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QUICK GUIDE TO CONTENT MARKETING

**8 tactics to boost your strategy with limited
time or resources**

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Quick Guide to Content Marketing

8 tactics to boost your strategy with limited time or resources

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Content Marketing: 8 tactics to boost your strategy with limited time or resources

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *Quick Guide to Content Marketing* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we give you ideas for jumpstarting (or maybe just starting) your content marketing strategy, even if you don't have a lot of time or resources.

They say content is king. But for marketers, it can also be gold. Content – especially good content – can serve as the foundation for your marketing efforts. This content is a valuable resource you can mine for email messages, blog posts, social media messaging and many other forms of communication. Content is how you engage, educate and perhaps entertain your prospects and customers. And of course, content is also critical these days for SEO benefits.

However, content can also be a challenge for marketers – especially if your company hasn't focused much time or energy on developing content up to this point. Starting from scratch, or trying to launch or expand a content marketing strategy on a limited budget, can seem like a daunting task. But, there are ways to get started quickly, even if you don't have a lot to spend.

In this report, we'll show you:

- Tips for determining where to start
- How to let your audience and the data be your guide
- Ways to take advantage of your existing resources
- Why repurposing is so helpful

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you boost your content marketing strategy with you.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *Quick Guide to Content Marketing*

About the *Quick Guide Series*

MarketingSherpa's *Quick Guide Series* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips you can use right away.

For each *Quick Guide*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and Benchmark Reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Tactic #1: Start with the Basics

If your current content marketing strategy consists of doing nothing at all (or at least, nothing worth mentioning), you need to start moving. Don't just sit there and wait until you have a bunch of brilliant ideas or worry about your lack of a big budget. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Content Marketing How-to: 7 steps for creating and optimizing content in any size organization](#)," Michael Aagaard, Online Copywriter, ContentVerve, warns the first, and biggest, mistake you can make when producing content is "not to get started."

He added, "If you wait until everything is 100% perfect, you will probably never get through the planning stage. It's important to get the basic setup and then just start generating content."

You can always start small with some easy-to-create basic content, and then gradually build on that foundation as you are able to. Here are some quick steps you can take to get started quickly.

Step #1. Evaluate where you are, or where you want to be

Joe Chernov, Vice President of Marketing, Kinvey, and former Vice President of Content Marketing, Eloqua, outlined three types of content production he has observed. Evaluate where your organization is or which would most realistically fit for your business model:

1. An executive sponsor obligates a certain number of people in product management and Marketing to create content. People are measured on the content they create, and they have a quota.
2. There is a corporate culture of content creators. "It's bottom up, and supported top down," Chernov said. These companies hire digital natives and consider content creation as a core requirement in the hiring process. Chernov provided HubSpot as a prime example of this.
3. The last type is content as a service bureau. A content team essentially takes orders from different marketing functions, identifies content gaps and is responsible for filling them. They act somewhat with autonomy, but basically act as an agency within a brand. Chernov considers this type as most in sync with Eloqua's style.

Step #2. Master the backdoor brag

One of the biggest mistakes marketers make in creating effective content marketing is they, well, market. Blatant bragging is the quickest way to turn off readers before they can find any real value in your content that would convert them into buyers. Chernov likened this to how people unsubscribe from Facebook friends who exclusively update to boast about their lives. "You would unfriend that person, and that's a human being. Imagine how much easier it is to unfriend a brand when they only talk about how great they are," he concluded.

Marketers commonly struggle when attempting to calibrate content as both a sales vehicle and as a service, Chernov said. The pressure to "make the numbers" can be daunting, but Chernov is adamant that "content as a service is a better way to ultimately sell than content as a sales medium ... your content should be in service of your audience, which is inclusive of your buyer, but not limited to your buyer."

Step #3. Turn problems into solutions

With bragging about your (undoubtedly amazing) company or product out the creative window, the goal is then to set up a content system that helps your audience. Share your knowledge and expertise unselfishly, and quickly provide real solutions so you can facilitate a dialogue and begin building a relationship.

