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A six step content marketing model

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How to start with strategic content marketing?

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What to expect from this paper?

- A pragmatic **6 step approach to start with content marketing**. For most marketers content marketing is intangible. This paper makes content marketing very easy to understand and it guides you through the basic principles behind the philosophy.

- This paper is based on research. **InSites Consulting** conducted a qualitative study among 27 international companies to talk about the **integration of social media**. Content marketing was one of the topics. Further, an in-depth analysis of 1,000 Facebook brand pages and 300,000 tweets about brands are used to write this paper. Finally, another source of inspiration was a quantitative study among 400 senior marketers in the US and the UK.

- The results of this research are translated into both **strategic and pragmatic insights** that should help companies to better understand and implement content marketing.

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The objectives of content marketing

Content marketing is one of the key challenges for companies these days. Most companies acknowledge the need to change their commercial model due to the rise of social media. Most companies are looking for ways to become responsive towards questions from consumers on sites like Facebook and Twitter. Companies also understand that they should be proactive and feed customers with conversation-worthy content. The latter is the main problem. Most companies don't know what content marketing means.

In this paper, we want to give a clear view on how to implement content marketing in any kind of business.

In case you wonder why content marketing is important, these are the objectives to achieve with content marketing.

- **Being recognised as an expert in your field:** Strong and relevant content will enhance the positioning of your company. Show that you are aware of the latest trends and that you are interested in innovation. This will help you to be seen as an expert in your field and will increase general awareness of your brand.

- **Maintaining relations with existing customers in a positive manner:** Share new content at regular intervals. This will encourage your customers to keep in touch with your brand. Do not bother them with new offers every five minutes, but provide them with information that is interesting and useful. Offering them relevant and valuable content will make it more acceptable to launch a promotion every once in a while.

- **Attracting new customers and grow business:** Your content is shared with existing customers and fans. If the content is strong enough, they will share it with their family, friends and colleagues. This is how content brings your company into contact with new people. Relevant content can arouse the curiosity of new prospects, which makes them want to discover more about your brand. In the end, content marketing should lead to an increase in revenues.

- **Increasing social media reach:** Finally, good content will automatically ensure that your company has a wider reach on social media. This will increase support for your content and increase its impact. A wider reach also makes it easier to achieve the first three objectives.

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A 6 step approach in content marketing

Content marketing consists of 6 different steps. Each of the steps is equally important; they all play an important role in achieving the previously mentioned objectives.

1.
Topic selection:

define what you want to be famous for. There is a content overload in the world. The magic happens when you find a topic you are knowledgeable in and that the market is still waiting for. Select your content domains smartly and be consistent in your choice.

2.
Content conversion strategy:

content marketing has to lead to an increase in revenues. Think upfront about where conversion should happen. Define a top conversion point and lead people to this point through your content

3.
Editorial content planning:

once you have defined the topics and the conversion strategy, create an editorial calendar. Set up a roadmap so you know when and where content will be shared. Streamline the content calendar with all other marketing actions in order to increase impact. The content calendar should also describe the level of intensity of each content action.

4.
Create shareable content:

the right content domain (step 1) is important but not sufficient. The content needs to be easy to share and worth sharing. People tend to spread content that is positive, relevant, appealing and contains a benefit. Take that into account during the creation of the content.

5.
Manage content conversation:

once the content is launched, people will react to it. Be open to this engagement from your audience and be ready to answer questions or to give feedback. Next to this conversation management, think about the role of industry influencers during the launch of your content.

6.
Measure success:

the moment the content strategy is up and running you can measure its impact through a set of relevant KPIs. These KPIs should be a combination of business generation measures and conversational measures.

The rest of this paper gives a detailed description of each step.

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1.

**Topic
selection**

1.

Topic selection:

Looking at the current content overload we find on the Internet, it is essential that your company only offers relevant content. The choice of the fields you wish to concentrate on will determine whether you are successful or not. In order to make the right decision, you must carry out both an internal analysis (What can you do and what can make you different?) and an external analysis (What is the market looking for?).

