



STONE WARD

Creating a Content Strategy for Your Digital Channels

by Emily Reeves / 9.2012

Overview

It is one thing to just be on a digital/social channel. It is quite another to create unique and engaging content for each of those channels on a regular basis. Too many brands are jumping onto a channel with no content strategy in place and making mistakes that drive customers away rather than encouraging conversation with them. This digital whitepaper outlines an approach for creating a content strategy for your brand's digital channels.



What is content marketing?

Content marketing is about providing your friends, fans, followers and visitors with information that enhances their lives by giving them information they didn't already know. Content marketing is not about directly selling your products and services to these friends, fans, followers and visitors. There is a difference between audience-centric content and brand-centric content. People will stop listening, stop visiting and ultimately stop buying when you just want to talk about you. The purpose of content marketing is to deliver valuable information to potential buyers, build relationships with them and ultimately make them loyal buyers.

Why is content marketing important?

Content marketing can work to guide visitors through the sales funnel from potential buyers to loyal buyers, over time. It is an effort at extending the brand narrative over a longer period of time than campaigns and promotions. By tailoring topics of content, marketers can:

- Improve search engine optimization (search engines are now ranking content based on social conversations and sharing related to your website, not just on your websites alone)
- Show thought leadership
- Plant seeds of consideration
- Grow relationships
- Verify product/service worth

If it is so great, why isn't everyone doing it?

Many brands are trying to implement content marketing and are not succeeding. Creating and curating content is not easy. It takes ideas, time, skill and a considerable amount of effort. Brands are essentially turning themselves into publishers whereas they have traditionally been campaign driven, pushing a branded sales message to the masses. It takes planning, a knowledge of audiences on the various digital channels, even an editorial calendar. Content marketing can also be overwhelming and intimidating: consider the number of channels available and the customization of content that needs to happen for and on each, depending



on the audiences and how each channel is used by its unique audience. What gets posted on Facebook might not be right for Twitter and Google+; what gets posted on Instagram might not be right for Pinterest and Facebook, etc. It is simply hard to generate the amount of content needed to keep and to keep the content that is generated engaging for your audiences. But it is doable.

Where are brands failing when it comes to content generation?

The biggest mistake brands are making is not approaching the content planning strategically. Or not even planning content at all. With a statement of objectives, a definition of the target audiences and a clear understanding of actions for friends, fans, followers and visitors to take, a content marketing plan can be put together with a purpose, a process and a procedure for implementing it and measuring the results.

What are some tips for approaching a content marketing strategy and plan?

Find Your Voice

Apply your brand voice to your digital channels, too. Regardless of channel and audience, the tone and voice should be consistent for the brand. Know what your brand stands for, what attributes you want to convey and what perceptions you want the audiences to have of your brand. This is a standard approach for most brands when planning their traditional communications efforts. However, it tends to get forgotten or left behind when it comes to social media channel communications. Pull that defined brand voice into the social spheres and maintain it there, too, regardless of who is writing or curating the content. If you are talking to a group of 18- to-24-year-old males, your posts can't be written from the point-of-view of a 40+-year-old female using pretty pictures, outdated slang and misunderstood cultural references. If you are a B2B thought leader, you need an authoritative voice, not one that sounds like a recent graduate. Maintaining a consistent brand voice may take a dedicated content editor. Remember, content marketing means that brands are essentially becoming publishers and need to start thinking like publishers.

Know Your Audience

Once you find your voice, tailor that voice by channel and audience, without straying from what the brand stands for in general. Before jumping into any communications channel, it's important to have a good idea of your customers and audience. Every social network is different and each has its own idiosyncrasies and audiences. Listen on each

Who are you?

Who are you talking to?

What are you going to say?

How are you going to say it?

Where are you going to say it?

How often will you say it?

How will you know if it is working?

channel to find out what people are saying about your brand, your products and the wider industry as a whole. What are people talking about? Is there a discussion already taking place that you can tap into? Use posts to tap into an engaged community that can respond to questions and ideas from the brand.

Pick Your Content Wisely

First, listen and observe. What are people searching to get to your site? What are they searching once they get there? What pages are they spending the most time on? What are they commenting on in your existing social channels? Use your findings here to develop your content calendar.

And remember that "content" doesn't mean that it all has to be original content. A brand can curate found content for its audiences, as long as it is relevant to the audiences where and when it is shared. Audiences will appreciate that the brand understands what they want and need and pull it into a location where and when it is relevant to them.

