

10 Ways to Make Your Content Marketing Strategy Work Harder For You in the New Year

Derived from the book "[Content Marketing Strategies for Professionals](#)," by Bruce Clay and Murray Newlands

SEO isn't dead and content marketing isn't a fad. In fact, today [9 in 10 organizations](#) market with content, and [78% of marketers](#) believe custom branded content will become more important in the next year.

With "the next year" being now. 2014.

Is your content marketing strategy ready for 2014?

This list is derived from our new book, "[Content Marketing Strategies for Professionals](#)," and – like the book itself – is intended for both novice and veteran marketers who understand the importance of "creating blog content," but may need some extra guidance when it comes to creating content that inspires engagement, gets ranked in SERPs, and otherwise achieves marketing goals.

Use the list as a resource, asking yourself whether you're doing each of the items in the list; whether you *should be* doing each item in the list (remember, everything isn't for everybody); and – with the items on this list in mind – whether you are approaching what you are currently doing from the right angle.

How's Your Strategy Look? A 10 Step Guide to Help You Put the Strategy Back in Content Marketing Strategy

1) Set Goals

Before any effort is spent creating content it is essential to set goals so that you know *why* you are creating the content. Without goals there's no way to know if your efforts are successful. Make sure your goals are research-based and attainable; there's nothing strategic about pulling numbers out of thin air and setting yourself up for failure.

Do your goals take into consideration:

- Relationship building
- Ranking in search engines
- Attracting inbound links from other websites
- Stimulating word of mouth and social media attention
- Generating inbound traffic
- Telling your brand story
- Last year's numbers (and improving upon them)
- External factors that may positively or negatively affect your efforts

2) Identify Your Audience and Perform Persona Research

All kinds of people go searching for content for all kinds of reasons. What kinds of people come looking for yours? Knowing who is reading your blog, watching your videos, and buying your products gives you valuable marketing intelligence that can help you keep your valued customers. Knowing how to appeal to the preferences of your current customers can also help you create campaigns that are likely to attract more customers like them. You may also find from this research that your current marketing efforts are not attracting the kind of crowd you were hoping for. In that case, you may find yourself using this data to map out ideal target market personas and adjusting your brand presence to attract a more on-target consumer.

Have you:

- Used in-house resources like customer service and sales to learn more about your current customers?
- Leveraged your web and social analytics for data about the gender, age and location of your engaged audience?
- Had in-house discussions about the habits of your ideal consumer?
- Performed market research online?
- Created internal-use persona profiles that include names and photos?

3) Perform a Content Audit

Before you start reinventing the wheel, it's a smart idea to survey your current content efforts to get a sense for what's working and what needs work. This is often called a content audit and can be as in depth or cursory as you like.

Look at:

- Analytics like the amount of traffic a post brought to your website, or the number of conversions a piece of content inspired
- How popular the content is (Did people share it, comment on it, or like it?)
- Does your content show signs of longevity? Is it still seeing engagement or traffic?
- Is your current content meeting the needs of your customers?
- What patterns do you see? Is there a certain theme or topic that always gets a traffic or engagement spike?
- The KPIs you established in your goal-setting phase and the types of content that are helping you meet those KPIs

4) Make Blog Content That Is Thoughtful and Well-Rounded

Your blog enables you to consistently give something to your customers and the community. It builds trust and familiarity with your brand, and it functions as part of your sales funnel anytime a prospect visits your website looking for more information. Your blog should also be a critical part of your SEO strategy.

Consider:

- Using your audit to build on successful themes and to create more content that works
- Strategizing new campaigns using keyword research tools, competitor research, PPC advertising, social media, current headlines and trends, blog comments and customer service inquiries, repurposed content, and company culture
- Your blog titles: are they optimized? Do they catch your target market's attention?
- Your on-page SEO; does your blog target a keyword phrase, or an idea based on a keyword phrase?
- Writing guest blog posts for related niche blogs
- Having others guest blog for you
- Curating the content of others
- Brainstorming lists of evergreen content that will never go out of style

5) Create High-Quality Video Content That Tells Your Story

Video offers the most personal form of interaction a brand can have with customers short of being in the same room with them. Plus, it's a highly sought-after medium that is great for SEO, and -- plain and simple -- some subjects are just better explained with video.

