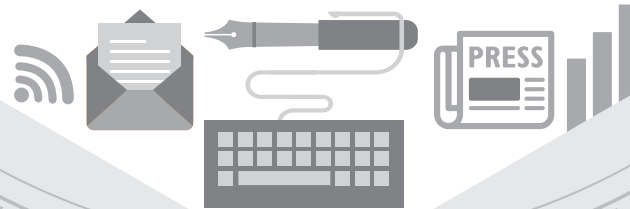




HOW TO FIX THE 5 CONTENT MARKETING MISTAKES YOU MIGHT BE MAKING



INTRODUCTION

Everybody and their mother now has a smartphone, but that doesn't mean everybody and their mother is an expert, or even a competent, smartphone user. When popular trends or patterns take off, the masses usually follow - for better or for worse. Remember when 'twerking' took over the world and then that girl twerked herself on fire? Oh right, that was a hoax (why did you have to ruin a perfectly good example, Jimmy Kimmel?). However, the point remains: just because a large group of people are doing the same thing doesn't mean they are all doing it well.

Enter content marketing, the digital darling of 2013. According to WordPress, just one (albeit huge) content management platform, users are producing 41 million new posts and 54.1 million comments per month. That's without including the other major content platforms or anything fully customized. That's a lot of content. Suffice to say when it comes to content marketing, everybody is doing it. Or at least, everybody is trying.

To be fair, the components of content marketing have been around forever; the term is just a new, buzzier name for things we as marketers should have been doing all along. But now that it's all the rage to have 'content marketing,' many businesses have taken the bait hook, line and sinker. Unfortunately for some companies, an insatiable appetite for more traffic, social signals and leads has devolved content marketing into much less than it's supposed to be.

Content marketing isn't a get-rich-quick scheme that'll have customers knocking down your doors the next day. It's not easy, it's not short-term and it's not cheap. But at the end of the day, it's a holistic digital marketing approach that can bring your brand and its customers together in a way not many other strategies can. Many companies, including your competitors, are probably investing in some form of content marketing, but less than half of them are reaping the true rewards of the strategy. The real way to get a leg up on your competition is to do the kind of content marketing nobody else has committed to.

Rather than play the blame game, it's just say that for whatever reason, the marketing habits of you or your company could be lacking. You might be making some of these content marketing mistakes; and even if you aren't, maybe you would have at some point in the future. Now that you're here, let's outline how to fix - or avoid - 5 content marketing mistakes that a whole bunch of companies are making.

MISTAKE 1

THINKING CONTENT MARKETING DOESN'T WORK THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO.

Moz's Rand Fishkin has said one of the reasons content marketing fails is too many people believing the biggest myth content marketing ever told the world: that great content directly leads to readers instantly making a purchase. But it's so true and bears repeating many times over: content marketing just doesn't work like that.

Let's say your company launches headlong into content marketing and decides it wants to publish the best blog post your industry has ever seen. You spend time and energy brainstorming the perfect idea and then pour your blood, sweat and tears into crafting an immaculate article. The heavens part and it's finally time to post that money-maker. Your traffic spikes as the blog gets shared around social media, slowly

building momentum in the days following its publication. Some links trickle in as a few other industry thought-leaders mention the article. After two weeks, all metrics point to the post being a huge success. There's only one problem: there's no uptick in sales! Your company no doubt feels angry and discouraged at this point, which could lead to a drastically decreased effort in content marketing (and in some cases, total abandonment). The shame of it all is that the above situation is an example of a truly successful piece of content that was simply misunderstood.



SOLUTION 1

ACCEPT AND UNDERSTAND HOW CONTENT MARKETING REALLY WORKS.

Content marketing isn't about conversions. Sure, you can optimize the conversion rate of your website and have everything set up for success; the buying process for a customer should be as easy as you can possibly make it. But the ultimate goal of content marketing isn't to publish great content and wait for the sales to come rolling in.

Content marketing is a tool brands should use to make connections and develop relationships with visitors. Over the course of time, the goal is to turn these visitors into brand advocates that share content and information to other people within their sphere of influence. The hope is that sales will come not from 'customers' but fans and friends of the company who were initially drawn in and attracted by great, insightful content.



KEY POINT:

Falling victim to popular misconceptions about how content marketing works is an extremely common mistake. Avoid it by developing a rock solid understanding of the actual goals and deliverables of content marketing.

MISTAKE 2

YOUR CONTENT IS WAY TOO FOCUSED ON YOURSELF!

