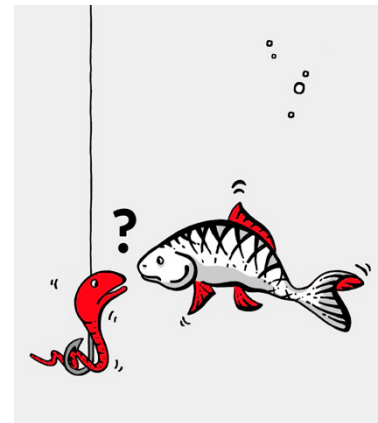


# DIFFERENT VIEW ON CONTENT MARKETING

*Content marketing is so pervasive these days that we really shouldn't still be writing about it. But something has gone badly wrong, particularly in the world of B2B marketing. So resist for a moment the temptation to waste money by leaping blindly onto the content bandwagon. At least until you've taken a different look at it.*

## ■ Gary and Seth were right all along

Here are the basics. Marketers shouldn't be interrupting people with undesired messages (that's push marketing) but interesting them with useful content instead (that's pull marketing). Seth Godin has written a good book about what he calls "permission marketing". He says: "Selling to people who actually want to hear from you is more effective than interrupting strangers who don't."



Simple so far. And all of this came about, of course, for two reasons:

- > People are fed up with traditional intrusive marketing and are less and less responsive to it
- > Technology made it easy to spread content around the web and streamline the interaction process

The companies that first started attracting customers with useful content instead of pushing ads began to reap big rewards. They understood that buyers were looking for information, conversation, stimulation, support – instead of just a sales pitch. Gary Vaynerchuk, a well-connected and much-followed digital marketing specialist, summed it up nicely when he said (or was perhaps the first to tweet) that: "every company needs to become a media company".

But here's the problem. Every company is now doing content marketing – but they are NOT media companies. Which means that they are not very good at creating media. As a result, the world of B2B is awash with low-grade content.

## ■ Is technology the answer – or the problem?

Vendors such as Hubspot, Pardot or Marketo have made a fortune selling the content marketing dream. But despite the rhetoric, they only solve part of the problem.

The part that they do well, very well indeed, in fact is the automation and management of the whole process. Their software has become so smart that it can direct the right message at precisely the right time to the right people but this depends on two important conditions.

- > First you need to set it up properly (which probably takes weeks of training and perhaps even a small army of highly paid Hubspot-certified contractors).
- > Second - and most importantly - you need decent content to put out there.

The latter is a job for a man or woman, not a machine. Even the mighty Hubspot cannot do everything.

### ■ Sell content first. Worry about your product later.

Content is now so universally accepted that it is seen as part of the whole product package. Before buyers will speak directly to sales, they expect self-service access to a range of videos, papers and blogs that answer their questions, thus helping them make an informed buying decision.

Differentiating your content is as important, therefore, as differentiating your product or service. You wouldn't go to market without a solid plan to ensure that your offering had a competitive edge over your competitors. Cheaper. More reliable. The local choice. That kind of thing. Your content needs to stand out in the same way by doing something different. Or it will be considered a commodity.

As explained in Doug Kessler's much-celebrated piece entitled "Crap. The Content Marketing Deluge", marketers have not been very good at differentiating their content offerings. As we've mentioned, we're not all media companies, but we should know about differentiation. Everyone covers the same, tired old topics in the same tired, old way. The result is crap.

Yet quality is more important than ever now because, as volume of competitive content increases, so does the need to stand out. Your content is never going to work well if it is exactly the same as the next link.

### ■ It's not the reader's fault, it's yours

Providing content is an easy job. Making it relevant is the hard work. Many marketers stay with the easy job, and fail. And then leap to the wrong conclusions: if people don't read, it must be the reader's fault, not the writer's crap. Under this assumption, the only solution is to engage a race to the bottom: make it shorter, delete the complexity, put bullet points, keep it simple and stupid, you name it. In the next round, do even more of it. Go on until even the most important topic is reduced to total nonsense.

To make matters worse, all content is free, so there is not even a price point to separate one whitepaper from another. In truth, however, there is still a price to pay. We need to think about the real value exchange that takes place when our prospects download a piece of content. They need to spend time, and sometimes they even need to give data to get access to what is called "gated content". There's no such thing as free lunch, as they say.

### ■ In the race to the bottom, the fastest loses

There is a worrying worldview that "normal" and "sound" are ineffective, and that only the outrageous or the overly simplistic can catch attention. It reaches its zenith in places like BuzzFeed, which unashamedly lists clickbait headings such as:

- > You won't believe what she did next...
- > We know your age based on what you eat
- > Only 5% of adults can solve this problem

We are not BuzzFeed, we are B2B and our main aim is to help our buyers to solve business problems. It may not be as exciting as finding out what she did next but it is what your audience wants, so don't be fooled into thinking that you have to do otherwise.

