A PR PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO KILLER CONTENT:

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS (WITH YOUR CONTENT)
AND INFLUENCE BUSINESS RESULTS (THROUGH OPTIMIZED EFFORTS)



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The content marketing industry is booming.

According to MarketingMag.com, it is expected to be a \$300 billion industry by 2019 - an explosive rate of growth that marks a more than 200% increase in less than four years.

But many marketers are still trying to figure out what exactly it is and how best to make it an effective part of their marketing mix.

Content marketing alone has proven to be an extremely effective tactic when done right - our friends at Curata found that 74% of companies indicate that content marketing is increasing their marketing teams' lead quality and quantity. We believe it is most impactful when deployed in conjunction with a comprehensive strategy that includes a public relations program to maximize the value of each asset and tactic.

Read on to find out how you can make content marketing work in your organization.

First Things First: What is Content Marketing?

The Content Marketing Institute, the definitive source of content, defines content marketing as, "a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."

This can come to life in many different forms, including but far from limited to:

- **Ebooks**, infographics and tip sheets that are distributed via email and the web
- Glossy magazines that are the descendents of the traditional print catalog
- **Videos that span from talking-heads** explaining a concept to high-budget, scripted storytelling
- Bylined articles or contributed content series
- Interactive calculators and tools
- Classic whitepapers and customer case studies
- **Blogs and social posts**
- **Podcasts**

Regardless of the form, the function of content marketing remains the same driving an audience to take a specific action. And it typically involves multiple pieces of content moving through the traditional sales/ marketing cycle: awareness, consideration and, ultimately, action - such as making a purchase.

As content marketing grew and evolved, it had a hard time finding a "home" in many marketing organizations - sometimes part of the PR function, sometimes lead generation, and often product marketing. Increasingly, however, content is holding its own as a standalone marketing function - fueling the many other cogs in the marketing wheel, like email marketing efforts, advertising and social campaigns.



The 1+1=3 Effect of Content and PR Together

For us at Version 2.0, content is optimally aligned with public relations, as the two bring out the best in one another and are both grounded in telling stories that resonate with targeted audiences. The power of PR amplifies content across paid, earned and owned channels and ensures a message is not only heard, but also elicits prompt action. Moreover:

- ► They share goals which often include a mix of brand awareness, market education, thought leadership and air cover for sales.
- ➤ They're competitive with each other in a good way, around which can drive greater measurable results, from increased web traffic to qualified leads generated.
- ➤ They commit to one another the relationship between PR and content is most meaningful when it is given the opportunity to grow over time. We always advise clients to run the programs together for at least six months to start to see the true 1+1=3 impact they can have.

This eBook is designed to provide you with a guide for ensuring your content strategy is designed and executed in a manner that makes it PR friendly so your marketing effort can reach its full potential - and you can best do your job.

Notable Findings from V2's State of Content & PR: Optimized or Opportunity? Report

We asked executives, marketers and PR pros how their content and PR programs could better work together. Here's some of what we heard:

Less than half of respondents use earned media channels to distribute content (vs. 90/85% using website/email)

42% believe their organization rarely or never realizes the maximum value from content

41% believe their organization's content would benefit from a single entity handling both its creation and amplification

Get the full report here:

https://v2comms.wishpond.com/state_of_content_pr/





Developing a content strategy is NOT synonymous with starting a blog or setting up a Twitter handle. A smart, effective content strategy is far more complex. But don't mistake complexity for confusion. Even the most advanced content strategies at the world's biggest brands share common elements (and yours should, too):

Personas

Compelling content tells people something they want to know but before you can figure out what they want, you need to have a clear idea of who they are. If your team has buyer personas already developed, you're a step or two ahead of the game.

If not, try to picture the exact person you're hoping to reach:

- What's their job title?
- What kind of company do they work for?
- Are they male or female?
- What are their communications preferences?
- ► How much do they already know about the topics you want to tell them about?
- What do they need to know that you can tell them?
- Why would they be interested in your company and its product(s) or services?

Use the answers to these questions to make decisions about what your content needs to say.

Content Audit

Unless you're starting entirely from scratch, it's very likely that your organization has a number of content assets already developed.

