



Telling a Good Story:

6 Best Practices for Using Content Marketing to Build Your Audience

News and media consumption patterns have shifted dramatically as people access information across a variety of devices and channels throughout the day.

With so many access points, consumers are overly connected and increasingly distracted, making the impact of any single message fleeting. In a marketplace delineated by information overload and on-demand delivery, what's a marketer to do?

Content is your answer. The goal of content marketing is to build engaged audiences through the information and experiences that your members and customers value. Content with a high perceived value will break through the clutter and be remembered. A well-crafted message is your invitation to engage, create a connection and provide a relevant experience that helps (not sells) and provides solutions for your audience's business needs.

Here are six indispensable practices for getting the most from your content marketing.



Content Marketing Explained

In a culture where people tune into their smartphones on average 221 times a day,* you can forget about making an impression or generating a response with a standard marketing message. But telling a compelling story will earn people's attention — and even spark them to share, like and tweet.

Content marketing engages people through information and experiences they value. It sidesteps the idea of the immediate sale or click and

focuses on building a relationship with the customer or member by providing help that translates into longer-term loyalty.

Powerful and useful content marketing takes multiple formats: white papers, infographics, blog posts, e-mail newsletters, videos and webinars. But it's the narrative that sets content marketing apart from marketing collateral. A good story can inspire awareness, trust or loyalty to a brand.

*Tecmark Survey - Smartphone Habits

1

PRACTICE 1: Set Goals

Content marketing at best is single-minded. There are two dimensions to this. First, clearly define and document your goals. Second, track your results so you can stop doing what isn't working and focus on what resonates.

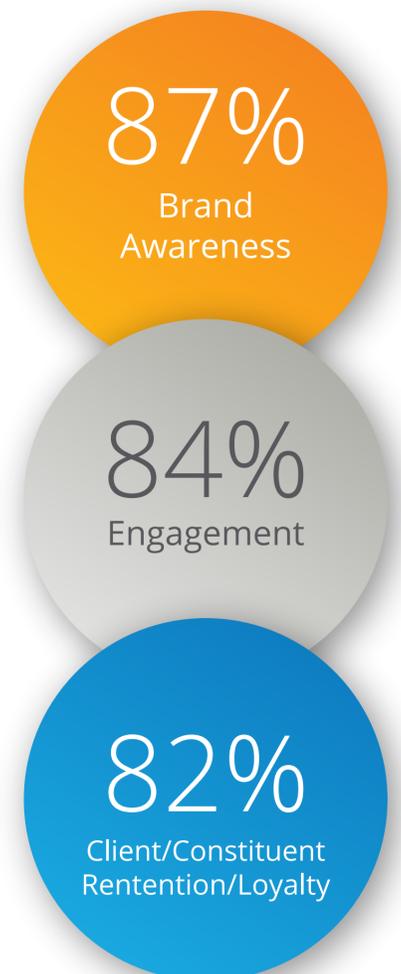
It may be that you're seeking brand awareness, member acquisition and retention, a position as a thought leader, new leads, an increase in exhibition sales, or something else. Content marketing can address all of these, but not necessarily at the same time.

Make sure the goals you've set align with those of your organization. For example, an international media company sought to expand outlets for its daily news content. Its marketing team worked with SmartBrief to develop cross-channel campaigns to engage high-end hotels as potential venues for this digital amenity. But that message was tucked inside white papers, webinars, and blog posts that provided valuable insights about innovative trends and practices for improving the hotel guest experience — information readers valued. By providing relevant and timely content, the brand was able to strengthen its voice as an industry leader and remain top-of-mind for those in the industry making purchasing decisions.

Top 3 Goals for Nonprofit Content Marketers



Top 3 Goals for B2B Content Marketers



Source: *Content Marketing Institute* 2015 content marketing trends surveys



Next, figure out how you'll track your results and define success. Research the metrics or indicators that make sense for your target segment or industry. Remember to exploit the reporting your media partner makes available to you. (You'd be surprised how little used this source of data is.)

Then start tracking return on investment (ROI) to redirect content marketing investment to where it is giving you the best payback. A recent research project from the Content Marketing Institute found that a mere 15% of nonprofits reported success in tracking ROI. On the B2B side, it's only 21%.

