

JANE HEATON

CONTENT MARKETING

I N a W E E K

Engage your audience with compelling
content in seven simple steps

Content Marketing In A Week

Jane Heaton

Jane Heaton is a marketing consultant, content specialist and writer who helps people master the principles and practice of marketing and communications, from strategy to execution. A member of the CIM and a Chartered Marketer, Jane developed her business and marketing expertise in a small ad agency, in regional newspaper publishing and for brands such as Shell and Cable & Wireless – through hands-on experience and setting up and leading marketing teams. She started Jane Heaton Associates in 2000 to give businesses of all sizes access to expert marketing advice and skills – easily and cost effectively.

As marketing becomes more complex, Jane believes marketers must be able to confidently apply the essential core principles of marketing and think in a joined-up way in order to manage the growing choice of tools and tactics and deploy them successfully. Today she uses her wide-ranging experience and a blend of consultancy, mentoring, training and coaching to enable individuals and teams to create well-written, well-produced content as part of a clear, focused marketing strategy.

Find out more at www.janeheatonassociates.com, connect with Jane on LinkedIn at <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/janeheaton> and follow her on Twitter @janeheaton.

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Jane Heaton

First published in Great Britain in 2016 by John Murray Learning

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9781473608252

eISBN 9781473608276

1

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Typeset by Cenveo® Publisher Services.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon, CR0 4YY.

John Murray Learning policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Carmelite House

50 Victoria Embankment

London EC4 0DZ

www.hodder.co.uk



Contents

Introduction	2
Sunday	
Adopt a content marketing mindset	4
Monday	
Understand the different types of content	20
Tuesday	
Develop your content marketing strategy	38
Wednesday	
Get started with content planning	56
Thursday	
Create compelling content	72
Friday	
Get ready to share	88
Saturday	
Learn how to measure success	104
7 × 7	119
Answers	124

Introduction

Content marketing is one of today's growing marketing trends following fast on the heels of social media. Depending on what you read, it's either heralded as the latest and only way to market anything or it's a big fuss about nothing – because it's actually been around for years and it's just what most marketers do anyway, at least to some extent.

Using content in marketing is of course not new. It could be said that the first direct response advertising which used long copy to set out the benefits of a product or service represents an early form of content marketing. But in those days there was little choice when it came to getting your message out there. There was print advertising and PR and then along came radio and television.

The marketing landscape only changed significantly when the internet arrived and enabled us to do all sorts of exciting things – including publish our own content, easily and cost effectively. How much new content is published online every day is open to debate, but suffice to say it's a truly staggering amount. And that's changed the way we all look for, find and buy things – whether for personal use or in business.

Enter the opportunity for content marketing – marketing through creating and sharing content that potential customers find relevant, useful and valuable in order to attract, engage, convert and retain them. As such it's much more than simply producing a brochure and a set of product sheets to be used primarily by your sales team, or publishing the occasional newsletter or blog post.

It's a strategy that requires careful thought, clear objectives and goals, and a deep understanding of your audience. It requires you to reach out to them with well-planned and well-produced content – in all forms and formats, offline as well as online.

Although some companies may be able to adopt a predominantly content marketing approach, most integrate it with other marketing strategies that work well together and use content to enhance a range of other marketing activities.

In this book we take a joined-up look at content marketing, the key principles that underpin it, and what it takes to put it into practice in a consistent and fully formed way. And we provide a practical framework for planning it and executing it successfully – whatever the size of your business or your marketing team.

What we know as content marketing today may become the marketing norm for future generations. It takes time to deliver real results and you need to be willing to play the long game and build a relationship and trust with your audience over the long term. Adopting a content marketing approach is certainly not a short term, quick win tactic.

But the chances are it could make a big difference to the effectiveness of your marketing. Let's find out.



SUNDAY

**Adopt a
content
marketing
mindset**

Today we set the scene for our work over the rest of the week and address some of the most commonly asked content marketing questions.

