

Although creating great content that forces a buyer to move through a specific channel can be very tricky, there are many examples in which the right content at the right moment is enough to tip the conversion scales. Or at a minimum, it maintains a conversation over time while the buyer is considering all the options including price.

Let's consider how you could think about mapping content to four unique buying scenarios. Although certain markets expect specific types of content (for instance, complex technical sales almost always feature product feature sheets), one of the most progressive tactics I've seen in the last 12 to 18 months is brands creating all new types of content. We cover some examples throughout this chapter, but it's seizing the opportunity to do something different from your direct competitor that is critical to impressing your prospect or customer.

Let's look at these four specific customer interaction points, and how you can support each one with great content strategy:

1. Acquisition.
2. Prospect nurturing.
3. Retention/loyalty.
4. Postpurchase.

Acquisition is potentially the most critical time to ensure you've articulated—and are effectively delivering—a comprehensive content strategy. This is especially true in B2B marketing, where it's now a required tactic. If you don't have a proactive outreach strategy (often an elegant combination of social, search, and paid media) supported by deep thought leadership content that educates the marketplace, then you're simply missing the mark. Your job as a marketer is to proactively seek ideal customers for your company, and to be razor-sharp at converting them into paying customers.

This is how many small startups are able to effectively mount a challenge to large-market incumbents. Think about small-business

services companies like Square, which singlehandedly democratized the process of accepting credit cards for small businesses and single-person companies. Or Buffer, which has demystified social media management to the point that a single person can manage multiple networks on behalf of multiple brands simultaneously. Both companies have built their brand around removing the friction from a previously miserable customer experience, and, as a result, enjoy awareness among millions of growing businesses each year based on a brilliant combination of business value and timely, insightful content that advances the skill level of their customers.

Beyond B2B, there are both big and small B2C brands who have figured out that lifestyle-driven content does a great job on creating a conversation with new prospective users, and that a selling opportunity might be months or years away but keeping that relationship warm is critical. You see very targeted examples of this with huge brands like Red Bull. I use them as a fully scaled example because they've taken lifestyle marketing to another level in the last two to three years. Beyond Formula One sponsorship (including epic Infiniti racing events all over the world), they've even taken the extraordinary step of creating a print magazine called *The Bulletin* that's 100 percent made up of lifestyle content. Add that to extreme sports tie-ins they manage with athletes from every sport (even space jumping with Austrian skydiver, daredevil, and BASE jumper Felix Baumgartner), and it's clear the Red Bull brand desires a long-term, lifestyle-driven conversation with new and existing customers designed to keep their energy drink products and brand top-of-mind with a very desirable demographic.

### Prospect Nurturing

Again, this is a bread-and-butter strategy for selling to businesses in a B2B scenario. I'll use my role with Silverpop as an example here. My job as an evangelist is two-pronged: the first part involves counseling and

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mentoring digital marketers in-person, and helping them tackle their most difficult issues. On that front, I see approximately 100 customers annually. The other half of my role is more scale-oriented. Beyond one-to-one thought leadership, I have the task of writing three to four blog posts each quarter, doing about 50 speaking engagements a year, and developing various whitepapers, tip sheets, and authored articles each year. It's a bit like a professor's gig in the sense that it's "publish or die."

We've proven pretty effective at scaling this across our entire organization. There were less than 10 blog contributors when I joined in 2011. That number exceeds 25 today, and we put out 300 to 400 posts annually with all kinds of perspectives. We also deliver more than 20 whitepapers each year, which average 10 to 12 pages and represent a significantly deep dive on a specific topic.

So why do so many people across our organization take the two to three hours required to write an insightful blog post, that often? For the simple reason that all that content powers the conversation between Silverpop and our customers—both existing and prospective. Our deep library on all topics related to digital marketing allows our sales team to share strategy in support of specific product-oriented conversations. If someone wants to understand how behavioral marketing fits with a loyalty program, there are no fewer than four or five blog posts on that topic from the prior year.

We also undertake primary research to support our customers' and prospects' need to understand how to benchmark their existing programs. Whether that's our annual *Email Benchmark Report* or the recent global research on Best Friend Brands (see Chapter 15), these are key content items that serve the absolutely critical role of educating our customers in exchange for them sharing more specific details about their marketing needs.

This type of multimonh or multiyear orchestration is a hallmark of almost every successful B2B brand, and, to put an execution-level fine point on it, I'll refer back to the previous chapter's discussion about

scoring user behaviors. When broken down to their smallest component parts, you can and should score each piece of content—blog post, whitepaper, tip sheet, and so forth—separately. When you combine and map these scores over time, they provide an excellent view of who's most interested in your solution. There are very few tactics better at guiding a high-velocity sales team in how to deploy their resources against an always-shifting pipeline of prospects.

Although I've focused deeply on our own B2B thinking around lead nurturing, I know many consumer-facing brands who apply many of the same tactics to derive an "engagement" score as opposed to a "propensity-to-buy" score. By understanding which customers are regularly opening their emails, repeatedly viewing high-value SKUs, and interacting with lifestyle-oriented content, they're able to build highly active segments and equally inactive segments.

Often, it's critical to monitor the inactive customers in B2C because high-volume senders seek to keep their email reputation clean at the Internet Service Provider (ISP) level. Most progressive retailers have either a manual or automated version of list cleanup that concentrates their efforts on those who have opened or clicked in the last 9 to 12 months. To ignore inactive users and continue to blast away almost always leads to deliverability pain. This is why understanding who *isn't* consuming your content can be just as important as knowing who is. For an even deeper dive on dealing with inactive users—or disinterested recipients as I call them—see Chapter 12.

### Retention/Loyalty

Although the specific types of content may not change radically across each of these disciplines (white papers, blog posts, etc.), the focus of each must represent the specific phase the customer is in. When thinking through customer retention and loyalty, the best marketers I know are seeking to deepen both the product and the emotional

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