

INSIDE
CONTENT
MARKETING



ECONTENT MAGAZINE'S GUIDE TO ROLES,
TOOLS, AND STRATEGIES FOR THRIVING IN
THE AGE OF BRAND JOURNALISM

THERESA CRAMER

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Inside Content Marketing: EContent Magazine's Guide to Roles, Tools, and Strategies for Thriving in the Age of Brand Journalism

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For Nana and Papa.
Thanks for everything.

Praise for *Inside Content Marketing*

“Where *Inside Content Marketing* departs from an endless sea of content marketing books and blogs is the deep analysis and insight into the content marketing/journalism connection. Debunking the notion that branded content means working for the ‘dark side,’ Theresa Cramer shines light on an emerging world in which brand publishers and journalists alike collaborate to produce meaningful content that connects, both intellectually and emotionally.”

—Russell Sparkman, CEO, FusionSpark Media

“The road to great content marketing is full of wrong turns and dead ends for both marketers and journalists—with Theresa Cramer’s engrossing new guide, we now have a map.”

—Sam Slaughter, VP Content, Contently

“Content marketing might seem like solely the domain of the marketing department. But the smartest companies know that it’s actually a collaborative effort. Theresa Cramer tells you why—and she lays out the prescription for how to vastly increase the success of your own program.”

—Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs

“In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is King. Theresa Cramer is the one-eyed Queen in the land of the content marketing blind—which is all of the rest of us.”

—Tim Bourgeois, Founder, ChiefDigitalOfficer.net

“There are many ways to generate attention for your product, service, personal brand, or cause. Nearly all require spending boatloads of money on agencies and advertising. Theresa Cramer shows you how content marketing has evolved into the best way to get your ideas out there to grow your business. And it’s all free!”

—David Meerman Scott, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*

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Introduction

One day I found myself sitting at my desk weeping at a video that popped up in my Facebook feed. This happens fairly frequently, so that wasn't what surprised me. It was a short film on Vimeo made by a photographer from the point of view of his dying dog. *Denali* was a beautiful ode to the bond between a man and his best friend, both of whom had lived pretty amazing lives. Beautiful footage from one last day at the beach interspersed with photographs from their 14 years together showed one adventure after another—including the filmmaker's bout with colon cancer and the dog's determination to stay by his side.

The two friends surfed, rock climbed, and hiked all over the country together—even after the battle with cancer. As sad as it was, the movie was also funny, but it was the credits that really surprised me. This wonderful little film—which had me hugging my dog so close she probably thought I'd lost my mind—had been “Made Possible by Patagonia.” There were also a handful of other, smaller sponsors in there.

I thought back for a minute to one picture that had caught my attention. It was of Denali curled up at camp with a Patagonia jacket draped over him to keep him warm. In that moment I'd thought, “If Patagonia didn't sponsor this, they really missed the boat.” Other than the occasional (completely organic and authentic) appearance of a sponsor's product, there were no brand mentions. Nonetheless, I resolved that my next winter coat will be from Patagonia.

I watched over the next few days and weeks as my friends shared the video on social media. I clicked on it each time and was moved to tears all over again. Why isn't all content marketing this good? Why aren't we all weeping, or laughing hysterically, or emphatically shaking our heads in agreement with every piece of content marketing that crosses our path? Why isn't every brand so in tune with its audience that all of its content elicits as strong a response as *Denali*?

All of those questions can be distilled into one that I kept in mind while writing this book: “What is the biggest obstacle to content

marketing success?” Some will tell you that a lack of strategy is at the heart of many marketers’ problems. There is plenty of truth to that—and *Inside Content Marketing* will certainly cover the necessity of a documented strategy—but I think there is a fundamental lack of understanding that haunts many marketing departments. Many still don’t understand exactly what creating great content marketing entails.

Content creation is a collaborative process. It takes a team of people who know how to conceive of, create, deliver, and promote quality content that will delight audiences—and this book is written for all the members of that team. Especially the reluctant ones.

In the new world of brand journalism, everyone needs to re-evaluate their place in the content ecosystem. Marketers have to think like journalists. Journalists have to understand marketers. And publishers have to bring everyone together. These are not small tasks.

Marketers will be first to the content marketing table. In fact, they are already there, eager to implement this new engagement tactic to capture customers’ attention. Selling is in their blood, and it will be difficult—if not impossible—for many of them to leave the marketing mindset behind and start thinking like a storyteller. That’s where journalists come in.

