

Content Marketing Strategy: Connecting Content Planning with Lead Generation, Sales, and Measurable Growth

Abstract

Content marketing is no longer communication, it is a business strategy today, one of the building blocks to acquire, engage, convert and grow customers. Creating and publishing content is not sufficient to create an effective content marketing strategy – it needs to be aligned with the needs of the audience, various phases of the sales funnel, lead generation objectives, search visibility, email funnel engagement, product launches, sales activities, and measurable business outcomes. Mobile marketing also has contributed to the shift of the marketing role as it has expanded access to customer information and provided more personalised and measurable customer interactions across channels. Systematic planning, proper distribution and promotion, organizational capabilities and measuring performance are therefore factors of content effectiveness. In this article, I'm going to explore an integrated strategy for content marketing, starting from content planning, all the way through the sales funnel, lead generation and prioritization, search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, product launches, sales alignment and ROI measurement. In the realm of healthcare, Hidoc Dr. shows how a single digital platform can help drive content-led HCP engagement by seamlessly integrating scientifically relevant content, digital communication and media, audience interaction, and the measurement of campaign performance. Once these elements are combined in a holistic system, organizations can move from content-as-a-single-use to a concrete process that can move prospects from discovery to conversion and support sales and business objectives.

Introduction

Digital channels have revolutionized the way that companies interact with their customers. Customers can easily look up, compare, rate and interact with organizations on websites, email, social networking and digital ads today. This means that digital transformation, data availability and changing customer behaviour and technological use in organizational processes are increasingly affecting marketing [1].

In such an atmosphere, content is a crucial element in engaging viewers and nurturing customer relationships. When businesses approach content marketing systematically as a process of content creation, content production, content distribution, content promotion and content measurement over content content, they can benefit from content marketing as opposed to creating little bits and pieces of content and letting it go to waste as communication efforts [2]. The elements Koob identified are related to the effectiveness of content marketing and include strategic clarity, content production, distribution, promotion and measurement of content performance as well as organizational factors [3].

At the same time, marketing is increasingly becoming associated with other functions of an organisation. The marketing world is evolving – propositions, processes and partnerships are transforming. Marketing is increasingly integrated with other activities to create customer value and this is needed, says Storbacka and Moser [4]. A good content marketing strategy should, therefore, be designed in sync with the sales funnel, lead creation, search engine marketing traffic, email marketing, product launches, sales alignment and ROI measurement.

In healthcare, the integration of these is demonstrated by Hidoc Dr., a platform that seamlessly marries scientifically relevant content with digital HCP engagement, connecting the dots between content planning and distribution, HCP engagement, and measurable outcomes of campaigns.

Content Planning: Building the Strategic Foundation

Content planning is the backbone of any successful content marketing strategy. Organizations should start with the question, “Who is our audience, what is our business objective, what are our customers' needs, what channels will we distribute through, and what do we hope to get out of our content?”

According to Koob, strategic planning, content creation, content distribution and promotion, performance assessment, and organizational design are five dimensions that are crucial for the success of content marketing [5]. This just underscores the importance of content being structured and not published in an erratic way.

The first step in effective planning is to identify your target, identify information you can supply and know when it is useful in the customer journey. Content formats can be chosen based on what they are used for. Different audiences may be interested in educational articles and resources that are optimized for search while others may be seeking resources that compare, demonstrate, or show them how to use a product, or are looking for references, or webinars.

In addition, digital transformation enhances this by giving organisations more access to customer information and more digital touchpoints [6]. The observations can help you select topics, target your audience, select channels, customize your content, and assess your performance. A content calendar, therefore, needs to be synchronized with strategic objectives and not just "scheduled dates".

In the healthcare space, Hidoc Dr. is an example of structured digital content to engage health professionals at multiple touchpoints. By providing education that is scientifically relevant, digital campaigns, webinars, surveys and other physician-centric communication formats, Hidoc Dr. can assist healthcare organisations in developing content for HCPs based on their content needs and engagement habits. This shows how the planning of content can progress from schedules to audience and objective-centered communication.

Content Across the Sales Funnel

One of the most essential roles of the content is to nurture prospects along the way. Customers don't just stop their actions after they encounter a marketing message. People can go through the process of Awareness, consideration, evaluation and conversion, before finally becoming a customer.

Huang and Liu show the applicability of various performance indicators throughout various phases of computational advertising, such as click-through rate, conversion rate [1]. One of the take-home points from their analysis is that the effectiveness of communication should be measured by the behavioural goal set for a specific stage, and not by one overall indicator of effectiveness.

