Discount codes for your services tucked away at the end of long white papers that not everyone is going to read.
- Credit/Gift Certificates for customers who share your content with others.
- Privileged status/benefits for those who interact the most on your website.

Keep in mind gamification is not right for every small business. If your company isn't seeing any lead to customer conversions because your site traffic is so low, then gamification isn't going to help you any! [Find out more](#) about when gamification may or may not work.

Troubleshooting the Sales Funnel

Finally, if you feel like your sales funnel just *isn't working*, troubleshoot by looking at these [3 Super Common Sales Funnel Snafus](#). The three snafus in brief:

- You're acting like a door-to-door salesman/knowledge gatekeeper.
- You aren't giving your customers options when it comes to navigating your site. And, at the same time, the options you *are* giving make no sense at all!
- You're spending your time on the wrong leads.

34%

of
marketers
have
generated
leads using
Twitter.

[Mindjumpers]

Closing the Sale

As you've carefully coaxed and guided your potential leads through the sales funnel, there are hopefully a few that have hung on, and are ready to make the purchase. This is what it all comes down to: closing the sale. Of course, closing is exciting, but don't let your excitement run away with you! There are a few key things to keep in mind as you close the sale.

Why Should I Buy From You?

As customers near the close, they'll sometimes have this eureka! moment where they realize that they're in the driver's seat *now* more so than ever before during the sales process. As a result, you might get some hardball questions. One of the most common ones is, "Why should I buy from you?" At first, you might be taken aback. Relax. You know exactly why a customer should buy from you; don't be shy in telling them.

This question should open up a treasure trove for you. And, if it's not being asked, you should still make sure to address all of the answers as you go about closing the sale. Your content marketing has done a lot of the work to get you to this point, now drive your "selling points" home.

Keep Things Personal

Also, as you close the sale, be careful to remain personal. You don't want to give the impression that you're going to drop off the map and no longer be a helpful resource for your customer immediately after the sale. You've got to maintain your friendly tone (or whatever your trademark personality is) throughout the process. Customers don't want to be nameless, faceless entities. They want to be remembered and valued. When you treat every customer importantly, they'll be coming back for more!

Troubleshooting the Close

If you're struggling to close the sale, it could be that you've relied on content marketing *too* much. This can be a big hurdle for many small businesses that dive into content marketing strategies without the right preparation. If you're struggling to close, be sure to read [8 Content Marketing Myths Keeping You From Closing the Sale](#). This blog post outlines some mistakes that sales rookies and veterans both make when trying out content marketing for the first time.

“Content marketing means creating and sharing valuable free content to attract and convert prospects into buyers.”
- Copyblogger

Brand Experience

The last important point to keep in mind when it comes to sales, is that you're **creating a brand experience**. Even if your business is completely online-based, everything about the sale – from the tone of your emails to the delivery of your product – reflect a brand experience. High quality brand experiences mean satisfied customers. And, what do satisfied customers do?

- They become repeat customers.
- They advertise for you.
- They bring you *more* customers.

What Exactly Is a 'Brand Experience'?

So you want to make sure your sales experience is a brand experience. But, what exactly is that? A brand experience means engaging with your customers in a way that transcends content. You can have the most interesting, informative, and exciting content in the world, but if there isn't a *person* behind it, then there's not going to be a genuine 'brand experience' taking place.

Bob Knorpp at AdAge addresses this issue in his article, [Break Free of the Digital Content Trap](#). Knorpp argues that many businesses become so wrapped up in creating content and getting traffic to engage with that content, that they forget to actually make it meaningful. If people aren't connecting with you and/or others through your content, you won't have an effective brand experience. Read Knorpp's article for a more in-depth understanding of this principle!

Creating Advocates For Your Brand

At this point you've made your first sales, and now you're ready to turn the focus on creating advocates for your brand. Customers who have had great brand experiences are going to be eager to share that experience with others. However, there are a few things you can do to ensure the "brand advocacy project" works swiftly and efficiently!

“Content marketing is the creation of free content.”
- StuffedWeb

Creating Customers That Advertise For You

Sounds too good to be true? Well, it isn't! Sure, you don't want to throw all of your advertising and marketing plans out the window, but with the right strategies, you can have your brand advocates advertise for you. After all, that's the beauty of inbound marketing. By creating useful content, people will naturally desire to share that content with others.

