



**MADISON
TAYLOR**
Marketing

MARKETING RESOURCES

Content Marketing



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Content is king. We've been saying it since day one, but it's no less true just because it's a little cliché. The whole idea of a content marketing strategy is to provide helpful, relevant, useful pieces of content to potential customers. So what do you think of when you think of a content strategy?

Obviously, the web comes first. Not only is it the easiest place to host content, but it's where business happens now. It doesn't matter if you're Amazon or a mom-and-pop mechanic, a web presence is no longer optional. Blogs, whitepapers, and pillar pages are all ways to spread educational content to your potential customers.

Social media is also no longer optional. [Over two-thirds of American adults are now using social media](#), and that number is higher for the younger segments. Social media is how people learn, communicate, and shop, and you can't afford not to be involved.

The number of ways to publish content is almost infinite — there's email, podcasts, infographics, videos, how-to guides, and tons more — but the driving force is the same.

Keep in mind that content marketing isn't a fast fix. This isn't about boosting your numbers for a quick, unsustainable spike. It's about being genuinely helpful, useful, and available to the people who need you. When done right, content marketing can create very stable, long-term growth. But you have to put the work in.

Chapter One: Building the Foundation

The World Runs On Social

First things first: [get your social media profiles in order](#). Think about which sites you're on — Facebook is a must, since its audience is simply too big to ignore, but beyond that, not every site will fit every business. Do you make software or something that doesn't lend itself well to photos and videos? Instagram and Pinterest probably aren't for you. Does your product sell mostly to teenagers? It's probably safe to skip LinkedIn.

What kind of content are you posting? Text, videos, photos, links? How do people respond? How often are you posting? Use [our social media guide](#) to fine-tune your social presence and maximize your engagement.

Do a quick audit of your social profiles, too. Make sure everything is spelled and capitalized correctly and consistently. Make sure your profile pictures are current, matching, and high-resolution. If you're using cover photos on Twitter or Facebook, make sure they're laid out properly and on-brand.

Add in details like a mission statement, what you do, why you do it, and when you were founded. Make sure any useful information is obvious and up to date — hours, website, contact phone and email, that kind of thing.

If you're a restaurant, link to your menu. If you're a brick and mortar, add a map to your location. It's all about being as user-friendly as possible — think about the things your customers might want to know about you, and anticipate those needs.

Worth The Effort: Running a Blog

If your site doesn't already have one, set up a blog. First, make sure your site is branded properly — [more on how to do that here](#) — and optimized to provide an easy, convenient, intuitive experience for the user. If your content strategy is working, you'll be drawing people into your site — make sure the site is ready to receive it.

If you already have a blog, do a quick audit. Make sure all the images — thumbnail, cover, inline, header, etc. — are high-resolution and crisp. Images should also be padded — add some white space on all sides so they aren't too snug with the text.

When you write, make sure you're using H1 and H2 tags. Changing font size, mixing up your colors, or making your subheadings bold might look good, but you still need the proper HTML behind the scenes to [optimize your SEO](#).

Go over every word with a fine-toothed comb for grammar and spelling

issues. Nobody's perfect, but the more attention you give to the little things, the less likely that errors will sneak through. And don't just rely on your browser's spell-check. Tools like Grammarly, Hemingway, and Google Drive will search for grammar and structure mistakes as well as typos.

Spruce Up Your Email Lists

Go through and cut any old or unsubscribed email addresses. If you're using a tool like Mailchimp, it will cut bounced or unsubscribed email addresses automatically, but it's still worth taking a look.

If you want to keep your message focused and conversion high, it might be worth cutting uninterested subscribers as well. Most email tools will generate reports of people who haven't opened, let's say, your last five emails. Send one last email asking why they aren't reading — is the content not relevant? Are there too many emails? — and then cut them from the list as well.

Take a look at your email provider, like Constant Contact or Mailchimp. Is it still meeting your needs? Are there limitations that it has that you're starting to find restrictive, like insufficient targeting or design capabilities? Don't just stick with the old client because you've been using it for a while. Make sure you have the best tools for the job.

Chapter Two: You Need A Content Strategy

In an ideal world, all your content will fit together and talk to each other. Blogs will speak to your social media users. Social posts will link back to blogs. Emails will direct readers to pillar pages to learn more. Podcasts will reference articles and whitepapers that are easy to find and download. And so on.

Who Are You Talking To?

One of the first things you need to sort out is who your content is directed at. That's where buyer personas come in.

A buyer persona is a fictional person that represents your ideal customer. If you have a very big company or a very wide array of products and services, then you might need a lot of different personas, each with their own strategy associated with them, but in all likelihood 1-3 personas is plenty.

