



CREATING CONVERSATIONS

*MAKING CONTENT MARKETING WORK FOR
YOUR BRAND*

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INTRODUCTION

“Traditional marketing talks at people. Content marketing talks with them.”

For the past decade, digital content has dominated as the primary form of media consumption, easily eclipsing print, TV and radio. A 2014 Isobar report has predicted that by 2020 digital media will comprise 80% of media usage globally (compared with 50% in 2007 and 66% in 2010).

This digital revolution has shifted the balance of power between businesses and consumers. Customer expectations have changed and they’re now setting the agenda in terms of how they interact with brands, research their options and make purchasing decisions.

Now that audiences are faced with more choices than ever before, brands need a more sophisticated approach to stand out from the competition – and relevant, consumable content is the new currency to fulfil this by providing tangible added value and a satisfying customer experience.

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING EXACTLY?

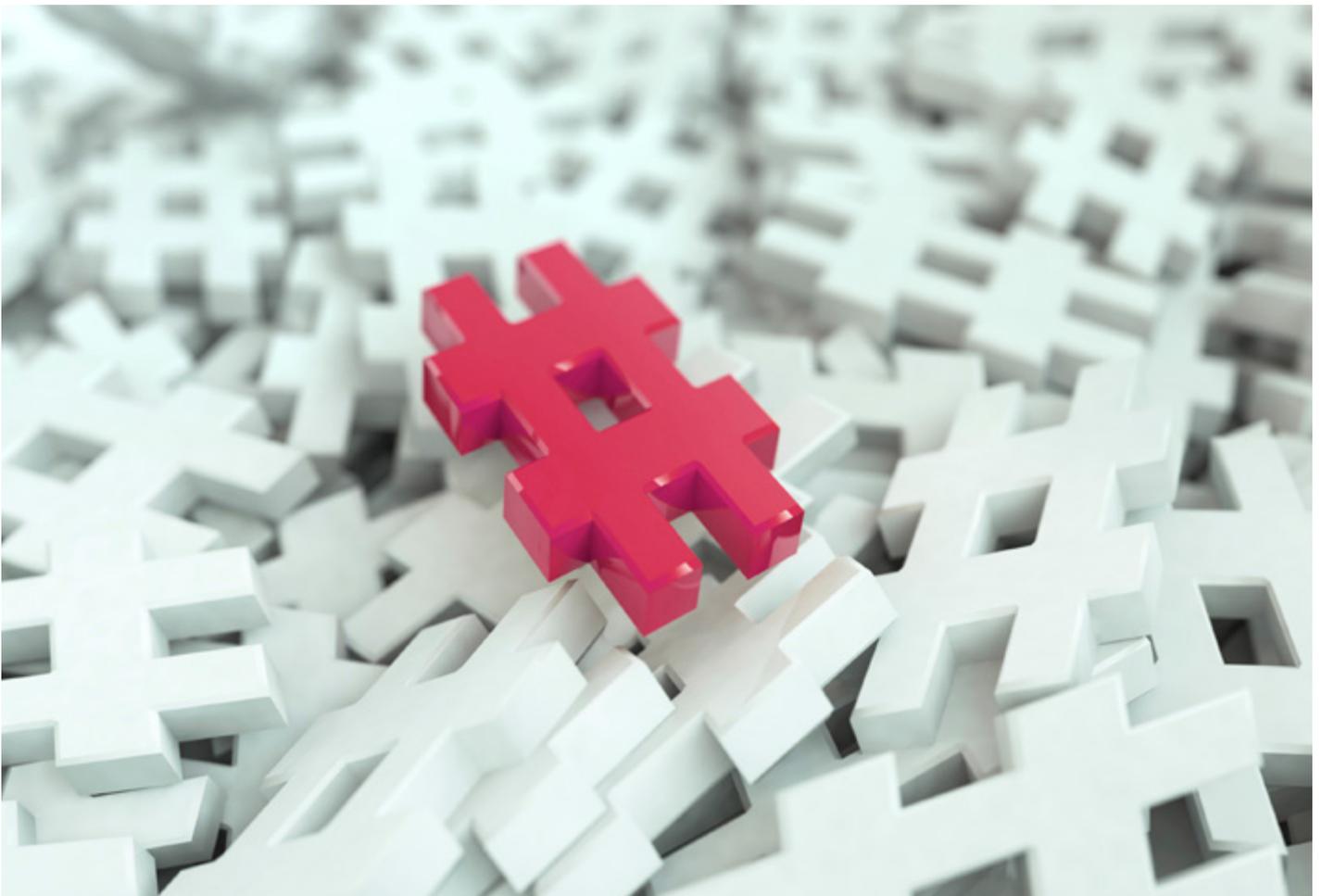
A short definition is:

“the creation and sharing of valuable, engaging content in order to acquire and retain customers”.

