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Beyond Thought Leadership: The Cutting Edge in Content Marketing Strategy

Thought leadership is great because it builds credibility, but today's content marketing can do so much more—capture leads, develop leads, qualify those leads, and give them to sales. Here's how...

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Are You Stuck with Thought Leadership?

Content marketers have been delivering thought leadership for many years now. The general approach has been to put content out in the form of blog posts, white papers, video, and other media. If you provide enough good content, the theory goes, customers will come to trust you and your knowledge. Thoughtful marketers use three basic steps:

- ❑ Provide ungated content on a blog or website for customers to browse
- ❑ Provide more premium content behind a conversion gate, such as a landing page
- ❑ When people sign up for premium content, you have a lead and sales makes a call.

There is a much better way. If you are stuck in thought leadership, there's a good chance your competition will soon be looking at you in the rearview mirror.

What You Will Learn From This White Paper

You'll learn the basics you'll need to know in order to move beyond thought leadership and into the cutting edge of content marketing strategy, including:

- ✓ Determining How Your Customers Buy
- ✓ How to Build Content to Address Customer Questions
- ✓ Using Progressive Profiling to Qualify and Score Leads
- ✓ How to Test the System



Beyond Thought Leadership — The New Content Marketing

Recent research¹ has shown that between 55% and 70% of the buying decision by business leaders is completed before they ever talk with a sales rep!

This drives a key question:

What content are they looking for?

And its answer:

Content that helps them make a decision.

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¹ CEB, MLC Customer Purchase Research Survey, 2011.



Most thought leadership content does not help customers make decisions. As a result, most thought leadership programs have the same problems:

- They capture demographic information, but that's all
- They cannot develop leads
- They cannot qualify leads
- Sales complains that they aren't leads at all

When you move beyond thought leadership, which makes you look like a credible expert, to a content program that supports a buying decision, you hit the holy grail of lead development, qualification, and optimization. Your content marketing program moves from publish and pray to a strategic asset. Below are guidelines for how to do it.

Step 1: Know How Your Customers Buy

The key is to understand exactly how your customers buy—what they need to know, when they need to know it, how they assess the differences, and so on. There is only one reliable way to know this—you have to ask them. That's what the new, emerging discipline of customer engagement research is all about. Beyond the basics of workflow, archetypes, profiles, and so on, the core knowledge is the specific concerns and insight into the decision making process so you can understand exactly what customer prospects need at various points in the process—and give it to them.

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If you are at this stage, [click here](#) for hints and tips on how to prepare for your customer engagement research project.

Step 2: Build Content to Answer Those Questions

Customers move through stages of a buying process in the general direction of increasing specificity. Here is an example from the category of “solutions to consider:”

- Are there solutions to our problem?
- Who has solutions to our problem?
- Who has solutions that might be a fit for us?
- Who should I consider?

Each question suggests different content that the user would find helpful. You can then develop profiles of the prospects based on three things:

- Offer a title that sounds like an answer
- Provide a real answer
- Track the customer's engagement with that content

“Each question suggests different content that the user would find helpful.”

Usually, additional categories apply as well: process fit (for service), technical fit (if there is a product), budget



expectations, adoption concerns, and any number of other concerns specific to your industry.

Step 3: Profile and Score Leads

As customers engage the content in your system, they essentially qualify themselves and tell you where they are in their buying process. Leads are scored on three major criteria:

- ❑ Demographic score (industry, buyer, company size, etc.)
- ❑ Engagement score (metrics of engagement with specific content and location in the buying process)
- ❑ Propensity to buy score (usually based on imminent need indicators, but could vary by industry).

Standard targeting and customer archetypes usually focus on demographic score only, but there is so much more available. Once scores are assigned, the best leads rise to the top of the pile, thereby giving your sales organization the best leads first so they can focus their time on the high propensity buyers.

Step 4: Progressive Profile Questions

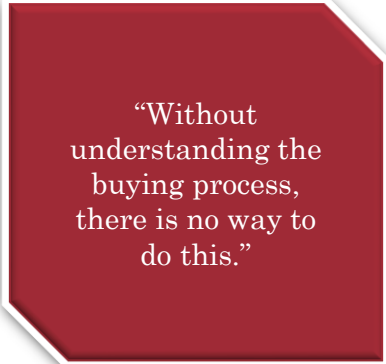
If your marketing system allows it, use progressive profiling questions to fill in the gaps. There are some details you simply cannot capture in content alone—you need interaction with your customer. Systems that allow interactive forms, questions, and other forms of tracking can be extremely helpful.

The problem: ***Most marketers don't really know what to ask.***

Typically, they only ask demographic questions, or they try to ask sales questions. Both approaches are mistakes. The first underutilizes the capability. The second over-extends it.

In contrast, when you understand the customer buying process, you can ask questions that enable you to do two things:

- ❑ Give the customer a better content experience
- ❑ Tell you key things you need to know to score the lead



“Without understanding the buying process, there is no way to do this.”

Again, without understanding the buying process, there is no way to do this.

Step 5: Test, Test, and Test

As always in marketing today, once you develop your score and your assumptions, you have to run the system and test it to optimize it. This enables you to focus on the best content, tweak the scoring, add new content, and determine who really is the most likely to buy. Testing continues long term.



Learn More

At Signorelli Consulting Group, we specialize in customer engagement research that opens the doors of perception into your customer's mind and experience. Then, where appropriate, we guide you in the process of aligning your content strategy to those insights.

To learn more about the cutting edge in content marketing strategy, please contact Tony Signorelli at: tony@signorelli.biz.

About the Author

Anthony Signorelli is President of Signorelli Consulting Group, Inc., an innovative leader in customer engagement, marketing effectiveness, and sales optimization. Using tools such as customer research, field organization assessment, process mapping, workflow analysis, customer journey mapping, and industry leading sales training methods, Signorelli helps corporate leaders get the most out of their sales force. From executive sales leadership, to product marketers and call center managers, clients rely on Signorelli to bring the insights necessary to keep their sales forces in line with the needs of a rapidly changing market. Find us on the web at: www.signorelli.biz.