We look at what content marketing is and find out if it really is something new – or something we've been doing by default without realizing it.

Many businesses are focusing on delivering various forms of content to demonstrate their value and differentiate themselves from their competitors, enabled in recent years by developments in technology, the internet and social media.

But not everyone is doing it well. So, what are the key principles and characteristics of content marketing? What do we need to understand in order to be able to plan, manage and put it into practice successfully?

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is the process of marketing through creating and sharing content that potential customers find relevant, useful and valuable in order to attract, engage, convert and retain them.

You provide content that people actually want to receive – that informs, educates or entertains. Rather than marketing or sales interventions that are unwelcome – unwanted, irrelevant or intrusive.



It prepares the ground for a sale, helping you develop a trusted relationship with your prospect and moving them through your marketing and sales process.

At various points in that process you will employ well-crafted, call-to-action and conversion copy, but it will be appropriate and timely. Content marketing is not just advertising by another name – or an excuse to deploy gimmicky sales techniques to grab attention before delivering a hard-hitting 'buy me and buy me now' sales message.

TIP

The emphasis in content marketing is on genuinely helping your prospect to come to a well-informed buying decision, through a clear understanding of their issue or aspiration.

In many ways you are doing what the best-in-class, consultative sales person is doing during a face-to-face meeting, except that you are doing it with 'content'.

What do we mean by content?

The word 'content' is a bit of a catch-all term. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines 'content' as 'the substance or material dealt with in a speech, literary work, etc. as distinct from its form or style'.

It is essentially *what* you are communicating. But you can present that 'what' – your core content – in different formats, in different places, using different methods of distribution and promotion.

Here's a simple example:

- Your 'what' might be an explanation of how your target audience could resolve a certain problem. For example, remove a red wine stain from a carpet.
- You could write this as a piece of 'how-to' text and publish it as a post on your company's blog.
- Or you could film a short video showing someone actually removing a red wine stain from a carpet and then publish the video on your company's blog and upload it to a video hosting platform such as YouTube or Vimeo.
- You could then draw your customers' attention to it by featuring it in your email newsletter or by sending out a specific email notification.

Content covers whatever you produce in text, image, audio, or video format wherever you publish or present it – on the web, in print, or in person.

Is content marketing new?

This example probably sounds familiar. So, is content marketing really new? Or is it something you've been doing for a long time already, but just not calling it 'content marketing'?

You may already be blogging, creating videos, producing newsletters, using social media and email marketing – plus doing a whole host of other content related activities.

So, is that content marketing?

The most likely answer is that although you may indeed be already using some form of content in your marketing, you may not be embracing content marketing in its fullest form.

If you are simply bolting some ad hoc content activities onto a 'traditional' marketing plan, you'll probably have some significant gaps.

The most likely ones are:

- Lack of a specific content marketing strategy that ties your content tactics together and integrates them with your overall marketing strategy.
- Lack of organization (a plan and tools) to create and publish content regularly to a consistent standard.
- Lack of measurement of content performance and return on investment.

This in itself requires a mindset shift for many marketers.

Although the *theory* of marketing strategy, planning and joined-up thinking is well known, in practice many businesses and marketing departments fall short under pressure to get on and just 'do' marketing – a way of working supported by the fact that, as marketers, we are often measured solely in terms of outputs.

Let's take the example of producing a customer newsletter.

We may be used to producing it four times a year. If we've been doing it for a while, chances are we've lost the connection with why we started the newsletter in the first place. It gets carried forward in the budget each year and we're primarily measured on simply getting it out on time each quarter. We may have some form of loose editorial planning in place but at some stage we get to the point of just wanting to get the thing

finished. Once we've got the core article written, we're looking for fillers and scrambling to hit our deadline. We've become almost exclusively focused on the output, so we can tick that box and get on with our next task. And there's little desire or time to assess how well any one newsletter has performed – a difficult task made harder by the fact that we don't really know what we wanted it to achieve in the first place.

