

Content is Marketing Currency

How Creating an Online Content Strategy
Increases Lead Quantity and Quality

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Introduction

Instead of buying ad space and lists or chasing journalists for press clips, marketers must meet prospects on their “online” turf and engage them with relevant content. The higher the relevance, the higher the value your content has as currency to pay for their attention. The buying cycle for a complex sale covers many stages from status quo through purchase. Transitioning your buyers across each stage means you have to pay the toll with content designed to address evolving needs.

Marketers must understand why the imperative for buyer knowledge presents a huge opportunity for increasing both lead quality and quantity with the precision that helps turn prospects into buyers. By flipping your focus to parallel buyer perspectives, marketing online content can be used to higher effectiveness during each stage of the buying process.

Content with currency value doesn't require a huge budget. With the proper planning and strategy, marketers can gain tremendous traction and return on investment from their content development budgets. From seven factors that play a role in increasing the currency value of marketing content to eight methods of listening that will help you improve content relevance, marketers will learn why an online content strategy plays a critical role in increasing the demand for their company's products and solutions.

When an online content strategy is designed around the concept of a “hub,” companies can create an educational resource that will generate and nurture leads far beyond the duration of a simple campaign through the reuse and repurposing of content assets. You'll discover how to integrate different formats, create an editorial calendar and measure success.

With the proper tools and planning, content can play an active role in helping companies shorten time to revenue by building pre-sale relationships your leads embrace because they receive the information they need to build the confidence that the best decision they can make is to choose your company as a partner in solving their highest priority problems.

90 percent of B2B buyers prefer to consume information online.

Given the shortened attention spans promoted by competing information only a click away, the value provided by your content must become a priority concern.

The Evolution of Online Content Availability

It wasn't too long ago that self-service information availability about products and solutions was limited to only the messaging the company decided to post on their Website. Traditionally, salespeople were the logical next step if a buyer wanted to learn more about a company and its products. Salespeople were the go-to people for building relationships with potential customers.

Marketing was focused on pushing out whatever company-focused spin the executives decided the market should hear. Communication efforts were definitely cultivated from the inside out. Of course, that was easier because it was all about the company and its products—two things marketers knew like the backs of their hands.

Lead generation was considered a numbers game. Companies worked hard on the formulas that determined how many leads needed to be pumped into the top of the funnel to produce the percentage of customer conversions the sales team needed to meet revenue quotas.

Due to the lack of alternative sources of information, this all worked pretty well—until the Internet changed everything.

The ability to publish and deliver information online more easily has enabled companies, big and small alike, to share a growing stream of content about every topic imaginable from an increasing array of sources. Finding information online has become so easy that your buyers' habits have been forever altered. Research conducted by Focus found that [90 percent of B2B buyers prefer to consume information online](#). Your buyers are no longer reliant upon your company for the information they need to solve problems, research options or determine which vendors to put on their short lists.

Today's biggest marketing challenges are in determining how best to be found and listened to by our buyers, followed by how to keep their attention long enough to become a trusted resource for solving their highest priority issues.

“The chief enemy of forward momentum is confusion.”

- Marketing Experiments

Flip Your Marketing Focus

Marketing content is no longer relevant if it's focused on what companies want their customers to know about them. The only thing that matters is to provide information that your prospects and customers care about—content that addresses what matters most to them. The ability to do this well requires a flip in focus from our companies to the people we serve. Marketing content needs to focus on what prospects are buying instead of what companies think they're selling.

Without a change in perspective, marketers will find increased difficulty in:

- Generating inbound interest that attracts prospects to seek out their companies.
- Creating two-way dialogues with multi-touch points that increase engagement.
- Separating the wheat from the chaff to prioritize high quality, sales-ready leads.
- Building pipeline momentum that moves prospects toward making a purchase decision.

The reason that flipping your marketing focus is so important to achieving the above is that the entire evaluation process has shifted. Buyers are now using the information they find online to qualify the vendors they choose to buy from. And, they're doing so with much higher scrutiny and attention to detail than marketers are using to qualify them.

With today's marketing increasingly turning to online avenues for execution, the challenge marketers must overcome is the urge for prospects to click the back button to move on in search of information they find more relevant. According to the Marketing Experiments report, [Clarity Trumps Persuasion](#), your content must answer at least the first two of these three simple questions within the first seven seconds of a prospect's arrival to the Web page.

- Where am I?
- What can I do here?
- Why should I do it?

Whenever a prospect clicks on a link, the first thing they need is to orient themselves about where they are and why they should stay. If your content doesn't clearly establish that relevance for the prospect, they will leave. If their perception about the effort it takes to answer

those questions is too high, the back button is only a click away. Prospects are busy. Their responsibilities are many and their time is a precious resource they must optimize.

The Marketing Experiments report discusses landing pages, but their findings apply to any and all content including your Website, articles, blog posts, email messaging, Webinars, white papers, videos and more. As the report states, “the chief enemy of forward momentum is confusion.”