Coca-Cola & YouTube

In an article from the *Harvard Business Review*, Joe Tripodi, the Chief Marketing and Commercial Officer for the Coca-Cola Company, shares a fascinating tidbit about Coca-Cola. [He writes](#), "We estimate on YouTube there are about 146 million views of content related to Coca-Cola. However, only 26 million views were of content that we created. The other 120 million views were of content created by others."

This was written in April 2011. For more on how Coca-Cola is engaging customers through its brand today, check out Ben's [brand case study on Coca-Cola](#).

Your Brand Advocates Influence Buyers

Not only do you want to have brand advocates creating content for you, but you *really* want to have them encouraging others to buy your product. Stephania Andrade with Tab Juice has created an Infographic that demonstrates [the psychology of social commerce](#). This Infographic should be required reading for anyone who's serious about turning customers into brand advocates. In this article, Andrade throws out plenty of statistics to demonstrate just how important it is to have brand advocates out there who will work on your behalf. A few highlights from the study:

- **77%** of online shoppers use reviews
- **81%** of customers receive advice from friends or family though a social media site before making a purchase
- Almost **50%** of shoppers have made a purchase based on a recommendation made through a social networking site.

Clearly, if you have people who enjoy your product, you want to encourage them to *be* these "friends and family members" who advise others before making a purchase! Fortunately, this

85%

of global
internet
users
search
with
Google
every
month.

[Media Post]

sharing behavior is usually natural to the 21st century Internet user. If you're struggling to get your brand advocates to *actively* promote your brand, consider drawing inspiration from [these five tips](#) for encouraging customers to share your content.

Sanjay Dholakia, CEO of Crowd Factory, advises in the article (with great examples to accompany her tactics):

1. Increase the payoff that comes with greater sharing.
2. Give exclusive offers.
3. Appeal to altruism.
4. Let customers create the deal.
5. Reward those people who *really* love and promote your brand.

Build Up Your Social Media Dynasty!

As you work through this process of creating brand advocates, you might be realizing that your social media strategy isn't entirely where it should be yet. Even if you feel content with how things are going on the social media front, you probably could stand to up the ante. Let's start ramping up your social media with a focus on brand advocacy.

The Connection Between Brand Advocates & Social Media

BzzAgent has an informative Infographic that covers [how brand advocates will talk about your products](#) (both online and off). (Also, you might find their [Field Guide to Brand Advocates](#) helpful.) The Infographic covers some valuable information, but a few things in particular really stand out.

- Brand Advocates are 2.5x more likely to use social media to expand their social circles than other web users.
- Brand Advocates are twice as likely to create online content about a brand than the average web user.
- Brand Advocates tend to be genuine, and communicate freely, whereas normal web users do *not* share the same feelings.

Clearly, these are the people you want on board! Don't forget the social media tactics we discussed earlier for getting these brand advocates working for you.

Tumblr
grew

900%

in 2009
and now
has 90
million
users.

[Jeff Bullas]

A Social Media Dynasty Needs to Address Issues

Your social media dynasty is benevolent. This isn't a dictator-style dynasty; this is a dynasty "for the people." No matter how great your brand is, and no matter how many positive things your brand advocates say on your behalf, sooner or later somebody is going to have a gripe about your company. And, if they're inclined to do so, there's a good chance that gripe will end up on a social networking site.

You already know that we're going to encourage you to address the issue. However, you might not realize just *how* critical it is to address these gripes and grievances. [A recent study](#) revealed that **68%** of consumers who posted a complaint or negative review following a purchase in the 2010 holiday season were contacted by the company that upset them. After they were contacted, **34%** deleted the original post. An impressive **33%** actually wrote a *positive* review. And, **18%** became loyal customers and (presumably) lived happily ever after.

If your company is under fire by someone who is *far* from being a brand advocate of yours, then it should be your goal to move them into that **18%** of customers who become brand loyal. However, it all starts with initiating contact. In the study mentioned, only **68%** of consumers were ever contacted. While that is fairly impressive considering how many negative statements are made on Facebook, Twitter, and everywhere else, *you* can probably do a lot better. After all, you aren't in the Forbes 500... it should be a bit easier to track down everyone who's talking about you!

