

Crafting Compelling, Customer-Centric Content

From the Partners at Consentric Marketing
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The young man had a job to be done and a job to be won.

The job-to-be-done (JTBD) was to make a good impression at an upcoming job interview. His appointment was less than an hour away, but he didn't have a suitable necktie. Clad in his Sunday best (minus tie), he headed out, stopping off at a Target store, where he hoped to grab a clip-on tie, head to the checkout, pay, and then have the tie on by the time he exited the store.



The young man strode purposefully to the men's department, where a Target associate greeted him and offered to help. His upbeat demeanor quickly faded to dismay, however, when he learned that this Target store didn't carry clip-on ties. The associate showed him a large selection of traditional neckties, but there was only one problem. The fifteen-year-old customer did not know how to tie one. The resourceful associate found an older male employee and asked him for help. As the second associate demonstrated the technique, the two Target employees chatted with the young man and learned about his mission. By the time the young job candidate was ready to go, the associates had not only helped put the finishing touches on his look; they also encouraged him and gave him advice on other ways to make a good impression in the interview.

He got the job.

There's more to the story. Another Target customer standing nearby witnessed the incident. She snapped a picture and shared the story. Within hours the incident went viral.

Target couldn't have planned it better, had they conjured up the story and created video for an advertising campaign.

The happenstance incident is brimming with many of the elements of an effective content marketing campaign:

- **Customer-focused employees.** Whether they knew the marketing jargon around “jobs to be done” or not, the Target employees took interest in learning the customer’s task and problem to be solved, and they took care to find a solution and make sure the customer learned to use the solution to complete his JTBD.
- **Engagement.** The employees went a step further and engaged the customer in his buyer’s journey, learned his story, and demonstrated personal interest in his success.
- **Relevant** content delivered with precise timing. Knowing the customer’s story and taking ownership of his situation enabled the employees to anticipate subsequent needs and deliver additional content (tips on interview success) at just the right time. Even though this didn’t lead to an additional sale at this moment for this customer, it’s a good bet that their personalized service will result in repeat business from him. The real dividend comes from the hundreds of thousands of potential customers—over 500,000 within the first two weeks after the story was shared on social media and international news outlets— who will view Target favorably as a result and take their business there.
- **Stories.** Stories are one of the key ways to personalize and engage. Target benefited from the perfect orchestration of an organic, naturally occurring story shared with the world by another Target customer. It’s a double testimony from two happy customers: the young man and the lady who shared his story.

Content marketing done right is like well-applied makeup or a well-planned dinner party. It comes off as natural and effortless. It’s the outgrowth of an orientation that recognizes that everyone in your organization, from the person answering the phone at the front desk, to the delivery person, to the clerk in the store, is a part of your marketing team. And it’s the commitment to making sure that every interaction between your company and your customers brings value. It must engage customers properly based on what you know about them, where they are in their buyer’s journey, and what they are looking for.

Marketing needs to offer clear interactions (often short ones) that are perfectly timed, like the one in the Target store, and that add value and make an emotional connection at each step in their respective buyer’s journeys.

Terminology

Before proceeding it makes sense to clarify terminology.

Twenty years ago, the word *content* was all but the exclusive purview of the IT department. It usually referred specifically to digital content (copy and graphics), and the role of creating content was often labeled *Technical Writer*. Often the job even fell to web designers, and a professional writer never entered the picture.

Today *content* is a mainstay for all areas of communication, as illustrated by the number of companies that now have executive positions like Chief Content Officer (Norman Pearlstine at Time, Inc. and Ted Sarando at Netflix are examples).

Content is simply a communicated message. *Content* is still understood by most people to include more than copy, especially with the popularity of infographics: the message itself is the focus, regardless of whether it is conveyed in printed words, audio, or visuals.

Content Marketing is the strategic marketing approach of creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.¹

The Role of Content Marketing

Stated simply, the role of content marketing is to engage the customer, then provide the information he or she needs at just the right time and in just the right place to build a trusting relationship in which the customer receives something of value-- the means to get his or her job done efficiently and successfully.