Whether it's a long list of beautifully-designed assets or some dated blog posts written by an intern, that material should be inventoried and assessed to determine if it can be used as is, needs to be retired or can be refreshed. Qualities to consider assessing in a content audit include:

- Format
- Length
 (in pages, words, or time)
- Buyer stage

- ▶ Target personas
- Key theme
- Branding
- Call to action

Use the answers to these questions to make decisions about what your content needs to say.

Production Plan

This is where most marketers tend to jump into a content strategy - because it is where the rubber meets the road, where the strategy starts to come to life.

The production plan should address all of the tactical elements of executing the strategy, including:

- Format of each content piece
- Subject matter experts informing the piece
- Writers actually authoring the piece if different than the subject matter experts
- **Contributors from industry influencers to third party research firms**
- Distribution plans including both online and offline channels
- Timing including target dates for first drafts, design deadlines and ultimate distribution
- The tone of voice and style, if your brand doesn't already have this well defined

Use the answers to these questions to make decisions about what your content needs to say.

Performance Measures

We've saved the best - and most important - for last: set goals. Like any marketing effort, content marketing should have very clearly defined objectives that can be measured over time. The most effective marketers look at not just the overall effectiveness of the strategy, but also the performance of each piece of content; this provides the macro- and micro-level views necessary to truly understand what's working, what isn't and where to make changes.

Thanks to modern-day technologies that collect large amounts of data, there are dozens of ways to measure content marketing performance. These often fall into four major categories:

- Consumption metrics e.g., page views, form completions, email opens/clicks, downloads
- Sharing metrics e.g., social media shared, forwards
- Lead metrics e.g., new leads generated, funnel conversion rates
- Sales metrics e.g., pipeline generated or touched, revenue influenced

While all of these elements are important, the most important measure of a strategy is whether it works for your organization and team. In our work with dozens of clients, we've never seen two content strategies that look exactly the same. Once you have a documented strategy, update it regularly and look for opportunities to improve each quarter and year.



As you learned in Chapter 1, there are many factors that contribute to a successful content strategy - but if your content isn't compelling, people will not follow you down the marketing funnel. In order to ensure that your content is both good and compelling, ask yourself these questions.

What is your desired outcome?

Your overarching goal - whether it is to increase website traffic, generate marketing/sales qualified leads, open new markets or promote your company's thought leadership - will affect the types and topics of content that your audience will find most compelling.

On a more tactical note, you should use content to cause your reader to take a specific action - but before you can lead them down a path, you need to have a clear idea of what the call to action should be. Do you want them to sign up for a free trial? To visit your blog? To download another asset? Compelling content has a clear idea of what it needs to accomplish and lays out a definitive call to action for the audience to take.

What does my audience want to listen to?

While your strategy should describe who your audience is, its execution should consider how you convey information so it will resonate with them. Voice and tone are just as important in content as they are in music. Some audiences respond better to technical information from an authority; others want easy-to-digest content from someone who sounds like a friend. You could be presenting valuable information, but if it's said in a way that turns your reader off, they'll stop reading long before they understand that you have something they want. It's best to avoid any and all barriers. For example, some audiences are not able to open and review long documents during the workday, or may not have access to social media.

What does my audience need to know right now?

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The best kind of content answers a question or addresses a need that the reader has identified - and now that you know who your reader is, it's your task to figure out what their unmet needs and unanswered questions are-and how you can answer them in a way that's informative, differentiated and responsive. Make sure you're addressing a question or need that people have now - content is the most effective when it's timely.

How do I want to convey this information?

Unlike some other forms of communication, creative and compelling content requires design to be an initial consideration, rather than an afterthought. Before you start drafting, consider what format would be best received by your reader and best fits the topic that you've honed in on. Is it an infographic? A whitepaper? An interactive calculator? Online? Downloadable? Printable? Let the format inform how you frame up the draft itself to ensure that all parts of your content are working in harmony with each other. Sometimes multiple formats are the right answer.

Truly compelling content delivers the right message to the right person at the right time. Above all else, keep your audience front of mind, and you'll always be pointed in the right direction.

