

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

Content Marketing for Ecommerce Retailers



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INTRODUCTION

Content marketing has taken the digital world by storm.

As our society becomes more averse to the sales-heavy marketing messages found on traditional advertising channels, content marketing has proven itself as an effective way to build trust and demonstrate your brand's industry expertise.

By providing valuable content to help shoppers solve problems and answer questions, ecommerce brands like yours are able to reach potential customers earlier in the buying cycle and foster a trusting relationship with these would-be buyers.

People buy from brands they know and trust, and content marketing is the perfect way to show your customers why your brand is the one they should be buying from.

What Is Content Marketing?



Before we get into developing your content marketing strategy, let's take a moment to get clear on what we mean when we say "content marketing."

Content marketing is a form of marketing that involves the publishing of online media as a way of educating or entertaining a targeted audience in an effort to establish interest in a product or brand.

This online media comes in a wide variety of formats including blog posts, videos, ebooks, etc. As a rule of thumb, this content avoids selling, instead working to educate the audience as a way of demonstrating industry expertise while exposing potential customers to the brand at the same time.

7 Ecommerce Benefits of Content Marketing

The benefits that content marketing provides to ecommerce brands like yours are vast. Let us share some of the most important with you now...

1. Reach Buyers Earlier

Content can be used to help shoppers understand that they have a need. Rather than waiting to advertise to people who already understand their need, content allows you to connect with a buyer earlier in their life cycle in order to begin nurturing them toward a conversion.

2. Showcase Expertise

Content also gives you the opportunity to showcase your industry expertise, which is a major component of earning a buyer's trust. If you can show people why you're worthy of their sale rather than just telling them, they'll be far more likely to buy from you.

3. Establish Trust

People buy from brands they know and trust, and content allows you to develop that trusted connection by providing the valuable information that helps them solve their problem or meet their need.

4. Qualify Leads Automatically

One of the most underestimated benefits of content is that it can help you automatically qualify your traffic. Rather than advertising to vast groups of people who may or may not be interested in what you have to offer, you can craft content based around the specific pain points of your target audience. That way, the traffic you drive to your site is more likely to find your offering relevant to their needs.

5. Nurture Leads to Convert

By connecting with buyers earlier in their lifecycle you're able to approach the sales process more gently. By slowly providing value and earning their trust you can nurture them toward a conversion rather than the high-pressure approach of traditional advertising (hitting them over the head with a "buy now" ad).

6. Build Organic Traffic

Creating optimized content (more on that in a later section) drives relevant traffic to your website without needing to continually pay for ads.

7. Decrease Long-Term Marketing Costs

By driving traffic to your site with content, you make your marketing investment once and watch each piece send regular, predictable traffic for years to come. Sure, the cost to create optimized content may seem high at first (unless you're creating it all yourself), but the long-term results it produces are often far less expensive than the same

The Buyer's Journey

amount of traffic obtained through paid advertising. The buyer's journey is the series of actions a buyer takes leading up to a sale; the active research process that helps someone determine whether or not they're going to buy from you. It's a very important concept to understand when developing an effective content marketing strategy as it will help you determine the types of content you need to create for each stage.

Different marketing institutions have different versions of the buyer's journey, with various numbers and names for the stages, however we're going to keep things simple. The most important stages to understand in content marketing are the Awareness, Consideration, and Decision Stages. Just to be clear, content can also be used to support the Purchase, Post-Purchase, and Re-Purchase Stages, but for now let's focus on the three core stages.



Awareness Stage

In the awareness stage, your buyer has yet to determine that they have a need. They are beginning to come aware of their problem but they don't yet understand the various options they have to go about meeting that need.

For example, let's say your ecommerce store sells weight loss supplements. In order to introduce potential customers to the idea that they should lose weight, you may decide to create a blog post on the long-term benefits of maintaining a healthy weight, or even the risks of carrying excess weight.



Consideration Stage

In the consideration stage, your buyer has become aware of their problem. They are now ready to seek out the various solutions to their problem so they can decide how to solve it.

Using the same example, you may decide to create another blog post or a downloadable guide called "7 Proven Ways to Lose Weight and Live Healthy." In this resource you would list the top ways people could support their weight loss goals, your supplements being one of them.



Decision Stage

By the decision stage your buyer is aware of their problem and the solutions that exist to solve it. It's up to your decision-stage content to show them why your product is the way to go.

For example, you may create a 3-part video series that you email to the people who downloaded your consideration stage guide. The first could include all of the benefits of your product, the second could be on how to use it most effectively, then the third would consist of user-generated content (more on that in a bit) that shows real-life success stories that your product helped your customers achieve.

