

Battle Tactics from the  
**Content Marketing Trenches**

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# Introduction



Content Marketing is a powerful and low cost way to engage and convert readers to buyers, but growing awareness of the benefits has increased competition to such an extent that a 'write it and they will come' approach is no longer an option. To reap the benefits of content marketing, your content needs to be seen and heard by the right audience at the right time.

But how can you do that when thousands of high quality pieces of content are created and shared each day? Like all good military strategists, you think outside of the box, outwit your competition and keep your head down until you know you have the upper hand.

Welcome to the content marketing trenches – our in-depth guide to winning the content marketing war with tips and tactics that will blow your competition out of the water.

## Rally the Troops



Your content marketing strategy will only be successful if everyone involved is fighting the same battle. The decline of the traditional purchase cycle has resulted in a divergent approach to closing a sale between the two main customer-magnets – sales and marketing. When the front line shares the same goals but disagrees on how to reach them, the result is a diluted effort that reduces reach and limits sales. To make the most of every opportunity, everyone needs to be on the same page and that page is the content marketing strategy.

## Sales & Marketing Alignment



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## Internal Propaganda



Get the internal propaganda right and you will leave the content marketing trenches with a formidable force.

Your sales team are likely to resist the implementation of a content marketing strategy simply because it appears to be unquantifiable. You need to demonstrate how investment in content marketing will translate into more real, live targets than traditional techniques. Further, they need to be part of the process. Sales will get on board with something they help to create and where their intimate knowledge of the prospect is valued and included.

Many companies have started to formalise the partnership between sales and marketing to ensure that opportunities are not lost through an inability to cooperate. These SLAs (Service Level Agreements) aim to quantify all aspects of the relationship so that both parties are working towards a clear, mutually agreed end-goal with recognised achievements on both sides.

## Draw up the battle plan

The 'who', the 'what' and the 'where'.



Your teams need to agree on a few variables before battle commencement:

- Who is the lead? What do they look like, where do they live and what do they do?
- What kind of content appeals to your readers?
- What turns them from readers into leads?
- Should content appeal to logic, emotions or both?
- Should different content be produced at different stages?

Where are your audience? How do you reach them? Which distribution channels are they most likely to be using? A complete profile of your prospect's content needs is fundamental to a good content strategy. Agreement between sales and marketing on those points is the key to gaining maximum return from your content.

## Identify the enemy



It won't be long before the competition launch a counter attack, so it is worth investing time in getting to know their content strategy. Robert Greene calls this the 'Polarity Strategy' in his 33 Strategies of War. You should be monitoring their content, measuring the success of that content and considering whether there are lessons to be learned from what the other side are doing. Your content needs to be better quality, there needs to be more of it and it must be easier to find than anything your rival are producing, too.

## Know when you've won



You may get a good response to your content, but you also need to agree on what a qualified lead looks like. Content marketing is so effective, too effective perhaps, at grabbing audience and capturing data. Not all of that data is immediately valuable and so sales and marketing need to agree on the level of qualification needed before sales resource is expended on speaking to them. All possible future leads should be welcomed into the fold, however, so marketing need to have a strategy for keeping those potential leads engaged with quality content via email marketing.

## Bring plenty of ammunition



Content marketing is a long-term strategy and whilst it is easy to get creative when thinking about the possibilities, coming up with the goods is harder than it looks. Quality content used to mean something vaguely original with no spelling mistakes. The bar was raised a couple of years ago when Google CEO Matt Cutts declared war on poor content and unleashed the Panda algorithm update. That was the turning point where high standards in content creation became the norm rather than the exception. Some businesses go about content creation the hard way and it becomes an interminable misery. If you want to survive the content marketing onslaught and generate quality leads from it then you need more than blood, sweat and cash. Here are some clever tactics for keeping the content machine running at all times, even in man down situations:

## Wage your own war of ideas



Behind all great content is a great idea. In the early days ideas come out of the blue, but after a while you need to start working at it. Content marketing hits the buffers pretty quickly without a constant stream of ideas, so get those creative juices flowing by trying these tips:

## Get your staff involved



'Crowd source' ideas from within your organisation. Different perspectives will enrich your content and 50 brainstorming heads are better than one.

## Recycle good content



Most content bobs on the surface for a few weeks or months then sinks into obscurity. But what if that post was really good and generated lots of interest in your business? You can't reuse it, but you can recycle it. Great ideas shouldn't have to die needlessly. Re-arm them and send them back out to fight another day.

## Repurpose content



You've likely put a lot of time and effort into the content you've produced, whether it's a long eBook, or one blog post. Don't replicate, repurpose. You have done the research so adapt it to as many of your content channels as possible – put the key points on a visual infographic, or script.

## Take hostages



Inspiration leads to innovation, so stealing ideas from other areas and reforming them into brilliant content of your own is a great idea. Never plagiarise, but do use others' content as a vast pool of inspiration.

## Keep an idea repository



Store ideas in a database and note when you use them. As you are creating new content you will come across points that you would like to explore in greater detail. Record them in the idea war chest to save valuable time generating ideas every time you need a new piece.

