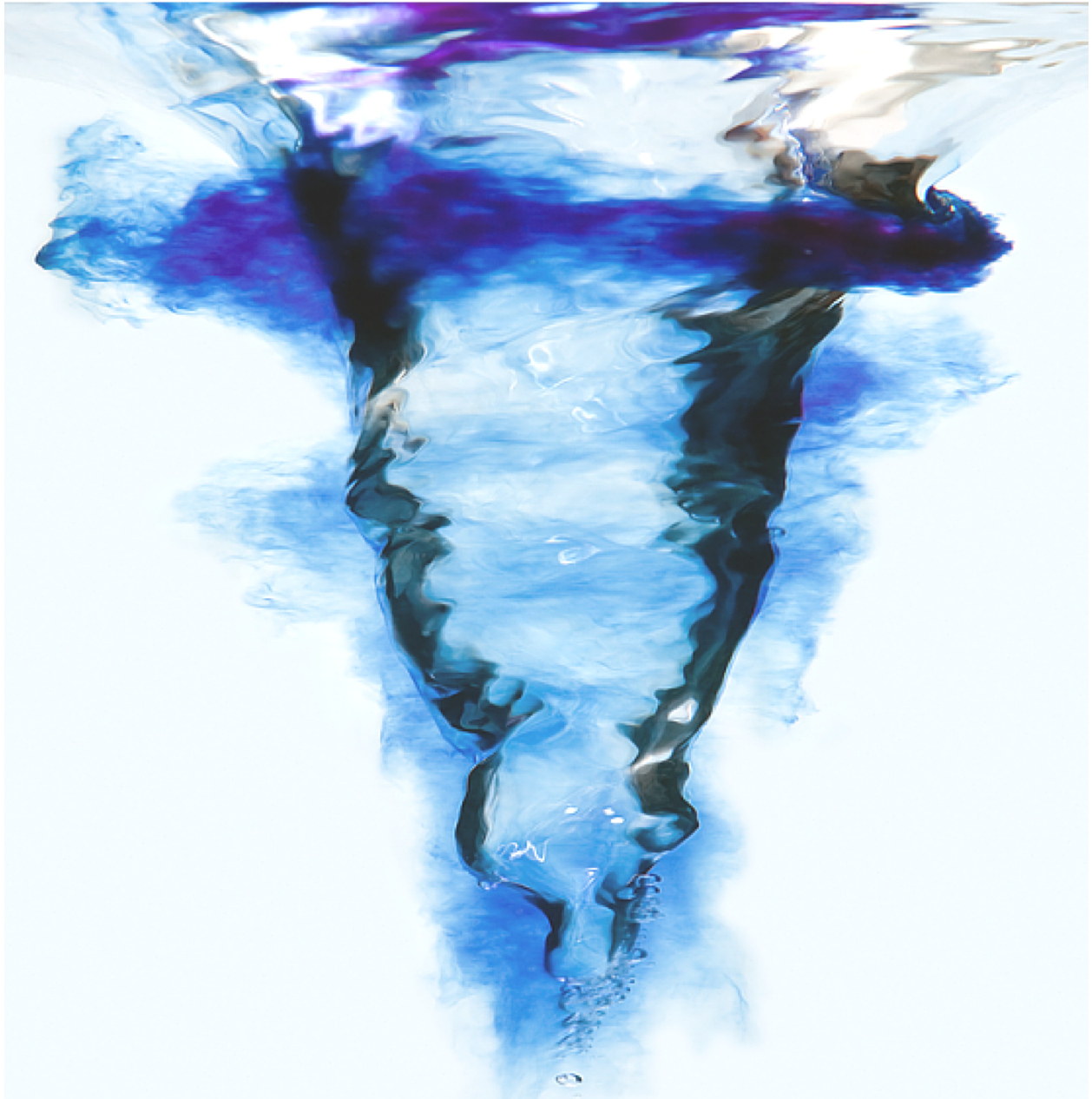


MARCCX MEDIA

THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

HOW TO DRIVE CONVERSIONS
WITH CONTENT MARKETING



The Buyer's Journey: How to Drive Conversions with Content Marketing

by: marccx media

www.marccx.com

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I. Introduction:

The buyer's journey is one of the most powerful frameworks for understanding your customers and how they buy your products. It breaks from traditional notions of "push" marketing and helps businesses "pull" customers in by guiding them through the purchase process.

