3 Essential Ways to Use Content Marketing for Generating Top-of-Funnel Leads

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Introduction

As healthcare marketers, we all know how difficult it can be to catch the attention of hard-to-reach physicians and other healthcare professionals. With the variety of communication types they receive, standing out from the crowd is never easy.

Content marketing is an effective strategy for attracting and engaging with professionals of the healthcare industry. By creating valuable content that resonates with your target audience and leveraging this content across multiple channels, you'll start to create engagement that drives results. In this eBook, you'll learn the foundations necessary to building a successful content marketing strategy to reach your lead generation goals.

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Introduction

Content is the currency of online marketing.

Strategic content marketing offers enormous business upside across the entire customer journey, including increased engagement, brand affinity, long-term trust, closed deals, and happy customers.

But can it generate leads?

Yes. This eBook shows you how to use content marketing to fill the top of the funnel.

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Modern Marketing Has Changed

Modern Marketing Has Changed

It used to be...

The main strategy for finding new prospects for the sales funnel used to be entirely a push strategy: Push brand messages in front of as many people as possible, as often as possible, and via as many channels as possible – print, TV, radio, direct mail, display ads, phone calls.

And it worked. Brands enjoyed huge economies of scale by capturing more customers than they aggravated ... and the latter had few options to cause much of a ruckus about it.

Those days are gone.

Today's buyers are online, engaged, empowered, and in full control of their journey. They're far less responsive to "push" marketing, and they're far less likely to give you a second glance unless you appeal to what they need and want ... when they need and want it.

FACT
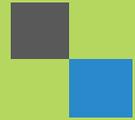
Prospects will have likely completed 70% of the buyers' journey by the time they engage with sales.

-- SiriusDecisions

Modern Marketing Has Changed

So how do today's marketers fill the funnel?

They use content marketing.

Since every funnel gets filled from the top, this eBook focuses on the **three key ways** content marketing is used to attract and generate leads at the top of the funnel. Whether you're a start-up, new to marketing, or simply want a refresher, this eBook will give you the basics of content marketing and set you on the path to lead generation success.

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What is Content Marketing?

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is a strategy for attracting and retaining customers by creating and distributing valuable, relevant content that engages, assists, or informs clearly defined target audiences. The ultimate goal is to drive a profitable customer action.

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What is Content Marketing?

Why should you care?

Because it works.

At the top of the marketing funnel, content marketing is used to attract and capture leads by offering compelling content in exchange for a tiny bit of information – commonly the person's email address. Once you "get the name," you can begin the process of building a relationship that results in a sale and, if you play your cards right, a long-term customer.

Successful content marketing fulfills one of three needs a potential lead has: To be informed, to be educated, or to be entertained; each at precisely the right time.

Get this right, and your reward is their business and loyalty.

Website conversion rates are nearly 6X higher for content marketing adopters than non-adopters.

-- Kapost

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What *isn't* Content Marketing?

What *isn't* Content Marketing?

> It isn't self-congratulatory ads and messages that tout the brand for the brand's sake

> It isn't about the hard sell

> It isn't solicitously pushed onto people

> It isn't an overt "pitch" of your products and services

FACT
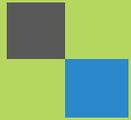
60% of consumers are inspired to seek out a product after reading content about it.

-- Demand Metric

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6 Steps to Get Started with Content Marketing

6 Steps to Get Started with Content Marketing

1. **Determine your business goals.**

   Before diving into content creation, it's important to know how many new leads you need every month or every quarter, as well as how much it costs to generate a lead. Work with sales and do a little math to ensure you have a clear picture of the playing field.

1. **Understand who you want to attract.**

   You're looking for people like your existing good customers. Have a clear picture of them, and know what they need and want from you. This step is foundational to all other efforts; without it, you're aiming in the dark (and blind ambition benefits no one).

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6 Steps to Get Started with Content Marketing

3.   **Create a content matrix.**

   This is an index of all the content you currently have. It includes information such as title, topic, format, target audience, abstract, date, and location. A content matrix helps you assess your current content and identify gaps in the mix.

4.   **Assess and identify your best lead-gen content.**

   Attracting new customers is all about creating awareness and interest, so the content that works best answers buyer questions, intrigues them to learn more, and helps them get to know your brand. Save the highly detailed information for later in the funnel.

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6 Steps to Get Started with Content Marketing

5. **Set up a campaign calendar.**

   Detail each campaign and the content needed to support it, step by step.

6. **Develop a process for measuring and reporting.**

   It's essential to have a mechanism for measuring your content marketing success and driving improvements. Key performance indicators tied to the business value of your program should include the obvious players (e.g., return on investment, contribution to leads, and contribution to sales) as well as less-obvious ones (e.g., the savings from reused content and social engagement). The content that provides the most leads is not always the content that provides the best leads; make sure you follow the money back to the first touch so you know which is which.

