

CONTENT MARKETING

INTRODUCTION

The existence of the internet has had a huge impact on not just technologies, but on the entire way of life of people. Business communication is one of the many areas that has been impacted by the internet. Businesses have taken great advantage of the internet, particularly in the areas of productivity and discovering new opportunities. We must admit that the internet has drastically changed communication in business settings. Before businesses began to fully utilize the internet, there were limitations to conducting business with customers and other businesses, especially by geographic locations. Although it was possible for customers to purchase goods using catalog, only bigger businesses had the capacity to mail catalogs to customers, due to the high cost involved. This puts smaller businesses, companies or marketers at a disadvantage. It was difficult for B2B companies to make salespeople available to individual customers, thereby limiting them. As a result of these limitations, small businesses were no match for larger businesses in the market. However, these inequalities have been adequately dealt with the introduction of both digital marketing and e-commerce, both of which have greatly impacted the business world- creating a level playing field for all categories and sizes of businesses. These have also reduced geographic limitations. These new methods which include buying, selling and marketing have impacted the approach of businesses to sales and customer relations. Digital marketing has also increased customers' ability to make choices and even more helps them to make choices. This has significantly raised the competition in the business world regarding customer retention, authority in the business sector, conversion and even loyalty.

DIGITAL MARKETING

In digital marketing, marketers or businesses primarily use digital technologies and/or devices to do some or all the following: promote their own products and services; connect customers; identify and understand the requirements of customers. Considering the increase in the use of internet and digital platforms in the world today, this virtual platform of business operations greatly gives organizations and businesses unmatched effectiveness in promoting their businesses online mainly to increase their brand awareness as well as to enhance their business development.

The basic functionality of digital marketing requires having a website or an application which could be used to utilize and link tools and promotions that are relevant to such an organization. Digital marketing currently boasts of being the most effective means of reaching target audience, especially where cost effectiveness is a bare minimum desired. Digital marketing also makes scaling a business easier and faster. Currently the average daily internet usage by individuals is around 145 minutes per day. This varies across continents as South Americans use an average 3hours 24 minutes daily while Europeans spend about 1 hour 15 minutes daily. Additionally, in 2021, approximately 3.8 billion people, which is more than half of the world's population, used

social media. This statistics ultimately makes the internet with its digital channels the largest platform for promotional activities.

There is a direct correlation between digitisation and increase in the number of Internet users. In India, by 2019 ending, approximately 63.4% of all mobile phone users in the country make use of the internet directly from their phones. Interestingly, this number is projected to reach 80% by 2025 (Mobile Phone Internet User Penetration Worldwide 2014–2019). Globally, statistics have it that about 66% of internet users utilize digital platforms to make their buying decisions (Mishra, 2020). Additionally, digital marketing now takes well over half of the yearly marketing budget of around 34% of organizations on a worldwide scale. In the United States, there is a 51% contribution by digital marketing to the overall marketing budget while in India, it stands around 22% (Mobile Phone Internet User Penetration Worldwide 2014–2019). These occurrences keep digital platforms for digital marketing booming. However, digital marketing continues to evolve as technology and humans advance. Digital marketing has now moved into personalizing and customizing the needs or requirements of customers. One major factor responsible for the transformation of digital marketing is storytelling which is ingrained in content marketing. Storytelling gives a customer an experience that keeps his love for and loyalty to a brand alive for as long as possible. Storytelling involves sharing a story that exemplifies relatable challenges to portray an experience your audience will connect with. Organizations use it as a digital media tool to drive traffic and to also connect emotionally, thought provoking and entertaining content to give a unique identity to their brands.

CONTENT MARKETING

To define content marketing will be to describe a process of management in which digital contents that are propagated by electronic channels are employed by firms for the purpose of identifying, analyzing and satisfying the demands of consumers in order to gain profits. This definition was derived by Rowley (2008). In marketing, one of the key ingredients for sustainability and success is Information, and this brings about marketing research with its strong association with consumer behavior. In detail, market research and consumer behavior involve retrieving data about customers and potential customers. The information collected in this process is then used to improve market exchange value for the customers, and ultimately the organization.

Holistically, any and every marketing activity has their customers and potential customers as the genesis of their existence (Rahimnia & Hassanzadeh, 2013). Customers are key to the sustenance and continuity of any organization. While this is so, customers/consumers also have a huge dependence on the existence of organizations. The entire market revolves around the interdependence of the customers and the organizations. To further explain this, companies have the obligation to carry out marketing activities for them to satisfactorily meet the needs of the consumer. We live in an era driven by information, where consumers demand instruments and guides such as facts and relevant information that can help them in making decisions. What makes content marketing what it has to do with the sharing of the most relevant information with the target audience. Interestingly, in today's world, individuals, who largely form the consumers, exhibit a high level of intelligence and this is typically exhibited in their understanding of how to

adequately deal with information: choosing what information to receive, the kind of information it is and whether to believe the content (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013).

