



Are You Using the Right Metrics to Measure Your Content Strategy's Effectiveness?

According to A Brief History of Content Marketing, an infographic from the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), content marketing is really nothing new. But it has become a big deal in the digital era. While people such as Benjamin Franklin and Charles Scribner and companies such as the Edison Electric Lighting Co. and Johnson & Johnson have been using content marketing to sell for literally hundreds of years, the term has been given new life by the ability for virtually anyone—and anyone virtually—to share information with the masses.

THE METHOD BEHIND CONTENT MADNESS

They share for a reason—to get attention and, ultimately, to sell something (a product, a service, or their own thought leadership). Toward this end, though, some lose sight of what the goal really is or should be: sales. Instead, we often hear a lot about metrics, such as the following:

- Clicks and click-through rate (CTR)—the number of people clicking on a link
- Shares—the number of people who are sharing the content you've posted
- Scroll depth—how far down a page people will scroll
- Time on screen—how long people stay on a page

It's not that these metrics are necessarily bad. They do matter, and, as marketers know, they can provide leading indicators of how more bottom line-oriented metrics may perform—the kind of metrics that board members, CEOs, CFOs, and other members of the C-suite are most interested in. Still, digital marketers need to be cautious in terms of how they consider and communicate these metrics as they're interacting with bosses, clients, and, especially, senior level executives and business owners.

METRIC MANAGEMENT

While digital marketers are understandably interested in process measures (such as followers, clicks, shares, and retweets), these metrics are best discussed and celebrated in their own internal circles. Business-savvy senior leaders are less interested in knowing how many people have visited a

blog post than they are in how many people took some action based on that post. Even then, there's a hierarchy in terms of the type of action that senior leaders value most: Leads, conversions, and requests for more information are good, but, ultimately, what generates excitement in the C-suite is sales.

Henry McIntosh, director of Twenty One Twelve, explains the relationship between the kind of metrics that marketers value and the kind of metrics they should be reporting to clients and senior executives. "Going beyond the vanity metrics is crucial to ensuring a campaign's success," he says. "At our agency, we call them 'selective metrics,' because content marketers tend to report a different metric each month depending on performance." At Twenty One Twelve, McIntosh says, "we start with the end in mind. Nearly every client we have wants to use content to drive new business inquiries; a distant second is 'brand exposure.'" He shares the metrics his team reports to clients:

- Number of leads generated
- Cost of acquiring each lead
- Quality of lead/conversion rate
- Lifetime value of conversions
- ROI based on lifetime value of clients acquired

Internally, though, McIntosh states, the marketing team looks at the following metrics—some of the drivers of the ROI-focused metrics shared with clients:

- CTR
- Amount of content downloads and new subscribers
- Time taken and point at which subscriber converts to inbound prospect

That two-pronged approach, he says, "allows us to understand what's working and what's not so we can optimize or double down in the areas where we are effective."

GOING BEYOND VANITY METRICS

Digital marketers can also play a role in helping to connect the dots between process (followers, CTR, and other vanity metrics) and outcome (e.g., sales) metrics. Chris

LINKS TO THE SOURCE

A Brief History of Content Marketing

contentmarketinginstitute.com/2016/07/history-content-marketing

The Context Marketing Revolution:

How to Motivate Buyers in the Age of Infinite Media

amazon.com/gp/product/B07V5WWFX

Nunn is a digital PR consultant who has worked with a number of different SEO agencies, and he's seen some different approaches to measurements and strategies around them. "From my experience, CFOs and leadership teams are more impressed by traffic and conversions than anything else when it comes to a content/content marketing strategy," Nunn says. "Links look nice and they're easy to read/report on, but they don't really tell you much and can be pretty misleading as to what end result they have. You can build a ton of links but see little to no impact if they're not the right audience or on the right sites."

[D]igital marketers need to be cautious in terms of how they consider and communicate these metrics. ...

It's important for digital marketers in any setting—in-house, agency, or freelance—to understand the financial focus of most of the clients, or bosses, they'll be working with. "By working on strategies that show traffic and conversion change, CFOs and leadership are more able to assign a budget figure against the activities as they can more accurately see if a strategy is bringing people into the sales process and generating leads," says Nunn. And, of course, at the end of the day, what matters most to any CEO, CFO, or senior leader is sales.

Others agree. Adam Hempenstall, CEO and founder of Better Proposals, says, "The number one metric that we look at is the conversion rate. It doesn't matter how many links or shares we get if it doesn't translate to cold, hard cash." Hempenstall says that based on existing data, he can determine, roughly, what level of traffic to expect and then measure the impact of that traffic. "If we spend hours upon hours creating content, building links to it and driving traffic to it, conversions need to happen," he states. "For us, it's the conversion from visitor to paid user that matters."

MAKING THE CONNECTION

In *The Context Marketing Revolution: How to Motivate Buyers in the Age of Infinite Media*, author and principal of marketing insights for Salesforce, Mathew Sweezey, offers a new, broader, and arguably more relevant way to evaluate the effectiveness of content used to guide prospects through the decision-making process. Instead of focusing on content, he recommends focusing on context across the customer journey, starting with helping people achieve the value they seek in the moment they need it. He calls this metric "a weighted pipeline."

He explains how the model works: "By seeing the entire customer journey in a single model, marketers can showcase many value metrics." These include the following:

- Net new demand
- Future demand
- How marketing affects customers' motivation across the journey
- How marketing increases existing revenue by decreasing customer churn
- The impact of increased brand advocacy

Sweezey argues that as marketers increasingly find a place in the C-suite and companies acknowledge marketing's impact as a primary business driver, marketers must be able to track and report the impact of their efforts on a balance sheet—which the weighted pipeline does.

Digital marketers can play an important part in helping to educate clients and senior leaders about the significant and cost-effective role that content has in boosting the bottom line. As they seek to do so, though, they need to be clearly focused not so much on the metrics that matter to them, but on the metrics that matter to the people who follow the numbers. If you can quantifiably demonstrate that your content can drive the numbers in a positive direction, you can demonstrate the value of the work you do.

LINDA POPHAL (LINGRENSINGPOPHAL.COM; [LINKEDIN.COM/IN/LINGRENSINGPOPHAL](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lingreningpophal)) IS A FREELANCE BUSINESS JOURNALIST AND CONTENT MARKETER WITH A WIDE RANGE OF WRITING CREDITS FOR VARIOUS BUSINESS AND TRADE PUBLICATIONS. IN ADDITION, SHE DOES CONTENT MARKETING FOR FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND INDIVIDUALS ON A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS, INCLUDING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS, AS WELL AS MARKETING, TECHNOLOGY, AND HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY TRENDS. SHE ALSO OWNS AND MANAGES A CONTENT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION FIRM, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, LLC (STRATCOMMUNICATIONS.COM). SEND YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS COLUMN TO ECLETTERS@INFOTODAY.COM OR TWEET US (@ITINNEWSBREAKS).