



THE CORNERSTONES OF CONTENT MARKETING

INFUSE

INFLUENCE

INVOLVE

INTEREST

INFORM

Introduction

In a world that is both rapidly evolving and oversaturated with information, useful and engaging content has proven to be one of the most effective ways to reach and engage target audiences. Content marketing requires only a third of a traditional marketing budget, while providing businesses with three times more leads. That's why 93 percent of B2B marketers across the globe employ content marketing to deliver their brand messages.

In this eBook, we explore the fundamentals of building and executing a B2B content marketing strategy, with a laser-like focus on converting your perfect customer.

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9 REASONS WHY YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY IS NOT WORKING

Many marketers have chosen to make content the centerpiece of their strategy. Yet, when it comes to results, not everyone is able to claim the same success. Content marketing can look deceptively simple. After all, you just need to create something and put it out there, right?

In fact, this couldn't be further from the truth.

In content marketing, the most effective approach is called the "Strategy – Execution – Analysis" Framework. It allows you to keep an eye on the big picture while keeping all aspects of your content marketing effort under control.



In the strategy phase, you are setting your goals for content marketing and making choices about the best means to pursue them.

Execution is when you'll implement the plan you created in the strategy phase. In this stage, it is important to keep an eye on the quality of the content you're producing and on implementing the specific tactics you chose in the strategy stage to the greatest benefit.

In the analysis stage of the cycle, you need to spend time analyzing the performance of the content you created. Find out what works well, identify what makes sense but needs to be improved, and determine what should be slashed altogether. The analysis stage allows you to go back to step 1 of the framework and begin strategizing again, armed with more reliable (i.e., data-backed) information.

The most important issue when it comes to planning your strategy is actually creating one, and that step should include writing it down. Think through the most important aspects of your strategy, and then sit down to document your master plan.

Whether you're working alone or as part of a team, a written strategy will help you keep yourself and your team accountable.

Here are some of the most common aspects marketers tend to get wrong:

1. No agreement on goals and core themes

When engaging in content marketing, the impulse can be to produce as much content as possible, regardless of the topic. Though it might feel appealing, this approach is more likely to harm you in the long term.

Instead of simply hitting the ground running and churning out as much as you can, start by thinking about the target of your content marketing: what topics you need to cover to reach the people in your target audience, how you'll track success, and your KPIs.

Marketing personas are an invaluable tool and can help you decide how best to reach your target audience. Use them to draw a picture of your target audience. Who's your customer? What are they influenced by? What does their buying cycle look like? How can you convert them from a visitor into a lead and ultimately a customer? Take time to answer all of these questions.

Start formulating KPIs by focusing on your end-goal—increased brand awareness, leads, or improved sales. Success would look different for each of these, so this will be your measurement for determining if you're on track.

For example, you might be getting hundreds of thousands of page views on your blog posts, but if none of your visitors are leaving their email addresses, and your goal is to harvest leads, is your content strategy really working?

2. Tactics aren't aligned with strategy

Content marketing comes in many forms: blogs, whitepapers, eBooks, podcasts, videos, infographics, etc.

Again, go back to your marketing personas and decide which are most likely to attract and convert your target visitor. Maybe your clientele is busy and doesn't have time to read lengthy blog posts? Maybe they live in a big city and have a long commute, which can be utilized for listening to podcasts? Whatever the case, the more targeted you can be, the faster you can accomplish your goals.



3. Strategy isn't aligned with budget

Various opinions exist on the optimal schedule for publishing and distributing content, but you can look to your industry peers and to experts for a rule of thumb.

As with any aspect of marketing, your schedule should be guided by your chosen field. If your goal is to increase brand awareness, you should aim to promote yourself and your brand as many times as possible. This will necessitate the creation of more content. On the other hand, if you want to establish authority, you'd probably choose to produce less often, instead producing longer, more authoritative content that covers your chosen topics in greater detail.

Your budget for content marketing is another constraint you'll have to take into account when deciding on your calendar. Whether you're doing everything in-house (not recommended) or you hire someone to do it for you, content marketing is often an expensive exercise.

Producing and distributing content is probably the most cumbersome part of content marketing. It's time-consuming, and there's often a fine line between success and failure. Outsourcing content will save you hours and money in the long run.



4. Bad content

“Create great content” is a catchphrase those of us in the marketing space have heard countless times. Unfortunately, we rarely hear what great content really is. The most obvious answer to this question would be, “It depends.” Yet some common principles will put almost any content producer on the right track:

➤ Produce content that is helpful to your audience.

No matter what product or service you’re offering, you’ll want to help your customers address a pain point they may have. When it comes to creating content, if it’s not helping your audience, then why are you producing it?

➤ Do not put out a sales pitch.

While we’re on the topic, make sure your content is not too self-centered. Remember, people come to your website to learn how to solve a problem. If you decide to mention your product/service, it should always be in relation to how it can help your audience. Never simply pitch for the sake of pitching.

➤ Use the attention you already have.