“You are going to help them by sharing your knowledge and answering their questions. Help your audience, establish yourself as an industry thought leader, and then you can start making money,” Aagaard said.

To make this a more concrete action, he frequently passes on a piece of advice learned from Marcus Sheridan of TheSalesLion.com: “Take the top 50 questions your clients ask, and turn those into 50 blog posts. Helping the consumer with those issues ‘is really what [content] is all about.’”

The other suggestions by the experts:

Step #4. Tap into your in-house resources for interesting content

We go into more detail on tapping your resources throughout other sections of this report.

Step #5. Lay out a content schedule

Once content goals and ideas are laid out, an organized content schedule to execute them is vital. To gain momentum in achieving the results you want to see, content must be produced on a regular basis on which readers can rely.

Step #6. Carefully choose platforms to promote content

Keep it basic to start off, Aagaard advised, and stay on your main channels such as email. Use these platforms to promote content initially, before jumping in an outlet without knowing if it will be a good use of time and resource. Let other platforms evolve over time by utilizing forums and other hangouts (e.g. LinkedIn groups) where your audience is active, and involve them in a dialogue to understand where you are best going to reach them.

Step #7. Constantly evaluate

We go into this step in detail in Tactic #8.

Tactic #2: Focus Efforts on What Your Customers Want

One of the easiest ways to blow through your budget is to spend lots of money creating content your customers will ignore. To avoid this type of wasted expense, you need to figure out the best ways to connect with and engage your audience in a way that fits their needs.

In the MarketingSherpa article, “[Content Marketing: Analytics drive relevant content, 26,000 new monthly visits to blog](#),” Danny Brown, CEO, Bonsai Interactive Marketing, an Ontario, Canada-based agency offering B2B social

media and mobile marketing, discovered how powerful adding analytics to a comprehensive content marketing campaign can be. He found that data – specifically learning what his readers were searching for, where they were coming from and where they were going after visiting part of his network – dramatically improved his visits, shares and engagement.

Let your audience tell you what they want by their actions

Brown said, “I think one of the biggest mistakes I probably made when I first started the blog was I wasn't really making strong use of analytics, and so I was basically putting up really willy-nilly blog topics.”

Once he began using analytics, he was able to understand what his audience was doing at the blog and website – what they were searching for, and how long they were on the site. These numbers gave Brown an overview of his audience and their behavior. He knew if traffic was coming from Facebook or Twitter, and what country his visitors were based. For example, he noticed he was receiving a large amount of traffic from Malaysia, so in response, he found a guest blogger from that country to write a blog post about blogging and social media for the Malaysian market.

Understand your reader

Brown combines two analytics tools to really drill down into how his readers are engaging his content marketing strategy. One tool offers data on searches made both at Brown's websites and away from his content network. The second tool, used in conjunction with the search tool, is an analytics platform that provides Brown with demographic information on his readers.

The most important aspect of bringing analytics into the content marketing strategy is it allows you to better understand your reader. Brown uses this data to craft blog posts he knows his readers want to see.

Brown sees his personal blog as an “idea generation place” where he takes cues from his community's involvement, like with comments on his posts, or questions posed to him on Facebook or Twitter. He combines this information with search and demographic analytics to create his overall content strategy.

Listen

Using the website search analytics tool, Brown realized “social media hub” was a popular search last year where people were trying to understand how to create a social hub using external platforms like Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter and more, and also attempting to create a social hub internally on a website or a blog.

In response, Brown began a series titled “How to Turn Your Blog into a Social Media Hub,” explaining how to integrate and engage with social networks and still keep traffic on a website or blog. He said that series received a lot of traffic, a lot of shares and a lot of inquiries from clients looking to create social media hubs of their own.

“[Analytics] really allows me to understand where [readers] are disappearing to once they have left my site, which is key to helping me decide whether I need to do something different to keep them on my site, or if I can transfer a lot of stuff over to the external sites where they are going,” he said.

