

Content marketing - the fundamental tool of digital marketing

Loredana PATRUTIU BALTES¹

Abstract: *In the era of digitalization, the importance of digital marketing has increased from one year to another as part of the marketing strategy practiced by organizations of any type and any size. Given that digital marketing requires the existence of a content marketing, the success or the failure of the company's online communication depends to a significant extent on the quality of its content marketing. In this context, besides promoting a high quality of the content marketing, the digital marketers must undertake an analysis of the target in order to adapt their content and to choose the right way of promoting it. This article defines the concept of content marketing and the importance that it has within the marketing policies, as well as the proper means of developing a correct content marketing strategy.*

Key-words: *Content marketing, content marketing strategy, digital marketing, copywriting*

1. Introduction

One of the major changes undergone by traditional marketing was determined by the emergence of digital marketing which required a rethinking of the marketing strategies of companies that wished to remain competitive in the new digital era.

Thus, content marketing has become the key of a successful online marketing campaign and the most important tool of the digital marketing.

According to "*The Future of Digital Marketing*" study, "based on an online survey of 262 digital marketing executives at B-to-C and B-to-B companies, 80% of companies plan to increase their digital marketing budgets over the next 12 to 18 months" (Maddox 2015, 4).

In this context, many companies are interested to increase the use of the content marketing tool in their marketing policy, as they notice the limitations of the traditional marketing communication strategy, as well as the huge opportunities brought by digital marketing.

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, lore_baltes@yahoo.com

Today, content marketing is practiced not only by large corporations (especially those in the IT field such as: Microsoft, Cisco, Facebook, Google, Apple etc.), but also by small and medium-sized companies.

2. Definition

There is no universally accepted definition of content marketing, but according to the Content Marketing Institute, “content marketing is the marketing and Business Process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

Furthermore, the Content Marketing Institute shows many definitions of marketing content, given by specialists in this field.

Thus, the definition given by Michael Brenner, author of *B2B Marketing Insider*, Co-Founder of Business 2 Community and Sr. Director of Global Marketing at SAP is: “content marketing is about delivering the content your audience is seeking in all the places they are searching for it. It is the effective combination of created, curated and syndicated content” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

According to Sam Decker, CEO of *Mass Relevance* (the SaaS leader in social integration), “content marketing is creating or curating non-product content — be it informational, educational, entertaining, etc. — and publishing it to contact points with customers to get their attention, to focus on the topic around your solution, and pull them closer to learning more about you” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

In this context, a differentiation must be made between content marketing and copywriting. If content marketing aims to raise awareness of the brand among the target segment, and automatically increase its loyalty to the company by information and education, copywriting mainly focuses on determining the target to act in the desired direction (most often purchasing a particular product or service).

Also, content marketing is different from the product advertising, which aims the purchase of a product or service.

Another content specialist, Barry Graubart says that: “Content marketing is an approach by which companies seek to author and/or share contextually relevant content to create or reinforce their brand messaging. When done effectively, content marketing is not done in direct support of a sales process, but rather by positioning a company or individual within a space” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

However, content marketing is what a company creates and shares to tell its story. “As individuals must gain the trust of others to manage them, similarly the companies need to gain the confidence of their potential clients in their products and services in order to impose themselves on the market.

To understand a company and its products, consumers need to know what type of company they have to do with, as well as what values are associated with it and how its employees come to meet the customers' needs" (Denning 2011, 47).

"Strong brands are based on a story that communicates who is the company; authenticity is to communicate what you really are" (Denning 2011, 163). Therefore, the content marketing should be based on the company's values.

3. History

Although content marketing seems to be born quite late, in the last 10 years, its history is much longer.

In 1891, "August Oetker sold small packages of his *Backin* baking powder to households with recipes printed on the back. In 1911 he started publishing his very successful cookbook. It went through major updates over past 100 years and is one of the most successful cookbooks globally reaching 19 million printed copies" (Schmidtke, 2015).

Four years later, in 1895, "John Deere launched *The Furrow* magazine that provides solutions to farmers to make their work more profitable. Today, it is sold in 40 countries and 12 different languages" (Kuenn, 2013).

In 1900, André Michelin with his brother Édouard published the first edition of the Michelin Guide. At that time, there were less than 3000 cars in France, but the guide was published in over 35 000 copies.

"This Guide, distributed for free to drivers, contained a lot of practical information on the use and repair of tires, the list of fuel depots, hotels, city maps, a list of mechanics (there was less than 600 for all France), etc.

Today, the Michelin Guide is published in 14 editions, covering 23 countries and it is sold in nearly 90 countries" (Le Guide Michelin, 2009).

In 1904, Jell-O salesmen went door-to-door, distributing their cookbook for free as a means of associating deserts with their product. Two years after, the company's sales rose to over \$1 million. Like Jell-O in those old days, content marketers like to talk of brand stories, as means of indirect marketing by making an emotional appeal ahead of the product sell (Keyser, 2013).

