

# tour de content.



## winning routes to real engagement.

A journey planner for owner managers and in-house marketing teams looking to make the transition to content-led strategies supported by digital marketing disciplines.

# index.

## 01. introduction.

The content marketing landscape.

## 02. getting started.

The itinerary.

## 03. getting in the zone.

Thinking like a content marketer.

## 04. the game plan.

Strategy setting.

## 05. talking tactics.

Content requirements.

## 06. team content.

People and skills.

## 07. PR's place in the push.

Understanding the mix.

## 08. 2016 planning.

Getting a head start.

## 01. introduction

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The digital revolution has spurred a fundamental shift in the way we interact with each other and the businesses we buy from - impacting how we digest information in our daily personal and working lives.

With so much data streaming our consciousness we're quick to filter out the irrelevant and the promotional and instead tune into two-way style communications that give us a reason to engage. That reason may be because it adds to our knowledge, helps narrow down a purchasing decision or simply because the humour or emotional pull shared has a 'feel good factor' about it that compels us to act - either by taking time out to digest the content or taking it a step further and sharing the sentiment.

Marketers have been grappling with this altered state of mind for some time.

Businesses are accepting of the need for a new way of 'bringing people in' but sometimes struggle with the fine line between business content and true thought leadership. And, actually, why it's important to have both.

Content marketing is that 'sweet spot' between what you want to talk about as a business (benefit needs and proof points) and what your customers and clients are interested in (saving time, understanding more, looking good and, ultimately, being entertained).

But while it's easy to buy into the concept of delivering content, the practicalities of transitioning from a traditional marketing standpoint to a more customer centric model can be complex to deliver (not to mention a challenging sell internally).

## 02. getting started

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The content marketing landscape can seem like tough terrain to the uninitiated. By signposting to the right tools and specialisms, the Tour de Content guide aims to equip decision makers with a leaner, meaner itinerary for the marketing year ahead.

### in here you'll find:

- A roadmap taking you from a pure PR starting point to a creative content marketing mix.
- How to translate traditional thinking into a digitally driven, customer centric approach.
- Tips on how to think like an editor and act like a true thought leader in your industry category.

## 03. getting in the zone

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Content comes in many guises: white papers, infographics, videos, blogs, news, webinars... the list goes on. Actually the format is irrelevant as long as it's engaging. What matters most is the focus - what subject or angles can you credibly 'own' and create content on?

The first step is to get tuned into the content marketing mindset.

You need to think like the customer and craft your communications to give them the answers they need, wherever they are in the journey - from interested prospect to serious buyer.

In other words, you need to think like an editor. Filter out the promotional and factor in relevance - and lots of it. Delivering exactly what they need in a timely and engaging format is the crux of content marketing.

And establishing exactly what they need (focus rather than format) is the foundation for successful content strategy.

### So where do you start?

We start with a process we call immersion. Different agencies will have different labels for this all-important step but we're essentially all doing the same thing.

The last point in the list opposite (selling your strengths) is exactly the point of developing a content strategy.

It's all very well having some loose themes to talk around and relentlessly churning content out for content's sake. But what are you achieving? Without a solid content strategy, that ties into the overall brand strategy, the customer journey will be disjointed and their perceptions of the brand disorientated.

### key questions:

#### understanding the customer journey.

What are their needs? What questions do they have about your product, service or the problem it solves? And how do these needs change along the course to conversion - be it a quick-fire decision or months - even years - of deliberation?

#### knowing the customer.

What makes them tick?  
Where do they hang out?  
What do they read?  
How do they digest information?

#### sizing up the competition.

How are your rivals claiming relevance?  
What opportunities are there to take the lead in your industry category?

#### taking stock of your content library.

Because believe it or not you have one. Every business has content, it might just need some reshaping to be content marketing ready. Consider too your internal and external content ambassadors.

#### seeing your strengths.

What value can you deliver your customer? How does your offer differ from everything else out there?

#### selling your strengths.

How can you tell your story in a way that resonates with your audiences and achieves stand-out in your industry category?