Tactic #3: Use data to drive your strategy

Once you study your analytics, you can then use that data to decide how to proceed. Earlier this year, Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, and Courtney Eckerle, Reporter, MECLABS, hosted a webinar, [“Email Marketing: 3 Tips for Producing Engaging Email Content”](#) sponsored by Return Path. In the event wrap-up, [“Content Marketing: 3 tips for producing engaging email content,”](#) they shared some highlights from the webinar – including the types you can use to guide your content strategy. For example, this data can tell you how to segment your email list, allowing you to send people content that is most relevant to them.

Endemic data

Endemic data is unique to a particular record, for example, contact and demographic information. For instance, in the MarketingSherpa article, [“Email Marketing How-to: 5 steps to improve your email newsletter,”](#) Scotts Miracle-Gro uses endemic data to segment its audience by areas of the country. That way, it can send highly personalized content specific to that area’s soil and planting seasons that will be incredibly useful to customers.

Behavioral data

With this type of data, Burstein gives the example of measuring “how many people and who are opening your emails, who are clicking through on your emails, who are redeeming your coupons – essentially, what actions are they taking with you?”

Through subscribers’ actions, “they are going to tell you a lot about what is important to them,” Burstein said.

Knowing what your consumers value as important can help guide your content and to whom you send it. Clickthrough rates can demonstrate the success of this tactic as consumers visit content on your website wanting to know more about the content you have specifically sent to them based on their interests, as determined by their behavioral data.

Tactic #4: Tap all available resources for content

When you need to come up with content quickly (and without spending a lot of money), it’s important to think about the resources you already have at your disposal. In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Overall Content Marketing Strategy Leads to 2,000% Lift in Blog Traffic, 40% Boost in Revenue,”](#) Deb McAlister-Holland, Director of Marketing, Distribion, said the team’s marketing pain point was building the brand, and creating awareness about its highly specialized product. The company targets a very specific marketplace, with customers in highly regulated industries. So, the team came up with a comprehensive content marketing strategy that incorporated content from a variety of places.

First, the team created a blog to provide information on best practices in the field. This blog is updated three times a week, and has its own domain name and website.

Create a resource library on the website

Concurrent with launching the best practices blog, the marketing team also created a resource library on the website to feature whitepapers and longer versions of the blog content. The team also launched a webinar series to provide even more informative content for the library.

Prior to this brand awareness effort, Distribion had only published one whitepaper and held one webinar in its six-year company history.

Reach out to strategic partners to increase the content volume

“We recognized that trying to do it by ourselves was a little bit foolhardy,” McAlister-Holland said. “So, we partnered with other companies for both our content and our webinars.”

The marketing team at Distribion consisted of two full-time employees and one part-time employee, so to create the volume of content McAlister-Holland was planning on required strategic partners to help generate content. When looking for strategic partners, the marketing team reaches out to peers who aren't quite in Distribion's specific niche. That way, they are serving the same space, but aren't really competitors. Distribion reaches out to other marketing automation vendors, data firms, compliance companies and industry associations for partnerships.

Look for spin-off opportunities to spread the content beyond the company assets

Whenever McAlister-Holland felt there was a particularly high-value piece of content, be it a whitepaper or blog post, she sought to leverage that content for bylined articles in other media, and also sought speaking engagements with Distribion's executives. The goal was to reach at least four spin-off opportunities each quarter, and the marketing team well exceeded that goal.

Organize the entire content package

McAlister-Holland said when the marketing team creates a new piece of content – blog post, whitepaper, etc. – [multiple items are created at the same time](#):

- The actual content piece
- The press release
- 10 to 12 tweets linking back to the content
- Abstracts for reddit, StumbleUpon, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social platforms

She added the blog frequently features guest bloggers. They love this approach because the marketing team provides so much material to promote the post.

Tactic #5: Repurpose content you already have

Once you do have some content in your inventory, you can earn the maximum ROI from it by trying to reuse that material in different ways.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, "[Content Marketing: 7 tips for content repurposing](#)," Muhammad Yasin, Director of Marketing, HCC Medical Insurance Services, said, "The Web expects you to generate a lot of content. It expects you to generate regularly, with quality content and to generate it prolifically while you are at it."

