



TRAINER'S BOX®

Small business guide to content marketing

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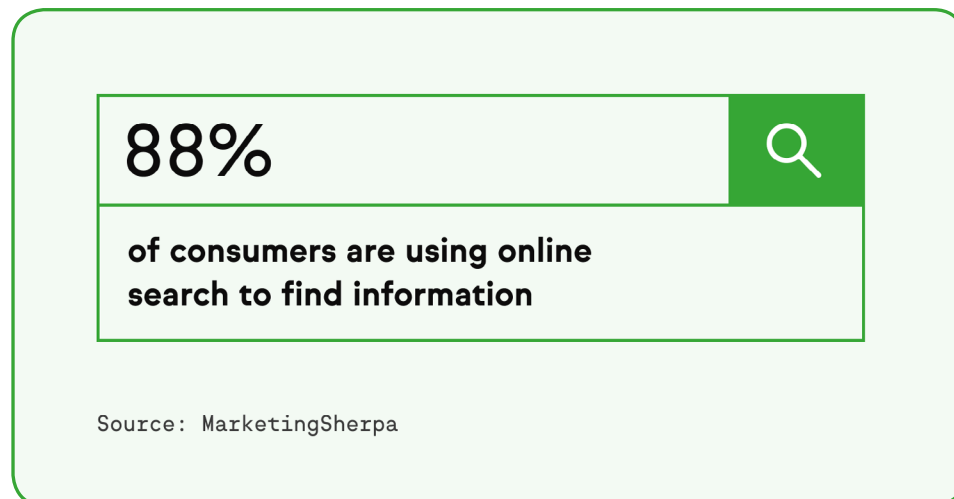
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Introduction

Small business marketing used to be fairly simple: Place ads in the local paper—or a few spots on radio or television—find a good location for your storefront, ask for referrals, and then wait for the business to come to you.

That's all changed. With unlimited information just clicks away on smartphones, tablets, and laptops, your clients have become active investigators. They do their own research, bypassing ads in favor of information relevant to their needs. Whether it's client reviews, articles or videos, they're looking for whatever helps them learn something useful.



In fact, according to one widely cited study by the technology company CEB, B2B buyers these days are already 57 percent of the way through their decision-making process before they even speak with a business.

Earning the attention of prospective clients—and then engaging them—means more than telling them about the great product or service you offer at attractive prices. You must educate them more widely on things that matter to them. By doing so, you earn their trust, which helps a ton when you're also trying to earn their business.

That's where [content marketing](#) comes in. If you're in the pets business, become a reliable source of information on feeding and breeds. Or, if you sell garden tools, be the go-to on growing prize-winning petunias.

Of course, you're not in business just to educate. Your real objective remains the same: growing your business. Achieving this goal in the new world requires not just good content—but content developed as part of a carefully executed plan.

5 steps to making content work

All this may seem like a tall order—if not a major headache. Where are you going to find the time (let alone the cash) for a content program, when running your business takes everything you've got? There's no question that great content takes effort and money. But as with any new initiative, the more you learn, the more natural it feels.

With a little of your own elbow grease—plus some judicious outside help where needed—you may find yourself creating killer, cost-effective content—and loving it. After all, here's your chance to tell the world about the things you know and love best.

70% 

of people would rather learn about a business through an article (not an ad)

Source: Demand Metric

In this chapter, we'll cover how marketing has changed and how you as a small business owner can create content—on a budget—that drives business and builds advocates of your brand. While 77 percent of B2C small businesses say they have a content strategy, only 40 percent have taken the time to document it, according to [Content Marketing Institute](#). **Be a part of the smart 40 percent.** A written document outlining the scope of your content, what you plan to spend and how you'll measure success can help you get the greatest return on investment.

5 first steps to a great content plan

Step 1: Identify your goals

It's a basic (but often overlooked) step—and perhaps the most important part of keeping a content strategy on track. What, precisely, do you hope to achieve with your content? Who do you want to reach? Do you want to drive more traffic to your website? Build brand awareness? Create sales leads? Provide ongoing support and information to clients? Once you identify these goals, prioritize them.

Step 2: Consider what to cover—and how

You've identified your goals—now how will you achieve them? How many pieces will you produce? How often? Once a user finishes consuming a piece of content, what action should the person take: click on a related article, schedule an appointment, chat with a sales rep?

Then comes the biggest question: What will you write about? There's no set answer, of course—that depends on your business, clients, creative instincts, and other factors. But you can start by putting yourself in your clients' shoes. What is that pleases (or bothers) them most? What questions do they most often ask? And, which of their problems did you go into business to solve? Whatever topics you cover, make sure they address some identifiable client need or want, and are pertinent to your business.