First and foremost, look for areas in which your company can offer unique content. Also study carefully what the market wants. What topics are of particular interest to your target group? You can track these topics down by conducting a nethnographic investigation, by a detailed online search or by market research in which you map the conversations of consumers. Combine all these elements to make a smart content domain selection.

By combining the internal (the extent to which you are unique) and external (what people are looking for) dimensions, it is possible to create four main content categories:

- **To be avoided**: content in which you are not unique and for which there is little demand. In other words, a waste of time and money. This category must form 0% of your total content.

- **Competitive**: content which the market is interested in, but in which you are not unique. In view of the level of market demand, you will occasionally, perhaps even regularly, need to use content of this kind. Bear in mind that your competitors will also be sharing this kind of content, so limit your efforts to a maximum of 25% of your total content.

- **Niche**: not many people are interested in this content, but it does differentiate you in the market. Invest where necessary, but limit your efforts to 15% of your total content.

- **Focus**: the content where you can really make a difference. There is market interest, but your competitors are not able to satisfy this interest. 60% of your total content should fall into this category.

2.
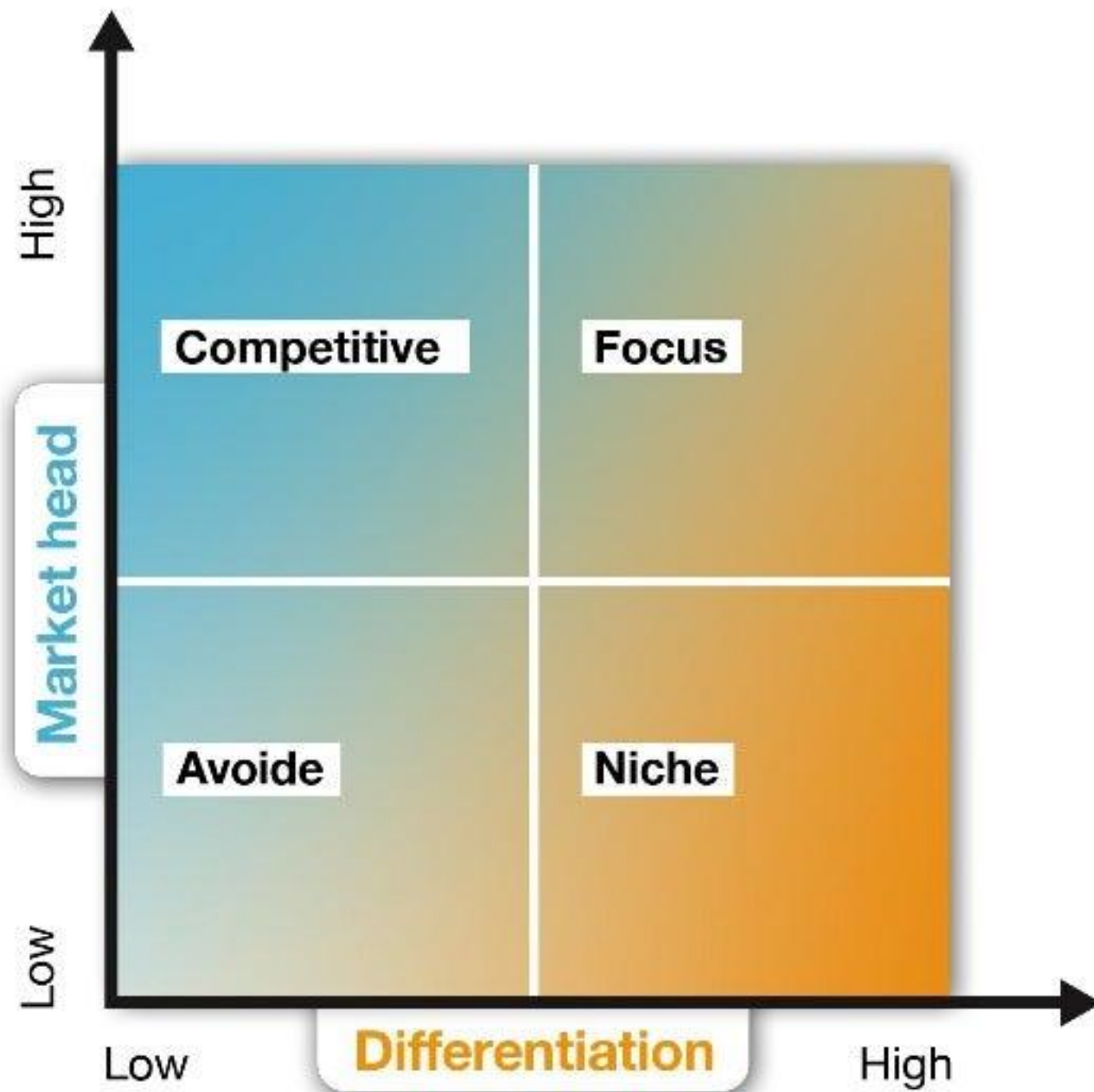
Content conversion strategy

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2.

Content conversion strategy:

One of the ultimate objectives of a content strategy is to attract new customers or persuade existing customers to re-purchase. In other words, content should lead to conversion and to an impact on your business. To achieve this, you will need to draw up a touch-point content plan. This plan should include all touch-points where a (potential) customer can come into contact with your content. Then you need to determine at which of these touch-points conversion to sales is likely to occur. In many cases, the converting touch-point is the website. A corporate blog can be the touch-point which leads people from the content area to the sales area. Social media accounts ensure that there is sufficient daily traffic to the blog.

For companies working in the knowledge sector, SlideShare can be used as a useful converting touch-point. SlideShare is a social network site where people can share presentations (PowerPoint, etc.). This is the ideal place to show what you can do and what you have to offer. On this platform, it is easy to directly convert a reader into a sales lead.