As more companies finally embrace the world of digital marketing, one thing that lingers is company-focused content. This is a huge mistake. If there's one blatantly obvious trait about successful digital marketing campaigns it's that the focus is always squarely on the customer. Your customers are the only star of your content – not you, your brand or whatever it is that you sell. These days, the moment you start talking about "company-this and company-that," the customer has already tuned you out and moved on to the next option.

Since the advent of Google's hostile crackdown on crappy content, it's been mightily confusing for companies to keep track of what's going on over in the zoo. But as hard as it is, staying updated – or at least working with someone who stays updated – is vital to

understanding how and why you need to nurture a customer focused-website and create customer-focused content.



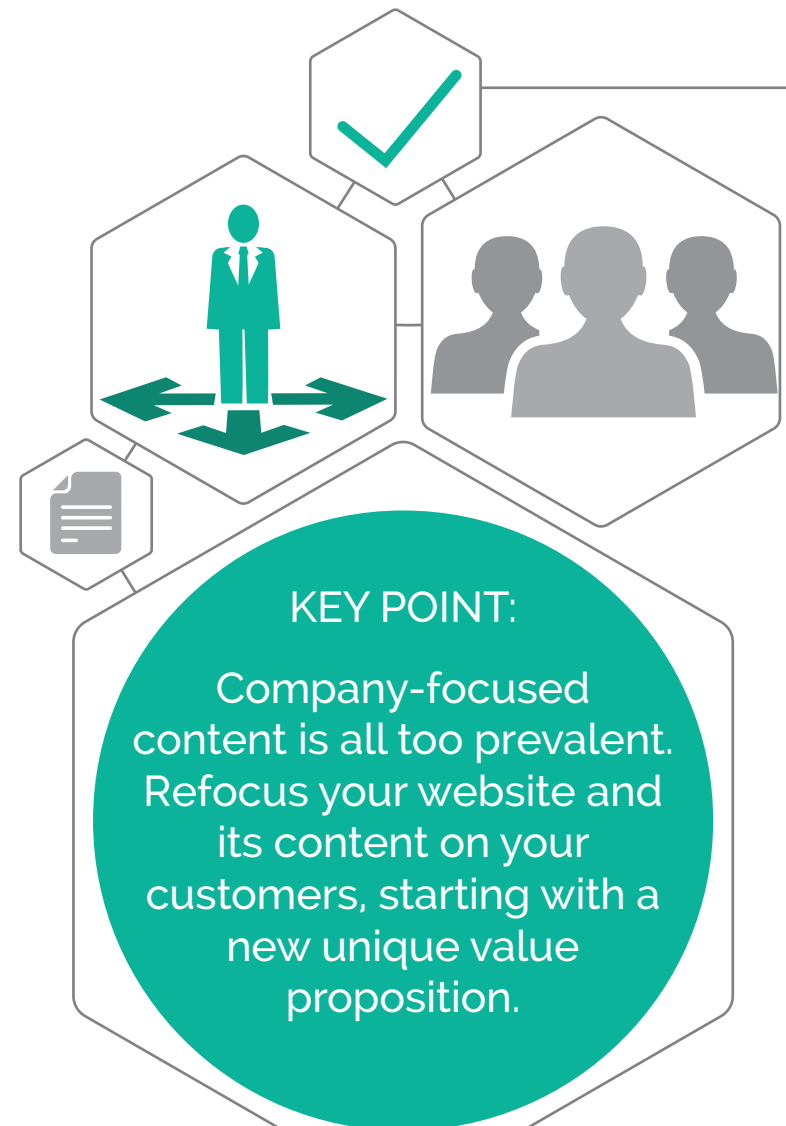
SOLUTION 2

REFOCUS YOUR CONTENT ON YOUR CUSTOMERS.

The first step in refocusing your content on your customers is fixing your unique selling proposition (USP). What's a USP? Put simply, it's your company's answer to the question, "Why should customers buy from us instead of our competitors?" To put it bluntly, most companies have a miserable, self-centered USP that doesn't even answer the question.

Some variant of "we provide great services" or "our product is awesome" is used by hundreds of companies that waste their precious USP by tooting their own horn without a shred of evidence. Customers are way too smart to blindly take a company's word that their product is great (and it's also easy for them to fact-check such claims).

To rewrite a successful USP, put yourself into your customers' shoes and think about what would make them feel not only secure, but connected and drawn to your company by only a few simple words. Some tips for writing a great USP include keeping it short (10 words or less), ensuring it's verifiable and of course, being certain it answers the question of why a customer should buy from you instead of someone else.