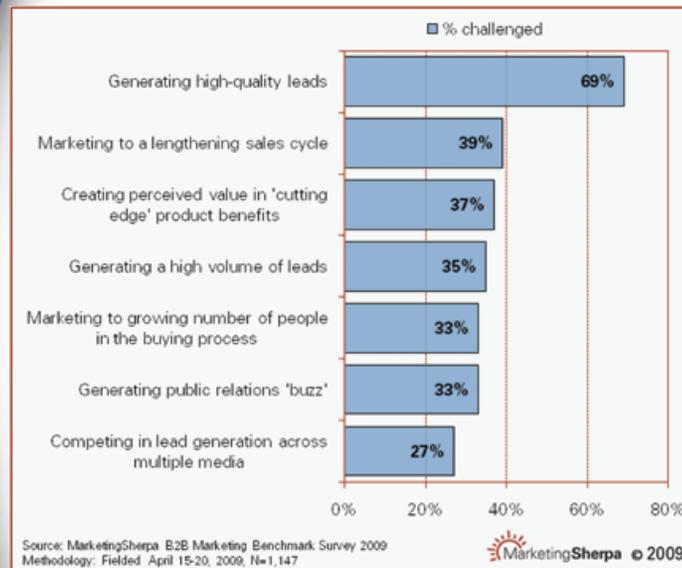
The Content Currency Equation

Content is the new medium of exchange between companies and buyers. With customers taking control of their buying process and so much information competing for notice, the relevance of your content must be perceived as high enough to pay for their attention. The value of your marketing content as currency is also determined by how many of your prospects decide to pay you by sharing their information and opting in to receive more.

As you can see in the chart on the left, the top marketing challenges are all related to the ability to create a perception of value in the eyes of targeted buyers. The finding that 69

percent of marketers asked said that generating high-quality leads is their top challenge speaks to the need to not just attract attention, but to increase the perceived substance of their marketing currency to the point of instantly recognizable and reciprocal value.

When your marketing currency is perceived as high, more prospective customers are willing to exchange their information for your content. An additional benefit is the willingness of those prospects to share your content with the growing number of people involved in the decision made during a lengthening buying process.



Being findable is the new "black" for marketing. The more accessible your content is—regardless of where your prospects happen to encounter it online—the higher your currency value.

To gauge the value of your marketing currency, evaluate the following factors that form the equation:

- **Time** – Are prospects viewing one article for 5 seconds or spending the time necessary to read the entire piece? Do your prospects stay for the entire Webinar or leave after the first 15 minutes?
- **Depth** – Do prospects read one page and leave your Website, or do they tend to click on links to related information and travel more deeply to explore the content more fully?
- **Storyline** – Is it evident that prospects follow a directed path through your content or do they click around aimlessly on unrelated pages without settling on any of them long enough to engage?
- **Interaction** – In addition to how many registrants your Webinars get, measure the difference between unique attendees and total attendees. A higher number of total attendees can be an indication that your content is considered important enough to revisit and view again, or that it's been passed along and shared with others—hopefully those involved in the buying decision. Even better, how many questions or chats were posed during and post-event.
- **Social** – How many of your prospects and customers are sharing your Webinars, white papers and other content with their social networks via Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook or mentions in their blog posts?
- **Opt In** – What percentage of prospects who visit your landing pages are opting in for your gated offers? This includes Webinar registrations, newsletter subscriptions, online demos and other content offers.
- **Referrals** – Are your prospects only visiting your Website when prompted by an email? Or are they coming to you via social media, search returns, peer recommendations or on their own? Being findable is the new "black" for marketing. The more accessible your

“...[buyers’] top ‘pet peeves’ center around hype and puffery of offerings, poor communication of business value proposition, and too few proof points to evidence ROI.”

- CMO Council

content is—regardless of where your prospects happen to encounter it online—the higher your currency value.

All content is not equal in relevance or usefulness to your prospects. The overwhelming amount of content available online generates a lot of clutter and noise that your prospects must sort through to find useful information that addresses their needs. Their assessment of your content’s currency value is expressed by the combination of the factors shown above. Content with currency value delivers immediate takeaways that leave lasting impressions, helping to motivate a higher willingness to trade their attention for your content whenever they see it.

The Imperative for Buyer Knowledge

The strength of your marketing content’s currency depends upon the level of relevance assigned to it by the prospects you want to become customers. The only way to reliably improve this perception is by addressing what matters most to your prospects because you know. Not just for the decision maker, but for all the people involved in the buying process.

Here are a few research findings that disprove marketers’ assumptions about the relevance of their content as perceived by prospective buyers:

- *“...[buyers’] top ‘pet peeves’ center around hype and puffery of offerings, poor communication of business value proposition, and too few proof points to evidence ROI.”*
CMO Council
- *“Only 14 percent of the ‘unique benefits’ promoted by companies drive enough preference to have a commercial impact.”* Corporate Executive Board
- *“The lack of relevancy for the prospect reduced the vendor’s chance of closing a sale by 45 percent”.* IDG
- *“A survey of IT buying team members shows that they find relevance in only 39 percent of links offered to vendor content from social conversations.”* IDG

Marketers need to take the initiative to continuously update and refine what they know about their buyers. Luckily, there are many more ways to do this today than were available in the past due to technology.

These 8 methods will help marketers focus their listening to cultivate insights that can be used to improve your marketing content's currency value:

1. **Phrasing:** One of the best ways to increase relevance with prospects is to use the language they use to talk about their problems. If they talk about *bottlenecks*, discussing *performance improvements* may not produce the same level of engagement as using the words they use intuitively. When you listen to prospects, make note of how they describe issues of importance. Remember that listening to your customers may not produce the same results as you've already indoctrinated them with some of your company's terminology and language.
2. **Webinars:** One of the ways to get up to speed about prospects is by attending Webinars your prospects attend. Sure, it's helpful to hear other experts talk about the issues, problems and solutions, but what's really valuable are the questions asked by attendees at the end or during session in the chat window. Addressing those questions and comments in your next piece of content can help to boost its success, as well as your company's credibility and expertise.
3. **Blogs:** Following the most active blogs in your industry is a great way to listen to your prospects. What you're looking for is not just timely topics of interest, but comments. How people respond to the blogger's point of view can provide a lot of insight to the concerns, beliefs and interests that are top of mind for your prospects (or people like them).
4. **Twitter Streams:** What I mean by Twitter Streams are hash tag searches for keywords or solutions. Use a program like TweetDeck or TweetGrid and dedicate 2 or 3 columns to hash tag searches pertinent to keywords your prospects use. This concentrates how many Tweets you have to plow through, makes for a quick study of phrasing and

provides links that are being shared and thought—by them—to be important sources of information.