In other words, content marketing is an inbound technique that focuses on the customer’s needs: the aim is to empower customers to make their own decisions with content that educates, inspires and entertains, rather than taking a pushy, interruptive, sales-orientated approach.

According to the Content Marketing Association, it’s now the single biggest channel in the marketing mix and an industry worth more than £4bn in the UK alone. It’s also cost effective: according to consultancy Demand Metric, content marketing generates about three times as many leads as traditional marketing and it costs 62% less.

This eBook explains how you can use content marketing effectively to reach customers and influence their choices, and ultimately grow your business.



PROBLEMS ARE A CONTENT MARKETER'S FRIEND

... because helping customers to solve them provides a basis for offering useful content.

When you have a burning question you need an answer to or want to research a way to do something, where's the first place you look? You might ask the person sitting next to you or phone your mum, but the next place most people will turn to is the internet to Google it. It's such an automatic and engrained response that we use the search engine's name as a verb in our everyday vocabulary.

People have immediate access to information that solves their problems or answers their questions, providing you with an opportunity to step in and provide a solution.

Marketing has always been about emphasising how your brand can help people become more successful and enhance their life. But, while the old school focus has been on making a sale, content marketing emphasises building relationships by adding value and delivering a satisfying customer experience long before the sales stage.

Identify the problems and challenges faced by your audience: what do they feel is holding them back from achieving success, or stopping them from reaching their goal? Identify how to provide them with information that offers a solution or a means of improving their circumstances, and you've unlocked the basis of your strategy.



PROBLEMS ARE A CONTENT MARKETER'S FRIEND

CONTINUED

The nature and complexity of customer problems - whether it's how to apply make-up or selecting the best pension option - will vary enormously between markets and businesses, but the process remains the same.

As an example, a business that offers cheap family breaks could create content that solves related problems, such as:

- 10 ways to keep the kids amused on a car trip (blog post list)
- The best way to pack a suitcase (infographic)
- Skip the salon - pre-holiday beauty treatments on a budget (video)

You're not haggling for a sale or commitment at this point, but acknowledging that you understand their needs and providing tangible evidence - a taster - of your brand's expertise and capability.

Think of it as offering a taster of what they can expect should you choose to become a customer in the future, or become a repeat customer if you've already done business.



PUT AUTHENTICITY FIRST

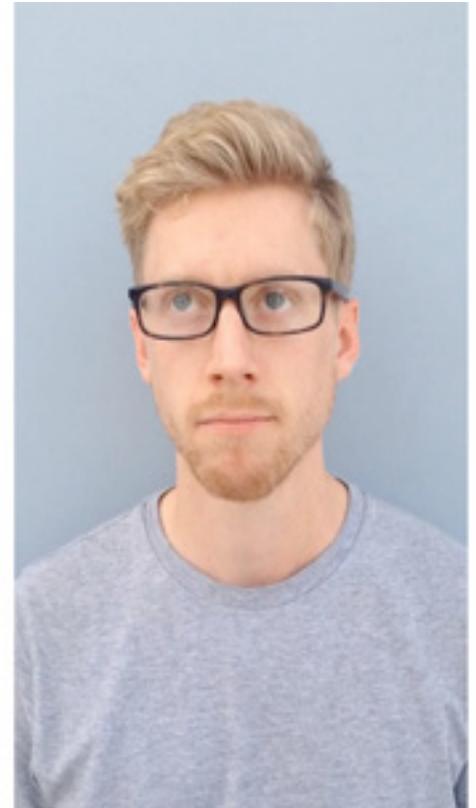
Testing...testing. Is this thing on? (Yes Mike, it's on...)

Mike is the chap who sent the entire Inbound.org community that empty 'test' email last week. He's truly sorry for interrupting your inbox, but sorry doesn't cut it around here.

It's up to you whether to forgive or punish him. Choose now, but choose wisely...

Forgive Mike

Punish Mike



This email from Inbound.org is a great example of a brand not only willing to admit to a mistake, but also turn it into a great piece of content: honest, amusing and even interactive!

If old school marketing is about carefully stage-managing an audience's perception of your brand, think of content marketing as giving customers a peek of what's happening backstage. Open, honest and willing to share the tricks of your trade.

Authenticity is what will differentiate your brand and make your messages memorable – sincerity is a powerful quality that creates trust.

Remember that content doesn't need to be overtly branded or feel like advertising. The aim is to strike a balance between showcasing your brand and offering engaging, helpful content that encourages people to take action.