A buyer persona should include everything you think is relevant to your business. Start with broad categories like age, gender, income level, and location. If you make women's business clothing, you don't need to spend any time marketing to men. If your business is local and in-person, like real estate or landscaping, don't waste your energy marketing to people too far away to reach.

Once you've narrowed your list down, start to incorporate other features of your ideal buyer. What are their hobbies? What TV shows do they watch? What kind of car do they drive? How tech-savvy are they? Have they used something like your product or service before? Have they bought from your competitors? The more precise you can get, the more specifically targeted your content (and marketing) can be.

Keep in mind that your customers won't all fit your persona, nor should they. The point is to target the perfect buyer — buyers who are close to that mold, or aspire to it, will come along for the ride.

Finally, think about the buyers you don't want. There are some customer out there who, even though they're willing to make a purchase from you, are going to be more trouble than they're worth. Maybe they're never going to make a repeat purchase. Maybe your product is too advanced for them — if you make photo-editing software for professionals, you don't want to spend all your time answering basic questions for beginners. Narrow your marketing down to only the people who are going to be the best fit for your company.

Which Platforms Should You Use?

Social media is an indispensable tool for any company's marketing efforts, but it's not a plug-and-play solution. Every account requires time, money, and attention, and some of them won't pay dividends.

Facebook is the only platform that you should definitely be using. It has by far the largest broadest audience of any social platform, and its targeting tools are unrivaled — no matter who your audience is, you can find them on Facebook.

The rest are less certain. Take a good hard look at the data on each platform to see if your target audience is using it. For example, Snapchat's audience skews heavily younger, so if you're after an older audience, Snapchat probably isn't worth your time. On the other hand, LinkedIn is a professional network for adults — you won't reach many teenagers with a LinkedIn post.

Think about how the format lends itself to your company too. Instagram, for example, is very visual — posts take the form of photos and videos, and captions are usually short. If you make software or something similar that doesn't lend itself to a visual medium, an Instagram account probably isn't the best way to show it off.

More Tips On Social Media

On social media as well as everywhere else, branding is crucial. To some extent, your profiles will have to fit the format of whatever platform you're using, but you can still make sure your logo is high-res, your cover photo matches your brand, and your copy fits the voice and tone you use elsewhere.

Think about how you're going to post. Are you going to put everything up manually? Are you going to use the built-in schedulers that Facebook and Twitter offer? Or are you going to use a third-party tool like HootSuite, Buffer, or Sprout?

How often are you going to post? Too often and you'll get annoying, not often enough and people will forget about you. [Each social media platform has different best practices](#) for how to stay in the front of your followers' minds, so you'll need to schedule accordingly.

Finally, [you need a content calendar](#). A content calendar helps you plan out

in advance what you're going to talk about, how you're going to talk about it, and where you're going to post it. It's a great way to make sure your content hits all your social channels at the same time and with a consistent look and tone.

Opinions vary on how far in advance you should plan your content — you don't want to be scrambling to keep up, and you want your writers and designers to have time to work ahead, but you also don't want to miss out on timely topics and current events. It's a good idea to work at least a month out, but probably no more than three. Exceptions can be made for major holidays and yearly promotions that you know are coming a long way off.

Be The Best Blog You Can

Blogging is one of the best ways to get traffic to your site, inform your customer, and demonstrate your authority and reliability on a topic. In today's market, consumers do more and more research before they buy, and almost all of that research happens online. You want to be the resource they turn to.

Blogs should be somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 to 800 words long. Any longer and readers will lose interest, any shorter and they won't feel like you've covered the subject. Stick to a specific, focused topic and save the broader materials for whitepapers, ebooks, and pillar pages — like this one!

How often should you post? Maybe more than you think. A recent study by HubSpot showed that [blogs with 16 or more posts a month got 3.5 times as many visitors](#) as blogs with four or fewer posts a month. Obviously, don't force it — putting out a ton of low-effort blogs will hurt you more than not posting enough — but in general, more is better.

Who's writing your blogs? If you're a small outfit, you might only have one or two writers on staff, so you know that the voice, tone, and writing style will be consistent. If you have a team of writers, it's imperative that they're all on the same page.

From little stuff like formatting dates, using contractions, or the Oxford comma to broader guidelines like vocabulary, paragraph length, and technical jargon, your brand should have explicit guidelines for how to write. In either case, it's probably smart to have a single editor read everything before it goes out.

Don't forget to use your content to promote your other content! If a blog references something you've covered in another blog, link to it! If you're talking about a study you read that supports what you're writing, link out to the study. Add links to your product pages, contact pages, whitepapers, how-to guides, demonstration videos, anything you have that's relevant to the article. You put the work into all this content — show it off!