Between 1904 and 1982, "marketers grew more adventurous in their content marketing methods. The lessons learned by John Deere, Michelin, and Jell-O still rang true in the 80's, but Hasbro and Marvel teamed up and followed a previously unexplored path in their approach to content marketing. Hasbro and Marvel refashioned the G.I. Joe action figure into a product that was primed for cross-channel promotion through television and comic books—which is how the 'Real American Hero' became a household name through bold content marketing. Modern marketers still struggle to balance effective content marketing with innovative strategies to boost brand awareness, but G.I. Joe proved that creative cross-channel

promotion was a viable option even when content marketers were more limited in their choice of media” (Bauer, 2014).

The term "content marketing" was used as early as 1996 when John F. Oppedahl led a roundtable for journalists at the American Society for Newspaper Editors. In 1998, Jerrell Jimerson held the title of "director of online and content marketing" at Netscape. In 1999, author Jeff Cannon wrote: “In content marketing, content is created to provide consumers with the information they seek” (Gupta, 2015).

Nowadays, any company which wants to become or to remain competitive on the digital market must develop marketing content adapted to its target and distributed by the right social networks.

4. The objectives and strategies of content marketing

The strategy of content marketing is adapted to each company, but it must consider the following elements: objectives of content marketing, analysis of the target, type of used content marketing, promotion channels, content marketing timetable (frequency), as well as metrics for measuring the impact of marketing content.

Regarding the **objectives** of content marketing, the most common are:

- increasing the brand awareness;
- “building a relationship based on trust with the target;
- attracting new leads;
- solving the problems related to low audience;
- creating a need for a specific product;
- developing customer loyalty;
- testing a product idea / business;
- creating an audience” (Ionescu, 2015).

The target analysis is necessary in order to know who are the target audience / potential clients (demography, age, hobbies, topics of interest, preference for certain social networking...).

The type of content marketing used is determined according to the information obtained by the target analysis.

Also, without considering the quality of the content, which is the most important part of digital marketing, the choice of the frequency of promotion and of the right social media plays a significant role in the success of the content marketing campaign.

Content marketing specialists indicate 9 key areas to be considered in creating a **content marketing strategy**:

1. Focus on quality first and not on volume.
2. Topics your prospects/customers care about – the topics should be of interest to target.
3. Don't ignore SEO – content marketing developed and promoted should take into consideration SEO, by including the keywords.
4. Think about variety - variety of media (pictures, videos, infographics, checklists, audio content, webinars and even live events), in addition to written content like blog posts, ebooks and white papers. Also, variety can extend to what kind of content you create.
5. Build a social foundation - content is the fuel that keeps the social media “engine” humming as people share and re-share content they've discovered or that someone else (in most cases) shared with them.
6. Get your employees to share – it is also important that the company's employees share the content marketing.
7. Align content marketing and advertising efforts.
8. Monitor the reactions online by metrics.
9. Engage with people who share and comment.

In addition to monitoring mentions and shares, engaging with people who responded to the content can be a very powerful way to spread your reach and to connect with potential prospects or industry stakeholders (Meltwater, 2014).

The **metrics** used in content marketing should consider:

- “visits to the company's site;
- page views;
- number of newsletter subscribers;
- followers on social media;
- bounce rate;
- time spent on the company' site” (DeMers, 2014).

Also, it must take into consideration **4 types of metrics**:

1. Consumption metrics (Google Analytics, Traffic, Open Rates).
2. Sharing metrics (Retweets, Forwards, Likes).
3. Lead metrics (Leads generated).
4. Sales metrics (Deals).

A well-defined strategy of content marketing has the ability to create a privileged relationship with the targeted audience by building a positive brand image. Thus, content marketers can attract, engage and retain audiences on a long term.

5. The importance of content marketing

According to the statistics provided by the Content Marketing Institute, the importance of content marketing is growing, as 70% of B2B marketers are creating more content than they did one year ago.

This is explained by the fact that “60% of B2B decision makers say branded content helps them make better purchase decisions, while 61% of consumers are more likely to buy from companies that offer custom content” (Gupta, 2014).

Also, “94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn to distribute content, 35% say they have a documented content marketing strategy, while 48% say they have a content marketing strategy, but it is not documented.

Moreover, 84% of them say that the content marketing goal of their organization is “brand awareness”, and 42% of organizations publish new content that supports their content marketing program daily or multiple times per week.

Concerning the percentage of the organization’s total marketing budget spent on content marketing, the average of B2B marketers from North America answered 28%” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

Basically, “content marketing is the art of communicating with your customers and prospects without selling. Instead of pitching your products or services, you are delivering information that makes your buyer more intelligent. The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

It is important to know that “Content marketing has benefits in terms of retaining reader attention and improving brand loyalty. The idea of sharing content as a means of persuading decision-making has driven content marketers to make their once-proprietary informational assets available to selected audiences. Alternatively, many content marketers choose to create new information and share it via any and all media.