Don’t let the eyeballs you already have go to waste. Engage your current audience. Depending on your chosen medium, the first step could be as simple as having a “Please leave a comment” call to action on your website or blog. You could also urge your visitors to leave their emails to get updates from you (converting them into leads) or explore a topic in more detail (by downloading a whitepaper from your website).

➤ Keep it simple and easy to understand.

Unnecessarily complicated words and long sentences don’t make you sound smart, but can alienate readers and lose their attention. Use all available tools to make your content as easily digestible possible.

5. SEO is being neglected

Ultimately, you’re producing content for humans, but keep in mind that a large proportion of your “audience” will be the SEO bots that crawl your site. Fortunately, search algorithms are becoming better at identifying and promoting the types of content that a human audience finds valuable.

Satisfy your SEO needs by optimizing all technical aspects of your website: performance speed, metadata, keyword targeting, page matching, and other critical elements. Don’t forget that social media platforms will also be impacted by SEO. How you implement page data determines how your information is displayed.

Remember to use text structure like headings and content length to your advantage. The majority of your visitors are still likely to come to your website as a result of a search, so perform keyword research and make sure to optimize the content you produce for the keywords you want to address. Know what your potential customers are looking for, and use keywords that will help ensure their search leads to you.

6. Insufficient promotion

“Write it, and they will come” is the worst piece of advice you can follow in content marketing. Yes, you should focus on producing good content, but the effort that you put into distributing it should be on par with the effort you put into creating it.

Successfully promoting your content is a question of finding the right mix of channels. There are many potentially successful approaches to take, but they vary in terms of effectiveness and cost.

➤ Content Syndication

Content Syndication is the process of re-publishing your content on other websites. This method is very valuable for building your top-of-funnel audience and can get your content in front of a sizable new audience. The challenge with this approach is that the same content can appear in more than one location, but having duplicate content doesn't necessarily result in a negative impact.

➤ Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising

Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising may feel like a counter-intuitive approach when you're considering content marketing, but it has great potential to guide and improve your related marketing efforts. PPC for content can be exceedingly useful on newer platforms such as the big social media networks. While traditional PPC is geared towards audiences who are already in the research and decision-making stage of the buyer's cycle, social advertising allows you to reach people who are looking for both information and distraction. This connects directly to the core purpose of content marketing. Social media sites allow for granular targeting based on demographic criteria. They make it easier to reach your target personas directly, without having to “burn” money on audiences who are not the right fit for your offering. PPC gives you a wealth of data, which you can use to learn more about your potential customers and how to serve them better. One related approach to consider is remarketing—targeting those who have already visited your website or interacted with you online. Not only will you be increasing your visibility with your targeted potential customers, but you'll also get to “follow” them around the web and learn more about their browsing habits and interests.

➤ Social Media and Email

Social Media and Email are direct and free (or very cheap) channels that shouldn't be overlooked or underestimated. Both can work with any chosen strategy. Delve into the details of each tactic and find out what works best for your content and your business.



7. Poor measurement

When it's time to measure your impact, look at the numbers that actually matter, even if the results aren't necessarily what you expected to see. Measuring vanity stats is just as bad as not measuring at all. If you have a clearly defined goal for content marketing, put the bulk of your time and money into tactics that support reaching that goal, and assess your progress bravely and mercilessly.

Looking for the right stats can also help you use your time more wisely. For example, if you're selling a product that has a lengthy buying cycle which requires working with a warm lead for a long time, then ask yourself: "What's the purpose of running a blog with thousands of readers, who are unlikely to convert to leads, but require my time and effort?"

8. Inadequate testing

Every aspect of your content marketing strategy should be open to experimentation and potential improvement. Try different forms of content. You may find that certain approaches are just begging to be tried.

Experiment with everything: test your titles, headings, and formatting to see when your visitors are most engaged.

Experiment with day and time when publishing your content and track how that is reflected in the performance. Where is your audience, and when are they active?

9. Time

Remember that content marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. If you're not ready to be in it for the long run, don't get into it at all. But if you're willing to invest time, some money, and sweat equity, remarkable things can be accomplished.

Working via a long-term strategy does not mean you should sit back and relax. Stay enthusiastic! Use each cycle of the Strategy – Execution – Analysis framework to find ways to tweak and improve your strategy. Redistribute your efforts and your budget into the initiatives that give you better results.

Conclusion

Even if you're not committing one of these "original sins" of content marketing, the Strategy – Execution – Analysis framework will allow you to identify and correct your mistakes. At the same time, the framework is simple enough to let you produce content without dealing with analysis paralysis.

STELLAR IDEAS FOR YOUR CONTENT LIBRARY

Content is at the heart of B2B marketing and its popularity has grown at a breakneck pace in recent years—with good reason. This powerful tactic requires only a third of a traditional marketing budget while tripling the number of leads.

Across the globe, B2B marketers employ content marketing to deliver their brand messages—by offering their audiences useful and engaging content. It's how marketers create meaningful relationships with buyers and better increase the chances of a sale. Timely and high-quality content is an effective way to build customer trust. Thoughtful content production demonstrates your commitment to helping others, and also builds a reliable and authoritative brand image. In other words, your content should speak for your brand at the right time, when your buyers are interested.