5. **Bit.ly Links:** Many of the links used on Twitter are created by the URL shortener Bit.ly. If you copy and paste the link into a browser and add a + (plus) sign at the end and click enter, you can see a stream of who has Tweeted the link and any comments readers have posted. You can click through on their Twitter handles to learn more about the people interested enough to share that information with their followers. This information also provides an impression about the level of interest in the topic by displaying how many clicks, Tweets and shares have happened over time. Additionally, the number of responses provides an idea of the level of influence of the original Tweeter, who may be enticed to help you spread your company's ideas to interested followers.
6. **LinkedIn Groups:** Using profiles of people like your prospects to get a baseline about a specific segment is a good start. But to get a feel for their sentiment about a topic, monitoring and participating on groups they belong to can provide great insights that translate back to improving your content relevance. Make sure when you participate that it's never to sell, only to provide valuable insights, answer the questions asked or ask questions about topics the group is focused on discussing.
7. **Feedback:** Direct learning about the opinions and reactions to your company, products and services is available in a variety of flavors. Whether or not your Webinar attendees stay for the duration of your event and are interested enough to ask questions is real-time feedback. Customer surveys post-Webinars help as well. Contact center reps are on the front lines, interacting with your customers daily and salespeople are speaking with the very types of people marketing content is responsible for attracting. Incorporating a variety of feedback into your listening can serve as validation for the types of information you're gathering through other methods.
8. **Metrics:** Paying attention to whether or not prospects are responding to your email is a form of listening, as is measuring bounces on specific Website pages and time spent with specific content. Noting the keywords site visitors use to find your Website is

95 percent of buyers said that the vendor they selected provided ample relevant content during their buying process.

- DemandGen Report

another input for your consideration when developing content. Metrics are the ultimate gauge of what's working and what's not.

By refining your content using insights derived from the eight methods above and then monitoring responses, you'll have the ability to continuously tweak your content to ensure that relevance does not diminish over time as priorities shift in parallel with business objectives.

Proof about the growing imperative to improve your knowledge about buyers is evidenced by the findings in a recent survey conducted by DemandGen Report, sponsored by Genius.com. Take a look at some of the results from the [Breaking Out of the Funnel: A Look Inside the Mind of the New Generation B2B Buyer](#) survey, conducted in February, 2010:

- 48.4 percent of buyers said they're utilizing a wider variety of sources during research.
- 59 percent shared the information they learned during research with others.
- 66 percent of buyers said consistency in messaging by vendors influenced their buying decision.
- 77 percent said their buying process did not follow a traditional path.
- 77.8 percent of buyers started with informal research around a business challenge.
- 95 percent of buyers said that the vendor they selected provided ample relevant content during their buying process.

It's also worth noting that nearly half of buyers asked said they're taking more time during the research and consideration stages. The implication for marketers is that by improving relevance and helping your prospects learn what they need to know in an efficient manner, your online marketing content could play an even larger role in reducing cycle times.

How the Buying Process Works

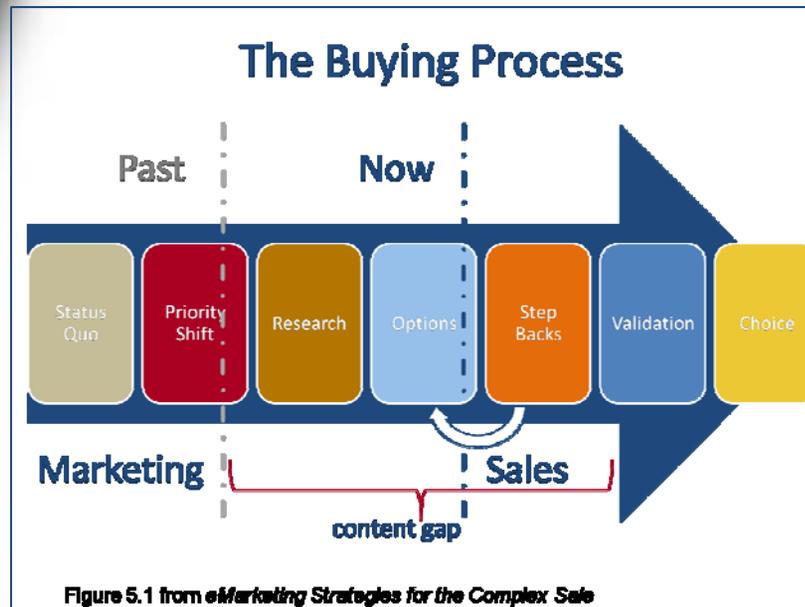
The buying cycle for marketers starts before the buying cycle for prospective customers. Marketing begins by destabilizing status quo, while buying begins once the desire to solve a problem becomes a motivational force. The buying cycle is often talked about in abbreviated terms like awareness, consideration and purchase, but those stages are too broad to offer

guidance to marketers about levels of engagement and transitions they can use to nudge buyers to take next steps along the way to purchase.

The buying process, pictured below, shows the gap between how companies have communicated with their prospects in the past and how much farther into that process nurturing must reach before sales activities are generally requested or agreed to by buyers.

Lead generation is about engaging prospects to the point that they agree to provide you with basic contact information and grant their permission for you to contact them with additional related information of the same—or higher—currency.