But what does the buyer's journey actually look like? How does it relate to content marketing? How can you use it to move prospects through the sales funnel?

In this eBook, we'll answer all these questions and more. By the end of the guide, you'll have a complete understanding of the buyer's journey and how you can use it to turn prospects into loyal customers.

II. The Buyer's Journey:

The buyer's journey essentially describes a framework for understanding how a customer approaches a purchase decision. It's not a new concept – it was first [explained in 1968](#) – but the changing nature of commerce has made it much more important for a modern business.

Every time a customer buys something, he goes through a series of steps before deciding what to buy. These steps involve understanding the problem, researching its solution, and finding the best (and cheapest) way to purchase a desired solution. In a way, it resembles a *journey*, and hence the name – the buyer's journey.

Broadly speaking, the buyer's journey can be divided into three separate stages:

1. **Awareness:** In this stage, the buyer first becomes aware of the a problem and starts the process of understanding it.
2. **Consideration:** In the consideration stage, the buyer starts evaluating different solutions and gains an in-depth understanding of the problem.
3. **Decision:** In the final decision stage, the buyer decides what to buy from a shortlist of solutions.



Depending on who you ask, the buyer's journey also has a fourth stage, called *Advocate* where buyers turn from customers into evangelists.

The Buyer's Journey is Not Linear

Based on the above, you might be tempted to believe that the buyer's journey is a linear process, i.e. buyers move from awareness to consideration stage and so on in a straight path.

In truth, the buyer's journey is highly unregimented. In today's internet age, a buyer is not beholden to salespeople and limited knowledge sources to research a product. A customer can very well jump from Google to a private forum to social media to understand what to buy. In

between, he can move from awareness to decision stage, and then back again depending on what he finds.

To drive conversions in a non-linear buyer's journey, it is important to invest in content, as we will see below.

Why is the Buyer's Journey Important?

While the buyer's journey has always been an important framework for understanding consumer behaviour, it has now grown into a crucial cog in any marketing machine. The reason for this transformation is the rapid advent of the internet and the way it has changed buying behavior.

Before the internet, if a consumer wanted to solve a problem, he had few ways to understand it. He might read a trade journal or ask friends in the industry for advice, but there was no way to get on-demand information on the problem and its solutions. Eventually, he would turn to a salesperson who would offer him selective information in the hope of landing a sale.

In contrast, the customer today has the world's knowledge base right at his fingertips. He can research a problem in-depth on Google, read countless blogs, and ask questions on social media to better understand his needs. He does not need to rely on a salesperson to provide him with information. In fact, according to one estimate, [67% of the buyer's journey is already done](#) by the time a prospect contacts a salesperson.

In a world where salespeople are no longer the gatekeepers of information, it is crucial for businesses to understand how their buyers approach the purchase process. Once you have the entire process mapped out, you can offer relevant solutions at the right time to influence the purchase decision.

In this way, the buyer's journey helps businesses model their marketing to fit the needs of their customers. Instead of "push" marketing, businesses can use "pull" marketing to influence, attract and retain customers.

III. The Buyer's Journey and Content Marketing:

Content marketing is the process of attracting customers by creating and sharing high-quality content. It is the foundation of modern SEO and any “pull” based marketing model.

As it turns out, content marketing is directly related to the buyer's journey. If you know what path your customers take to buy a product, you can create content that helps them make a purchase decision in your favor. This content can be tailored to each stage in the buyer's journey, so that instead of being a business that merely *sells* its own products, you can transform yourself into a business that *helps* customers solve problems.

