



Best Practices for a Well-Executed Content Marketing Plan in 2020

Content marketers are well aware that having a solid strategy can help them reap greater rewards from their content marketing efforts. Unfortunately, as research by the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and MarketingProfs, sponsored by Sitecore, point out, not all organizations have a “documented content marketing strategy.” While the numbers are growing, heading into 2020, only 41% of all B2B respondents indicated that they do; only 33% of B2C respondents from CMI’s 2019 research indicated the same. What should content marketers be doing now to prepare to hit the ground running in 2020?

LOOK BACK BEFORE YOU LOOK FORWARD

Planning for 2020 should start with a look back at 2019. “Content marketers should analyze what content performed well in 2019, and why, to determine what they should replicate or do more of in 2020,” says Andy Zimmerman, CMO of Evergage. Most marketers recognize the importance of analytics, Zimmerman states, but “they sometimes forget that content marketing should be evaluated using downstream metrics like number and value of sales opportunities influenced.” Analytics “should drive selection and prioritization of content initiatives,” Zimmerman says. “Content for the sake of content is nice to have, but content for the sake of lead generation and sales enablement is critical.”

CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

“If you don’t know where you’re going / Any road will take you there”—these lyrics from George Harrison’s song “Any Road” are immediately relevant to planning. When planning, content marketers need to consider where they want to go (i.e., their goals) before they can think about how they’re going to get there.

Karen Dawson, VP of brand marketing for Lionbridge, says, “In putting together a great 2020 marketing plan, it’s important to reflect on whether your company will have the same goals.” At Lionbridge, she states, three goals are in place: “Connect with our audience, attract new customers, and deepen loyalty with existing customers.” Those goals prompt action, including “working hard to plan well-crafted, powerful content that drives social media sharing and engagement.”

LINKS TO THE SOURCE

“B2B Content Marketing 2020: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America”

contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2020_B2B_Research_Final.pdf

“B2C Content Marketing 2019: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America”

contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019_B2C_Research-FINAL-PDF-12_10_18.pdf

Google’s BERT update

blog.google/products/search/search-language-understanding-bert

FIND YOUR FOCUS

Paige Arnof-Fenn is founder and CEO of Mavens & Moguls, a global strategic marketing firm that she started 18 years ago. Arnof-Fenn says she is a big fan of content marketing. It is, she believes, “a great way to build your brand, increase your visibility more broadly, raise your profile, and attract more clients.” Arnof-Fenn has positioned herself as a thought leader in the marketing space, regularly contributing content to publications such as *Entrepreneur* and *Forbes*.

Strategy involves having a clear understanding of your desired audience and picking platforms that are most likely to reach and resonate with them. For Arnof-Fenn, as a professional service business, LinkedIn is her top choice for sharing content. Finding your specific focus for disseminating content is the key to being most efficient and effective with your efforts. You don’t need to distribute your content through every available channel—just the one(s) most likely to connect with your audience.

THINK BEYOND THE WRITTEN WORD

Technology is increasingly affecting how content is disseminated, though, and Jakub Kliszczak, a marketing specialist with CrazyCall, is keeping that top of mind. In 2020, he wants to make sure he’s meeting the expectations of the 2020 reader. This means, according to Kliszczak, that his content will not only be in a text format, but will also contain video and audio.

Consider, too, the growing impact of voice search. Kliszczak says that, in 2020, he will be increasingly focused on making sure his content is optimized for voice search. More and more

consumers are using their mobile and voice-assistant devices (e.g., Amazon's Alexa, Google Home, or Apple's Siri) rather than their keyboards or keypads to find information. This needs to be a critical consideration for content marketers.

THINK QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Google continues to tweak its algorithms in a quest to deliver the highest quality content to the millions who use this most popular of search engines. In recognition of Google's continued algorithm refinements to increasingly favor high-quality content, Kliszcak says he will be focused on quality over quantity in terms of content creation: "Ten 5,000-word blog posts instead of 50 thousand-word blog posts."

However, others recommend the opposite approach—more bite-sized bits of content. Adam Gingery is digital strategy and paid search manager with Majux Marketing. "For the last couple of years, a huge article on our client's site called 'The Complete Guide to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) in 2018' was getting tons of traffic, for all sorts of queries," he says. "We were ranking and getting answer boxes for things like, 'how to apply for Social Security disability,' 'how to qualify for Social Security disability,' etc." Then, he states, with the release of Google's Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) algorithm update—which allows anyone to train a question-answering system—things changed.

"Since the BERT update, our more specific content has gotten more traffic, and those catch-all pages have dropped off," says Gingery. "Our blog posts that address a singular question in a very in-depth manner are gaining popularity." Based on these experiences, Gingery says that in 2020, he plans to use tools such as Google's Keyword Planner and its People Also Ask feature, SEMRush's Keyword Magic Tool, and Ahrefs' question filter "to find specific questions to answer, and stop focusing on huge, expansive 'complete guide' pages." In addition, he states, it may also make sense to break some existing content up into multiple pages.

What works today may not tomorrow, and what works for one content marketer may not work for another. It's essential to pay close attention to what's working for you on an ongoing basis, making adjustments as needed. For content marketers focused on the right channel(s) to reach their audiences, clear goals, and insightful analytics, 2020 is likely to be a very good year.

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»»» Ecommerce PREDICTIONS

Harry Thakkar, an ecommerce and retail expert and partner at Avatria, a digital commerce firm, shares his ecommerce predictions for 2020:

Greater Emphasis on AI-Based Personalization

- AI and machine learning were very big buzzwords in 2019 and made some inroads in the ecommerce space primarily via chatbots and some personalization tools.
- This trend is going to increase substantially in 2020; the recommendation platforms that provide this capability will significantly increase, and, more importantly, they will be accessible to SMB (small and medium business) players in addition to the largest enterprises.
- In 2020 there will also be new areas within ecommerce that AI will become relevant for, primarily as it relates to shipping and pricing. From a shipping standpoint, AI will be used to provide more accurate delivery dates and times for customers based on their specific address while also assisting on the back end to help optimize shipping costs that ecommerce sites have to pay. From a pricing standpoint, AI-based dynamic pricing will start to become more prevalent and will take factors such as current demand, competitor pricing, and shopper preferences into account. This type of pricing within ecommerce will have parallels to how airlines typically charge for plane tickets online.

Consolidation and New Entrants

- The major players in the ecommerce world (Salesforce, SAP, Adobe, etc.) will continue to get bigger through acquisitions in order to help them fill any gaps they have in their offerings.
- 2019 saw a number of major acquisitions take place (many related to personalization and AI), and this trend is going to be amplified in 2020.
- In addition to this, with the introduction of social commerce on Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, we may start to see some large new players make a more active foray into the ecommerce arena.

Expansion of Headless Commerce

- This is in many ways contradictory to the consolidation trend; however, I see both consolidation and headless commerce trending in parallel in 2020. For customers who are not interested in implementing large, expensive platforms with one vendor, headless commerce offers more flexibility and the ability to choose best-of-breed solutions to power their ecommerce storefronts. Headless commerce is much further behind the major players from a market share standpoint, so it will likely not have as significant of an impact, but this is one approach to keep an eye on.

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