MISTAKE 3

NOT KNOWING WHO YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE OR WHAT THEY WANT.

Not knowing who your customers are or what they want is a by-product of mistake #2. If you aren't focused on and creating content for your customers, then you probably don't know what questions they are asking and what they need help with. Ultimately, this means you're not providing answers, value or insight to your customers (which, if you've been paying attention, is the main goal of content marketing).

Let's back up for a second. People buy products and services because they're in pain (and real or imagined, they want something that eases this pain). Your job is to figure out what kind of pain your customers are in, why they are in pain and, most importantly, how you can help alleviate the pain.

You can't discern pain points if you don't know who is in pain, and you definitely won't be able to create very

successful content without these details. Making these customer-based mistakes is an absolutely vicious cycle that can threaten to wipe out even your best content marketing intentions. If this sounds like you or your company, you need to get things on the right track as quickly as possible!



SOLUTION 3

CREATE BUYER PERSONAS.

Creating buyer personas is absolutely the answer for getting to know your customers and aligning your content with their needs. Buyer personas are fictional profiles devised from any and all data you can collect from your customers. But like content marketing as a whole, the process of creating buyer personas requires time, energy and dedication.

To effectively create buyer personas, you need to collect data from your web analytics, your own business intelligence and even directly from your customers. Then, using the data you've collected, you can start to create various different personas that act as representatives of your various customer groups.

The personas should be as vivid and detailed as you can possibly make them. You can even refer to them as real customers around the office and in meetings. Name your personas; give them genders, faces, styles, financial situations and even motivations. Apply common pain points to each persona so you can imagine the problems you are trying to solve with each piece of targeted content you create.



KEY POINT:

You can't do great marketing without knowing who your customers are. Create and use buyer personas to breathe life into your content marketing.

MISTAKE 4

ASSUMING YOU DON'T NEED A STRATEGY.

The phrase "we'll just create content when we have time" means only one thing: no content - ever. It's a nice idea to think that you'll be able to churn out excellent content with all that spare time that usually crops up during the workweek, but...no. It won't happen. It never happens because seriously, who has extra time during their workweek? Plus, good content - the kind that rises to the top and actually gets read - isn't easy to create. You don't just whip that kind of content up out of thin air.

If you don't think you need a strategy then you probably aren't focusing on your customers or creating buyer personas either, so at this point, you've got a few compounded mistakes on your hands. The good news is that a strategy gathers and organizes all the components of a successful content marketing strategy into place, so it's a great place to start if you want to get back on track.



SOLUTION 4

PREPARE, PLAN AND EXECUTE.

The tricky part about this solution is convincing yourself, your boss or whoever is in charge that you do, in fact, need a plan. The urge to not have a plan can be unusually strong, only because in the short-term, not having a plan is less work. However, in the long run, a plan is always going to save you time (and sleep, stress, heartache and possibly your job or company). In the business world, plans and preparedness breed success.

Map out your plan by starting with your USP. If you don't know what a USP is, go directly to mistake #2 (do not pass GO, do not collect \$200). Once you're back and have a real USP, consult your customer personas and begin to think about how each of your customer groups

views your USP in relation to their pain points. Once you've got a general idea about the kinds of questions your customers are asking, you can start to create targeted content that seeks to provide helpful, insightful answers to these questions.

The last step in your content marketing strategy is to plan a schedule. You now have various topics and ideas for helpful content, so you've got to figure out the following details:

- What forms of content are going to be most effective (blog, infographic, video)?
- Are you matching your content to the buying funnel?
- Who will create the content?
- If collaborating on content with an outside firm, what is the budget?
- How often will we produce content?
- What does our content calendar look like?

If it sounds like a lot of ground to cover, it is - but that's what it takes to be prepared. In order to deliver exceptional content marketing to your customers, you need to be able to visualize and execute a strategy.

KEYPOINT:

Assuming you don't need a content marketing strategy is asking for trouble. To achieve content marketing success you need to plan, prepare and execute a strategy.