This transformation from a seller to an authoritative source of information can do wonders for your brand. It can also be a direct source of quality leads and sales.

For example, a business that sells electronics can create an in-depth guide to buying laptops. When customers searching for help in buying laptops chance upon this guide, the business can pitch them its own products or capture leads to follow-up later.

To understand how the buyer's journey relates to content marketing, we have to first understand the content marketing process in-depth.

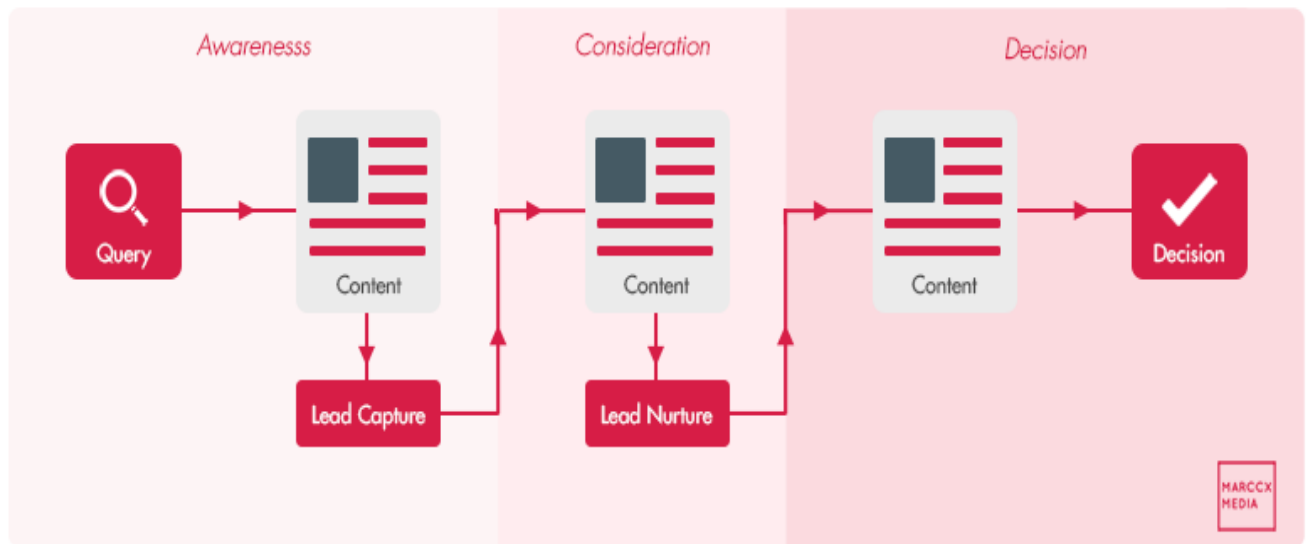
The Content Marketing Process

Combining content marketing with the buyer's journey is a three-step process:

1. Mapping the buyer's journey and aligning it with your sales funnel.
2. Developing content for each stage of the journey.
3. Capturing leads and pushing them further down the sales funnel.

Essentially, it involves identifying what buyers look for at different stages in the buyer's journey, creating content that answers their questions, and then leveraging the content to move buyer's further down the sales funnel.

Graphically, it can be represented as follows:



Below, we'll look at all three steps in the process in more detail.

IV. Setting up the Sales Funnel:

The first step in the content marketing process is to identify the sales funnel and align it with the buyer's journey.

As you might be aware, the sales funnel is a concept for mapping how customers move from 'unqualified prospects' to 'paying customer'. Since the number of prospects is always going to be substantially larger than the number of customers, the end result is a 'funnel' like structure:



Here, a large number of prospects enter the top of the funnel. Through lead qualification and nurturing, unmotivated prospects are removed in each stage of the funnel. By the very end, only highly motivated, qualified leads remain who can easily be converted into customers.

Broadly speaking, the sales funnel has the following stages:

1. **Raw leads:** These are incoming leads you know little about, except for broad details (such as phone number or email address). It is marketing's job to learn more about these leads and remove all unqualified ones.

