8 Ways to Improve Your Content Marketing in 2022
and... ACTION!

Content marketing has undergone a transformation in recent years. B2B companies are competing for attention in a space dominated by flashy, attention-grabbing methods of B2C marketers. Some of those tactics are easily adapted to B2B, while others just don’t make sense.

**Knowing the Balance**
As B2B marketers, our best chance at improving the ROI of our marketing efforts is to infuse relevant digital tactics into our tried-and-true strategies to reach the broadest base of customers, from entry level up to senior management. When was the last time you compared your efforts to the latest best practices for email, social media, blogging, etc?

Customer expectations have shifted; not only should digital content be available, but it should be offered in various formats through multiple platforms and channels.

**Your Marketing in a New Light**
Whether it’s intentional or otherwise, many B2B companies tend to half-heartedly incorporate the following 8 tactics into their outreach efforts. But the key to building a better marketing communications plan lies in embracing these tactics to meet the modern customer on their playing field.
CONTENTS

1 Websites are Never Done p 4
2 Email Optimization p 7
3 What Social Media Can Do for B2B p 10
4 Why a Blog Makes Sense p 13
5 Writing Stories with Emotion p 16
6 Gain Attention Using Visuals p 18
7 Social Proof p 21
8 Delivery p 23
Websites Are Never Done

Once you launch your new website, you may be thinking, “Whew, thank goodness that’s done!” Unfortunately, this is not a one-and-done moment. Now the next phase begins—updating content on a regular basis, managing technical elements on the backend and optimizing SEO across all your market segments. There will always be tweaks to the metadata, graphics to update and new pages to create.

Speaking of new pages, since URLs themselves help contribute to site traffic, it’s good practice to keep them short and to the point. They’re a critical building block of your website, part of its identity. In fact, how your site ranks in the search engines directly translates to how customers can find your website. (Bonus: See URL Best Practices on Page 6)

An up-to-date site shows your customers that you’re current with your products and services as well as with the times. No one wants to look at a website with outdated photos, misinformation or bad links. They won’t come back, trust us.

Here’s a suggested schedule of actions you can take to stay on track and keep your site in tiptop shape:

• **Weekly:** Provide updates on new products being released or upcoming events. By keeping customers up-to-date, they will find your website reliable.

**Key Insight**

Once your website is user-friendly and updated, it’ll help customers find what they’re looking for. Remember to edit websites behind the scenes, too, by assessing the infrastructure and continuing SEO optimization techniques.
• Monthly: Write new blogs that pique your customers’ interests to help increase traffic. Try to post them consistently to have your website set on a higher rank on search engines. Check for website platform, plugin and security updates so the live site continues to function properly.

• Quarterly: Determine what has been working and which aspects could use improvement by looking at analytics. Consider using A/B testing to help improve your website to see which version is gaining more traffic. It can be as minor as changing the menu button to another color or testing out a new format.

• Yearly: Check to make sure metadata, graphics, statistics, contact info and SEO is updated. While analyzing an SEO audit, you are capable of eliminating issues with the website and identifying ways to improve.

Here’s a more comprehensive list of suggested website updates we use to keep our client’s sites current

URL Best Practices

There are several tips to remember when creating new page URLs:

1. Use keywords and remove unnecessary words – stick to 50-60 characters, using keywords specific to the page topic. Remember the character count includes the domain and breadcrumbs sections of the URL as well as the specific page detail.

2. URLs and page titles should match, or use the same keywords if the URL is condensed. This helps lower bounce rates by meeting content expectations - the page topic matches the URL and title.

3. Separate with hyphens – hyphens separate words in a clear manner. Don’t use spaces, punctuations or other characters because it will confuse search engines, resulting in lower SEO rankings.
7 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CONTENT MARKETING IN 2022

THE SIMON GROUP

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Email
Email Optimization

Every marketer knows the first goal of an email is for the reader to open it, with an industry average open rate of 19% for email. Reaching or exceeding that goal begins with a catchy subject line, like a specific call-to-action that requires immediate attention or something as simple as an insightful update. Either way it needs to be meaningful enough to get the reader’s attention.

While we all know that not every recipient will open every email, your best bet for a higher open rate is to focus on the subject line and secure that initial interest.

Some subject line tips to help your email reach its maximum open potential include:

- If the message is urgent or time sensitive, create a call-to-action
- Ask open-ended questions to promote curiosity
- Use numbers or statistics in the headline
- Keep it short and conversational with critical info appearing first
- Use language that speaks to them, not at them

So, they opened, but didn’t click? Let’s be honest, an email is just the start of the process. You need to keep people engaged at all steps along the way and the subject line is only the start.

Key Insight

Your subject line needs to incentivize readers to open the email, while the content within needs to engage them enough to click to your website. And make sure you are leading them to an up-to-date page with a clear call to action and useful resources relevant to the content of the email.

Check out more ways to create emails that make an impact
Understanding benchmark data for your industry, like these stats for Manufacturing and Distribution from Constant Contact, help you understand your email performance to see where to make improvements.
Social Media
What Social Media Can Do for B2B

B2B and B2C are two different animals. While a component of B2C marketing carries over to B2B, the tactics need to be applied in a way that makes sense for B2B audiences.

Social media is a perfect example. Most people think of Facebook-type updates and posts, which leads to two common misconceptions of social media for B2B:

1. Some companies still think it’s a platform used for traditional ‘social’ interactions, which they feel hold no business value.

2. If they are using it, companies think it’s a way to sell to customers, not educate and inform.

Social media is a powerful tool for B2B companies to build trust with customers, lead people to your website and create a purpose-driven environment among your followers. It’s also a huge part of establishing your brand and defining your company mission, while showing growth, accomplishments, culture and innovation.

The key is to share credible, valuable content.

Key Insight

Social media platforms allow you to build a direct conversation with your customers that gives you insight to their needs. With this understanding, you can generate posts that they will want to click on and share with others.
When you post content, you should be thinking about:

- How will this content start a conversation with my audience?
- Will this turn into a larger contextual conversation or fail to launch into anything deeper?
- What challenges am I addressing to help our customers?
- Am I providing concrete data to aid in the decision-making process?
- How am I making things easier for my customer?
- How can my customer get more information?

There are several different social media platforms that should be considered by B2B companies. Knowing which ones your audience uses is key. LinkedIn is popular for business, but is there a space for Instagram? Check out your competitors to see which platforms others in your industry are using and how they are using them as well.

Social media for the B2B world is not just about web traffic. It’s about branding. It’s about conversations you want to be included in, not be kept out of.
Why a Blog Makes Sense

Like social media, some B2B companies approach blogs with a flawed mindset. We aren’t talking a blog that highlights the top five watercooler topics of the week or that gives a running commentary of office shenanigans, but rather a structured, calculated and scheduled method of providing detailed content on topics of interest to your customers.

Some other misconceptions include:

- **Frequency:** To start, we recommend a once-a-month posting. If that’s too taxing, drop to every other month. Easily keeping up with one blog every 30 days? Change it to every other week. The critical piece is making the content relevant and meaningful.

- **Comments:** No one said you need to have an active comments section—if anything, provide a means for the reader to reach out to the proper contact within your company to start a meaningful discussion.

- **Time commitment:** Repurposing existing content from a webinar, internal presentation, sales meeting, news release, you name it...a blog can easily be formed. You many need to reinvent the wheel for some blogs, but for most, using an existing source will provide the content needed to stay on track.

**Key Insight**

Blogs are a great resource to provide information in an informal manner and a way to increase engagement. It also helps SEO by ensuring your site continually includes fresh, new and relevant content—search engines love that!
And don’t forget to use your blog as a way to lead visitors deeper into your site by offering additional resources and content linked in a post. Blogs are also a prime spot to take advantage of SEO opportunities by using relevant keywords and phrases in context throughout your blog post.

According to Demand Gen Report,

46% of respondents prefer blog posts when reading B2B research materials

(Source: Demand Gen Report, 2021)

Read this oldie, but goodie, blog post about the basics that still ring true.
Storytelling
Writing Stories with Emotion

When given the choice, people choose to read a story they connect with, one with emotion, nuance and details that speak to the reader as a person and keep them entertained. While getting your message across is vital, people won’t continue reading your content if it isn’t interesting.

At the end of the day, all content is a story, even in the B2B world where content is highly technical. Some ways to write better stories with emotion include:

- Identify how you want to connect with the reader — what will they gain by reading this
- Include visual content relevant to the information and that helps guide people through the story
- Keep out “fluff” while using language that presents your emotion
  - Use words that resonate with your company brand, industry and message as well as language your reader is familiar with in their own business practices

Telling the right story is a big part of the customer journey—if you don’t engage them at the start, how do you expect them to move along the path?

Key Insight

Including valuable information while speaking to the readers is helpful and you can gain more engagement by including visuals throughout the content.
Visuals
Gain Attention Using Visuals

In the B2B world, we write and read a lot of long, technical content. In order to effectively increase engagement, all types of content must provide visuals.

Adults have an attention span of up to 8 seconds and dropping. Eye-catching visuals grab attention so users are more likely to continue reading the content.

What type of visual you use depends on the content format and engagement goals.

- When creating digital content on the same topic but in different formats, like a digital brochure vs website pages, make sure you are presenting it appropriately for each channel and audience—different platforms have different expectations.

- When writing a longer piece, insert relevant photos or videos and place headlines in bold to keep the reader’s attention.

- Charts and quote callouts can be equally as effective as visuals in a whitepaper or editorial article when the goal is to encourage the viewer to read the whole content piece.

Key Insight

Utilizing visuals throughout your content will not only help your engagement rate, but it will also keep readers intrigued to learn more, while presenting information to suit different learning styles.
• Social media posts (where the short attention span is even shorter) rely on pictures, gif or video to keep the user entertained and ‘stop the scroll’ in a newsfeed. Keep the captions concise and to the point so the user views the entire message.

Using appropriate visuals for various formats helps match your message to your audience’s expectations to improve engagement on each channel.

Present information in various formats to keep your audience engaged.

Learn more ways to cater your content to readers with visuals for all content formats and why those different formats are beneficial.
Improving Credibility and Authenticity

‘Social Proof’ is the new word of mouth, which is arguably the most effective type of marketing in any industry. Humans are social creatures who naturally look to their peers for input, so buying decisions can be swayed one way or another based on a review.

People not only like reviews, but they seek them out and trust the authentic information from someone with real-world experience dealing with your company. Your audience doesn’t want to be sold to, they want to be educated. Part of that education is learning about the experiences of previous customers.

Here are a few ways you can use social proof:

- Include testimonials on your website to show that customers prefer your brand
- Case studies help potential clients to decide if they want to work with you or use your services
- Ask your customers to write a review on social media
- Add counters or other numeric indicators of success to your site. Showing how many people have visited a product page can indicate popularity
- Improve SEO by aligning keywords with positive and solutions-based phrases
- Address negative reviews and make improvements based on them

Key Insight

Start gaining the feedback and insights now from your customers so you have a published legacy to stake your claim on in the future.

>>> Need more ‘proof’? Check out this blog on the importance of online reviews for B2B.
Hub & Spoke Content Model

Appealing to the preferences of a wide audience requires delivering content in different formats. Assets crafted around the same message, but catering to different readability styles, is the basis of the ‘hub and spoke’ model of content creation. Maybe some of your followers read headlines and skim the rest, while others might look at graphics only, and others still crave all the full-length details.

When writing content, there are specific ways to present the same information for different reader styles. A social post isn’t just a short version of your blog. An email isn’t just a summary of your whitepaper. Each tactic still communicates the value and relevancy of your content.

Matching the message to the format of each channel leads to happier readers and ensures you hit a wider range of people in the format they prefer. Here are a few examples:

**Key Insight**

Creating content using the ‘hub and spoke’ model with multiple formats around one message will help increase engagement across a wider range of your audience based on their learning style, available time to engage with content and other personal preferences.

44% of B2B buyers stated they typically consume three to five pieces of content before engaging with a vendor

(Source: Demand Gen Report, 2021)
• **Blog** - Use bold headlines and graphics relevant to the topic in order to keep the reader entertained and easily navigate the sections. Numbered lists and questions work well. Aim for 2,100-2,400 words with 3-5 subsections, along with links to other related resources.

• **Social Media** - Far less words than a blog, so keep posts more casual. Although LinkedIn can have up to 3,000 characters, people are less likely to read posts that are long. Keep the character limit to 280, including a link, so users will understand the message.

• **Emails** - Match your company brand style and include catchy subject lines. Formats that incorporate graphics and include short snippets increase readability. Add links and buttons that lead to longer, more detailed content.

• **Whitepapers** – Readers expect a more formal, in-depth article that’s multiple pages long and discusses, at length, how you can solve problems. Infographics, charts and other visuals, especially with statistics, help showcase data as well as break up long content sections for better readability.

See how different content delivery methods help nurture your audience from strangers to customers and beyond with the modern flywheel approach to marketing.
THAT’S A WRAP!

While it’s been easy to gloss over digital marketing strategies in the B2B world and not stay current, the good news is, it’s now even easier to recognize where your activities may be falling short and know how to apply modern, digital techniques to your overall marketing strategy.

Your customers are relying more and more on content to research and make B2B purchase decisions than ever before. They want to learn about your company through social media, blogs, emails and experiences of other customers. Embracing the tactics outlined in this guide will help you successfully reach your audience and position your company as a thought leader in your industry.

And now that you’ve seen your marketing in a new light, let us know how we can help you shine!

Give us a call or drop us a note, we’re ready to put 35 years of successful B2B marketing practices to work for you.

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