Recipe for a Superstar Content Mix:

65% created 25% curated 10% syndicated

Source: Curata





A successful content program takes considerable planning, resources, tools, time and creativity to get it right. But, luckily, it doesn't always have to be difficult. In fact, we've found that there are often some very practical, even simple ways companies can make immediate and impactful content marketing improvements.

Here are four quick, easy changes to see big improvements in your content efforts:

1. Answer the big questions your audiences are asking

Do you know if your content actually addresses concerns, challenges or problems your audiences have? You should, and it's surprisingly simple to find this out.

Use Google's autocomplete feature to get an idea of what people are searching for, which in turn provides incredible (free!) insight into the questions your target audiences are asking, what's motivating them and, most likely, topics you never would have thought of brainstorming around a conference room table.

2. Ask someone in your audience to read your content

Seems obvious, right? Our friend Samantha Stone of The Marketing Advisory Network suggested this tip during her panel at last year's Content Marketing Conference, and based on the room's reaction, it's not a common practice. But it should be because it will easily help you understand if your content is relevant, interesting and helpful - and will avoid putting you at risk if something is off-base and could diminish your brand's position as an expert and thought leader. Whether your audience is CMOs, IT managers, GenXers or another cohort, find someone in that group you know and can trust to provide honest feedback - most people are flattered to be asked for their expertise.

3. "Make unicorn babies"

This one sounds hard (and weird!), but it's one of our favorite content marketing tips ever, courtesy of Larry Kim, founder of Wordstream and CEO of Mobile Monkey. With an ever-growing volume of content now available, getting yours to stand out is hard. Larry suggested (and we agree) that data should be used to identify the donkeys (duds) and the unicorns (the rare, high-engagement pieces), and from there, you should leverage the unicorns. Enter unicorn babies, derivative pieces stemming from the same idea as the unicorn content. Because the topic is already popular among your audience, there is a higher possibility these assets will also drive high engagement. It's essentially our hub and spoke approach to content, with a magical twist that puts successful past content at the center of a broader ongoing campaign poised to drive sustained high engagement.

4. Maximize your content through media

With so much time and effort going into researching, writing and distributing a piece of content, it is a waste to not pursue additional media (traditional and social) placements for it when it's non-promotional and speaks to a publication's readership. With the hardest work done, it's a tremendous way to establish or strengthen thought leadership.



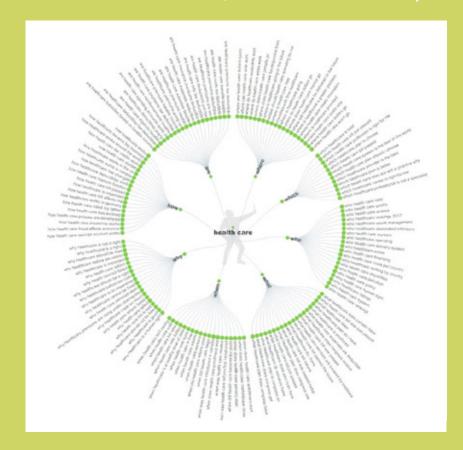
Did you know that per dollar spent, <u>content</u> <u>marketing generates three</u> <u>times more leads than</u> <u>traditional marketing?</u>

It's no wonder that content marketing budgets are on the rise: according to research from The Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 51% of B2B marketers will increase their content marketing spend in the next 12 months.

However, if you're like most marketers, you're always looking to do more and more with less (or, at least, do more with more efficient use of resources). Whether your budget abounds or you have limited resources, our favorite free tools will help you create powerful content that resonates with your audiences.

Answer the Public

When designing your content strategy (or when you hit a creative block in executing against it), Answer the Public is a great starting point to see what people want to know about your specific topic or industry. This nifty tool allows users to type in a word and visually see what people are searching for about it in search engines like Google and Bing. For example, in the image below, we typed in "health care," and Answer the Public visually generated 151 related questions that are frequently searched for, including "How health care works," "When does health care enrollment start," and "Which health care plan should I choose."



