



Stop wasting your money on
**CONTENT
MARKETING**

Content Marketing Mistakes

Content has always been king.

Before the advent of the Internet, it was third-party content on TV, radio and in newspapers that provided the end value to our efforts. But the Internet now empowers marketers to drive content internally, thereby disrupting the “content marketing” landscape and opening up the industry to an array of providers.

On average, marketers now spend nearly a quarter of their budgets on content marketing (Cision). It may be no surprise, then, that the industry is expected to reach \$412 billion by 2021 (The Drum).

That’s a big responsibility.

As this new group of content creators evolves and grows, there will naturally be some mistakes, failures and waste (part of the learning process!). It’s time to learn from our experience and focus on value over volume — content first, marketing second.

It sounds simple, but it’s not. We marketers all need gentle reminders that, although we promote brands, we do not serve them. We serve our audience.

Here are some (perhaps not-so-gentle) reminders.



Everyone's an Expert

The No. 1 goal of content marketing is to position yourself as an expert in your industry, right? People will be more inclined to buy your goods and services if you're a thought leader. Or so the theory goes.

But the Internet is now overflowing with experts. When you Google "how to change a light bulb," there are over 100 million results. That's 100 million people who think they're an expert on changing light bulbs. Suddenly the joke "how many people does it take to screw in a lightbulb" isn't so funny.

So if the expert landscape is overpopulated, do we just give up on content marketing? Of course not. Instead of pumping out expertise articles by the armload, we need to work toward becoming visionaries.

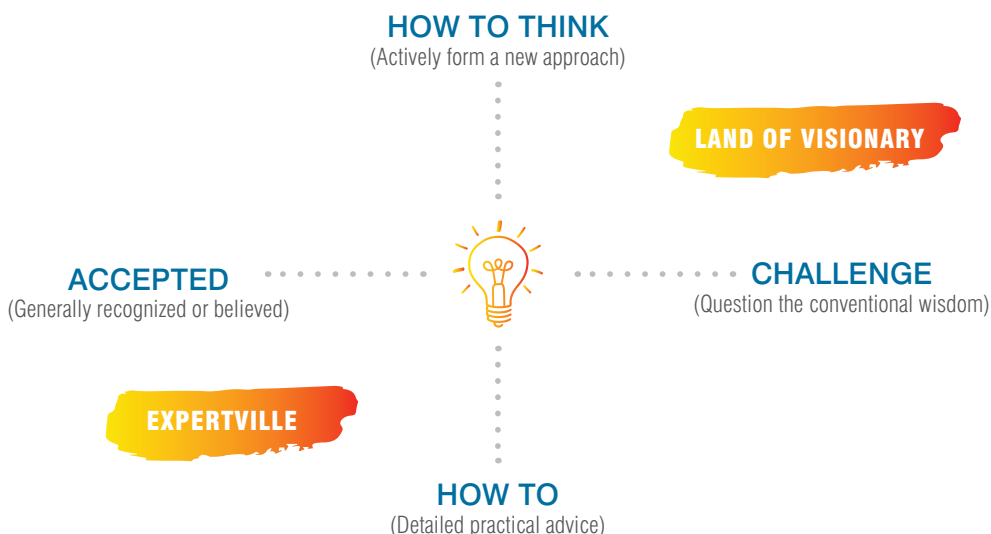
While experts answer "how-to," visionaries ask the "how-to-think" questions. Instead of being satisfied with best practices (which just become average

practices once everyone is doing them), visionaries form a new approach. The matrix below outlines where your content can fall in these categories. The new goal of content marketing should be to reach the much less populated "land of visionary."

We recommend following marketing strategist Caroline Nuttall's steps to becoming a visionary:

1. Ask questions until you find one that hasn't been answered. Investigate that question like a journalist.
2. Get feedback on the answers you find.
3. Simplify and amplify by focusing on what works and leaving behind what doesn't.