This differs from advertising in several important ways, and is the key to making marketing more personal—more Consentric:

- Instead of pitching products or services, the marketer delivers information that is timely, valuable, credible, and sought after by the customer.
- Instead of pushing content, the focus is on facilitating conversation.
- Instead of interrupting a buyer at a time dictated by the advertiser, the content marketer attempts to read customer signals and understand who the customer is and what he or she is trying to achieve; then provide information on a one-to-moment basis or in the very moment the customer is interacting with a brand. Instead of interrupting, the effective content marketer listens.
- Instead of requiring customers to “give up” information like their emails and phone numbers in order to access content, the content marketer delivers value with no strings attached. In other words, the marketer commits to trust the customer before asking the customer to trust the company.

When it comes right down to it, the most effective way to build business is to build respectful relationships with customers. And the simplest and most profound way to do that is to treat customers with respect. Not like statistics, stereotypes, probabilities, or sales prospects. Like human beings who have choices and always find an alternative way to get their jobs done.

The Consentric approach works best when it is executed seamlessly, naturally, and comes from the heart, much like the Target example described above. The key to flawless, natural execution is rooted in your organizational culture. Your entire organization is the face and voice of your brand that the customer sees in every interaction with your company. To make marketing more Consentric, all employees must buy into this philosophy and make it a natural part of their dealings with customers.

When that happens, no one has to think too much about making marketing more Consentric. It will just be that natural way business is done. If your firm decided to adopt a “Making Marketing More Consentric Charter,” it would look something like this:

We will get to know our customers as people.

If we want to communicate more Consentrically with our customers, we need to get to know them as people. Ideally, we’d sit and chat with each and every one of them, like in the Target example, or in the conversations conducted as part of the milkshake research. That’s not feasible, of course, but what it does mean is that we need to gather the right kind of data and

do the right kind of research, so we can read the customer's signals—the breadcrumbs—be they digital or face-to-face.

We also need to recognize that people are more than their demographic makeup. A customer is not the same all the time in exactly the same way. Your buyer's journey for a car follows one pattern when you seek new wheels for driving to work every day and occasionally having clients ride in your vehicle. It's entirely different when you are car shopping for your sixteen-year-old son or your eighty-year-old mother. And all of the above can be influenced by your bank balance, how long you intend to own the car, your attitude toward car shopping, and on and on.

We will not waste your time by pushing irrelevant, untailed content.

When companies blindly offer additional content without knowledge of who the customer is or where he is in the buyer's journey, they are pushing content. Much of pushed content turns out to be content that serves or is about the seller. Some can be chalked up to bad timing or pushing the wrong content at the wrong time and in the wrong way. Then there's content that is just lame, period. Content that diverts attention from the job to be done is misleading and distracting. It fails to deliver on its promises and does nothing to win friends or business. It may, in fact, drive away customers who might otherwise turn out to be loyal and profitable. Smart marketers do their best to make sure the content they deliver is what the customer wants, when they want it, and in the medium and format they prefer.

We will provide valuable content with no strings attached and no expectation of return.

Instead of "sales speak," deliver relevant content, like tips, advice, and other value-added information. The goal is to become a valued resource for folks who can get a job done with the products or services you sell. Over a period of weeks, months, and years, you'll build a solid relationship with them and earn their trust. You don't want to sell to them once and never see them again. You want to make a friend—a friend who enjoys buying from you—for life.²

Content marketing leaders offer more than just great content. While innovative thought leadership and inspiration is important, it is not enough. Leaders use content marketing to build **trust**, and they do it in two critical ways. The first involves how they offer their content.

Content should be good no matter what. That should be the standard. You want your name to be associated with meaningful, thoughtful content. Your first obligation as a content marketer is to deliver value. But here is the clincher: **You should provide that value devoid of an expectation of return.**

Consider how you feel yourself when you read an intriguing blog or email with teaser content leading to an offer for a white paper download. Then comes the dreaded moment when you're required to give your name, email, phone number, and who knows what else before receiving the promised content. You know you'll be inundated with calls and emails once you have the document in hand, so you may decide to pass.

Content marketing leaders don't force readers to give their names or email addresses, or to jump through other hoops, in order to access their content. They never ask for an email before

providing content. If you want to download a white paper, it's there. If you want to read a section on the site, it's there. You will not be barred from content if you don't give up something first. Content marketing leaders publish content with the belief and intent that because they provide a level of value that's real, genuine and not requiring a return, you will see benefit and associate it with them. So, they stress quality content and purity of intent behind the content. The focus again is on the customer—educating the market and making people better at what they do. And demonstrating their commitment to helping the customer get a job done.