## 04. the game plan

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**Content strategy development is the process of defining the overarching purpose of your marketing communications at a brand level.**

It should not be tacked in isolation. It should be informed by an in-depth knowledge of your business: both now and a vision for the future. Some points for consideration are listed opposite but it's not necessary for you to have an answer to all of these when you engage with an agency or commit internally to delivering a content programme. Often discussions at this level call for time investment from a broad spectrum of people within the organisation to arrive at a confident position on where the brand sits and how we should be talking about it.

Firstly, understand the message you want to take to market. Then - and only then - can you devise the best route to delivering absolute relevancy to your customers, at absolutely the right time.

And keep front of mind that content marketing must be measurable, meaningful and, critically, meet the company's objectives.

### strategic first steps:

#### **future identity.**

Your position - where you are now and where do you want to be?

#### **creative proposition/execution.**

The brand - what does it look, feel and sound like and how will this transcend content?

#### **stakeholder mapping.**

Understanding the people that matter - who are they? What are their challenges? How can we help them? Internal as well external audiences come into the mix.

#### **channel prioritisation.**

Understanding where you need to be to impact the physical and virtual spheres of influence.

#### **the KPIs.**

What does success look like to you, to your FD, to the owner(s) of the company?

## 05. talking tactics

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**Content marketing is constantly evolving and there's an ongoing need for evaluation. Some tactics will work better than others. Repeat what works well and ditch or adapt what doesn't.**

Importantly, avoid being too ad-hoc, knee-jerk and overly gimmicky. Style will not win out over substance in a crowded content world. It's OK to be bold if the brief calls for it but it can be easy to get too preoccupied with how you're presenting the content - before you even know what the story is that you need to tell.

Once you have focus, you can start thinking about format - in other words it's time to talk tactics.

**You'll need different types of content to cater for the entire prospect pool. These can be broadly split into the four categories outlined on this page.**

These principles are based on the marketing funnel model that aims to 'plug' content according to where prospects are in the nurture cycle. Recent developments in the theory of modern marketing now refer to 'digital moments of truth' that depend on serving up the right content at a specific moment in time, when that prospect is most 'ripe' for nurturing. But taking it further, it is acknowledged that the content marketer's job isn't just about making the sales-marketing integration more seamless, it's about creating a customer experience that's so enjoyable it's shareable. In other words, it's about creating the 'ultimate moment of truth'.

In true content marketing style, we'll serve you up another piece of content that goes into this customer journey in more detail. For now, take away from this, that you'll need a carefully planned flow of content that can be drip-fed over time to your audiences in the avenues most likely to reach them.

### content requirements:

#### 01.

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Issues-led content that assumes no prior knowledge of your offer. Entirely educational in purpose, this content exists to build awareness - not necessarily of the brand but of the industry issues that a product or service can solve. **Example formats: White paper, research report, infographic, webinar.**

#### 02.

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Content that can afford to be more aligned to your product or service offering. This content exists to give interested buyers more information to sign-post them to a specific solution by aligning benefits and solutions in an acceptable way that still tips more to issues-led content than it does promotional. **Example formats: Video, business infographic, presentation, Q&A.**

#### 03.

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Evidence of the product or solution in action. This content is designed to give a highly engaged prospect the proof points they need to move closer to 'converting'. **Example formats: Case studies, testimonials, video references, awards.**

#### 04.

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Secondary or supporting 'bread and butter' assets that complement the lead content material at each stage of the journey. **Example formats: Blogs, social posts, news, features.**

## 06. team content

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### your dream team:

#### **Co-ordinator.**

Someone to keep on top of the churn.

#### **Ambassadors.**

Spokespeople within the business to 'front' the content. It's important to note that those most comfortable in the spotlight might not be those leaking the information behind the scenes. The knowledge and the personality could be one in the same but, the point is, they don't have to be.

#### **Decision maker(s).**

Only one or two people within the business should have responsibility for sign-off. Too many cooks...

#### **Editor or strategist.**

The relevance checker overseeing that the content programme stays on track i.e. that it's meaningful, measurable and meeting the company's objectives.

#### **Technologist .**

Content marketing isn't just a case of having an impressive stock of stand-out information. It's about distributing and tracking where that information is going, how people are engaging with it and how we can intervene that process to push them along the funnel. There's some impressive kit out there but what's right for a massive corporate machine, isn't necessarily right for a small start-up.