Journalists, however, have been the most reluctant to embrace content marketing. Concerned by issues of editorial integrity, many journalists still eschew this new career path (although plenty of them *are* embracing it and you’ll hear from them in the book). It’s up to marketers—and publishers—to help journalists understand that they need neither compromise their ethics nor sacrifice their creativity in taking on content marketing work.

Publishers, on the other hand, should be jumping at the chance to help advertisers create branded content! Would you, under any other circumstance, refuse to use your expertise and platform to help your advertisers reach their audience? I doubt it. Yet many publishers are still letting this revenue stream pass them by.

Marketers. Journalists. Publishers. These are the people at the crux of content marketing. It behooves them to understand where they all fit in the value chain, and how, by working together, they can help this industry to continue to thrive. Perhaps just as

important as understanding their own place in the world of content marketing is understanding their colleagues. If marketers could help assuage the fears of journalists, and journalists could understand what marketers truly need from content, the end result would be a product everyone is proud of. Publishers can help bring these two groups together—and profit in the process.

Inside Content Marketing is broken up into three parts: the first focuses on the marketer's experience, and what they need to know to create *Denali*-level content; the second makes the case for content marketing to journalists; the third helps publishers understand how they can capitalize on this shift in the marketing industry—and explains why marketers should be teaming up with publishers who already have an audience, and storytelling experience. While you may be tempted to go straight to the section of the book that speaks most directly to you, that would be a mistake. Creating the kind of content that audiences want is a team sport. Understanding your teammates—and the very important roles you all play in the game—is a crucial part of creating the kind of content that audiences crave and brings them back to your brand time and again.

In this book you will find practical advice on how to create meaningful content marketing strategies, hear from the experts on some of the most challenging aspects of the practice, and delve into some of the best examples of content marketing the world has to offer. You will also hear from people working in every corner of content marketing, and gain invaluable knowledge about bringing together a content marketing dream team that can turn your brand into a rock star!

Part I

The Marketer's Mission

What *Is* Content Marketing, Really?

When you think about marketing, what do you picture? Flyers? Coupons? Billboards? Banner ads? Or do you picture a white paper, a blog post, or an infographic? If you picture the latter, then it's safe to say you are part of the content marketing revolution. Consumer expectations are changing and so are the tactics companies are using to reach them. Today's customers are looking for more than a few dollars off, and today's marketers are giving consumers the information and value they need through content marketing.

Study after study confirms what most of us already know: People respond to content, not advertising. According to "Consumers' Attitudes Toward Custom Content," 70 percent of people surveyed say they "prefer to learn about a company through a collection of articles rather than in an ad." Marketers have heard that message loud and clear, embracing the idea of content marketing wholeheartedly. The interest in content marketing has only grown since that study came out, as audiences have become even more discerning about the content they consume.

However, if you believe the numbers (and I am about to share a lot of numbers with you), you probably don't need convincing that content marketing is a must-have tool in your bag of marketing tricks. Google searches for the term "content marketing" have grown 400 percent since 2011. Back in 2014, the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and MarketingProfs found that 93 percent of marketers said they were using content marketing. That number is so high it's almost shocking. In 2015, they tweaked the definition of content marketing and got slightly different results, with 86 percent of respondents saying their organizations use content marketing. In 2016 that number jumped a bit to 88 percent. It's clear that the siren song of content marketing is strong, and if you aren't careful about your approach, you might just crash on the rocks.

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At first glance, content marketing seems simple—almost a dream come true. Instead of buying expensive billboards or television ads to raise brand awareness, all you have to do is create some great content, post it on your blog, promote it through your social channels, and *voila!* Right?

Wrong.

While traditional marketers and brands may be eager to cash in on the content marketing craze, I have a word of warning for them: Content marketing isn't as easy as it seems. According to CMI's *B2C Content Marketing 2016 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America*, 76 percent of Business to Consumer (B2C) marketers are using content marketing but only 28 percent consider themselves effective at it (with just 10 percent describing themselves as very effective). That hasn't slowed down the content machine, though. The amount of content companies continue to create has grown consistently—even though only 43 percent understand what “content marketing success” looks like. Here's the takeaway: The buzz is massive, but many still struggle to define content marketing, let alone implement it successfully.

