

Review: Epic Content Marketing: How to Tell a Different Story, Break through the Clutter, and Win More Customers by Marketing Less by Joe Pulizzi

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submission Date: 04 January 2025

Accepted Date: 06 February 2025

Published Date: 03 March 2025

VOLUME: Vol.05 Issue03

Page No. 9-14

DOI: - <https://doi.org/10.37547/social-fsshj-05-03-02>

ABSTRACT

Marketing in this day and age is nothing like it was in the past. With a wide variety of methods to employ, it can be rather difficult to determine which ones are ideal for achieving your goals. Evolution is what separates humans from other animals, and knowing when and where to use this change affords the ability to operate in any industry. Content marketing is an amalgamation of ways of thinking that direct the focus of marketing interest to the ones who keep the market alive: the audience. To connect with the audience, brands and businesses now need to learn the art of storytelling. By entertaining, informing, and evoking emotional connections, companies have the opportunity to create a stronger tie between the customer and the brand. Words, images, videos – we are all creators and consumers of these forms of content. Blog posts, tweets, status updates, case studies, white papers, and infographics are all just a few examples of content that a brand can incorporate into its overall content marketing strategy. This content helps to engage and captivate the attention of their intended audience – in some cases, even driving the group to convert.

Keywords: Entertaining, informing, evoking emotional connections, marketing, audience, brands and businesses

INTRODUCTION

A person could argue that one of the big business benefits of content marketing is the opportunity for competitive advantage it affords. However, others argue – myself included – that creating, perfecting, and implementing a unique content marketing strategy with the ability to turn even amateur lead generators into epic content marketing strategists represents an even greater competitive opportunity. By understanding the

wants and needs of a target audience, a company can create an even greater divide between itself and the competition. Companies that have spent the time and effort to create a well-defined and understood content strategy know that aligning the content of the company with the needs, wants, likes, and dislikes of a target audience can transform a normal content strategy into an element of excitement. Discovery-based strategy connections help to more deeply embed interest

between the target audience and the company. These two attributes alone can make the difference in driving not just low volume and low quality of leads, but in driving excitement and action-promising leads for sales teams. Ideally, it is this concept of “epic content marketing” that will be discussed in the following pages.

Content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience while driving profitable customer action. There are no hard boundaries when it comes to what content marketing is and isn't. This means that, part of the time, content marketing isn't content at all. Content marketing is about delivering the content your audience is seeking in all the places they are searching for it. It is the effective strategy that is designed to operate over the long term and recognizes the importance of creating customer relationships.

The fundamental structure of brand-consumer relationships is driven by managing the content. Several distinct strategies that correspond to numerous marketing campaigns are required. Three factors are central to content marketing: the audience, the relevance and value of content to the audience, and the brand. Content marketing includes creating and seeding viral content that is intended for wide distribution and is rarely even about the brand. While many marketers are focused on short-term ROI, content marketing is a long-term strategy. Excellent pieces of content marketing take time to create. Content marketing is an audience-first strategy. A great brand should be like a great friend: passionate, trustworthy, and consistent. However, many modern brands actively provide content for their audiences without necessarily having the knowledge.

"Business as usual" content won't cut it. For content to provide the ROI needed to encourage executive leadership to continue investment, each asset needs to be an "epic" piece of content. Epic, as used here, simply means original, creative, and designed to provoke emotion. To appeal to viewers and keep them engaged, content like this has to stand out in their crowded content universe and be designed to appeal to their interests, needs, or hopes. This is what it means to create content designed for humans, not robots. If a story is good enough, then it is universal. Shake things up. Humans are unique and complex; they like to see brands do it, too. Brands that deeply understand

their audiences produce content that the audience finds relevant for their needs, interests, and passions. They create a desire to see and hear each piece of communication, which ends up generating a real emotional response. Your brand has something worth revealing and sharing, which will then reveal something new to the audience. By customizing your content to share information that is relevant to your audience's lives or useful for your audience's problem-solving, you can answer those questions not just better, but in a way that no one else is doing. The best way to differentiate your brand is to express it with a unique brand voice. This means avoiding the obvious and sticking to your brand and its story. A diverse brand voice is okay, as long as it stays true to your brand. Consistency is key to developing a consistent voice and building trust with your audience because they will begin to expect a certain aspect of your brand. You can't perform if you don't measure. Data can help inform decisions and drive organizational change. Use it.

