

## **B2B content marketing: Positioning your thought leadership**

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## Executive Summary

With the rise of the Internet has come an entirely new way of reaching business clients. Today's corporate clients are experienced researchers who utilize the Internet in an effort to become as informed as possible before they begin their search for solution providers. The search for providers begins online with the identification of industry thought leaders.

Content marketing is the primary method by which businesses provide the information potential customers are seeking, without blatantly selling a service or product, with the goal of winning their loyalty and business.

The problem is that too many companies have not yet implemented content marketing effectively. They stick to the same old marketing plans and techniques and miss out on the potential business customers that a few changes in their plan could bring them. The good news is that it is not difficult for a business to do things differently, step out of the box, and take advantage of the direct communication with business clients that content marketing facilitates.

By consistently distributing content that is both relevant and valuable to your target market, you can earn trust, build your reputation, and influence customers to find that your solution best solves their business problems. There are numerous Web 2.0 vehicles for this relevant content — from blogs and podcasts to e-mails, newsletters, white papers, and e-zines – and each finds its place in an overall actionable content marketing strategy.

The purpose of this white paper is to help facilitate an understanding of B2B content marketing and to learn how to implement it as part of your marketing plan in order to elevate your perception in the marketplace as a thought leader..

## Understanding B2B Content Marketing

Content marketing is informing, educating, and communicating with customers without advertising or selling. Rather than offering a sales pitch, you provide the information your target market desires via print, digital, audio, video, or events. The strategy behind content marketing is that the prospective buyer becomes educated through your content, ultimately viewing you as a potential strategic partner.

Effective content marketing bypasses marketing hype and goes straight for what prospective customers desire most: useful information. It is important to note that the content must be valuable and relevant. There is a significant amount of spurious information on the Internet, and potential customers as a whole now have a finely-honed sense of what is credible and what is not. Industry buyers expect a certain level of professionalism and expertise, so anything less will send

them in the opposite direction, promptly destroying your chances to earn their respect.

Genuine B2B content marketing is offering something new to your prospects, providing an education they will appreciate and value. It makes an impact on customers who have become jaded by vendors boasting empty marketing promises. When your first encounter with a new business prospect is offering them desired information, you tear down the walls and instantly engage them. You are essentially investing in your business customers before you expect them to invest in you.

## **Vehicles for Content Marketing Delivery**

Below are a few of the most popular vehicles for content marketing delivery leveraging Web 2.0 functionality:

### **White Papers**

White papers have taken a place of prominence in the online world. They have proven to be an effective method for attracting new customers while providing valuable information. They allow your company to impact purchasing decisions of your target market by offering them the information they are seeking and, through the content you provide, workable solutions for their needs.

### **Informational Articles**

Article marketing may be a newer method for marketing, but it works. It is again a way to create and share content to inform and educate readers in your target market. Your potential customers are searching the Internet in record numbers. They are plugging in keywords as they try to find the solutions they need to help their businesses run smoothly and more profitably. In article marketing your informational articles are published in strategic Web locations where they become viral, extending your online reach exponentially as they are re-published on other relevant sites. Potential customers read your articles and may click links within the article, bringing them to your company's website. It is an effective way to be positioned as an expert, increase traffic to your website, and earn the trust of customers even before there is direct contact.

## Podcasts

A digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, or an audio file you simply create in your office, a podcast can be an effective tool for content marketing. You can incorporate interviews, reader/listener questions or any other useful content that you believe your business customers want to hear.

It makes sense to align your podcast topics with your solutions, but avoid making it a verbal advertisement. Instead, the objective is to provide interesting and resourceful content that offers value and gives your listeners a base of information that complements your overall marketing plan.

## Blogs

Once perceived as reserved for the narcissistic early technology adopters, blogs add an interactive component to your content marketing strategy. Key to the effectiveness of a business blog is letting the blogger's personality come through, especially if he or she is an established industry expert. Thought provoking, anecdotal, even controversial blog entries can promote online discussion with your prospects.

Other great content marketing vehicles include e-books, e-zines (online magazines), and newsletters. Again, each element in your content marketing plan is developed to form a systematic strategy for establishing your company's thought leadership in the mind of the buyer.

## Implementing a B2B Content Marketing Program

Perhaps one of the most important first steps to implementing an effective content marketing strategy is to become an expert problem solver. Shift your focus from your product to your client. Listen to your business customers to find out what problems and issues they are dealing with so you can present information relative to how your solution will help them.

Here are some additional steps you can take as you put a content marketing plan to work for you:

### **Deliver valuable information to your potential customers, even before they call you or visit your website**

Once a prospect has contacted you, they know you are on the prowl for their business. However, if you offer indispensable information with no-strings attached, and no perceived expectations before they contact you, it is easier

for them to see you as an expert and trusted resource, and they are more likely to buy in the long run.

### **Offer truly relevant and valuable content**

If a business customer is smart enough to research, he or she is smart enough to read through phony content. Never underestimate the intelligence of a potential customer. Assume they know their stuff and that they will analyze your content. Then create content that stands up to research and meets the standards of quality content in your industry.

### **Vary your vehicles for content delivery**

If you want to more effectively reach your target market, select a variety of delivery methods for your content. This enables you to leverage your existing content for broader impact. This is where your comprehensive content marketing plan comes into play. Each element adds venues for reaching your market and establishing your business as the field expert and prime solution.

### **Persevere**

Like any marketing technique, you will want to give content marketing a little time to work. Because of the viral nature of an effective B2B content campaign, consistency leads to conversion. Keep delivering quality content, and you *will* see the positive impact on your business.

## **Conclusion**

Content marketing is all about meeting your target prospects where they are -- online, researching and learning about potential solutions to solve their business issues. Give them the information they need, laying the path that will lead them to your solution without advertising or hyperbole. Strive not just to increase sales, but to be perceived as a thought leader in your industry.

A robust content marketing plan plays a vital role in reaching new clients and elevating your presence with existing clients. It requires careful planning, clearly stated goals, commitment, executive buy-in, and adequate resource allocation.

For more information on how to incorporate content marketing into your business-to-business marketing plan, visit VAZT at <http://www.salesalignment.com>.