When mapping out your conversion touch-point plan, define the trigger of each touch-point to move to the next. Furthermore, try to keep the lines as short as possible. The more steps somebody needs to take before reaching the point where you achieve your business goals, the harder it is to get high conversion rates.

Include a clear call to action for your audience. Guide them to the point of conversion. The good thing is: if you provide them with relevant content, you are allowed to use commercial content as well. Just make sure the commercial content comes at the point where you convince people with your non-commercial content.

When creating your content, take into account the memory of Google. Google has a great memory. By using the right words and titles, your content will pop up quicker in Google searches. This creates a higher flow of readers, which eventually leads to a higher conversion.

So there are actually two aspects to work on in order to boost conversion:

- Define a content conversion touch-point plan: know where you want to sell and how you will guide people to that point.
- Define a 'Google' strategy to increase the number of people who find your content. A good touch-point plan combined with a strong 'Google' plan leads to a high business impact of your content.

The compilation of a content conversion strategy can perhaps be compared best with putting together a football team. Your ultimate objective is to score. To do so, you need to get the ball to your strikers. Some teams play a long ball game, so that the ball is played quickly and directly to your forward players. Other teams play a passing game, with lots of short combinations before finally whacking the ball into the goal. But no matter how you do it, getting the ball into the back of the net is the only thing that counts. You are the trainer of the team, so it is up to you to decide the best route to the goal. Every strategy has its advantages and disadvantages, but one thing is certain: without any kind of strategy, you won't win anything at all.

3.

Editorial content planning

JANUARY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MEMO				1	2	3
				New Year's Day		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Martin Luther King Day

3.

Editorial content planning:

The next step in the process is planning your content. Set up a detailed sheet (in my experience Excel is the easiest tool) in which you match content and touch-points. Decide on the timing when certain content will be published on a certain touch-point. Touch-points should be a combination of owned and paid media. Earned media is the effect of your conversation-worthy content.

It's important to understand that not every content item can and should have the same level of attention and intensity. To bring the right nuance into your planning, it helps to use three content streams: content updates, content projects and content campaigns.