Repurposing has been a useful solution to this constant demand for Yasin, and many marketers are searching for a consistent plan for repurposing that will relieve both time and budget.

Tip #1. Create a repurposing map

If you create content with the mindset of always making it rich for further content plundering, Yasin said, then it is easier to map out your repurposing intentions ahead of time. His team started out very serious about repurposing, and over the past two years, they have worked out a repurposing map that works well for them.

Tip #2. Don't rely on duplicating content

Yasin added a warning about the dangers of duplicating content, even though it may seem like the quickest and easiest way to repurpose: repurposing doesn't mean regurgitating the exact same content on a different page. It is restyling or expanding on an original piece of content so that it is useful and valuable in a different way.

Tip #3. Start off with a robust piece of content

Yasin said his process usually starts with a webinar, because "it is a big piece of content, and it is easier to start with something big and walk through all the different pieces of content you can create based off of that."

For his team, the easiest piece of content to create off a webinar is the PowerPoint presentation, and those slides can be uploaded to SlideShare. While running the webinar, Yasin said they simultaneously stream it live on Google+, which creates a conversation on that platform that can be shared. Once the webinar is complete, another asset is then in place: "We now have audio that we can add breaks into and we have a podcast that can be released," added Yasin.

Tip #4. Break up robust content into smaller topics

Yasin said his webinars are usually broken up into three different sections. Then, those can then be turned into three different topics that can be remarketed as an individual video on that specific topic. From just those relatively simple reworkings of webinar content, a wealth of useful content is created.

"I think right now ... we have a Google+ Hangout that we have done. We have a SlideShare presentation that we have posted. We have three videos that we have created, and we have a podcast – that is five pieces of content out of one webinar so far."

From the original three topics, they will occasionally shoot a more produced video “usually as a whiteboard video or perhaps in an interview style,” Yasin said. “It is really easy to create that new content. It usually takes us 10 minutes maybe to shoot the video, and then we go in the post production, and we are done.”

(For more details about how webinars can be a valuable tool in your content marketing strategy, check out our 30-Minute Marketer, [How to Use Webinars to Drive Content Marketing.](#))

Tip #5. Cultivate user-generated content

A compelling and resource-friendly repurposing option Yasin utilizes is user-generated content. “If some of our customers come back from trips abroad, we will shoot interviews with them just letting them tell the story about how their trip went, what they did, what they found exciting,” Yasin said.

Once that is transcribed, he said, it is usually turned into a blog post. The team posts the video to its YouTube page, and features it in the post. It is smaller-scale example of repurposing, but consumers find it extremely useful and it may answer many questions Yasin and his team wouldn’t have thought of.

Tip #6. Utilize video

Yasin said when he was first producing and repurposing content, he found video was the easiest way both to quickly produce, and to repurpose into content, such as a blog post.

He has found a quick turnaround time, along with a unique source of content and repurposing opportunities, with video. After producing the video, he can then incorporate it into a blog post, or use it for a podcast or publishing a transcript.

Tip #7. Reuse a great sentence

Transcripts from interviews or webinars can be used down to the individual sentence, according to Yasin. “We also use those transcripts to pull out quotes ... I will keep running list of all the quotes that we pulled out of the webinars when we were really feeling inspired and said something awesome,” he said.

Especially in a pinch, Yasin said it has been incredibly useful for him in moments where he is crunched for time, but needs to be thought provoking.

For more tips on re-purposing content, check out the MarketingSherpa articles, “[Reformat, Reuse, Recycle: 5 Strategies to Stretch your Marketing Content](#),” and “[Content Marketing: 21 ideas for planning, creating, and leveraging content from your webinars.](#)”

Tactic #6: Consider your unique assets

Your company's key strengths can be a great source of content. If your organization has a resource no other company has, and it can be used to help your customers, then it can be a wellspring of valuable, compelling information. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Content Marketing: How employee content drove 200 leads per day at Guitar Center](#)," the team at Guitar Center increased sales leads by leveraging one of its most abundant resources – the expertise of its sales team.