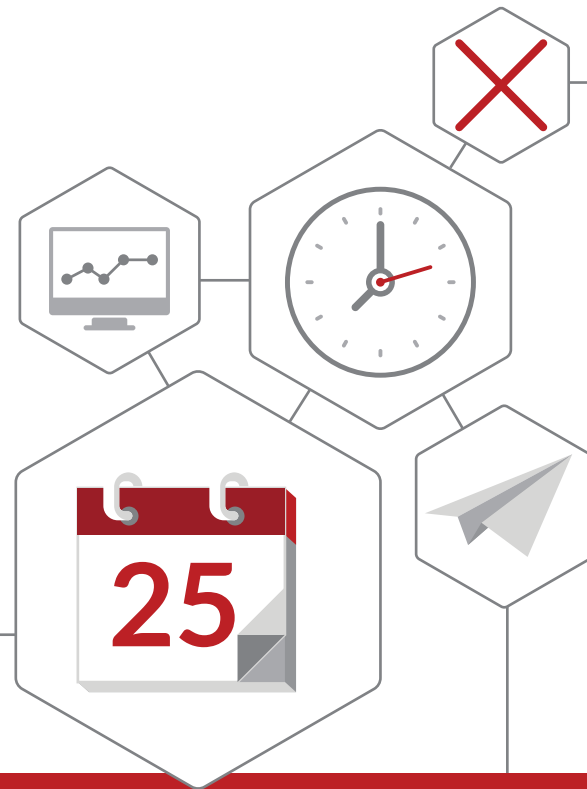
MISTAKE 5

YOU DON'T COMMIT, THEN YOU QUIT.

This fifth most common mistake is best explained courtesy of the wise Wizard of Moz, who says that when it comes to content marketing, most people give up way too soon. Content marketing is a long-term strategy that most people use it to try to accomplish short-term goals. Look, you can't shoehorn content marketing into something it isn't (this goes back to mistake #1). But unfortunately, far too many companies have unreasonable expectations for content marketing. At first, they're disappointed. Then things turn sour and as impatience sets in, the content marketing plug is pulled. Ouch. Content marketing, you never had a chance!

If you've done this, don't pretend you went all-in on content marketing and things "just didn't work out." No, part of the reason nothing happened is that you didn't commit long-term to a strategy that needs a long-term commitment in order to succeed. Those are the facts.

If a marketer or an agency has promised quick wins with content, that's their fault for setting unrealistic expectations. If you're not legitimately interested in developing real relationships and providing true value to your customers, then content marketing just isn't for you.



SOLUTION 5

JUST STICK WITH IT.

Failure comes with the content marketing territory. You're going to publish truly great articles that go unnoticed. You'll create an amazing infographic you are sure will go viral, but it'll barely move the needle. An awesome video you invest a little bit of money into won't generate the views and shares you anticipate. These things are not just likely to happen, they are necessary in order for you to achieve content marketing success. Fail. Then fail again. Just don't quit.

While some of the above "failures" will sting, there will be small victories along the way that let you know you're on the right track. Think of it as a journey in which you're laying the foundations of success. Then one day you'll wake up and all of your hard work will start paying off at the same time and, better yet, it'll continue paying dividends long after your initial investment.

Here are some success markers you can use as motivation to stick with content marketing when times are tough:

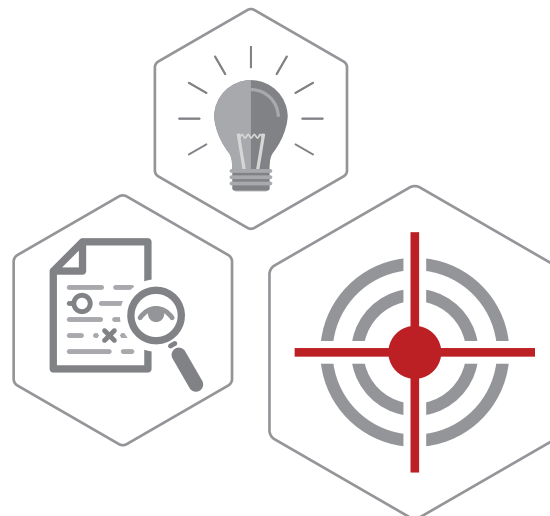
- Every once in a while, a piece of content will do much better than anything else you've created. This isn't just a "good sign," it's a huge indicator of future success.
- When you get a comment, share, or pat on the back from a thought-leader or a large company, it's a big deal.
- If you are proud of a piece of content you or your company created, then show that pride. Share it like crazy even if nobody else is - it might pay off down the road.
- If you read all of your content and truly believe it can help your customers, never give up. Someday, you'll be over the moon that you didn't quit.



CONCLUSION

LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES!

We all make mistakes. There's a good chance you or your company has made one or two of the content marketing missteps we've outlined, and that's okay. The good news is you can easily fix the mistakes you've made. Better yet, you can minimize the damage by avoiding the mistakes you've yet to make. Completely understanding and embracing content marketing is the quickest path to success, so if you've made mistakes, don't be afraid to learn from them!



ABOUT WSI

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