

Essential Components of a Content Marketing Strategy

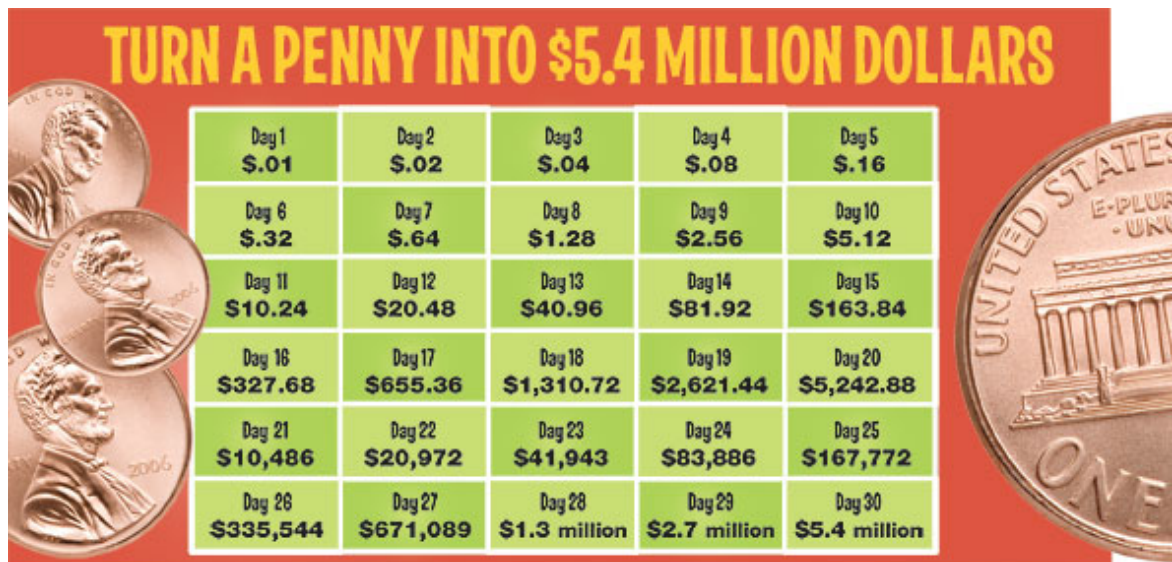
“One of the primary purposes of a content marketing strategy is to influence your ideal customer to make a decision to buy. One of the strongest influences is: *‘what do other people like me think about this product or service?’* One of the most powerful examples is a customer testimonial. Another classic example is an endorsement from a famous person. This content you’re producing is to encourage them to buy,” Bob Haataia said.

A content marketing strategy is essential for driving sales. A strategy is a living document that defines your actions. It gives you a basis for continuous improvement. Bob Haataia, a senior product leader, recommends a documented strategy with answers to the following questions:

What are your goals?

In your content marketing strategy you should have goals so you know why you’re doing what you’re doing, whether it’s increase your sales by 10% in three months, or doubling your business in eighteen months. It’s important to know why you’re trying to get your message out.

“With content marketing you have to think in terms of getting traffic over time. You have to think more about the long term. You can pay for Google Ads to boost traffic, but you have to continue to pay over the long term to keep traffic coming. With content marketing, the traffic builds over time, and is sustained long-term because of the content. It’s the classic example of deciding whether you want a million dollars now, or a penny in an account that doubles every day?” Bob said.



A penny doubled every day produces more than \$5 million dollars in 30 days.

It's important to have SMART goals is so you can find out what's working and what isn't. For example, if you start out with a six-month marketing campaign with a number of activities, you'll be able to track those activities that bring you closer to your goals. It's important that your goals are business results, not activities. A business result is a 15% increase in your traffic, versus an activity such as Tweeting daily.



Here are some examples of some SMART content marketing goals:

- increase website traffic by 25% in the next six months

- educate customers on new service in the next thirty days
- collect 500 email addresses in the next ninety days
- increase revenue by 5% over the next six months

“In the beginning, you may not know if your goals are realistic or not. Even if you don’t achieve your goals, by having SMART content marketing goals and tracking your progress over time, this will help you set better goals in the future,” Bob said.

Who is your ideal customer?

