



# Content Rules

Create Customer Connections,  
Deliver Engagement and Drive Business

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# Introduction

In 2008 – a long time ago in the digital age — a webinar audience member asked the author of 18 internationally best-selling marketing books about the role of content marketing vs. traditional media. The response: **“Content marketing is the only marketing left.”**<sup>1</sup>

That seems like a big statement. Yet, while traditional advertising may not be completely dead, marketers can no longer create a great 30-second TV spot and assume their work is done. Today the customer is in control. As Hubspot’s 2017 annual survey of international marketers concluded, “We are abandoning the broadcast channels era to enter an individual on-demand environment.”<sup>2</sup>

## What is Content Marketing? Building Customer Connections

Content marketing encompasses any type of media—blogs, white papers, video, webinars, podcasts—that effectively connects stakeholders—prospects, customers, prospective and current employees, media—to your brand, products, and services. The key words in that sentence are “effectively connects.” To succeed, you must create and distribute valuable, relevant and consistent content that attracts a clearly defined audience, focusing on specific goals, from brand awareness through brand evangelism, across a range of media, both on- and offline. You also must personalize your communications, giving them a human voice and a personality that is a clear link to your brand. Elder statesman, friendly neighbor, practical maiden aunt, brash tech guru—depending on your business, any one of these can be the person whom your prospects are confident can and will deliver answers they seek.

### Be human

Marketing—and effective sales—has always been about connecting with customers. Think about the old-fashioned hardware store owner your grandfather depended on to both know and supply the right tool for the job. While big box stores have largely supplanted the expert local shopkeeper, in today’s multi-media environment even business-to-business (B2B) brands make that same personal connection with customers—albeit through a series of how-to videos or webinars—and customers are expecting that same level of tangible support. Today, as a good marketer you are a trusted advisor, counseling prospects through each stage of their buying journey—and giving them the resources they need to succeed.<sup>2</sup>

In the process, you are creating a personal, human bond with your customers and prospects. By using your content to start a conversation, to inspire people and draw them in, you become involved with their business—and they become involved with your company.<sup>3</sup>

### Be relevant

Think about what you want when you conduct an internet search: probably a fast answer to a specific question. You are not alone. Today’s customers want content that is relevant, practical, informative—and possibly entertaining.

As a marketer, your opportunity lies in the open channels: customers don’t care where that content comes from, as long as the source is credible. That is also your challenge: Across industries, companies are no longer totally in charge of their message. You must be truthful; plenty of other sources on the web will confirm or deny what you say. You also need to be meaningful: 67% of readers unsubscribe from a brand once they have received irrelevant information or product recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

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## Rise above the noise

A decade ago, volume mattered—search engines gave higher rankings to sites with more pages and fresh content. Today, 211 million pieces of new online content appear every minute<sup>7</sup>—and cranking out mediocre content neither engages prospects nor influences search engines. In fact, mediocre content can be counterproductive: 43% of consumers ignore future communications from a brand once they have received irrelevant information or products—and 20% of consumers report they stopped buying products from a company after receiving irrelevant communications.<sup>6</sup>

In short: Simply creating more content isn't enough. To stand out, you must create better, more relevant content.

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**Content marketing is the art of listening to your prospects' wants and needs, magnified by the science of communicating effective solutions in a compelling way.**

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## Fit the media to the message

Which media should you target? The media that your prospects and customers primarily use. Obviously, you need a great website that reflects your industry, appeals to your most broad array of clients, customers or prospects and that is kept very current and fresh. Here are other media you should consider:

**Email:** Business people at every level use email more than any other medium—but the typical email open rate is just 2%, so you need a significant email list to have a true impact. Inbound marketing strategies often center on building email lists by offering white papers, webinars and other engaging content.

**Social:** Today, 55% of B2B buyers search for information on social media<sup>12</sup>, a number that will only increase. By the time these prospects talk to an actual sales person, they've already made the decision to try your product. So don't shy away from social media because you are in a "boring" or regulated industry. In fact, social media is a great venue to humanize your brand with a voice and content that projects personality.

