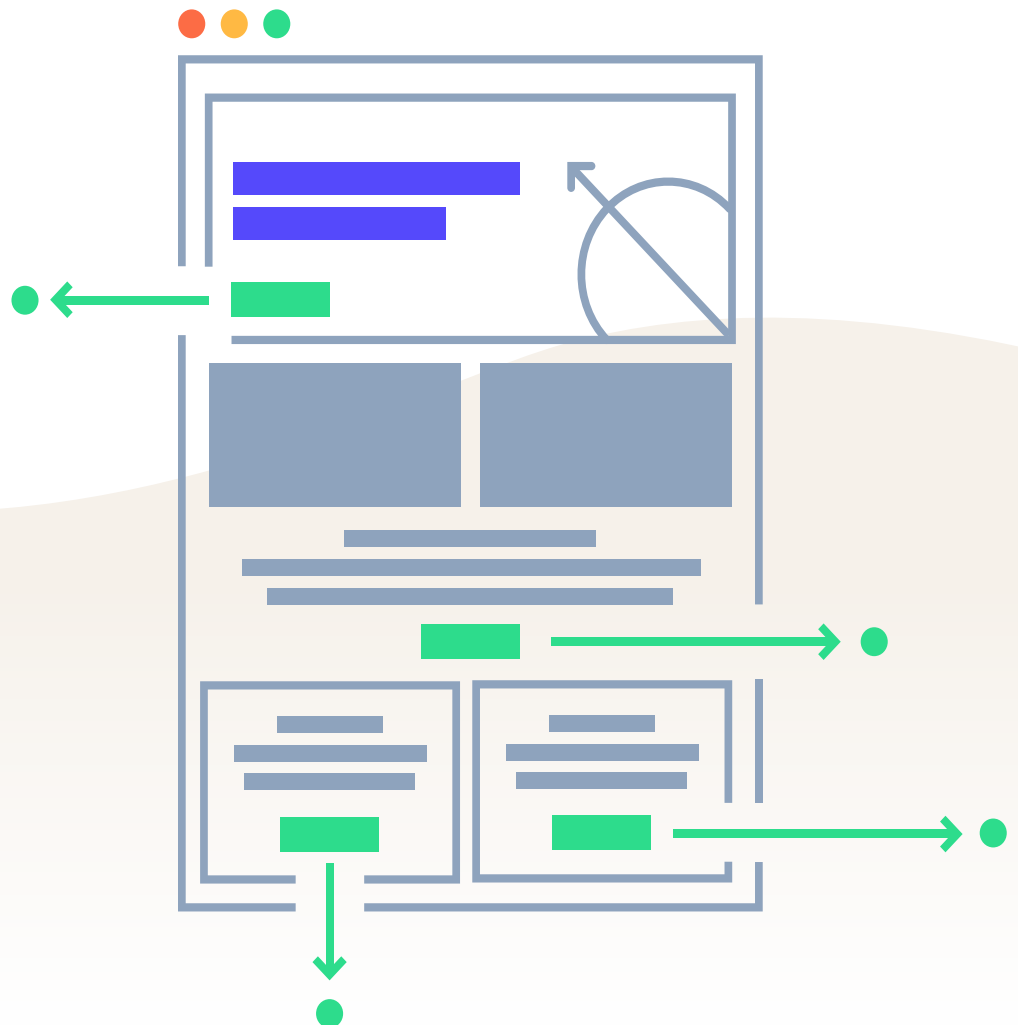


Introduction to

B2B Content Marketing

This guide will help those new to content marketing, and those looking to get better results, develop a winning content marketing strategy.





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What is content marketing?

What makes content so important in B2B marketing?

Think about any recent time you made an important purchase decision, large or small, for your company. Think back over the process that led up to that purchase. Did it begin with a cold call from a company you'd never heard of, an advert on the side of your favourite website, or with a piece of direct mail? Probably not.