Lead nurturing is the process marketing employs to engage the leads generated as they move through their buying process. This is achieved by filling the content gap shown in the figure to the left. Lead nurturing uses the foundation of initial interest to continuously expand the knowledge of prospects until they have the level of confidence they need to make a purchase decision.



The goal of lead nurturing is to mitigate perceptions of risk while motivating prospects to explore the opportunity to make a purchase decision by speaking with a salesperson.

The Web has jumped squarely in between your sales team and your customers, delaying conversations and even eliminating the need for many of the early-stage discussions that were used to establish 1-to-1 relationships from the start.

To get closer to your prospects and connect more often with the right information at the right time, it helps to get more granular about how you evaluate the

way your customers buy from you, and think about new tools, such as technology, for greater communication.

The 7 Stages of the Buying Process:

1. **Status Quo:** Prospects have not yet recognized the problem as one they need to solve.
2. **Priority:** The problem has been recognized but prospects are unsure which route is best for solution for their specific situation.
3. **Research:** Prospects are now actively engaged in learning what they need to know, building the confidence necessary to take action.
4. **Options:** Learning about solution sets that will best fit immediate and future needs is underway.
5. **Step Backs:** Something has arisen that's made the prospect return to an earlier stage to verify beliefs or to answer a question from another member of the buying committee.
6. **Validation:** You're on the short list and now the prospect wants to know if your company can deliver on promises.
7. **Choice:** The decision to buy must move from intent to reality with the purchase and implementation.

Traversing the seven stages of the buying process in step with your prospects requires that marketing content show, instead of tell. Marketers must educate prospects about what they need to know, apply their company's unique expertise in addition to their products and prove the company walks its talk through the sharing of evidence.

This does not mean you rush out and create content that includes the kitchen sink. Instead, you need to match your content to your prospects' needs at each stage, telling the story over time as they're ready to learn more.

Fill the Content Gap

There are three types of content most effective in lead nurturing programs: education, expertise and evidence. Leveraging these types of content during different buying stages can help marketers motivate faster progression to purchase.

Education: Your prospects likely have a lot to learn before they can make a considered purchase decision. Education is essential in the early stages of the buying process. Focus on revealing why the issue must be dealt with, industry trends driving the solution of the problem and what types of setbacks to their business objectives could result if they choose to put off addressing the need. The role of educational content is to help your leads answer all their questions to help them understand why it's urgent to solve a problem they face—sooner, rather than later.

Expertise: It's likely that another similar product is easily available. Since most products are commodities—especially true from your prospects' perspective—it's imperative to show what difference your company's expertise will bring to their project. Buyers are looking for vendors that are partners who deliver a value add in addition to the capabilities their products and solutions enable. Showcase your expertise through thought leadership activities and content and become the coach they rely on to get the results they're charged to deliver.

Evidence: No matter how good your product offerings sound, it's unlikely that your buyers will just take your word for it. You need to present the proof that your company delivers on promises. Since customer success stories are also a valid sales tool, consider creating two versions. The first version is usually a shorter story that highlights your customer's company, problem, the solution and results achieved. The late-stage success story should include more detail about the project—issues not apparent at the start, obstacles overcome during implementation, overlap discoveries that impact other departments, and more. Analyst reports and media mentions are also worthy evidence offering weighted opinions that your company can be relied upon to be there when the rubber hits the road.

It's likely that business executives are monitoring instant messages, email and talking on the phone at the same time. Switching back and forth between applications and formats is part of the digital work style.

These three types of content play across the buying process in different ways. Educational content helps your prospects learn what they need to know to make a confident decision. Expertise shows that your company provides value in addition to a product your prospects may consider a commodity. Evidence-based content proves that your company walks its talk and can deliver on the promises made in relation to what your products and solutions enable that your customers couldn't do before. The strategic combination of these three types of content will help your prospects make faster progress across their buying journey.

The Role of Formats in Content Marketing

There are many different ways to package your marketing content. Regardless of which format is the trendy choice, be sure to select formats that your prospects and customers will readily engage with. The challenge for marketers is that your prospects are likely a mix that includes digital natives as well as people who are less comfortable with digital content. Consider the different ways people engage with content. For example, white papers have long been regarded as desirable during the research phase of buying, Webinars are now sought out for learning more about a specific topic and video has just recently become a preference for some executive buyers..

Remember that people embrace content in different ways depending upon their preference for visual, audio or textual content. Because B2B complex sales usually involve a number of people in the purchase decision, providing a mix of content formats can help marketing programs engage the different preferences of stakeholders, thus increasing the odds of connecting with more of the people involved in the buying decision.

Consider these 6 points in relation to content format:

- 1. Effort Perceptions:** Attention is in higher demand than ever. We've compressed the amount of attention we pay to content and often multi-task, resulting in getting the gist but not necessarily the meaty context. Many people say they surf the Internet and watch TV at the same time. It's likely that business executives are monitoring instant messages, email and talking on the phone at the same time. Switching back and forth between applications and formats is part of the digital work style. This is why scanning has become the predominant method for deciding if the content is worth the effort and time necessary to actually read it. People tend to read the title, the first couple of sentences and then scroll down the page looking for something relevant to jump out at them and give them a reason to spend more time with your content.
- 2. Hooks:** With a Webinar, video or podcast scrolling isn't possible, which is why it's extremely important to establish orientation and then hook your audience as quickly as possible. A white paper requires a time commitment to read thoroughly. This is why an executive summary at the beginning can help to establish the motivation your prospects need to expend the effort. The first couple of sentences should be your hook. Remember the seven-second rule about landing pages. With Webinars you may have more time to convince people to stick with your content, but not much.
- 3. Intellectual Format:** Beyond the physical format for distribution purposes, the intellectual format of marketing content can also serve as a currency enhancer. Consider the expectations set by a customer success story in comparison to a list article like "Top 10 Tips for..." or "3 Best Practices in..." Both of these formats help the audience interpret what they will receive and help them to decide whether or not to read them.
- 4. Purpose:** The purpose of your content will also play a role in determining which format you select. If the purpose is lead generation which requires your prospect to share their contact information, the format—in addition to the topic—must be perceived as having a higher currency value. Webinars and white papers are two of the best formats used to convince prospects that the informational exchange is worthwhile. It's important to note

that purpose can evolve in stages.

