

ATTRACT & ADVANCE: 2 KEY ROLES FOR CONTENT IN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY.

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INTRODUCTION

The same trend that has been happening in advertising over the past several decades has now begun to play out in content marketing: the sheer volume of branded content far exceeds what any prospect can possibly consume in a lifetime. This has created a scarcity in consumer attention, which has forced brands to try to make content that is ever more relevant and engaging to their target audiences.

Turning to content marketing as a primary battleground for their prospect's attention, CMO's have started to ask some fundamental questions about their brand's content strategy, such as:

- + How does content tie in with our overall marketing objectives?
- + How do we know what types of content we should be producing?
- + How should we measure our success?

A good content strategy can answer these and other questions by helping you:

1. Design your brand's content model
2. Prioritize and set goals at each step of the way
3. Identify business-driven content KPI's

The truth is that a great content strategy should not be built on some new framework that is adjacent to your business model. The most effective content strategies piggy-back off of a brand's existing business model, helping it strengthen and accelerate customer acquisition and retention. One of the simplest of these frameworks is the marketing funnel. Aligning your brand's content strategy against your business's marketing funnel (or prospect development process), can create a powerful content strategy tool which can help inform everything from content goals to topics, types, information architecture, systems and processes. The trick lies in putting a slight twist on this age-old business framework; one which brings it up to date with today's marketing realities and creates a new and distinct role for content.

WHAT IS CONTENT STRATEGY?

Unfortunately, one of the fundamental problems with content strategy today is that nobody can agree on what it is. If you were to randomly ask 10 marketers for their definition, you will likely get 10 different responses. Some will define it as a set of tactics that span “the planning, development and management of informational content,”¹ while others might talk about user experience design, information architecture, documentation, processes or editorial calendars. Unfortunately, none of these definitions paint a truly complete picture of what content strategy really is.

Content strategy is a model that helps to identify and prioritize the content that a brand should produce at each stage of prospect development: awareness, consideration, purchase and advocacy. Depending on business or marketing priorities, we can use the model to create content that attracts prospects and builds brand awareness, or we can use it to help create content that advances prospects from consideration into purchase.

WHY YOUR BRAND NEEDS A CONTENT STRATEGY

Great content allows brands to more easily attract new prospects and to recruit their existing customers into advocacy on their behalf. You don't have to look much further than some of today's most beloved brands to see why this is important.

What do brands like Coke, IBM, Lowes and BMW have in common? They all use content as a powerful tool that creates and fuels an immediate emotional connection with the customer. Think about the

depth of understanding that Coca-Cola has about their prospect's lifestyle, or the way that Lowes creates online content and digital tools that help their customers get over the hurdle of starting new home improvement projects. In both cases, branded content extends the “magic” or ethos of the brand into new mediums, immediately evoking emotional reactions from the audience.

Over time, such emotional reactions crystallize into brand affinity, acting as proof points that support brand taglines or cultural slogans such as: “The ultimate driving machine”² and “Never stop improving.”³ These rallying cries also hold the power to turn large groups of customers into armies of advocates that build anticipation for launch events and curb blow-back from big blunders.

DESIGNING YOUR BRAND'S CONTENT MODEL

An effective model for content strategy has to be grounded in a business framework that already drives 90% of the activity within an organization. In the case of marketing content strategy, this framework is the marketing funnel. **[Figure 1]**

Figure 1: Basic Marketing Funnel



¹ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_strategy

² BMW

³ Lowes

Regardless of the category, or the name and number of stages they may have in their purchase process, all brands fundamentally try to drive awareness, consideration, purchase and advocacy for their products and services. Why should their content do anything different?