Social Media Today's “13 Ways Content Marketers Miss the Mark” found that the three biggest complaints expressed by B2B audiences are too many barriers to downloading materials, self-promotional content, and (perhaps the worst offense of all) content that lacks substance. While it is tempting to dismiss the marketers creating this content as a clueless minority, it's clear that a hefty majority of marketers and brands are still struggling to fine-tune their content marketing and make it a useful part of their overall strategy. Forrester's “Compare Your B2B Content Marketing Maturity” found that “51 percent of B2B marketing leaders rate their content marketing practices as very mature, an overwhelming 85 percent fail to connect content activity to business value—and, as a result, fail to retain customers or win their long-term loyalty.” These results are unacceptable—especially for a channel that is so important to so many companies—but they are also predictable, considering that so many practitioners still don't grasp the real meaning of content marketing.

Defining Content Marketing

So let's start at the beginning by simply defining what content marketing is. If you ask 100 different people, you're likely to get 100 different answers. The confusion stems in part from the stealthy nature of content marketing, which aims to go (almost) unnoticed as marketing while simultaneously providing valuable content to customers that ultimately raises the brand's profile and results in sales.

"Content marketing is a blanket term that describes the process of creating and sharing relevant brand information in hopes of engaging current consumers and attracting new ones. Also referred to as branded content and custom publishing, in the internet age, content marketing is the act of relaying this valuable information. ... Content marketers believe that sharing specialized content leads to a better informed consumer, and a better informed consumer yields more profitable results."

*Eileen Mullan, "What Is Content Marketing?"
(EContentmag.com)*

Unlike so many other things in life, you may not know content marketing when you see it. In fact, if the content creators are doing their jobs right, you often won't notice you're being marketed to until it's too late, and you're already poking around the brand's site—or are even in a store—to purchase the product the marketers were hoping you would buy all along. To complicate matters further, content marketing often doesn't even reveal what it's selling. Take, for instance, Chipotle's *Farmed and Dangerous* (see Figure 1.1), a show the burrito-slinging chain created for Hulu.

Antony Young described the show on Adage.com: "*Farmed and Dangerous* takes branded content to another level by not including any branding at all in the show. Social Media Week organizers dubbed it Unbranded Entertainment. Chipotle and other advertisers placed commercials in the show, but by not including branding in

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Figure 1.1 A screenshot of *Farmed and Dangerous*, an original series by Chipotle that ran on Hulu.

the show itself, the restaurant has taken a risk that few marketers would entertain.”

Instead of pushing burritos, *Farmed and Dangerous* used comedy to reach the masses with a message from Chipotle—though viewers may have been blissfully unaware where the content was coming from. Famous for its efforts to source ingredients sustainably, Chipotle created a show about the dangers of industrial agriculture, not about its own food.

This wasn’t the first time Chipotle tackled this topic in its marketing. Many may remember its “Back to the Start Commercial” that featured Willie Nelson singing Coldplay’s “The Scientist” while adorable animated farmers realized the error of their industrialized ways. If you didn’t watch carefully, you may have missed the Chipotle tag at the end.

Not all content marketing will be devoid of any branding. In fact, if your goal is to drive actual sales and not just general “brand lift,” then you will almost certainly have to include some brand information, but it’s important to keep one thing in mind: Your content should aim to answer a question for your potential customers; promoting your brand must always be secondary to that mission. Chipotle understands this and takes it very seriously.

More recently, Chipotle won a PR Award at Cannes for a 3½-minute video about a scarecrow that is disillusioned with the food system but finds happiness through serving burrito bowls filled

“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”

What Is Content Marketing? (Content Marketing Institute)

with fresh ingredients to customers (see Figure 1.2). More importantly, the video was a companion piece for a game—delivered in app form—that continued Chipotle’s content marketing mission of promoting sustainable food practices.

With so many different formats, channels, and mediums available to content marketers—video, apps, blogs, feature films, and beyond—you can see how a newbie might be a bit confused about how to get a successful content marketing effort up and running. According to CMI’s 2016 B2C research, “This year, [content marketers are] allocating 32% of their total marketing budget, on average, to content marketing (vs. 25% last year).” With numbers like that, it’s essential that marketers start getting their content marketing strategies right.

It doesn’t have to be confusing. “At its very core [good content marketing is] delivery of value that goes beyond the product or service being marketed,” says Robert Rose, chief strategist at CMI. “Great content marketing can stand on its own—and delivers education, entertainment, and engagement without the need of the product or service. That’s really the litmus test. If the content would stand by itself as a valuable experience (because of, or even despite the brand’s involvement) to a consumer—then it’s great content marketing.”