Creating and developing your content asset library is key to nurturing your brand's relationship with an audience. Yet finding content ideas can be a daunting task for many B2B marketers. To assist you in your content development efforts, we've compiled 10 best practices for finding stellar content ideas. These tactics can help you build up a solid asset library that educates and engages both leads and customers, all while landing you more sales.

1. Start with your company's existing content assets

Your first step to discovering valuable content ideas for your B2B asset library is, in fact, your B2B asset library. Exploring your existing content and reusing relevant assets can save you valuable time and resources while also curing the ever-so-common writer's block that often occurs during content creation.

You might be surprised by how many useful insights you can draw from existing assets. Case studies, reports, presentations, event briefs, project reports, and statistics are all great preliminary resources—even if they require some updating—to share with your audience. Data-driven content is in high demand. Therefore, leveraging your company's archives is a fantastic way to showcase your industry expertise as well. Any data from research or your own operations is particularly useful and makes for compelling content. It also helps to position your brand as a thought leader in your relative industry. What you have to say, therefore, is trusted. Once you've identified assets that can be published online, you can either repurpose them into content marketing formats, such as blog posts and white papers, or find inspiration for creating new articles, infographics, and e-books. You can also use customer testimonials to reach prospects, which has proven to have a positive impact on sales.

2. Get ideas from your current team's know-how and projects

Insights stay off the radar if your team doesn't share them. So talk with everybody (not just the marketing department) about their projects and challenges.

By knowing what everybody in the company is doing, you have a constant source of content ideas: an employee going over his workday can spark that *eureka moment* for your next asset.

Arrange processes to facilitate this, such as sending a message to managers every Monday, or asking employees a list of completed activities at the end of each workday. Ask more when you find a content-worthy topic and book a meeting if you need more information.

Also, stay close to the c-suite, tech team, and engineers for the latest details on projects. And whenever you're stumped, an interview with a company expert can be just the ticket for your next ebook, webinar, podcast, or article.

3. Showcase your company's talents and insights in a content series

After digging into your existing content assets and brainstorming with employees, there's one last method for extracting amazing content from your company. It involves getting close with your team members and understanding their top talents and expertise, then persuading them to take part in your company's content. People's personal insights are especially useful for creating a content series.

There are abundant opportunities for a series of content assets. You can make consecutive video episodes that revolve around daily life in your company or follow team members throughout the workday. An alternative approach is to create an interview or conversation series in which your employees share their knowledge of a certain area related to your business. Get creative and build trust with your team members, as this will help you produce more authentic content.

Other types of content series include webinars and podcasts, which are becoming increasingly popular, or blog posts that build up significant know-how in a certain field of expertise. To inspire your team members to participate, it's important to focus on building their personal brands through these content pieces. The series comes from your company's knowledge, but people will be more inclined to participate if they see the personal reward of showcasing their talents and know-how.

4. Interview industry leaders on your blog

Once you've exhausted different content ideas within your company, it's time to look for third-party industry expertise that you can share with your audience. The first step is to identify prominent industry leaders and influencers in your field. This involves thorough market research.

Seasoned experts and active online bloggers are an excellent source of information that can be of high value for your customers. Their own audiences, additionally, can offer a fresh influx of potential leads for your own business. There are different content ideas that can spur from relationships with specialists, including guest blogging opportunities and content partnerships. As with your own team, it's important to determine how you want to incorporate experts into your content.



One of the best ways to leverage industry experts is to conduct interviews. Interviews can be shared on your blog or presented as recorded videos or live events. Hosting the desirable content on your website, rather than on the experts' domain, can increase your traffic significantly. Alternatively, you can invite specialists to participate in your social media conversations (like Twitter) to create higher engagement with your online audience.

5. Get ideas and content from your current customers

Your existing customers can also inspire and evoke compelling content ideas. You can illustrate their experiences with your products, or discuss important industry topics once you have developed a good relationship with them. To get there, it's worth investing in continuous communication with them, even beyond the point of the actual sale.

As mentioned earlier, testimonials are one of the most successful content formats. Your prospects are likely to find such assets useful, as they demonstrate the trajectory that your first-time buyers have gone through. Testimonials are also highly informative in terms of the benefits of your products or services. Instead of a theoretical presentation of what your customers gain by connecting with your brand, they offer an overview of the practical application and the positives coming from working with your company.

Other types of content to build solid relationships with current customers include interviews, use cases, surveys, and polls. You can ask your existing community questions of importance to your audience, then share this first-hand information online. It's also important to make it easy for your current customers to share their know-how, experience, and tips on your blog platform or social media channels.

6. Learn from your competitors

Competitors are a source you *need* to keep your eye on. Don't copy them, but observe what they consider relevant and their approach to industry topics.

Tools such as Flipboard, Feedly, and Pocket set up content streams for your competitors so you discover them on a single platform. Tweetdeck is great for tracking competitors' recent updates.