4 Highly Effective Content Formats



1. Blog Posts

Blog posts make up the backbone of an effective content marketing strategy. Blog posts have the power to drive

the initial traffic to your site and expose new audiences to your brand, plus the power to educate that audience and build the trust necessary to convert them into a paying customer.

Blog posts are also highly versatile in that they can be created for each stage of the buyer's journey that lead up to a sale, and even be used as powerful resources to support the customer experience after a sale.

2. Downloadable Offers

Downloadable offers can come in the form of style guides, product guides, ebooks, white papers, checklists, cheat sheets, tip sheets, templates, webinars, and virtually anything else valuable enough that people would be willing to exchange their contact information for it.

Once you've driven someone to your website with a blog post, for example, you should work to get them to download an offer related to that blog post by including a CTA (or multiple CTAs) on the blog page.

You can also use PPC ads to promote your offer directly and start using it to earn leads as soon as it's created. Either way, the point is to require the offer to be downloaded in exchange for an email address (and potentially a few more relevant details).

By capturing a lead's contact information you're able to remain in contact with them and continue to nurture them toward a conversion. This typically requires sending them more valuable content, offers, or promotional emails.

3. Videos

Video is a very powerful content format when executed correctly. You can relay far more information in the time it takes to watch a video than the equivalent amount of time spent reading a written resource.

Videos are highly engaging and can showcase your products or brand in a way that still photos just can't.

That said, it's also very easy to lose people's attention with video, so careful planning and production need to be of top priority in order to maintain viewer engagement.

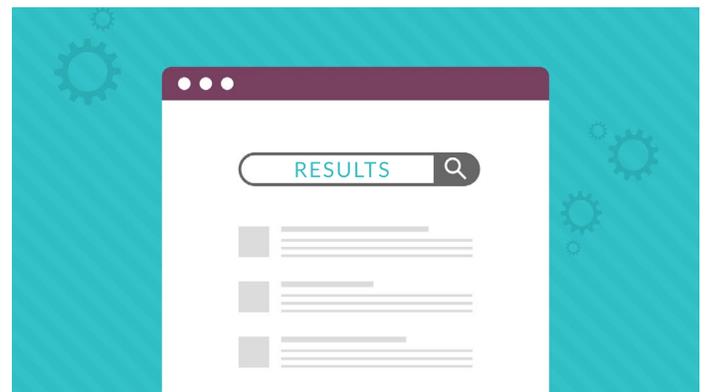
4. User-Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) is essentially any content provided by a user of your product. User content can come in the form of written reviews, video testimonials, or photos or videos of your product(s) being used in real-life applications.

User-generated content is especially effective because it's a very powerful trust signal for your prospective buyers. Word of mouth has always been the most effective form of advertising and user-generated content captures the power of these trusted peer reviews. This enables brands to use it to showcase real people using their real products in real life rather than having to sell them on the benefits using traditional methods.

UGC is such an important concept that we've actually created a comprehensive guide on how to develop a [full-scope user-generated content marketing strategy](#). Be sure to use it as a resource when developing yours!

How to Create Content That Gets Results



Unfortunately, content marketing isn't as simple as creating a few blog posts and ebooks and watching the conversions pour in. With the mass popularity of this marketing format, competition is fierce.

Don't get discouraged, though.

This section is all about how to create highly effective content that will allow you to outpace the competition and drive conversions.



Blog Posts

Remember when we referred to blog posts as the backbone of your content marketing program?

This is especially true for brands that sell online. Your entire online business is based on driving qualified traffic to your site and converting that traffic into leads and paying customers. The first part of that is driving traffic, and to do so you need to understand the basics of SEO.

Search engine optimization is more complicated than it used to be, sure. But that doesn't mean that it has to be hard. In fact, ranking your content is largely dependent on one thing.

Value.

Providing value has always been, and will always be, the number one focus of Google (and other search engines). You can score a lot of points with the search engines if you can prove that your content provides their audience with the value they're seeking.

In fact, most of the metrics Google tracks to determine

whether or not to rank your content tie back to providing value. For example, Google considers time on page (TOP, or the amount of time someone stays reading your content) a very important metric.

The reason?

Because the more time your readers spend on the page, the more likely they are to have found it valuable enough to continue consuming. If the content was not valuable, readers would likely click back after a few seconds. See how that works?

While the full scope of SEO and search marketing optimization will take some time to master, the basics are pretty straightforward and can have a dramatic impact on your content's performance.

Here are a few tips to get you started.

Create Buyer Personas

One of the best ways to provide value to your reader is to focus on writing for the unique audience you're targeting. Write to address their unique pain points and speak the language they speak.

