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Introduction to
Content Marketing

How you attract
an audience of
qualified buyers
in the digital age



How to get noticed in a noisy digital world, from the man behind BCS.

An Introduction to Content Marketing

The terms “content marketing” and “inbound marketing” have been buzzing around now for quite some time. But what on earth do they mean? As a small business owner do you need to be paying attention to them?

Let’s start with both of the terms and understand where they have come from and if there is any difference.

Inbound is a term coined by a marketing automation company called Hubspot. Content marketing is actually a subset of inbound marketing.

The difference is in fact very subtle. Content marketing is the process of creating various different types of content to educate and inform your prospect. Inbound marketing, although including events and apps, is still primarily based around creating content so there is actually very little difference.

Why invest into Content Marketing?

Stealing a line from the brilliant Simon Sinek, let’s start with why. Why you should be considering Content Marketing is actually a very compelling question.

Traditionally, selling was quite straight forward; get in front of enough people enough times and in the end some of them would buy. We heard expressions such as “always be closing”, “It’s a numbers game”, and “pound the pavement”. Businesses of all sizes would employ telesales people to call hundreds of companies each and every day trying to sell something. This would be combined with advertising, networking and trade shows.

Now to be fair, a lot of companies today still do this and will claim to still do it well. I believe networking is still valuable when the intent is to build relationships and add value first.

As for the rest of it, a lot has changed. What sales people had in the last 10 years was uninformed decision makers. We relied on trade shows and trade magazines to keep up to date. There was no social media or the abundance of information that we have today on the internet.

Today we can get access to the answer to any question we have in a few seconds from the device that is always within an arm’s reach – our mobile phone.

As a result of the fact that we can now research everything and anything and it’s quick and easy, we are no longer restrained and reliant on a sales person to tell us about their product or service.

If we have a question about any product, service, company, or even person, we expect to be able to answer it in our own time via whatever device is front of us. This often starts with a Google search and could/should end up with that person on your website looking to self-serve and self-educate themselves.

We also have an abundance of feedback from reviews and from people actually experiencing the product or service.

When Google conducted their ZMOT (Zero moment of truth) study a few years back they found that there was a huge increase in the amount of sources that people consume before making a purchase decision. It jumped from around 5.4 to over 11 sources on average and that was in 2012, imagine

what that number would be now. The ZMOT also showed how we read reviews and also asked our trusted network before making a purchase decision.

The ZMOT study also showed us that between 59 – 70% of the buying process was taking place online before they contacted a company via a form or telephone and had any kind of engagement with a sales person.

The study was updated in 2015 and coined the term “Micro moments of truth”. This is where there are even more moments of truth for a prospect and they take place across multiple devices.

Understanding that the modern consumer is taking your sales funnel and turning it upside down is imperative.

You have lost business that you never knew you were competing for as a result of not providing the experience or the answer a prospect was looking for when they wanted it.

How do you do Content Marketing?

If we now understand why we should be doing Content Marketing let’s take a look at how we do it.

It is very easy to think that everyone is interested in our products and services and the truth is most people don’t care. What they do care about is their problems and their challenges. Your product or service may be able to solve those problems or help them overcome their challenges and it is all about positioning yourself correctly for the modern consumer.

From the start you simply need to want your company/brand to become the best teachers in your chosen industry for the geographical area you serve.

For example, at BCS our aim is to become the best teachers in Kent when it comes to anything related to Managed Services and IT support. This Ebook is part of our content strategy to provide you with something of value even though it does not directly relate to the services that we provide.

If you check out our blog at <http://www.businesscomputersolutions.co.uk/blog> you will find that we are constantly and consistently producing content to achieve the following:

- Educate
- Inform
- Inspire
- Entertain

We also are always seeking out the questions you may have and looking to answer every single one of them in some form of content that you can consume in your own time.

So what do we mean by content?

Content can be any of the following but not limited to:

- Blog posts
- Videos
- Webinars
- Ebooks
- Whitepapers
- Podcasts
- Livestreams

- Vlogging

If you are new to content marketing I would suggest you start off by writing down the top 10 questions your sales team are always asked and answer them in whatever form you feel comfortable with and whatever form you think your prospects and customers will get the most from.

