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CONTENT MARKETING *for* MINISTRIES 101

video tutorials



lead

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CONTENT MARKETING 101

Whether you've attended a webinar, downloaded an eBook or shared a graphic on Facebook, you've probably participated in content marketing without even knowing it. While it might be an ambiguous term, content marketing is one of the most effective and popular marketing tools in today's cluttered world – and one your ministry or nonprofit should be using.

What is content marketing?

According to the Content Marketing Institute, “Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

In other words, where advertisers rent media, content marketers own it – creating and distributing articles, art, blogs, videos, graphics and other pieces to reach and connect with new and existing supporters and customers. Content marketing is highly effective for discovery, lead generation and reputation building. It is highly shareable and can cause a connection with audiences, regardless of knowledge of your brand.

Examples of content marketing

White papers, articles
and PDF resources

Webinars

Blog posts

Social media share
graphics

Video tutorials

Interviews with leaders

Case studies

Customer quotes

Testimonial videos

Story videos

Short films

Photography

eBooks

It's nothing new.

While “content marketing” is currently all the rage in the industry, the concept of using non-marketing-focused content to build relationships with your audience is nothing new. Custom publishers have been creating corporate magazines, full of interviews, stories and resources related to a brand, for years. In fact, John Deere’s magazine, *The Furrow*, launched in 1985, is often credited as being the first example content marketing piece.

The difference today is that advances in media and technology create new ways to share content, giving it a viral quality and making it a tool for lead generation and discovery, not just a connection point with existing audiences.

It's not just for business.

While content marketing is heavily used in business-to-business communications, it is an important – and often overlooked – marketing tool for ministries. After all, content marketing is nothing more than storytelling, and nonprofits often have the best stories to tell. Sharing tales of impact, tips for ministry, or examples of content (if you are a content-focused organization like a church or publisher) can be a great way to build trust with supporters and show instead of just tell the importance of your work.

For example, in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. day, Friends Life, a development program for adults with disabilities, asked its participants to share their dreams, which they then shared across their social media platforms. This content put names with faces and demonstrated how people with developmental disabilities still fight for equality – and how Friends Life helps them do so.

Why content marketing?

From targeted ads on every website and the billboards of Times Square to the TVs at the gas pump and the sponsorship at every event, we live in a society saturated with marketing messages. In fact, Yankelovich, a market research firm, estimated that a person living in a city 30 years ago saw up to 2,000 ad messages a day, compared with up to 5,000 in 2007 (and it's only increasing). This sensory overload had led to consumers becoming more immune to traditional sales-focused methods. Content marketing is highly a response to this marketing burnout, cutting through the clutter by offering something of value.

Not only are today's consumers more overwhelmed, they are also more informed – making them more skeptical and savvy. With our highly social culture, word-of-mouth or

recommendations from friends hold higher value than an ad claim, and finding the truth about a product or organization is just a Google search away. Rather than telling someone why you're the best, when you provide a resource, you show why you're the best, positioning yourself as an expert and build trust and a reputation over time.

The benefits of content marketing

- Builds trust.
- Positions you as an expert.
- Lets your audience get to know you – not just what you're selling.
- Non-invasive.
- Provides a resource instead of a sell.
- Highly shareable.

At the end of the day, people don't want to be marketed to; they want to be part of something. Instead of trying to influence decision, content marketing gives consumers the education they need to make informed decisions – an action that will be rewarded with financial support.

*“People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves because everyone wants to be bigger than they are. So when you have a conversation about **how you fit into their lives instead of the other way around**, you reframe the conversation and give them a chance to own it.” – Brains on Fire*

Building a successful content strategy.

Think like an editor.

Just like a newspaper editor takes time determining what stories are most important and where they should be placed, the same is true for content marketing. While the ultimate goal of content marketing is conversion, it is implemented most effectively when you take off your marketer’s hat and think like a journalist, paying attention to what is newsworthy, what is relevant to your audience, and when and what format makes the most sense.

Think about every piece you release in context. Ask if it’s relevant to your audience and how it builds on itself. Create an editorial calendar so you can see the big picture of how each piece fits together. Remember that at the point of content creation, your job is not to sell but to resource, creating an opportunity to follow up with the ask later.

Streamline your strategy.

