9 Ways Content Marketing Generates Leads and Closes Sales

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The following excerpt is from Robert W. Bly's The Content Marketing Handbook. *Buy it now from* Amazon | Barnes & Noble *or click here to buy it directly from us and* ***SAVE 60%*** *on this book when you use code* ***MARKET2021*** *through* ***4/3/21.***

Content marketing performs nine functions that help both B2B and B2C marketers generate more leads and ultimately close more sales. Let's explore them:

1. *Sets the specs.* Content marketing can educate prospects on what features, functions, and capabilities they should look for when buying a particular type of product or service. If you've presented your criteria in a white paper or other medium that looks like useful information and not a sales pitch, readers will absorb and accept your guidelines. They'll then use the specifications you've set.

Say you sell motionless mixers, one of the products I helped market at Koch Engineering. In your ads, you offer a booklet called *7 Things to Look for When Specifying Motionless Mixers*. Prospects read it and use your criteria when looking to purchase motionless mixers. And whose mixer fits all seven criteria perfectly? Yours.

2. *Makes the prospect beholden.* This is the principle of

reciprocity as described by marketing expert Robert Cialdini in his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. When you give somebody something, they feel obligated to give you something in return. Giving a prospect free content doesn't make them feel obligated to buy your product, but it does make them inclined to give you a little more of their time and attention than they otherwise might.

More than half of buyers strongly agree that if brands packaged relevant content together, it would help expedite the research phase of the buying cycle. Content marketing includes delivering personalized, segmented, relevant content to your existing customers. By keeping your current customers engaged and updated with great content, you'll improve your long-term customer retention rates.

Richie M., one of my newsletter subscribers, told me in an email, "This is just a short note to say that I really enjoy your emails. I can tell when they're commercials, but don't mind them, because you generally also give me worthwhile information. I believe that's why you're successful. When I receive useful information in free emails, I'm more likely to purchase additional information – and I have." Richie's response is what you hope for when writing content.

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3. *Generates more inquiries.* A lead-generating promotion with a free content offer can produce more than double the response as the same campaign without the free offer. Good content marketing is *that* effective. By publishing new and relevant content on your digital channels, and doing so often, you can increase the likelihood of new customers finding out about your business, its services, and the value you can bring them. Plus, prospects are more likely to return to your website when they know you frequently add fresh content.

4. *Gets you new customers.* Many marketers acquire new

customers through their blogs. Whether your content first caught a prospect's eye on Google or a white paper they downloaded on your site tipped them over the edge, content marketing plays an important role in the B2B purchase life cycle.

Typically, a B2B prospect searching for a product may work through 70 to 90 percent of the product search, research, and evaluation process before contacting the vendor, according to Forrester Research. B2B vendor research happens online, and one thing that can help move the prospect down the pipeline is publishing valuable content on your website, email, search, and social channels.

For emails sent regularly to your opt-in elist, half or more of the messages should be content, while fewer than half should be sales emails. If you send too many sales pitches and not enough good content, your unsubscribe rate will spike. So will your "mental" unsubscribe rate, meaning that although people won't ask to be removed from your list, they just stop reading or even opening your emails.

5. *Establishes you as the expert.* Publishing content on your industry, niche, or area of specialization helps position you as a recognized authority in your field, and prospects would rather buy from knowledgeable experts than ordinary salespeople. In a rapidly changing industry, content marketing can help force your team to stay up-to-date on changes and trends, which can become invaluable in your product development efforts.

It shouldn't be solely the marketing team's job to generate all the material used in your content marketing efforts. Account managers, SMEs, and even long-term clients and site visitors can be engaged to help create great content.

6. *Educates the market.* Content marketing supports your sales efforts, but its first mission is to educate and inform, not

make blatant product pitches. Nine out of 10 of the top-performing B2B content marketers put their audience's informational needs ahead of their company's sales message, reports the Content Marketing Institute.

One marketer of content management software (CMS) was the first to integrate their CMS with analytics, ecommerce, and other applications. But the market didn't yet understand the benefits of this integration, so the marketer published a white paper explaining them, with good results.

7. *Drives sales.* Content can be strategically disseminated at various steps in the buying cycle, helping to accelerate each step and ultimately increasing sales. The sales funnel takes most buyers through four stages: getting their attention, gaining their interest, creating desire for the product, and asking for the order. Each stage can use both selling (copy) and education (content).

8. *Improves search engine ranking and discovery.* Search engines love new, relevant, indexed content. When you host content on your website – whether through blog posts, white papers, or web copy – you can improve your search engine ranking and the likelihood customers will find your website. According to accounting firm Ignite Spot, a blog on your website will lead to 434 percent more indexed pages on Google and 97 percent more inbound links. By increasing your indexed pages and links, you'll make your site more reputable in a search engine's eyes. Higher search engine rankings mean interested prospects are more likely to discover your site when they search for relevant keywords.

9. *Drives web traffic.* Search engine discovery combined with social posts that point to your site can increase your web traffic considerably. According to HubSpot, if you've got 51 to 100 pages on your website (consider each blog post to be a unique page), you'll generate 48 percent more traffic than if you had under 50. Increased traffic means increased engagement

means increased revenue.

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