To do content marketing well, you need to appreciate the value given to you by the simple act of someone reading your free material. It takes time for people to read your content, and their time is precious.

We will listen, and tailor our content to the customer's needs and timetable rather than to what we want to sell.

Every interaction between a company and a customer needs to bring value. It must engage the customer properly, based on what we know about them, the nature of their job-to-be-done, and where they are in the buyer's journey.³

Whether you meet the customer in a physical setting like a retail store or an office, or in a digital setting like a website visit, the principle is the same. You need to be facilitating conversation. That's the only way to understand the customer and her needs so that you can develop a trusting relationship and deliver timely, relevant, and valuable content.

Timeliness is the other critical factor. This leads to another way effective content marketers distinguish themselves from the rest: practicing attentive listening as customers engage with their content. If you're in the digital space, this means listening carefully to the digital cues and then using them to try and interpret the buyer's journey so that you can provide the right content in the right place at the right time.

Using Content Strategically

To be successful, we need to use content strategically. Buyers are often well advanced in their journeys when they come onto a company's radar screen. By then we have lost much of any potential we might have had to influence the journey and the decision-making process along the way.

The key is to engage the customer early, maybe even before she considers herself a customer or buyer, so that we can get on *her* radar screen and predispose her to consider us if and when she becomes a serious prospective buyer.

To do that, we'll need to have content prepared and ready to deliver when and where the right opportunity strikes.

Let's say you've begun to think about buying your first home. At this early stage, you may not be sure you can afford a home yet, so you probably don't consider yourself a prospective home buyer yet. Your initial job-to-be-done? To evaluate the feasibility of jumping into the housing market.

You may start to gather information on the home buying experience and on the costs and financing options in order to make the go-no-go decision. You'll probably talk to friends and co-workers who have recently taken the plunge.

Lenders, realtors, and even community colleges and recreation program directors all have good reasons to get to know you. You'll likely visit lender websites (including that of your own bank or credit union) to learn how much you can afford and to familiarize yourself with the process of obtaining a mortgage. You'll check out Zillow and visit real estate listings to see what homes are selling for in the neighborhoods or developments that interest you. You might also consider taking a home buying course. All of these entities have the opportunity to use content marketing to introduce themselves to you and start building a mutually beneficial relationship.

Let's take your bank or credit union as an example. If they're like most financial institutions, they already have a lot of data on you and know exactly what your buying habits look like. Once their online tracking system gets a whiff of the digital breadcrumbs you left when you visited the website to investigate mortgages, they should begin anticipating where you are in the buyer's journey and supplying you with helpful content.

Our "different strokes for different folks" mantra from the segmentation chapter applies here as well. Recognize that, in order to personalize content, you'll need to consider

1. The **job-to-be-done** for you as a marketer. In other words, what you want to accomplish by using the content.
2. The **channels or vehicles** you will use to reach customers.

Hiring Content to Do Marketing Jobs

Let's look at some examples of the jobs content can do for the marketer.

To engage.

For your content to be relevant and grab people's attention, it has to be relevant, interesting, and purposeful. Applying analytical insights, you can create content that cuts through the noise, gets right to the core of your diverse audiences' needs, and helps them complete the jobs they set out to do.

In this customer-centric economy, providing a positive and memorable customer experience is key to making marketing more Consentric. For years teachers and trainers have used the "tell me-show me-let me do it myself" philosophy to facilitate learning. It's the same with marketing. The more you involve customers, the more likely they are to remember your message long afterward.

Stories are one of the key ways the successful content marketer captures attention and engages the customer. Face it-- stories are more engaging, more appealing, than facts. If you grab your customer with a catchy opening, they'll stay with you until the end.

Successful storytelling engages the customer and brings him into the picture – puts him into the story so he can experience it for himself.

To work, the story must be credible (it really happened, or it really could have happened), personal (I can imagine myself having the same experience), and relevant (the situation addresses my needs/interests/JTBD).

To interact.

Once your customer is engaged, the next step is to facilitate a conversation. If you're face-to-face with a customer – say, in a retail setting – it's easier. You read the signals from the person's behavior and from their reactions to the information you provide. If you get a negative reaction or sense your merchandise isn't a good fit, you back off and let the customer continue to browse, or to leave your shop.

