



August 2012

PRINTtips

Engage Your Customers . . . With Content Marketing



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Customers are rapidly developing a new set of habits to govern their interaction with businesses. In the past, the interaction was described by the push system – the business pushed its products and services at customers and prospects while using focus groups, trend analysis, and other techniques to forecast demand. In a push system, the business is largely in control of the customer interaction.

With the rise of e-commerce, a shift is occurring to a pull system: customers and prospects pull the products and services they require or want from businesses. By changing who controls the interaction (the customer instead of the business), customers are becoming increasingly resistant to interruption marketing (such as television ads, telemarketing, spam, and web pop-up and banner ads) and are seeking useful, relevant information to help them make buying decisions. Social networking sites as well as “comment” and “review” features of e-commerce sites are new ways for customers to seek and receive information.

The emphasis on useful and relevant information also means that customers and prospects are becoming increasingly sensitive to bias and deceit, demanding transparency from businesses. Rather than relying on advertising alone, customers are reading reviews and comments of those who have a personal experience of the product, service, or the business itself – often without knowing much about the reviewer. (This



is called the social proof method – determining what is correct by finding out what others think is correct.)

All this leads to the need for today’s businesses to adopt a new marketing technique called content marketing. Content marketing consists of focusing on creating and distributing information that a specific target audience will find relevant and engaging. Rather than emphasizing the features and benefits of a product or service, content marketing is communicating without direct selling. It is providing information that educates your customers and prospects so they can make better buying decisions. It is giving control to customers rather than businesses.

Best Practices of Content Marketing

Successful content marketing is built on a foundation of well-written copy that covers topics of interest to the target audience and

Engage Your Customers... With Content Marketing (cont.)

“use a writing style that the target audience is comfortable with...”

“writing style is how you write rather than what you write...”

“Good content advances the reader’s knowledge of a topic.”

follows the rules of grammar and copyright law. The best content will be useful to the target audience, unique in some way from what others are writing on the topic, use a writing style that the target audience is comfortable with, is fresh and appealing, and advances a conversation.

• Useful Content

Remember that the goal of content marketing is to build trust and confidence among a target audience by attracting and keeping their interest. Do you know what those interests are? Can you define them in the context of the products and services your business or organization provides? If not, then the first task is to study the individuals you are trying to reach. Conduct surveys, ask for feedback, and try sample topics until you can define their needs and desires.

• Unique Content

To ensure that readers continue their interest, a successful content marketer must do more than compile relevant information from other sources. You will need to add something – facts and figures, personal anecdotes, a new perspective – that will intrigue your readers.

• Writing Style

Your writing style is how you write rather than what you write. Depending on your topics and audience, you may use any of these styles: narrative (describes a personal experience based on a real event); expository (conveys information or explains something difficult to understand); or persuasive (tries to convince the reader to accept a point of view or take an action). Within each of these styles, you can use grammar and sentence structure to strike a conversational (written like you talk), formal (follows all the rules of grammar and syntax) or entertaining (humorous or fun) tone.

• Fresh and Appealing Content

The best way to keep content fresh and appealing is to write what you know. Find topics in areas where you have some expertise. Not only will it be easier to write, but you will find it easier to offer unique insights or perspectives.

• Advance a Conversation

Good content advances the reader’s knowledge of a topic. Avoid rambling, repeating yourself, and adding words, phrases or sentences that add nothing to the content.

• Use Good Grammar

Misspellings, run-on or incomplete sentences, misuse of words and other grammar violations will cause your audience to pay more attention to the mistakes than to the content. Proofread vigorously and edit ruthlessly.

• Honor Copyright Law

If you are using information from other sources, give appropriate credit and use quotation marks to indicate when you are using another writer’s words.

