How to Create Expert Content: Separation of Responsibilities by @alexmorozov

My previous post discussed the first pillar of a successful expert content strategy. We used the demand-based approach to craft compelling, relevant and sales-oriented content.

Our subject matter research has brought us a list of semantically grouped topics with keywords. Now how do we involve our experts in content creation in a non-coercive way?

Second Pillar: Separation of Responsibilities

In many companies, Marketing is somewhat isolated from the rest of staff. But that’s not an issue per se. After all, our heart resides separately from the brain and other organs, but there haven’t been any problems with that.

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As with our body, the keys to maximum performance are the clear separation of responsibilities, shared goals, and well-established communication. Let’s dive into each of these.

Frictionless Workflow

Except for rare talents, subject matter experts aren’t copywriters, marketers aren’t subject matter experts, and copywriters are neither subject matter experts nor demand-aware strategists.

Asking too much of anyone inevitably leads to frustration and unwillingness to contribute to the creation process.

To establish a viable content marketing pipeline throughout the company, you should *separate demand analysis, content outlining and copywriting*.

To keep track of things, you might want to set up a workflow system. That can be anything from a shared Google Docs spreadsheet to a Trello board to a full-featured BPM system like Camunda.

Otherwise, you'll soon find yourself spending all day long coordinating efforts.

Here's what our internal system looks like:



Separate teams work on various parts of a task, passing results to each other.

But above all, it removes friction.

Don Broekelman of Influence & Co puts it this way:

> *"If the process runs smoothly, employees can focus on showcasing their expertise without getting bogged down in the process."*

Ask for Advice, Not an Article

We've already seen how to come up with a list of demand-based content topics. Generally, that should be done by marketing, as they are the only people who can align content with the overarching strategy.

Now I'm going to share with you our experience on how to involve employees of any department in content creation.

First, let’s think for a moment. Why nine times out of 10 they don’t seem to be very happy about participating in content creation stuff?

For one thing, *they aren’t writers*. Any employee dreads the possibility of being ridiculed for a clumsy passage.

And even if your colleague considers himself or herself great writer, it’s always better to offload this work to a dedicated copywriter who knows how to deal with SEO requirements, style guides, and such.

So don’t push them outside the comfort zone. Use the right framing to get the most of the in-company expertise while not making the work uncomfortable.

Do *not* ask them to make a draft of an article.

Instead, give employees a list of keywords we’ve collected before and invite them to provide some advice to a virtual customer. In other words, share their insights and expertise.

Be sure to clarify that their text won’t be used as is, but instead will be skillfully rewritten by a professional copywriter.

Making the Most of an Expert’s Advice

Keywords Are Real Questions

As experts will be “answering” the questions people ask of Google, they should keep in mind that, though looking fragmentary, the keywords are the real questions asked by real customers.

For example, for a “mexico vacations december” keyword the actual question a customer had in mind would be something like “What should I know of about going to Mexico on vacation in December?”.

Keep It Succinct

As a rule, we ask our expert to give 6 to 10 points on every keyword group. It's more than enough to mold a keywords group into a great article section later. Your mileage may vary based on length of content you're working with.

It always makes sense to create a set of outline templates to remove the friction for colleagues who just started to contribute to content creation. As Jonathan Blank of NewsCred advises, "Employees should have a template for documenting this in a manner that a brand editor can understand and use."

No Common Knowledge

Another important thing is to tell the experts that no common knowledge is allowed in points.

It's tempting to write something like "You can really have some fun in Mexico hotels in December", but it doesn't give any value to a customer.

Ask your employees to add details and specifics so that their points become more valuable.

Not Just Text

A great article is not just an endless wall of text (like this one).

To engage a customer, we should sprinkle it with vivid photos, exciting videos, comparison tables and useful lists.

We call them "add-ons" and ask our experts to provide them with the points they create.

Why ask staff members and not copywriters?

As I said before, copywriters are not subject matter experts.

This goes even for finding photos.

Without proper vetting, you may end up having an article about Finland with some Canadian scenery on it.

To avoid that, we always ensure that all the initial information is gathered by experts.

Depending on the length of the content, you might want to add several add-ons to each article.

Among other things, this helps to include your content in Google's quick answers, and get, to a certain extent, ready for the voice search.

Engaging Experts

What if your colleagues are reluctant to give a written piece of advice?

In addition to possible monetary incentives, we've found these two reasons to work wonders:

- An employee will be listed as the article author. As a result, he'll get credibility and recognition as a trusted authority among customers. For salespeople, we always insert a photo and contact information at least in two places in the article so that a customer doesn't hesitate whom to contact if he or she needs to buy from us.
- Your colleague will increase his own recognition among industry peers. For some people, that alone may be a compelling reason to start contributing to content creation.

Another benefit of making your experts take part is that they will be much more eager to share "their own" piece of content on social networks.

In many cases, you won't even have to ask them to share a new article. Because they've participated in the content creation, they'll be happy to broadcast it over all the social accounts

they have.

It’s Not About Handing Over, It’s About Working Together

Content marketing is a collective effort. At least, it should be.

So after the article is finished, call on the expert to read it and check for factual errors.

Many times we encountered silly mistakes about our products that are hard to spot for a non-professional but are easily identifiable by an expert.

And, of course, hold all involved employees accountable for their content commitments.

Copywriting

Let’s recap what we have as at this point. We’ve got three main components:

- An outline with several dozen of succinct points produced by a subject matter expert.
- Additional relevant content, such as videos, comparison tables, lists, etc.
- A list of keywords for each section of the outline.

Now is when a copywriter steps up to the plate. He or she needs to unfold the above structure into a full-featured text, embedding right keywords in canvas.

As with any task that implies a separation of responsibilities, the only way to ensure consistent results is a comprehensive guideline. We found that the key points that allowed us to avoid massive rework in our case were:

Strategic & Tactical Goals

Along with a strategic goal for your content, identify

tactical goals for every party involved in the creation process.

For instance, a strategic goal for the content might be “Create the readable, comprehensive and very interesting how-to” and a tactical objective for a copywriter might be “Clients should be leaving inquiries after having read this article.”

Style

Depending on your brand, you’ll want to choose between sticking to the first, second, or third person narrative.

This can be quite hard to instill across all the copywriter pool, so watch it carefully for some time until everyone gets used to it.

Before setting it in stone, though, consider the fact that the result will be bylined by staff experts, so the style should match their personal preferences too. Why? Because we need a buy-in to engage our colleagues fully. If the article isn’t what an expert expected, it will be difficult to ask him to participate further.

Another fundamental requirement is the length of your sentences and paragraphs.

This, combined with your narrative style, will have the biggest impact on what your content will look and feel like.

What’s Next?

By now you’ve managed to collect some expert wisdom and translated it into a fantastic article. The only thing left before you start promoting the content is to make sure it’s ready for multi-channel distribution.

We’ll discuss that in the last part of this series, next week.

More Content Marketing Resources Here:

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Screenshots by Alex Morozov. Taken October, 2017.