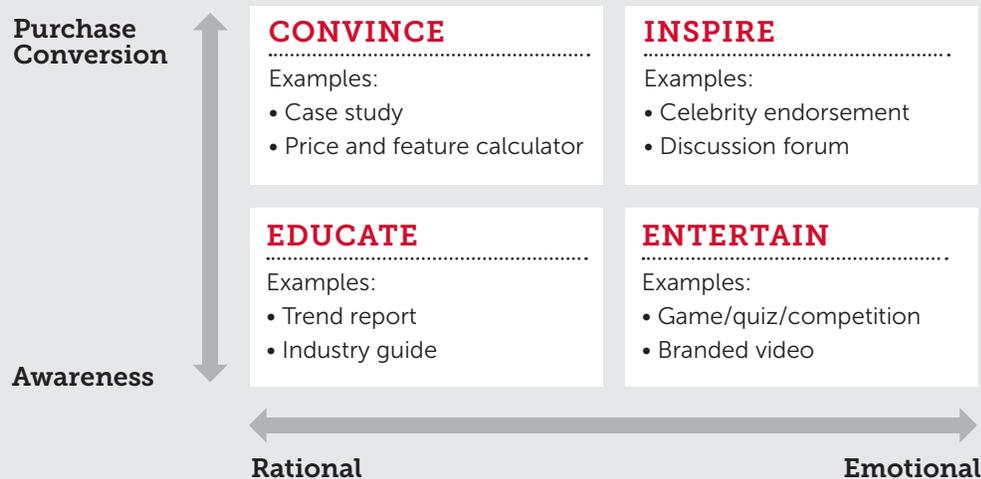


What is content marketing?

There is a dizzying number of competing definitions for content marketing and its resulting material (the very paper you are reading is an example of content marketing). The Institute for Content Marketing defines the practice as: “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

If that sounds close to the definition of just “marketing,” you’d be right. The term “content marketing” has gained prominence due to technological improvements driving the ease of content creation, the number and range of distribution channels, and the reduction in costs of distribution through many of those channels. Consequently, many brands have become quasi-publishers, creating a huge array of content. So, simply put, content marketing is the production of material, such as blogs, white papers, videos, articles, infographics, guides, quizzes, tips, Q&As, samples, case studies and any other form of media content that is produced by a company in order to draw attention (explicitly or by association) to what it does.

Content marketing matrix



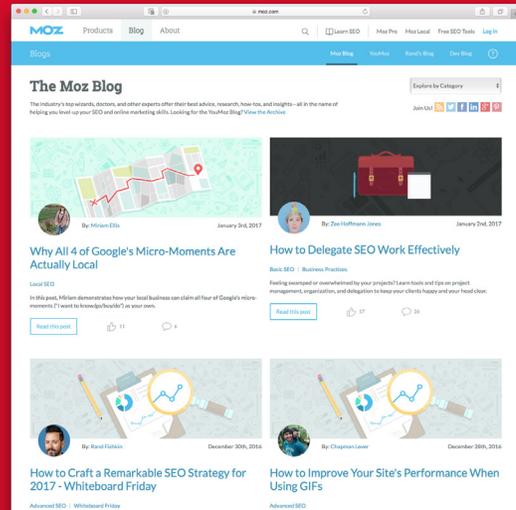
Adapted from The Content Marketing Matrix by Smart Insights

The first step is to think about the objectives for your brand, and to consider what kind of content will help you realize your goals. Start by asking yourself whether you need to focus on raising awareness or driving purchase. Are you appealing to your audience’s emotions, or looking to educate and convince through data and rational debate? Which of these approaches makes most sense based on your brand values? They may overlap, but each can be maximized with messaging tailored to a particular platform.

If raising awareness through entertainment best fits your branding, you might package content in games, quizzes, competitions and videos. If you want to inspire a purchase, discussion forums and endorsements may be more effective. To educate your audience, you might offer guides and articles, as well as trend reports and other data-based materials. And to turn education into intent to purchase, you can make use of webinars, case studies and checklists.