Updates

Updates are short messages you send out with a certain degree of regularity. Updates are usually a combination of formal (facts and figures, news, recruitments, etc.) and informal (culture, staff news and events, a look behind the scenes, etc.) content. These are content pin-pricks that allow your fans and followers to keep abreast of all the important and not-so-important developments in their favourite company. Updates are usually shared via social media. They keep your company in the thoughts of your customers.

Projects

Projects run over a longer period and are usually related to a particular theme. For example, a project might be a product launch, the opening of a new department, an important research study, a major customer event or a recruitment drive. The company develops content relating to the theme on a regular basis over a longer period, varying from one week to three months. Projects work towards a specific objective, and the content is planned in relation to that objective. This content (regular small and large pin-pricks) is primarily shared via online channels, but can be supplemented by offline media. A project can also be supported by means of a campaign (see below). Projects aim the spotlight at a certain aspect of your company.

Campaigns

Campaigns are shorter and more intense than projects, and are frequently supported with offline media. This content is designed to increase awareness of your company or to announce important news (e.g. a new product). All available media are employed to force a specific short-term result (usually increased awareness and sales).
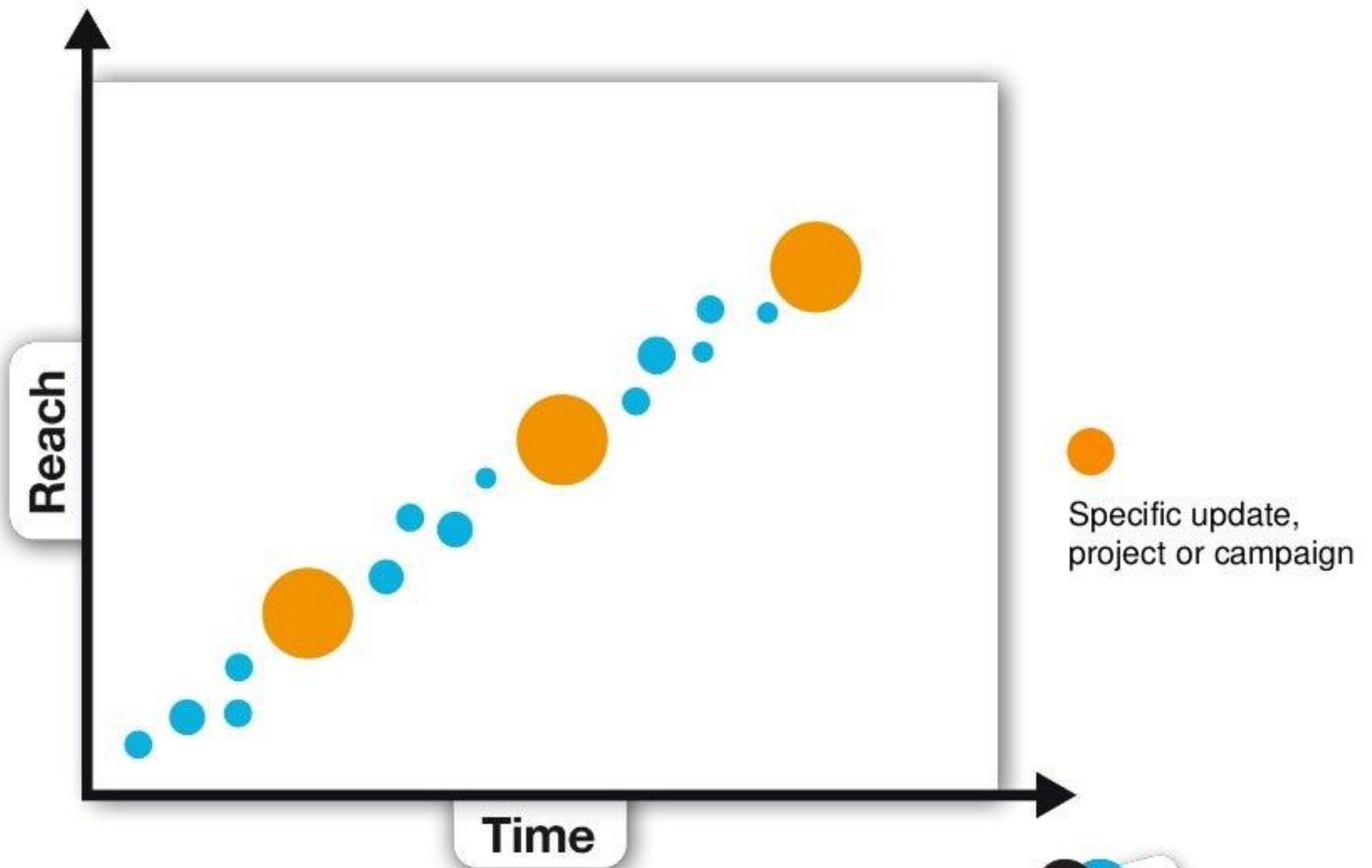
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	Updates	Projects	Campaigns
Objective	Maintaining relations in a frequent manner	Mid to long-term realisation of objectives	Short-term realisation of objectives (awareness, sales)
Objective	Continuous	1 week to 3 months	Average: 1 month
Frequency of new content creation	High (almost daily)	High: during the project new content is shared almost continuously	Low: the same content (advert, games) is used repeatedly throughout the campaign
Intensivity	Low	Average	High
Media pressure	Low	Average	High
Target group	Maintaining relations in a frequent manner	Mid to long-term realisation of objectives	Short-term realisation of objectives (awareness, sales)
Media choice	Primarily online channels (Facebook, Twitter, blog)	Primarily online channels, supported by suitable offline media	Targeted offline media pressure, supplemented with all own online channels
Type of content	Formal and informal 'did-you-knows', news, a glimpse behind the scenes	Content in function of project objectives	Commercial content