Why is it important to know your customers? The more you know and understand them, the better your content is going to meet their needs. By knowing your customers, you can provide information at every step of the buyer’s journey. Customer education is a key ingredient to drive sales.

“Whether you’re a consumer business, or B2B, you want to know who buys your product or service. For example with a hair salon, you might get a lot of everyday consumers who are in a particular age range. By understanding this, you can start targeting your message and services to this age,” Bob said.

It can be very helpful to document this. You can do this through personas. These are generalized representations of ideal customers you’re trying to bring in.

HOW TO SPOT

A YELP USER

Yelp users certainly have a unique way of seeing and interacting with the world. You can easily recognize one by their penchant for food photography and need to review everything from parking lots to laundromats.



Large marketing organizations, such as [Yelp](#), create customer personas to better target their messages and build better products or services. They describe what a typical customer does for a living. They often even describe their hobbies. What do they like and what do they do in their spare time? Part of your product or service is making their life easier.

“Buyer personas are fictional, generalized representations of your ideal customers. They help us internalize the ideal customer we’re trying to attract, and relate to our customers as real humans. Having a deep understanding of your buyer persona(s) is critical to driving content creation, product development, sales follow up, and really anything that relates to customer acquisition and retention.” – Hubspot

It’s helpful to know your customers so well that you can predict their questions. Once you understand their common questions like:

- What is it that I need or want?
- What does it do for me?
- What’s included in the product or service?
- How much am I willing to spend on it?

These are deeper rooted questions than ‘*what is your location*’ or ‘*what services do you have?*’ As you look at all your service offerings, you can decide where you want to focus more of your attention. It’s important to know if the services you provide are meeting the needs of your customers.

You can go one step further and look at the competition. How does your ideal customer see you compared to the competition? How is your product better? When you know your customer, you look at your competition in a different light. You need to know your strengths to ensure your key messages stand out.

“This is how you develop your content marketing strategy to ensure your content is centered around answering the questions your customers have. In the beginning, these are questions they don’t even know they have. They may not know they need a product or service because they’re not even aware it exists. Your content needs to expose the problem so they can recognize

how they might benefit,” Bob said.

By better understanding your customers, you’ll be better able to answer their questions before they even ask them.

What are your key messages?

In your content marketing strategy you’re going to have core messages to address customer questions along the buying journey. You want to limit your content to some key themes. In these core messages, you build your brand and stand out among your competitors.

“In content marketing you can answer all your customer questions. Ideally, over time, your website will answer every question a customer might have. Once a person discovers you through social media or advertising, they can look deeper into your website to find answers to their questions. This can save a small business many hours of answering the same questions over and over,” Bob said.

I recently began exploring conversion vans. By browsing through articles I found answers to questions I didn’t even know I had, such as:

- *How do you take a shower in such a small space?*
- *How long will batteries last?*
- *What will solar power do for me?*
- *Can I get internet everywhere?*
- *Where can I park?*
- *Do the front seats swivel?*

“Everybody likes to hear a story. This is another advantage of content marketing. I recently read an article about a couple living 100% in their conversion van. It was fun to

read their story. I learned about some of the challenges of living in a tiny space, but I also learned about the exhilaration of parking near the ocean and hearing the waves. They talked about going to a campground and having dinner outside in a Redwood forest. A customer story is a great way to capture your customer's attention. A content market expert knows how to tell stories to promote your product or service," Bob said.



"Telling stories captures people's imagination. In reading the article about living in a conversion van, I learned that there are many people who live full-time in a conversion van. I also learned about boondocking. I didn't even know what it was, but now I'm interested," Bob said.

"The questions in the early buying stage are different than later on. In the beginning I may be looking at floor plans. And later I might be looking for answers on how to fix my propane tank. So the content you put out is not only what a person might ask before they buy, but also what they ask after they buy. Through the process you become a trusted partner," Bob said.

Where are you going to share your content?

“Start off with recognizing the vast number of channels where you can place content on the internet to be found. It’s virtually impossible to get the information everywhere, so you have to make good decisions about where you’re going to expose your information,” Bob said.