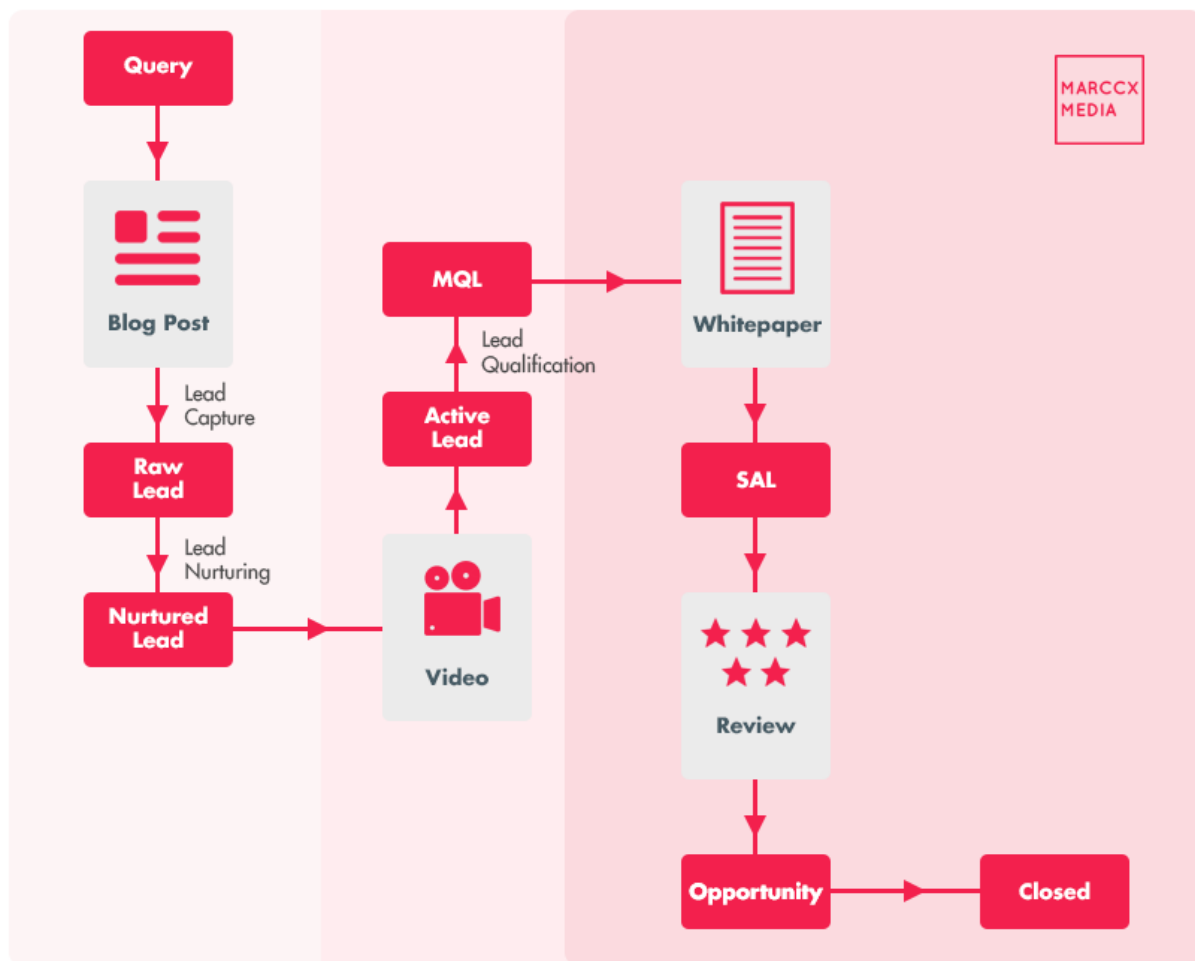
2. **Nurtured leads:** Leads that remain after removal of all unqualified raw leads are classified as *nurtured leads*. You'll likely have more information about them, including their names, position, and website.
3. **Active leads:** Nurtured leads that have shown an intent to purchase are classified as *active leads*. These are actively engaged in the purchase process and have a strong likelihood of turning into customers.
4. **Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs):** These are leads that meet the qualification criteria laid down by the marketing department (such as budget, timeframe to purchase, etc.).
5. **Sales Accepted Leads (SALs):** MQLs that have been accepted by sales are categorized as SALs. Once leads enter the SAL stage, the responsibilities of the marketing department stop and the sales department picks up.
6. **Opportunities:** SALs who have shown a strong desire to buy are classified as *opportunities*. An opportunity is just one step away from turning into a customer.
7. **Closed:** A lead that has turned into a paying customer is said to have *closed*.