Get Your Brand Advocates to Solve Product Problems

As you work on building that social media dynasty, you might find that it's possible to reduce your product support staff, and turn the job over to your brand advocates. If that thought scares you, you either have a highly technical product, or you just need a bit more convincing before you make the leap – which is definitely a good sign.

“Search provides the highest quality leads.”
- HubSpot

The Web Strategist's Test

The Web Strategist, Jeremiah Owyang, has a great article on [social media maturity](#) for business. While all ten of the points are quite valuable, our particular focus is on point number six. Owyang suggests that a true sign of social maturity is when customers are supporting each other with product issues.

Starting Your Own Forum

How do you get the ball rolling on this? A great way is to add a forum to your site. Of course, moderating the forum will take a little bit of work. However, once you have an open forum attached to your website (relatively inexpensive and easy to do), you don't have to spend nearly as much time answering the same questions over and over. Besides, you'll probably be surprised at how ingenious many of your brand advocates are when it comes to solving problems!

Companies like WordPress do a great job of running and moderating forums in which users ask questions and receive help from their fellow users.

eHow, YouTube Tutorials, etc.

However, content doesn't have to be on your platform in order to be helpful! It's quite possible that your brand advocates will share content on other platforms: tutorials on eHow, YouTube, or maybe even their own blogs.

These resources can be great for customers, and they can reduce your workload. Make sure to reward and/or recognize those who are especially helpful when it comes to educating others about your product. These people are worth their weight in gold to your company. Treat them appropriately!

“Search provides the highest quality leads.”
- HubSpot

Starting Over

You've come a long way! From learning the basics of content marketing to using effective strategies to find your customers, you got a lot of the basics under your belt early on. You continued to develop your strategies as you engaged customers, lured them into the sales funnel, and then carefully nurtured your leads with the right information at the right time.

When it was time for a sale, you successfully employed gamification tactics and offered even more information than you ever had before! Whitepapers, videos, articles... you had it all! It all paid off when you closed that sale and created a phenomenal brand experience. However, the work still wasn't finished. You turned right back around and fought hard to turn those customers into brand advocates. Now, you even have them doing some of your work *for you*.

Yes... you know where this is going. It's time to start over. Going through the process the first time is definitely a big accomplishment. You've learned a ton. Think of how much more effective you can be the second, third, and fourth time around! Ready to give it a shot?

Repeating the Sales Cycle

You may think that there can't be a whole lot to repeating the sales cycle, right? While there's a lot to be said for sticking to what worked in the past, it's going to take more work to keep customers engaged. One of the best ways to repeat the sales cycle is by building an email list.

Making an Effective Email List

Because you already have an email address for every customer, building an email list shouldn't be the most difficult thing in the world. You've got all the resources at your fingertips! However,

Social
media
sites and
blogs
reach

80%

of all US
internet
users.

[Mindjumpers]

in order for that list to be effective, you need to **get as much data as your customers are comfortable sharing**. The more information you know about your customers, the more carefully you can target them.

Also, one of the most important things to remember about your email list is that this is *not* your one-way newsletter. As with all aspects of your content marketing strategy, this is a *two-way* conversation. Sonia Simone highlights [this point and others](#) in an email marketing must-read from Copyblogger.

Following Up

Be sure that you follow up regularly with customers in order to keep them engaged and interested in becoming repeat customers. Smart business owners come up with very clear and defined plans on *when* exactly they engage with customers.

Derek Halpern of Social Triggers hits this point better than anyone else. [He suggests](#) a great little model for a local spa that you can probably translate for your business:

- Day After: friendly reminder to drink water after a massage.
- One week later: share data about the importance of regular massages. Check in with customer, and ask them how they're feeling.
- Two weeks later: offer a loyalty program.

All three of these emails are great examples of content marketing. They're friendly, informative, and they aren't driving for the hard sell. However, Halpern's loyalty program advice is where his true genius lies.

Creating a Loyalty Program

Customers love loyalty programs. How many ice cream shops have you returned to just to get those little punches and, eventually, a free scoop of ice cream? How many Great Clips haircuts have you tallied up before finally getting that free one?

Even better – how much money did that ice cream store and Great Clips get from *you*? It's time for you to move over to the profitable side of the loyalty program!