Creating this framework and ensuring the smooth flow of the three different streams is not an exact science. They do, however, give you a solid basis for action. Try to think in terms of these three streams and draw up a content planning in function of your company-specific objectives.

The combination of these three streams will gradually result in the widening of your reach and engagement. The updates will ensure a steady influx of new interested parties. The campaigns will boost your reach tremendously for a short period. Because campaigns are expensive, you need to think carefully about how you will use them. Organise them at the right time and in the right place. Use updates and projects to usefully maintain customer interest in the periods between campaigns. That is how you will keep in touch with the people who are interested in your company all year round.

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By combining the three content levels, you are gradually increasing the engagement with the target group

Reach

Time

Specific update, project or campaign

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4.

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**Create
shareable
content**

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4.

Create shareable content:

Once you have decided which content domains to focus on, you have a clear view on how content can lead to conversion and you have made a content plan, the only thing left is the execution of the plan. There is one key challenge here: people have to share your content with their network. That is the only way you can structurally grow the business through content.

Develop different layers of content

The concrete implementation of your content strategy can take place at many different levels. Talk about your industry in general. Show that you know which direction the sector is developing in. Mention new trends and fashionable insights which will confirm your expert status in the field. Your customers will be interested in sharing specific content about your company. Facts, figures and 'did-you-knows' can all be very useful. Furthermore, you will also be able to generate large amounts of informal content through your own staff. Make your culture tangible. Tell 'human-interest' stories about your activities. And last but not least, remember to talk about your products. You can even use content which compares your products with those of your competitors, as long as you do so objectively.

Make the content easy to share

Make sure all your content is available in a digital format. This allows people to share it spontaneously with their friends through social networks and e-mails. Next to that, make sure that you connect 'share' buttons to all your content pieces. The philosophy is simple: create easy opportunities for your target audience to follow and share everything you say.

Make the content worth sharing

What type of content do people share? That is the golden 1 million dollar question that many Internet experts are asking themselves today. Research conducted by Chip and Dan Heath learns us that there are six 'sticky' criteria. Content that successfully passes the sticky test will be shared by the target group.

- *Simplicity*

Selling a single idea to your consumers is enough. The more arguments and choice you give consumers, the more difficult to share.

- *Surprise*

The message must attract and hold the attention of the consumer in an innovative and counter-intuitive manner.

- *Concrete*

Formulate exactly what you want to say to the consumer as clearly as possible. This can involve the use of all the different senses. Make sure that people can see in one split second what the story is about. Titles and design play an important role in this dimension.