CREATE A VOICE FOR YOUR BRAND

A distinctive, consistent voice is one of the hallmarks of a successful, recognisable brand. Think of Gillette’s masculine, empowering tone of voice in tag lines such as “Live life on the edge” and “The best a man can get”. Or the quirky, irreverent tone of Innocent Drinks: (on the underneath of a carton) “Stop looking at my bottom”.

Aim to develop a brand personality that appeals to your target market, and reinforces the image and values you wish to convey.



TELL YOUR STORY

This is a common phrase used in relation to content marketing that means sharing narratives about your business – its objectives, history, people, plans for the future, and perhaps the odd anecdote – that demonstrates your core values and brings your brand to life. Here’s [Click Consult’s story](#).

CONTENT AND SEO:

HOW DOES CONTENT MARKETING IMPROVE YOUR ONLINE SEARCH VISIBILITY?

As well as raising brand awareness, building trust and credibility for your brand and creating connections with customers, the quality and relevance of your content is a major influencing factor for SEO.

As Google aims to return the most relevant and useful results to answer users' queries, the brands that rank highly in search results are those which provide a great customer experience by regularly publishing unique, customer-focused content.

When your assets are shared, this helps to spread your message and increase brand awareness. The higher the relevance and quality of those shares, the greater the chance your content gets seen by the right audience, and attracts the right kind of traffic.

Using outreach to build high-quality links

Content also has an important role to play in helping to create genuine, organic inbound links from influential and trustworthy sources: another important SEO factor.

Outreach is the process of identifying these influencers and offering them great content for them to publish or share, with an inbound link to your site.

Outreach is about maximising the amplification of your content through:

- Earning links to your site through useful and remarkable content
- Building relationships with 'influencers' – websites and writers that operate in your niche
- Identifying topics and content types that will appeal to their readership
- Establishing yourself as an industry thought leader/authority and a source of great content

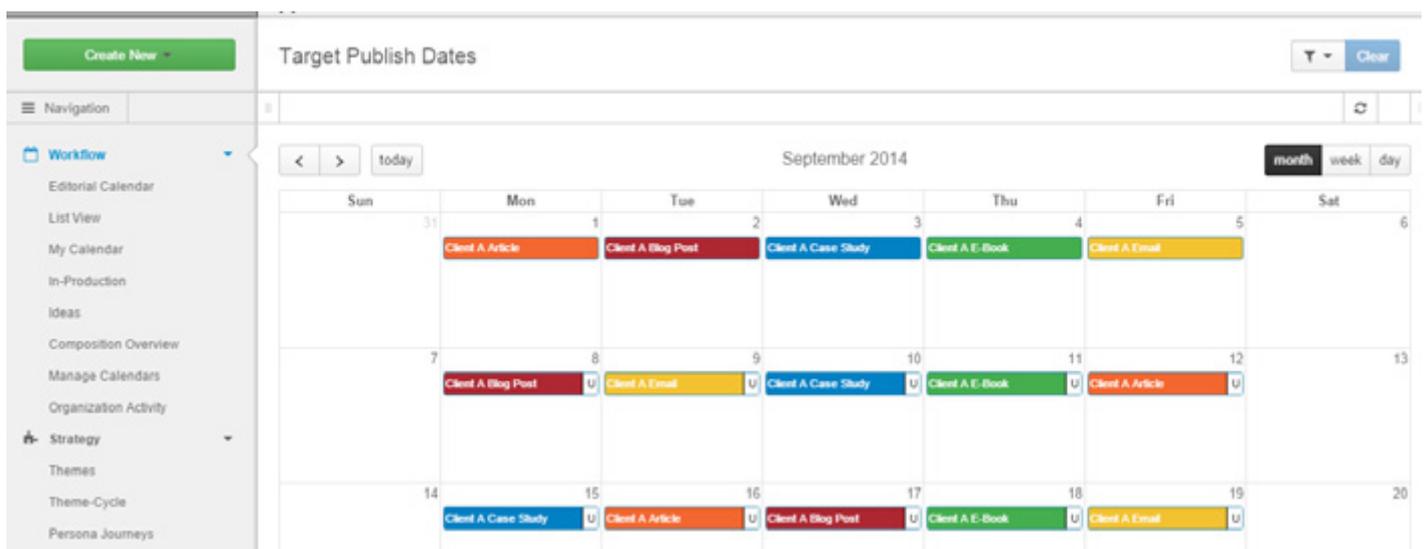
Our eBook [Link Building Through Outreach](#) covers this subject in more detail.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING (BRILLIANT CONTENT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT)

In a survey on content culture in Europe, content marketers identified the lack of a clear strategy as the number one barrier to their success. When you consider the significant time and effort required to create and distribute content effectively, it's no surprise that marketers without a plan come unstuck. A documented plan gives you focus and direction, and allows you to:

- Ensure consistent brand messaging
- Align content activity with your marketing calendar
- Allocate your resources more effectively
- Coordinate the different departments or individuals involved
- Identify gaps and inspire new ideas

Your plan can be as simple or as detailed as you need it to be, as long as it provides you with structure and focus and is flexible enough to allow for ad hoc opportunities and changing priorities.