IMPORTANT METRICS FOR MEASURING CONTENT MAKRETING

1. Site traffic
2. Revenues
3. Keyword traffic & conversions
4. Search engine rankings
5. Organic search conversions
6. Social media mentions
7. Search query volume
8. Contributions to activity in other channels
9. Customer satisfaction
10. Number of inbound links
11. Customer value
12. Customer sentiment

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Attraction Tactics 101:

Search Marketing

Search Marketing

What is it?

Search marketing is the process of gaining traffic and visibility from search engines using paid and unpaid efforts.

Two Types:

1. **Pay-Per-Click (PPC):** This is where you **buy** traffic through paid search listings. PPC focuses on acquiring prospects via paid ads that are placed on search results pages. PPC is just one of several types of online advertising.

2. **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** This is where you **earn** traffic through unpaid listings. SEO focuses on acquiring prospects via visibility in organic/natural search results.

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Search Marketing

Why is it valuable?

Search marketing is an unobtrusive way to get found by prospective buyers who are – right now – looking for the products and services you offer.

Since 4 out of 5 consumers use a search engine to begin the hunt for something they're interested in, you have the opportunity to get in front of buyers exactly when they're seeking information about a product or service you offer.

It gets better.

The audience-driven nature of search engines has the net effect of pre-qualifying prospects; if they click on your listing, it's likely because it matches what they're looking for *at this very moment*. So not only does search marketing drive traffic to your website, it drives highly targeted traffic, which further increases the chances for a sale.

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Search Marketing

How do I use it to generate leads?

In a nutshell: You put valuable, relevant content in front of people who express interest, via keywords, in something you offer – e.g., a product, service, or piece of information.

You probably know that SEO and PPC are different animals; they require unique approaches and can become complex and confounding in a hurry. Nonetheless, the foundational principles for generating leads with search marketing are the same – and pretty straight-forward – whether you're practicing SEO or PPC:

1. **Write for your audience.**

   Don't create content for search engines. Create it for your ideal customers – their needs and interests and pain points. This means knowing who they are and writing in natural language.

Using relevant terms in your website is probably one of the most important SEO ranking factors.

-- Searchmetrics

Search Marketing

2. **Speak the searcher's language.**

   Learn the terms – keywords and phrases – that your target audience is searching on. When you understand what people are searching on, you can create content that connects to their wants and needs, and select keywords that resonate.

2. **Optimize your website content.**

   Thoughtfully incorporate keywords and semantically related phrases into your webpages. By doing so, you help the search engines find and deliver your content to the people who are looking for it.

Search Marketing

Optimize your Web Pages with…

> **Title Tag:** This displays as the text on a page's tab.

> **URL:** Have your keyword as far forward in the URL as feasible.

> **H1 and H2 tags:** These are your headlines and subheads.

> **Calls to action:** These are important for conversion, as well as if you're linking to an internal or external page.

> **Body copy:** Don't "keyword stuff." Think about and use the terms someone might expect to find on your page.

> **Meta description:** This displays on the search results page as the description underneath the title. It's a trailer for your page's content. (Not shown)

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Attraction Tactics 101:

Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing

What is it?

"Social media marketing" is an umbrella term for using social networking sites – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, VK, Vine, etc. – as marketing tools to gain the interest and engagement of potential buyers.

Why it is valuable?

Because many of your current and prospective customers spend *a lot* of time on social media sites. Social media marketing gives brands the opportunity to:

> Optimize visibility and connect with modern customers
> Create relationships with people who otherwise would not know about them
> Become "real" to consumers – a friendly face with a personality, opinions, and expertise

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Social Media Marketing

Social media is exactly like any other venue where people gather and socialize – if you don't add value to the conversation, you're shunned pretty quickly.

To generate leads from social networks, your brand must be viewed as a trusted advisor and expert in your industry. This is done by producing high-quality content that educates, informs, or entertains while directly responding to the problems, issues, pain points, wants, and needs of the people using the social networks you're targeting.

Here's how content marketing can encourage your social followers to raise a hand and jump into the top of your sales funnel:

1. **Provide a mix of content:**

   Offer a wide selection of content types and formats to ensure there's something for everyone; e.g., white papers, quizzes, eBooks, infographics, images, blog posts, surveys, checklists. Content variety increases your visibility and also the potential that your content will be shared.

Social Media Marketing

2. **Place calls to action in your content.**

    People respond best to clear instruction that tells them what to do next. Provide it. Make your calls to action visible and specific to encourage prospects to take the next step.

2. **Require registration for your high-value content.**

    Place lead-generation forms in front of the content most sought after by your ideal buyers, such as eBooks, training, or templates. Gating serves as a lead qualifier: People who are willing to supply a bit of personal information in exchange for your content are likely interested in learning more.

80% of marketers indicate that their social media efforts have increased traffic to their website.

-- Social Media Examiner

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Attraction Tactics 101:

Email Marketing

Email Marketing

What is it?