Content marketing products frequently take the form of custom magazines, print or online newsletters, digital content, websites or microsites, white papers, webcasts/webinars, podcasts, video portals or series, in-person roadshows, roundtables, interactive online, email, events. The purpose of this information is not to spout the virtues of the marketer’s own products or services, but to inform target customers and prospects about key industry issues, sometimes involving the marketer’s products.

The motivation behind content marketing is the belief that educating the customer results in the brand’s recognition as a thought leader and industry expert” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015).

The explanation is that “When a brand uses specific words or stories that resonate with a consumer, they can dig deeper into who they are as a consumer. By

utilizing content marketing, brands can cater campaigns and stories around buying patterns and personalities” (Cohen, 2015).

That’s why, to be relevant to your audience and create a powerful brand you must win their trust and admiration. With the creation of valuable content you build interest that transforms into lasting relationships.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, content marketing is the present and especially the future of digital marketing and inherently to marketing in general. Therefore, a digital marketing strategy cannot be successful without having a quality content marketing.

In this context, companies need to conduct extensive research on the target in order to create the content marketing that meets their interest.

The main role played by content marketing is to inform and educate audiences in order to develop a privileged relationship with them and to determine brand loyalty.

To be relevant to your audience and create a powerful brand you must win their trust and admiration. With the creation of valuable content you build interest that transforms into lasting relationships (Vuelo6, 2015).

This is why one of the biggest mistakes in the strategy of content marketing is to omit the analysis of the audience, which can conduct to an erroneous content.

7. References

- Bauer, Emily. *A Brief History of Content Marketing (It's Not As New As You Think)*, 2014. Available at: hub.uberflip.com/h/i/11305110-a-brief-history-of-content-marketing-its-not-as-new-as-you-think. Accessed on: 03 Oct 2015.
- „B2B Content Marketing, 2015 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends -North America", Content Marketing Institute. Available at: http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2015_B2B_Research.pdf, 03.10.2015).
- Cohen, Heidi. *Content Marketing Definition: 21 Experts Weigh In*. Available at: <http://heidicohen.com/content-marketing-definition/>. 03.10.2015.
- Dearborn, Edwin. *Best Tips for Branding Your Company*. Available at: <http://www.powerbrandingsecrets.com/tag/best-tips-for-branding-your-company/>. Accessed on: 03.10.2015.
- DeMers, Jayson. *2014 Is The Year Of Digital Marketing Analytics: What It Means For Your Company*, Forbes, 10 Feb 2014. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2014/02/10/2014-is-the-year-of->

- digital-marketing-analytics-what-it-means-for-your-company/. Accessed on: 02.10.2015.
- Denning, Stephen, 2011. *Arta povestirii în afaceri. Un ghid pentru lideri*. Bucuresti : Ed Publica.
- Gupta, Vijayendra, *Content Marketing: Say Something; Say It Well; Say It Often*, http://www.academia.edu/14323564/Content_Marketing_Say_Something_Say_It_Well_Say_It_Often_Dr._Vijayendrakumar_S._Gupta-Assistant_Professor, 03.10.2015.
- Ionascu, Catalin. *Tu de ce faci content marketing?* Available at: <http://romaniancopywriter.ro/tu-de-ce-faci-content-marketing/>. Accessed on: 02.10.2015.
- Keyser, William. 2013. *Telling StartUp Stories: Keep the End in Mind* Kindle. Edition Booktango.
- Kuenn, Arnie. *Is John Deere The Original Content Marketer?*, 25 June 2013 (<http://marketingland.com/is-john-deere-the-original-content-marketer-2-49138>, 04.10.2015).
- Le Guide MICHELIN (France): 109 ans d'histoire d'aide à la mobilité*, 2009. Available at : <http://www.beyond.fr/food/michelin-guide-history.html>. Accessed on: 04.10.2015.
- Maddox, Kate. “*Study: 80% of Companies Will Increase Digital Marketing Budgets*” in Advertising Age, 27 January 2015 (<http://adage.com/article/digital/80-companies-increase-digital-marketing-budgets/296814/>, 29.09.2015).
- Meltwater. *9 Keys to an Effective Content Marketing Strategy*. Available at: <http://www.meltwater.com/blog/keys-to-effective-content-marketing-strategy/>. Accessed on: 04.10.2015.
- Schmidtke, Mickael. “*The Roots of Content Marketing 1891 – 1900*”. Available at: <https://storify.com/michaschmidtke/the-roots-of-content-marketing-1891-1900>. Accessed on: 03.10.2015.
- Vuelo6, *Content Marketing*. Available at: <http://www.vuelo6.com/content-marketing/>. Accessed on: 03.10.2015.
- *** “What Is Content Marketing?” in *Content Marketing Institute*. Available at: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>. Accessed on: 30.09.2015.