Using Email Strategically

Think about your email schedule. Are you sending a monthly newsletter, or twice-a-week deals? In general, the longer your emails are, the less frequent they should be. Conversely, if emails are hyper-focused on a single product or promotion, you can send them more often. Experiment with frequency and keep an eye on your open and click rates to determine what works best for you.

Put a lot of thought into your subject lines. Readers can't click through to your site if they don't open the email, so your primary goal is to get them to open the email. It's a fine line — too vague and it'll sound like clickbait, too specific and they won't feel the need to read it at all. Don't be misleading, though — readers will get sick of you and unsubscribe if the email isn't what the subject line promised.

Again, use the content you already have! When you write a blog post, turn it into an email as well! Include links in your emails to relevant whitepapers, videos, and buyer's guides — or even include them in the body of the email itself. The more well-built your content is, the better it will serve to [guide people down the funnel to becoming customers](#).

What Other Content Should You Be Using?

Social media, blogs, and email are the big three of content publication, but they're far from the only options out there. Think about what would best serve your brand, your product, and your company.

Do you have a lot of data to present, but you're worried it will be boring? An infographic might spruce it up. Is your product difficult to use or set up, or are you getting a lot of the same questions from customers? Shoot a demonstration video and get ahead of it. Is there an expert in your field that could lend your brand some extra cachet? Maybe a podcast with that person will show off your expertise.

Don't just throw yourself into every possible channel — some of them won't be worth your time. But don't limit yourself either. Look into all your options, narrow them down, optimize them for your audience, and then launch them.

Chapter Three: Making Your Strategy Work For You

Ok, so we've talked about a strategy and built a foundation. Your branding is beautiful, your content calendar is robust, and your social media accounts are flawless. Now you just have to crank out some content.

The goal is to be proactive, not reactive. In fact, if you're launching from scratch, it probably makes sense to write half a dozen blog posts before you launch. You don't want readers coming to your blog from a social post, looking for more, and finding nothing.

Figure out what a sustainable rate of creation is for you — it would be great to post a blog post with high-quality photos and videos every other day, but creating good content takes time, and that's not feasible with a small crew. Take stock of how fast you can create good content and then build your calendar around that.

Make sure you're tracking your metrics. Some of them are obvious, like clicks on social and pageviews on your site, but [some will vary depending on your](#)

[needs and goals](#). Are you trying to convert readers into on-site evaluations? Are you trying to attract phone calls? Are you trying to increase time on site or reduce bounce rate? Focus on the metrics that are most important to you and make sure you're tracking them accordingly.

Chapter Four: The Buyer's Journey

Broadly speaking, the buyer's journey is the path that a person takes to becoming a customer. It starts with strangers who have never heard of you and ends with a customer who has researched their options and decided to go with you. There are three phases to the buyer's journey: awareness, consideration, and decision.

Phase One: Awareness

The awareness phase is the earliest part of the process. In this phase, your potential customer has the symptoms of a problem, but can't quite put their finger on what's causing it.

Let's say you make a premium foam mattress, like Tempur-Pedic, Casper, Leesa, Purple, or any of many others. What does the awareness phase look like for your customers? It might be Googling "how to get better sleep" or "chronic back pain." Your potential customer knows they have a problem. You know that your product is the solution, but they don't yet.

At this point, your role is simply to inform. Use tools like Google's web suggestions to find out what people are searching for and write on those topics. Publish blog posts about how sleep matters for health, how Americans don't get enough sleep, and similar topics.

Blogs, whitepapers, and social posts are perfect at this stage of the process. All you're trying to do is spread useful, relevant information as far as possible.

Don't fill this content with sales copy, CTAs, or mentions of your brand. Awareness-phase readers aren't ready to be sold to and might be put off by overly aggressive tactics. You're not trying to move mattresses just yet —

you're trying to show them that a new mattress will solve their back pain.

Phase Two: Consideration

At this phase, potential consumers are starting to assemble a list of solutions to their problem in their head. Maybe they need to go to bed earlier? Maybe they need prescription medication? Maybe they need a new mattress?

Your role in the consideration phase is to highlight your product in such a way that your potential buyer realizes you're the best solution to their problem. This is a perfect opportunity for video demonstrations, statistics about the benefits of a mattress upgrade, and customer testimonials explaining how their new mattress changed their life.

This is also a good phase to start generating leads. Customers are now interested enough that if you create top-quality resources, people will exchange email addresses or phone numbers in order to see them. You can use that contact info to follow up with people, send them more content, and nurture their connection to your brand.