The best way to do so is by creating buyer personas. Personas are semi-fictitious representations of your ideal buyer. These buyer personas will help you to identify the needs of your buyer and create content to support those needs, which will help you drive more qualified traffic to your site.

These personas are a foundational element of effective content creation and should be used when creating any type of content for any stage of the buyer's journey. For more on creating effective buyer personas, see this [template from HubSpot](#).

Topic Selection

Writing on topics that you think your audience wants to read will only get you so far. To define the topics you need to be writing about, start by listing all of the potential questions your buyers face before purchasing your product.

These questions will be specific to your personas, but they'll all tie back to helping them solve a problem that can be remedied with your product or service. Be sure to document this list of questions as a part of your search marketing optimization strategy.

Research Relevant Keywords



If you're like most brands, keyword research may be the area where your search marketing suffers the most. It's important to write for a particular keyword related to the topic of your article and the search query your reader inputs into Google.

Keywords are words that Google uses to help understand what your content is about. If you don't structure your article around keywords that you know people are searching for, you're writing without knowing whether or not your article will actually drive any traffic.

Even if you are doing it, it's important to make sure you're doing it right.

Paid tools like [Ahrefs](#) and [Semrush](#) can help you to determine a keyword monthly search volume and the competition you'll face when attempting to rank for that keyword. Free tools like [Google Keyword Planner](#) can help you if you're not ready to make the investment in these powerful tools.

Search Volume



Search volume is the number of times (on average) a particular word or phrase is searched for each month. Rather than making assumptions about search volume, be sure to use a tool to help you avoid writing for keywords that don't actually get searched for.

Keyword Difficulty

With over 2 million blog posts being published every day, you can bet you'll face some tough competition for many of the most popular words you want to write for. That's where tools like the ones mentioned above come in handy. Each have a keyword difficulty score that will help you to determine how hard it will be to rank for a particular keyword.

Search Marketing Optimization Pro Tip: Focus on using 1-2 long-tail keywords (multiple word phrases) throughout your copy, as they'll be more specific to user queries related to your business. Broad-term keywords may drive a lot of traffic, but most of it won't be looking for what you're selling.

Length and Comprehensiveness

Once again, length ties into the perceived value of your article. Longer posts are more likely to contain more valuable information and be more important to searchers. A rule of thumb to give your content a fighting chance is to write a longer post than the articles that currently rank on Google's first page for your keyword.

Rather than focusing purely on word count, aim to include more variety and information than the other posts as well. A more comprehensive post is a more valuable post.

How to Use Your Target Keyword

The frequency and positioning of your keyword is also important. As a general rule of thumb, your content should:

Include the keyword in the first 100 words and last 100 words

Include your keyword in about every 100-200 words throughout the body of your article

Not use your keyword more than every 50 words

Aim for a keyword density of around 0.5-2%

Include your keyword in your title, heading, and subheadings

Graphics and Images

Images help to break up long blocks of text and provide a lot of value to your readers. Use images, graphs, charts, and other visual aids to support your text.

In fact, a recent [Cornell study](#) found that readers were 29% more likely to believe the claims made in an article if they were supported by a graph. They don't need to be complicated, they just need to provide an accurate visual representation of your data.

Metadata

When you go to publish your post, it's important to give Google as much information about it as possible to help it decide who to show it to. Nearly every publishing platform lets you edit your metadata.

Search Marketing Optimization Pro Tip: *WordPress plugins like [Yoast](#) help make editing metadata easy.*

The information included above will give you a massive head start to successful SEO, but it's vital that you continue to learn how to optimize your posts even further. Don't miss great resources from SEO masters like [Brian Dean](#) and [Neil Patel](#).



Downloadable Offers

Blog posts may be the backbone of your content marketing strategy, but the downloadable offer is what turns a website visitor into a lead. Once you have that email address, you're one step closer to driving a conversion. As such, these downloadable offers have to be highly valuable.

A good rule of thumb for creating highly valuable offers is to create something so great that you could charge for it, then give it away for free.

The more value you can provide to your ecommerce leads, the more likely they are to see you as an industry expert deserving of their trust and their sale.

CTAs

The value of these resources lies in actually getting people to download them. This requires that they be promoted effectively with powerful landing CTAs (calls-to-action) and landing pages (where someone lands when they click on your CTA).

Every blog post you write should include a next step—an action that the reader should take—and that next step will often include a CTA to explore one of your offers.

For example, this guide will give you a massive head start to developing an effective content marketing strategy, but you should really be sure to read our [Ultimate Guide to User-Generated Content](#) to take your content marketing to the next level!

These CTAs don't need to be salesy or aggressive.

Instead, write them as if you're providing your readers with a valuable next step that they can take to support their goals (you are). Just make sure you're clearly outlining the benefits the reader will receive from the resource you're pointing them toward.