"What really drives the difference between us and them is that we have stores," Kirit Sarvaiya, Multichannel Executive, Guitar Center, said. "We have real people in there, about 6,000 of them, who have been working at Guitar Center for many years, and they really help customers figure out what is right for them."

Create public profiles of salespeople

"People buy from people they like or feel a connection with, so we are trying to help that along, especially online," Sarvaiya said. "We have taken our asset, which is our people, and their knowledge and their skills and interests in musical instruments, and are showing that online."

The team first encouraged salespeople to provide content for a [full profile](#). These profiles would be published online and would help generate sales leads. Depending on the amount of content provided, the profiles could include:

- Photos
- Videos
- Blog posts
- Link to send an email
- More information on specialty and experience

Some salespeople provided only a bio and a personal picture, while others continually add a variety of content to their profiles.

Give incentives to contribute

To jumpstart creation, the team ran sweepstakes for the sales team. Employees could enter by creating a profile, adding a photo and writing a short bio and prizes included an Apple iPad. The team encouraged store managers to fill out the "about" section of each store's local page.

To encourage employees to build richer profiles, the team ran contests at the store, district and regional levels, and gave prizes to associates who made use of the site's multimedia and blogging features.

Emphasize the team's expertise

To encourage sales leads, the team wanted to emphasize its salespeople are experts and they welcome questions. With that in mind, the team created a local "store experts" page for each location.

When a person clicks the “store experts” tab in the homepage’s top navigation bar, they arrive on a page with the following features:

- *Clear instructions* – a very large font tells visitors they are on the “store experts” page. A few lines of text explain that they can find an associate from their local store. The text encourages them to use the “Email Me” link to ask an associate a question.
- *Localized sub-headline* – a sub-headline includes the city of the nearest Guitar Center store. For example, a visitor from Charlotte, N.C. would see the headline “Store Experts in Charlotte.”
- *Salespeople profiles* – as on the local store pages, these pages also include summary profiles of the salespeople including links to email them.

EXAMPLE: GUITAR CENTER SALESPEOPLE PROFILES ON LOCAL PAGES

The screenshot displays the Guitar Center website for the Hallandale store. The page features a search bar at the top, navigation links, and a main banner for a John Shanks guitar. Below the banner is a section titled "Find an Associate" which is circled in red. This section includes a search bar and a grid of salespeople profiles. Each profile includes a name, title, and a short bio. For example, Sally G. is the Store Manager, and Jovi B. is a Sales Associate. The page also includes a "Blog Archives" section and a "GET TO KNOW GUITAR CENTER, HALLANDALE" section with a recent blog post about a drum off regional final.

Tactic #7: Be creative and unique

Content doesn't need to be expensive to be effective. Coming up with a creative idea can help you engage the readers you already have – and attract many more. The MarketingSherpa article, "[Content Marketing: Interactive infographic blog post generates 3.9 million views for small insurance company](#)," featured Muhammad Yasin, Director of Marketing, HCC Medical Insurance Services (whom you will remember from Tactic #5).

