Content and Content Marketing Are Not the Same. Here’s How to Frame the Top 11 Content Formats.

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On the internet, content is anything that expresses thoughts, information or experiences through written, visual, or audio form.

This article is content. The 95 million photos uploaded to Instagram today are content. The 500 hours’ worth of videos uploaded to YouTube in the last 60 seconds are all content.

The internet is built with content and always has been. It also means everyone has content, and everyone creates it all the time.

That creates some confusion when it comes to content versus content marketing. A lot of content is intended to market a brand … but that doesn’t mean the brand does content marketing.

Here’s why.

What does content marketing really look like?

Content marketing is a strategic approach to marketing that

emphasizes the creation and delivery of valuable content to attract, retain and convert a clearly defined audience.

In other words, it’s using content strategically to provide solutions to problems that either your business or your readers have. Great examples abound:

- The fitness brand that creates a community and encourages its subscribers to share knowledge.
- The home décor retailer that distributes a monthly magazine on minimalism and good housekeeping practices.
- The SaaS platform that uses gamification to encourage users to discover and get to know its features.
- The travel company that uses a thrilling interactive website to hint at the experiences it offers.
- The health supplement site that publishes a vegan recipe blog.

Do you see a difference? All of these efforts position you as an authority in your industry, demonstrate your expertise in your topic over the long run and cultivate trust in your audience by putting their needs and interests first.

How to tell if you’re doing it right

You’re doing content marketing (and not just content creation or digital marketing) if your content:

- **Puts your audience first.** Be customer-focused, not company-focused. You’re delivering helpful, valuable content and letting the customer decide when they trust you enough to buy from you.
- **Links back to a business goal or solution to a problem.** You’ve laid out how your content works together to further your business goals.
- **Rarely, if ever, actively promotes your brand outright.** CTAs are great, but you aren’t trying to push your readers to your solutions.

- **Attracts readers to your turf.** You're building authority by providing readers with a destination to which they can keep returning.
- **Gets published consistently and continuously.** You're building trust by proving you're an expert in the matter over time rather than publishing one-offs.
- **Uses metrics to measure and optimize.** You can identify what's performing well, and where you need to improve based on data.

Related: How Do You Improve Email Marketing? Start by Improving Your List.

To master content marketing, you must master these 11 content types.

High-performing content is central to your content marketing, but the way you craft it can make or break your strategy. It's not enough to simply create eBooks, blogs and catchy social media that provide helpful information … that's still biased toward your brand.

People are catching on to even that now.

Yet, with all the content creation that you will still do, it can be easy to lose your focus. Here's an overview of how to use the eleven main types of content in content marketing:

1. **Blogs.** Make sure they're optimized for SEO because they're one of the best ways to boost your page ranks. Include a CTA and consider opening up comments for further engagement.
2. **Case studies.** Illustrate your expertise by taking your readers on a journey that showcases solutions to their pain points.
3. **eBooks.** They make great lead magnets, especially when you craft a magnetizing title and supply information

people can’t find elsewhere.

4. **Emails.** Write direct, powerful, concise copy that contains information that can change your readers’ lives. They’re a direct line to your audience and can build long-lasting relationships when done well.
5. **Headlines.** Powerful, compelling headlines (that don’t sound spammy!) let your readers know exactly what they’re getting. They’re also a great way to convey brand with language.
6. **Meta titles and descriptions.** Put yourself in your readers’ shoes and let them know you have the answers they’re searching for right now.
7. **Product descriptions.** Optimize with keywords and describe products in terms of benefits rather than features.
8. **Social media posts.** Create an experience that puts them at the center and encourages engagement. This helps your audience connect with your brand emotionally and can help you find their pain points.
9. **Video scripts.** Tell your brand’s story engagingly. You can also include the script text on the page to make your content more accessible, and boost SEO.
10. **Web content.** Make important or helpful information prominent, include a clear CTA, and use high-quality images to craft a powerful message.
11. **White papers.** Explore relevant topics in-depth and give your target audience ideas that they can apply to their own problems or daily life.

Related: What You Need to Know About the LinkedIn Stories Feature

Content making content marketing work: an example

By now, I hope I’ve demonstrated how content creation is

intrinsic to content marketing. However, just because you're creating content, it doesn't mean you're doing content marketing.

I want to drive things home with an example.

Let's say that we're growing an athletic clothing brand and looking for ways to attract more customers to our e-commerce site. We've decided to turn to content marketing for help. It might look like this:

1. You want to increase your brand's presence on Google and social media, but you don't want to constantly annoy your readers with ads. How else can you get your brand in front of your readers?

You decide that the best way forward is to start a blog full of topics that interest your readers. A few things that come to mind include clean eating, exercising at home, and personal empowerment. You can also talk about clothes, of course, but your models can all wear your brand, which eliminates the need for more direct advertising.

2. You start your blog, set up your social media and let your following know about it.

Engagement metrics indicate that readers are most excited about exercising at home. Looking through their comments, you notice that things like staying focused, finding the right space, and keeping a schedule are all major pain points that they have.

3. You respond by creating an online guide to exercising at home.

You use a combination of eBooks chock-full of challenges that are available as lead magnets, and video tutorials for exercises hosted on your site. To demonstrate how popular your guides are, you create a way for users to record their

progress and encourage each other.

4. To maintain engagement, you start up an email newsletter with the latest challenges, shoutouts for people who have achieved their goals and occasionally a promo here or there.

Throughout this, you continue to grow your online community, adding more content to your blog that addresses questions or pain points. You even start a hashtag that your followers can use to highlight their fitness efforts so that they can spread the word about you.

5. At some point, you realize that you can enrich your readers' experience with case studies and white papers.

You begin to include "white papers" about health and fitness that are relevant to your target audience. You also start to create case studies of "success stories" from your community.

6. As fitness centers start to notice what you're doing, you start getting offers for sponsored classes and requests to sell your brand in their shops.

Your content marketing is now extending your brand's reach into the offline world. You'll continue all of the efforts above, as the results are feeding further content production.

Can you spot all eleven content types above? Look carefully. They're here.

(Bonus: Do you know what brand I just described? Spoiler: This is Athleta's content marketing strategy. Check it out at https://events.athleta.com/)

Now you know the difference between content and content marketing in

2020.

The main difference between content versus content marketing? Content marketing involves a lot more than just content creation. In fact, the emphasis isn’t content creation at all, but crafting an experience that improves the lives of your readers. If you’re putting your readers first, addressing pain points and producing exceptional quality content consistently, then you’ll grow your brand while you cultivate authority and trust. That’s content marketing.

Hopefully, I’ve left you with an idea or two about your content marketing strategy. Now, go forth and convert that target audience into passionate fans.

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