Email marketing is exactly what its name suggests: The use of email to send marketing communications that promote your products, services, and expertise. It's primarily used to:

> Acquire new customers
> Nurture top- and mid-funnel leads along the buyer's journey
> Enhance relationships with current customers in order to upsell and/or increase loyalty

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Email Marketing

Why is it valuable?

It's inexpensive. Email marketing is easy on the wallet, costing far less than nearly any
other form of marketing.

It's measurable. Today's analytics capabilities make it quick and easy to measure and track email marketing campaigns from launch to conversion. This knowledge helps marketers make improvements (often on-the-fly) and optimize performance.

It's successful. Email marketing gives businesses the ability to tightly target and personalize messages to specific audience segments based on any combination of known criteria, such as demographics and behavioral data. The ROI of segmentation and personalization is well- documented and indisputable.

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Email Marketing

How do I use it to generate leads?

Using email marketing to generate leads may sound paradoxical – like putting the cart before the horse. After all, before you can send an email, you need a list of names to send it to. And if you have this list, doesn't that mean the leads are already generated?

Maybe. But a list does not a lead make.

Put another way, simply because someone says, "Hi, my name is Jane Smith and I live in Cincinnati," doesn't mean Jane has any intention of having a relationship with your brand. Yes, you have her name and know how to contact her ... maybe even have permission to do so. But she's not a lead. Not yet.

Email marketing lets you start a conversation with Jane and, over time, convert her to a lead – someone who is on the path to purchase – by delivering content that is relevant to her needs and interests.

So how can you use email marketing for lead generation?

Email Marketing

Common ways email marketing fills the top of the funnel:

Third-party and co-branded programs. You can work with a partner to include your messaging and materials in their email campaigns. You could advertise an upcoming webinar, for example.

Nurture email programs. This is a best practice that keeps your brand top-of-mind with your prospects by educating them with relevant information as they progress through the buyer's journey. A "raw lead" gathered as a business card at a trade show, for example, could be nurtured into a marketing-qualified lead.

Trigger email programs. These act as immediate responses to some action taken by a prospect and can serve as both a thank-you and an introduction to your company. For example, when someone fills out a form to download content from your website, you could send a triggered message that offers them related materials, which is both a friendly gesture and a display of your company's expertise.

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Email Marketing

Dynamic content. This is where your email message is customized to match each recipient's interests based on what you know about them – demographics, behaviors, purchase history, etc. By delivering personalized communications to your prospects, you increase engagement and strengthen the relationship, both of which contribute to lead conversion.

Segmentation. This is the secret sauce that turns email marketing into a lead-generation machine. Segmenting your lists lets you target your prospect by what matters – uniquely – to them. It's one of the most powerful tools in your email marketing tool belt.

Email conversion rates to purchase are at least 3X as high as social media conversion rates, and the average order value is 17% higher.

-- eMarketing

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In Closing

In Closing

Content marketing by any other name… is still content marketing, whether they call it that or not.

> John Deere Tractor started The Furrow magazine in 1895. It offered farming-related articles and tips to their target audience: farmers. John Deere still publishes The Furrow today – in paper, online, and via social media.
> In 1904, JELL-O began publishing recipe books. Guess which key ingredient cooks needed for any of the recipes? JELL-O, of course. The books were wildly successful for the company; they generated leads, increased sales, and created new long-term customers.
> Legendary catalog publisher, Sears, began using radio to market to farmers. It was 1924. The tactic was so successful, Sears formed its own radio station: WLS Radio (World's Largest Store).

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In Closing

Nothing has changed except the medium.

People still want to be informed, educated, and entertained; they just get more of what they want online now, in addition to (or instead of) traditional channels.

Content marketing is still your best opportunity to make new friends and influence new people. That's why embracing and implementing content marketing practices at the top of the funnel sets you squarely on the path for success – through all stages of your sales process.

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About MedData Group

MedData Group provides demand generation and data services to providers of healthcare technology, medical devices, medical education, and others looking to engage with hard-to-reach physicians and other healthcare professionals by using a fundamentally unique approach.

MedData Group publishes Medical Product Guide, the industry's go-to resource that provides clinicians and healthcare professionals with meaningful vendor, product and industry information. By distributing meaningful content to healthcare professionals, we are able to collect more data, glean deeper insights, and reach larger audiences than any other demand generation service. Using behavioral analytics and big-data techniques, our proprietary content and lead management system produces unrivaled insights that we apply to best-in-class marketing practices to achieve unmatched results towards helping our clients reach their business goals.

About Act-On

Act-On Software delivers cloud-based integrated marketing automation software. Marketers can manage all of their online marketing efforts from a single dashboard that can be seamlessly integrated with CRM so that sales can have access into various marketing functions. Act-On's fresh approach to marketing automation gives its users full functionality without the complexity other systems impose, and makes campaign creation and program execution easier and faster.

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