Storytelling Techniques

Good advice has a formula: surprise, exposition, and an 'aha!' but good stories contain a surprise, stir curiosity, and lead to an 'aha!' Stories gently blend events and convey a brand message in emotional language, making the listener smile, laugh, or cry. It's all about reader connection. Customers are people who have gone through many of the same experiences, struggles, and feelings that you have. They prefer to connect with others about obstacles they've overcome. Telling these stories will provide a sense of common ground. You don't have to stop telling your own business stories, but using customer stories can enhance your business's relatability.

Narrative-your story will follow a pattern. This is especially useful for content creators who are struggling to sift through ideas. Every culture on earth can boil their stories down to the same events. One method was to interweave everything the audience loved—violent action, beautiful women, humor, and fear. Sound familiar? The stereotype of the spaghetti western? A certain style is heavily influenced by those who made it 'easy' to tell stories for an audience they wanted to influence. Visual storytelling—turn your travel footage into short travel featurettes. The goal is to create a story using your trip. This is emotional. This is important. This is a reason for others to want to connect with your stories. Use your videos

to connect with your audience. Share the adventure. Dance through your wild, untouched landscapes. Capture the view of a mountain peak and record the sound of the snow beneath your skis.

"Will it Blend?" has become a folklore story within the marketing industry, and Blendtec's sales have been driven by strong content marketing for years. He tested ideas we couldn't ignore. The best running workout videos are based entirely on sharing new trends—running and fitness news, explaining and breaking down everything from supplements and balanced breathing to what quality gear can effectively reduce blistering. The Color Run, by creating a new brand of athletic event, has grown exponentially because each event they do is more than another 5k; it's a frame-worthy, feel-good experience.

Real Beauty Sketches went past jokes and made a bold statement on the value of brand decisions. Real Beauty Sketches turns the way we see and talk about beauty on its head. All present three examples we cannot ignore—and present them in a beautifully executed, easy-to-digest interactive campaign. As you can see, many of the things we have learned from creators are becoming industry standards. We now have guides to how-tos for engaging people in the same ways did. I have to agree; to get attention, brands and creators should "be brief, be bright, be gone."

The next relationship interaction will be and is content. A new world of content is where brands that think they cannot compete need to be. And they don't need to whip out playbooks, but they do show lessons learned. Branded partnerships are still just below the surface of these well-crafted videos. Be open to change. If change is required, be already "charged" to generate new success principles. Start dancing to the beat of a new drum. Today's take on the old that we loved in 1980 is Doritos. Marketing legend talks about the high praise he gets from that "can reinvent an industry." That's what who owns Doritos, did with "Crash the Super Bowl" and several cutting-edge campaigns.

Successful Content Marketing Campaigns

Content marketing success stories can offer insights into the strategies implemented to achieve exceptional outcomes. 'Recall' by Volkswagen was a brand-led initiative with the objective of introducing a new car and ultimately increasing car sales. The campaign told a South African love story with a dramatic twist. Success was measured by more than 140,000 shares on social media. The

campaign aimed at middle-aged couples, so it was mainly promoted via video content and social media channels. 'Recall' spectacularly provides the punchline 4 minutes and 8 seconds into the video. The content strategy aimed to create a viral discussion on social media and a targeted conversation around the activation. Developed-in conversation drivers included flirtation, happiness, surprise, and innovation.