Creating a memorable ad is hard enough, but creating the kind of content Rose describes seems to be damn near impossible for many marketers. At the Cannes International Festival of Creativity in 2015, there was no Grand Prix winner in the branded content and entertainment category. Not only are marketers falling short of

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Figure 1.2 A screenshot of “The Scarecrow,” an award-winning video from Chipotle.

their own goals but their content literally isn’t winning any prizes for creativity. There are plenty of reasons for this—which we’ll explore in these pages—but one thing seems clear: Many marketers still don’t “get it.”

What Are Marketers Doing Wrong?

The Content Marketing Institute delved deeper into the numbers in its *2014 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends* report, looking at what made the organizations that were confident in their content marketing successful. A couple of things stood out. A hefty majority—60 percent—of the companies that rated their efforts highly had a documented content strategy, as opposed to just 12 percent of the least effective. Additionally, 85 percent of the strongest marketers had “someone who oversees content marketing strategy” in comparison to 50 percent of the least effective.

The 2015 version of the report supported these findings but looked at the numbers a bit differently. The report found that “most B2B marketers have a content marketing strategy—but only 35 percent have documented it” according to a post on the CMI site (see Figure 1.3). By 2016, that number had shrunk to just 32 percent. This

EContent: *What do you think is the most significant challenge that content marketing is facing today?*

Joe Pulizzi: It's different than what most companies are used to. The practice of content marketing is not necessarily rocket science, but it's significantly different than how most organizations are set up. Change is hard, especially in big companies. Agile companies and even startups have an easier time with content marketing than longstanding companies because of this. We believe that education and training is the way to break through to these organizations. Well, I don't know of a better way.

Excerpted from "Q&A: Joe Pulizzi, Founder, Content Marketing Institute" (EContentmag.com)

presents some problems. "B2B marketers who have a documented strategy are more effective and less challenged with every aspect of content marketing when compared with their peers who only have a verbal strategy or no strategy at all," says the CMI post.

It's clear that two of the secrets to content marketing success are planning and oversight, but not everyone is getting that message. The low barrier to entry and deceptively simple tactics of content marketing can be misleading for those who don't understand the need for a coherent strategy, or simply don't understand what one looks like. As Greg Satell wrote on Forbes.com, "Alas, I discovered that content strategy was in reality just another name for brand planners selling long form ads to clients. Nobody who was talking about content strategy seemed to have ever published or produced anything." (That is why organizations should hire a journalist, but we'll get to that later.) Creating a meaningful content marketing strategy, and holding your staff accountable for achieving the goals set out by the strategy, are important to any endeavor, and that is no different when it comes to creating branded content.

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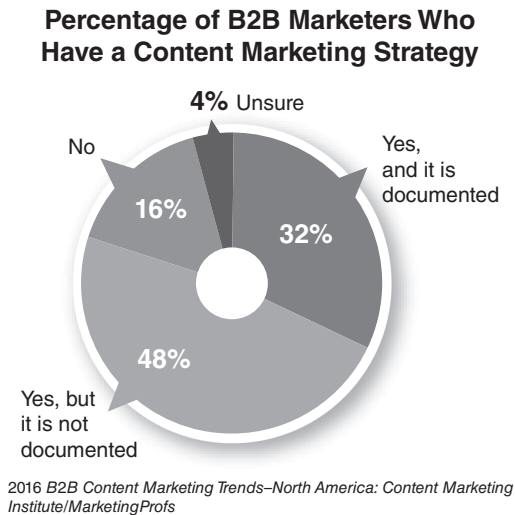


Figure 1.3 A chart from Content Marketing Institute that says only 32% of companies have a documented content marketing strategy in 2016.

However, if developing a content marketing strategy were as easy as it sounds, so many companies would not still be struggling with it. In fact, IMN’s 2014 Content Marketing Survey reported that 30 percent of its respondents admitted to “winging it” when it came to their strategy. Joe Pulizzi, founder of CMI, suggested in his “7 Content Marketing Strategies for 2013” column for *EContent* that a mission statement might be a good place to start. Pulizzi wrote:

“I’ve surveyed about 1,000 people over the past month, asking each if they have developed an editorial mission, or content marketing mission statement, for their content strategies. Easily less than 5% had something like this prepared, let alone a content marketing strategy.