If you take a closer look at the sales funnel, you'll realize that it resembles the buyer's journey:

- Buyers in the *Awareness Stage* know little about the problem or its solution. Hence, they represent *raw leads* who are very unsure of whether they'll buy anything.
- Buyers in the *Consideration Stage* understand the problem and are evaluating solutions. They represent *qualified leads* who have a strong chance of turning into customers.
- Buyers in the *Decision Stage* are choosing between a handful of options. These represent *opportunities* who can be turned into *closed* deals with the right sales push.

Combined with the buyer's journey, the sales funnel can be represented this way:



Thus, the sales funnel is closely aligned with the buyer's journey. Once you map the two, it is possible to create content that helps customers in each stage of the journey and pushes them further down the sales funnel.

V. Creating Content for the Buyer's Journey:

After mapping out the buyer's journey, the next step in the content marketing process is to create content for each stage in the journey.

There are two things you need to know about this:

- What keywords best represent different stages in the journey?
- What content-type works best for each stage?

We'll answer both these questions below.

Mapping the Buyer's Journey by Keywords

[84% of buyers research online](#) before making a purchase decision. Among B2B buyers, this number is as [high as 94%](#).

Since your customers are looking for solutions on search engines, it's crucial to understand what keywords they use in different stages of the buyer's journey. Knowing this will help you map out the journey better and create highly targeted content.

The right way to do this is to get a list of keywords for your niche, then segregate them into different buyer's journey stages. Use the guide below to understand what keywords fit into what stage:

Awareness stage keywords

Buyers in the awareness stage want to understand their problem and its solutions better. Thus, they use broad, problem-related keywords to ask questions. These keywords usually seek to expand on a problem or explain its basics.

For example, if you were running a laptop store, your awareness stage keywords would help customers understand laptops better. "*netbook vs. notebook*", "*what laptop to buy*", "*laptop brands*", "*right screen size for laptop*", "*how to upgrade laptop*" etc. would be some of your target keywords.

Most awareness stage keywords would have words like *solve*, *optimize*, *how-to*, *resolve*, *troubleshoot*, *upgrade*, *improve*, etc.

Consideration stage keywords

In the consideration stage, buyers have more knowledge of the problem and start evaluating solutions. Their target keywords show greater awareness of their own needs and a broader understanding of available products.

In our example, the laptop store would use consideration stage keywords that ask specific questions about laptops. Some example keywords would be “*what processor to buy?*”, “*dell laptop review*”, “*best laptop brands*”, “*best laptop software*”, “*13” laptop buying guide*” etc.

Most consideration stage keywords would have words like *review*, *solution*, *service*, *supplier*, *tool* etc.

Decision stage keywords

In the decision stage, customers are primarily concerned with picking the best solution from a list of options. Their searches, thus, revolve around finding discounts, in-depth comparison reports, coupon codes, etc.

For the laptop store in our example, target decision stage keywords would revolve around helping buyers choose between two or more laptops, or finding discounts and coupon codes. Some sample keywords would be “*dell vs. acer laptops*”, “*intel i3 speed comparison*”, “*buy dell laptops online*”, “*acer laptop coupon codes*”.