CAROLINE NUTTALL'S AMPLIFY MATRIX



You Don't Need a Video Crew to Start Shooting

You've heard it before: video is the future. It's the new king of attention, whether it's stopping your audience's scrolling thumbs on social or increasing your dwell-time on the web.

But isn't video too big of an investment for smaller campaigns?

Absolutely not.

In a world where some of the most watched videos online are shot by a YouTuber with a phone, audience expectations have adjusted accordingly. Combined with a growing preference for more authentic-feeling advertising, you don't need to shell out half your budget on production.

"Brands now spend a lot of money trying to make video *look* like it was shot on a phone," says Tim Schmoyer, founder of Video Creators. "So why not cut out the middle man?"

Try investing in inexpensive ways to add polish to your phone video — maybe a stabilizer and a small lapel mic. Then, get shooting! Share your company culture or give a quick demo on your product — anything that can help you connect with your audience in a meaningful way.

Remember that real authenticity means staying true to the platform you are using, so don't post a 3-minute vertical video to Twitter or hold your phone sideways for an Instagram Story. But if you know what platform you're shooting for (and *who* you're shooting for), you are ready to plan a solid video strategy.



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The Answer Is in the Data



It sounds straightforward: create content based on what your audience is asking. But how do you know what information they want? It's all about the data and your resources.

Heather Whaling, CEO of Geben Communications, believes that the best way to use data to build better content is to “apply analytics to understand your target markets and ensure your content is relevant to your audience.”

What does that mean? Use your resources! Here's how:

- Publish what your audience is asking you about — never waste a good conversation by having it in private. Share the answers to the questions you are frequently asked through a blog post or on another page on your site.
- Leverage the data you already have to create your content. What top five blog topics are performing the best? Which have the best engagement? The most site traffic, shares or time on site? Analyze the metrics and build a list of your top-performing content topics and styles to create new content you already know works.

Using data to build higher-performing content is no small feat. It requires research and analysis, but the reward is a larger, more engaged audience.

Be a Zero Hero

The way we approach search engine optimization (SEO) is changing. It is becoming increasingly popular to use voice search, so your web content needs to change to accommodate how people are searching.

According to Gartner Research, 30% of web browsing will be done without a screen by 2020. Your audience is asking questions using communicative language. Here's the problem for brands looking to be found: When your audience is using voice search, they are only receiving one answer. When their search assistant retrieves a result, that answer is almost always pulled from a featured snippet. (A featured snippet is a search result chosen by Google and shown in a special block at the top of the results page.)

So now what? The only position that matters is number one?

No, it's actually position zero. The featured snippet has now replaced the No. 1 position in a search result as the most coveted piece of real estate.

Here's how to optimize for voice search and the coveted featured snippet:

- Create relevant content based on what your audience is asking. If you have a list of customer FAQs, publish it.
- Use the questions your audience is asking as headings within your content. Make it easier for search engines (and people) to find you.
- Be concise. Use bullet points, lists and step-by-step instructions. Your voice-search audience wants an answer, not a story.
- Finally, implement regular SEO practices into your routine. Optimize your H1s and H2s, alt text and meta tags.



"Hey Siri, find the best pizza place in Boston."

"Hey Google, how many people live in Maine?"

"Hey Alexa, order me a blue iPhone X phone case with a 4-star or higher review."

Put the Letter in Newsletter

If you're doing email marketing right, it's the easiest channel to see success. After all, you're talking to someone who has opted-in, someone who wants to listen.

This explains why email marketing has up to a 38:1 return-on-investment. It's still the backbone of our content efforts, according to Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs.

Email is also the only remaining distribution platform where people, not algorithms, control if your content is seen. And yet, you may not be talking to people at all when you send your weekly or monthly eNewsletter — at least not in a way that matters.

When we're developing an email newsletter, almost all of us remain focused on the "news" aspect of this distribution approach.

We share the latest or greatest happenings in our companies, whether that's a new hire or a new blog. It seems so simple, even formulated. That's the problem.