There are lots of different ways you can share your content. You’re going to post it to your website, but you need a strategy for which social media channels to use. Depending on your customer demographics they will most likely be using at least one of these channels:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Google+](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [NextDoor](#)
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Yelp](#)
- [YouTube](#)

“As a small business, your content marketing strategy should reflect the actions it will take to increase your sales. Maybe you need advertising, or a new social media channel depending on the product and competition. Maybe you need to place an article in a magazine. Maybe you need to start a YouTube channel. Maybe you need a Facebook page, or maybe you need a [SnapChat](#) channel. A lot of younger consumers are moving to SnapChat. A lot of people in India use [WhatsApp](#). In a small business like [Restoration Illumination](#), I imagine that most of her customers are on [Pinterest](#),” Bob said.



For a small business owner, it can be effective to work with a [content marketing specialist](#) to develop your content marketing strategy because all of this can be time-consuming and overwhelming.

“A few years back when I was division governor in [Toastmasters](#), I did some analysis on Facebook. Roughly half of the people in Northern Florida were on Facebook. What other medium can you use to get to nearly half of your target population? After that, the district governor created a social media chair and I helped to develop the strategy,” Bob said.

“All of the technology we’ve talked about here is essentially free. There’s not a huge investment that’s required. One of the most important reasons to have your own website is that you can measure your results much better. You can still post your information out on these social media channels, but with your own website, you can track the results of your efforts. It’s vital to have a website that’s driven by a content

management system, such as [WordPress](#) or [HubSpot](#),” Bob said.

As a small business you have limited time. You can look at your analytics on Twitter and Facebook and a lot of other places, but with your own website, you can get all the information you need in one place. [Google Analytics](#) is good enough for most small businesses.

How are you going to measure results?

“The reason it’s important to have measures in place is to know which activities are hitting your target market. If you see lots of traffic coming from another potential market, you might want to up your investment into that new market. This is one of the reasons why you need to do content marketing for several months. There may be another need you can meet. If you publish services that are coming soon, and you see lots of hits in that area, you might want to fill that need sooner,” Bob said.



“You want your activity to translate into purchases. By measuring results in these areas, you can find out who is

being educated appropriately and decides to purchase. By measuring all this, it helps you to decide what content to publish,” Bob said.

Paying attention to page analytics can be helpful. By looking at [Google Analytics](#), you can see whether your information is coming from Google, Facebook, Instagram, or Pinterest for example. And you can adjust your efforts to get better results.

How are you going to improve your content marketing strategy?

“Content marketing is not a silver bullet. You can’t write one article and expect all your traffic to come. The way Google search engines work is that it takes a consistently updated website to get it to the top where it can be discovered. Having this as a long-term strategy and finding out what really resonates with your customers will help you target content that translates into sales. It’s important to have a continuous improvement plan in place for all your marketing activities,” Bob said.

Not everything you do will always work, but knowing what works better allows you to focus your messages and continuously improve.



“Let’s say you have a menu of services and one or two of your pages is getting more hits, but you aren’t getting a lot of sales in that area. By paying attention to these numbers, you might be able to make small changes to convert these into sales,” Bob said.

When you have a lot of different services, you may have one that is yet to be discovered. One of the benefits of having a content marketing strategy over a six month period is that it allows you to potentially tap into new markets you weren’t aware of.

When you try something like [Groupon](#), and it doesn’t work, this becomes part of your living document. As important as it is to track what you’re doing right, it’s equally important to track what isn’t working. This is why it helps to have a six-month campaign. After your first six months, your strategy is going to be so much better than it was in the beginning.

“When I was at IBM, we decided to do a [Google AdWords](#) campaign with a \$10,000 budget. I got the team together and brainstormed all the [keywords](#). After doing this, we discovered our web traffic didn’t increase at all. We spent \$10,000 to find out that Google AdWords didn’t work in driving up traffic to the IBM support website. Even though Google AdWords didn’t

work, we were able to increase traffic by two million hits over twelve months by understanding other activities that were working and doing more of it," Bob said.

By answering these questions, documenting your content marketing strategy, and taking action, you will see an increase in your sales. This will also provide sustained traffic to your website over the long term which will make introducing new products or services that much easier.



[Bob Haataia](#) is a senior product leader with success in delivering complex solutions to achieve significant revenue. He solves today's business problems with technology and the latest Agile development methodologies. He focuses on increasing global sales and services, lowering support costs, and delivering premier product experiences. He provides complete product management from inception to end of life. He believes that a content marketing strategy is essential for driving sales.