You probably went online and researched a challenge you were facing, to improve your understanding. While doing so, you probably became aware of some of the companies that provided solutions to your challenge, as well as which ones were popular with others. Eventually, you found yourself on the website of one such company and decided to talk to them. You contacted the company and, soon after, the deal was done.

This is the process that more and more purchase decisions are going through. And if this is how you make purchase decisions, why should your buyers be any different?

Content that is educational, impartial and problem-solving is needed to reach buyers and earn their trust early in their decision making process, and to remain relevant throughout it.

Other types of purchase process

There are other types of purchase process of course, for example, the tender process. But even in a tender process, participation is the result of similar forces - reaching people early, creating awareness, and building trust.

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is any set of activities that use content (written word, images, video, audio or interactive) to reach and engage an audience - usually with the intention of converting them, first into a lead and then later into a customer.

The more valuable and targeted that content is, the more potential it has to do this well. What makes content valuable? It solves a problem or fulfils a need for a buyer.

Companies that create and freely share valuable content are allowed past modern buyer's defences and can form a trusting relationship with them, sometimes long before a purchase decision is made. Buyers who consume content that they find valuable can develop a preference for the company producing it, thus making it more likely that they will select or shortlist that company when they are ready to buy.

In a time when the traditional ways of using outbound and mass audience marketing techniques have all but stopped working, content marketing is one of the most efficient and reliable way to reach and influence your ideal buyers.

How does content marketing support growth?

Lead, opportunity and revenue generation in B2B markets is typically chaotic. Often, no two customers seem to come from the same place, or follow the same journey. And so, having a wide and welcoming funnel, most easily obtained through content marketing, is one way to embrace this reality.

Done well, content helps you rank more highly, over time, for more attractive search terms. Content helps you to rank for both long-tail problem-oriented terms and, with good SEO, for short-tail solution-oriented ones. It helps you to engage and hold the attention of the people who visit your site, during which time you can start to earn their trust and build their preference for your brand.

Content can also help you turn visitors into leads who can then be nurtured and brought back to the site again and again.

Increasing traffic from new and returning visitors will, increasingly, correlate with more opportunities. For a long time there may be no pattern or trend to which visitors become opportunities but what matters more than this is that they do - increasing demand being the primary objective.



Content marketing strategy

There are multitude of different content formats to choose from, and a plethora of channel to distribute them over. Plus there are different types of buyers and the different stages of the buying process to which you content needs to be aligned.

With so many choices to make, it only makes sense that you need to have a strategy in place in order to succeed.

You content marketing strategy needn't be complex, though. All it needs to do are determine the type and volume of work you will do and the areas you want that work to impact. Drops in the ocean (small levels of sustained effort) don't often work in content marketing, so your strategy is as much about choosing what you will not do (for the planning duration) as what you will do.

Key elements of a good content strategy include:

- Personas - the people you will create content for
- Content plan - the topics you will cover as well as the format and frequency
- Keywords - the search terms that your content will be optimised to improve your position on
- Channels - the channels you will use to distribute and promote your content

Personas

Personas are definitions of the people you want your content to reach and influence.



The number one reason for having personas is to get you to think about what content will truly be of interest to your potential customers, not to the person sat next to you in the office. They are about turning 180 degrees to look outward from your organisation to the content needs of your buyer, rather than looking internally for what will appeal to colleagues or superiors.

Why do business blogs fail?

Many business blogs fail to generate the desired results because the content talks about topics that only really matter or appeal internally - things like new hires, funding wins or partnerships. As a result, these posts fail to align with the language that buyers use to describe their problems and, as a result, don't get discovered.

Once you are looking the right way, you can refine your personas to target your buyers more accurately, addressing their challenges and using their language - but you can take persona refinement too far. Refine your personas too far and you go beyond the point of them being useful and reduce your ability to sustainably create content for them. In B2B marketing, a somewhat broad definition of a persona is a good thing; unlike in B2C marketing.

Fewer personas is also better than more. Increasing the number of personas your try to target doesn't have the same effect on the amount of content you can reasonably produce, meaning the content you do produce has to be spread more thinly and its impact on traffic and leads will be diluted.