Why do organizations find tracking ROI so hard? Frequently, nobody's assigned to track and manage reporting. Or there's no standardized method or template for simplifying the process of data collection. Therefore, results may reside in bits and pieces on multiple computers and in different formats.

TIP To get your arms around tracking ROI, develop a reporting framework and get agreement from your content marketing team on how data will be gathered and reported. Integrate a three-minute review of the reporting into your standing meetings and use that data to inform your next steps.

2

PRACTICE 2:

Document Your Content Strategy

Once you've pinned down your goals and how success will be measured, you have the basics of your content strategy.

These are the kinds of details your plan will include:

- What is to be published and specific calls to action for each.
- The goals for each type of content.
- Schedules.
- Budgets.
- Channel plans for specific segments and industries.

More broadly, this content strategy provides a home for your business case: the need for content marketing; what you hope to accomplish; what the marketing prospects look like now and what they should look like in six months, a year, two years.

Documenting the business case and providing as many details as possible will be vital in helping you gain buy-in from executives and other stakeholders. At a minimum, its existence will show that your creative efforts fit into a structure.

TIP Get permission to fail (and succeed) upfront. Without explicit sign-off from top leadership, your content marketing ideas will never get off the ground. Remember to integrate feedback from executives, managers and others into the plan so they have a stake in its success and your content is furthering the overall organizational objectives.

60%

of “highly effective” B2B companies have a documented content marketing strategy*

32%

of “highly effective” B2B companies rely on a strategy that isn’t written*

42%

of “highly effective” nonprofits have a documented content marketing strategy‡

23%

of “highly effective” nonprofits have a strategy but it’s not documented‡

*2015 B2B

Content Marketing

Trends—North America:

Content Marketing Institute/
MarketingProfs

‡2015 Nonprofit Content

Marketing Benchmarks Budgets

Trends—North America:

Content Marketing Institute/
Blackbaud/FusionSpark

3

PRACTICE 3: Relevancy Rules

Because it's so easy for a person to ignore communications, your content must be relevant and credible to make it highly valued. You need to approach content marketing as a quest to earn the right to somebody's attention.

"Content must provide entertainment, education, or utility," says brand pundit Scott Donaton. People watch [Super Bowl ads](#) because they know companies have gone all out to come up with story lines that will entertain them. [Aruba Networks' Airheads Community](#) reaches beyond the typical support site to make its technically minded customers feel like "rock stars" in the process of learning about Wi-Fi and Aruba's products. And organizations such as [AARP](#), [Content Marketing Institute](#), and [Berkeley Wellness](#) have become trusted sources for useful how-to guidance.

In each of these examples it's almost as if the relevancy of the content allows time to stop for the person experiencing it — because little else matters while he or she is engaging with it.

Credible Content

The top three sources executives turn to most often for credible content:

 56% Email newsletters

 55% Industry news sites

 55% General news sites

Source: [Quartz Insights Global Executive Study](#)



To build that kind of relationship through your content marketing, you must understand your audience and know what it values, including its preferred news sources and media channels. Research and interview representatives of your target market to determine content angles and identify authentic, creative messages that will resonate with them.

Also, you need to position your company or organization as an expert worth paying attention to. This can't be accomplished by pushing out content emphasizing your story, which is often the approach taken in traditional marketing fodder. You accomplish this by showing the role your products and services play in the lives of your customers or members.

TIP Don't go it alone. Seek out a media partner with content connections inside industry and professional associations in order to gain access to data that may turn trends on their heads. Then test out new ways to deliver those insights to executives, who are always on the hunt for focused, need-to-know business information and insights that will give them an edge.

4

PRACTICE 4:

Create Highly Shareable Content

Shareable stories include concise quotes and data points. They are often counterintuitive, making people want to share them with their social networks. Getting links back to your site increases the potential reach of your content marketing and moves your content higher in search engine results.