A good B2B marketer is a *competitor content connoisseur* and identifies what their brand can improve. If your competitor wrote a lackluster guide, write a comprehensive alternative. If they design confusing infographics, make yours crystal clear.

Learn from competitors' mistakes and find room for improvement your brand can fill in.

7. Scout industry websites and forums for trending topics

Another way to stay on top of recent developments in your industry is to regularly explore relevant forums and community platforms, such as Quora and Reddit. It's also important to follow topical social media feeds, news outlets, industry magazines, and newsletters. These resources are available online, so you can easily tap into them for content creation inspiration.

Additional niche platforms you can explore include industry-relevant Facebook groups and Slack chats. You should follow existing conversations or start new discussions whenever possible so that you can spur meaningful exchanges that will inform your content efforts. Or, you can identify key influencers and participants on these platforms and observe the topics they focus on.

A great way to keep track of news and trends in your field is to use social media listening. In practical terms, this just means following relevant people, like influencers and prospects, on social media and noting the topics they are discussing and the questions they are asking. These sources can give you a completely fresh take on topics for your content library.



8. Create a content partnership

A unique way to come up with content ideas is to consider the possibility of establishing partnerships for common creation and distribution of content. Your existing partners may be open to such opportunities, or you might look to create partnerships with other organizations that align with your company's value proposition.

By identifying a common goal, both teams can work on crafting a content partnership strategy. In this way, you can easily get inspiration from your partner's content efforts and apply it in your new endeavor. It's especially useful if the other company possesses assets or skills that fill in skill gaps, such as video production or graphic design. Or, they might have compiled or researched valuable data that you can use in the content assets you create together.

Once you've identified your team's strengths, you can work on creating common campaigns. Besides getting ideas for content, such partnerships are very useful in terms of distribution. The channels and audience reach can double since both companies have existing distribution methods.

9. Make sequels to your best-performing content

There's a more strategic way to come up with great content ideas for your asset library that doesn't involve much research and brainstorming. Whether it's a blog post, a guide, a video, or an infographic, you can create a sequel if it's performed particularly well. This is a tried-and-true method that many content marketers are applying today to grow their content base and to benefit from top-performing content.

To determine which pieces of content merit sequels, it's important to carefully review and analyze previous assets to identify successes. Naturally, this involves using Google Analytics (or other analytics tools of your liking) to see which pieces drove the most organic traffic to your website. Then, it's useful to focus on understanding the language, visuals, SEO, and timing that work best, so that you can leverage these findings for future content creation and distribution.

10. Go beyond the limits of B2B marketing

When you've exhausted all the different methods for creating content, it's time to go beyond the typical B2B marketing approaches. Who said that creativity doesn't have a place in B2B? Use your imagination to break the common patterns of content creation, and this might even turn into your best content.

If you are completely out of ideas, using a content idea generator can be a smart way to spark your creativity. Another way to go about it is to research what's trending in B2C content and check what's already been adapted for B2B. If you identify approaches that haven't been applied yet, you can try them out and pioneer them in your field.

Content marketing is here to stay, so it's important for B2B marketers today to get a hold of their content efforts. Coming up with ideas for your B2B asset library can be tough, especially after months of creating content consistently. However, if you're ever stuck when brainstorming ideas, these 10 best practices can shake up your content production.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE WHITEPAPER TITLES

No matter how strong the content, the success of a marketing asset often depends on the title.

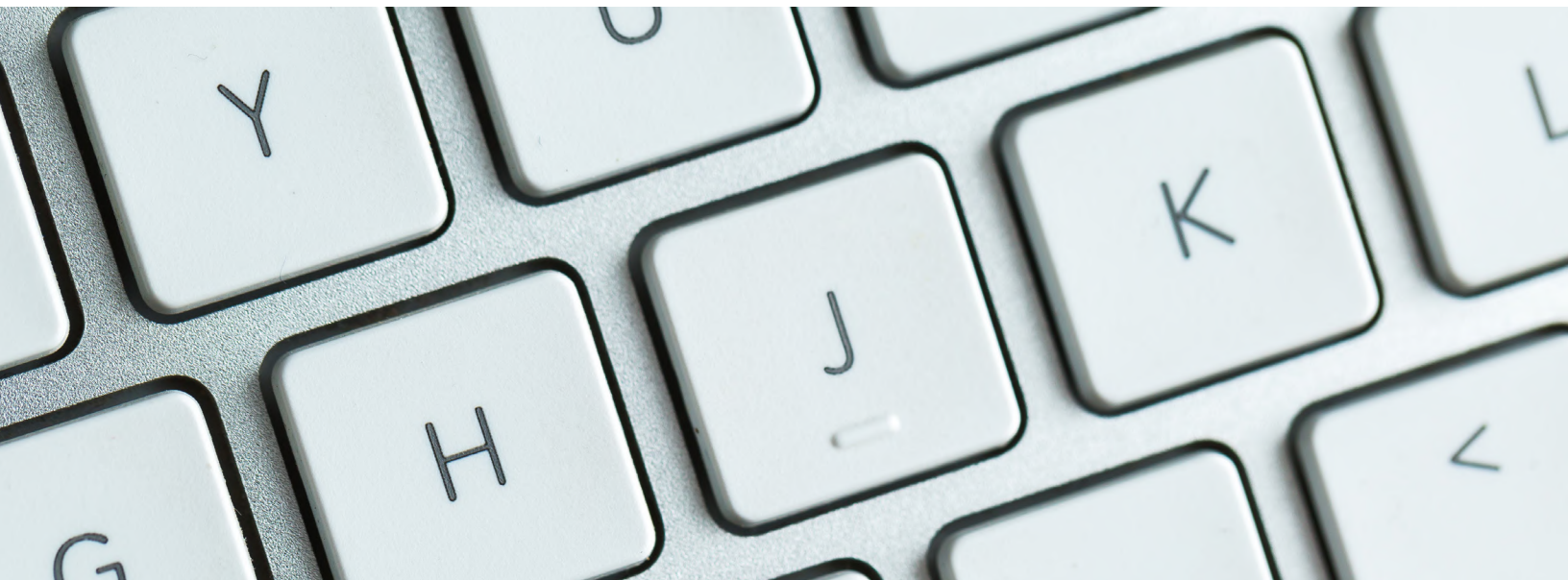
Crafting a headline that attracts and captures readers' attention is crucial: headlines have an effect on conversions as well as leads. In this whitepaper, we will examine some of the most popular and successful headline practices for capturing your audience's attention.