These CTAs can also be designed and placed throughout your content or on other part of your website. It's important to drive traffic to these lead-generation machines from as many sources as possible.

Landing Pages

Once you get your website visitor to click on a CTA, you'll need to incentivize them to actually fill out the form on your landing page and download the offer. That means telling your reader all about the offer in as few words as possible.

Focus on writing benefit-driven content. Tell people about the benefits they'll receive from the guide rather than just what is included inside. This way you're inciting an emotional response rather than just a logical one.

Truly effective landing page design is both an art and a science and requires testing different versions to determine what is most effective for each ecommerce audience.

That said, there are some widely accepted industry best practices that will help to provide you with a massive head start. Check out this [article from Unbounce](#) or search for landing page design best practices and read away!

Evergreen Content

Creating evergreen resources (those that remain valuable, relevant, and effective for longer than just a few weeks or months) is always a good idea, but it's especially true for these offers as they represent a significant investment of resources to produce.

Yes, a seasonal style guide may be achievable for larger

fashion ecommerce brands, but it may not represent the same value for smaller brands with smaller revenue figures and a tighter marketing budget.

Instead, focus on creating resources that you can promote and use for at least a year (hopefully longer). This is a concept that should be applied to all of your content marketing.



Videos

Video is typically a more advanced content format. That's not to say that novice ecommerce content creators can't use it successfully, it's just that it typically requires a bit more effort to produce a high-performing video.

Focus on creating a highly informative, entertaining, funny, or visually stunning video to keep viewers engaged with your content. If possible, try to make your video all of these things!

The video quality coming from most point-and-shoot or even smartphone cameras is good enough for most brands to produce their video content, so don't worry too much about investing in new equipment.

Instead, focus on creating videos and testing them with your audience. Trial by fire is often the best way for new video content creators to learn about what their ideal buyer responds to best.

Post your videos to your social media feeds and see what your followers engage with the most. For example, does your audience appreciate editing that jumps from clip to clip to keep them continually updated with new sensory information, or a slower paced and more cinematic edit? Work to discover the key components that your audience

appreciates by testing multiple videos. For more on highly effective video content marketing, check out this [guide from HubSpot](#).



User-Generated Content

User-generated content is our specialty at Rivet Works. We understand the dramatic impact UGC can have on your marketing and that's why we built our product in the first place. The intricacies of effective user-generated content marketing are beyond the scope of this guide.

However, we have a [comprehensive guide to user-generated content](#) that is a must-read to make the most of your content marketing.

How to Structure an Effective Content Marketing Funnel

Content is effective as separate pieces, but far more effective when used together as a part of a content marketing funnel. A funnel structures your content based on the stages of the buyer's journey and automatically nurtures them toward a conversion.

Let's take a look at a few examples ...

Example One:

For our first example we'll use an online women's boot store, "CuteBoots.com" and a more traditional content funnel.

➔ Awareness-Stage Blog Post

After strategic persona development and keyword research the shoe retailer decides to create a blog post called "How to Wear Knee-High Boots."

➔ Consideration-Stage Ebook

That blog posts contains a CTA for their downloadable guide, "A Woman's Guide to Timeless Boot Fashion: The Secret to Always Being in Style."

➔ Decision-Stage Blog Post

Finally, that guide contains CTAs for their blog post, "17 Reasons You'll Love Your Cute Boots Forever!" This and similar articles are also emailed to the email address they received upon downloading the guide.

Example Two:

Our second example will use an outdoors supply ecommerce brand and a funnel made entirely from content offers.

➔ Awareness-Stage Guide

They jump right into lead generation by offering a downloadable guide "21 Tips to Packing Smart: How to Avoid Over- or Under-Packing." They direct traffic from relevant blog posts to this offer and use paid advertising to promote it.

➔ Consideration-Stage Checklist

With new contact information at their disposal, they email relevant blog posts and their new checklist, "The Ultimate Backpackers Checklist: Bring Everything You Need and Nothing You Don't."

➔ Decision-Stage Catalog

With the consideration stage offer downloaded, a new email list is created and they get sent "An Expert's Guide to Selecting the Perfect Outdoor Gear." This guide is full of examples of the right gear for different skill levels and applications from their store and with links to the product pages.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Content marketing is a highly effective marketing channel that can produce an astounding return on investment when executed correctly. You now have a serious head start to creating a powerful content marketing strategy and funnels that nurture new audiences to convert.

Take what you've learned here and apply it to your content creation, but don't get complacent. The key to marketing success is continually advancing your marketing knowledge and testing new tactics.

Continue to expand your content marketing skillset and it will provide scalable, predictable results for your business for years to come!



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