The early funnel stage should target developing awareness and engagement. Search-optimized articles, study materials, videos, social media and expert led content can raise the audience to an obstacle or a chance. [7]

Prospects need more depth in the middle of the funnel. Aid for monitoring and confidence building through webinars, guides, comparisons, FAQs, case studies and expert resources. The bottom of the funnel should have content that makes it comfortable for the consumer to take appropriate action, such as illustration, product information, reviews, sales, consultations and appropriate calls to action.

Therefore, sales-funnel design and content strategy are not individual entities, but rather clustered together. The consumer traffic might be seen, but not bring any market value if it is not moving toward the conversion funnel.[8]

Lead Generation and Lead Prioritization

Lead generation is when leads are identified after being drawn to an audience. There are several ways that digital channels can bring in leads such as websites, search engines, emails, blogs, social media, digital advertising, webinars and downloadable resources.

But, a lot of leads don't mean superior sales results. Quality and prioritization of leads are also crucial. The authors of the paper, González-Flores et al., highlight the importance of lead prioritization in B2B settings and showcase the application of machine-learning-based lead scoring to help select leads that are more likely to convert [8]. Organizations can use lead scoring to focus their marketing and sales efforts on better prospects.

Data-driven strategies can also support the optimization of the sales process. The process of generating, qualifying, converting leads and sales processes are discussed in Gaddam et al.'s (2016) data-driven approach [9]. If content interactions are recorded as behavioral signals they can help provide a more fulsome understanding of the intent of the lead.

For instance, a single awareness article read could be a sign of early interest while consistent visits to the website, downloading a comprehensive resource, attendance at a webinar, or requesting product information can be a sign of a higher purchase intent. This leads to content analytics being a direct input to lead qualification and prioritization.

SEO Traffic: Making Content Discoverable

If the prospect hasn't found it, then a good piece of content is worth little. SEO is, in a sense, a crucial link between content and audience.

The need of titles, key words, abstracts and suitable writing methods for making medical literature more accessible and discoverable is stressed by Chaudhari and Banga [5]. While the discussion is on scientific literature, the core of the concept is applicable to digital content strategy: the strategy for creating digital content must take the audience into account as well as the discoverability of the content.

When strategizing content while keeping SEO in mind, it is imperative to understand the intent of the researcher and create content that is valuable to them. Keywords should be incorporated in titles, headings, metadata, and the body of the text in a way that the keywords appear to be in the flow and not forced. The meaning and understanding of the content is preserved and not altered in any way possible.[10]

Importantly, SEO performance should be measured not just by the rankings or traffic. When people talk about digital marketing, StClergy puts it in the context of reaching people and turning online interactions into tangible business opportunities [6]. Organic traffic should then be linked to other actions like engagement, enquiries, downloads, lead generation, appointments, demonstrations, sales, etc.

While it's important to boost the number of visitors to a website, SEO is most useful when it brings in the right kind of traffic.

Email Marketing: Converting Attention into Continued Engagement

Marketing via emails, is an awesome way to sustain with existing consumers and prospects, while digital content optimized with SEO can help you reach new consumers. This further can be utilized for retaining the consumers, educating them about the product, promoting the event, nurturing the leads, and finally converting them into consumers.

Chaparro-Peláez et al. analyzed a huge volume of promotional emails and found that the effectiveness of opening emails depended on the campaign characteristics, in addition to the message content [7]. Their findings confirm the importance of considering performance in email as a result of an overall strategy and not just the size of a mailing database.

The email's content should be appropriate as per the recipient's requirements and the different stages of the funnel. A newly-converted lead could utilize educational information while someone who has shown greater intention might need case studies, comparisons between the products, demonstrations, or an opportunity to connect with the sales team.

The metrics used to measure email performance include delivery rate, open rate, click through rate, conversion rate and subsequent customer actions. But these signs should always be taken into consideration within the larger marketing and business goals.

Content Marketing for Product Launches

Product launches are an application of content marketing that is especially significant. A launch should not be thought of as one announcement, but rather a series of communications with the goal of raising awareness, clarifying value, aiding in assessment, and prompting uptake.

Educational and thought-leadership content can set the agenda before launch, creating consumers' curiosity. Product value proposition can be conveyed by product pages, demonstrations, videos, e-mail marketing messages, webinars, sales materials, FAQs, and digital campaigns during the launch. Case studies, customer experiences, education and follow-up campaigns can keep the engagement going after the launch.[3]

Digital transformation has opened up a whole new world of channels and interactions for marketers [2]. Content planning can then be used to ensure consistency in messaging across search, websites, emails, social, ads and sales.

In the healthcare context, marketing strategy should also take into account the unique attributes of healthcare consumers, healthcare professionals and healthcare systems. Purcarea underlines the growing importance of marketing strategies and digital strategies in healthcare, and the necessity of understanding the needs of the consumer and creating the adequate communication strategies [4].