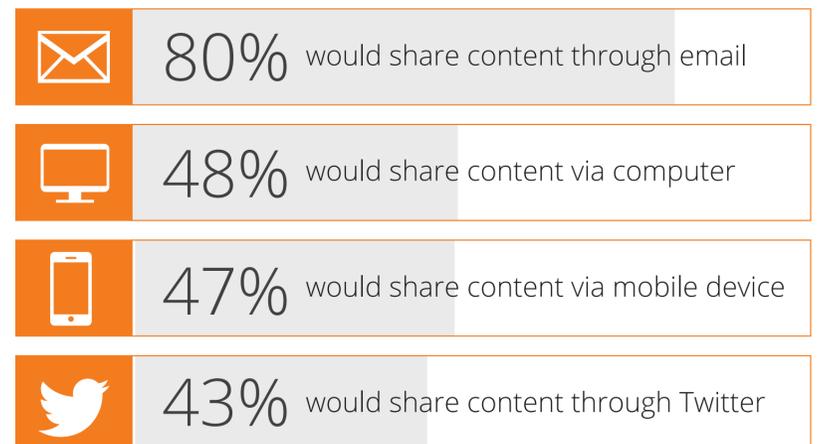
To encourage sharing, publish your content in a way that makes it easy:

- Keep your content brief and current.
- Allow the reader to scan your content through strategic use of headings, boldface, highlighting, pull-quotes and sidebars.
- Use an infographic to turn your data or research into easy-to-grasp visuals.
- Run enticing polls that provoke response and instantly display results.
- If you're cultivating thought leadership through reports and white papers, make those documents available in multiple formats and give them readable URLs or file names.
- Use social share buttons, not just for the whole page, but also on specific call-outs from the page.
- Provide shareable content that works for each major channel — e-mail, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, SlideShare, Pinterest and others relevant to your readers, customers and members.

How Sharing Happens

91%

of executives would share work-related content if they found it valuable.



TIP Study how others do it. SmartBrief editors aggregate content daily and have mastered the art of writing headlines that stand out and appeal to readers.

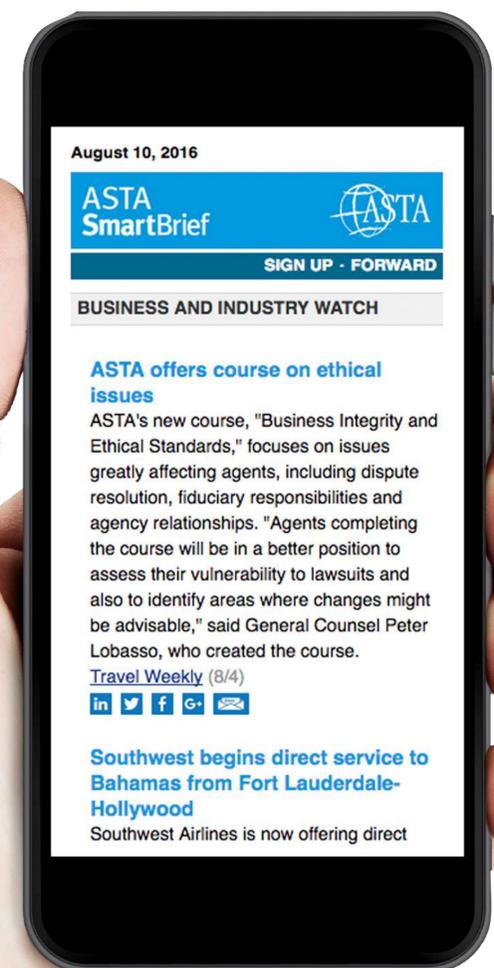
5

PRACTICE 5: Make Your Content Mobile

Mobile — both smartphones and tablets — now accounts for 19% of all Web usage in the United States, an 11% increase from 2013, according to [Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers](#). Likewise, email is fast becoming a “mobile-first” channel, more likely to be read and responded to on a mobile device than on a laptop or desktop PC. Email tracking software company [Litmus](#) pegs mobile opens at slightly less than 50 percent — nearly double desktop and webmail opens. If your content marketing isn’t enabled for mobile viewing, you’re missing out. If it’s hard to read, nobody will bother.

Although that mobile-aware design calls for a simpler layout, enabling your content for mobile viewing is a complex job requiring extensive website and content redesign. Your best workaround: Expedite the process by working with a media partner that’s already done the heavy lifting.

TIP SmartBrief’s communications are automatically optimized for mobile viewing, allowing readers in 14 industries and over 200 newsletters to access content in their preferred format.