- *Credible*

Advertisers often use research material or experts to make their message seem credible. This is one way to do so, but it is also possible to personalise credibility. Credibility is one of the reasons why Obama is now living in the White House. He didn't get there simply by using a mass of statistics.

- *Emotional*

Let the consumers feel what you are trying to say. If you want to stop teenagers from smoking, telling them it is bad for their health will be less effective than telling them it gives them halitosis.

- *Stories*

Nobody remembers adverts; everybody remembers a good story. Right from our earliest years, we were told stories which will remain with us for the rest of our lives. Remember that when you are communicating with your consumers. Try to keep them enthralled. The average classroom presentation by a student contains 2.5 statistics each minute, but only one in ten attempts to tell a story. Yet if you ask the students in the audience what they remember from all these presentations, 63% say that they remember the stories, whereas just 5% remember the statistics.

To make it even more concrete, we conducted a unique study as part of the preparation for this paper. We collected all the conversations from 1,000 Facebook pages of 200 global brands. In total, we analysed about 770,000 conversations about these brands. We did a similar exercise for Twitter.

Heath & Heath, *Made to stick; why some ideas survive and others die*, 2007.

In this instance, we selected a random week in June 2011 and analysed the tweets for 300 brands. This gave us about 246,000 conversations. Our insights with regard to the most frequently shared material were gleaned from the data-mining of these million brand-related conversations. These conversations were a mix of spontaneous conversations about brands and content shared by brands. It gives you the full overview of what people share.

The study gave us insights in the content people share on social media:

- **Experience with your products or services:** People give feedback about their experience with your products and/or services. It is noticeable that there are more conversations about specific products than about brands.
- **Experience with offline touch-points:** Offline customer experience is an important online conversation starter. The customer-friendliness of employees in a sales point is the most important conversation starter.
- **Competitions and games:** Content with a games/competitive element produces many conversations. In addition to interaction, 'gamification' results in many 'likes'.
- **Free:** Free always works. If people think they can get something for free, they will talk about it to everyone! This is not only valid for free products, but also for free content.
- **Collaboration:** Involve people in your decision-making and they will love telling others about it. If their engagement increases, so too will the number of conversations. This does not need to be complicated. Simply asking your fans a question can be enough to generate plenty of interaction. In addition, the customers can also show their enthusiasm through their 'likes'.
- **Lifestyle:** Even if this does not immediately relate to your products, people like to talk about music, eating out, sport, etc., and again show their enthusiasm for this content through their 'likes'.
- **Positive messages:** This is the value of happiness. There are more interactions as a result of sharing something positive than something negative. Consumers like happy stories and positive messages generate plenty of 'likes'.
- **News:** Your fans like to share news about your company and like to be kept informed about the developments relating to their favourite brand.
- **Advertising:** There are a lot of conversations on Twitter about advertising. This is probably related to the presence of the high penetration media and numerous advertising professionals on this network. Complete reviews of advertising campaigns are sometimes shared.
- **Social media news:** There are plenty of conversations on Twitter about the latest iPhone and iPad apps.
- **Employee stories:** Company employees share considerable amounts of informal content via Twitter. They talk about where they work and give their followers a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes. This content is re-tweeted at a higher rate than the average.

If you produce content, it would be wise to take these conclusions into account. Make sure there is enough variety in your content. Organise a competition every now and then. Include a games element in your stories. Make sure that your news is news-worthy. And keep it positive!

This last aspect is crucial. Our extensive study proves that the overwhelming majority of people make and share positive content. Only 10% of the comments on Facebook fan pages and 14% of tweets are negative. It is very difficult to even find hate pages about brands on Facebook. Protest pages with a clear objective do exist and sometimes gain support. But out-and-out hate campaigns are only rarely popular with the broader public. People are put off by the negative attitude; they prefer to share positive messages.

5.

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**Manage
content
conversation**

5.

**Conversation
Management**

As a manager	As a brand	As a peer
Observe	**Facilitate**	**Join**

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