While there are many systematic ways to compose titles, the three most common methodologies are as follows:

- The **psychological approach** employs words and expressions that appeal to readers' desires or needs, their intelligence, and their curiosity.
- The **formulaic approach** presents a handy way of crafting headlines that follow a specific formula, which is easily recognized by readers and carries a practical message.
- The **scientific approach** to creating good titles is based on research. This approach analyzes which words capture and attract readers' attention based on data and statistics.

Often, these three methodologies overlap and support each other: the formulaic approach can utilize psychological triggers, or it can make use of certain words that have shown to be successful in captivating readers.

Still, the rules remain the same: test, analyze, draw conclusions, then try again. Let's go into more detail.



1 Surprise

Surprise is an essential component of a headline that draws attention. It works by creating a break in the norm. When readers expect something to read one way, it can be advantageous to surprise them by inserting words that create a dissonance between their expectations and what is offered.

For example, we could have titled this piece, *“Use These 10 Best Practices on Titles for Whitepapers—Or Risk Failure”* with the hopes of stirring people’s interest. (The negative twist at the end is something we’ll explore later.)

FOR EXAMPLE

Be the Shakespeare of Facebook: The Enormous Guide to Writing Spectacular Social Media Updates



By Kevan Lee

One important distinction to draw in titles with elements of surprise is using catchy versus clickbait language. Although clickbait may be effective for catching readers’ attention, misleading titles can lead to a drop in readership overtime as your readers will lose trust that the content behind the title is worth their attention. Titles can still be catchy, punchy, or even cheeky, but there’s a fine line between catchy and clickbait. The point is, good content delivers on the promise, sustains interest, and most importantly, offers value.



2 Ask questions

Good content communicates with its audience. A title that strikes up a conversation by asking a question is, therefore, a great way to attract readers' attention. Questions pique curiosity by challenging what readers know and understand. A question urges them to continue reading until they find out the answer or discover a deeper meaning of the story.

FOR EXAMPLE

Hate this Headline? You'll Probably Share the Story.

By Neil Patel



When formulating headlines as questions, be careful not to fall into the clickbait hole. Some writers are turned off by negative titles that ask questions because they often come across as merely attention-seeking. Furthermore, if you can answer any "question-headline" with a "no", it's probably not particularly useful or informative. To avoid this pitfall, provide readers with a solution to your challenge.

FOR EXAMPLE

Want to Know How to Craft the Best Whitepaper Headlines? Here Are 10 Tried and Tested Approaches.

or

9 Engaging Examples of the Best Headlines to Rally Your Audience

Written by The Daily Egg

3 Engage curiosity

Curiosity and surprise go hand-in-hand. One way to trigger readers' curiosity is by inferring that there's something valuable within your content that they may not already know.

For example, you could test their knowledge directly: ***"So You Think You Know How to Create Great whitepaper Titles? Let's Find Out!"*** This title promises to either appeal to the reader's ego by affirming what they already know or to give them new information altogether—in other words, it sparks curiosity with the implicit promise of widening their understanding.

4 Be negative

Being positive can work, but sometimes being negative drives better results. Titles with negative superlatives like “*never*” or “*worst*” generally perform better than positive superlatives.

FOR EXAMPLE

I found the most boring headline on the internet.

By Jonny Diamond



Whether it’s “*10 Tips for Crafting Whitepaper Headlines You Can’t Do Without*” or “*10 Whitepaper Title Tips That Will Kill It*”, make sure you try out a number of options before deciding on whatever title feels most engaging, yet also intriguing.