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING CONTINUED

Identify what you want to achieve

First things first. Before you unleash your inner creativity and start putting your ideas into action, remember that success is impossible without first clarifying your objectives. What messages do you want to communicate and image do you want to convey? What behaviour do you want to drive? What action do you want customers to take? How will you measure success?

Your content marketing objectives need to be aligned with with your business' overall commercial goals and support your wider marketing strategy. Common objectives include increasing traffic to your website; driving conversions (sales, sign-ups etc); and creating brand awareness.

Know your audience

If you miss out any part of the planning and research stage, make sure it's not this bit. To hit the mark with your content, you really need to know your audience inside out. Every piece of information you can gather about your audience is gold dust that will help you to:

- Identify customers' values, goals, challenges and interests
- Create engaging content that meets their needs
- Deliver it in the optimum format, place and time

You probably already have a clear picture of your target market's demographics. If, like many marketers, you've created buyer personas, which give a snapshot of your target customers' purchasing patterns, interests, motivations, and challenges, now's the time to dig them out.

Any existing research will form an excellent basis for you to dig a little deeper into your customers' online behaviour and identify the right topics, formats and distribution methods for your content.

Questions to answer:

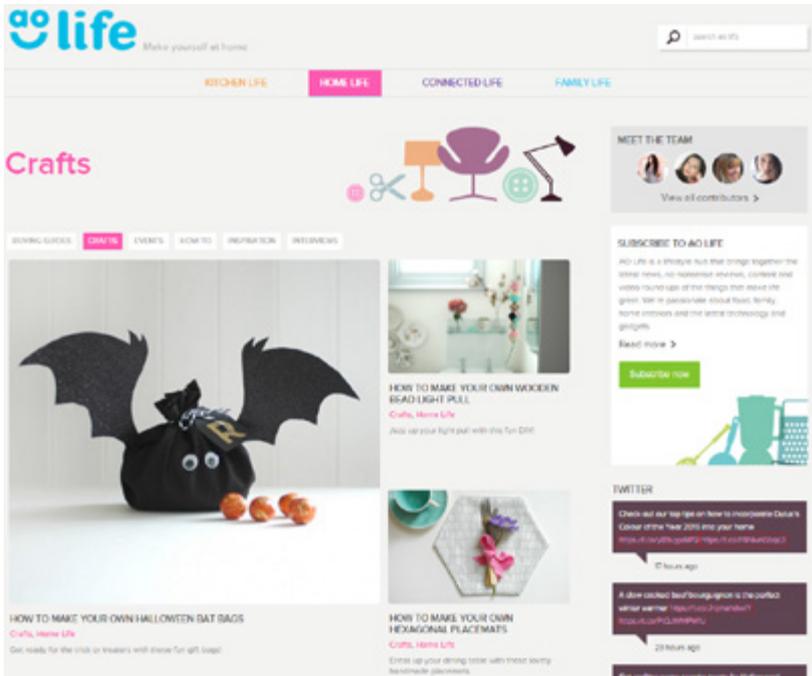
- How do they use the internet? Which platforms and channels do they use? When are they active online (times/days/frequency)? Knowing where and when they hang out online will help you to determine the best methods of distribution for your content.
- Which brands do they follow? Are they members of any groups or forums? How do they interact with or share content? How do they interact or share? This will help you to identify the type of content that resonates, in terms of preferred format, length, tone of voice, etc.

Treat your research as an ongoing process; it's important to keep your finger on the pulse to pick up on emerging trends, find inspiration and act on new opportunities.

Content marketing can work for any business and industry

Content marketing isn't reserved for brands with a glamorous or aspirational offering. With a little ingenuity, it's possible for any business to serve up compelling content. In fact, it could be the industries traditionally perceived as 'dry' that would benefit the most from a fresh approach.

AO.COM: CREATING ELECTRIC CONTENT



Few people would consider white goods exciting, or an inspiring subject for creating content. However, ao.com (formerly known as Appliances Online) is a good example of a brand that has thought outside of the box to come up with engaging content, including practical guidance that's relevant to its customer base.