How many personas should you target? Ideally, one. Most SMEs can achieve more than adequate growth if they are effective at marketing to their most attractive persona.

Don't confuse the number of personas that you market to with the number of options in your forms or marketing automation systems - these can and should be different. It's a good thing to segment leads into multiple personas so that you know which ones to prioritise and which ones to not. Your forms can have many more options for persona than are identified in your marketing strategy.

Topics

Inbound marketing is a marathon of content topic idea generation, not a sprint, so the aim of your content strategy should be to set off in the right direction, not planning every post, pillar page and conversion offer in advance.

Whenever possible, your content topics need to align to challenges and questions your buyers face as they navigate the research and buying processes the typically lead to a purchase of what you offer. You can, and should, target a mixture of specific problems, broad topics, stories of success and anything that really should be of interest to your buyer or your existing customers - let's not forget to delight them too.

For the purposes of your content strategy it can be helpful to call out some example blog post and conversion offer titles, indicating how they relate to the persona's challenges and the various stages of the buying process.

There are, of course, plenty of tools, both free and paid, that can help you create your initial content strategy and create new content topics going forward.

[BuzzSumo](#) is incredibly popular for research topic popularity and [CoSchedule's headline analyzer](#) can help you optimise titles.

Keywords

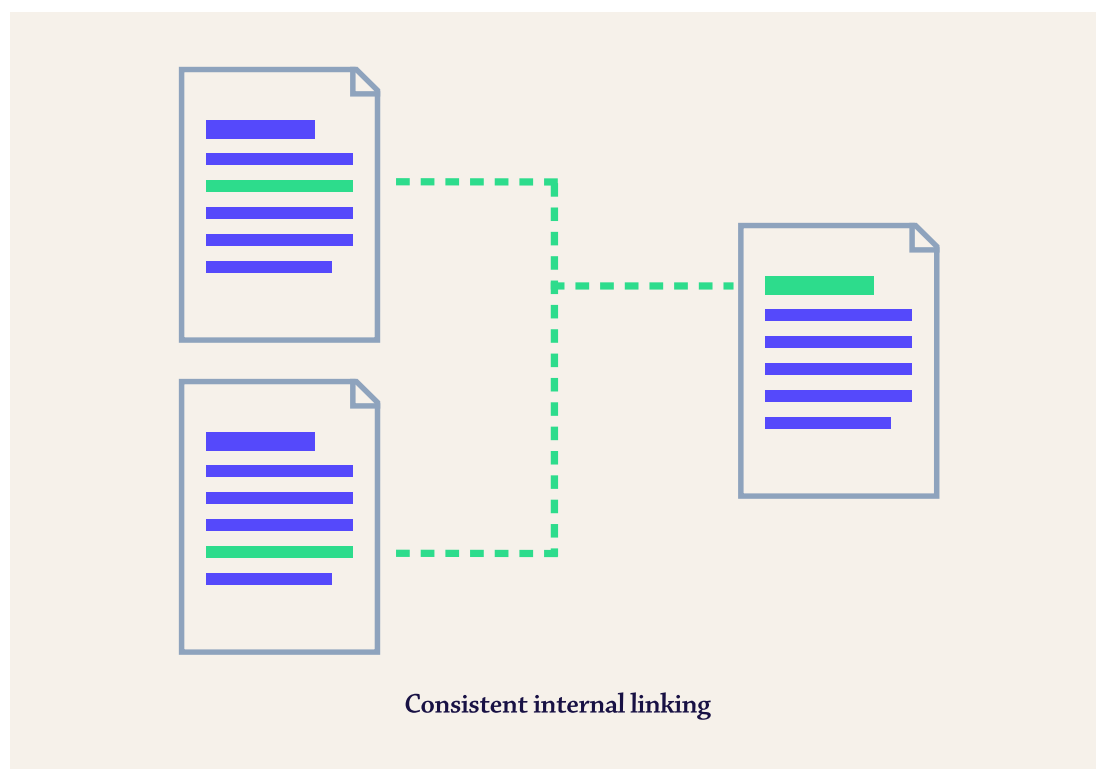
Keywords go hand-in-hand with topics really and there will be a lot of overlap between them.