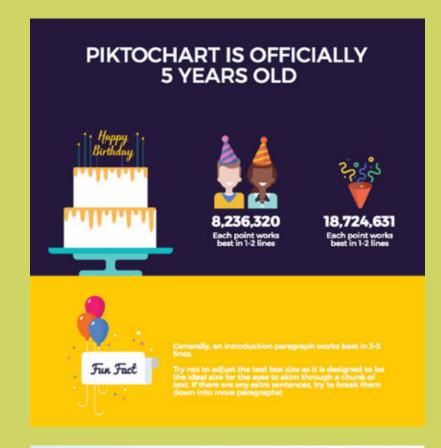


<u>Piktochart</u>

Content marketers know our audiences love sleekly-designed infographics that capture attention before they can read a single word, but we are not all naturally graphic design mavens. Creating graphics in-house can certainly save time and money, but many companies don't have in-house design resources - or if they do, that team is backed up with projects that will slow down your workflow. With Piktochart, you're in luck! Piktochart is an easy-to-use, online infographic tool that has templates with various photos, shapes and frames to choose from, so you can create your own masterpiece in a short amount of time. This user-friendly tool is definitely our go-to. Check out the sample infographic template to the right.

Adobe Spark

Social graphics, animated videos, web stories - it's all here, and it's all free. Need an image for a blog post? Want to create quote cards to share with social content? Look no further than Adobe Spark. See to the right for an example of a simple image we created for a recent blog post.







You've developed a detailed strategy.
You've written, reworked and edited the content. You've put it into a compelling, eye catching design. You distributed it across channels - online and off, to existing audiences and entirely new ones. Heck, you not only met your goals, but you blew them out of the water (or, maybe that data is still coming together....)

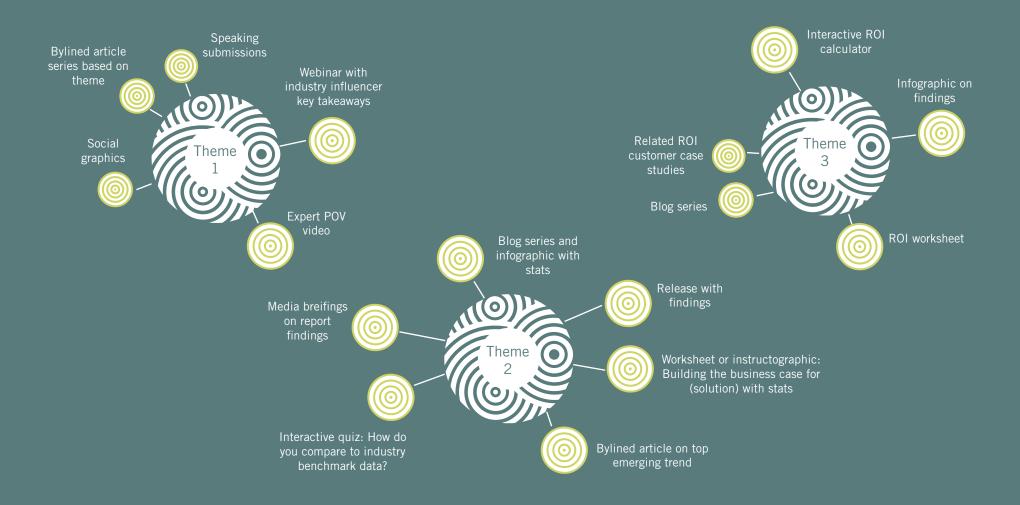
Now what?

Let's revisit the 1+1=3 concept from the beginning of this eBook to see how one piece of content can be used to fuel every aspect of a marketing and/or PR program.

Take, for instance, an industry survey. Though it may initially seem like a drag having to identify a survey partner, poll targets and analyze results, the expenditure of resources immediately makes up for itself (and then some) upon collection of marketing and PR fodder for months to come. From a PR standpoint alone, that one piece of content can supply the basis for:

- ► A press release, which announces the most compelling results to make a strong case for your business.
- ► Thought leadership campaigns, which highlight some of the central industry trends uncovered by the survey.
- Speaker submissions, which use the findings to underscore industry challenges or gaps - and how they can be overcome and addressed via guidance from your expert spokesperson.
- ► Months of social media fodder, which not only helps drive website traffic but offers digestible "fun facts" to keep the stats and your company's industry expertise front and center.
- ➤ An infographic, which delivers a visual representation of the information that can be pitched exclusively to a target publication for more stellar media coverage.