With the amount of information available in the world we live in presently, it's even become easier to manipulate such information because of the availability of instruments such as computers, laptops, and phones which enable customers to connect to the internet and thereby staying connected to the digital world unlimited. This has made customers have an unrestricted access to contents and because of this, consumers now live off contents that are available on the internet. Apart from internet platforms, there exist numerous channels such as radio, billboards, print media, and television through which contents are generated and can be fed on by the audience. All of these have created an audience that demands complete and unlimited solutions and entertainment. As a result of this a lot of companies now strongly incorporate making the latest information available on several marketing channels mainly to satisfy the needs of customers/consumers. Content marketing lives ultimately for driving potential leads and conversions into a business' sales pipeline. In a post by Hubspot, it is evidenced that approximately 47% of customers went through 3-5 content materials before going ahead with the purchase process which involves interacting with a sales rep.

As it has been established, businesses now make a great deal of investments in content marketing, especially by creating content marketing programs, and this is because of the continuous successes that have been recorded by users over time. Content marketing is as effective as, and even more effective than many existing methods used for improving a business' online communication, growing audience engagement, developing brand presence, as well as improving sales. This surely makes it a must-do growth approach for many businesses. Typically, content marketing helps to provide answers to the limitless questions of customers and potential customers. By doing this, it helps to build trust between a business and its customers; foster good relationships, increase conversions, and generate leads. The era we are in today is one in which customers constantly hope for high-quality, consistent content, and brands who have or expect to have such customers are obliged to make those contents available.

In a report by the State of Inbound, 82% of businesses have content creation as a top priority and are actively using it. The rate at which businesses invest content marketing is at a level that has never been reached before. For example, being consistent in brand messaging serves as a critical factor that shapes the success of a business. This equally applies to content marketing. For a business to be on top of their online communication and audience engagement game, such a business' content should bear a unique and identifiable voice, style, and pitch across all its distribution channels. When a business' content is steady, it helps to demonstrate credibility, builds trust, and strengthens reputation.

CHALLENGES FACED BY DIGITAL MARKETING

While the internet era has pushed for digital marketing, digital marketing has continued to face challenges. In a report by Deloitte, about 72% of marketers report that the pandemic has impacted the importance of marketing in the business world (Vonage Staff, 2020). Through digital, businesses and marketers have found it easy to communicate with new and existing customers,

considering the changes that the pandemic has made to consumer behavior. Some of the challenges currently faced by many digital marketers and companies employing digital marketing include:

Difficulty achieving a customer-focused marketing style.

It is quite difficult to take up a marketing approach that centers the customer. This is particularly so because of the constantly changing of the needs and expectations of the customer. While this is so, it is still best to use a customer-centered approach to succeed as a business in this current world. Statistics by Salesforce reveals that the experience of about sixty-six (66%) of customers with one business impacts on what they expect from other businesses. In the same report, up to 52% of customers want personalized offers. Additionally, about 66% of customers said they would like businesses to understand their individual needs. These numbers without any doubt show how intensely customer-focused marketing strategies are needed in the business world today.

Difficulty in creating engaging content

Digital marketing relies greatly on the success of content marketing and content marketing has great contents as a major driver. In recent years, what is known as great content has diversified, considering the existence of videos and audios that are being utilized by businesses and brands in order to drive traffic and communicate with customers. There is even more reason to create great content now than ever before. Customers now have many options on the internet, making the competition for successful content marketing more intense, and by extension digital marketing. Businesses are faced with the daunting task of developing relevant and outstanding contents through which they can communicate their values and offers with their demographics.

USING MULTICHANNEL MARKETING STRATEGIES

There is a need for brands and businesses to employ multichannel tactics which could range from email, social media, business website, and even SEO. Salesforce reports that 74% of customers have used multiple channels to initiate and finalize a single transaction. Apart from being expected to create consistent content using these different platforms, businesses are also charged with the task of personalizing such contents.

IMPORTANCE OF CONTENT MARKETING AND HOW IT HELPS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Customer Pull

Content marketing impacts greatly on digital marketing. Having outstanding content in a digital marketing strategy is the first thing that matters in content marketing. Great content is as important as the company's image, it is an irreplaceable asset. Having the right content for the right audience can create positive experiences for potential customers. An outstanding content also has great pull on such customers- ensuring they come back more often. Beyond being a business' direct power to capture the attention of the audience, it also helps to re-establish a positive brand impression for the company.

Coke's "Share A Coke" Campaign was one of the greatest content marketing strategies the world has ever seen. The campaign gave everyone the opportunity to personalize their favorite drink. This campaign rode on the wings of personalization and it was successful. It got everyone talking about Coke. Coke made people feel very special, and this personal touch is the crux of content marketing. As a general knowledge, everyone's favorite point of discussion is themselves, so Coke targeted the most important thing to customers — their name (Pratik Dholakiya, 2015). If you want to get someone's attention, use their name. This strategy by Coke was one with a massive pull on the general market, irrespective of the geographic location.

The Coke's "Share A Coke" campaign was developed with the aim of recruiting a new generation of regular teen drinkers by building a deeper connection between them and the brand. The goal was to get one in two teens to enjoy a Coke. The campaign drove dramatic increases in sales volume and revenue. There was a 11% increase in sales volume; 11% increase in revenue; 1.6% increase in sales share; and a 10% increase in sales velocity (Luis Mendoza, 2015).

