

6 good practices in content marketing you cannot afford to ignore



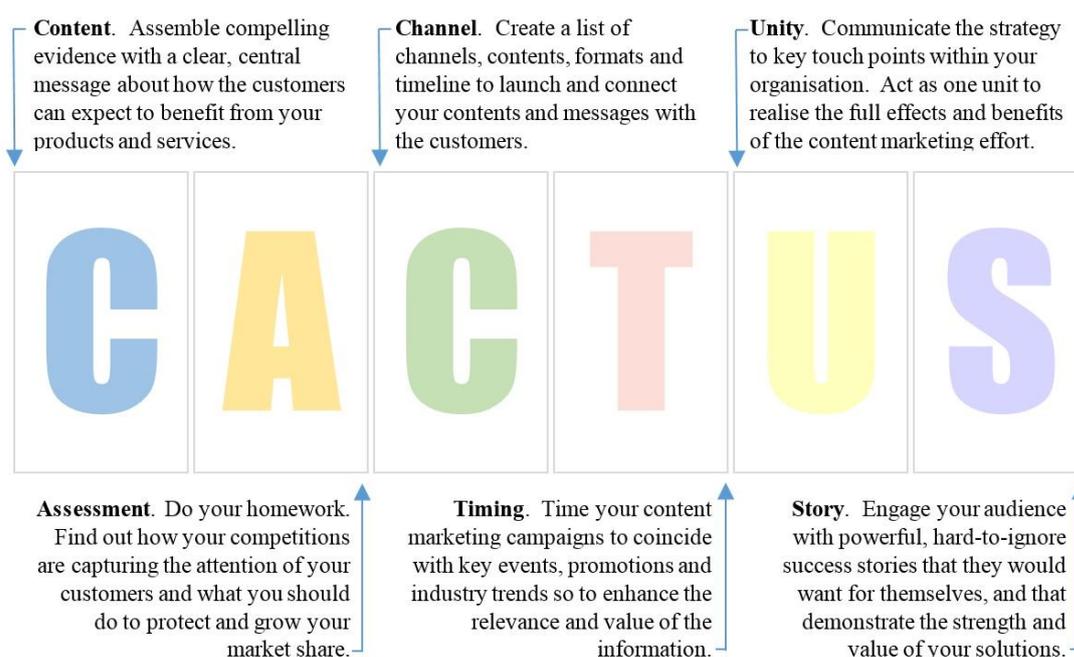
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Use CACTUS to create purposeful content marketing campaigns that pull the heartstrings, tell a compelling story and win new, loyal customers.



Think about this: There are now as many mobile devices as there are people in the world today. That's 7.1 billion. Add another 1.4 billion personal computers to the tab, and we have to ask ourselves just how much information are we exactly sharing online today? As it turns out, it's a staggering 4 zettabytes. That's a 4 with 21 zeroes behind it. It's an astronomical number. But how much of this is actually useful to us and can make us more productive? We know that not every content is relevant. In fact, a significant amount of contents are actually duplicates of original sources. It's one of the clever tricks used by many IT consultants to improve search engine results. These contents may be pervasive but this does not necessarily make them pertinent or even persistent for recall. In fact, in many cases, quite the opposite happens when audience screen out these contents as spam. This has important implication for content marketing. How should organisations go about generating content that will be noticed, remembered and shared?

Part of the answer lies in the following six simple lessons which we have collected from supporting organisations getting their content marketing campaigns off the ground with minimal hiccups:



CONTENT

Let's start with the basic building blocks. The first step towards any content marketing campaign is to gather the ideas and facts that will allow you to create good content. By that, we mean well summarised and persuasive information that is useful to a particular group of people. The application of knowledge in the right context is what give the content purpose and relevance. Keeping the message clear, concise, correct, complete and compelling will increase the rate of diffusion and reduce miscommunication. To make great content, however, requires both infectiousness and stickiness. Those are the special qualities that can attract attention immediately, make people pause and think about it, and inspire them to share with others whom they know would appreciate the information. Gossip and bad news tend to possess these viral qualities precisely because the nature of these content captivates the audience and make them want to know more. Unless you are your own customer, don't focus on yourself. Too often, instead of telling an interesting story about how a customer was helped by the product, the content focuses only on the dreary features of the solutions. This is like too many bad dates with people who rattled on about themselves instead of connecting with you. Not that the technical aspects of a product or service are unimportant. This can be done in good time when the customers asked to find out more.

Q-tip: Train your salesforce to avoid the rut of going into a sales pitch at every turn of a conversation. Create anecdotes of common application scenarios that will enable them to entertain and engage the customers with stories of how other customers have discovered the benefits of your products and services. Have someone step into the shoes of your customers and look at your contents from outside-in to rate the persuasiveness and relevance of your content.

ASSESSMENT

Ensure your content marketing campaign is aligned with the ongoing efforts of your salesforce and other outreach programmes. Visualise the likely scenarios and interests from the customer's perspective and incorporate them into your execution plan. Having a team that is representative of the target customer group will help in devising a more comprehensive and balanced strategy. Once you have worked a reasonable plan, execute it. Try not to overthink and over-control. Instead, learn to be agile and adapt your strategy along the way. The nice thing about content marketing strategy is that you get to see what your competitors are doing in the open. Do your homework and avoid pitfalls by learning from past efforts. Make sure you maintain an open line with the sales, marketing and frontline staff to profile typical customer behaviours and trends. Work out a list of actions that will help to improve your customers' experience as well as their understanding of the company and its brands.