This is an example of using content (a collection of articles published in a newsletter) but it is not well executed content marketing.

TIP

To be successful, content marketing has to be seen and treated as an end-to-end, joined-up process – driven by customer needs and a clear purpose.

Why an ad hoc approach to content is a bad idea

If you come to content marketing with a predominately 'doing' mindset, with just a glance at strategy and no real plan, you're in danger of becoming very busy writing and producing content and using up a lot of time and resources doing it with no clear idea of what you're getting in return.

In such a scenario getting ongoing support for your content marketing will be at best difficult – whether from your line manager, the management team, your fellow team members or others within your organization who you rely on as subject matter experts.

The seven key principles of content marketing

What then are the key principles and characteristics of content marketing that you have to understand and master in order to become the consummate practitioner?

1. Clearly understand the value you need to create for your audience

Your content is the means by which you will deliver value to your audience. Therefore you need to understand your prospects and customers in a deep and detailed way – to a far greater degree than you may currently be used to. You need to know all about your audience and what will make a real difference to their lives in relation to the products or services you are offering – in order to provide content that they will truly want and value.

2. Provide that value consistently, over the long term

Buying decisions are not usually made in an instant. Even a fairly low-cost product can have a wrapper of decision making around it. When you are in the washing powder aisle of the supermarket, your choice of brand and product is influenced by several factors – all unique to you, your values and beliefs as well economic factors and aesthetic preferences. And our choices are governed by habit. If you are providing a new eco-friendly laundry alternative you may be appealing to an innate desire to be ‘green’ (knocking on an open door) or have to work harder to educate and persuade someone to buy or switch, keep on buying and recommend your brand. This may take time and the building of rapport and trust – hence why we talk about the need to build relationships over the long term.

This is very different to most marketing campaigns. They tend to take place over months rather than years and have short-term sales goals. Content marketing, by its very nature, is all about playing the long game.

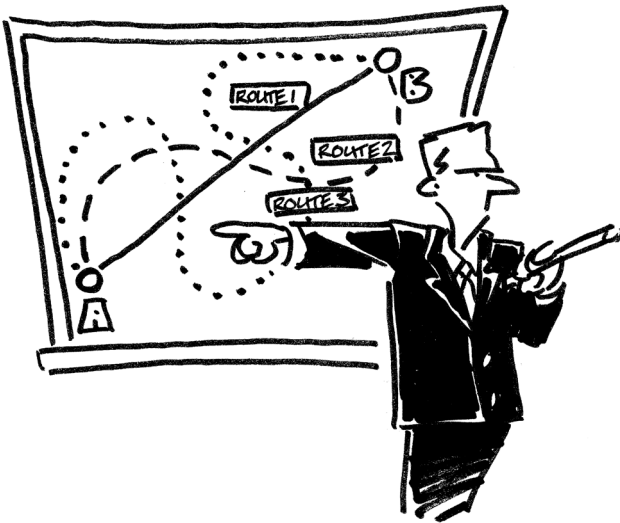
3. Measure results and ROI over the long term

In turn, this means that you can have no expectation of short-term financial pay back. This often presents difficulties in getting your business case for a content marketing approach or initiative adopted – unless your stakeholders and decision makers are all on board. The better news is that a lot of your content marketing efforts will be measurable – especially the

part that takes place online as there is a wealth of web and social measurement tools available. The challenge however is to make sure you are setting up your content marketing so that a) you are able to measure it and b) you are selecting relevant, useful metrics to track. You want feedback that will allow you to test and improve performance of the specific content and channels you are deploying.

4. Be crystal clear on strategy and apply joined-up thinking

Content marketing is not the ad hoc execution of random content-based activities. It requires a strategy and plan that integrates with your overall marketing strategy and plan, and specific implementation plans for content creation, production, publishing, distribution, promotion and evaluation. Even when you have a simple strategy, these implementation plans are likely to be complex in the sheer number of schedules and activities to be integrated and mapped. So clear strategic thinking is crucial in order to provide direction and keep focused and on track – while being flexible and adaptable to marketplace changes.