Understanding SEO and defining your keyword strategy, ideally before commencing your content marketing, is an essential step for success.

This is because a large proportion of the overall results that content marketing can produce come down to ranking more highly for attractive keywords in search engines like Google and being found by your ideal buyer as they search for information.

Conscious use of relevant and attractive keywords in topic creation, titles of content and internal hyperlinking ensure that every piece of content you publish is contributing to your overall results, regardless of how popular or successful any individual piece turns out to be.

Keyword research can be performed using spreadsheets and your brain alone but is vastly improved with a good SEO software tool - such a tool can enhance your research with competition and volume data as well as helping you report on positions later on.





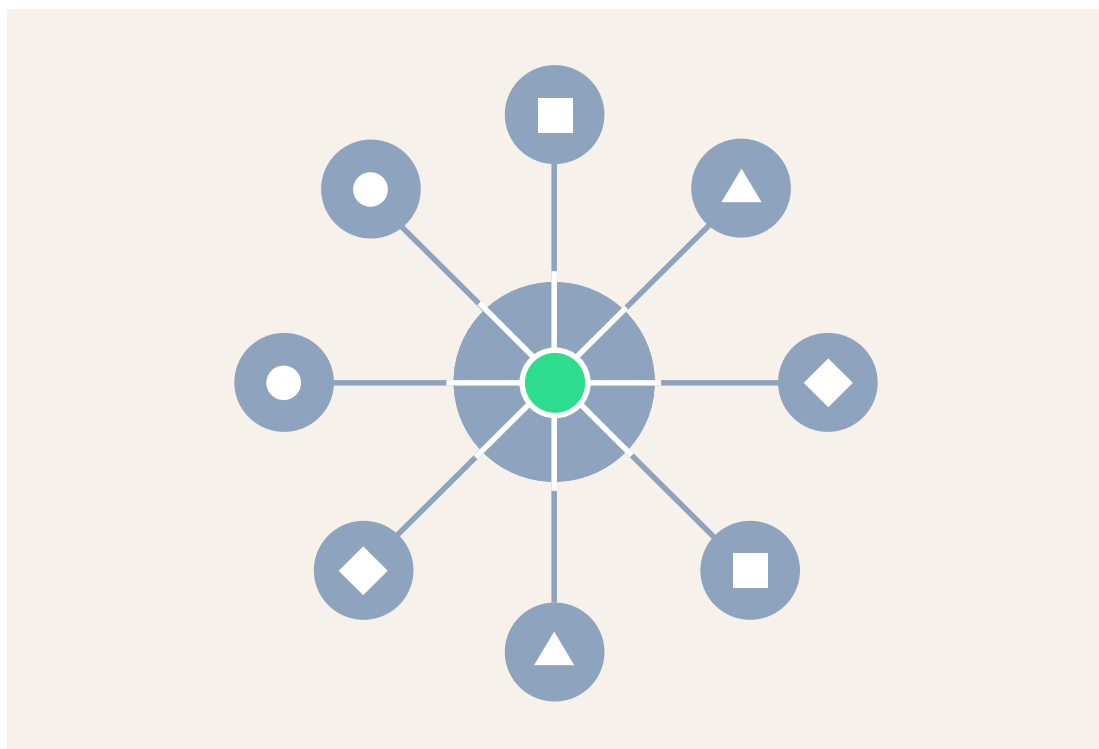
Models for content marketing

The un-ending and unpredictable nature of a content marketing strategy can be a little overwhelming. It can be helpful, therefore, to understand two generally accepted models for content marketing that can be used to give structure and purpose to act otherwise never-ending act of creating new content.

Hub & Spoke

In the hub and spoke model, the hub is a high value piece of content that you think is evergreen - i.e. has long lasting value to your buyers - and that will convert well.

