

PMGUIDE

2016 PERFORMANCE MARKETING GUIDE

Content Marketing

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Content marketing has been around since the first printing press was built, and now in the 21st century the digital world is continually throwing up new ways for brands to reach their audiences.

Plenty of forms of content exist: photos, videos and even audio can be considered alongside the usual articles and reports you'll find around the web. As for content marketing, whittling everything down to one concise definition has proved too much for even the seasoned experts. For many, [the Content Marketing Institute's \(CMA's\) guidelines](#) provide a pretty decent overview of things:

“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”

State of play

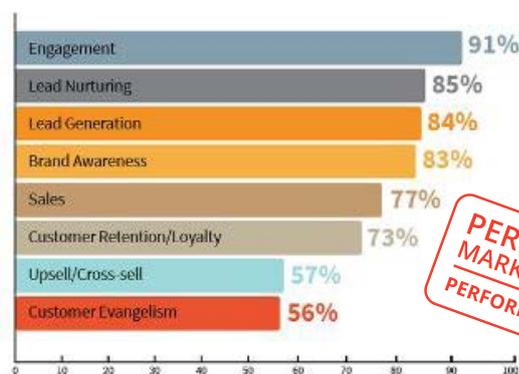
For a long time, the major focus of content marketing for many brands in the online world was about raising awareness and visibility. However, according to the CMA, in 2015 we saw a shift in this trend (fig 1.0) with brands moving towards engagement and the nurturing of new customers. This is achieved in a variety of ways from short, campaign-based efforts to large-scale events like the spectacular [Red Bull Stratos campaign](#).

Figure 1.0 – 2014 vs 2015 [organisational goals for UK content marketing](#)

Organizational Goals for Content Marketing in the UK



Organizational Goals for UK Content Marketing



In 2016, UK marketers are raising their investments in content marketing – shown by the medium taking [29% of digital budgets this year versus 26% from last year](#), according to the CMA. When it comes to paid forms of content marketing, the real boom is in promoted posts, which jumped in use from 34% last year to 64% this year. Furthermore, in the same CMA study, 66% of UK marketers expected their content marketing budget to increase this year.

Content marketing forms

Content marketing comes in all shapes and sizes, covering a multitude of platforms, including sponsored posts on blogs, social media activity, podcasts, vlogs and more. It's hard to choose the best forms of content to aim for. In general, the best content marketing will happen in the channels where your audience spends most of their time, so it makes sense to start producing in these areas.

Social media is obviously one of the prime target areas for content marketing as so many of us now use such a wide variety of platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and, more recently, Snapchat.

When it comes to the different forms that content marketing can take, the possibilities are virtually endless, with examples including:

- Amazing video content such as the aforementioned Red Bull Stratos campaign.
- GoPro with its insanely popular Instagram feed (8.7 million followers to date) and the GoPro Awards, where users are rewarded for their best content.
- Coca-Cola's 2015 campaign for Coke Zero was based around [drinkable ads](#), which featured across TV, print, digital and radio. This campaign allowed customers to get a free Coke Zero by virtually pouring a Coke.

It's imperative for brands, agencies and networks to get involved in some form of content marketing as today's consumers become even more fickle, and loyalty comes second to who has the best deal or cashback.

Sponsored posts are particularly relevant to the affiliate channel. As we continue our strategy of developing relationships with content sites and influencers, sponsored posts have proven to be a great way of engaging an audience. Some important rules to remember when running sponsored posts are:

- Make sure that the blogger/content site's audience is relevant to your brand.
- Ensure you and your content partner are following the new [CMA guidelines](#) on sponsored posts.
- Don't overdo it. Consumers are bombarded with more types of advertising than ever before, so make sure you don't wear your audience out with too much content.

Doing it right

In terms of what makes for a good content marketing campaign, there are a number of factors you need to consider when starting to plan your strategy. These include but are not limited to:

Personalisation: Keeping it personal really is at the core of a great content campaign. By making your marketing personal you're creating a positive buzz around your brand. A great example of this is Coke's "[Share a Coke](#)" campaign, where fans were encouraged to create positive brand messaging off the back of finding a bottle of Coke with their name on it.

Tell a story: Think about storytelling when it comes to your content; Stella Artois is a brand that is currently running a great story-based campaign on the legacy of master brewer [Sebastien Artois](#). Stories have been engaging and exciting people since the start of recorded history, so it's probably not a bad place to begin.

Trust and openness: Being completely transparent is something that is very important in the content marketing world. Consumers don't like to feel hoodwinked, so make sure you're open with people. This is especially important for things like sponsored posts, which are rising in popularity.

Measurability

Content marketing is a great way to engage existing and new audiences, and there are plenty of ways to go about it. With a deluge of different ways to measure success, you need to ensure you are using the right metrics for the campaign. Just because you can measure everything, it doesn't necessarily mean you should look into everything when seeing if something was successful or not.

To effectively measure the value of your strategy, you need to understand the people you want to engage with. Make sure you have detailed insight into your customers and potential customers; this is where user journey tracking can be of real benefit. What motivates your customers and those people you want to reach? What do you want them to accomplish through your strategy? These are key questions you need to ask yourself when deciding how to measure the success of your strategy.

So, the type of campaign you want to run informs the type of metrics that you will use to measure its ROI, and taking a more holistic approach can often be the best way.

In an ideal world your content marketing strategy will drive sales or whatever else you consider as an end goal, but it takes time to build towards this. When running a campaign, you need to make sure you analyse the whole purchase funnel and start by looking at what's going on at the top and the engagement you are receiving.

Engagement metrics have been getting a lot of coverage over the last few years. Their shapes and sizes vary depending on the platforms you are using, with examples including:

- Views/video plays
- Shares/retweets/reposts
- Comments
- Engagement time (the time someone has spent on your post or article)
- Visitor frequency (the amount of times someone returns to your site or content)

It's important not to get hung up on particular metrics and to continue that holistic approach to interpreting them.

To clarify, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to measuring the success of a content strategy. The measurement of success comes from having a crystal clear goal on what success looks like, understanding your audience and using the right metrics and data sets to quantify your results.

Conclusion

As there is so much to explore, test, prove and disprove about content marketing, it truly is an exciting area to be involved in. There are so many different views and opinions that all have their merits and are worth considering. In the end, brands must really focus on the specific goals for their own forms of content marketing.

They must plan for the long game, not just short-term wins, and measure their success on the right terms. Just because their graph isn't going the right way, it doesn't necessarily mean failure; analyse, learn and implement are three rules worth considering.

Looking ahead, the key areas of focus will continue to be around how to measure the success of content campaigns and strategies, the development of an evermore detailed user journey and the use of new and exciting platforms. For an example of a new and exciting platform, look no further than virtual reality. It's still gimmicky at the moment, but if there are any certainties in life, it's that brands will continue to latch onto and try new ways of reaching audiences through new technology.

As for the biggest challenge facing content marketers, that lies in the fickle nature of consumers and standing out from the vast amount of marketing that people are bombarded with every day, through every conceivable form of communication.

Know your audience, know your goals, your platforms and metrics, and you should give yourself a pretty good start.



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