5. **Distribution:** The ways in which your marketing content will be accessed and used and how your company intends to share it with prospects plays an important role in selecting format. Obviously if you want to create a YouTube channel, you need video. Direct mail means print. A white paper is generally a PDF. Live Webinars can be repurposed as on-demand content. Consider how various formats provide more opportunities for repurposing your content to help broaden the reach of your ideas based on content consumption preferences.
6. **Buying Stage:** How much time someone is willing to commit to your content depends upon a number of factors. Their perception of your company's credibility and the urgency ascribed to their need for the information are the top two. Beyond that, their level of commitment to solving the problem is a key to engagement based on format perceptions. For example, in status quo, a prospect is less likely to exchange their information for a white paper, but they may take a few minutes to read a blog post or article they can easily scan to determine relevance. As they become accustomed to receiving information they value from your company, your prospects become willing to spend more of their time with your ideas because the value of your marketing content as currency in payment for their attention has risen over time.



The key point to consider with marketing content formats is that marketers need to embrace a variety of them to ensure they answer the needs and expectations of their prospects. Getting the right mix will evolve over time as you monitor which formats of content develop the highest levels of engagement. It's also worth noting that just because a format doesn't work once, doesn't mean it should be eliminated from the mix until you've tested to learn that the problem is the format itself, and not a lacking in the takeaways your content delivers to your audience.

Mapping Content to the Buying Process

The evolution of technology to manage and automate marketing processes has necessitated that marketers find tangible ways to prove their marketing programs are playing an important role in generating net new revenues. With the technology to measure a prospect's online behavior in relation to content, marketers can now measure and work to improve transitions across the buying cycle to help produce more sales-ready leads.

Mapping content to the buying process helps marketers gain the insights they need to improve their effectiveness at generating higher quantity and quality of leads instead of only accumulating contacts that sales must spend their time qualifying for pursuit. This opportunity to coordinate the marketing-to-sales process increases your capabilities to reduce lead wastage, increase the effectiveness of pre-sale relationships and to ensure that salespeople are spending their time following up with leads closer to making a buying decision.

Buying is about gathering the information needed to answer all the questions, reasons and doubts that hinder the ability to make a confident decision. When you use questions to guide your content mapping, it becomes a simpler task to determine which content plays best during specific buying stages. Here are a few examples of questions asked across the buying process:

Question	Buying Stage
What will happen if I do nothing?	Status Quo
How can we achieve a new company goal that our current processes don't support?	Priority
Are there best practices I can refer to about solving the problem?	Research
Which vendors are companies like mine using?	Options
What if the solution I choose doesn't work?	Step Backs
What levels of success are companies like mine finding by using this solution?	Validation
Who do I most trust to make me successful?	Choice

If you put yourself into the mind of your buyer, or even think about how you buy something complex—such as a computer, car or house—you can see that the answers to each question invite the next question to surface.

The answer(s) to each of those example questions provide topics for content development that will address your prospects' needs at different times. Developing a content library based on answering questions buyers have across buying stages will help your marketing programs deliver the highest returns.

Why You Need A Content Strategy

[The 2010 Marketing Content Spending Survey](#) conducted by Junta42 found that content marketing spending rose to 33 percent of the total marketing budget—up 11 percent from 2008. That's a lot of resources dedicated to content-driven marketing programs. For marketers to sustain this budget growth into the future, they must prove the return on investment produced by those dollars. A content strategy will help you document tangible proof that content marketing is indeed playing an identifiable role in driving revenues. But, more importantly, a content strategy will help companies improve their efficiency and effectiveness in maximizing the returns possible by using every content resource to its fullest potential.

The objective of an integrated content strategy is to convince your prospect that spending more time with your content is a valuable activity in comparison to other sources of content on similar topics. Consistent delivery of relevant content is difficult to execute without a plan. In a B2B complex sale, the pre-sales relationship is often lengthy, requiring a larger number of touch points and the dissemination of a depth of information necessary for each decision made to take next steps along the way. Without a strategy, it's nearly impossible to discern if your marketing programs are working over the long term, or to efficiently sustain your efforts regardless of when a potential buyer opts into your nurturing process.

55 percent of marketers are using Webinars as part of their lead nurturing strategy.

- 2010 Virtual Market Outlook Report

Create a Content Hub to Increase Engagement

Content must be designed to create interactions, broaden your reach into target markets and build the credibility of your company as an expert in solving the problems that matter to prospects. One way to do this is to design content programs around the concept of a hub. This approach helps marketers to create the repetition of impressions needed to get your company's ideas to stick. Research shows that it takes from five to seven impressions of an idea for it to have staying power.

For the purposes of providing an example of how a hub can be used to create an integrated content strategy, let's put a Webinar at the center of a marketing program. The [2010 Virtual Market Outlook Report](#) found that 83 percent of respondents say they have attended a Webinar in the last year. More importantly, 55 percent use Webinars as part of their lead nurturing strategy. Webinars play a significant role in how people are gathering information and engaging with vendors and subject matter experts.