Putting in place a sound content marketing ensures that each marketing channel utilizes the marketing tactics that guarantees the achievement of desired marketing goals and sales revenue targets. With content marketing, a marketer or a business can nurture their prospects using contents that are made available online. Businesses can achieve this using what is termed "nurturing campaigns". For example, in a digital marketing strategy, engaging email content with attractive values can encourage a customer reading it to take the next step and continue doing so till they arrive where you want them to be. Typically, a nurturing campaign is devised to help a business or marketer, or company connect with potential customers early enough and to build a relationship with them on their journey to purchasing. During this campaign, the business or marketer can collect information about potential customers through their actions. This ultimately allows the business or marketer to create content that largely aligns with customers' interests and expectations (Nilangan Jamie and Brandy, 2021).

Statistics have shown that by 2023 ending, the amount of spending on advertisement to generate leads is expected to be higher than \$200 billion. As seen in the Demand Gen Report, approximately 70% of businesses stated that they have continued to increase their lead generation budget (Andrew Gaffney, 2018). Furthermore, businesses that have gone ahead to successfully carry out nurturing campaigns have been reported to generate about 50% more sales-ready leads than companies that don't. Looking at all the statistics regarding nurturing campaigns, it goes beyond the possibility of more deals but also the possibility of larger deals. Groove's Onboarding Campaign is an example of nurturing campaigns and the sequence of contents used has been an inspiration. It is reported that the email sequence used in the campaign helped to convert 10% of blog subscribers to trial users, and then turned trial customers into paid users (Alex Turnbull, 2021). In this campaign, the first email already informed the recipient that they would be receiving a series of emails. Doing this makes the recipient aware of what to expect and as such can react accordingly.

Improved Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Google and other search engines survey contents of different websites to ascertain the kind of users to be directed to different websites. In order to drive more traffic, having great content on a

company's website is non-negotiable. This is because the contents on the websites help these search engines to get an adequate understanding of the business. If for any reason, having an improved SEO should be enough to put up good content. With a great SEO, search engines will help you to deliver your next customer. Buyers use search engines to find answers to their questions prior to making a purchase, and this they do using keywords. When a business masters how to appear at the top of consumer search on any search engine, such a business continues to win regarding organic search. As a result of this, such businesses continue to drive rich traffic to their websites. Undoubtedly, having great content, which is the heart of content marketing, is an unmatched way to drive organic traffic to a business website.

Byrdie, a beauty industry publisher, is an example of a business that has mastered SEO to their advantage. Byrdie's organic search performance beats many big-name businesses in the same niche regarding Google market share. When checked, Byrdie's content marketing strategy is characterized by strong focus, incorporating several evergreen and educational contents. The excellent content marketing strategy of Byrdie allows the company to outshine massive companies like Chanel, Estée Lauder, Dior, Maybelline, Givenchy, and L'Oréal in Google market share. Byrdie already has a firm hold on consumer attention in the beauty space. How do they do this? The company creates popular, engaging, long-form content. As of 2020, Byrdie dominated Google organic search, even across many different market sectors. How has Byrdie stayed on top of their game in the SEO space? Byrdie has well-organized website architecture, with categories and subcategories, short keyword-rich URLs, topic clusters, content creator credentials, and many more. All of these have helped the company to achieve the following: 27.7M monthly global visit; average post among its top performing 100 posts drives 56.7K monthly visits; top 250 posts represent about 2.4% of all posts but drive 42.38% of all traffic; More than 1.1 million Google page one rankings; 72.16% of all pages have a click depth within 3 clicks (Jonas Sickler, 2021).

Byrdie's content marketing has been successful in the past years and from analysis, the success of the company's content marketing is tied to a powerful SEO strategy. The world keeps advancing and consumers are staying more on the internet than before, and as consumers continue to welcome digital experiences, the more they rely on Google for answers. This ultimately makes SEO an essential tool for the success of a business' online communication.

Build trust with your website visitors

Content marketing is a powerful way to build trust as a business in the heart of your customers and potential customers. Contents put out by a business are read by customers and this is one of the important ways they get an insight into the company's values and philosophy. Contents created by businesses on their websites or other digital channels like social media platforms help customers to form opinions as they read and how the business is presented by these contents will determine how well or not the customers will associate with the brand. Content marketing presents a brand to the audience and if the contents used can bring the brand alive in their heart, it goes a long way to establish a positive brand reputation to them even before their first buy.

Building trust with customers could put a business right at the top of a customer's mind until such a customer is ready to make their purchase. Furthermore, a consistent creation of content across

several digital channels could portray a brand or business as an industry leader. This could translate into the business gaining authority in the minds of the audience which can help the business to sustain communication with current customers and reach new ones. Byrdie is a company that has mastered consistency in content creation, despite their long-format contents (Jonas Sickler, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In today's business world, one way to stand out as an excellent business or brand is through content because content marketing is the soul of digital marketing. As a result, the quality of a business' content marketing is the most effective way to entice and convert customers if such a business employs digital marketing. For digital marketers and companies utilizing digital marketing, there is no other way to achieve success in the business world if content marketing is not prioritized.

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