

The art of understanding your customer

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Content marketing is the art of understanding exactly what type of information a brand's customer need and for brands to provide that information in a relevant and compelling way.

Brands need to provide their followers with practical and value-adding information on a regular basis. A brand with such information helps to solve daily problems and will benefit from positive brand association and exposure. That brand will create an expectation among its customers and they will return to engage with the brand on the various channels. A builder for instance could share information on how to build a wall or use certain building applications.

The unfortunate thing of marketing today is that a large portion of advertising simply becomes noise with average banner click through rates of approximately 0.25%.

Advertising in the future will be focussed around content and how brands structure the content in order for it to satisfy the need of its customers. Brands should shift from a 'brand first, need second' attitude to that of a 'need first, brand second' approach. By actually solving the customer's problem the brand will automatically benefit.

An evolving art

The actual art of content marketing has been around for years and continues to evolve. In the food industry for example, brands have been publishing recipe books for a very long time and have built a loyal following among readers, some of whom have built collections of the recipe books. The brands provided information that was of practical benefit to their readers. An expectation was created by the food brand and readers looked forward to future publications. The content provided by the brand fulfilled an existing and future need.

With the advent of digital, the whole equation changes because of the data that digital platforms produce. Now brands can target content at the right people. Brands can know exactly who their customers are and profile them as individuals, thereby allowing them to push the right type of content. In other words, providing a specific customer with the information he or she needs.

Make sure you are always relevant

The most important thing about content marketing is to remain relevant, always. Once a brand has identified a community, it is all about understanding who they are and what they want. It is all about the understanding of information consumption needs. That said, a large base of fans and followers on social channels is in no way a bad thing. The reality, however, is that many marketers still highly regard the number of fans on social channels as the ultimate goal and focus less on who they are. Engaging with those fans around content on those social media channels is critical.

It is better for a brand to spend its marketing budget by speaking directly to a targeted group rather than having a large base of people that ignore messaging because it is too generic, not applicable or the initial interaction with the brand was based on a short-term motivation such as the chance to win a prize. However if a channel grows because it provides relevant content in a meaningful and compelling way, engagement rates are likely to rise as well.

So many marketers remain fixated about social media, newsletters, websites, etc. All these are simply platforms for content and the fascination should be content rather than platforms. This is simply because content determines the success of platforms.

Content is king

Measuring the success of a campaign should be focussed on content of which the successes are then applied to websites, newsletters and banners. Great content and engaging stories are rewarded by users because it is worth sharing with a friend and by search engines because of the multiple backlinks created on various platforms.

In a recent post, Frank Strong ([Copyblogger](#)), makes a great case for why content marketing is the new branding. According to Strong, branding is more than a logo or a tagline. It exists in the minds of consumers as a perception and all the company assets support or extend existing notions or expectations. Great companies exceed these expectations with the experiences they deliver with their product or service.

The burning question remains what the relationship is between content marketing and traditional above-the-line messaging.

It is also content that drives the above-the-line messaging. Once a brand publishes relevant content and engaging stories it is given an opportunity to listen to how customers respond to it and give a clear indication of which messages customers are interested in hearing. From the listening process marketers can pass the most relevant content to above-the-line campaigns.

All in all, content marketing allows a brand to gain insight and pass it on before earning the benefit for the brand. It is the future of brand communication and should not be ignored.

ABOUT ZIBUSISO MKHWANAZI

Zibusiso Mkhwanazi is the founder and Group CEO of M&N Brands a holding company with diversified investments in leading advertising, media and communication businesses. M&N Brands, owns Avatar JHB, Avatar OPT, Avatar DBN, Avatar Media Agency, Avatar FR, Mela Events, Mela Projects. The group has acquired the The Make Beautiful Agency in their most recent acquisition to form part of their Integrated Advertising Division as well as Zkhiphani.com to form part of M&N Publishing...

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