Use Pre-Event Promotion to Build the Hub:

Create the registration page for the Webinar with the promotional copy. This will be the hub for your program. To help your Webinar stand out, consider embedding content that will increase the value perception about your event. In a Rain Today members-only interview, Paul Dunay, co-author of *Facebook Marketing for Dummies*, shared that showcasing a podcast on the registration page can increase the conversion rate from 10 percent up to 50 percent. The podcast doesn't need to be lengthy. Two minutes with the speaker discussing the value proposition of their presentation will give people a taste of what's to come and help increase the perceived currency value, enticing prospects to register.

While you're creating the registration copy, create messaging and content for the following promotional uses:

- **Email invitations sent to your lead database.**

Promoting a Webinar to your lead database usually consists of sending the same email repeatedly up until the Webinar. Instead, consider creating four or more different versions of email messaging. After all, if one version doesn't catch their attention, why

keep sending it and expecting different results? Look for different angles your email invitations can address.

- **Tweets spread by your social network.**
Similar to the tip above, create a number of different 120 character messages to Tweet about your event to promote registration. Send a personal email to people you know offering them the selection of Tweets and asking them to Tweet on your behalf. If you make it really simple, people will help you. Additionally, you don't want to Tweet the same thing repeatedly over the several weeks of pre-event promotion. It gets monotonous for your followers and sticks out like a self-promotional rant for potential new followers.
- **A news post in each LinkedIn group you belong to where the topic is relevant.**
Unless you're intending to start a discussion about the topic of the Webinar, it's a lapse of etiquette to post notice of a Webinar with a link to register as a discussion topic. Put it in the news listings to set appropriate expectations. Vary the description for each group to increase relevance based on the purpose of each group.
- **An event posting on LinkedIn.**
Adding an event to LinkedIn will append it to the main events listing page on LinkedIn and will include the event in the updated status emails that are sent out weekly to your connections.
- **Blog post(s) about the webinar topic.**
The first blog post may be similar to the copy on the registration page for your Webinar. Include pictures of the speakers to personalize your post and add visual context. Consider writing an additional blog post (or several) that expands on a point that will be covered during the Webinar with a link to the registration page.

These are just a few suggestions for promoting your Webinar. Others include the more obvious, from a posting on your Website's home and event pages and your company's Facebook fan page and even creating a social media press release.

Notice that the Webinar serves as the hub. Everything marketing is doing during promotion is intended to pull prospects to the Webinar registration page. This is usually where most marketers stop. Once the Webinar is over they publish the archive of the event, send a link to everyone who registered and move on to the next marketing program on their agenda.

But wait. Your Webinar's marketing currency has value far beyond the event, itself—don't squander it.

Create Post-Event Traction to Extend the Value of Your Hub:

After you've completed your Webinar, it's time to repurpose and use the content to create more interactions, generate additional leads and spread your ideas farther than those who attended the live event. Consider the following possibilities for increasing the return on investment from your Webinar:

- **Post your slide deck on [SlideShare](#).** Embed it into a blog post and answer a few questions that were asked by attendees. Link to the archive page where people can go to view the full webinar.
- **Create a transcript of the Webinar.** Polish it up for reading purposes and turn it into a white paper. Insert additional expertise, research and/or customer success stories to add value for those who attended the event. If you asked poll questions during the Webinar, include the results. Turn some of your slides into graphics and insert those into the document to add visual flavor.
- **Review the questions asked during the Webinar.** After you've responded to each person who asked a question personally, via email, extract a list of topics the questions address. Do these ideas provide enough fodder for the development of a content series you can develop as follow-on communications and content for the attendees and registrants of the Webinar? Consider this a mini nurturing campaign that builds off the momentum of the webinar with people you know are interested in this specific subject matter.

- **Replay the Webinar to find a few choice snips of audio** that you can extract and turn into podcasts. You could use these as teasers on the Webinar archive page, to enhance a company newsletter or even as adjuncts to a customer success story or as embeds in the article series in the point above.
- **Build a Webpage** devoted to featuring all the resources that you've created around the Webinar's topic. Think of it as an educational microsite that has something for everyone interested in the topic. Do not create this as a laundry list link page. Create content around the links to resources that establishes context for site visitors and motivates them to explore based on interests.

A Webinar's currency can buy much more attention from your prospects than attendance at a one-hour virtual event. People who are willing to spend an hour of their time with you are demonstrating a deep interest in the topic, otherwise they wouldn't be there. All of these content extensions can help to motivate prospects to take the next steps in their buying process. The amount of additional engagement the related content stimulates can help to increase both the quantity and quality of your lead database.



The “hub” concept can be applied to increase the currency value of a variety of marketing content. The very nature of using the “hub” approach helps keep marketers on track and enables the easy development of an integrated content program. When every resource you develop expands from the main resource and relates to the others, you achieve integration of your messaging across those resources.

Additional “Hub” Approaches:

- **White Papers and eBooks:** Assign the content resource to the “hub” position and use it as the anchor for a Webinar, extract a series of articles, expand some key points into blog posts and even turn those key points into a slide deck you can post on SlideShare. The promotional ideas in step one will apply, as well.
- **Article Series:** Marketers can also build out the “hub” concept around a series of articles and use them to encourage prospects to subscribe to the series. Once the series has run its course, compile all the articles into an eBook or white paper. Update the information if needed and add something extra to ensure added value to those who’ve already read the articles.

This type of pervasive content strategy incorporates the subtle repetition needed for your company’s ideas and expertise to become the anchor for how your prospects think about solving their problems. It also provides a variety of formats to ensure that you address different content preferences for your prospects. By developing a combination of written, audio and visual content on the subject matter, people can ingest the ideas and information based on what works best for them.

Becoming the anchor provides competitive differentiation making it more difficult for a competitor to step in. This is the tipping point for becoming a trusted resource for valuable information that enables your prospects to take action.