For decision stage keywords, use words like *versus*, *comparison*, *discount*, *buy*, *coupon code*, *choose*, *decide*, etc.

Mapping Content-Type with Buyer’s Journey Stage

Once you have a list of keywords segregated by stage, it is time to start creating content tailored for those keywords. However, not every content-type performs equally well in every stage. Buyers have different requirements depending on where they are in the buyer’s journey.

Based on this, look to create the following content-types for different stages in the journey:

Awareness stage content

Buyers in the awareness stage mostly want to learn more about the problem. Hence, content for this stage must be impartial, educational and easy to access (i.e. it shouldn’t be hidden behind a sign-up form). Blog posts, how-to articles, eBooks and buying guides work really well here.

Consideration stage content

In the consideration stage, buyers want more in-depth content that helps them choose between different solutions. Since buyers are further along the purchase process, they need to be engaged at a high-level and offered direct, succinct advice on what to buy. It is okay to be promotional here as long as you don’t overdo it. You should also have CTAs in this content to capture leads and push prospects further down the journey.

Webinars, videos, whitepapers, podcasts, etc. work really well in the consideration stage.

Decision stage content

Once buyers hit the decision stage, they already have a good idea of what they want to buy. Now they need a final push to select a solution and buy it at the cheapest possible price.

Given these requirements, content that compares two competing products, case studies, compilation of coupon codes, etc. works well in the decision stage. Look to create benchmark whitepapers, in-depth case studies, reviews and user testimonials to help buyers make a decision.

VI. Capturing Leads through Email Marketing:

As outlined above, step #3 in a successful content marketing process is to capture leads. For most businesses today, this means capturing email addresses at different stages in the buyer's journey.

There are two reasons why this is important:

- Once you've captured a prospect's email address, you can get in touch with them on-demand. This essentially disrupts the buyer's journey and gives you direct access to them, regardless of where they are in the journey.
- Both [ROI](#) and [conversion rates](#) for email marketing are substantially higher than other forms of marketing.

Whatever stage your buyers are in, it is crucial that you capture their email addresses so you can nurture them further. For example, a buyer who reads an awareness stage guide can be emailed a video that further explains the problem and offers a handful of solutions (consideration stage content). By reaching out this way, you will not only push the buyer along the buying process, but also grow your brand authority.

There are countless tactics to capture emails for email marketing, but for content marketers, some of the most effective ones are:

- **[Use content upgrades](#):** Offer additional information at the end of a blog post that expands on the blog's topic in exchange for an email address.
- **Create a newsletter:** If you regularly update your content, create a weekly newsletter recapping the best content from your blog and across the web.
- **Offer content incentives:** Give away a free eBook or guide that explains a common problem in exchange for an email address.
- **Offer discounts:** Giveaway a discount or a coupon code in exchange for an email address to capture leads.
- **Use referrals:** Offer discounts or prizes in exchange for referrals from existing users. Every referred user will have to sign-up for your business with their email address to avail the discount.

VII. Content Promotion:

Creating content and setting up a strong lead capture process is only one half of the content marketing battle. The other half is content distribution and promotion.

Promotion tactics can be broadly divided into two categories:

- **Active:** Tactics that require active participation to yield results. Example: social media, outreach, paid advertising, etc.
- **Passive:** Tactics that yield results passively. Example: SEO.

For good results, your promotion plan should include a healthy mix of both active and passive tactics. Often, investing in active tactics can result in better results from passive tactics. For example, a good outreach strategy can get you strong backlinks, which, in turn, will improve your SEO.

While a detailed overview of all these promotion tactics is beyond the scope of this eBook, at the very least, you should follow the guidelines given below:

Social Media

- Identify core social channels that yield maximum returns for businesses in your niche. B2B businesses, for instance, will benefit more from LinkedIn than Instagram. Fashion retailers, on the other hand, should focus more on Instagram than Twitter.
- Follow the 80/20 rule: spend 80% of your social media marketing time on core social channels. Spend remaining 20% time on other social channels. For example, a B2B business should spend 80% of its time promoting on LinkedIn, and 20% on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest combined.
- Setup automated sharing of all new content across all social profiles.
- Follow a sharing schedule where you distribute both yours and others' content (i.e. content curation). Make sure to recycle older content to expand its reach.