Deliver Content the Way Your Audience Wants to Receive It

Content marketing is often associated with web-based communication – blogging, e-letters, or posting on Facebook, for example. But remember that content marketing is based on the preferences of the target audience, so it may be that a traditional printed newsletter is the best way to create a following for your content. And even if you decide to deliver content exclusively via the web, you can use a printed post card to invite members of the target audience to subscribe or join your online community.

Let Us Help You Perfect Your Content

If you are having trouble finding a writing style or the time to create content, let us help. We may have someone on our staff who can assist, or we can provide a recommendation for a copywriter, editor, photographer, or other professional to augment your efforts. One of our services is to help our customers develop and execute an effective marketing plan, so let us go to work for you. Call us at 513-248-2121 if you have questions or would like to arrange a convenient time to talk.

Plural and Possessive Nouns

Many writers are confused about the difference between plural and possessive nouns. (A noun is the part of speech that indicates a person, place, or thing.) Nouns can be either singular (one thing) or plural (many things). The term possessive indicates ownership.

To make a singular noun plural, add either *s* or *es* to the end (depending on whether the noun ends in *s*): bird (singular) becomes birds (plural); boss (singular) becomes bosses (plural).

There are different rules for indicating the possessive of singular and plural nouns depending on whether or not they end in *s*. To form the possessive of a singular noun that doesn't end in *s*, add an apostrophe *s* (bird's nest); for singular and plural nouns that end in *s*, add only an apostrophe (birds' nest; boss' desk).

The possessive pronouns and adjectives *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *its*, *theirs*, and *whose* do not have an apostrophe. Note that a common error is to use *it's* for the possessive of *it*; however, *it's* is actually a contraction of *it is* or *it has*. Similarly, the plural of numerals is formed by added *s*, not *'s*: 100s of drawings (not 100's of drawings).

In his book *The Language Instinct*, Steven Pinker demonstrates the importance of correctly forming plurals and possessives:

- my sister's friend's investments (I have one sister and she has one friend.)
- my sisters' friends' investments (I have many sisters and they have many friends.)
- my sisters' friend's investments (I have many sisters and they have one friend.)
- my sister's friends' investments (I have one sister and she has many friends.)



"The term possessive indicates ownership."

Q. *I have always been bad at grammar. Can you help me improve?*

A. You are wise to recognize that bad grammar can distract the reader from the information you are providing. Here are some homonyms – pairs of words with the same pronunciation but different meanings – that will help you avoid some common grammatical errors.

- who's (a contraction of *who is*), whose (the possessive form of *who* and *which*)
- you're (a contraction of *you are*), your (the possessive form of *you*)
- there (in that place), their (the possessive form of *they*), they're (a contraction of *they are*).
- it's (a contraction of *it is*), its (the possessive form of *it is* or *it has*)
- affect (to have an influence on), effect (a result). Affect is generally used as a verb (to affect) while effect is generally used as a noun (the effect).

For more help with spelling, grammar and punctuation, consult these online sources:

<http://www.m-w.com> (Merriam-Webster)

<http://thesaurus.reference.com> (Roget's)

<http://onelook.com> (dictionary service)

<http://www.grammarly.com> (grammar checker)

"Here are some homonyms"



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The Benefit of Using Active Voice

Most writing, and especially informal writing such as blogging, benefits from the use of active voice. Voice is the grammatical term for describing whether the action of a sentence is performed by the subject (active voice) or the object of the sentence (passive voice). For example:

Active voice: *Sally used a credit card to pay for her purchases.*

Passive voice: *A credit card was used by Sally for her purchases.*

It is easy to recognize passive voice because the verb phrase will always include a form of to be (such as *am, is, was, were, are, or been*)

or the prepositional phase *by the* following the verb. In contrast, active voice allows for simpler sentence construction and therefore better reader comprehension.

To change from passive to active voice, locate who or what is performing the action expressed by the verb. Make that the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly.

Passive voice: *The information presented was commented on by six people.*

Change to active voice: *Six people commented on the information presented.*



*“Most writing ...
benefits from using
active voice.”*