Be Visual: Images and Video Count as Content

There has been a large uptick in use of photography and video in digital channels to communicate messages and share ideas. Consider how you might show, not tell, and leverage visual content sites to share your content.

44%
**increase in engagement
if pictures used in posts**

Forty-four percent of users are more likely to engage with brands if they post pictures than any other media. Pictures have become one of our default modes of sorting and understanding the vast amounts of information we're exposed to every day. Brands can use visual content on their social media to increase engagement and inspire sharing and viral marketing. The rise of platforms like Pinterest and Instagram, and Facebook's multimillion-dollar acquisition of the latter, shows how visual content is becoming an increasingly important force for communication online.

Limit Self-Promotion

It will be uncomfortable at first to restrict and cut back content directly related to your products or services. However, if a product is explicitly promoted, few people will click on the content. And it is likely that no one will share it. Consumers are smart. They expect content that brings value to their lives, and you need to deliver it or else they'll cast you aside. When your publishing strategy is working, your brand and products will benefit from the explicit association with fantastic content. Consider applying the 80/20 rule: 80-percent of the content is audience-center and 20-percent of all content is brand-centric.

Distribute Your Content

If you're making high-quality content, you need to invest in getting some eyeballs on it. Unless you already have a massive social media following, you can't rely only on your own blog and social media accounts for distribution. Creating content that people want to share is always critical, but unless you strike viral gold, sharing might not be enough. Your Twitter followers probably aren't going to rally together to ensure that as many people as possible read your article. Take the time and effort to outline how each piece of content will be distributed across your various digital communications channels, carefully considering the audiences on each channel and tailoring how the content is shared on that channel for that audience. For example, a blog post share on Twitter might make sense for just a headline and a link. But a

blog post share on Facebook might be worthy of a one sentence description to entice visitors to click through. And a blog post share on Google+ might need a lengthy description and an image to go along with it. All of these things should be part of the planning for content marketing.

And don't forget about your company website: it is still the most efficient distribution hub for online content. Think about it as the central clearinghouse for all your digital communications channels and make sure that a visitor can go there to connect to any and all social channels for your brand.

Frequency and Timing

Frequency and timing depends on channel, of course. A Facebook post has an average shelf-life of 18 hours, so you will want to post daily if possible. For Twitter, a stream that moves rather quickly, you will want to post multiple times throughout the day and even repeat some of your posts. The frequency of blog posts can depend on the audience, the subject and the density of the material. You should also think about how your content will be viewed, depending on the channel: will it be chronologically (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) or by topic (i.e., Pinterest, Branch, Medium)? This should effect your frequency and timing. The point is to consider all of these variables as you are planning your content marketing strategy.

Measure

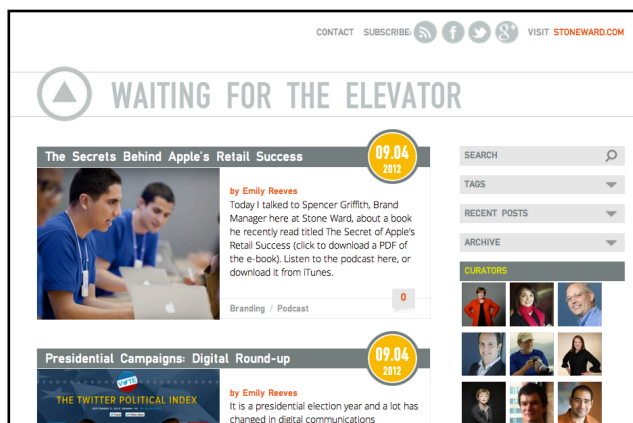
How many people is each post reaching? Are people engaging with the posts? Are they taking action, asking for more and really consuming the content? Look at these metrics regularly and adjust content, approaches and channels based on the activity you are observing from your audiences.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Stone Ward

[Stone Ward](#) is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 49, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.



About Emily Reeves

Director of Digital Strategy & Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital

technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

Sources

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[What You Need to Know About Facebook, Content and Brands](#)

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[Google+ Marketing: 5 Good Practices to Follow](#)

[The Rise of Visual Social Media](#)

[Emerging B2B Content Marketing Trends in 2012](#)

Image sources: Shutterstock