Influencer Outreach & Guest Posting

- Reach out to any influencers you've mentioned in your content. Ask them to share it.
- Reach out to curators who share content similar to yours and ask them to share your posts.
- Guest post on blogs in your niche, adding a link back to your content. For better results, create a dedicated landing page for each blog along with a targeted content offer to capture leads.
- Use [HARO](#) to identify opportunities to get a mention in news stories.
- Repurpose existing content and reshare it on additional platforms. For example, you can turn a blog post into a Slideshare presentation.

Paid Advertising

- Test targeted Facebook ads to increase the reach of your content.
- Use Promoted Tweets to grow your audience through Twitter.
- Test StumbleUpon paid discovery if you publish a lot of content with ‘viral’ potential.
- Try Outbrain and Taboola paid discovery for showcasing your content on top industry blogs.

SEO

- Identify a popular article with a large number of backlinks. Improve the article and publish it on your own site, then reach out to all webmasters who’ve linked to the article. Point them to your article and ask for a backlink (i.e. the [“Skyscraper” technique](#)).
- Optimize on-page SEO by using the right headings, title, ALT tags.
- Optimize website for mobile readers.
- Target long-tail keywords that offer more targeted traffic.
- Create content with a mix of images, text and videos.

You’ll find that if you follow most guidelines listed above, promoting your content will be easy. With a strong lead capture system in place, you’ll be able to drive conversions content marketing.

VIII. Content Marketing Metrics: Measuring Marketing Success

The final piece in the content marketing process is measuring the success of your marketing efforts. This involves understanding what metrics actually matter to your business and setting up a robust system to measure them.

What Metrics Matter?

Content marketing metrics can be broadly divided into three categories:

1. **Share metrics:** The number of shares each piece of content receives broken down by social media channel.
2. **Consumption metrics:** How many people read the content (page views), where do they read it (audience demographics) and how long (bounce rate)?
3. **Lead and sales metrics:** How many readers turn into leads (as qualified by marketing)? How many of those leads turn into sales?

How to Measure Content Marketing Metrics?

Measuring the metrics outlined above will give you an in-depth understanding of your content's performance. However, you'll find that some of these are easier to measure than others. For example, while you can readily check the number of shares each piece of content receives, it isn't quite as easy to understand what content leads to a sale.

Follow the guidelines below to better measure your content's performance:

- Use Google Analytics or similar tools to measure consumption metrics such as page views, average time on site, bounce rate, etc.
- Use Bit.ly to track click-throughs on links.
- Use SharedCount or a social media marketing tool like HootSuite to measure share metrics.
- For measuring email open rates and CTRs, use Marketo, MailChimp, or InfusionSoft.
- Marketo, Eloqua, etc. can help you measure leads generated through your content.
- Use Salesforce or similar CRMs to measure sales metrics and understand how readers turn into customers.

While it's important to measure page views, unique visitors, etc., understand that these are largely vanity metrics that don't actually show how content marketing helps you land more customers. You'll get much better insight by focusing on lead and vanity metrics, particularly your conversion rates at different stages in the funnel – from reader to lead, from lead to opportunity, and from opportunity to customer.

IX. Conclusion

Content marketing is one of the most powerful marketing tactics for modern businesses. Combined with the buyer's journey, it can yield valuable insight into your customers and how they buy your product. By tailoring your content to answer customer queries at each stage in the buyer's journey, you can not only grow your sales but also improve brand recognition and influence.

About Marccx Media

Marccx Media is a full service digital marketing agency based in New York City. We specialize in Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Content Marketing, and we're dedicated to delivering targeted traffic that converts prospects to paying customers. You can contact us by visiting www.marccx.com