For healthcare or pharmaceutical companies, Hidoc Dr. can help this communication process by making available, online, a platform for reaching and engaging healthcare professionals and sharing scientific and educational content. It is possible to use different types of content in a strategic way over the pre-launch, launch and post-launch period to build awareness, communicate science, engage HCPs and maintain communication beyond the launch period. This is a great example of the power of content marketing within healthcare to support a product launch campaign while maintaining a professional and clinically relevant tone.

Sales and Marketing Alignment

Marketing and sales are enhanced as a unified system to create more value from content. While marketing can raise awareness and generate leads, sales typically have firsthand knowledge of customer objections, buying roadblocks, commonly asked questions, competitor issues, and decision factors.

The authors of Storbacka and Moser give a description of the change in the marketing processes and partnerships, where the traditional boundaries between organizational activities are changing [5]. This view facilitates better alignment of sales and marketing in terms of customer value creation.

There is, therefore, a need to incorporate sales intelligence into content planning. Objections raised often can be turned into articles or FAQs; customer questions can be turned into webinars or educational materials; successful customer results can be used for case studies;

and customers' questions can be incorporated into marketing materials used by the sales team during prospect discussions.[8]

The enhancement of this connection is made with lead scoring. Organizations can assess whether the prospects in their database are likely to convert into customers, and then prioritize certain leads for nurturing through automated nurturing campaigns while passing the rest to sales [8]. If everyone involved in the process of definition, qualification, customer stages and measures of performance has a common understanding of these definitions, then the traditional difference between marketing activity and sales results can be reduced.

Measuring Content Marketing ROI

Without measurement, counting, you can't know if content marketing is working towards organization goals. According to Koob, one of the key aspects in content marketing management is its measurement of performance [6]. But the measurement should not just be about clicks or page views.

The funnel has to have different metrics at different stages. Reach, impressions, search visibility, website traffic and content consumption are all metrics used to measure awareness. Time on page, repeat visits, email interaction, downloads and other meaningful behaviors are all ways to measure engagement.[7] Lead generation can measure the number of leads, qualified leads, cost per lead, and lead to opportunity conversions. The metrics that can be used to measure the commercial performance can be conversion rates, sale numbers, customer acquisition, and revenue contribution.

StClergy is calling for monitoring digital marketing efforts and the knowledge of how marketing investment relates to business results [6]. In the same way, there are data-driven sales models that show the importance of leveraging measurable data about customers and sales for decision-making [9].

The concept of ROI may be expressed as:

$$\text{ROI} = (\text{Return due to marketing} - \text{Marketing investment}) / (\text{Marketing investment}) \times 100$$

Attribution is the biggest analytical challenge, as multiple pieces of content are often interacted with by customers prior to conversion. For the same rationale, it's important to ensure that institutions do not judge by the end of the communication. Instead, content should be evaluated throughout the consumer journey to evaluate each content asset's capability in creating awareness, engagement, lead nurturing, and conversions.

Hidoc Dr. illustrates how one can implement an integrated content marketing strategy in the context of healthcare professionals engagement. Content creation, digital distribution, lead generation, campaign involvement and performance measurement are not separate functions, but can be integrated into a coordinated digital strategy. Scientific articles, expert content, webinars, surveys, videos, and other digital formats can be used to tackle various communication goals and phases of engagement with HCPs.

Importantly, this also provides the opportunity to gauge the way content is used by healthcare professionals. You can measure content performance and inform future communication using metrics like reach, impressions, views, clicks, participation, engagement and more. Hidoc Dr. is a practical example of how the concepts outlined in the content marketing strategy explained throughout the article can be applied to the healthcare industry and measurement.

Conclusion

The best content marketing is when it's part of an overall business strategy, not a publishing program. Strategic content planning sets the stage, and SEO and digital distribution enhance discoverability. Content, when viewed through the lens of funnel marketing, takes viewers from awareness to consideration to conversion, and content that is identified as a commercial prospect value is referred to as lead generation and lead scoring. In fact, email marketing can help you reach your audience again, and a well-coordinated content strategy can support your product launches in various customer interactions.

One other key aspect that's equally essential is the coordination between marketing and sales. Helping the customers by providing information, lead data, and content can help optimize the journey from initial stage of contact to final stage of conversion. Lastly, structured assessment helps institutions to move forward and beyond traffic and clicks to qualified leads, conversion, revenue and ROI.

In today's digital age, where customers and organizations are changing, the role of successful content marketing is becoming more complex with the ability to integrate content, data, technology, sales and measuring. When these facets are linked together, organisations can turn content into a quantifiable tool for acquiring customers, enabling sales, and advancing long-term business growth.

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