Is your video content:

- High-quality
- Personality-rich
- Shareable
- Optimized for search
- Technically ready to be published on YouTube, Vimeo or embedded in your own blog

And does it:

- Support your overall objectives
- Inspire action
- Tell a story
- Represent your brand and your brand personality
- Include people
- Communicate it's message clearly

6) Don't Forget an Image Speaks 1,000 Words (When It's The Right Image)

Great content marketing photos tell a story, have a message and compel people to take action. Any photo that is part of your content marketing should do a little of each. Images are an excellent engagement tool and they should be used readily in your blog posts and your social media campaigns.

Before sharing your photo, have you considered:

- Why you're sharing the photo
- How it supports your overall objectives
- What you want people to do when they see the photo
- The story your photo is telling
- How you want people to feel about your brand, and whether this photo encourages that feeling
- Whether there are people in it
- If the quality of your image is high, and whether your contrast is good
- Whether the photo communicates clearly what it is
- If it will be easy for someone who sees it to share it with their networks

7) Help Your Tribe Create the Content For You

Consider asking fans, customers and other people who follow you to help tell your story from their point of view.

Some ideas to get the user-generated content flowing:

- Offer to share user-generated images or stories in your blog or on your social media channels. (Burt's Bees knocks this one out of the park with their [Raise Your Burt's campaign](#).)
- Run contests to inspire user generated content. (A great example: [Copyblogger's November 2013 essay contest](#). The actual essay contest is over, call to action has been taken down, but here are some lingering remnants of the glory that was: <http://iamles.com/introducing-the-first-ever-copyblogger-essay-contest/>; <https://medium.com/p/ca48da4a38cc>; <http://naijawriterscoach.com/copyblogger-essay-contest/>)

8) Lead, Attend, and Sponsor Live Events

Whether you're attending them, sponsoring them, or throwing them, events are an incredible opportunity for you to lead or create the storyline.

Consider:

- Taking lots of photos at events
- Sponsoring an event
- Creating your own event and building content marketing opportunities into the itinerary
- Liveblogging at an event

(Note: We discuss events and the benefits of throwing your own in particular depth in chapter eight of "[Content Marketing Strategies for Professionals](#)." Co-author [Murray Newlands](#) attends and runs a lot of events and is kind of a connoisseur on the topic.)

9) Use Social Media to Talk *With* People Not At Them

Having active networks can help get your messaging, personality, branding and products in front of more of the right people at the right time. The trick is to use social media as a community tool, not a broadcast tool.

Are you:

- Being selective about which networks you're on? (Not everyone should be on every network)
- Amplifying your organic social media efforts with social media advertising?
- Reflecting your brand personality in your content?
- Taking advantage of Facebook apps to help your SERP representation?
- Creating content that is shareable?
- Using social media to offer better customer service?
- Leveraging social influencers?
- Considering how your social efforts may affect your SERP rank?

10) Use Paid Media to Amplify Earned and Owned Media

The terms "paid," "earned" and "owned" media describe the different ways content is created and distributed online. Paid media can easily integrate with nonpaid (earned and owned) content marketing efforts to make all three more effective.

Are you:

- Thinking of paid, earned and owned media as separate buckets, or integrated efforts that play off one another?
- Using paid media to help your organic (or "owned") content get in front of a larger target audience?
- Using paid media to analyze the CTR of potential keyword phrases?
- Utilizing sponsored tweets or other social media promotions to get your social media content in front of more people?
- Running paid ads for keywords you rank organically for so that your paid ads will run next to your organic listings?

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