Then after that write down the top 5-10 objections to why people may not work with you. Again address these objections in whatever form you feel most comfortable with.

These two tasks alone will put you in a great place to kick off your Content Marketing efforts.

Consistency is key

Many companies will start with great intentions and will churn out 5 or 6 blog posts and then stop. They either expected to see results in a heartbeat or then run out of things to blog about.

Take this list below and combine this with answering every question you could and do ever do get answered you should never run out of ideas for content.

- Cost/Price – address costs and pricing even if the answer is “it depends”. The most trafficked blog post is on this subject matter.
- Problems – any problem that you solve you should be talking about and addressing; this is the route and the start of most customer journeys.
- Comparisons – there will normally always be comparative products and services and as consumers we will always compare. Be the resource they find when comparing.
- Reviews – as new products and services enter the market, write honest and fair reviews. If there is another option for a prospect that fits them better – tell them and help them find the right option.
- Best of or Top # articles – these are great lists that are very useful and easy to create and consume.

How does this all drive sales?

This should be the most important question when it comes to Content Marketing. Understanding that this is all part of the new way of doing sales and marketing. This will of course keep evolving but today sales and marketing have never been more closely aligned or at least should be.

Creating content that our prospects are looking for and adding value to their process will without a doubt create trust. The challenge is making sure when that prospect is ready to buy, we are the provider that is at the forefront of their mind.

To do this we need to consider two things:

- 1) Not everybody is ready to buy today

2) Those that do want to buy need an easy process and experience

Bringing this back to content marketing to address these two points.

For those that are not ready to buy we need to find a way of connecting and communicating with them and ultimately nurturing them until they either are ready to buy or no longer in the market at all.

This is done through a number of ways, some of which are technology dependent but all are about delivering value and getting them to re-engage with your brand and continue their own self-paced sales journey.

This is more often than not done using a combination of email marketing and social media.

With email marketing you of course need to first get their email address and more importantly their permission.

Social Media

Getting someone to follow you on social media is much easier than asking for their email address. The challenge is that it is much harder to gain their attention on social media due to the amount of noise there is today. This does not make it any less important, it is just a lot harder.

Email Marketing

In order to get your prospect's email address, you will need to offer some form of a value exchange for example an Ebook like this or a whitepaper or even something like a video or email course.

It has to be something of genuine value in order to get people to exchange their email address.

These are often called lead magnets. The most important thing about any lead magnet is to understand the value exchange. People will not give up their email address for a sales leaflet or brochure. The item you are giving away has to have genuine value.

Ready to buy

For those that are ready to buy, the challenge is now to make that buying process as simple and frictionless as possible.

You can achieve this also with Content Marketing. Addressing your prospects' objections, being clear on how much things cost and answering as many questions as possible is great. Now you need to explain how the sales journey will work. How long does it take, what will happen and what can they expect? You need to make it really clear how to start the process, is it with a phone call or will an email do?

If a prospective customer is not sure or has any doubts, then it's likely they'll not even get started.

Sometimes the next step is a discovery meeting before a sale can take place. If that is the case say that and make it very clear. This is where sales will then take over from marketing and finish the process.

Creating content for all stages of the buying process is an important part of planning your Content Marketing strategy. These stages for most are:

- Awareness/Discovery - See
- Research/Education - Think

- Cost/Price/Comparison - Do

Content marketing needs a culture change to really thrive. This cannot be something that marketing does, but something the whole company needs to buy into and support.

The two areas that this affects the most is sales and marketing. These two areas of the business are merging into one.

This is often called Smarketing. It is quite simple really, it is the merging of the sales and marketing functions in your business. Getting both sales and marketing folk to all work towards the same goals will also help with the overall success of your content marketing efforts.

Quite simply, if content marketing is something only the marketing people get involved with it will not work.

Smarketing is another term that has been around for a number of years now. If we take a quick look at where we have come from it might give us a little bit of context as to why this is important today.