What we may be missing is that, while news is ubiquitous, we all still love receiving and reading personal letters. Therefore, a good email newsletter focuses on the being a "letter" first, and it should do three things:

- Come from someone the reader cares about (such as your company's CEO, not info@).
- Speak in a way that makes the reader matter. Pretend you have one subscriber and write to them. By writing at a human level, you're including everyone.
- Be recognizable. A great newsletter has a style, embedded in a brand voice, that tells people who you are immediately.

And while a good email newsletter is a great start, keep in mind the next level of your email marketing efforts. Automated emails, which are individualized and triggered by a specific customer action, drive 60% higher open rates and double the click-through rate compared to an eNewsletter that is sent out at one time to a master email list.



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Work Smarter, Not Harder

Users grow more and more impatient as technology continues to transform the means of communication. They have grown to expect a timely and personalized customer experience.

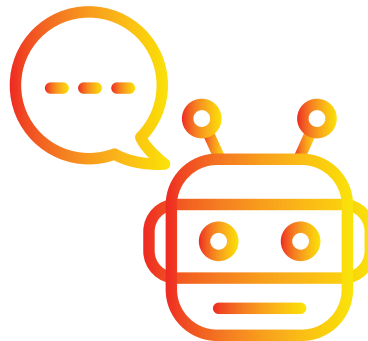
To address consumers as quickly as possible, we've exhausted ourselves trying to keep up via email, live chat and direct messages. An emerging pathway to customer service is chatbots — the artificial intelligence that engages users when they visit a website.

Chatbots can transform your customer service because they can offer instant answers, 24-7. Additionally, chatbots have few incremental costs. However, personalized chatbots capable of this kind of transformation can be a heavy up-front investment.

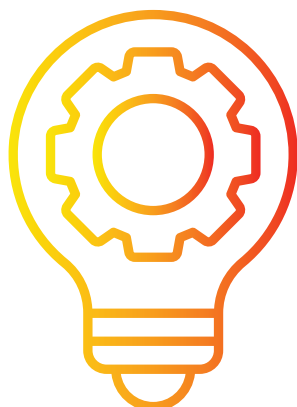
A study of 6,000+ chatbots found that only 11.8% of users abandoned their chat (SnatchBot), indicating that users are open to having conversations with chatbots.

Chatbots should be personalized in order to address customers in a way that's not only appropriate to the conversation they want to have, but also in a way that's more familiar to them. To do so, be sure to integrate your brand's voice.

The natural frustration around this emerging technology happens when users feel misled. Chatbots are bots, not people...so you shouldn't disguise your bot as a human. Transparency can help set expectations, but make sure you know when to intervene.



You Have a Lot to Repurpose



You're likely exhausting yourself trying to maintain a flow of fresh, consistent content. In the fight for audience attention, you've overhauled your efforts — and your budget, time and resources — to be prolific. The weight on quantity over quality has prohibited a happy marriage of the two.

Great content and consistency need to be a package deal, but how do you prioritize both with a limited budget? It's simple: Work smarter, not harder, by repurposing your content. Here's how:

- Analyze your existing content to see what's worked best, and then figure out how you can improve on these results. Refresh and update existing content.
- Once you optimize, republish. Amplify your refreshed content through your own platforms, such as social media and email.
- Target third-party websites to push out your amplified content to increase visibility.

Repurposed content will not only save you time and money, but it'll keep your best content actionable.

Artificial Intelligence Is Here for You

When you're watching a movie or series on Netflix, you receive suggestions for other entertainment on your dashboard based on your search history. Usually, the streaming service is pretty spot-on, but how do they decide what you'll like?

Artificial Intelligence (AI). No, it's not a robot that is going to take your job; it's a tool that is going to drastically change the way we make marketing decisions.

Our lives are already machine-assisted. Think about smartphone features and curated content. You may even have quick-response email or SMS features enabled on your devices. All of these are derived from AI learning.

AI gives us the information we need to make smarter marketing decisions, streamline our jobs and help our businesses be more profitable. Whether it's recommending highly-targeted content to users, optimizing email send times to boost open rates or determining topics and titles for content marketing calendars based on past performances and forecasting, AI is going to make your marketing efforts more effective than ever before.