5 Tell them “How to”

A “*How to*” headline promises that the forthcoming content will provide clear, structured steps in order to achieve something. It speaks to the audience’s desire to have clarity, and even predictability at times. Human beings have often been described as “cognitive misers,” which simply means that we usually prefer clear directions that help us navigate the world and perform our job easier, without the added effort of having to figure it all out by ourselves. Appeal to this innate desire by formulating whitepaper titles aimed at helping us to simplify our job.

FOR EXAMPLE

How To Increase CTR: A Simple and Practical Guide

By Ian Matthews



Therefore, the “*How to*___” formula is always a good call whenever you have tips, advice, and guidance to offer that are both practical and specific. Variations of this formula allow you to supply further details or specify the target audience. For instance, “*How to Create Whitepaper Titles Like a True Marketing Expert*” is one such example.

Other examples include:

- “How to _____ for Beginners”
- “How to _____ in _____ Steps”
- “How to _____ Without _____” (this makes use of a negative word, as well)

Furthermore, testing your titles may show that in certain cases, “*The [Beginner’s] Guide to _____*,” “*An Introduction to _____*,” “*The Secret of _____*,” and “*X Ways to _____*” may work just as well.

6 Make a list

Much like “*How to*” titles, lists help us manage our expectations by creating clear objectives about what we will receive from the content. The occasional “+” after a number may engage readers further, as offering “more” of something by simulating a sense of limitlessness. Interestingly, some experts claim that bigger numbers as well as odd-numbered lists have been found to generate more attention than even-numbered ones. Who knew humans liked the numbers 5 and 7 more than 6 and 8!



7 Address your readers

Directly addressing your target audience (also called “audience referencing”) is useful because it clearly specifies who the content is speaking to. Much like asking a question in the title, audience referencing strikes up a conversation with your intended audience or buyer persona. Generally, human beings prefer to be named and identified, and specifically addressing them could mean they will be more likely to respond. This can be done by using the second-person personal pronoun “*you*,” or by addressing them with a title they identify with—marketer, CEO, chef, blogger, banker, and so on. Be careful, though, not to have your whitepaper sound too colloquial or informal—unless, of course, that is part of your brand image.

FOR EXAMPLE

Marketers, Here's How To Succeed As Change Leaders

Written by Jim Heininger

or

10 Killer Whitepaper Headline Techniques for B2B Marketers

The latter combines the technique of using a list, a fairly strong and even negative identifier (“killer”), plus it addresses the audience directly by calling out B2B marketers.

8 Make your title S.H.I.N.E.

A terrific way to craft your headline is to use the **S.H.I.N.E.** formula developed by Kissmetrics, which stands for **S**pecificity, **H**elpfulness, **I**mmediacy, **N**ewsworthiness, and **E**ntertainment. value.

Although this formula doesn't enforce a particular set of words or a specific structure, it does offer a set of components which, when brought together, supply both the necessary information and incentive that readers look for in a title.

FOR EXAMPLE

How to Increase Conversion Rates Without Touching A Landing Page



By Larry Kim

Of course, S.H.I.N.E. can be combined with other techniques we've previously mentioned. Here's how we could revamp the title of this whitepaper using the S.H.I.N.E. formula: *"10+ (specificity) Great Practices for Whitepaper Titles (newsworthy) You Can Learn Now (immediacy) That Will Help You (helpfulness) Rock It (entertainment)."*

9 Use parentheses

The use of bracketed clarifications in titles, such as *[Infographic]*, *[Template]*, *[Free eBook]*, or *[Free Download]*, significantly increases click through rates (CTR) as well as page views and conversion rates (CR), since brackets specifically detail the type of content readers can expect to get. Among these, infographics and templates fare particularly well.

10 Use "Photo," "Who," "Amazing," and "Need"

Words like *"photo"* and *"who"* show a consistent and significant increase in CTR.

The word *"amazing,"* on the other hand, can be risky. While some audiences do very well with it—sometimes driving a notable increase in page views and conversion rates—others are turned off by the word *"amazing,"* perhaps linking it with titles of a clickbait nature. If you do decide to use it, careful testing can be extremely important.

The word *"heed"* is similar in performance to the word *"amazing"* in that it can sometimes drive an increase in CR and page views, yet comes across as pushy and too urgent for some readers.

Words such as *"magic," "trick," "always,"* and *"best"* have low and even negative performance with respect to CTR, page views, and conversion rates. They sound clickbait and are best to be avoided in professional writing. Unless, of course, you are writing about magic.

Conclusion:

Marketers understand that writing can be a little bit of science and whole lot of art. In the end, effective copy should be guided by brand voice, analytics and internal and external feedback so that it remains true to its context, audience, and industry.

This should also help reduce or eliminate the confusion surrounding what the “ideal” headline is—that it’s only part of a greater whole and is not a guarantor for success. Headlines simply increase the likelihood of your content being noticed but do not drive all of engagement. Your content must still deliver on what you promise.

In the end, “10 Best Practices for Writing Effective Whitepaper Titles” offers a perfect combination of specificity, simplicity, and curiosity.