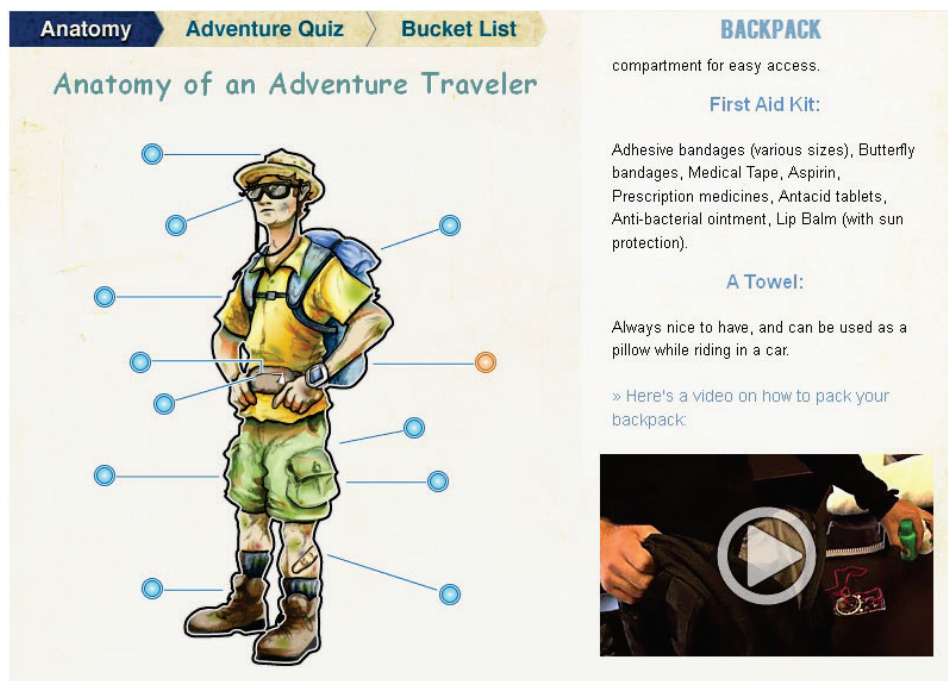
As a smaller company with big competition, HCC Medical Insurance Services needed a way to distinguish its content, even though it lacked the resources and budget of the bigger companies. Yasin's team found success in embracing nontraditional and interactive efforts to reach its consumers and engage them year-round.

They decided to capitalize on the fact they recently started offering coverage for extreme sports activities. To promote this unique value, the team decided to go beyond static infographics and create the "[Extreme Guide to the World](#)," as the beginning of its highly interactive series.

The infographic has three sections:

- The anatomy of an adventure traveler
- An adventure quiz
- A worldwide bucket list

EXAMPLE: HCC MEDICAL INSURANCE SERVICES ADVENTURE TRAVEL INFOGRAPHIC



In the first section, pop-out bullets give the reader information on different necessities for adventure travel, according to Yasin.

“So what you click on first is may be his shoes, and it will tell you these are the types you need to look for ... we look into the backpack, and it has tips but it also has a real thumbnail video ... [of] one of our prior customers who is a backpacker, talking about how to pack your backpack for a trip,” Yasin said.

In the adventurer quiz, participants collect “Extreme Points” and can share their score via Facebook or Twitter. Points are given for checking off items such as, “Nap while sky diving? Yeah that sounds like a good idea” and “You know how to ask for malaria pills in 6 languages.”

The third section, a worldwide bucket list, features extreme activities to participate in around the world, such as alligator wrestling in Florida, extreme ironing in England and Ireland – it requires ironing along difficult terrain and locations – or bridge swinging in Namibia. The ski stunting bullet in Canada also features a video of a previous customer skiing off trail.

Here is Yasin’s six-step process for executing this campaign:

Step #1. Make infographics as interactive as possible

Yasin said the team had a lot of past success creating infographics, but to spark more interest, they decided to make them interactive. Developing multiple layers and areas for consumers to share via social networks has made a huge difference, according to Yasin.

“One of the reasons why people spend so much time on a page with [the interactive infographics is] because there were more and more things to find,” Yasin said, especially once video was added.

Step #2. Find the topic people want to talk about

The biggest thing in creating content “is in understanding who the person is,” Yasin said. While insurance may not be the most obviously share-worthy topic, he asserted any industry can find some segment that will catch the attention of current and potential customers.

By focusing on a topic travel medical insurance buyers are interested in – travel – HCCMIS is able to “create content that is valuable to the right people, people that we can actually turn into customers,” Yasin said.

Creating an effective graphic hinges on finding out what the potential customer is interested in, from the perspective of why they are purchasing your service, according to Yasin.

Tip: One way to hit on topics that will be likely to interest people is to tie content to current events. You can also make sure content has a timely or seasonal angle.