“This is a major problem. How can we execute a content strategy if we don’t have a clear vision for why we are developing the content in the first place?

“Every person that touches the content marketing program should know, by heart, what the mission of the content strategy is. In addition, if you don’t have a content vision, how do you know which stories should or should not be included? This is a major problem.”

But what does a truly meaningful mission statement consist of? According to Rose, there are three questions that need to be addressed:

1. Who is the intended audience?
2. What value will be delivered in the content?
3. How will the audience be better off having experienced the content?

I would also add that you should begin to address your own goals with your mission statement. It's never too early to define what you consider success so that you'll be able to measure your return on investment (ROI) later.

Once you understand why you are creating content, you'll be able to better detail and execute your strategy—but even the folks at CMI have had trouble battling the content strategy demons. As Robert Rose wrote in a CMI post about the difference between content marketing and content strategy, “But, here at CMI we haven't yet (at least, not to the extent that we should) fully embraced the advancement of content strategy, or helped preach the distinction between the skill sets needed for content marketing and those required for content strategy. In fact, we've been guilty of using the terms ‘content marketing strategy’ and ‘content strategy’ interchangeably at times (we have resolved to be more clear on this, moving forward).”

The experts at CMI aren't the only ones conflating content strategy and content marketing—to say nothing of content marketing strategy. A few years ago, I was being interviewed and the writer asked me what, if any, difference there was between content marketing and content strategy. I was confused for a moment. In a way, I didn't even understand the question. My background in journalism and publishing—not marketing—had led me to distinguish between these two things long before anyone else seemed to have. Eventually I pulled myself together and said something like, “These are two completely different concepts but you can't be successful at one (content marketing) without the other (content strategy).” It wasn't until Rose's *mea culpa* that I realized this was a common misconception—and eventually had both Rose and “Content Wrangler” Scott Abel on an *EContent* Live Hangout to hash out the difference between content strategy and content marketing once and for all.

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For the record, content strategy is, at least according to Kristina Halvorson, author of *Content Strategy for the Web*, “Planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable content.” (Really smart marketers will add “measurement” to that list—because you always need to know what’s working.)

Content Strategy vs. Content Marketing Strategy

“Well there are two different things at play here—a content strategy and a content marketing strategy,” says Rose. “I view them as different. Related, but different. A content strategy is the holistic approach to managing content in an organization. It is how we organize, manage, and utilize content as a strategic asset. So it covers all manner of content—from the documentation of our products, to our customer onboarding forms, to our invoicing terminology to the way we communicate and so on and so on. Content marketing strategy, on the other hand, is solely devoted to the practice of how we use content to drive a marketing-related business purpose.”

He continues: “The content marketing strategy is narrower in scope, certainly, and truly focuses how we use that created value in order to differentiate our offering, create reasons for customers to become customers, and ultimately create loyalty and evangelism among our constituents.”

The moral of the story is that even the experts get it wrong sometimes, and if you’re planning on making content marketing part of your repertoire, it’s important to not only have a clear mission statement for your content objectives but also to make sure you have an overarching strategy in place to govern your every move. One of the keys to creating and implementing that strategy will be finding the right people.

The Chief Content Marketing Officer to the Rescue

You may recall that one of the factors cited by successful content marketers is having “someone who oversees content marketing

strategy.” Yes, accountability is key. According to Curata’s “Content Marketing Tactics Planner,” 71 percent of companies plan on increasing content marketing budgets, and the same study found that the bulk of that money is going toward money and people. At the time, 57 percent said they did not have an executive directly responsible for content marketing, and that while new sales and leads were the top goals of most content marketing campaigns, companies found their efforts had more impact on brand awareness. Curata’s chief marketing officer, Michael Gerard, told *EContent* he thought the lack of oversight might be why goals and results weren’t matching up.

“Getting the organization to invest in a new role, content marketing executive, who will coalesce all of the content-related resources across the organization is no easy feat,” Gerard said. “From a tactical perspective, content marketing requires a detailed understanding of the digital marketing space. Many marketing executives continue to struggle to keep up-to-date with this rapidly developing space while dealing with the everyday pressures of managing a large marketing organization.”