### Exhibit 1

### The competition is relentless

# 211 Million

## Pieces of New Content

### Every 60 Seconds<sup>7</sup>



- Email users send **204,000,000** messages
- Google receives over **4,000,000** search queries
- Blog writers post **1,400** new blog posts
- Facebook users share **2,460,000** status updates
- Twitter users tweet **277,000** times
- Instagram users post **216,000** new photos
- Yelp users post **26,380** reviews
- Pinterest users pin **3,472** images
- YouTube creators post **300** hours of new video<sup>8</sup>

**Video:** Numerous surveys and research reports prove that audiences want raw, honest content. Video supplies that sense of immediacy, creating a connection between a company and its prospects. Maybe that's why adding video to your landing page can increase conversion by 80%<sup>9</sup> and emails with the word "video" in the headline are more likely to be opened.<sup>10</sup> In fact, 76.5% of marketers who use video marketing say it had a direct impact on business.<sup>11</sup>

# Six Steps to Success

With customers today choosing their own media consumption, successful content marketing is often more about content than marketing. To be truly effective, you must connect with your customers and prospects by creating content so necessary to them that they actually seek it out, content so compelling to them that it builds a lasting connection, content so useful to them that they open it, save it—and even share it with others.

Success does not necessarily mean the multiple millions of connections and downloads reported in stories about celebrities and household name consumer brands. More often than not, the B2B clients we work with can claim success with comparatively modest results such as these that we've been able to generate with them:

- Nearly 30,000 views of an HR video for prospective employees
- More than 2,000 views of an instructional webinar video
- Averaging 200 sign-ups for webinars
- Achieving more than 70,000 clicks to the CSR section of a website—when previously it was near zero
- 12% email open rate vs. 2% industry average
- A social media following of more than 130,000 Millennials seeking financial knowledge
- A weekly show on Facebook averaging 20,000 live viewers

## Exhibit 2

### Everything old is new again

Content marketing is not exactly a new concept. In 1895, John Deere launched a magazine called *The Furrow*; and 122 years later *The Furrow* has nearly 2 million readers in 40 countries,<sup>4</sup> augmented by its own website with video and other “web exclusives.” Farmers who trust John Deere to tell them about new crop-rotation strategies and why container shipping is advantageous for oilseed producers probably trust John Deere to sell them a combine, too.

Today, sparked by the ease of publishing on the web, 89% of business-to-business marketers rely on content marketing to build audience as well as drive sales.<sup>5</sup>

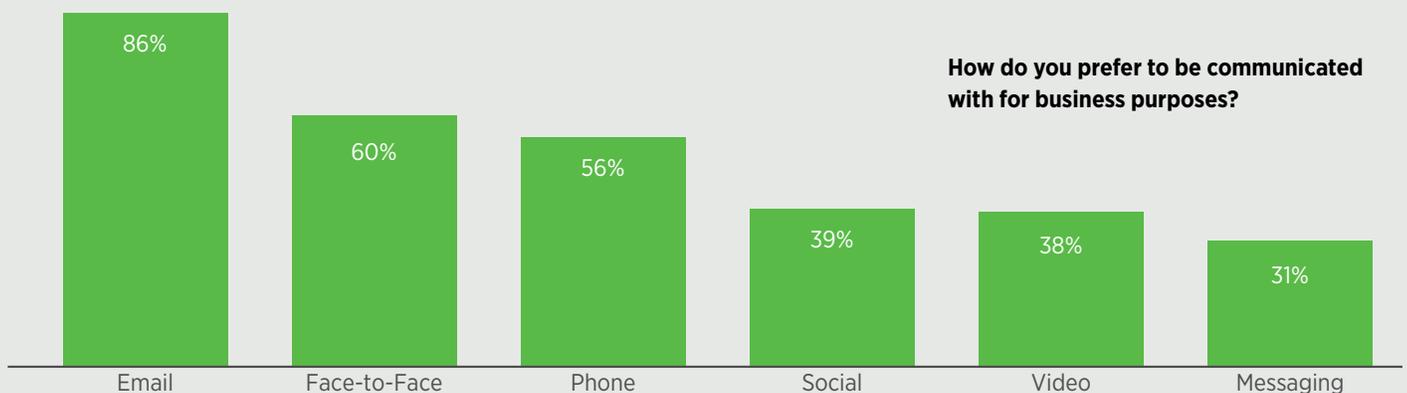
But as you will see, not all content is created equal.

Your content needs to be engaging, yes, but successful engagement must be measured in context. Building a drum beat of content with consistent results like those cited above is effective content engagement. Also, success metrics will be different for each client.

Still, the term “content” is so broad as to be almost meaningless. It spans white papers and blogs, videos and webinars, distributed through channels from websites to email to social media to podcasts—and sometimes in-person presentations.