To ensure that as many potential buyers as possible discover your hub piece of content, lots of spokes are created that can lead them to it. Spokes can be blog posts, guest posts, social updates, email campaigns, related webinars, etc. The more spokes there are, the more traffic the hub can receive and, if it converts well, the more leads it can generate.



With a number of content-hubs providing the purpose behind other efforts, choosing topics and creating spoke-content should become easier to do.

Topic clusters - an evolution of hub and spoke

Traditionally, the hub and spoke model referred to a way to promote a piece of gated content - something locked away behind a form that required a visitor to submit information and convert before they could view it.

While this is still a valid approach, another way of using a hub and spoke-like structure has become effective - topic clusters.

Marketers have found that placing a comprehensive piece of un-gated content at the centre of a cluster (commonly called a [pillar page](#)), with other content consistently using the same keywords to hyperlink to it, can have a very positive effect on search engine rankings and traffic. Because the content at the centre of the cluster is open to the world, search engines can see and index the content, and this helps the incoming links have even more of an effect.

This approach may reduce lead generation, but can seriously improve organic traffic. A smart move is to offer the content in both formats - visible in full on the pillar page but also available for download behind a form.

Skyscraper or 10X content

In the skyscraper model, the effort and emphasis is placed on creating individual pieces of content that are far richer or better than anything else already available on the subject.

The goal in the skyscraper model is to create content of such high quality and appeal that a large number of backlinks and shares are acquired. If this happens, the content will also rank well organically for its target keywords, further increasing its traffic potential.


Success with the skyscraper approach relies heavily on identifying and researching a sufficiently popular topic, and on intensive content promotion techniques once your content has been created.

Hacks vs hard work

As we talk about models for your approach to content marketing, it feels like a good time to talk about growth hacks - the get rich quick schemes and shortcuts in the content marketing world.

By the time you read about the next great content marketing hack, chances are it has already stopped working. Hacks are the product of two things that are rarely revealed at the same time as the success - many failed attempts and a lot of luck. In addition, they are almost always executed toward existing audiences and on the back of established content marketing practices. Hence, very few of them will have the same effect when applied to your business.

Rand Fishkin, founder of SEO Moz and author of *Lost and Founder: A painfully honest field guide to the start-up world*, says:



Marketing flywheels, in my experience, almost always beat growth hacks.

In our opinion, and Rand's, the smartest strategy is to focus doing the hard work of your own content marketing, and continually trying to improve it. By consistently creating content that is right for your buyer you will, over time, establish the traffic levels and audience sizes that may allow you to discover new growth hacks all of your own.



Measuring the results of content marketing

Measuring results is, of course, vital, allowing you answer a multitude of questions.

Given time, content marketing can directly affect some easily measured metrics that typically correlate with success; things like keyword rankings, website traffic, conversion rate, lead generation and more.

Content marketing can also have less measurable impacts, such shortening the sales cycle or increasing the average deal size.

A [marketing automation](#) system, ideally fully [integrated with a CRM system](#), will help greatly when it comes to measuring the results of your content marketing. A single system that is able to observe every interaction between your company and its website visitors will help you to stay permanently abreast of the metrics that matter, and focus on using them rather than finding them.

Metrics that you should consider monitoring and reporting on include:

Sessions - Traffic to your website, particularly organic search traffic, should increase steadily with a content marketing approach, and more traffic typically results in more leads and opportunities. Gains in traffic will be larger if the [search engine optimisation](#) of your content is strong.

Contacts / leads - The number of website visitors who convert into known contacts via your website is another leading indicator of success.

Marketing Qualified Leads - A subset of the contacts that convert on your website will do so at the bottom of the funnel, near purchase and ready to talk to sales. [We recommend labelling these as MQLs](#) and tracking growth in this key metric.

Keyword rankings - While the strength of your SEO strategy is reflected in your traffic and lead levels, it is often worth monitoring ranking positions for important keywords over time. Search results have become increasingly personalised and localised, so this kind of reporting has to be taken with a pinch of salt, but good tools (SEMRush, SERanking) can give you good directional data.