The Oreo 'Daily Twist' campaign was strategized to create brand consideration and excite brand lovers, sparking conversations on social media and achieving a considerable amount of media attention. It received more than 231 million free media impressions and a 110% uplift in fan engagement across social platforms. The 'Daily Twist' campaign strategy aimed at switching the focus from being a distant, popular cookie brand to that of a more tangible brand with strong global connections while driving retail sales. It was designed to appeal to all ages and built with digital and social channels in mind – especially social media. Seventeen percent of all campaign impressions were from social media, worth a significant amount. The brand strategy for the video content was built around a message of being 'accessible worldwide.' In assessing effective content strategies, it is worth noting that blogs and social media were employed for the Recall and Oreo campaigns, indicating that they remain key vehicles for generating engagement with the content. Each of the projects indicates that the correct use of specific communication headlines can result in exceptional brand messaging engagement. The standout feature of this headline for communications is its relevance to the target market and that the message is distinguished by being interesting. From the above primary case analyses, the strategies behind successful content marketing campaigns are evident. The importance of identifying the intended audience is paramount, as is the relevance of the content and the creative vehicle that carries the message. The role and timing of distributing the content are equally significant, as is building in points of engagement. Crucially, the content must align with existing brand identity and be promoted through the brand or business' established distribution channels. A clear call to action should be included in the messaging to encourage engagement and sharing. Taking actionable steps is what's involved in implementing the first E, which is for developing an epic content marketing strategy. Attendees run through a process to develop a documented

content marketing plan that's aligned with their business objectives. Among many, some of the outputs over the two days include audience research, competitive analysis, content calendar and framework, a list of content production projects, and a scorecard for reviewing and evaluating current in-market content.

In addition, we also address some of the following areas and provide these guiding questions in the class exercises: How can we implement collaboration across teams to ensure the story and message are consistent? Have we considered our persona preferences? What types of content make sense based on the four P's? Theory says that people consume four types of content. Which are most/least popular for our particular organization? How can we address this unique selling proposition? What are we trying to achieve with our content for both the customer and the enterprise? What are the resource constraints? Do we have a budget to pay for creation? What are the different iterations that would occur to use a promotional video for completely different purposes? How will we collect feedback to adapt our content marketing strategy on a regular basis? What does the feedback mean for us and the content? Key room finish, Q&A, and feedback in the top 10 minutes of day 2.

However thorough the business planning process is, we also submit the following as a key requisite for an effective and engaging content strategy. That is, we must bear in mind what is required to implement the strategy as stipulated by top management, but also understand and acknowledge what the audience, habitually staff, want to engage with and what makes them tick irrespective of the fact that we want to 'sell' a product or a service. Strategy only goes as far as having the allocated budget to proceed with the campaign or project, but if there's no audience engagement for it to work wonders and captivate the interest of the target audience, then the strategy, in essence, is utterly worthless.

All the writing that we did for our audience was based on need. We brainstormed ideas, and our internal creative teams started drafting. You want your content to be highly relatable and engaging, which starts with a well-drafted piece. After creation, it goes through the one-two-three punch of review, rewrite, and extensive editing. When it comes to content creation, the best piece is always the one that provides the reader with the most value. It helps if you craft a compelling narrative to

frame your content. We also made sure that what we were writing was relevant. The team researched what keywords were best to incorporate when creating written content so that it would rank on search engines. Keyword research tools tell us the specific words people are typing in to find what you are talking about. After our research is conducted and our drafts finalized, we moved on to our distribution strategies for our content. By this point, we had distributed a variety of pieces, including everything from videos to print material.

Formulating ideas, creating content, and then distributing it are not individual processes. You want your content to resonate across all channels so that more people hear and see what you have to say. Social media and personalizing direct emails were the biggest ways the content was distributed. Social media has a large audience. It has a significant number of users, which can target a broad demographic of people. Another platform comes in second on the list with a large user base, most of which feed into the first platform anyway. We posted our content on all of these social sites, along with distributing it via email. Culture was our go-to site, and we were able to personalize emails for auto dealers in each city. This helped with SEO capabilities and reaching a local demographic. We also shared our written content on our internal blog. Writing regular blog posts about what we are talking about benefits our optimization efforts. Sharing our social content and blog published posts was another step in converging our distribution process. Sharing is caring, right? We took our content distribution efforts one step further by placing them in our monthly e-newsletter campaigns, too!

The timing and frequency of a post are also key pieces that make a difference. Posting on social media in the morning or around 5 PM is when the highest engagement takes place. This is also encouragement for what time of day to email people. Sharing your written content is also better on the weekends. Certain days are high traffic points for people using the internet after work. After you share your content, analytics tools are useful to track how well it is doing. We pay particular care to see how many people are looking at our site, and at what times. Regular reporting metrics should help you understand how well certain posts have performed and predict how well new content may do. Analytics will help you understand what works and what does not, and let

you know the best time to post content.