Online, it's different. Starting a digital dialogue is trickier – rather like discussing a sensitive subject via text message. There are land mines all over the place. The temptation in a digital interaction is to forget we are dealing with human beings. We are not face-to-face; we are not even ear-to-ear. We are forced to follow the digital breadcrumbs, moment-by-moment. Then, if conversation is appropriate, you ask a polite, implicit question, as if you were saying, "Would you like to see more about 'x'?" Live chat is one way to do this. Another similar tactic is letting the prospective buyer request content through a real-time staffed interactive dialogue box – almost like asking the librarian for book recommendations.

If we can humanize our online dialogue with customers such that it feels more like a face-to-face interaction, engagement and conversation surely will plant the seeds for a long-term relationship.

To educate.

Only after we establish a friendly, no-pressure, trusting relationship with the customer can we proceed to provide educational content about our product or service and how it will help get the job done. The only exception is if the customer takes the initiative to request the information. Even then, it makes sense to take care in how the information is packaged. Depending on your product, you may need to develop spec sheets, user guides, brochures, and other types of content. FAQ and Live Chat can be valuable as well.

Don't forget to help your customer with sample experiences. Video demonstrations and user testimonials can be priceless for their positive impact. They help the customer imagine herself actually using the product and experiencing the results of a job-to-be-done accomplished.

To provide thought leadership.

Thought leadership is the practice of disseminating ideas that, in the minds of business leaders and customers, merit attention.

Generating thought leadership content that is consistently viewed as "highly valuable and meriting attention" by the intended audience can be challenging. According to a survey by the American Marketing Association, 90% of CXOs consider excellent thought leadership important in selecting business partners. But the same group of CXOs also reported that 86% of the thought leadership material they actually do receive is only good, fair, or poor.⁴

We generally think of thought leadership in terms of the B2B space. An expert in the field publicizes his or her ideas and opinions in speeches, white papers, blogs, interviews, and perhaps even in branded advertising. Thought leadership can be a critical component in building credibility and adding value to your brand. It can even assist in building a company's reputation. As with any other content, thought leadership content must pass muster in being relevant, solution-oriented, original, informative, credible, and supported by evidence.

In the B2C space, thought leadership is more likely to take the form of celebrity or cultural icon endorsements, or peer reviews. If this sounds surprising, consider how influential social media treatment of brands and companies with respect to their political views or social behavior can be (both positive and negative). In the minds of some consumers, social media influencers carry as much weight as a thought leader would for a CXO.

To influence the buyer's journey.

Without a doubt, the most important job your content can do is the influence the buyer on his or her journey to becoming your loyal repeat customer and advocate.

Marketers now compete on generating content that can influence *specific* buying stages, from the earliest stage of recognizing a need, through gathering and evaluating information and making a final purchase decision, even on to post-purchase attitudes leading to loyalty, repeat purchase, and recommending the company or brand to others. In fact, there are several notable examples of companies who have experienced phenomenal success by tackling the very buyer's journeys customers dread most.

Casper is one such example.

Somewhat akin to buying a new car, the process of buying a mattress can be fraught with stress, complicated by myriad choices of brands and models, and plagued by hard selling and hidden costs (warranty, delivery). And let's not get started with the returns process.

But as mattress shopping has gotten trickier over the past decades, sleep has become an important health and wellness focus. What is a consumer to do? Is there a better alternative to traditional mattress shopping?

Enter Casper, the upstart online mattress company that says they were founded with the intent of disrupting an entire industry while simultaneously helping customers complete the job of getting a healthy good night's sleep.

How is it possible that anyone wants to buy a mattress online? It's all about building trust by providing the right customer experience. Casper goes the extra mile and shows that the company is willing to invest in the customer before the customer invests in one of their mattresses.

From the informative website, to sending a follow-up email to site visitors within hours, to providing purchasers with an extensive 100-night money-back guarantee and a referral discount to share with friends and family, Casper gets content right. Speaking of well-timed content, visitors in selected markets who remain on the site for a few minutes are shown a popup offering an in-person experience at a local "concept" store—typically located in a trendy shopping area. What's more, the visitor (who is likely a prospective buyer by now) is invited to book a 30-minute nap at the store.