Where ao.com particularly excels is in its social media content and strategy, creating a buzz with a fun, interactive approach that has helped to build an online community and promote brand trust. Its Facebook strategy alone has achieved a 60% boost in branded search traffic.

GUITAR CENTER: STRIKING AN EMOTIONAL CHORD

Guitar Center, a leading retailer of musical instruments in the US, has won awards for the content it creates for its YouTube channel (and leverages across several social channels). It runs a number of successful, high profile competitions, such as the Search for the Next Great American Singer-Songwriter and the Annual Drum-off, alongside music tutorials (both online and instore), regular podcasts promoting new artistes and its own TV station. With a constant stream of fresh videos, the compelling element of competition, and consistent, high-value content that's perfectly matched to its audience and platforms, Guitar Center already ticks all of the content marketing boxes.

But more than this, Guitar Center's approach appeals to the passion people have for music, offering a meaningful experience and inspiring them to participate. Creating an emotional reaction like this is a powerful way to influence and persuade (buying decisions are based on 20% logic and 80% emotion).



Appropriately, the company's tagline is *"All we sell is the greatest feeling on earth"*.

6 WAYS TO FIND INSPIRATION FOR IRRESISTIBLE CONTENT

There are no excuses for relying on guesswork when you have all of these free resources at your fingertips:

- ***Start by mining your brand's own exclusive knowledge and insider tips***

Your own industry expertise means you're already an authoritative source of information for those who work outside of your industry, even if your role isn't customer-facing (think how often your friends and family ask you for advice based on your job or industry, as well as the times you've offered them an unsolicited professional opinion down the pub or at a dinner party). Add to that the collective experience and knowhow of everyone else in your business, and you'll find your brand is sitting on an existing wealth of valuable insights just waiting to be channelled into consumable content assets.

- ***Google Adwords Keyword Planner***

Intended primarily as a resource for paid search (PPC) marketers, it's also a secret goldmine of topic ideas. What's more, you can use it to research and track the volume of searches carried out for specific keywords, and help generate traffic from search engines. Also check out Google Trends.

- ***Monitor social media activity***

LinkedIn Groups are excellent for exploring popular topics and discussions among the B2B community, or take advantage of Twitter's powerful search function to search for relevant hashtags and uncover trends. Pay attention to the characteristics of the posts your target audience chooses to share.

- ***Keep an eye on your competitors***

Learning from competitor activity is second nature to every marketer. Sign up for their newsletters, follow them on social media and dip into their blog regularly. Look critically at both what they are doing well and where there's room for improvement and use this to refine your own content tactics.

- ***Survey your audience***

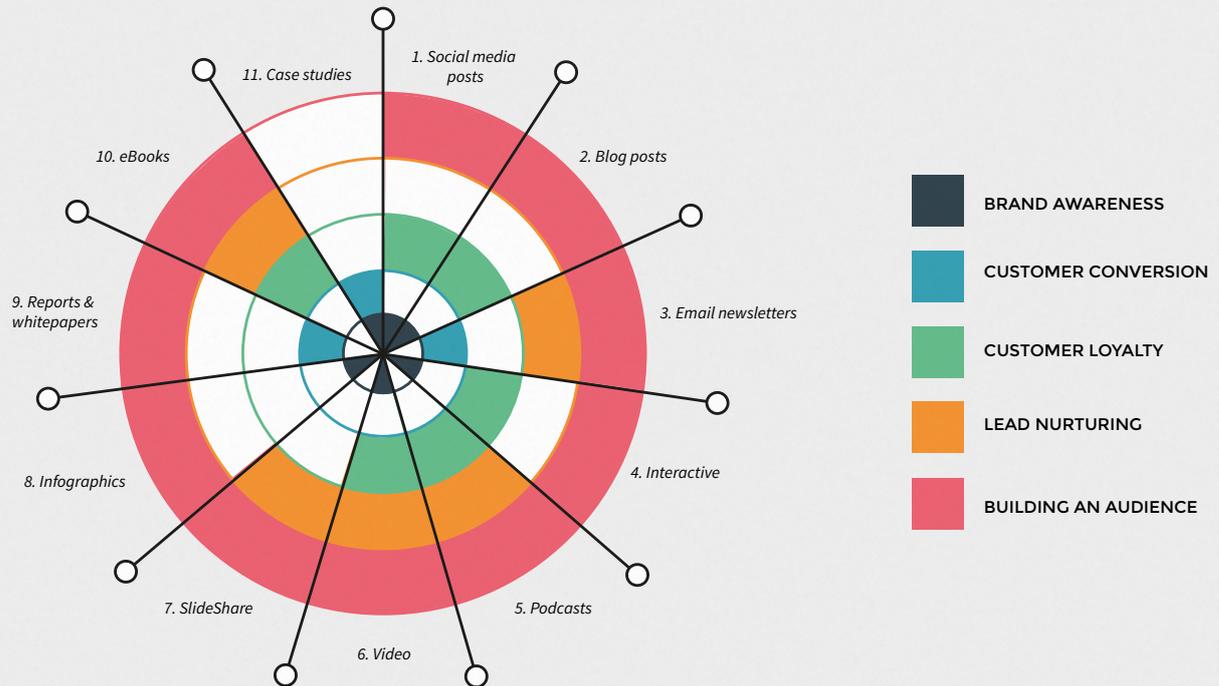
Take the direct approach and ask existing and potential customers about the kind of content they'd like to see using tools such as SurveyMonkey or Google Consumer Surveys. Ask colleagues who regularly interact with customers and potential leads, especially those involved in sales/business development and account management, about the most commonly-asked questions, concerns or reservations raised, and barriers to conversion.