5. Produce content regularly and consistently

Robert Rose, Chief Strategy Officer at the Content Marketing Institute, has referred to content as 'a show that never closes'. It requires commitment and resources to keep it going and maintain standards. It also means that you have to think more like a publisher or broadcaster than a seller of goods and services – and organize your team and workflow accordingly.

This inevitably shifts content from being a collection of marketing collateral to being more of a brand asset. You could be building up a store of valuable intellectual property. It's therefore important to consider where you host, publish and distribute your content and how you protect it. Make sure you own and are in control of the place where you keep and primarily display this asset (e.g. your own web domain) rather than relying on third party hosts (e.g. social media platforms) that can disappear or withdraw services – along with your content and followers – at any time.

6. Understand that distributing and promoting your content is as important as producing it

You can only do so much to get your content found by organic search. Even when you've mastered principles 1 to 5, you still need to build your audience through appropriate and timely distribution and promotion. Just writing and producing great content is not enough, you have to get it out there and, yes, shared and ideally talked about, used and acted on. This means bringing various marketing channels, tools and activities to bear and weaving them seamlessly into your content marketing strategy and plan. Things like email marketing, social media, partnering and even paid advertising.

7. Never neglect your internal communications

In order to get and keep support for your content marketing you are going to have to run and manage your own internal communications and PR campaign. This may involve helping to educate and win over the Board, the management team, your boss, your marketing team and other creatives, your agencies,

and those people who you are going to be relying on as subject matter specialists.

When it comes to your marketing people, it's likely you're going to have to ask them to work differently, acquire new skills and take on new responsibilities. You may find yourself having to bring in new people with different skill sets. The old order may get shaken up a little or a lot. Be aware of the challenges and, as your content marketing evolves, ensure you are communicating effectively and involving and managing others appropriately.

Is content marketing a good strategy for every business?

As the concept of content marketing has gained momentum, more companies are producing more content – although not always as part of a well-rounded strategy.

Whenever something new or different comes along we, as marketing leaders or practitioners, ask ourselves, 'Is this something I should be considering?', 'Could this give us better results than our current approach?'

Ultimately, whether a content marketing approach will work for you depends on:

- the nature of your customer base and your customer decision-making processes
- how committed you are to properly planning and executing such an approach
- how willing and able you are to make changes.

In my experience, no broad generalizations hold true – such as that content marketing only works for B2B or B2C, or for those providing services, or producing products. You can use it effectively – to some degree – whatever your market, sector or offering.

That's not to say it's always easy to see how well it could work (or not) when you first start to consider it. In many cases, that's because we're all so used to looking at our business and our marketing in a certain way that's it hard to adjust

our thinking. You need to start with a clean slate and no preconceived ideas – especially when it comes to tackling what your customers really want from you.

This may mean that you need to:

- work harder and devote more resources to understanding your customers
- be more creative and inventive in planning and designing content
- be more generous with the information, advice and value you provide as part of the process.

If you are involved in marketing a small business, then your content marketing landscape is going to be less complex than if you are a large, multinational enterprise.

Most companies who approach content marketing in a well thought-out way integrate it into their existing marketing plan alongside other marketing strategies.

Not everyone has the potential to become a fully-fledged brand publisher.

However, most businesses can benefit by thinking about and executing their content activities in a more professional way – looking at the content they are creating from their customers' perspective in order to provide something of genuine value rather than something that still looks like an advert or a sales pitch.

Summary

Today we've looked at what content marketing is and the core principles that underpin an effective content marketing approach. It's much more than simply adding a few content activities (like sending out a newsletter or writing the occasional blog post) into your existing set of marketing activities.