Your clients are not dummies. What they seek is trustworthy advice and information – with the emphasis firmly on trust. If you want to build your brand on content, you must keep this in mind before you build your content strategy.

Many agencies and marketers still believe that content marketing is about producing a continuous stream of written or visual content. And companies such as HubSpot heavily promote this idea, as it fits their technology. However, what might be true in the fast-lived consumer arena doesn't work in the industrial market place. Putting pressure on content production results in one main outcome: crap. Best case nobody wants it, worst case it damages your brand.

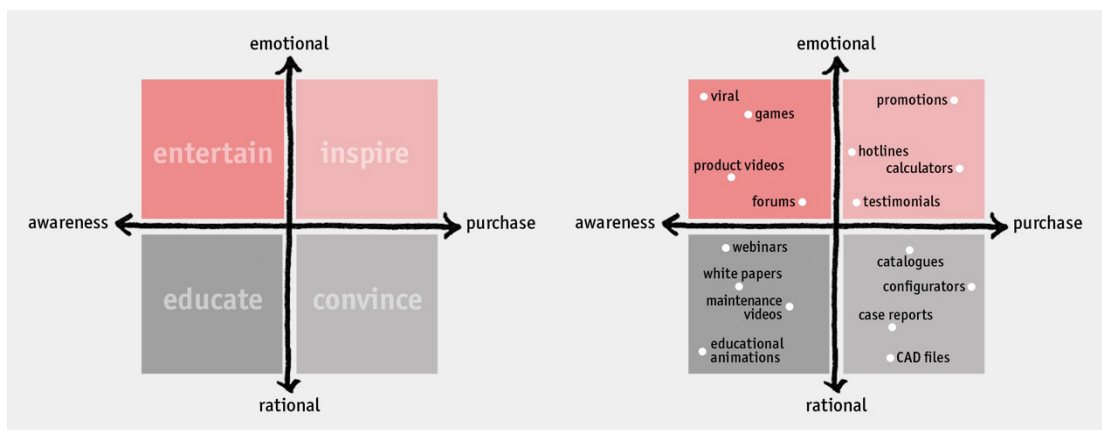
■ **Is it worth reading?**

So we have to ensure that we offer enough value to make it worth our prospects' effort – and the most important way to do this is to be different, if possible unique. Do something that others aren't. Try to zig where others are zagging. Check out the competition and see what they are offering then use it as inspiration to do something different and better.

Prospects are not primarily interested in your verbose blog. They are interested in finding information that makes their life easier, solves a problem, provides a gain or relieves a pain. Rather than the wordy stuff, give them what they really need: hotline access, download of CAD files, application information, system configurators, product selectors, compliance certificates, competitive comparisons, comprehensive catalogues, relevant case studies, fast lane services and so on. Whatever service or information you can bring to your prospects across the web is worth considering. Get your best people on it, brainstorm it, workshop it. Just come up with something that is either original or helpful, or preferably both.

Most of this high-value stuff will be gated content. Some of it, especially technical information, can be visited many times without any need for renewal. If your target prospects happily come back to your information, you've hit the hot spot of industrial content marketing. You've become a reference site.

Once you have done the homework, you can think about displaying your baits accurately on the web.



*Whether your content is designed to inspire, entertain, educate or convince, it must always be useful and distinctive.*

■ **In a nutshell**

Content marketing, associated with the right technology tools, is the future for industrial and b2b marketers. But how to avoid the crap trap? Collectively racing to the bottom is not the adequate response to information overflow.

In fact, the opposite is true. Your customers are hungry for relevant, trustworthy, helpful information. They won't necessarily find it in blogs and other short-lived media, but in information resources that might lie unexplored in departments who don't even consider it as content. So, do the internal mining to find the information gold. Go content fracking and think about how to bring that precious resource to the surface. Find the good quality material – something that informs and interests instead of just repeating what everyone else says – and your prospects and customers will love you for it.

It's often easier to distinguish value and crap from an outside perspective. Check it out with a workshop, including some members of your own staff and one or two outsiders. We will be happy to help (and if you refer to this article, we will do it free of charge ;-).

**■ Further reading:**

Seth Godin: Permission marketing

Doug Kessler: Crap: the content deluge

Gary Vaynerchuk: Every company is a media company

**OTHER PUBLICATIONS FROM US****■ Read our white papers on:**

- > Digital transformation
- > Communicating credibility
- > Emotions and the industry
- > Value propositions in industrial b2b markets
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