- ***Keep experimenting and testing***

Don't be afraid to experiment with new ideas and approaches. Measure the impact of each piece of content so that you can do more of what works.

CHOOSING A FORMAT

One of the most useful ways of classifying the types of content is to align them with the objectives they're most commonly used to fulfil.



TYPE OF CONTENT

1. Social media posts

Connecting with your audience via a third party platform, such as Twitter or Pinterest; typically includes a link to your website

2. Blog posts

Eg, 'how to', lists, opinion-led pieces, newsjacks (tying your brand to a current news item)

3. Email newsletters

A regular digest of your best content sent to the inboxes of customers who opt to receive them

4. Interactive

Branded quizzes, games or tools that provide the customer with a tangible outcome

5. Podcasts

Content in an audio format; allow audiences to access info 'on the go'

6. Videos

Allow a more detailed demonstration of products/benefits/advice

7. SlideShare

PowerPoint-style presentations containing key points

8. Infographics

Graphic representations of information designed to highlight key data and make concepts quick & easy to understand

9. Reports & whitepapers

Research-led long-form content offering facts, stats and industry insights

10. eBooks

Downloadable, in-depth information and/or guidance covering a specific topic

11. Case studies

Real-life examples of how your business solved a customer problem, often including a customer testimonial

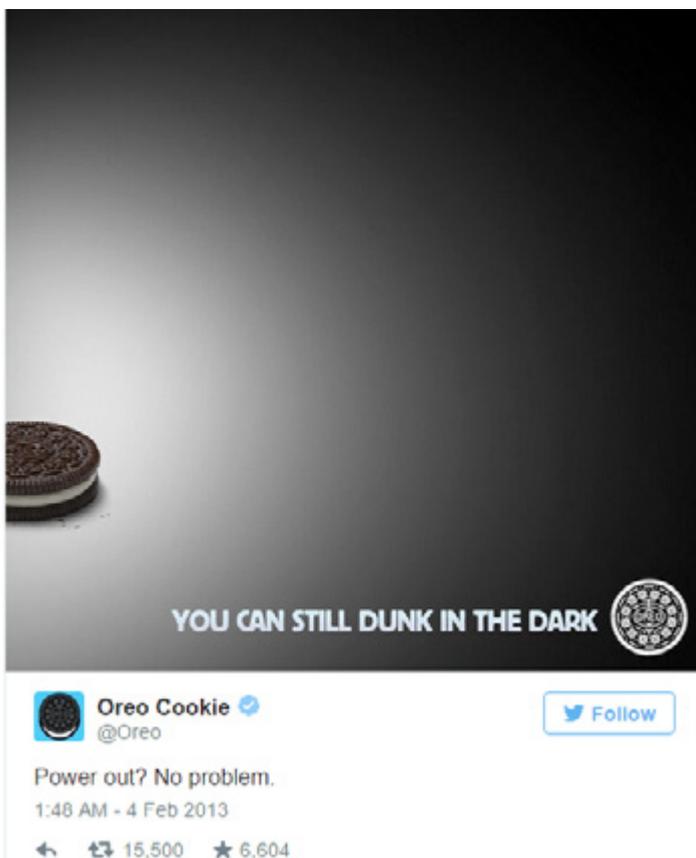
Give particular consideration to...

Evergreen content offers advice or information that's not overly time sensitive and tends to be created specifically as a substantial, definitive resource that will build readership over time.

Evergreen content takes more time to produce than other forms, but retains its relevance and value over a longer period.

Useful for generating leads (businesses will often capture customer data by asking people to sign up for email updates in return for accessing premium content), building brand authority or retaining customer loyalty, it's also very SEO friendly. For more SEO guidance, download our [Simple Guide to SEO](#) eBook (which also happens to be a great example of evergreen content).