Content Marketing in Action: Doing It Right

If you think content marketing means juggling lots of balls at once, you're right. By this time, you should have nailed down much of the "science" of the process. Now it's time to execute the "art." You'll want to take the following steps:

1. Identify goals.
2. Audit your current content and content marketing program.
3. Draft messaging for each scenario.
4. Develop your channel strategy.
5. Map your plan in a content strategy document.
6. Write and produce new content.
7. Launch the program.
8. Evaluate and refine.

Let's examine each of these steps in more detail.

1. Goals

Here we take each segment and the likely jobs-to-be-done we identified for them earlier in the process. Decide which job(s) your content needs to do at each milestone in the buyer's journey

2. Audit

A thorough content audit is a bear to tackle, but it's more than a bare necessity when you set out to develop an effective world-class content marketing program. The audit serves three purposes:

- It reveals the gaps in the content you currently have on hand, showing you what content you need to revise or update, what new content you need to develop, and how and for what audience and situation any new or updated content will be used.
- It provides a built-in process for maintaining consistent excellence in your content. The best content marketers schedule and perform regular content audits, whether the business or customer profile has changed or not. It's essential to keeping content current and effective.
- A thorough audit includes a content inventory, which lays the groundwork for creating and managing a content marketing library – essential to being able to source and publish or distribute content the minute your customer enters a new phase of the buyer's journey, actively requests information from you, or pivots from the behavior we expect, based on the signals we've identified.

In addition to evaluating the content itself, the audit should focus on how well the content marketing program is working. In this sense, the audit serves as a valuable component of your evaluation process (more about that later).

An audit of your content marketing program should explore the degree to which you

- Align content with personas and their jobs-to-be-done.
- Tailor content to customer information needs at each phase in the buyer's journey.
- Include calls to action that are appropriate to the buyer's journey and provide the means for the customer to easily respond to them.
- Utilize multiple and diverse content delivery vehicles, both offline and digital.
- Coordinate messaging, timing, and mix of content delivery vehicles to provide an integrated, seamless experience for the customer.
- Facilitate the customer moving back and forth between online and offline throughout the buyer's journey.
- Use a variety of methods to promote content (for example, various social media platforms plus multimedia advertising).
- Measure content effectiveness in multiple ways: overall, by content piece, by delivery vehicle, etc.

Based on the results, apply one of the three **R's**:

- **Refine** content that needs new or updated information
- **Repurpose** content has been successful and may be useful in another scenario
- **Retire** content that is no longer necessary or relevant

3. Messaging

Here's where your customer research data earns its keep. Use it to predict the information needs of your customer at each step of the buyer's journey, then develop messaging to facilitate interactions with your product or brand.

Contextual interactions are achieved by understanding who your customer is in the moment and matching the exact right message to her needs at that moment. Only after you have shared value with the prospective customer can you tiptoe into dialogue about doing business with you. Your content should always aim first to inform, then to dialogue, then to sell.

Articulate the essence of the message you want to deliver at each stage in the buyer's journey by persona and by customer type. At this point it doesn't have to be fancy – just get to the core of the message and the behavior you hope to elicit and let the writers work their magic.

4. Channels and Formats

It sounds simple: distributing your content via multiple channels and in multiple formats creates a "multiplier" effect. That is, the more places you plant your content, the more likely it will intersect the buyer's journey and the customer's desire to know more. This is especially true in today's marketplace, where customers often take a circuitous route from recognizing a job-to-be-done to making a purchase. Most of us can't afford to be everywhere all the time. That's why

it's more important than ever before to know the customer well enough to predict where she will go next, and to be ready to take a detour when she does.

Kasey is in the market for new eyeglasses. Her vision hasn't changed that much in the last few years, but she's bored with her frames and is looking for a way to get some snazzier specs affordably. She learns about Warby Parker from a blog written by a consumer watchdog in her city. Next day, Kasey checks out the website and invests a half hour or so browsing the site, taking a quiz, and reviewing Warby's recommended frame styles. Although she's a bit skittish about ordering glasses online, the styles look really cool. She finally takes advantage of Warby's Home Try-On offer and "checks out" 5 frames to play with in the comfort of her own home.

A few days later, the frames arrive. Kasey rejects three of them almost immediately. She vacillates between the other two, amid nagging doubts about whether she can get a good fit and an accurate prescription online. Even with the advice of her daughter and her most trusted friend, Kasey can't make up her mind. Then she learns that Warby Parker has a retail store in her town. Kasey and her friend decide to have lunch in the trendy shopping area and then stop by the Warby Parker store.