How can you implement AI into your business operations?

Paul Roetzer, founder of Marketing AI Institute, boils it down to three steps:

- Take a look at your repetitive, manual marketing tasks. Determine what could be intelligently automated.
- Assess the opportunities to get more out of your data — discover insights, predict outcomes and devise strategies.
- Explore the AI capabilities of your current marketing tools — whether you have content analysis or speech-to-text software, many of these tools already contain AI capabilities.

A tool like Google's Cloud Speech-to-Text is powered by machine learning and can recognize 120 languages and variants thanks to its deep-learning algorithms (cloud.google.com/speech-to-text/). This tool can be utilized for transcribing conversations in real time, as well as transcribing audio from video clips in foreign or domestic languages.

Artificial intelligence is still developing, but it has already made an impact on the way we create and distribute content.

You Don't Need a Celebrity, You Need a Partner



There's a tendency to assume that the term "influencer" has one definition: someone with a huge following who has a broad appeal to a large audience.

Not only is the definition dead wrong, but even the word itself doesn't do justice to what these people should be to you — creative partners.

Finding someone with a large reach and paying them to post your ad on their platform might sound good on the surface, but what will it do for your marketing goals? Adding more noise to an audience that isn't engaged means that even if you reach all those people, they'll be tuning you out.

Instead, partner with content creators in your vertical. Find people who share your values and who are already making content that's relevant to your audience. Then, you'll find that the work you do together is reaching the most relevant and engaged people for your message.

Tom's of Maine leveraged brand-aligned micro-influencers who had only 500 to 5,000 followers. This move led to a 600% increase in consumer engagement, far beyond what they could've ever achieved through their own social channels.

Trust your partners. They have a loyal following for a reason. They understand their audience and platform better than anyone. If you give them the freedom to do what they do best, you might find that they provide the most valuable service of all: generating content ideas for you.

You Can Earn More Than Eight Seconds of Attention

In this world of social media and content on demand, you've been told that your audience's attention span is short and growing shorter. To stay in the game, you need shorter content to match.

For certain platforms, this may make sense. Twitter was built for snippets of short, "snackable" content. And yet, just last year, Twitter increased its character limit in order to give its users more breathing room when creating posts.

As a general rule, short content is not better. According to Andrew Davis, author of *Brandscaping* and CEO of Monumental Shift, we've removed everything that really makes our content interesting in the rush to get a few seconds of our audience's attention. We're giving it all away up front and we've stopped giving people a reason to keep paying attention.

It's time to stop.

But how do you make longer content work? How do you earn more of your audience's attention?

Content only becomes too long when the audience has no more questions. When they know everything they need to know, they become bored. So instead of revealing everything upfront, we need to nurture curiosity in our audiences. The more curiosity we create, the longer our content can be before we must reveal the payoff — what the audience needs to know.



You Need to Get Your Audience's Opinion



We're giving it all away up front and we've stopped giving people a reason to keep paying attention.

It's no secret that public trust in online platforms like Facebook is waning. So how are you supposed to garner goodwill and trust with your audience if you're reaching them through a platform they find suspect?

To meaningfully connect, you'll need to do more than add to the noise they're trying to filter every day. Trust is a two-way street. That means you need to invite your viewers and readers to interact with your content and add their voice to your platform.

Interactive content, such as embedded polls or quizzes, makes users feel as though brands are listening to them. As a result, they begin to feel as though the source of the content is more trustworthy.

The research backs it up. Interactive content sees a massive 2:15 average dwell-time as compared to the famous :08 industry average. According to research by Nielsen, brands that used interactive content (as compared to passive content, such as a blog article) saw a 282% brand lift — 16x Nielsen's norm.

If that isn't enough for you, consider this: adding interactive polls to your online content could also give you insight into the mind of your audience.

A meaningful connection AND market research in one?

Will you be trying out interactive content? [YES] / [YES]

*Ready to
find the
perfect partner
to amplify
your brand?*

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