Shorter-form content, such as social media updates and most blog posts, is most effective when you want to generate a quick buzz, often by jumping on a trending topic. With this type of real-time marketing, timing is everything.



Probably the best known example is Oreo's Dunk in the Dark tweet following news of a blackout at the US Super Bowl in 2013, which created real-time marketing magic with a clever, brand-relevant and perfectly-timed response.

Visual content, such as infographics, videos and SlideShare presentations, is a powerful way to convey your message as our brains process visual information more effectively than text alone. Producing imagery and video may require a few extra skills, but there are lots of online resources available, such as Infogr.am, Canva.com, and YouTube Editor, that can help you.

Repurposing makes the most efficient use of your resources

Taking the content you've produced and finding new ways to present and publish it allows you to extend your content's reach, maximise its value, and share it a greater number of times across a wider range of media platforms.

An example in practice could be to produce an in-depth whitepaper you've produced, then:

- Pull out interesting stats and present as an infographic
- Distil the top-level messages into a SlideShare presentation
- Adapt parts of it into a vlog or podcast
- Focus on the key points over a series of blog posts

BE WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE IS

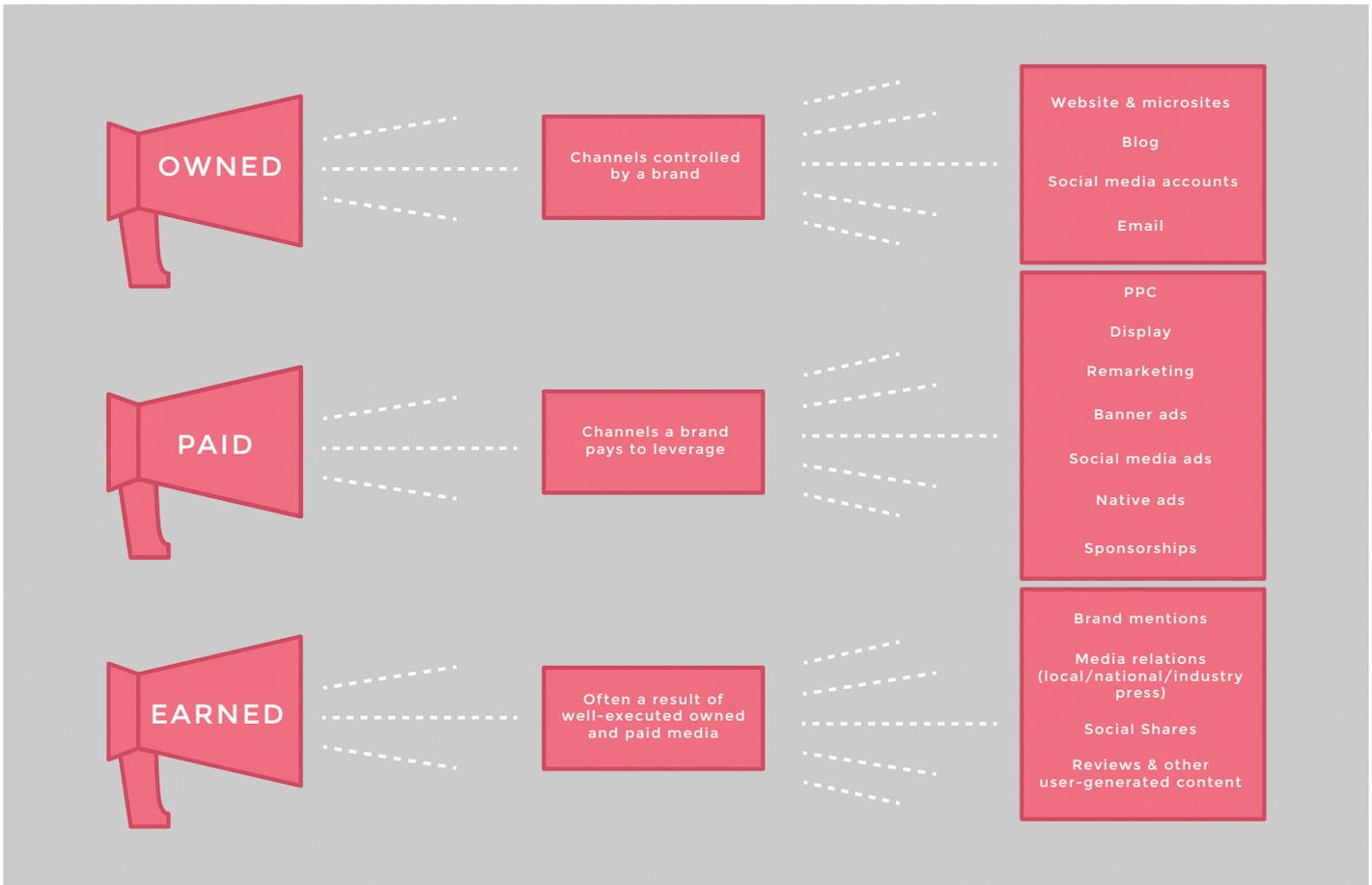
In the offline world, stores employ people specifically to ensure their products are displayed in the most visually appealing way possible and seen by the maximum number of customers. Visual merchandising is viewed as an essential element of product promotion, and is a career, and an industry, in its own right.