## Exhibit 3

### Fit the media to the message



Source: State of Inbound 2017<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, you don't need to use *all* these options, much less use them all at once. At any given moment, you can decide what to deliver to whom, and how, with one simple question: What does *this* person want to know *right now*?

**You succeed by following six essential steps:**

1. Profile your customer
2. Plot the customer journey
3. Establish your goals
4. Chart your roadmap
5. Optimize your content
6. Track your ROI

Then rinse and repeat. Through this process, you will understand exactly who your customers are, what their needs are, and how you can answer those needs. If you succeed, you will gain a customer for life—or at least for as long as you continue your content marketing.

Case Study **Changing Industry Perceptions**

When a major Wall Street financial services firm was struggling to recruit and retain diverse financial advisors, a field that is widely perceived as an “old boys’ network,” the executives wanted to increase their multicultural reach.

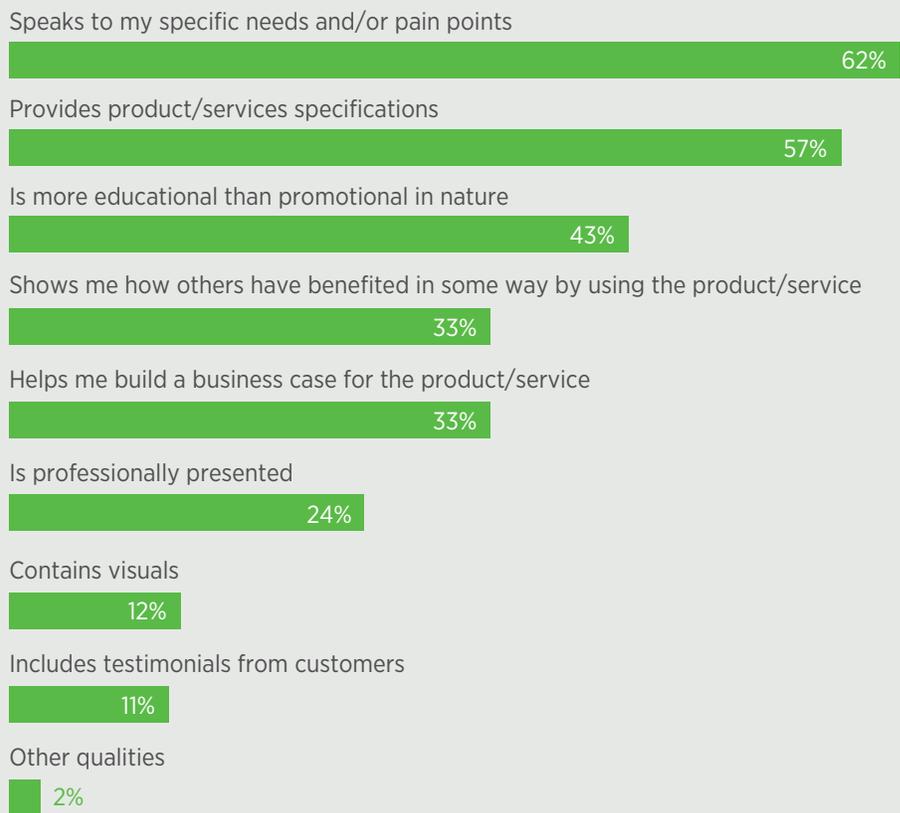
Lumentus created a blog and video series highlighting the diversity among company executives and financial advisors, as well as the communities they serve, with a strong emphasis on the business case for diversity and inclusion.

- Produced compelling, personalized stories of executives and members of the community
- Leveraged the videos across multicultural sections of the website and social media

After five years, the firm now has a reputation as a leader in diversity for women, African-American, Latino, and LGBTQ financial advisors.

Exhibit 4 **Content Qualities**

## The Most Important Qualities of Content Reviewed in the Purchasing Decision-Making Process



Source: Smart Briefs

## 1. Profile your customer

To provide content that your customers will find compelling, you need a deep understanding of those customers. Customer profiles help organize that understanding in a way that you can easily leverage later.

Is your customer the Chief Marketing Officer or the Chief Technology Officer? A 30-year-old Latina or a 50-year-old white man? Married or single? A suburbanite or city dweller? And, most importantly, what are their goals, challenges and typical objections to buying your product? The answers to these questions will impact your subject matter, distribution channels—even your tone of voice.