Measuring Success and ROI

How do you prove content marketing is working for your company's ROI? It's tempting to see unanswerable or dismissive responses to that question as uncertain signs of failure, but the metrics you should be gathering may be an indication of a better strategy than you think. How you measure the effectiveness of your epic content will depend, to some extent, on your initial business objectives – is it designed to drive people to a landing page, to start conversations, or to sell? Traffic is often cited as a key indicator of content marketing success, which makes it a tempting way to measure the effects of your epic content. Other people prefer direct engagement, interaction, even the number or quality of interactions a piece of content has instigated.

The particularly savvy will line KPIs like these up against their business objectives, then follow them up with some measuring and reporting. There are dozens of tools for choosing, depending on how you want to measure your success. One of the first tools people think of in the context of content marketing measurement because it's free, powerful, and offers a huge range of statistics that can be used to measure nearly anything – and there's nothing to stop you from combining it with paid tools or software. Similar services give you a suite of marketing tools including automated, some dig-down-into-it social engagement measurement features. Another option offers almost everything the first tool does but with a few bells and whistles for larger enterprises, and is generally considered a bit flashier, but the biggest benefit is that it's easy to merge compliant data from part before crunching those numbers. For the particularly social media inclined, another analytics tool lets you measure how many fans or subscribers you've earned since publishing. Another tool has built-in SEO and social media optimization features in addition to offering a large number of interactive content options – not just quizzes. Most competitive analytics tools, especially those with a content marketing focus, are available. As of right now, a tech startup has taken a social analytics tool and their own conversation analytics tool. Another option offers a clean, slick, persuasive in-app social media analytics tool, making it rank first on the list of the best social media marketing places in the world. Another tool rounds up the top of our list of social media analytics tools, and it's somewhat of a belt-

and-braces choice; it's an analytics tool specifically designed for brands that rely heavily on data. Interviewing audience members and asking them what they think directly may mean that you miss out on less vocal people, or that your views become skewed by overly ardent fans. Conducting a survey to uncover qualitative insight is often a good substitute because you can begin to make quantitative assertions based on the feedback you receive - all of which must be planned beforehand, as part of your initial documentation process.

The perceived success of your content should carry some weight in your next round of strategy development. Plus, using a metric such as 'shares' is naturally built into the life of your content – if something is good enough, people will share it. Finally, and hopefully, those initial intentions and KPIs will have resulted in more people converting for you. Measuring the effectiveness of epic content to launching a product, suggesting you should learn, re-launch, and grow over time, creating unlimited potential for growth.

CONCLUSION

The success of content marketing is usually measured by specific KPIs or Key Performance Indicators. KPIs are used to quantitatively measure the strategic goals of the marketing campaign. Several consumption parameters are used in practice in the framework of the content marketing strategies of companies.

These KPIs can be divided into two different categories, i.e., into parameters that are mainly of quantitative nature, and those that are mainly qualitative in nature. Both have their right to exist and mainly reflect the content and subsequently the objectives of the marketing tactics. Which KPI is appropriate ultimately depends on which task or target the campaign pursues. Consequently, companies need to become more aware of their objectives and desired outcomes. As a content marketer, you must be aware that you can only measure successfully by defining objectives and KPIs. You should always reflect the strategy and lead the corporate goals in the long run. Content marketing can and should change; for its part, this view also includes the data, which directly allow the success and failure of the operations to be tracked.

Performance measurements must be target-oriented if they are to be meaningful. Consequently, it is important to start with comprehensive KPI evaluations. These should always be aligned with the company's goals and

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needs. This way, only factors that are suitable for business success can be evaluated, as is suitable for scaling. In the same way, the review of KPIs must be regular, and this should take place at least on a monthly basis. Especially if, for example, content is regularly published, it will be essential to know whether the effort of the current production is in any way justified. In the same way, KPIs should be communicated with all persons involved, as well as all other stakeholders. They must be integrated in order to ensure consent, alignment, and coherence. In order to modify the priorities and continuously refine and extend them with the constant also negative results in the context of content marketing strategy, the various groups can be used with a KPI-helped updated feature. Regular reports should shed light and help your companies understand your strategies by publishing the KPIs for transparency and clarity, particularly at the C-level participants and all others.

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