While critics⁴ may argue that the marketing funnel is outdated or broken, citing social media as the upending force that has fundamentally changed a prospect's path to becoming a customer, they often focus on a narrow use of the funnel. Since the funnel has traditionally been used to map a prospect's linear path from awareness into consideration and purchase, marketers have often used it in the following manner:

Step 1: Launch large-scale awareness campaign

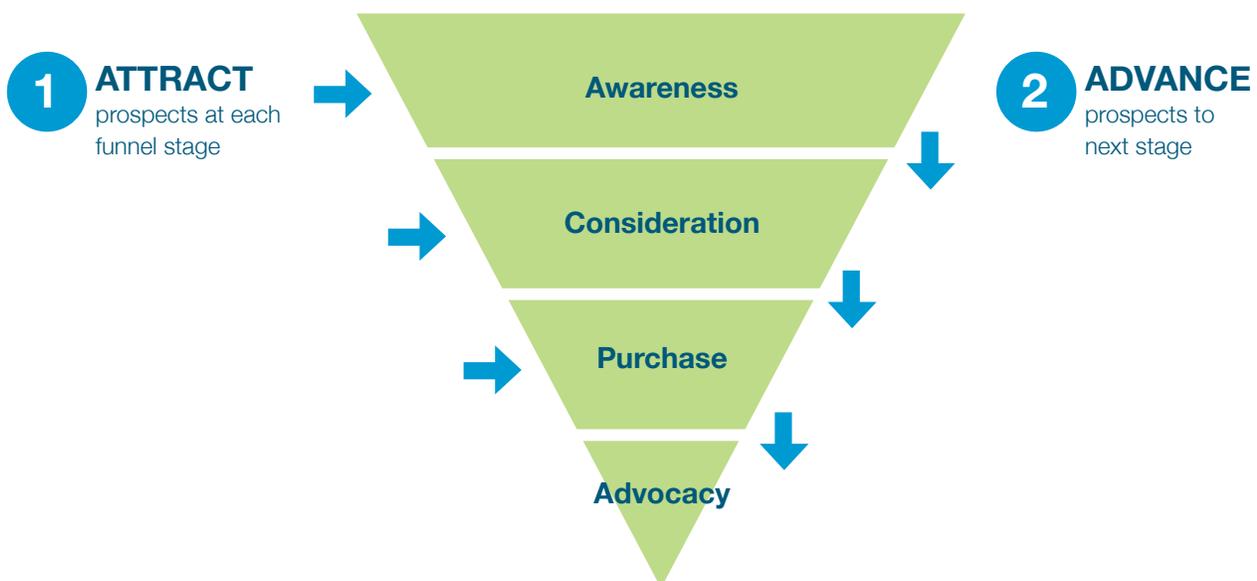
Step 2: Take the pool of prospects that have expressed interest and move as many as possible into consideration.

Step 3: Turn as many prospects as possible from the "consideration" pool into customers.

Such a process is linear, since it is predicated on advancing an initial pool of prospects down through each stage of development. While often effective, this approach can be particularly limiting in the role that it asks content to play within the prospect development process. In other words, in a linear world, content grabs prospect's attention at awareness, and then is quickly relegated to moving them into consideration or purchase.

Adding a second motion to the model at each stage, "attract," allows you to create content that does more than push prospects from one stage to another. It allows you to attract prospects in a consideration or purchase mindset, even though they may not be aware of your brand in the marketplace. The key to being able to do this effectively lies in understanding the prospect's mindset at each development stage. Let's take a closer look at what this means using a simple marketing funnel comprised of awareness, consideration, purchase and advocacy. **[Figure 2]**

Figure 2: Content Strategy Model



AWARENESS CONTENT

Marketers often set ambiguous goals for their awareness campaigns. While the main goal is often to “generate buzz,” the art lies in how that buzz is created and how attention is translated into action. Content strategy can help us address both of these issues by breaking down awareness content goals into two phases: attract and advance.

Attract at Awareness

In the “attract” phase of awareness, content can connect the brand to a prospect’s lifestyle, increasing the brand’s relevance to the target. Savvy brands often choose lifestyle topics that are both adjacent to their core value proposition and highly relevant to their prospect’s personal interests. The first point about adjacency is of equal importance to the second, since it is what separates great awareness campaigns from head-scratchers that make the audience say, “That got my attention because it was relevant to me, but wait – what did it have to do with the brand?”