Gather this data through primary research:

- Interview your sales team and customer service representatives and be specific
- Carefully review your website analytics to understand the sources of your web traffic—and what people search for on your website
- Survey your customers, stage focus groups or use Amazon customer forums
- Use social listening; it's a great way to understand brand awareness, customer needs and questions with no response bias

Depending on the diversity of your products, you may be targeting more than one customer, audience or decision maker; profile each one of them. This may seem like a simplistic exercise, but it is actually the foundation for all your work.

## 2. Plot the customer journey

The traditional sales funnel puts products and services at the heart of marketing; this is a mistake, since customers who aren't ready to buy typically aren't receptive to a sales pitch—who cares about the features of a product they don't think they need?



### Ranking with Google

The following factors can enhance your Google ranking:

- Relevance and authority
- Context to enable semantic search [do you mean “lemon” the fruit or “lemon” a car that will never work?]
- Social shares and links
- Links from other reputable, relevant sources

### Case Study

### Building an Inbound Platform

Our life sciences client has a deep bench of subject matter experts in a range of challenging therapeutic areas. Lumentus harnessed their knowledge to develop an armada of content—then built an integrated program with multiple distribution channels to disseminate targeted content, supporting prospects throughout their customer journey.

- Multiple Email Nurturing/Drip Campaigns by Target Segment
- Search Engine Marketing with AdWords
- Media Relations and Bylined Articles Placement
- Digital Display Ads and Online Sponsorships
- Social Media Channels

The metrics speak to success, with double-digit growth in website visitors, email open rates averaging 12% and average webinar registration of 200+. Most importantly, these marketing efforts are directly accountable for **\$50+ million** of new business opportunities in the course of a year.

Instead, nurture leads with information designed for their current stage of the customer journey. If your target client is a specialty pharmaceutical development company just launching its first preclinical trial, share a blog post on protocol design and save the white paper on overcoming regulatory hurdles for those further down the pipeline.

## 3. Establish your goals

You will have specific goals for customers at each stage of the journey—from growing brand awareness to building brand loyalty. Ideally, these will overlap with your broader marketing goals; for instance, increasing customer awareness should help build your prospect funnel. By clearly identifying your goal, you can consider the best topics and media options to achieve it.

- Recognition and reinforcement: Informational webinars, blogs, social media
- Lead nurturing: Product demonstrations, events and e-newsletters
- Conversion: Proof points, testimonials, price/feature comparisons
- Customer Service: FAQs, user videos, newsletters, webinars, customer events

One note of caution: According to industry studies, 70% of marketers are focused on converting leads to customers.<sup>2</sup> Yet it

costs five times as much to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing one, while increasing customer retention by just 5% increases profits by 25%-95%.<sup>13</sup>

The customer journey never ends. Neither should your support.

## 4. Create your roadmap

Seventy percent of marketers lack a consistent or integrated content plan.<sup>14</sup> Don't be one of them. A simple 10-field editorial calendar can help you organize your content goals, creation and distribution to ensure that you are always delivering the right content to the right person at the right time. Build it by asking yourself these questions:

1. **Customer profile:** *Who are you targeting?* Each customer type requires a separate editorial calendar.
2. **Stage:** *Where are they in their customer journey?* You will create unique content for each stage of the customer journey. This overlaps with your marketing goal; content designed to build a funnel of prospects will differ from content designed to reduce churn.
3. **Need:** *What need or pain point does your content tackle?* This informs your choice of content topic.
4. **Topic:** *What topic does it address?* Organizing by topics optimizes content for both readers and search engines.
5. **Content goal:** *What do you want your customer or prospect to do with the content?* This should be a specific goal, linked to the customer journey.
6. **Format:** *What format will be most effective?* Don't just blog because you know how to; consider your customer profile—who they are, how they work, where they live online—before deciding how best to reach them. Also, consider how to repurpose one type of content into several offerings; this is both an effective way to create a multiplier effect and an effective way to test which format resonates best with each customer segment.
7. **Publication medium:** *Where will you publish?* Noting the distribution channel (email platform, YouTube channel) can help flag any related concerns.
8. **Release date:** *When will you publish?* This can be a calendar date for a newsletter or a timeframe for a nurturing campaign (1st email sent when the lead is acquired; 2nd email sent four days later...).
9. **Promotion:** *How will you promote your content?* Where do your readers, customers, prospects and fans look for information? Use social amplification (tweets, Facebook ads, LinkedIn posts) to help extend the reach of your message.
10. **Measurement:** *How will you measure success?* Many metrics (such as awareness) are tricky to measure, but it is



## Optimize Your Pages

Readers decide in milliseconds whether or not to stay on a specific page. Make it easy for them.

- Headline
- Short, easy-to-read paragraphs with subheads and ample white space
- Images, charts, illustrations, screenshots
- Quotes

Perform A/B and multivariate testing to learn what works best with your target audience(s).

worth tracking such items as listing positions, traffic, user acquisition costs, and conversion rates to get a general idea of effectiveness.

Of course, an editorial calendar is a living document; you will continue to update it based on the results of your campaigns, competitive information, new media channels and new product and messaging opportunities.

## 5. Optimize your content

There are over 5.5 billion Google searches every day<sup>15</sup>—and 90% of the clicks are on the top few listings. Your potential customers are behind some of those searches, making search engine optimization (SEO) a critical component of your content marketing strategy.

Yet the rules of SEO are changing. With over 200 search-ranking [factors](#), there is really no way to game the system. Google's advice is to create timely, relevant web pages that users want to use and share.

Your best strategy: Ask yourself how you can make the very best page on the web for the topic at hand.

## 6. Track your ROI

Businesses that calculate ROI are 72% more likely to have an effective marketing strategy.<sup>15</sup> However, ROI is often hard to measure. Video completion rates don't tell you if someone actually purchased your product as a result of your efforts.

However, it is possible to track individual engagement, as well as indicators such as your Google ranking, page views, email sign-ups, and conversation rates to get a general idea of your strategy's overall effectiveness.

# Conclusion

As much as you would like to believe that a simple head-to-head comparison demonstrating the clear superiority of your product will sway customers, it's not enough. As psychologist Douglas Van Praet notes, "Don't believe that customers rely on reasoning to make decisions...emotions drive our choices."<sup>16</sup>

Today, victory depends on a magic combination of delivering the right content to the right person at the right time. To succeed, you must understand your prospect—their state of mind, their aspirations, inspirations, desires, and dreams. If you do, you can reasonably predict their reactions and enhance both your conversion rate and future sales. And if you consistently connect your prospects with engaging, timely content, you won't just make a sale—you will make your brand an inextricable part of their lives.

## Case Study

## For ROI, Frequency Matters

When it comes to content, consistency and frequency matter. This is not a one-and-done proposition.

But how much frequency is the *right* amount? Typically, analyses peg effective frequency from 3 to 20 or more exposures.

In our client's B2B email marketing case, frequency was geared toward engaging prospects with an average mid-six-figure revenue value. In this example, our client met a prime prospect at its tradeshow booth. Her card was collected, a follow-up "good to meet you" email was sent immediately after the show, and followed by a series of emails designed to educate and engage the prospect, serving up offers of content and opportunities to connect again in person. The email outreach plan was:

- Week 1 – Sent tradeshow follow-up
- Weeks 2-4 – Sent "Nurturing Campaign A" #1, #2, #3
- Week 8 – Prospect visited website (viewing 9 pages over 5 minutes) and received follow-up email
- Week 12, 15, 17 – Sent "Drip Campaign B" #1, #2, #3

With that eighth email in Week 17, our prospect clicked on the "Please Contact Me" link and a sales person reached out to pursue this red-hot lead. So, in this scenario, eight was the effective frequency level that ultimately led to revenue.

These were eight highly targeted email contacts. These messages were sent with identifiable intent to one prospect; messages with offers of relevant content and information based on a growing body of knowledge being acquired about the potential customer.

Reaching the point of sale is a process. Content marketing succeeds when it excites your audience about your offering. Tracking content as described here allows clients to demonstrate that marketing is not a cost center, but a business-building, revenue-generating, brand investment. And stories like this one keep a marketer's blood pumping (to paraphrase our client)!

# Notes

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## About the Authors



**Robert Beltran** is a respected leader in advertising and integrated communications who built his reputation while working with an array of industry-leading companies and brands, including Advil, Coca-Cola, Colgate-Palmolive, Kodak, LG Appliances, UBS, the U.S. Postal Service and Weill Cornell Medical College.

Rob relies on his broad, cross-industry experience to provide strategic counsel and direction around integrated marketing assignments created for clients. He has led the development of numerous award-winning marketing programs, including ones honored with Effie, Sabre and Mercury awards.

Prior to joining the Lumentus founding team, Rob served as chief operating officer and managing director of Burson-Marsteller's legendary Marsteller group where he led the agency's Advertising, Design and Events/Production groups. He began his career with Young & Rubicam Advertising where he worked for over a decade including a tour in the company's Frankfurt, Germany office.

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