We call this the "hub and spoke" approach - a way to ensure that the output of each content campaign is exponentially greater than the work invested to create it by engaging audiences across different stages of the buyer's journey, different distribution channels and in different formats.



The Hub and Spoke Applied across Three Distinct Campaign Themes

The Hub and Spoke Applied to the Buyer's Journey

Example Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3 **Bylined articles** Industry survey Blog series on ROI **Speaking engagements** Media coverage of Inforgraphic on survey findings (reease findings eBook & briefings) ROI worksheet **Expert POV video DISCOVERY** Social posts with key stats "Do I have a Infographic on findings problem?" Interactive ROI Webinar with industry Interactive quiz: How calculator influencer, key do you compare to industry benchmark takeaways **CONSIDERATION** Case study speaking data? engagement "Who can help me **New product press** solve this problem? release How can I solve it?" Related ROI customer Related case study Worksheet or instructographic: case study **Awards Building the business** case using stats from DECISION survey "Why are you the best to help me solve my problem?"

Version 2.0 Content Optimization at Work: A Mini Case Study

We worked with V2client Exact U.S. Cloud Solutions to develop three industry reports - content we used to fuel a multi-faceted campaign that included a press release, extensive coverage in target manufacturing, wholesale and professional services outlets, and recognition from industry influencer Gene Marks via Twitter.





If there's one lesson to take away from this eBook, it's to NOT create content for content's sake. Time and time again, companies invest the manpower to draft, develop, design and distribute content without thinking through real purpose or intent. The key to a successful content strategy (as you should have learned in chapter 1) is to think about the strategic end goal first. While being thoughtful, planful and strategic is not always the easiest route, it will provide the best results in helping an organization reach its target audience.

As proof points, we've put together a shortlist of content we love and the brands behind the magic. These companies not only developed compelling and creative content, but did so with a comprehensive strategy in mind.



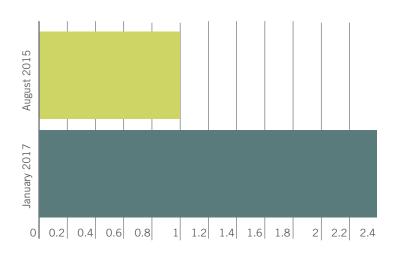
Know Your Audience and How to Reach Them

Nobody likes dieting, especially when it means restricting so many foods from your daily routine, which is exactly what the Whole30 requires. And yet, what started as a 30-day guide in 2012 quickly exploded into one of the most popular dieting/cleansing trends today - all thanks to the co-founders' content strategy. Rather than develop content to be distributed through traditional advertising channels, the Whole30 team started their campaign on a platform they knew would reach their target users: Instagram. According to this Digiday article, Whole30 "has 1.3 million followers on its accounts @whole30, @whole30recipes and @whole30approved combined, with over 2.4 million photos tagged with the hashtag #whole30 itself (up from one million in August 2015)."

Not only did the Whole30 team have a sound strategy in place when knowing what channels were best for their audience, but they also continue to produce relatable, genuine content - something that differs greatly from other diet programs. They have a distinct voice, giving shout outs to dieters on their <u>Facebook page</u> for recipe

Number of uses of #whole30 on Instagram

Source: Digiday article



ideas and success with the program, ensuring that their content is relatable and easy to understand. When they don't have an answer, they source outside content, making their intent all the more genuine and appealing to an audience. Between knowing who they want to reach and knowing how to reach them, Whole30 is a great example of content marketing success.



Turn Your Brand into a Lifestyle

Want to take a run-of-the-mill household product and turn it into a high-end, luxury good that everybody wants? Look at <u>Yeti</u>, a company started in 2006 by two outdoor-enthusiast brothers who launched the premium cooler category - a product that everyone didn't know they needed. Yeti changed what was once thought of as a disposable product into an investment, and one in which almost every cooler-using individual quickly became interested. Though they started out by focusing their content efforts on hunting, fishing and barbequing communities, the company is now actively - and successfully - reaching the everyday, beer-drinking, beach-going and cold drink-loving consumer.