Let’s bring this idea to life with an example. Imagine that you are security software company trying to attract attention from chief security officers (CSO’s) at fortune 500 companies. For the “attract” phase of your awareness efforts, you might pair a \$1M hackathon campaign with a whitepaper talking about the 5 most common attack vectors at fortune 500 companies. Your content goal for this “attract” phase of the campaign might simply be to “raise the importance of the problem that we solve, in the mind of the CSO.”

Advance to Consideration

In the “advance” phase of awareness, content is focused on overcoming the key barriers that stand in the way of prospects beginning to consider your brand as a viable solution to their problem. This content assumes that the prospect has had some kind of exposure to your brand (perhaps through a campaign like the one above). The role of content now shifts to “advancing” prospects into consideration.

Using the earlier example of the security software provider, you might create an interactive vulnerability assessment tool that helps your prospects see what gaps exist in their security systems. Such a tool would be a way to personalize the brand’s value proposition in order to help your prospects envision how your solution could fit their situation. Of course, you might also use such a tactic to build off of earlier momentum in the “attract” phase, by designing the tool to draw a disproportionate amount of attention to vulnerabilities that fit your offering. Your content goal for this phase might be to “offer assessment tools that help prospects envision how our solution can impact their business.”

CONSIDERATION CONTENT

Unlike the awareness stage where prospects may not even know that they have a problem, the consideration stage is often comprised of prospects that are actively seeking a solution to a specific problem. The primary role of content at this stage is to help prospects see how your solution solves their problem better than any other competitor in the market.

Attract at Consideration

Prospects in a consideration mindset often use a specific set of criteria to decide between a number of alternatives. Content that attracts prospects at consideration often molds the set of consideration criteria in the favor of the brand. It then maps key criteria to elements of the brand's core value proposition, bringing the product or service into the "consideration set" in the mind of the prospect.

For example, every wireless phone carrier invests in marketing to attract customers away from their major competitors. While there may be a broad set of category consideration criteria that prospects use to judge wireless providers, such as network coverage, device selection and price, your cell company may only have a competitive advantage on "price." The goal of your "attract at consideration" content might be "to elevate 'price' as the number one criterion that prospects should use to judge the competitive set." In order to do this, you might create and distribute content that raises doubts in the customer's mind as to why your competition charges more money for products or services that are essentially identical to what you offer.

Advance to Purchase

Once a brand has alleviated a prospect's concerns around key consideration criteria (by perhaps elevating an advantageous criterion and demonstrating parity across the rest-as in the example above), content begins to play the role of inducing a purchasing action. It starts to answer a much simpler question: "how do we trigger a prospect's impulse to buy?"

For the cell phone company above, this might take the form of exclusive offer content or insider deals that entice prospects to buy. You may also run live demos of the products, and provide ways for people to call and sign up over the phone. It's all about creating as many reasons and ways as possible for the prospect to buy from you today.

PURCHASING CONTENT

At the purchasing stage, content often serves the dual role of both inducing the purchase as well as arming the advocates. This can be done by attracting prospects at the purchase stage with enticing offers or tools, as well as advancing converted prospects (now customers) into advocacy with expressive content.

Attract at Purchase

To attract prospects who are showing signs they're ready to buy, brands can employ some of the same content tactics as they do in the "advance to purchase" phase of consideration. In addition to promoting hot deals and offers, content in this phase can also take the form of decision-making tools such as "purchasing wizards," which help prospects choose the right product for their particular needs. A goal for content in this phase might be to "offer flash deal content and tools that enable a customer to order the right product for their needs."

As an example, a healthcare technology provider could create an online tool that helps lab technicians decide on which assay is right for their laboratory testing needs. By answering a handful of key questions, the interactive wizard could recommend the best product for a lab that conducts 5 experiments per week, with an average complexity score of “2.” Such a tool could be paired with a purchasing call-to-action asking prospects to “click to request a free price quote.”