## Engage the engagees



Who knows more about the issues that matter to your target audience than anyone else? Your target market of course. Lots of sites invite their own customers to blog for them, but it doesn't have to be limited to blogs. Q&A's, interviews and video reviews are just a handful of suggestions for content that can be expanded upon. And nothing is more engaging than real participation.

## Write tight



You don't need to write War and Peace three times a week and no one wants read it either. Choose a subject, keep it succinct and if you have more to say, give it life in another piece. Long-form content is valuable but the filler stuff should be concise and interesting.

## Rules of engagement



Rules on format, length and style for every type of content can all be incorporated into your content strategy. This saves time and money as all content is targeted and formulaic instead of scattergun and inconsistent.

## Strike first



Content holds more weight when it is completely original and that only happens when you are the first to comment on any given subject. Stay abreast of industry news and get your version out before anyone else. Thought leadership and subject authority always do better than regurgitated content.

## Keep your supply lines clear



In the excitement of generating ideas and creating great content, it is easy to forget the real purpose of competitive content marketing. Measuring the value of content marketing to business is intrinsically difficult, so if we don't know if it's worth the investment, why are we doing so much of it?

In their 2015 report *Driving Content Marketing Success in Europe*, HubSpot and Smart Insights found that 97% of marketers believed in the power of content marketing, but half of them struggled to measure ROI and effectiveness. Last year's Forrester report 'Compare Your B2B Content Marketing Maturity' paints an even more depressing picture, revealing that 85% of businesses fail to connect content activity to business value. That's great news for you. Your opponent has the best gun in the market, but he can't aim for toffee.

We know that content marketing is a route to generating good quality leads, so making content relevant to each level of the sales funnel is absolutely fundamental to taking readers from prospect to close and businesses simply aren't doing that. We have discussed how to gain competitive edge in a saturated content environment, and here is the biggest clue yet. As Sun- Tzu says in the art of war, "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity".

## Matching content to sales pipeline



The top of the sales funnel is measurable. Clicks, downloads, views are all metrics that show you how popular your content is. But how many of those clicks are still transacting at the bottom of the funnel? If you aren't trying to figure this out, you're getting left behind and you are losing sales. Knowing that figure, and how to improve on it is the key to winning the content marketing war.

Engagement is a term that finds its way into marketing vocabulary a little too often in the wrong context. But engagement, or relationship building, is the oil on the wheels. It is the catalyst for transformation from passive reader to active buyer. It is less measurable than tangible clicks at the brand awareness level, but it is measurable.



## Education, Education, Engagement



At the middle of the funnel, the lead is hungry for education. They've done their research at the top of the funnel, chosen to interact with you and now you need to develop a long-term relationship. You provide content, the lead provides personal information and then you provide targeted content to those who indicate they are ready to go to the next level. Emails, white papers and eBooks are all very good content choices at this stage – gated so that you are measuring response all of the time. Not all of those details will be willing, ready or even real buyers, but many will already be close to qualified lead status.

## Send in the cavalry



Responses to your follow up content should net you a 'cleaned up' version of your new database. You now have a captive audience for content designed to inform, educate and convert to qualified leads. At this stage a comprehensive content CRM is a must, and this is how you will measure 'engagement'. Record the point that each cleaned prospect entered the funnel. What was their first point of contact? What other pieces have they consumed? Don't know? Ask them - you now have a relationship. That is the content story. How many of your rivals are going to this level of detail? All of that time and money on producing content and they don't have the time to record the results – but you do.

## ROI



At the bottom of the funnel you measure ROI. How much has it cost you in cold hard cash to bring your lead to this end point? What is the hit rate from content to credit card? Content at the bottom of the funnel is about maintaining relationships going forward. Some businesses create customer only areas with great content, news and insights – like yours. Other businesses drop the customer like a hot stone once they've parted them from the cash.

## The cycle



The top of the funnel is just as important as the bottom. Once prospects leave the system, new leads should be coming down the funnel to take their place. Since you now have detailed metrics on your content effectiveness, you can try to increase the size of the funnel by promoting content that works and dropping the ineffectual stuff.

3 <http://www.vidyard.com/blog/attributing-content-marketing-to-pipeline/>

## Conclusion



The internet is close to its saturation point of good quality content, and yet the benefits of a successful content marketing campaign cannot be ignored. Creating content in its own right isn't going to give you a competitive edge as a long-term strategy, but there are many areas where you can differentiate. Your opponent is fighting the same war, but by the time they realise what they are fighting for, you will already have conquered the content marketing world. At all stages, the aim is to feed the lead and avoid creating content as a vanity project. Clearly defined goals, a close alignment between sales and marketing, a consistent approach to content creation and, above all, gearing your content to satisfy content demand at all levels of the sales funnel are all areas where most businesses fall short and you can take advantage of those weaknesses.

# About Inbox Insight

Inbox Insight publish highly targeted content-driven email bulletins that offer access to key global markets.

We specialise in cost-per-lead content marketing, syndicating the most up-to-date and relevant whitepapers, guides, eBooks and other thought leadership features to generate leads, demand and brand awareness on behalf of our clients.



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