Once in the store, she's greeted by an upbeat store associate asks a few questions, then introduces her to Jen, a sales advisor who measures Kasey and then pulls the frames Kasey is considering. As Kasey tries them on, Jen tells her the story of the company, adding that, for every pair of glasses sold, Warby distributes a pair to someone in need via a non-profit that one of the company owners founded. Kasey warms to the idea of ordering. When Jen reminds Kasey of the liberal return policy, Kasey's fears are allayed. Since Jen has already entered all of Kasey's info on the iPad she is carrying, Kasey decides to make the purchase there in the store and lets Jen place the order.

Warby Parker has mastered the art of handling what is becoming the most common type of buyer's journey – one that begins digital but ends physical. These are customers doing their research online but following up with an in-store purchase. Think automobiles, cookware, bridal gowns, and tools, to name a few. In many cases the physical store becomes a training and advising center rather than a product showcase. If this is the case for your product, you'll want to provide instructional content for the store – perhaps in the form of store associate handbooks and scripts, product brochures, live or video demos, or classes.

Map out how your content will be used and where it will be placed. Start with the buyer's journey, your target segments, and the results of your content audit. Then specify the messaging, how you'll communicate it (format or vehicle), the delivery channel you'll use (website landing page, direct mail, etc.), and at which stage(s) in the buyer's journey it is potentially needed. Keep in mind that customers with identical demographics may differ in their preferred way of accessing information, so you'll want to offer the same information in multiple formats.

Omni-channel communications is a growing trend in customer-centric content marketing. It simply means offering the customer a **choice** of format for content delivery. So you might offer a white paper and give the customer a choice of viewing a video presentation, listening to a podcast, or downloading a document of the same content. With an omnichannel solution, you can meet the needs of multiple customers with the same content. Just remember that

omnichannel is from the *customer's* point of view, not yours. It doesn't mean sending me info in as many ways as you can contrive.

The table below pairs stages in the buyer's journey with potential content vehicles. It is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive – the mantra here is the right content in the right place at the right time for the individual in the moment. But this will get you started as you think about your individual customers, their buyer's journey experiences, and how to build and deploy your content library:

Content Vehicles per Buyer's Journey Stage

Buyer's Journey Stage	Typical Vehicles
Problem Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blog White paper or case study PR/Press release Infographic Direct mail or email Webinar/podcast
Information Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blog Social media posts Spec sheets & brochures White paper or case study Video Webinar/podcast Demo Live chat Support articles Radio/TV advertising Infomercial Sales presentation
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blog Social media post Spec sheets & brochures White paper or case study Video PR/Press release Direct mail or email Demo Free trial Live chat Infomercial FAQ Product sample

Buyer's Journey Stage	Typical Vehicles
Purchase	Video Live chat Direct mail or email (offer or promo) Referral Free trial/test Sales presentation Infomercial Product sample SMS (Offer)
Post-purchase Evaluation	Blog Support article/tutorial FAQ User guide PR/press release Social media News story Product reviews/testimonials Service tips "Insider" publications Direct mail (follow-up/thank you) Phone, email, SMS follow-up Customer service knowledge base/scripts

It's a delicate balance. You want to offer the customer information when and where it is needed without overwhelming and alienating the customer. So, you need to pick and choose what to deliver to which customer and when.

Marketing automation is a necessary component to marketing in this digital age. But it's one of the biggest offenders when it comes to content overload. We need the responsiveness and efficiency, but we need to be mindful of the downfalls:

- You may be marketing to a person who is simply not interested.
- You could be pushing your best targets away by delivering too much too often.

When it comes to B2B customers, it's even more of a challenge than with consumers. CRM can be your best bet (See the MarTech chapter for a description of CRM 3.0 and its benefits). When used correctly, CRM can help personalize interactions with customers and foster better customer relationships.

With both B2B and B2C audiences, send highly-targeted and specific content to a narrowed audience. Nearly 5 billion pieces of content are published every single day. Sure, it's cheap to add 1000 more direct mail pieces to a print run of 50,000. But what if those are the very

customers who have already been hit with email and billing inserts? Is your direct mail a reminder or an annoyance?