Phase Three: Decision

This phase is all about you. Buyers in the decision phase have done their research, concluded that they need a new mattress, and are just deciding which one to spend their hard-earned paycheck on.

Lots of companies start their marketing efforts here, ignoring the first two phases. But it won't do you much good to splash your product all over the internet if people can't even see why they would need it in the first place. That's why the journey is so important.

This is the part where you get to tell potential customers that you make the best premium foam mattress on the market. Talk about your price point, your warranty, or your features. Talk about free shipping, trial periods, rebates, and discounts. Talk about satisfied customers. If you've been top-ranked on review sites, Amazon, Consumer Reports, or anywhere else, now's the time to

brag about it!

Finally, this is the stage to guide people toward an actual purchase. Gear your CTAs toward pricing, quotes, or trial offers. If you have email addresses of people who haven't bought yet, offer them a limited-time discount, or a coupon for their first purchase. If you offer a service instead of a product, offer free consultations or appraisals to help nudge them into a sale.

The Secret Phase Four: Existing Customers

Did we say there were only three phases? That's not exactly true. Your job doesn't end once you swipe a customer's credit card.

In the age of social media, a dissatisfied customer can wreak havoc on your brand and your reputation — just ask United Airlines — so it's important to keep your existing customers happy. Existing customers are more likely to try new things, spend more when they do, and tell their friends about their experience.

Follow up with them to ask how they're enjoying their purchase! Ask them if you can use their review on your website — people like having their opinions valued. Send them follow-up offers for related products and services — if they bought a mattress, maybe they need pillows or bedding too. Most importantly, don't treat them like new customers. Remember, they've already been through the funnel, and if they make another purchase, they won't be starting from square one. If you can, separate your social media and email campaigns so that existing customers aren't seeing the same thing as strangers. You want them to feel like part of the club.

Chapter Five: Test Everything, Then Test It Again

This is where it becomes so important to keep track of your metrics. If you've got a close eye on the data and analytics, you should start noticing differences between one piece of content and another.

When it comes to blog posts, look at time on page, unique viewers, and

conversions. On social posts, pay attention to engagement and clicks. On emails, watch open rates, clickthrough, and conversions. See if you notice any patterns or commonalities between successful posts and unsuccessful ones.

Some channels, like email and social, will let you run A/B testing, where you serve one post to half your audience and another to the other half. That way, you can directly compare imagery, copy, headlines, CTAs, or whatever else you want to test to narrow down the best options.

Don't be afraid to kill your darlings. You may love a piece of content or social platform, but you have to be prepared to let it go if the numbers just aren't supporting it. Take a look at where your weaker pieces are failing, optimize them if you can, but if nothing works, cut them loose. Not every post is going to work for you.

If your product is geared toward both B2C and B2B, test out what kind of approaches work best in each market. Things that work beautifully in your B2C emails might not resonate at all with your B2B customers, and vice versa. Don't assume that you can take one approach across both markets.

Chapter Six: To Ad Or Not To Ad?

The short answer is that you should probably be spending some money on advertising — boosting social media posts at the very least. It's a big world out there and it's easy for your posts to get lost even with the best of targeting, so a little nudge to help you rise above the pack won't go amiss.

Counterintuitively, don't boost the posts that aren't doing well. They're not doing well for a reason — the target market simply isn't interested in what that post is saying — and that won't change with money. Instead, put your money behind the posts that are already succeeding. They're the ones with a message people want to hear, so spread that message as far as you can.

How much should you spend? That depends on a lot of factors, but we'd suggest a floor of \$50 for a social post. Less than that and your reach won't be big enough to draw meaningful conclusions from.

On the other end, the sky's the limit — just see what works! If you have a social post that's getting solid, quantifiable conversions and a high ROI, feel free to keep pumping it up. You don't have to stick to a budget that's not working for you just because you talked about it in your last meeting.

Chapter Seven: Determining KPIs and ROI

You won't see huge gains right away — that's not the point of a content strategy. The point is to provide useful, informative, relevant content to people who might be in the market for what you're selling. It'll take time for people to find you, but it's a more stable strategy over time.

After a few months, though, you should start to see increases in clicks to your site from social posts. On the site itself, your visitors' time on page and page views per session will rise, and bounce rates will go down. Your emails will get opened more, and more readers will click through to your site. You'll get more signups and contacts out of your forms and CTAs. And of course, the end result is more customers!

Content is King

In the end, it all comes back to the content. If your content isn't up to snuff, the best strategy in the world won't keep you afloat. But if you provide high-quality, easy-to-read, useful content, in whatever forms your customers want it, your ROI will go up and the KPIs mentioned above will keep rising.

Your customers are out there, looking for information, assistance, and solutions. Your job is be there when they need you.