Content types are nearly as numerous: ebooks, newsletters, stand-alone articles, webinars, B2B white papers—just to name a few. Using a few exceptionally good pieces that capture attention beats the scattershot approach. So plan to concentrate on a few areas and build from there. Always focus on quality over quantity.

Tip: If writing isn't your thing, or you don't have the time, [you can hire an affordable freelance copywriter and graphic designer](#). Upwork and Freelancers Union conducted a study that estimates 57.3 million Americans are freelancing. Freelancers are incredible time managers and welcome new work. Start small to ensure a good fit. The best of them want to build relationships and may even negotiate on price if there's a chance for ongoing work.

Step 3: Set a budget

Decide on a percentage of your overall advertising and marketing budget to devote to content—and recognize that spending on content may mean cutting back on other types of marketing. While you can always adjust, depending on your needs and results, a solid budget will help keep costs in line with your strategy.

Budget line items to consider:

- Incorporating content into your website (design, development)
- Content creation (writers, photo rights, videographers)
- Paid search (PPC) and social media advertising

Step 4: Take stock of available resources

Original content is a mark of distinction and can set you apart from your competition. But it takes time and money to produce. To make sure you'll get the most from that expense, consider what information you may be able to pass along to clients as a “curator” of existing content. Your content strategy may include your own articles, or pieces repurposed from other sources (with appropriate permissions). You may want to highlight content by or about your clients.

Thinking carefully about existing resources will help you determine how best to fill the gaps with content you create on your own.

Step 5: Select a content team

When it comes to original content, depending on your creative bent and what type of content you envision, you or your staff may want produce some or all of it yourself. After all, nobody knows your business and field better than you—and outside talent costs money.

But maybe you just want to focus on running the business. Fortunately, the digital economy has produced a bumper crop of skilled freelancers who help support the work of small agencies that specialize in content marketing. While rates vary by region, these talented, reliable “outsiders” can be cost-effective (no benefits, no paid vacations and they use their own equipment) and produce quality results you’ll be proud to showcase.

If freelancers are part of the plan, identify which staff members will be their primary point of contact and what revision-and-approval processes you need to put in place to ensure the content is in line with your brand, values, and goals.

Creating content that converts

Once you have your content strategy in place, it's time to start creating content. Now it's time to think about what you can do to make sure your content sparkles, hits home with your audience, and converts leads to clients.

Before you create and launch your content, make sure you:

1. Stick to a detailed roadmap

Before you write your first piece of content, map out an initial three-month calendar that outlines the topics you'll cover, the types of content you'll produce (articles, video, etc.) and often how you'll post to your website/social media avenues. You can always modify your plan based on engagement, but an initial roadmap ensures you're covering all your bases.

2. Maximize distribution

While the most obvious place for content is your website, you can't afford to wait for people to wander by. A good content program reaches clients and prospects where they're most likely to be. Think about your clients and ask yourself:

- How do they like to receive information?
- Where do they spend their time?
- What key influencers in your industry might be willing to share your educational articles or let the world know about your upcoming webinar?

Don't know the answers to these questions? No worries. Send a quick survey to your clients and find out. It will be a great chance to reconnect, and a valuable source of information for you.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media are key delivery channels, and targeted emails can get an article or newsletter to the clients most likely to read them.

3. Pay attention to your headlines

Considering how much information people are barraged with these days, there's no overstating the value of a strong headline in attracting readers to your content. Use short, active sentences that communicate what the reader will learn. But be sure to deliver on the headline's promise of useful info—dupe them once and they may not return. And make sure that each piece of content includes a call to action at the end, such as links to your services, or ways to contact you.

4. Personalize your follow-ups

When a potential client reaches out based on content he or she has read, help convert those leads into clients with personalized email responses written directly to them. Note that:

- Email subject lines with the person's name or company have a 29 percent higher open rate
- Personalized content within the email generate 41 percent higher click rates, with 6 times higher email revenue

While personally writing every promising prospect might occupy huge chunks of your time, it doesn't have to—thanks to helpful tools like [Keap's personalized automated follow-up](#). You can customize email templates to deliver the right message to the right lead or client, with a human touch.

Launching your content

Launching a successful content program isn't easy, and the results won't happen overnight. But as a small business owner, you're already familiar with the hard work and dedication that go into being the best at what you do. You also know the rewards that can come from having a solid plan and a commitment to results.

With the right plan and help where you need it, great content can become a defining feature of your business and a driving factor in convincing new and existing clients that you're looking out for their best interests.

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