Social
networks
and blogs
account
for

23%

of all time
spent
online.

[Mindjumpers]

“ Blogs are the single most important inbound marketing tool.”
- Marketing Charts

[In the same blog post](#), Halpern shares an example of a brilliant loyalty program. On the same day, a car wash offers two punch cards. One card required 8 car washes to get a free wash. The other required 10 car washes to get a free one, but already had two punches as a free bonus. Customers have to buy the same number of car washes in order to get the free one, but one set is being favored by artificial advancement.

Artificial Advancement

Artificial advancement is a strategy where you make the customer *think* that they're getting a deal, when really there's no *actual* advantage. How did that play out in the car wash example? In a [more detailed post](#) about that study, Halpern reveals the following:

- 28/150 customers without the head start earned a free car wash.
- 51/150 customers with the head start (artificial advancement) earned a free car wash.
- That's an impressive **increase of 82%**.

Impressive, right? Your artificial advancement strategies and loyalty program can be a part of your email marketing campaign, or you can integrate them in another way. You can use social media, your blog, or, if you're a brick-and-mortar business, you can do it the old fashioned way with a card and a custom hole punch!

No matter *how* you implement a loyalty program, just make sure that you *do*. The results will speak for themselves.

Having Trouble? Is It Your Product/Service?

One of the more common complaints about repeating the sales cycle goes like this: “My products just aren't designed for repeat customers. You only have to buy them once.” **False**. Just about *anything* can be sold twice. And, if your product is so unique that you can really only sell it once, then it's time to expand your product line. After all, if a customer chooses your business for that literally once-in-a-lifetime purchase, chances are they'd be willing to buy something else from you.

On the Second Time Around

You're geared up, and ready to go in repeating the sales cycle. This time, as you make the second sale, there are a few things you'll want to work on in order to ensure you and your customers both have a great experience!

Selling More Products and Different Products

You can't expect to continue doing the same old thing for years to come. Stagnant businesses are dying businesses. You may think that good things never change, but even the world's most trusted brands are constantly on their toes. They don't simply rely on their good name for making sales.

You should never add more products or services for the sake of having more. (Steve Jobs is remembered for cutting the Apple product line [from 350 to 10 in 1998](#).) However, you should always be thinking about the needs of your customer, and what you can provide to meet those needs. The idea is not **volume**, but **value**.

Nobody Goes to Two Grocery Stores

Typically, when people can minimize the time they spend "shopping around," they're eager to do so. Nobody goes to two grocery stores unless they absolutely have to. However, the moment Grocery Store A (where they do 99% of their shopping) starts carrying *that one item* that used to be exclusive to Grocery Store B, well it's goodbye Store B.

Of course, offering valuable products that meet your customer's needs is a part of being 'Grocery Store A.' However, your products aren't the only important factor.

Honest, Reliable, Personable

As we discussed earlier, there's a lot to be said for the brand experience that your customer has throughout the entire sales process. In order to retain customers, it's important to focus on that experience while being honest, reliable, and personable. Customers want businesses that they can relate to. And, at the end of the day, a lot of the content marketing principles we've been discussing boil down to these two things...

Be trustworthy; be personable.

“ Slideshare attracts three times more traffic from business owners than any other social media site. ”
- Jeff Bullas

Ready to Say Hello Again?

Well, the title of this guide is “From Hello to Sale and Back Again.” And, at this point, you’ve come a long way! You started introducing yourself and engaging with customers with some pretty exciting content marketing strategies. You found your leads, nurtured them, and turned them into sales. Then, you were able to successfully repeat the sales cycle.

As the title indicates, it’s now time to go back again! While this guide can be a great resource for you as you move through the process, there’s no lesson like the lesson of experience. As you run through the sales cycle multiple times, you’ll learn far more than you could ever *read*.

So, what are you waiting for? Create something new and exciting in your content strategy, keep things fresh, and, of course, keep making those sales!

Thanks for spending your time with us, and reading through this guide. We certainly hope you’ve found it helpful. For more information, be sure to check out our [blog](#)!

And, if you find yourself in need of some content writing services, [let us know](#), and we’ll figure out the best way to meet your content writing needs.

79%

of B2B
marketers
use article
marketing.

[Smart
Insights]

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