Most organizations, especially small ministries, nonprofits and churches, rarely have staff devoted entirely to content creation, which can make content marketing seem inaccessible or impossible. While content marketing certainly requires a time investment, it doesn't have to be as overwhelming as it seems. Rather than constantly chasing after content ideas, finding ways to streamline and repurpose content will not only save your organization time but also make your strategy more consistent and comprehensive.

- **Anchor your content.**

- Like a popular big box store in a new shopping center, choose one area of expertise to anchor your content strategy and then build around it. Identify one topic that is relevant to your audience and ministry and create a month – or even year's – worth of content around it, using multiple forms of media (blogs, infographics, share graphics, PDFs, video series etc.) to give each element a life of its own.

For example, Student Leadership University, an experience-based leadership training program for youth, surveyed students about the most pressing topics and challenges facing their generation. The results of this survey became the anchor of an integrated content

marketing strategy, ranging from webinars and blog posts addressing the topics to a PDF resource releasing the survey findings.

- **Know its lifespan.**

- While it can be tempting to overfill an editorial calendar, many marketers underestimate the shelf life of a truly valuable content piece. For example, Christian Copyright Solutions was surprised to see how the article, *6 Myths About Copyrights That Put Your Church at Risk*, it created in partnership with The A Group was actively being downloaded weeks after it was released. Rather than move on to the next piece, CCS decided to make the most of the momentum it was still seeing, taking the article and breaking it into six individual blog posts and offering its staff up as guest bloggers to cover the topic. You never want your content to stagnate, but you also want to max out the full life of a piece.

Curate your content.

Once you've created content, the true marketing begins with content distribution. Where traditional print media such as newspapers, magazines, and direct mail used to be the main avenue for distributing content, new technology makes it easy for anyone to be a publisher – and for content to have a much more viral and wider reach. Promote content directly through your channels as well as seed it through other networks for increased visibility.

- **Send an email blast** to your lists releasing the content.
- **Design, print, and mail** hard copies of large pieces such as whitepapers to key contacts.
- **Promote it** on your blog and social media accounts – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Pinterest and Instagram.
- **Reach out** to prominent bloggers who you think would be interested in your content and ask them to help share it.
- **Run a series** of pay-per-click and online ads promoting large content pieces.
- **Find outlets** that aggregate content, such as Slideshare for presentations, where you can seed your content, getting it in front of larger audiences.

Close the deal.

While providing relevant content resources simply to equip customers and supporters is a noble cause, conversion is still the ultimate goal of content marketing. The content serves as an introduction, letting someone get to know your brand and what you have to offer, and a way to collect information for follow up. Your content should be branded, allow you to collect contact information whenever possible, and leave them wanting more.

- **Make the ask match the offer.**
 - ❑ Personal information is an unspoken currency in the digital age. Most are willing to give it up, but only for something of equal value in return. Understand the weight that different pieces of content hold and make the gateway to accessing that content appropriate for the offer. For example, most are used to registering for a webinar or providing an email to download an in-depth whitepaper, where collecting contact information to read a blog or check out an info graphic will likely turn away more than it will grab.
- **Call when you say you will.**
 - ❑ Most people understand that they will be contacted if they give you their email address. Don't miss an opportunity to reach out to these new contacts, but

also don't fall into the trap of simply adding them to a newsletter list or sales database. Follow up shortly after they interact with you and make the contact personal, recognizing the content they downloaded and offering them related content. An audience member is most engaged immediately after they've interacted with your brand, so follow the three days rule and contact them quickly after the introduction.

- **Don't come on too strong.**
 - ❑ At the same time, just like you wouldn't (or at least shouldn't!) propose on a first date, don't go straight for the sales pitch or donation ask. Remember it was your content, not necessarily your organization, that drew them in, and you want to let them get to know you at a comfortable pace. Engage them with more relevant content and always include calls-to-action to learn more about what you do. Keep track of how many times you've contacted someone and slowly increase the ask as you build a relationship.

Content marketing doesn't have to be confusing. By creating an editorial calendar, streamlining your ideas, and effectively distributing and following up on your content, you can quickly build relationships – and fans – through storytelling and relevant resources.

ABOUT THE A GROUP

The A Group is a full-service marketing and technology firm helping ministries, churches, and nonprofits tell their stories and build influence.

We are a strategic solutions company. Our vision is to offer our clients creative and effective solutions to their branding, technology and communications needs. We work hard to understand their challenges and opportunities and navigate the marketplace, which has been radically transformed by new technologies.

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