According to “The Rise of the Chief Content Officer” by Bill Kolbenschlag, Petco, Netflix, and Coca-Cola all have chief content officers or a similar position. Before long, hiring a content officer will be unavoidable even for smaller companies—at least if they hope to ever be successful. What exactly will that new position be doing? “This is hard to say definitively because of the varying degrees of role that this person plays,” says Rose. “But ideally, they are the chief storyteller for the organization. They are responsible for managing content as a strategic asset for marketing and communications.”

Pulizzi has a slightly different take. He says you will need “someone with a clear understanding of your audience, combined with someone who can execute consistent stories. This could be a journalist, editor, copywriter, producer, broadcaster—most likely someone who has worked with the media. If we are positioning ourselves as publishers, we need to search out and find talent with media savvy and experience.”

Finding the right person to be in charge of your content marketing efforts may not be easy, but one thing should be clear: You

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probably don't want that person to be a marketer, because the emphasis should always be on the content.

The Building Blocks of Good Content Marketing

Now that we have defined content marketing, cleared up the content marketing vs. content strategy confusion, and you know you need to start looking for someone to oversee your content marketing efforts, you might be wondering what good content marketing looks like. We'll look at specific examples later; for now, let's talk about the basics.

For this I turned to the experts. Joe Pulizzi offered the following list of six elements that are essential to "dominating your niche with content."

1. Your content *must fill an audience need* in some way.
2. *Consistency wins*. Content marketing is not a campaign.
3. *Write/Create/Produce like a human*. Remove all corporate speak.
4. *Have a point of view*. What's your take? Become the thought leader.
5. *Remove the sale from your content*. Inserting product and sales messages in your content will kill your strategy.
6. *Be best of breed*. To win it, you need to set a goal to be the leading informational provider in your industry niche.

These are clear, simple goals. Now let's figure out how to achieve them, and what they look like in practice.

Filling the Audience Need

It should go without saying that your content must address a need for your audience, though this seems to be one of the hardest lessons for marketers to learn. Content is not about the organization, its products, or services—it's about customers and prospects. Answer their questions. Address their concerns. Entertain them. Just give them the content they want.

The energy drink company Red Bull is a legend in the content marketing industry. Recognizing that no one was catering to extreme sports enthusiasts, it filled the gap with a variety of content aimed at that underserved audience. In the process, it won a legion of new fans and grew to become one of the biggest energy drink companies in the world.

The Importance of Consistency

As Joe Pulizzi says, content marketing is not a campaign. Rather, it is a sustained part of your overall marketing strategy. You can't expect to post on your blog now and then or tweet an infographic every few months and find success. To truly gain your customers' trust and build a relationship based on addressing their needs, you need to be consistent. Just like a traditional media outlet, it's important to let your audience know what kind of content to expect from you and how often to expect it, and you will establish a relationship that has your users seeking out your content. Don't forget, it's not just about making the sale, it's about retaining that customer and making him a loyal brand advocate, and that means you're in it for the long haul.

Humanize Your Content

No one likes content packed with keywords and industry jargon—not even Google. While it is certainly important to create clear, concise content that, ideally, can be repurposed for other formats and uses, it's important to remember that you are connecting with people, not machines. For starters, creating an interesting and compelling social media presence helps customers get to know “the real you.” On a more granular level, replacing a sterile sales pitch with a real-life scenario can put a human face on a problem and help prospects intuitively grasp what you have to offer them.

Thought Leadership

Let's be clear about one thing: There is no shortage of content. We are all competing for the limited attention of the same group of consumers, which is why it's important to stand out among the crowd as not only a provider of great content but as a thought leader. That means you can't be content to rehash the same old

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ideas and serve them up in a different package. You need to say something new, have a clear point of view, and make sure your voice is *the* authority. That may mean thinking beyond the written word, videos, and other tricks of the marketing trade. Maybe your CEO needs to hit the lecture circuit or put out an ebook. Those are the details only you can decide on, but whatever you decide, you need to shake things up and make your voice heard.

Banish the Sales Pitch

If there is one thing you take away from this book—and, of course, I hope you absorb more than that—it should be that content marketing is not about making a sales pitch. If you find yourself tempted to start name-dropping your products and urging readers to contact your sales department, think again. Please refer back to “Filling the Audience Need” if you’re confused about what you *should* be doing with your content marketing. Establish yourself as a trusted source of knowledge and sales will eventually follow. If you try to force it, you’ll lose the audience’s confidence.