6

PRACTICE 6:

Go 360 Degrees with Your Content

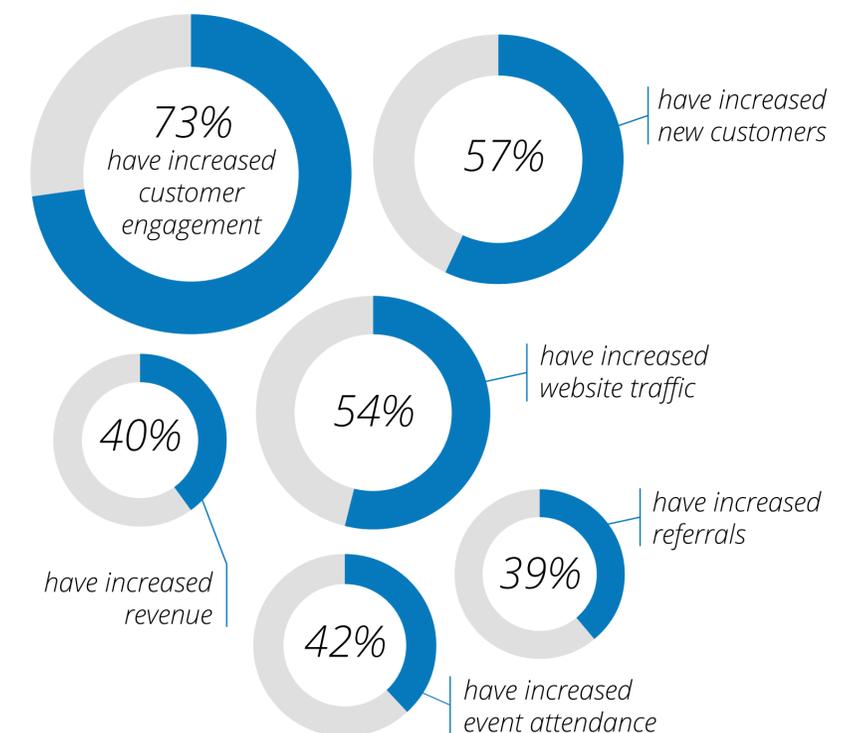
The most effective content marketing pursues its goal through multiple channels for good reason. Individual members of your audience have different preferences. People who might never take the time to view a video will jump on a social media link if it comes from somebody they trust or admire. Visually oriented readers will scrutinize an infographic or interactive flipbook where they might pass right by a lengthy written piece on the same information.

Head into your content campaign with a philosophy of bundling products together — a white paper supported by blog posts; an infographic accompanied by webinars; panel participation with conference coverage. And through it all, extend the conversation with your clients and members through social channels.

TIP Use a media partner such as SmartBrief to help you research your customers and members to develop a key piece of premium content (such as a white paper or webinar), and then create a series of derivatives in a variety of formats (articles, blogs, infographics, podcasts and events) to extend your reach and amplify your story.

Linking Multichannel Marketing to Success

82% of small businesses and nonprofits have adopted multi-channel marketing programs and as a result:



Source: [Constant Contact Small Biz Council survey](#)



SmartBrief

Serving nearly 6 million senior executives, thought leaders and industry professionals, SmartBrief is the leading digital media publisher of targeted business news and information by industry. By combining technology and editorial expertise, SmartBrief filters thousands of sources daily to deliver the most relevant industry news in partnership with leading trade associations, professional societies, nonprofits and corporate entities.

SmartBrief Content Marketing Services

With a full suite of services from strategy to development and distribution, SmartBrief can help you create a successful content marketing program. Whether you need end-to-end support, additional bandwidth for a special project or campaign or vertical B2B content expertise, SmartBrief's Content Marketing Services is an experienced team that delivers outstanding service.

For more information about SmartBrief's custom content solutions, contact sales@smartbrief.com

Help Your Audience Remember You

The idea of telling a good story isn't just about coming up with a gripping, poignant or humorous tale and interjecting your business or association into it. It's about figuring out what your customers and members care about, and their questions and concerns; identifying where your products and services intersect with those issues; and coming up with practical suggestions that enlighten, educate, and — yes — entertain them. That

formula is the best way to prove your expertise and build trust with your audience.

Set goals, document your strategy, keep your content relevant, and make it shareable and mobile. Refining these delivery practices will accelerate your content marketing and persuade distracted customers and members to stop what they're doing and stick around to find out how you can help.