So traditionally, sales and marketing were very much separate functions in a business and depending on the size, was headed up by either one or two directors. Now there was some overlap of course and we have generally linked the two departments. So we were always Smarketing? Not quite.

Marketing's function traditionally was to raise and increase awareness of a brand and its product. This may be using advertising, trade shows, direct mail and similar activities.

The sales team was often split into two teams of telesales and sales managers. The telesales teams would approach hundreds and thousands of businesses every day in the hope to secure a sale or an appointment. In the case of the appointment, the sales manager or field sales guys and girls would then meet the prospect and try and sell their product or service. This was a numbers game and for years it worked for the decade we were in at the time.

There was very little collaboration between the two departments and very little need.

Fast forward to today and the world has changed considerably. The sales process is now between 59% and 70%+ online. We live in a self-serve environment and we expect to be able to educate ourselves in our own time where we want.

We want more and more information and we want it faster; push based and interruption based marketing is having less and less effect year after year.

Today, marketing professionals need to understand more about sales, and sales folk need to understand more about marketing. These teams need to be working as one, hence the term smarketing.

Getting these two departments to work as one is not an easy feat and needs the correct education and resources to make it happen.

The third member of this team is technology. This is a whole different subject and another Ebook.

Today you may want consider how your team is setup, and understand your sales process and buyers' journeys to determine the new look of smarketing.

This is not the end of sales teams at all, sales is still the most important function in a business; it's just changed and in fact we are all in sales whether we like it or not.

What smarketing will bring you is an aligned team where everybody is working towards the same goal. Those goals are more often than not “leads and sales”. If the marketing folk understand what makes a qualified lead, they can deliver great leads to sales. If the sales folk understand where the tipping point is in a buyer’s journey, they can work with marketing to provide the questions the prospects are asking and ensure that marketing answer that question online in the appropriate place. Even better if the sales people become the faces the prospects get to know. If the sales people start blogging and vlogging and even better podcasting, they become the trusted face the prospect or customer buys from.

Content marketing is an exciting opportunity for sales people and marketing teams too. Providing an amazing experience and helpful, useful content throughout the entire process is key to business going forward, and getting these teams aligned is an important part of that process.

After you have got your sales and marketing teams working together and you are creating your amazing useful content you then have to make sure it gets seen.

Using social media and email marketing are great ways of getting your content out there and seen by the right people but it does take time to collect those email addresses and build a relevant audience on social media.

With or without these things in place you should be distributing your content. It is not a case of build it and they will come. There are some basic things you can do to give the search engines every chance of ranking your content however distributing across the channels where your ideal prospects are likely to be will drive the right kind of traffic to your website to start their sales journey.

Measuring The Success of your Content Marketing Efforts.

So what does success look like? I am not a fan of vanity metrics; these are fluffy statistics that don’t actually mean very much such as “Likes” and Retweets. There are a few things worth measuring and they are as follows:

- 1) Traffic
- 2) Leads
- 3) Sales

Traffic

Relevant traffic is what you need; anybody can drive low quality traffic. What you need is people that could and are interested in your content.

Leads

Micro Conversions like email signups or phone calls are warm leads and these can be nurtured via email marketing and more great content into hot leads.

Sales

This is the ultimate metric, Content Marketing costs money and you have to get a return on this investment and the best way to do that is via sales.

Time

This is the caveat to the above; Content Marketing takes time. It takes time to get the content flowing and then building an audience for your content. For most they will start seeing results of some kind in 6-12 months. However, think of each piece of content as a sales person that is working for you 24/7 365, a bit like our engineers at BCS.

As you create more and more content you will find that they become amazing resources that people all over your company can refer to and share. The phrase 'we have a blog for that' or 'there is a blog here somewhere' will become commonplace.

We have certainly found this to be the case at BCS as we are fast building an army of blog posts and other content ready for any prospective visitor to our site to find.

We have lots more content planned and in all kinds of formats as we continue on our quest to become the best teachers in Kent when it comes to all things Managed Services and IT related.

We hope that this Ebook will inspire you to want to be the same in your industry. If you have any questions about this Ebook , content marketing or IT of any kind please do not hesitate to contact us.