Q-tip: Establish and communicate the objectives, goals and outcomes of the content marketing campaign with everyone in the organisation, especially the frontline staff who are in direct contact with the customers. Usually, a simple, clear email will do the trick. It's all about getting everyone's support, feedback and alignment so that there is consistency in customer experience.

CHANNEL

Leverage your market intelligence to determine the best mix of media and channels to reach out to your target customers in your content marketing campaign. There is no cookbook approach here. Although the variety of media and channels today has grown to be quite phenomenal, not every channel is effective in reaching your target audience. It still depends on how you pair each media with the correct channel to reap the best results. Written content is still central to most content marketing strategies. They're the easiest and least expensive to create, and take the form of printed, digital and web content. However, there are also infographics, slides, audios, videos and images that should not be ignored. The key is in choosing the best media that can carry and convey the message successfully. For instance, a delicious picture of a steaming soup, a video of a happy couple enjoying a vacation, a webinar by a thought leader or an infographic that summarises key statistics may be better platforms to convey those specific messages than words alone. Different people also access contents differently. They may use different devices and favour one format over another. Social media in particular has become a powerful resource for online communication in recent times. Its strength lies in the influence of trusted families and friends as well as weak ties of fans and followers. Use market and web analytics to understand the behaviours of your customers. And try not to limit yourself to just a few convenient platform and miss the opportunities for greater coverage with the others.

Q-tip: Work out an editorial plan for your content marketing strategy that can sustain your message over time to support marketing plan, promotions and events. Avoid spamming with trivial content. A well-timed, good quality message will always enhance brand positioning and recall. As a general rule of thumb, customise the contents for website, email, mobile device, newsletter and social media.

TIMING

This is perhaps the most critical element that is often ignored or taken for granted by marketers. Good timing is really the other side of the coin for a well-conceived message. It is a crucial factor that can make or break the best marketing campaign. Learn to acquire a taste for current affairs and industry trends to cultivate a foresight on where the public's interest and attention may lie. A badly timed message may be seen as being insensitive or done in poor taste. That's just a slap on the wrist. In graver situation, it can lead to negative publicity and reputational damage. If you

can, hitch a ride on a larger message. Say you are promoting a chartered flight service, an announcement on the increased trade relationship between two regions could mean an opportunity for you to secure new customers. Try to do it with some finesse by reinforcing the value of the brand and less of the sales pitch. Conversely, back-pedal a little if you are aware of more important or conflicting announcements that are being made that would distract audience from your message or create a backlash.

Q-tip: Ready a simple drawer plan and a story bank to execute when you spot a good opportunity to deliver a message. The market favours those who are prepared and eager for its business. If you are operating remotely from abroad, have some trusted eyes and ears on the ground to feel the pulse of the local market situation. Not knowing what's going on is never a good excuse for poor execution of a marketing campaign.

UNITY

This is another important component that is generally forgotten in many content marketing campaigns. Communications within an organisation, especially a large one, can sometimes suffer from broken telephone syndrome, due to a variety of reasons, such as miscommunication, competency gap, conflict of interest and coordination issue. Such misalignment can waylay the effectiveness of a campaign. You can maximise the impact and investment of the marketing campaign by ensuring everyone involved in the value chain is aligned in their efforts to contribute to the outcome of the marketing campaign. Brief the sales and support staff on the content in preparation of customer queries, ready the operations people for anticipated surge in sales following a successful campaign, and standby the service team to deliver the products promptly to the customers.

Q-tip: Get everyone in the organisation to sing the same song and stay in tune. Identify the specific results and behaviours for each function and convey them clearly to the staff to secure their participation and support. Don't expect success at once. Give it a few runs to oil the system. Sharing credits and recognising contributions are ways to encourage active involvement. Get the marketers, sales and frontline staff to extend the market reach further by sharing relevant content with their professional networks either on social media or direct email.

STORY

Everyone loves a good story. So tell one. Create content that will allow your frontline staff to engage the customers in conversations. Demonstrate the benefits of your products and services through real results and positive customer experience. You should have some fantastic stories around you waiting to be found. They may be sitting with your sales people, clients or end users. And remember to deliver the story

with the same level of enthusiasm and passion as they would with their pet subjects, be it a holiday in Bali or the new restaurant downtown. It's a skill that comes with practice. Allow interested customers to continue their discovery process and relationship with you at their own pace by providing them easy access to relevant stories and connecting them with more content by influencers, associated events and other useful leads. Never hard sell. It's a bullying tactic that neither wins loyalty nor builds a sustainable business. Cultivate brand loyalty and expand customer base by providing real value to your customers.

Q-tip: You don't have to be perfect but you do have to be consistent. The storyline must make sense to the customers. Organise story circles for the sharing of war stories and document them. Make yourself readily available to the customers. Placement does not mean a physical location anymore. It includes online real estate, mobile platform and a friendly voice on the other end of the line.

Every content you have created should add a little more to the overall corporate or product story you are telling. So, if you are not already making an impression and leaving a mark, then your marketing efforts have been all but wasted.

About Cactus Communications

Cactus Communications was founded in 2007 with the objective of providing our clients with clear messaging and concise contents to meet their corporate and marketing communication needs in a timely and responsible manner. We have successfully helped many MNCs and SMEs shape their brand perception, market their solutions and communicate to their target audience through an array of channels and media. Cactus Communications offers a suite of PR, corporate branding and integrated marketing communication services that include company announcements and product launches through traditional and non-traditional channels such as press releases, media relations, editorial contributions, advertisements, websites and social media. We provide content development, translation and copywriting services for clients in various industries ranging from healthcare and education, to retail and property development, as well as hospitality and tourism. For more information, visit cactuscomms.com.