HOW TO USE STORYTELLING IN CONTENT MARKETING

Even when B2B marketers embrace and employ content marketing in full power, it's not easy to cut through the clutter and effectively reach customers. There are simply way too many brands out there, fighting for attention.

While this overload of information is significant, it provides an opportunity for B2B companies to make a real change. They can finally break long-standing wrongful concepts about how their marketing efforts should look.

Instead of sticking to old traditions where B2B marketing messages remain stiff, marketers are turning to more innovative ways to communicate their brand. The focus is back where it belongs: on people, since B2B decision makers are, after all, driven by the same emotions, fears, and motivations as everyone else. This doesn't mean that marketing is not appealing to the rational part of people's brains—it has just added an emotional dimension to it.

Powerful brands place engaging stories at the heart of their marketing. Storytelling makes B2B marketing human and easily relatable.

With the gradual change happening in B2B marketing, companies are also embracing the effective methods of storytelling that are already widely used in B2C. This allows them to reach out to people and create meaningful and lasting connections. Good stories capture attention and nurture relationships with the B2B brands in ways that other marketing methods cannot.

If you are persuaded to give storytelling a go, it's important to know the crucial tips that will guide your efforts. Here are the top storytelling know-how's to glean inspirational muse.

#1. Transcend brand centrality

Before you start exploring the possibilities that storytelling presents for your brand marketing, it's useful to understand exactly how it can work for your audiences. While it does come from your company, storytelling is not only about your brand and products.

Maximize the effects of storytelling in your marketing by transcending brand centrality. The focus of your narratives must be on your customers—their wants, needs, pain points, constraints, and dreams. People are not thrilled to read about companies. Instead, they are excited about human stories that they can directly, even subconsciously, relate to. The most important hook for them will be something they have experienced or are looking to experience, even if it's only through a story.

How can you identify the right type of stories to tell? A number of brands are already creating engaging narratives for their audiences. One of the brightest examples comes from Google. The company uses an impactful narrative that is human-centered and aims to create a heartfelt connection with the audience.

#2. Build a brand narrative

Creating a powerful story can be tough, but there are tried-and-true methods to approach the story structure and make it work. Your first step is to learn how the four-act story structure is used. In the case of brand storytelling, this entails having an introduction, entering into the action, which is the challenge your customers are facing, and then after a critical climax, resolving the issues, and finding the continuation that keeps the story fresh.

Once you've gotten a hold of the theoretical part, it's time to apply it to your own story. It's best to build the narrative around a strong desire that your target audiences can relate to. Then you move on to presenting the grand obstacle that prevents its accomplishment. This is the challenge that needs to be tackled by the protagonist, with the help of a 'sage,' which can often be your brand. After passing through various difficulties and reaching a breaking point, the hurdle is eventually overcome. The hero has changed in a positive way, and the dragon has been slain.

Besides the resolution of this conflict, you also need to find a way to close the cycle of the story and plant the seeds for its renewal. This is the 'resurrection'—or how the story of your brand goes on, indefinitely.



#3. Make your customer the hero

As already advised, it's important to go beyond brand centricity when crafting your storytelling. To this end, the hero of your narrative doesn't need to be your brand. Instead of making your product or company the main character of your story, the customer, a person from your company, or another individual can play the role. This is the protagonist who goes through trials and tribulations to achieve a big goal. Instead of pushing your products on this person, you can demonstrate in your narrative the challenges they face and eventually bring in your solution to their problems in the most natural way possible.

Through empowering your customers with the story you tell, you will be able to engage them and spark a genuine interest in your brand. This is a powerful way to create an authentic emotional relationship with your B2B audience that transcends pushy advertising messages and truly caters to what people care for.

#4. Recognize the importance of authenticity

After having established the structure and main characters in your B2B storytelling, it's time to pay close attention to the content you will fill in this framework. In the imaginary world of stories, it can be tempting to come up with a heroic narrative that's far away from reality. But there is something important to keep in mind here, and that is authenticity. Even if you create a fairy tale around your brand, it needs to stay true to the heart of your company.

That's why, when crafting your brand story, it's important to base it on true facts about your business. Your actual company history can be a great source of inspiration for the narrative that you will tell the world. Whether it's how the founders met, or another major event from your company's history, these can be relatable story bits for your audience. Additionally, you can follow proven tips that ensure your story sounds legitimate, such as writing a simple chronicle, driving the action through truthful characters, and engaging other people to tell your story too.

To achieve authenticity among your potential customers, avoid self-promotion. Look for what truly interests your audience and dig out the matching aspects of your brand.

Your story is also a way to share the *raison d'être* of your company, so you can use it to explain why your business exists, and what your big dreams and goals are.

#5. Embrace humor in your storytelling

Besides embracing and embedding authenticity in your brand's storytelling efforts, there's one more important element that B2B companies might overlook: humor. Even though you're crafting B2B marketing, don't forget that humor can humanize your brand and make it more relatable.