Develop a Content Editorial Calendar

The best approach for executing a “hub” marketing program is to create an editorial calendar from your content development plan. The layout of your editorial calendar can help you add layers of integration you may have overlooked. The calendar will also serve as the execution roadmap for the program, enabling the planning for things like the logistical details of content publishing and the order of publishing to facilitate efficient linking strategies to create content pathways. The next page has an example of a content editorial calendar for the hub example, previously outlined using a Webinar, might include.

Sample Marketing Content Hub Editorial Calendar

Month	Content	Deliverable	Execution
1	Registration copy	Web page layout	Web page
1	Create slide deck	PowerPoint + talking points	
1	Email messaging	3 messaging versions	3 email invitation sends
1	Blog post - promo	2 blog posts	2 posts link to registration
1	Tweets	10 - 12 versions	Enlist "friends" to Tweet
1	Short event Descriptions	Event listings	LinkedIn groups, events
1	Social media press Release	Press release with pre-event teaser podcast, link to registration, speaker pictures	Wires & Web site press page
2	Webinar	Host live event	GoToWebinar
2	Upload slide deck	SlideShare	Embed on archive page
2	Post-event messaging	Email with link to archive page	Email send to registrants
2	Q & A blog post	Answers to attendee questions	Post + SlideShare + link to view archived event
3	White paper + email messaging	Develop white paper from transcript and create download form and page	Email to lead database, Tweets, LinkedIn News
3	Podcasts	Extract several 1-2 minute snips from Webinar	Website, iTunes, blog, Tweets
3	Extension articles and email messaging	Develop additional related content – 2 or 3 short articles	Post to Website, use in mini nurturing campaign with biweekly email sends
4	Educational Web resource center	Web page(s) - microsite	Include all content hub resources

*NOTE: When you create an actual editorial calendar, you'll want to note specific dates, cross links to resources and other pertinent logistical details specific to your organizational processes.

Consistency of messaging influences 66 percent of buyers during vendor selection.

- DemandGen Report

By investing the time to plan a content editorial calendar, content creation becomes simpler because research can be consolidated based on a known quantity of deliverables. Because you've taken the time to develop a distribution and publishing plan, logistical details are simpler to plan for and execute. As you can see by this plan, instead of one Webinar, your company now has developed a topical content library that also includes:

- 3 blog posts
- 1 slide share
- 3 podcasts (1 pre-event, 2 post-event)
- 1 white paper
- 2 – 3 articles
- 1 social press release

Combining all of this content into an educational destination resource for prospects will help to generate and engage leads for months to come. It should not go without notice that consistency of messaging influences 66 percent of buyers during vendor selection. (See page 11) This is likely because the company's expertise is being reinforced with every touch point.

Metrics and Content Strategy

Highly relevant content has increased currency value. The best part about the hub concept for marketing content strategies is that marketers are capitalizing on a known relevance to that specific set of prospects. If you have the ability to track response and interactions to all of the related content, you can score the intensity your prospects' interest and prioritize next steps based on their behavior. The following metrics can be applied to the hub program:

Increasing Lead Quantity:

- The number of leads generated from both the webinar and the white paper.
- Additional lead generation from resource web pages offering additional avenues for opt in such as subscribing to a newsletter or a mini nurturing series related to the webinar.

- Exposure to net new leads via Twitter, LinkedIn, the company Blog and the social media press release.

Monitor origination sources to determine the best conversion producers. If you used different copy on Tweets and emails, learn which messages generated the highest conversion rates. Capitalize on that intelligence for the development of messaging for future programs.

Improved Lead Quality:

- The number of topical resources a lead interacts with is an expression of where they are in their buying cycle. In the hub example presented, a total of 12 content resources were produced. Determine the appropriate threshold of interaction to prompt sales follow-up.
- Time spent viewing the content will indicate the depth of interest. Clicking through is not enough if the person does not spend enough time to read and ingest the content.
- Expanded reach into a prospect's company can result from the depth of content on the subject matter. The Breaking Out of the Funnel survey found that 30 percent of buyers solicited internal member input. Make sure you're monitoring the growth in contacts developed from the same company during these programs. With buying committees growing, an expanded number of participants from the same company can be an indication of serious buying intention.
- Solicit feedback from sales about the Leads with the highest participation in the program to determine opportunities for improvement to defining Lead quality for future programs.

Always remember that business priorities are dynamic and shift with market conditions. Refining your marketing programs to ensure effectiveness is a continuous process.

4 Deficiencies that Derail Content Marketing

1. Lack of Knowledge About Technology Tools and Platforms:

The increasing availability of technology tools and platforms that can help marketers share content, attract and monitor leads while engaging them across their buying process are abundant. Marketers need to learn which will work best in helping them to deliver on

objectives, as well as how to use them with proficiency. Minimal hands-on knowledge can result in lower returns on marketing investments. An example of this is noted in the DemandGen report, [Marketing Automation: Lessons Learned in the Trenches](#), where it was learned that more than 47 percent of B2B marketers indicate they are currently using 50 percent or less of their marketing automation system's functionality.

To keep up with the swiftly moving demands for content publishing and the preference for online content consumption, marketers not only need the ability to monitor online behavior and sentiment but they need to be able to publish content at the speed of need. We live in an on-demand world and instant gratification to informational needs is the expectation of our audiences. Marketers with the capability to respond as their lead's behavior warrants will find more success than those who cannot. To achieve this level of competence, marketers need to reduce their reliance on IT departments for content strategy execution.