The key to Yeti's success is creating content that espouses a certain lifestyle – something the company's creative agency is keenly focused on. With every cooler purchase comes a sleek magazine featuring stories of fishermen and women, hunters and adventurers who have used Yeti products. In addition to its print content, the company also releases short, "character-driven" films on its website, focusing on the adventures of an outdoorsman with brief shots of their products.

While the person buying a Yeti cooler might not be using it for housing freshly caught deer, they are purchasing a product that represents a cool (enjoy the wordplay) and adventurous lifestyle – that's also been proven to work in even the toughest conditions.

care@work

Make your Content Educational

Care@Work is Care.com's B2B offering that serves HR and benefits professionals, and allows employees to manage their family care needs on a 24/7 basis from any device. While there tends to be more familiarity with the consumer brand Care.com, Care@Work has developed a content strategy that addresses the needs of their specific market.

The company's <u>blog</u> offers insights for HR professionals to learn how to develop benefits that will attract top talent to their organization. In addition to blog posts, Care@Work also offers a variety of content assets meant to educate HR professionals on a number of relevant issues, including <u>customer case studies</u>, infographics, instructographics and interactive quizzes. The content is broken down into channels, focusing on corporate culture, working families, employee benefits and talent acquisition. Topics include stress management, <u>summer outing ideas</u>, gender

biases and navigating the benefits for members of the five generations that are currently in the workforce - to name a few. The company also uses data to promote their benefits expertise - such as stats on the importance of family care to millennials and how Care@Work's services encourage employees to work harder.

Care@Work's success lies in understanding exactly what their target audience is looking for, and developing content that more efficiently meets those needs. They take educational information and turn it into fun, easy-to-consume and sharable content that reaches the specific people for which it's intended. It not only allows HR professionals to reflect on their company's practices, but also gets them interested in learning more about Care@ Work's services - the end goal of any successful content campaign.

Read more about how several brands tapped their Halloween spirit to develop content treats on our blog:

http://www.v2comms.com/news-post/halloween-content-treats/



As content has become an increasingly valuable and essential marketing function, ensuring you have a sound content marketing strategy that speaks to your key audiences will enable you to make it a successful part of the marketing mix at your organization.

The key points to remember from this eBook are:

- ► Put your audience first know who they are, what problems they face, how your brand solves those problems and where and how to best reach them.
- ➤ Set and measure progress against goals content marketing can be a lot of fun, but it should also be productive. In the famous words of Peter Drucker, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."
- ► Take advantage of the 1+1=3 effect the true value of content marketing can best be achieved when it is paired with a robust PR strategy that extends the reach to new audiences and strengthens your credibility in market.

LET V2 HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CONTENT

With an innate ability to articulate a set of compelling messages and support narratives for multiple audiences and across multiple channels, Version 2.0 is uniquely qualified to both develop and execute integrated campaigns across the buyer journey.

We've trained a team of content experts that will work in tandem with account teams, established partnerships with technology and service providers in the space, and developed a proprietary methodology that ensures an integrated, strategic approach.

Our proprietary Align methodology ensures that your content and PR programs are integrated to generate the most value.



V2 Content is aligned...

With key themes:

- Key company storylines
- Integrated into overall communications program
- ► Timely and relevant storytelling
- ► PR working in tandem with content efforts + strategic narratives
- All efforts elevated and amplified

Around a cohesive strategy:

- Based on a foundation of analysis and research
- Storyline and messaging workshop
- Content audit to uncover gaps
- Driven by company and marketing goals and aligned with buyer journey

To high quality standards

- ► Well-written, eloquent + articulate
- Creative
- Engaging + well designed
- Measured

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM VERSION 2.0 COMMUNICATIONS:

7 Secrets for Getting the Media to Fall in Love with You and Your Wisdom Webinar



The State of Content & PR Study Optimized or Opportunity?





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