

Content Marketing in the Document Industry What's it All About?

Companies that sell products and services in the document industry are having a tough time - especially the small to medium size vendors. Competing with larger players and their promotional programs, incentives, and advertising campaigns can make it difficult to get noticed.

In a tight market, the larger companies have an advantage. They have the resources to promote their brand and let prospective customers know about their latest products.

Fortunately for smaller vendors, there is another path to customer trust and consideration that is affordable. One way to level the playing field is by effectively exploiting the concept of content marketing.

What Is Content Marketing?

Also known as branded content, *content marketing* involves understanding what your target market wants to know and then delivering that information to them in a relevant manner. Think of content marketing as an opportunity to educate your potential customers – to give them the information they will need to enable them to be comfortable doing business with you. By beginning a relationship with prospects before you even know they are interested in your product you make it easier for them to buy from you when they are ready.

Content marketing is used to establish your company as a trusted source of valuable information – an organization that understands the needs and challenges of its customers. Once you are established as a trusted information source, you have a good chance of becoming a trusted source of products or services.

All companies, regardless of their size or their budget, can take advantage of the benefits that content marketing can provide. This strategy is an equalizer that helps vendors with great products but scarce resources compete with larger contenders.

It sounds like it should be easy. But just as with anything of value, producing and distributing branded content takes skill and persistence. Companies who sell their goods to document service providers are set up to develop solutions and sell products, not for creating compelling editorial content.



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Not Usually a Do-It-Yourself Project

Most successful B2B marketers outsource their content projects. They are busy figuring out how to bring products to market, sell them, and provide after-sale service. There is no time to research, write, and publish articles that address the prospective customer's informational needs - months before the sale. Getting help from outside your organization is a smart move. Doing so makes it unnecessary to distract key individuals from other important tasks. If you can find someone who has knowledge of your products and experience in the document industry to create your content, that's even better.



This strategy of outsourcing content management to an expert is especially valuable to small organizations where the subject matter expert might also be responsible for product development, sales, installation, and technical support. Writing articles is obviously not the best use of time for these valuable people.

Ironically these key individuals may be used to having to do everything themselves. They are often founders of the company. The thought of turning work over to someone else may never occur to them. Consequentially the task to write informative articles is buried on a to-do list of substantial length. Although intentions are good, the writing never gets done.

Another mistake organizations often make is waiting "until the time is right." While poor writing is probably worse than no writing, perfection is not necessary. Take the steps now to make a plan and then start executing. You can refine as you go. Remember that many of the technologies that come into play in an effective content marketing program such as social media, video, and webinars are relatively new and constantly changing. There are no distinctly right and wrong ways to do things. As long as you use common sense, create quality content, and keep an eye on your objectives, your content marketing plan should yield results.

For Best Results: Plan and Coordinate

Of course a plan is essential. Make sure that your content marketing activities are in sync with your overall marketing plan and develop a schedule of when you'll release written pieces and through which channels. Consistency is a huge success factor. Just as in advertising, a single article or even a slew of them all at once followed by no



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activity is not as effective as a steady stream of exposure for your company over a long period of time.

Content marketing programs fail as often from poor execution as from lack of content. Companies frequently start out with a plan but are unable to follow through. If resources are an issue you can start small and then build out to additional channels or formats.

Branded content may be used to your advantage in a number of different channels and formats. Here are a few of the common tactics that you might consider using:

- **ARTICLES** – These can vary in length, depending on the topic and the channel. Articles can appear in print magazines, online magazines, or newsletters.
- **E-NEWSLETTERS** – Newsletters should be sent only to subscribers and must include opt-out or unsubscribe options. Not following the rules is not only unprofessional, it is against the law.
- **PRINT NEWSLETTERS** – These are useful if your audience doesn't have regular internet access, such as field technicians or frequent travelers.
- **WHITE PAPERS** – These are usually 6-12 pages long and can be effective ways to communicate complicated ideas or concepts. White papers can also be called research papers or briefs.
- **WEBINARS/TELESEMINARS** – A good way to get feedback from customers. Always record them so those who registered can access the content at their convenience.
- **CASE STUDIES** – Usually only a couple of pages in length, case studies are great ways to build credibility through real life success stories.
- **BLOGS** – The key to success with blogs is to make the entries brief but to add new posts on a frequent basis and keep to a theme. If you allow comments on your blog you may get some valuable customer reaction to your thoughts. But don't count on it. There is plenty of competition for blog readers. In many cases, blogs are most useful for improving your ranking in search results.
- **QUIZZES/SURVEYS** – These are great ways to encourage interaction with your customers and can be a gold mine of valuable information. Make them short and provide feedback instantly if possible.
- **MICROBLOGS (TWITTER)** – Best used to point readers to more lengthy content on your web site or blog.



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What to Write?

When it comes to content, the quality of your material must be at least as good as what is available elsewhere. This includes the subject matter as well as technical details such as spelling and grammar. Poorly-written content reflects worse on your company than no content at all. If you are not a writer then outsource the task to someone who has experience.

Remember to keep the content focused on the customer, not on your company or your products. Content marketing is not the same as product marketing. It's not all about features and benefits. But it is marketing. The pieces have a purpose beyond pure education and that is to encourage a specific behavior or action by the reader. Depending on the channel, the clues as to what behavior is desired may be more or less subtle.

Don't be afraid to express an opinion. Take a stand and you will get noticed. Entertaining or provocative pieces are the ones that get shared more often through social networks.



Take a look at your organization as a rich source of content. Publishing articles written from the perspective of staff members in technical support, research and development, or field service gives your potential customers confidence that they will have an opportunity to work with high-quality and knowledgeable people when they purchase from you.

Why Use Content Marketing?

B2B customers in the document industry will do extensive research before they ever talk to a sales representative. In order for your company to be considered a contender, you've got to be familiar to the prospect or show up prominently in the results generated by key word searches. Content marketing will help in both regards.

Consumers are bombarded with too many marketing messages – in every medium and channel you can imagine. The vast majority of these messages are ignored. Added to the difficulty of getting through the clutter, messages that are clearly marketing in nature rank low on the trust level. Internet shopping has had something to do with this. Several studies have shown that consumers place more trust in comments and reviews posted on



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a web site from other consumers (total strangers) than they do in the material supplied by the company selling the product.

Publishing carefully planned content that is relevant to the concerns of your target customers shows that you understand their business. Providing expert advice or analysis shows that your people are equipped to handle questions or problems that might come up after a prospect buys your product. Providing case studies, white papers, or survey results lets prospects know that others in the industry have evaluated your product and found it to be worthwhile. All these things are powerful when it comes to attracting, selling, and retaining customers.

Content marketing does not drive sales directly. Vendors should not expect to be able to correlate a particular article or event with specific sales results. If your objective is to increase sales opportunities, the cumulative effect of your branded content pieces should be productive.

From an ROI perspective, content marketing strategies implemented by vendors in the document industry are likely to produce a better average return than advertisements over the long term. The cost is relatively low and the potential return is great. Combined with traditional marketing activities, content marketing strengthens the brand and improves customer confidence.

Is Content Marketing a Strategy for Us?

Content marketing can work for just about any vendor. But if any of the following conditions describe your organization or product then the strategy can be especially effective:

- The budget for marketing is extremely restricted.
- There are no dedicated marketing resources.
- Your competition includes some large, well-known companies.
- Your product has features and benefits that are difficult to understand.
- The subject matter experts in your company are engineers, not writers.

Evaluate your needs and resources and then start formulating a plan. It's time to get started!