Content marketing is all about giving your customers real value – content that informs, educates or entertains. Content that they actually want and can use, that gives advice and answers questions. In this way it prepares the ground for a sale, attracting interest and keeping people engaged until such time as they are ready to buy. It's therefore a strategy that requires commitment over the long term.

Think for a moment about your own business. What content do you already produce as part of your marketing activities? Do you have scope to improve? Do you need to understand your prospects and customers better?

SUNDAY

MONDAY


TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY



Briefly assess where you are at the moment
and over the course of the week we'll see
how you might develop, tailor and improve
your content marketing approach.

Tomorrow we look at the different types of
content formats and techniques at
your disposal.

Fact-check

1. What is content marketing?
 - a) A version of social media marketing
 - b) Marketing by providing and sharing content that people find useful and valuable
 - c) Another name for advertising
 - d) A form of email marketing
2. What is content marketing especially good for?
 - a) Annoying customers with unwanted direct mail
 - b) Delivering in-your-face 'buy me now' sales messages
 - c) Preparing the ground for a sale by developing a trusted relationship with your prospect
 - d) Distracting people from all the other things they have to do
3. Is content marketing new?
 - a) Absolutely – no one has ever thought of using content in marketing before
 - b) Definitely not – after all you've had a newsletter for years
 - c) No – it's exactly the same as email marketing
 - d) Using content in marketing is not new, but content marketing as a fully formed strategy has only come into its own in recent years
4. When could you be said to have adopted a content marketing approach?
 - a) When you throw a couple of blogs and few Tweets and Facebook posts together and call it content marketing
 - b) When you develop it as a well thought-out strategy within your marketing plan
 - c) When you bolt a few ad hoc content initiatives on to your existing marketing plan
 - d) When you just produce a couple of product sheets each year for your sales team
5. How well do you need to know your audience?
 - a) In a deep way so you know how your content can deliver value to them
 - b) Not that well, you'll just continue to guess what they want
 - c) Just enough to be able to make a sales pitch
 - d) It doesn't matter how well you know them, it won't make a difference to what you do

6. Will content marketing always bring you a rapid return on investment?
- a) Yes, it's a short-term, quick-win sales tactic
 - b) It might, as long as you spend a lot of money on it in the first place
 - c) No, because there's just no way to measure it
 - d) No, you should expect to reap the rewards over the long term
7. Why do you need a clear content marketing strategy?
- a) You don't, having a strategy is completely unimportant
 - b) It's essential in order to provide direction and keep your content marketing on track
 - c) So you can then put it in your drawer and forget about it
 - d) So you can feel smug in review meetings
8. Why does thinking like a publisher help?
- a) Because working for a newspaper or magazine seems more exciting than what you do
 - b) It doesn't help at all because you're just here to sell stuff
 - c) Because you need to take your commitment to content seriously and adopt a professional approach to publishing
 - d) Because it will look good on your CV
9. Is it enough just to create good content?
- a) Yes, if you do that people will find it somehow
 - b) Yes, as long as it's on your website Google will send you plenty of visitors
 - c) No, you have to actively distribute and promote it across all your marketing channels
 - d) All you have to do is mention it on social media when you first create it
10. Should you tell anyone in-house about your content marketing?
- a) No, no one within your organization will care what you're up to
 - b) Yes, it's crucial you communicate in order to win support from your team, your managers and the Board
 - c) Only if someone asks you
 - d) No, you haven't got time to do that

Thank you for reading

I hope you've enjoyed this chapter from Content Marketing In a Week.

If you'd like to buy the book you can do so here:

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) or buy from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

If you have any feedback or questions or would like some help with your content marketing, just get in touch.

Telephone: 01386 701944 (+44 1386 701944)

Email: jane.heaton@janeheatonassociates.com

Connect with me on LinkedIn: <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/janeheaton>

Follow me on Twitter @janeheaton: <https://twitter.com/janeheaton>

www.janeheatonassociates.com