Take a look at the capabilities offered by many of the on-demand software-as-a-service applications marketers can employ:

- Blog platforms like WordPress and Typepad enable ease of content publishing with interactive capabilities that are intuitive for most everyone.
- Webinar platforms enable business-user execution and the ability to interact with prospects in real time through audio, chat and polls.
- Social media platforms enable companies to expand their reach by building networks of followers interested in exchanging information in personalized, conversational formats.
- Marketing automation solutions enable a vast array of capabilities including the creation of landing pages, forms, and emails without HTML or software programmer expertise and then automatically track and score how prospects interact with them.
- Analytics programs can be set to monitor blogs and websites by copying and pasting a snip of provided code. Some platforms have developed widgets to distill this process into point and click activation.

In order to capitalize on the preferences and needs of today's prospects, developing a proficiency in digital tools is a necessary enhancement to a marketer's expertise.

2. Lack of Compelling Content:

With content publishing easier than ever, the need for compelling content, produced on a consistent basis has never been in higher demand. The complexity of problems is growing exponentially. Marketers who can distill those issues to simplify the effort expended by leads as they learn about the best solutions to their problems will become the stars who generate more and higher quality Leads for their sales teams.

How many of these 12 statements can you say are true about your marketing content?

	Compelling Marketing Content Evaluation	True	False
1	Your content is written to match your prospects' perspectives.		
2	Your content answers questions your prospects have about their priority issues.		
3	Your slide decks present juicy nuggets you speak to, not text-laden slides you read to your webinar attendees.		
4	You never start your webinars with a "let me tell you about my company" slide.		
5	Nowhere in your content do you stipulate that your company is the "leading provider of..." and the use of "our" and the company name is minimal.		
6	Mention of your solutions and features is minimal and presented in a supporting role, not as the main focus of the content.		
7	You employ a combination of educational, expertise and evidence content to share your company's story.		
8	Your content tells a consistent story that evolves across buying stages.		
9	Your content always includes a persuasive call to action.		
10	Your content is designed to stimulate conversations among members of potential customers' buying committees.		
11	Use of buzzwords and jargon is nonexistent or minimal.		
12	Your content is designed to be scanned for value and to be easily read online.		

*Every statement that received a false answer diminishes the ability of your content to compel responses that help prospects take next steps in their buying process with your company.

3. Lack of Conversational Competence:

The debate about inbound vs. outbound marketing is a hot topic in B2B marketing circles. The growth of social media and online platforms, such as Webinars, is one of the driving forces for inbound marketing. One of the biggest issues prospects have with companies is that many of them never respond to their dialogue with anything remotely relevant or, even worse, don't respond at all. It used to be that nearly all conversations were relegated to salespeople. Sales used to enter the relationship at the beginning. The fact that salespeople are being pushed farther down the buying funnel has necessitated that marketers step up to fill in that conversational gap.

This is a new skill that many marketers are still learning. The difficulty in embracing conversational competence lies in defining just what that means. From an online perspective it can be responding to a lead's activity by suggesting they may find another content resource useful based on the content they've previously viewed. It can mean answering a question in a LinkedIn group or responding to a Tweet that asks a question your company can answer.

Conversational competence also comes into play around events such as Webinars. When the only follow-up to the Webinar is an email with a link to the archived event, marketers are missing a huge opportunity to extend the engagement of those who attended the event—and even with registrants who did not. What better expression of interest is there than someone who is willing to spend an hour with you and your ideas? Marketers need to learn to be much more responsive if they're to prove that marketing contributes to revenues and shortens sales cycles.

Consider the difference in marketing prowess if it can be shown, for example, that marketing created 8 interactions with a prospect moving them far enough through their buying process that sales only needed to have 4 additional interactions with them before the decision to purchase was made. What would change for your company if that scenario became the norm?

Only 46 percent of marketers measure the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts.

- Digital + Exhibit Marketing Insights Report

4. Lack of Marketing Measurement:

The [Digital + Exhibit Marketing Insights Report](#) found that only 46 percent of marketers measure the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts. The report also found that 81 percent of respondents cite webinars as the most commonly used type of virtual event, but only 50 percent of them are measuring the return on that investment. In this economy, a lack of proof for the effectiveness of marketing investments can result in diminishing marketing budgets.

With the need for the marketing process to extend further through the buying process, marketers are already being squeezed to do more with less. There's never been a better time for marketing to embrace the technology tools and platforms that increase their visibility into the momentum of Leads as they move through their buying process.

Marketers may be concerned about the increasing pressure for accountability, but the truth is that measurement and metrics are critical to improving effectiveness for both the short and long terms. Insights to short-term activities allow marketers to make adjustments to ongoing programs to increase the outcomes derived over the longer term. Monitoring clicks and viewing time as standalone metrics is not enough to impact marketing strategy across a complex sales process. It's the ability to see what transpires across the entirety of the process that will enable marketers to effectively contribute to shortening time to revenue.

Content Effectiveness Depends on Currency Value

Increasing your marketing content's currency value is dependent upon numerous factors from the relevance of the information your company shares based on buyers' needs to a marketers' ability to utilize the latest technology for strategic execution. Developing a content strategy to plan in advance for resource development and the integration of content with inbound and outbound activities affords marketers economies of scale not possible with a short-term, fragmented campaign mentality. The overall consistency of messaging will create higher credibility and engagement that noticeably increases both lead quantity and quality. Your salespeople will notice—and you'll be able to prove impact to revenues.

About the Author:



Ardath Albee is a B2B Marketing Strategist and CEO of her firm, Marketing Interactions, Inc. She helps B2B companies with complex sales increase their marketing effectiveness by implementing eMarketing strategies driven by compelling content that produce more sales opportunities. Ardath is a frequent industry speaker and the author of the popular Marketing Interactions blog. Her book, *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale* was recently released by McGraw-Hill.

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