Be the Best

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again—there is no shortage of content. To stand out, therefore, your content marketing needs to be better than the rest. Your research needs to be deeper; your blog posts need to be funnier and more informative; your videos need to be more entertaining; and your ideas need to be more cutting edge. You need to be organized and have a very clear mission. You aren’t just competing with your normal competitors here—you’re up against every media outlet and content source on the web, and you need to make your voice heard above the din.

You Get What You Measure

Of course, all the strategy and talent in the world won’t get you anywhere if you’re not aiming for the right goals and taking the right measurements. After all, for most brands, the aim is to use content marketing to win new customers and retain existing ones, and to

Reaching Millennials

It's no secret that millennials have almost no brand loyalty but still represent massive buying power and social media cachet. According to *Content Marketing: Best Practices Among Millennials*, a report from Yahoo!, Tumblr, Razorfish, and Digitas, 45 percent of millennials don't find content marketing compelling enough to share. The report identified the following five strategic principles to help brands better engage the digital native demographic.

1. **"Be Native, Not Deceptive."** The report found that millennials are willing to share advertising, but it has to be relevant and cannot aim to deceive the reader in any way.
2. **"Be an Individual...And Be Ready to Evolve."** Millennials respond to personality. They want to get to know a brand and to see that brand strive to stay culturally relevant.
3. **"Deliver on an Emotion...And Know That Humor Rules."** Millennials like funny content, no matter what form it comes in. Humor rules online, but if you can succeed at making a digital native feel *any* emotion, you will be rewarded.
4. **"Reserve Judgment."** Millennials aren't interested in your judgment and hang-ups. Self-expression is important to them, even in interactions with brands.
5. **"Act Like the Locals."** Millennials are all over the internet. They know the ins and outs of all their favorite sites and they expect you to as well. That includes being familiar with and using all the appropriate formats, whether it's a six-second video or a 140-character tweet.

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do that you need information. CMI found in its *B2B Content Marketing: 2015 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America* that most marketers are using website traffic to measure their success. This is a recurring trend, and it's one that Joe Pulizzi finds troubling. He says that growing your subscriber list should be the goal. Why? Because getting subscriber information allows you to understand more about the people using your content and to ultimately deliver the right content to further cultivate your relationship. In other words, it's all about the leads.

Still, CMI also found that only 21 percent of respondents say they are successful at tracking ROI. Having a strategy helps—the number jumps to 35 percent for marketers who have one—but getting the desired results remains elusive for many.

While 63 percent of respondents said they use website traffic to measure their content marketing success, only 30 percent cited subscriber growth. Sales lead quality, higher conversion rates, sales, sales lead quantity, search engine optimization (SEO) ranking, time spent on site, inbound links, and qualitative feedback from customers were also on the list. That's a lot of factors to take into account, but there's a reason Pulizzi advocates for new subscriptions. You don't want your content to be a thinly veiled sales pitch for your widgets, but if you can encourage readers to sign up for, say, a newsletter, you can parlay the information you gain—and the access you've earned—into things like sales and higher conversion rates by nurturing the relationship with great content. Once you have someone's name and information, it's easier to track them through the rest of the sales funnel.

Jay Baer offers useful insight into the world of measurement in "The 4 Types of Content Metrics That Matter" on Convince and Convert. According to Baer, "Content cannot be measured with a single metric, because no one data point can successfully or satisfactorily tell you whether your program is working. Instead, you need to create an array of metrics that are selected from four primary buckets..." He goes on to list consumption metrics, sharing metrics, lead generation metrics, and sales metrics as the four numbers marketers need to be looking at to ensure they are getting the desired results.

According to Cody Goolsby's post "The Four Fundamentals of Reporting Inbound Marketing Progress" on Business2Community.com, there are four "pillars" to consider when setting your budget and evaluating content marketing success:

1. **Goals.** "You can only measure ROI against established goals. Make certain everyone knows what they are!"
2. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).** "The KPIs you choose should have a direct correlation to your goals."
3. **Closed Loop Marketing.** "Closed loop marketing happens when your sales team reports back to your marketing team with the results from the leads they generated."
4. **Reports Need to Be Actionable.** "By looking at your KPIs, you should be able to formulate actionable items to improve your ROI."

These benchmarks should sound familiar to marketers but, for reasons that still escape me, they go ignored among many content marketers. I do have a theory about why so many content marketers still have trouble reaching their goals, and it comes down to a case of mixed messaging.