Vetting individuals that interact with your brand will give you an idea of what type of services and content they are likely to be interested in. If someone begins to visit your website frequently, displays intent on which services are of interest, and spends time engaging with your site, serve up content that matches the behavior. This could take the form of an unobtrusive “want to know more?” dialogue box, a white paper offer, or customer testimonial. Essentially, the customer is walking into your digital store and you’re asking: “how may I help you?”

5. The Content Strategy Document

At this point in the process, it makes sense to think ahead to the implementation phase of content marketing. You’ll want to document your plan so that everyone on the team understands the strategy and their roles. Here’s a sample outline; you may want to include more detail in an appendix or companion document:

Content Strategy Document Outline

Purpose

Identify the product or service and the situation, issue, or goal that justifies a content marketing program.

Project Overview

Describe the scope of the project and what it is designed to accomplish. You may want to include project milestones.

Audience

Describe target customers, along with any pertinent demographic information or associated personas. You'll also want to cite the job(s)-to-be-done here.

Research and Voice of the Customer

Share information about the data you have captured and any customer interviews, surveys, feedback, or other relevant information about jobs-to-be-done and the buyer's journey.

Competitive Considerations

Is the content marketing program being developed in response to some action by competitors? What is our competition and what is our strategy for addressing their current position and anything they might do in response to our program?

For digital content, it's helpful to include things like website pages affected, SEO and accessibility considerations, any technical assumptions or needs, impacts on site architecture, and so on.

Legal Considerations

Will you need to have content reviewed by corporate attorneys? Allowing for these reviews is especially important in regulated and high-profile industries, and it almost always takes more time than anticipated, so be sure to factor that into your project plan and timetable.

Success Measures

Include specifics on how and when you will measure success of the program.

Maintenance and Follow-up

For digital, as well as for content involving time-sensitive components like limited-time offers, you'll need a plan for managing and updating or removing out-of-date content. As an example, say you're adding content to your company website's Home page announcing a new product offering. At some point you'll need to remove the "new" references. Be sure to plan for content updates when product enhancements or line extensions occur.

6. Content

We come to the main event: writing and producing content that will get your brand or product hired. It's a lot like conducting a job search for yourself. You research companies and listings and choose the open positions that best align with your experience and skills to get the job done. Then comes the inquiry or interview, where the employer (your prospective customer) asks for more information. Depending on your field and expertise, you put together the appropriate content – resume, work samples, success stories, references, and so on. So it is with content development. When a prospective buyer asks if you have a white paper, it needs to be waiting in your content library, buttoned up and ready to go in whatever format your customer prefers. Compelling content streamlines the conversation and helps the customer see your product getting his or her job done successfully.

Here are eight ways to exceed customer expectations with more Consentric Content

1. **Engage.** Score a positive first impression by establishing a connection right at the outset. Do this by asking a question or sharing an anecdote or success story. A story can be the vessel carrying your message. When choosing a story, you'll want to make sure to tell it like a story (as opposed to a documentary), make it credible, and help the audience see themselves in the story, ideally as the main character. Choose the right tone based on the targeted phase in the buyer's journey, the customer characteristics, the medium or vehicle, and your brand voice.
2. **Personalize.** Personalization goes beyond using the customer's name in the subject line of an email. It means listening to the customer first as a person and then as a prospective customer: asking how you may help before you assume anything. Your job as a marketer is to listen to how and when the customer wants to engage and then be ready to respond and understand all of the conversations. The more successful you are at delivering content that is created just for the individual customer in his or her one-to-moment experience, the more successful you will be at developing a long-term profitable relationship with that customer.
3. **Focus.** Remember your primary message and make it your focal point. This is especially important in digital communications, where the audience's attention span is even more limited than in other mediums. Visit Casper's website Home page (<https://casper.com/>), and then visit those of mainline mattress companies. What's the focal point? If in doubt close your eyes as you load the page. When you open them, what's the first thing you see? A couple blissfully sleeping in a bed with a message about the best rest you've ever had, or a bare mattress surrounded by whitespace and bold sales copy? And be sure to stick to the targeted step in the buyer's journey – no scope creep into other buyer's journey steps until the buyer says he's ready.
4. **Address the job-to-be-done.** Funny how so many marketers forego an opportunity and dance around the job-to-be-done. Don't make the customer work too hard. Tell them how your product or service helps them get the job done for the targeted stage in the buyer's journey. Casper does it beautifully:

Better sleep, better everything:

*Award-winning mattresses
and sleep products for your best rest.*

5. **Get to the point.** Don't waste the customer's time, and don't be afraid to give critical details that are pertinent to the buyer's journey stage. If the customer is at the purchase decision-making stage, she'll definitely want to see pricing and shipping charges.
6. **Anticipate.** If "Frequently Asked Questions" are questions that are asked frequently, why not just answer them in the place the customer expects to find that information? Reserve FAQ for complex answers and quick reference. Put yourself in the buyer's shoes and head off questions and objections.
7. **Facilitate** conversation. Give the customer quick, easy, and intuitive ways to reach you and continue the conversation. And make sure your operations are set up to harvest customer interactions and respond or direct them to someone who will – pronto.
8. **Be patient.** Calls to action are important. But until you get clear buying signals, make sure you are offering multiple interaction options in case she's not ready yet.

7. Launch

Testing is always a good idea. Presumably you did some testing in drafting your content messaging. Even informal testing beats none at all.

Digital is the place where A/B testing can be a must, especially since we are attempting to read customer signals and anticipate information needs. Consider testing subject lines, headlines, images, CTAs, and any offers. And don't forget to test timing for email delivery, especially if your company sends out mail for multiple products.

SME blessings in hand. Testing and tweaking done. Approvals secured. Response mechanisms in place. Your content is ready for publication and delivery.

8. Evaluate and refine

In the content marketing strategy document, you outline the ways your team will measure success. Be sure to follow through! You'll want to be fastidious about conducting regular content audits, evaluating results using relevant traditional measures, reviewing data, and acting on results. But you should also be using newer, non-traditional methods of assessing success.

Today there are more options, more channels, and more content vying for our attention than ever before. That trend, coupled with the spread of ad blocking technology, gives consumers not just power in terms of having information accessible, but choice with respect to what they allow onto their radar screens.

When evaluating the success of content marketing programs, consider these new and novel metrics for assessing performance:

ROA (Return on Attention)
ROI (Return on Information)
ROS (Return on Skills)

Return on Attention has three components for the customer:

1. To achieve more of what is valuable and meaningful for each unit of time spent.
2. To make the time spent as engaging and enjoyable as possible.
3. To reduce the amount of time spent wherever possible unless it contributes significantly to the value received.

To break through the noise, the pressure is now on companies to strategize how to hold on to a customer's time and attention. One way is to help the customer learn faster, so less time is required to accomplish tasks and get jobs done. Another is to unleash creativity in designing physical store spaces and customer experiences. When a vendor knows how much it needs to spend to get a unit of attention from a customer, the vendor will know more about the customer than they ever did with traditional transaction-based models. This learning can be used to become even more helpful to the consumer.

Return on Information takes ROA to the next logical step. It addresses how much value the consumer receives for whatever information she provides to a vendor about herself. From the vendor perspective the question becomes how much revenue can be generated from the information the vendor receives about the customer. If marketers focus on delivering value without expectation of return, they will need to learn how to balance the cost of providing information with the need to be patient about asking for information in return from the customer.

Return on skills considers the increasing pressure on consumers to develop greater skills both in terms of picking the right products and services and, equally importantly, in getting as much value from them once they have been purchased. As a marketer you have a role in that process – paying attention to customer feedback, constantly updating and improving support content, and providing excellent service after the sale. When you take an active role in helping the customer learn how to extract the most value from your product and your relationship, you'll reap the benefits of long-term loyalty and repeat business.

Conclusion

Making your content more Consentric is a daunting task. It requires a new way of thinking about content. It is:

- Underpinned by a refined customer-centric philosophy that goes far beyond paying mere lip service to the claim like “we put the customer first”, when the subtle message sent to customers every day is “this company is more important than you are”.
- It is designed to serve customers when they enter into a specific stage of their buyer’s journey. When customers are researching their problem, they are not interested in a comparison of features and benefits of your company versus competitors. When they near the acquisition phase of their journey, however, feature comparison tools can be very helpful.
- It is designed and refined based on research. What works for the consumers of your content? What makes some content pieces so much more attractive than others?
- It delivers a payoff. How purchases are facilitated by website content?

* * *

For more information or to start a personal conversation, [email us](#).

We welcome [your comments](#) about this post.

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