#### **Who do you need on board to deliver?**

**It depends on how your team is structured and the in-house skills at your disposal.**

Feeding the content machine can be overwhelming. Especially if it is a new way of working for a business.

Whether you elect people from within the organisation, or work with partners to deliver your programme, you'll benefit from allocating roles and responsibilities to those in your team - and extended team - best-placed to step up to the jobs outlined on this page.

Other experts will come into play along the way too.

Brand or creative insight when you're starting out on the journey, PR people to help portray your personal best and recruiting digital know-how is obviously essential for keeping a track of how successfully you're drawing in spectators and turning them into participators.

Each of these roles has the opportunity to be the metaphorically speaking 'yellow jersey' front runner depending on what leg of the journey is being undertaken.

Campaign success relies on egos being put aside and working with a team that understands what each party brings and then letting them do so.

## 07. PR's place in the content push

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**Content marketing is the new social media. Everyone's an expert. Or claims to be. The truth is no one single discipline can take complete ownership. It's about content and technology coming together to make more engaging marketing programmes that incite action.**

But where does PR come into the mix? As a content marketing agency founded in PR principles surely we should be banging that drum hard?

There's an argument PR agencies are in a strong position to take the content mantle. 'Story telling' is central to our art. It's engrained in our thinking to hunt out and

create intrinsically interesting stories that people want to read - and now share - on multiple platforms.

But it's not just another string to PR's bow. Content strategy is an all encompassing discipline that sits above PR, as it does all the other channels (email, advertising, social etc.) that can be used to take your message to market.

The beauty of it is we're not beholden to the media to be our mouthpiece. As long as we can stay true to the content marketing mantra of relevancy we can leverage editorial thinking to make ourselves famous within our own industries.

## 08. 2016 planning

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**The Grand Depart is already nigh.**

Perhaps you've dabbled with content but without any real strategic direction.

You may have done nothing at all.

Of course, you could be doing it pretty successfully but simply lack inspiration.

Whatever your reasons for taking the time to read this guide, if 2016 is 'The Year of Content' it's time to take action.

But before going into full on production mode take a step back and strategise. It will pay off in the long run - not just in ROI terms - but by saving time (and your sanity) in understanding where the greatest effort to reward ratios lie and finding focus in and among the content chaos.

Here are some steps you could get underway today, to get a head start on 2016's content marketing drive.

### get in training:

#### **Content audit.**

Take stock of what you've got. Be it in a publishable format or not. This could include anything from brochures and presentations through to papers, features, blogs and video. Use a traffic light system or similar to identify and prioritise content and potential content e.g. red = not relevant; amber = needs work; green = good to go.

#### **Gap analysis.**

Attempt to map out your customer journey i.e. the value chain and understand what questions your prospects have at each stage and what content you could deliver to help answer those queries. You should soon start to see gaps in your portfolio for your content programme to address.

## 08. 2016 planning

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### **Industry benchmarking.**

Who in your market is doing a good content job? Or if there isn't a shining example look to other markets for inspiration.

### **Create an editorial calendar.**

It may just be skeleton for now but there will be certain events throughout the year that will need support e.g. an annual trade event. Start plotting awards, speaking opportunities, key windows when customers are in buying mode etc.

### **Know your technology suite.**

Investing in technology platforms to monitor the impact of your campaigns is a must. Without tracking your customers' interactions with the brand you're missing the point of producing great content.

But before you go out and invest in the latest tools, take stock of what you've already got at your disposal. This could include email platforms, web traffic analytics and search data.

Essentially, you need to carry out a gap analysis of your tracking capabilities as well as your content portfolio.

## about hattrick

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We're a goal driven content marketing agency with our roots in the PR agency world. As such, we are well placed to tackle the challenge of achieving 'stand out' for clients in this digital and noisy era - telling compelling stories has always been at the core of our craft. To find out more visit [www.hattrickpr.co.uk](http://www.hattrickpr.co.uk)

## strategising for success.

Thanks for joining us on this whistle-stop tour. If you want the full guided tour, or just a few pointers in the first instance, we'd be happy to accompany you on the journey.

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