Humor can be included in your narrative in many subtle ways—it can be in the form of an anecdote, witty language, or a simple parody of reality. Your branding still keeps its solid and rational aspects, which your B2B buyers need in order to make important and often expensive business purchases. At the same time, with appropriate use of humor, you can shorten the distance with decision-makers by appealing to their emotional side.

Humorous stories are easier to perceive and spark a stronger emotional connection with people. In fact, they are a powerful way to get to your customers' hearts. To fuel your own fun factor, you can get inspiration from some brands that have already used humor successfully in their storytelling.



#6. Put data at the heart of your story

Your brand story needs to be authentic and can use humor to connect with your audience. But the fact that you are telling a story doesn't mean it has to be all fantasy—castles, heroes, and dragons.

Quite the contrary. As magical as it can be, you also need to make it rationally engaging. First of all, you can use data to drive your decisions regarding the shape of your narrative. This means that you can use predefined target personas as the main protagonist of your story and employ the information you have gathered from your research to create a plausible scenario with truthful characters.

But using data doesn't stop there. In fact, you can lead your story on the basis of the real-life information that you have at your disposal. That's what data-driven brand storytelling is all about. This can help you increase the credibility of your content, especially if you can use quantifiable data to prove your points.

#7. Build cross-media narratives

What more do you need to know beyond the structure and content that your brand storytelling has to follow? Well, the formats and channels your marketing is using should also be guided by your comprehensive storytelling strategy. Just telling your brand story in the 'About' section of your website is not enough. It needs to turn into the only way that your brand speaks to its audience.

How does cross-media storytelling work? In simple terms, it means that you put your efforts into completely immersing your target customers into your brand message. To this end, you can use all the channels that your brand is on. For example, instead of posting disconnected updates on social media, you can prepare messages for all the channels that build upon the central narrative you have set for your brand.

To maximize the impact of your story, launch cross-channel campaigns. This will also allow you to create more complex story structures and content that is being complemented by the different channels you operate.

#8. Make your story locally relevant

Make your brand story appeal to different groups within your target audience by speaking to local factors. You can work on adapting your narrative to local specifics, as this shows your consideration and simply makes it easier for people to relate to it.

By extending your brand to gain local relevance, you can directly boost the level of relatability for your customers from a certain area. People often have a strong feeling about the place they're from, and by acknowledging that it's special, you're gaining ground in their hearts. Besides that, in the local context, word of mouth can be a strong force in spreading awareness for your brand and converting prospects into buyers.

How can you make your story locally relevant? It all starts by following local events and news so that you're informed about the state of affairs in certain places. Then you can base your campaigns on important milestones in those communities, making your content both locally relevant and timely.

#9. Test gamification and interactivity

Another important aspect of your B2B storytelling efforts is how to integrate gamification and interactivity in your branding. Just like authenticity and humor, employing game thinking is not a method reserved only for B2C marketing.

In fact, it holds great potential to engage your B2B audience too, because infotainment can be more effective than simply serving information in the form of white papers and eBooks.

Besides the fun factor, gamification is a lot about giving people control over how they consume your brand story. The interactivity involved creates a sense of ownership over the way your content will be perceived by them. It is also more engaging than one-way communication from your brand to your potential customers.

How can you embed game thinking and interactivity in your storytelling? Creativity can certainly help here, but there are already some commonly used formats such as surveys, quizzes, games, and interactive videos that you can take advantage of. They allow people to participate and interact with your content.

#10. Invite your audience to become a part of the story

A natural continuation of integrating gamification and interactivity in your content is to open the doors for your audience to actively shape your brand story. Your customers can be quite creative, so they can add new facets to your narrative. B2B marketers shouldn't be afraid to experiment with these typically B2C approaches because they can prove quite powerful.

For example, a great way to boost your content sharing is to invite your audience to create user-generated content that complements your brand story. You can launch contests, invest time into creating an influential hashtag, or gather content from influencers and thought leaders in your field that matches your narrative.

Using such an approach is a clear win. It makes people feel as if they are a part of your brand story. At the same time, it provides loads of content that is free, authentic, and persuasive for the rest of your audience. Making people a part of your brand journey adds a solid layer of credibility to your brand.

Today, storytelling has proven its place is not only in children's books or wild B2C marketing campaigns. Understanding the human factor in B2B marketing is more important than ever, and powerful stories hold great potential to engage and emotionally influence an otherwise 'rational' audience. Whether you're already employing brand storytelling or just starting out, these 10 best practices will help guide your efforts in terms of structure, content, and platforms for your narrative.



Final thoughts

Timely, high-quality content is one of the best ways to build trust in your company. By offering useful and engaging content, you will create meaningful relationships with buyers. Moreover, content marketing is the most effective way to generate leads and close deals with your perfect customer. It is my sincere hope that the tips in this book will encourage you to build a long-term content marketing strategy that grows your B2B business.

About the Author



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Alexander Kesler is a visionary B2B digital marketer with over 20 years of experience. Focusing on solutions for B2B demand generation, digital marketing, ABM, intent, and AI-driven lead generation, among others, Alexander embraces innovation and turns concepts and methodologies into products and marketing programs that drive ROI.

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