Advance to Advocacy

In any given set of customers, there is always a vocal minority who frequently recommend solutions to friends and colleagues. Content that advances customers into advocacy can focus on communicating reasons to advocate and on giving customers the ammunition to do so. A goal for content in this phase may be to “grant insider access to our most vocal brand advocates and to arm them with content in order to build buzz prior to major announcements.”

To go back to our example of a healthcare provider, content that does this may take the form an online community that rewards brand advocates by giving them sneak peaks into new product releases prior to their public launch. After incentivizing customers with exclusive content, our healthcare provider can arm them with expressive content, such as funny e-cards, that they can send along to friends and colleagues in order to build awareness. Putting exclusive teaser content [about upcoming product launches] into the hands of these brand advocates can also recruit them to build buzz for the next big product launch.

PRIORITIZING ACTIVITIES & KPI'S

While your organization’s funnel may look different from the one used here, the fundamental approach can be adapted to suit your specific needs. You can start by identifying the stages in your organization’s marketing funnel, and filling in “attract” and “advance” content goals for each stage. Use Appendix A to guide your efforts.

After you have filled in funnel stages and content goals for your organization, you can acid test your model by doing a content audit. Simply map each of your existing content pieces to a specific funnel stage and phase (attract or advance). This will give you a sense for where you may have gaps in your content footprint, or where there may be misalignment with marketing priorities (i.e. if you have a number of awareness campaigns coming up but most of your content platform is not built to capitalize on that awareness). Conducting a content audit can also stimulate thinking about when and where your content can be deployed.

Mapping content to funnel stages may also prompt you to reconsider your particular organization’s marketing funnel: for example, you may have two mid-funnel stages called “consideration” and “preference” [figure 3]. Through the process of writing your content goals for each stage and mapping your content to each, you may find there to be little discernible difference in the content that applies to each stage. This would indicate that either your content goals are not focused enough or that you have an extra, unnecessary funnel stage in your model.

Figure 3: Acid-Testing Your Funnel

KPI's at each phase can help measure the effectiveness of your content. After you have written content goals at each funnel stage, you can prioritize KPI's against those goals. Here are some common content KPI's you can map to each stage of your content model:

- + Visitor bounce rates
- + Time on site/page
- + Clicks to next funnel stage content
- + Purchasing clicks
- + Social sharing
- + Inbound links
- + Gated content downloads

IMPLICATIONS FOR INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE AND USER EXPERIENCE

This content strategy model can also be used to inform the user experience and information architecture of your brand's web properties. By analyzing prospect flows into and through a website, you can map web pages to funnel stages or "visitor mindsets," suggesting the topic and type of content to prioritize on a given page. For example, it may be a bad idea to have awareness or advocacy content placed on a page dedicated to the "purchase" mindset, where screen real estate is best used for inducing the purchase click. As marketers, we may intuit this by avoiding placing anything that dilutes clicks from primary call-to-action on conversion pages.

A less obvious application might come from charting a user's path across a website and strategically incorporating "advance" content into on-page callouts along the path. This can help accelerate the velocity with which prospects move through the site and from one funnel stage to another. A KPI to measure this might be bounce rate and call-to-action click-through rates.

CONCLUSION

A robust content strategy can act as a springboard to purposeful content creation, and provide a basis for measuring business success. In other words, it can be useful in identifying the types of content that your brand should create, as well as in testing the effectiveness of that content in generating business results. While the content strategy above does both, it is by no means the end-all framework for content creation. It is merely a starting point for a more structured approach to deciding and prioritizing your brand's approach to creating content.

APPENDIX A: CONTENT STRATEGY WORKSHEET

1 ATTRACT →

2 ADVANCE ↓

Goal: Content:	AWARENESS	Goal: Content:
Goal: Content:	CONSIDERATION	Goal: Content:
Goal: Content:	PURCHASE	Goal: Content:
Goal: Content:	ADVOCACY	Goal: Content: