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## Using Content Marketing to Drive Sales

According to the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and MarketingProfs 2012 report on Business-to-Business Content Marketing, 90% of organizations are marketing with content. It's a trend showing no signs of stopping. Personally, I couldn't be happier. Content marketing intersects two of my favorite topics—marketing and the media. Done well, the “self-publishing” aspect of content marketing offers a great way to augment a PR strategy.

However, there are tricks to ensure your content marketing strategy works well. For example, unlike sales-focused marketing content biased toward product features and benefits or company information, content marketing will not succeed if it is self-serving. Successful content marketing requires three things: deep knowledge of your buyer's interests, great writing, and the ability to serve it where and how your prospects want to consume it.

### Step 1: Focus content on buyer needs

One surefire way to engage readers is to develop an editorial calendar approach to content that zeros in on what prospects care most about. The objective is to find the intersection between your business and buyer needs. This requires understanding your audience. Meet with sales to unearth prospect questions heard regularly. What are buyer fears, concerns and issues? What problems are they dealing with or worried about? What bias, prejudices or misconceptions do they have? Are there legislative or industry issues affecting their business?

Another technique is to scour the editorial calendars of your industry's best-read trade journals. Publishers and editors live and die by their ability to provide readers with compelling content. Review their planned topics and consider how to modify with your own spin. Do the same thing with the topic agendas for well-attended tradeshows.

### Step 2: Write your content as if you were a reporter

#### Executive Insights



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Writing like a reporter differs from traditional corporate writing. Good reporters are storytellers. They create an experience for readers by inserting them in the action. Observe how your favorite reporter (TV, print or online) presents content that

hooks you. Overtime a few formulaic approaches will become apparent, including:

- Using visuals, compelling headlines and statistics or shocking facts as hooks
- Starting with a great lede—convey the main points of the story in the first 40 words, followed quickly with important scene setting details such as where, why and how.
- Use the inverted pyramid approach to structure your writing, with the most compelling information and facts up front.
- Add human-interest angles to help your reader picture themselves in the story.
- Use descriptive adjectives and action-focused verbs to add life to content.
- Seek stories with an interesting narrative—show progress change or accomplishment and write about topics that defy conventional wisdom are unexpected or counter intuitive.

### Step 3: Serve your content directly to prospects

To break through market noise it's crucial to repurpose and dole out your content in a variety of digestible ways. For example, if you've worked hard to create an unbiased and compelling story about how a customer has overcome a common, aggravating issue, make sure to retell the

story in a variety of formats and lengths that can be consumed in multiple ways:

- Email marketing: provide a brief teaser and summary of the story in your newsletter
- Post a white paper on your website: examine the story from an in depth, detailed perspective
- Webinar: jointly present the story with the client from an educational standpoint
- Tradeshow presentation: provide a condensed version of the webinar at an industry show
- Company blog and guest blog: repurpose the story using a Q & A approach
- Instagram infographic: create and post a visual at-a-glance overview of the story facts
- Social networks: use facts from the story to start a conversation and link to more content
- Online video or podcasts: interview the client in a visual format
- Media pitches: recommend the story to an industry reporter who can approach it from another angle

Done well, content marketing will engage and ultimately influence your buyers. It offers an indirect way to sell your ideas, vision, knowledge and insight to prospects. Just like a great media story, this type of influence is worth its weight in gold because when buyers are poised to purchase they want to engage with the most knowledgeable source. When you make your content part of your prospect's discovery and research phase, chances are you will influence their purchase.

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