Data-driven: The Moz Blog

Moz is a software company that offers solutions to increase marketing visibility online. Their well-known blog features posts from industry leaders, experts and advisors based on hard data and tested knowledge in an easy-to-digest format. Many businesses turn to the blog for regular updates, innovations, applications, infographics, statistics, case studies and interactive content. There is a forum for comments which often contains equally valuable insight. The blog stresses the independent nature of its posts, thereby increasing the sense of objectivity and reliability.



As you select your ideal format and platform, consider how your goals relate to content. Your content must always remain relevant to your audience and suited to the medium. Though your message should always reflect the values of your brand, the connections may be subtle.

Regardless of your approach, it is vital to remember that content marketing is an exchange of value: be sure to offer your audience something that is worth their time on its own merits, while still representing your brand and its values. That can be a delicate balance—while your ultimate goal is to promote yourself, you have to do so while offering something different than what is already out there. Your branding and message should help you consider how directly to tie the content to your brand. If you want the benefit to be immediate, you should make the connection explicit; a more long-term goal could allow for a subtler tie in. Some of the most successful long-term content marketing initiatives barely mention the brand at all; John Deere's *The Furrow* magazine, for example, is an important agricultural resource that has been published quarterly since 1895.

A successful content marketing campaign must be connected to all other branding initiatives. To ensure an effective, holistic approach, you need a clear strategy at the outset. Write it down. Plan every step of your content marketing approach as you would any other campaign. Although content needs to be constantly updated and refreshed, it still must fit into a larger strategic plan that reinforces and interacts with every other piece of your overall marketing strategy.

Make sure your content adds value by offering resources and expertise. Content needs to both grab and hold attention, leaving readers with more information that directly connects to your brand. Careful targeting, high-quality presentation and engaging messaging will help your material stand out from the crowd. Too much content isn't in the best interests of your company either. Not only will it get lost in the vast sea of material out there, it may work against you. You don't want to create clutter, but rather communicate your expertise through information that is tied to your branding.

How to maximize your message and stand out in the crowd.

In order to make sure your message reaches its audience, you have to be able to clearly identify its constituent members and understand what they want. Ask yourself: how can I ensure I am offering more relevant content,

Hipmunk's Traveler's Guide to Tipping Internationally:

Hipmunk is a travel booking site that hosts a blog with answers to common traveler questions. Their post, "Traveler's Guide to Tipping Internationally," is neither flashy nor interactive, but provides highly relevant information for those engaged with their service. People really do need to know tipping customs in other countries, and this guide consolidates the information in one location that happens to be connected to Hipmunk's main booking site. The post speaks directly to Hipmunk's demographic, offering them exactly what they want to know and making travel a little easier. The post implicitly promotes travel but in no way references its own company.



rather than just more? This may mean taking the time to create in-depth material and being strategic about how, where and to whom it is targeted. To do this, you have to understand precisely what is relevant to your audience for a particular content marketing campaign. Be sure to connect your content marketing to your overall social media and community-building strategies. Once you know your audience, you can ensure that your content is designed for those who will appreciate it. Be aligned with customer interests so that they will take the time to engage with your content.

If the best-executed content is not read, it may as well not exist.

But it is not only about what your audience wants—you have to make your message powerful, meaningful and representative of your brand and its values. Quality is a vital component of this exchange; aim to produce more meaningful content, not necessarily more content overall. Have a sharp focus and work hard on each piece. If it is effective, your content can be leveraged across multiple platforms, increasing the reach of the piece. These can be linked back to the original article with additional images and infographics.

Craft your content to create unique experiences and engagement, building on your particular areas of expertise. Focus on a few key messages and themes. Make your audience feel special by offering them exclusive access to information or behind-the-scenes glimpses at your company. Use social media to attract customers and keep them coming back through interconnected material like videos, checklists, worksheets and promotions. Use this material to emphasize your company's unique insight. Take advantage of interaction opportunities by updating content to reflect common questions and challenges, as well as underscoring what has been successful.

Be thoughtful about your platforms and media: the format, structure and tone all affect the reader's experience. Be sure to update your content accordingly, ensuring that you tailor your message to take full advantage of the affordances of each medium. Update your material regularly. Offer links to related resources that underscore your unique insight and expertise, thereby motivating audiences to continually return to the content while also enhancing your own reputation. Throughout, be clear about what you are offering so that audiences have appropriate expectations that can only be exceeded.