Step #3. Conduct a micro-test

Yasin said a test was conducted earlier in the year with an infographic that was slightly interactive. It allowed people to click countries to see what international vaccines were required or other health concerns for that area. The test run, posted on the blog and promoted through social media, had an unexpected result. “We actually got a random phone call from the [Center for Disease Control] a week after it went live, saying that the person in charge of their outreach ... one of his friends had done it on Facebook and sent it over to him, and he really loved it,” said Yasin.

The response from an unexpected source was invaluable, according to Yasin. “We actually got a relationship with the CDC, and chat with them on some of the projects, as well. It was amazing for me, as a marketer in a small organization,” he said.

Step #4. Reach out to influencers

Reaching out to influencers and thought leaders is a vital part of the process in creating a detailed infographic that resonates with the target audience, Yasin said. “I talk to them first to get a few ideas and make sure we are going in the right direction, and then we will continue researching, once we get those first few pointers,” he said.

Developing relationships with influencers, as well as people who are simply interested in the topic, can lend vital knowledge to content, according to Yasin.

Step #5. Distribute content

Generally, Yasin said he prefers to have a few months in advance where he can develop relationships with influencers who can promote the content once it is launched. Once an infographic is complete, Yasin said influencers receive it first, to promote it within their circles. By including influencers in the content throughout its development, the influencers have a personal investment in its success, and this will encourage their communities to take an interest.

The infographic is usually released a day or two later through HCCMIS’s own communities, such as social media and email. Social sharing is a large component of promoting the interactive infographics, especially within the quiz section, where sharing scores with Facebook and Twitter followers is encouraged.

Step #6. Repurpose content

Yasin said repurposing content is a big part of how they create, starting “from a high level and saying, ‘We have this great piece of content, how can we take portions of it and create other pieces of content off of it?’”

Repurposing is underused, according to Yasin. Online marketers “often think, ‘Do I need to start all over again?’ It’s not really the case. Usually, you have something else already in your back catalogue that will at least get you 90% down the road.”

Tactic #8: Constantly re-evaluate your approach

Even once you've established your content marketing strategy and it has been running smoothly for a while, you always need to be continuously evaluating your existing tactics – and considering new ones.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, "[Content Marketing: A process for evaluating content channels](#)," Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, said, "If you're already deeply engaged in content marketing, you likely want to re-evaluate the channels you've been using at regular intervals as shiny new channels emerge and old channels diminish."

Here is a process for evaluating content channels.

Step #1: Determine value of brand

All marketing, including content marketing (heck, really every decision your company makes), should begin with [your value proposition](#). After all, the main focus of your content marketing should be communicating helpful information that is in line with the value of your brand.

Drafting an effective value proposition is a big topic, but here are a few high-level tips to help you out:

Answer this question – *Why should [Prospect Here] choose [Brand Here] instead of [Competitor Here]?*

Obviously, you may need to do this more than once if you're targeting more than one type of prospect or have more than one competitor.

Identify and express your value proposition – You can use this simple [value proposition worksheet](#) to help you answer the above question and to identify and express your value prop. Also, make sure you find evidentials, which are elements that help you to support the claims made in your above answer.

Evaluate your answer – Be sure to gain input from others inside your company yet outside the marketing department (What does Customer Service or Product Development think the value of the brand is?). And, of course, you ultimately have to [test your value proposition](#) to see how effective it is with your target audience.

Step #2: Determine value of product(s)

Now do the same exercise as in step #1 to determine the value of your products. Just slightly change the question to, ***Why should [Prospect Here] choose [Product Here] instead of [Competitor Product Here]?*** (If you are a one-product company, you can likely skip this step).

Step #3: Conduct preliminary research

Those first two steps are really independent of content marketing, and you should have already done these for your marketing as a whole. However, we felt it was important to include them because your content marketing is essentially an extension of your brand and product value propositions.

That said, let's dive into some content aspects:

Identify target audience – At whom does this content aim? Decision-makers? Influencers? How old are they? What income level? Where do they live?