However, the importance of choosing the most appropriate distribution methods can often be under played when it comes to online content. But publishing vaguely-relevant content arbitrarily across numerous channels is unlikely to achieve the results you're looking for or help to build a trusting relationship with your customers. When you've invested time and effort in creating remarkable content, why miss the opportunity to maximise its exposure and impact?

*"Spend as much time on content promotion as you did with creating a piece of content." Lindsay Thibeault (@LindsayRegina),
Principal Inbound Professor at the HubSpot Academy*

Make sure your carefully created content gets the attention it deserves by using the findings of your research to target the right audience, in the right place, at the right time.

Your content distribution and promotion options fall broadly into one of the three categories of owned, earned or paid media. Decide which channel, or combination of channels, are most relevant to your audience and best showcases your content.



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT CONTENT

- *Starts conversations:*

It provokes a reaction, whether that's contacting your company for more information, visiting your website to make a purchase, or sharing it on social media. The best content has the 'shareability' factor, which spreads your brand's message further with your customers doing the work for you. It's an important feature in content marketing as people are more likely to trust recommendations from people they know than from a company. It's also easy to measure on social media platforms and therefore used by many marketers as a success metric.

- *Offers real value:*

While the ultimate objective is, in the words of the Content Marketing Institute, to "drive profitable customer action", this shouldn't be your only goal. Content marketing isn't simply about pushing a sales message: your content needs to be well-researched, high quality and offer unique benefits.

In the words of Christopher Ian Bennett, VP of Communications at US brand Guitar Center, which has won multiple awards for its content: "Brands should have the goal of creating true content that is standalone and successful outside of their [commercial] offering."

- *Is relevant to your target market:*

Think about how much information you're bombarded with online – what makes you stop and take notice? To engage people's attention, your content needs to offer something that's both original and that really appeals to your audience's interests. The format, platform and timing are just as important as the subject matter (the how, where and when); the key to success is relevancy. This is why it's so important to know your customer.

- *Cultivates relationships:*

Rather than going after a short-term win, such as making a quick sale, successful content marketing focuses on the long game of building up trust and awareness, so that your brand is front-of-mind when a customer decides to make a purchase.

ANALYSE, EVALUATE & REPEAT

- Measure success against the specific goals you set out in your content marketing strategy
- Regularly monitor and record a summary of performance metrics using Google Analytics (useful metrics include web traffic, conversions, social media shares)
- Keep reviewing and re-evaluating your approach

As well as keeping your performance on-track, this data will allow you to demonstrate to stakeholders the value and ROI of your content marketing activity.

Keep in mind that you're unlikely to see instant results; content marketing is long term commitment and a slow burn process which requires patience and a consistent approach, not a one-off activity or an ad hoc tactic.

CREATING CONVERSATIONS

WHAT?



PROBLEMS



AUTHENTICITY



BRAND VOICE



STORYTELLING

HOW?



PLANNING



INSPIRATION



FORMAT

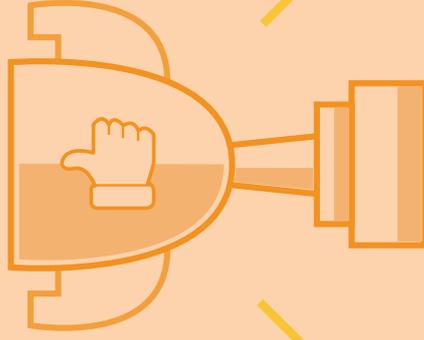


AUDIENCE

ANALYSE

EVALUATE

REPEAT



GREAT CONTENT!

GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY!

Our content marketing team works with clients to develop and deliver consistent, valuable content that helps to drive organic performance and supports overall online visibility, brand and messaging.

Contact us today on **0845 366 7589** to discuss how we could work together to take your strategy to the next level...

Our website features an online resources section, full of useful [eBooks](#). We also write a [blog](#), where you can find an abundance of search marketing tips. If you're feeling social, get in touch on [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

Our Accreditations