Mixed Messages and Measurement

I realize that, sometimes, the messages coming from content marketing experts can seem contradictory. Don't fill your content with sales pitches, but don't forget it's all about the sale. Confusing, right? It's no wonder so many brands end up missing their content marketing goals. All of a sudden, it's more understandable why marketers are seeing plenty of brand lift but not enough new sales leads. How do you create great content that isn't too "salesy," but can still convert readers to customers, while at the same time being able to prove the content worked?

Jordan Berg wrote "Opinion: Five Ways to Measure Your Content Marketing" for Digiday, and a couple of his suggestions addressed this very issue. His first point that stands out for me is, "Don't simply create content. Create content campaigns."

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This goes back to the need for consistency. Imagine that your goal is to sell more widgets to women aged 30–35. You start by creating an infographic and sharing it with your social channels. You see that the topic is popular with your target audience—through sharing metrics, new likes, and followers—so you write a longer, more informative blog post on the topic and share it. This time, however, you include a link to your newsletter sign-up. Now you have a more direct connection to the women you are trying to reach, and a lot more information about them. You can craft newsletters filled with original and curated content that will interest your readers, and eventually you can include a call to action with a specialized landing page that will make it easy for you to see how effectively your content campaign is converting readers to customers. And, after those customers make purchases, you can continue to nurture the relationships with helpful tips and tricks on how to use your widget.

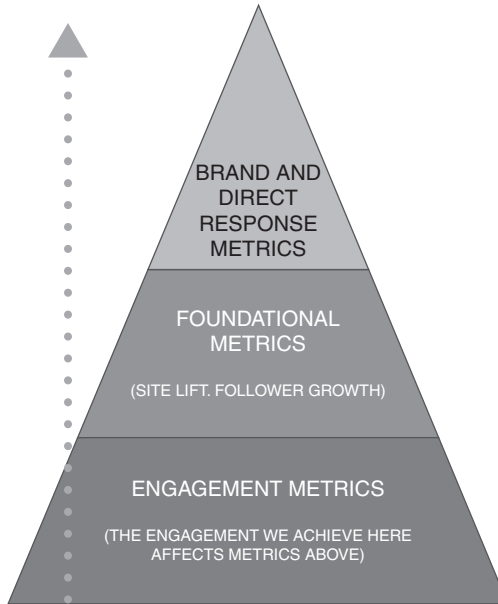


Figure 1.4 Jordan Berg, founding partner of Questus, created the Analytics Pyramid (reprinted with permission of Jordan Berg).

Berg puts this a bit more succinctly, writing that “Engagement metrics drive brand metrics.” He also describes an analytics pyramid with engagement metrics at the bottom (see Figure 1.4), which then lead to more foundational metrics (such as site traffic and follower growth). At the top of the pyramid is brand and direct response metrics.

Just remember that you have to start with sound goals and develop the right strategy to work your way to the top of the analytics pyramid. No matter which metrics you decide are best for you, ultimately your content marketing program should result in that “profitable customer action” mentioned in CMI’s definition. Shares and Likes are great, but sales are the ultimate goal. The best content marketers have known this going back a century or more. The longevity of the discipline alone is a testament to the power of a well-executed content marketing strategy. In Chapter 2, let’s see what content powerhouses from history—along with some more recent practitioners—have to teach us.

About the Author



By day, Theresa Cramer is the editor of *EContent*, where she covers the world of digital media and marketing. By night she is a reader and writer of books, NPR addict, and avid gardener. Cramer has over a decade of experience in publishing. From newspapers to books to magazines, she has worked in every arm of the industry. With the inherent curiosity of a journalist, and the attention to detail of a seasoned editor, she helps create content success stories.

A graduate of the University of Connecticut, Cramer began her career working at a small-town newspaper with virtually no web presence. After several years of covering the Board of Education and local sports, she moved on to Harper Collins Publishers. In 2008 she joined the *EContent* team as assistant editor, taking the helm as editor in 2011. Covering the digital media industry has taught Cramer many things, chief among them that the internet allows us all the freedom to experiment but that it takes commitment to strategy and execution to succeed.

Cramer lives in Connecticut with two cats and a dog. She blogs about her adventures in home decorating (and whatever else strikes her fancy) at TheresaCramer.com. Send her your comments at the website or follow her on Twitter @TheresaCramer.

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