Identify channels for analysis – This step is crucial for overcoming “I Hear Twitter is Hot and I Should Use It” Syndrome. *You* might love Twitter, but does your intended audience? You can start by looking at your analytics. Which content channels are already driving traffic to your website?

Discuss with your team – As with value propositions above, not all of the wisdom resides within Marketing. What has Customer Service learned about your customers, the information they’re looking for and where they find it? What about Sales?

Step #4: Determine what the ideal channels for communicating content would look like

This is where you get to really stretch your imagination. Think about what your ideal communication channel would look like – even if it doesn’t yet exist. For example, if a few years ago, you thought a great content channel to reach your audience with would be like Facebook but more visual, then you could have been a successful early adaptor when Pinterest came along. Or, you might even find the need to create your own community.

Either way, grab a whiteboard and ask yourself these questions:

What would the ideal channel’s value be? – To your potential audience. Why would hearing about this new channel stop them in their tracks and make them sign up right away? What element of that can you leverage using the current content channels that are at your disposal?

How would you use the ideal channel(s)? – What would these channels offer you, the content creator, that you cannot utilize now? Is there any way to work within the confines of today’s channels to make possible what you currently view as impossible?

Step #5: Create a draft content infrastructure

Now it’s time to create a draft content infrastructure.

For each channel in that content infrastructure, you should have this information:

To whom does the channel speak? – It doesn’t have to be every member of your target audience either. You just have to make sure the channel is appropriate for at least one targeted persona in the audience. For example, it might appeal to influencers but not executive-level decision makers.

What content can we produce? Do a little corporate soul searching on this one ... can we create the type of content that is expected in this channel? Will we be able to have a blog as informative as competitive sources of information? Will we be able to have a YouTube channel as entertaining as other choices the customer has?

How is our company organized, and what is its culture? Is information easily accessible? Will subject matter experts contribute to our content?

These are not “yes” or “no” questions. You’re grading yourself along a scale and trying to prioritize in which content channels to invest your resources. That said, even with infinite resources, you should not invest in infinite channels.

And, this ties into the next question ...

Can we support this channel until the sun (or Wal-Mart) expands enough to swallow up the Earth? How frequently will you add new content to this channel? How often will you read and respond to customer feedback?

Important questions, because that Google+ account you last updated eight months ago telegraphs the message that you'll abandon your customers, as well.

Does the channel support my brand's and product's value propositions? – The channel itself communicates value. For example, should a serious B2B brand be on Facebook? How do the ads surrounding your YouTube videos affect the perception of your brand's value?

What is the value proposition of your content on this channel? – Why should [Prospect Type Here] [Read Your Blog To Learn About Fixing an Appliance] instead of [Getting Information To Fix An Appliance In Any Other Way]?

Even your free content needs an effective value proposition. That is the final litmus test. If you can't answer the above question, you're just wasting time and money investing in that content channel.

Step #6: Create and disperse your content channel recommendations

You have a pretty good understanding of which channels are worth the significant investment of time, money and resources necessary to have an impact on your content marketing.

Now that you have created your content infrastructure, one last piece of advice from me to you.

Call it a "draft." Distribute it to your team and to appropriate departments internally, for two reasons:

You're always going to overlook something – call it Murphy's Law, or whatever you like. Even after going through the above steps, having something that looks like a plan will likely jog the thinking of someone in IT who will say, "I was reading an industry forum, and found that competitor "X" is going to launch the same ..."

Get buy-in – content marketing is not simply a marketing effort. It is an entire company effort. If you want to create a blog, much of the information you fill it with will come from outside of Marketing.

So, if you don't have the proper leaders and teams on board, you'll have selected the perfect content channels ... but have nothing to put in them.

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa Article – Mindjet's infographic strategy boosts blog traffic 420%, Facebook views 313.4%](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article – Four tactics that led to \\$2.5 million in annual contracts](#)

[MarketingSherpa Blog – Gamification: 3 tips for gamification apps as part of your content marketing](#)

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