Content marketing

How to create content by focusing on customers

FOUNDRY

Formerly IDG Communications

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Source: Foundry's Customer Engagement Study, 2019

Competing with content

You're reading this guide, so you must already know content continues to be B2B marketing's king.

Technology buyers are smart, and they're often a bit cynical. They don't always want to hear a sales pitch. But because their jobs are complex, they do want to hear useful, timely, in-depth information that helps them complete projects and make buying decisions.

That's what content marketing is all about: Creating relevant and interesting content that attracts a specific audience, and ultimately results in a profitable action. But content marketing is unlike traditional advertising or marketing in that it focuses on the audience first, not the product or service.

Think of content less like a sales call and more like a cocktail party—the person that always talks about himself winds up with nobody listening, but the one that is engaging and interested in others draws the crowd.

Research shows how vital it is to focus on the audience. Foundry's 2019 Customer Engagement study found 72% of IT buyers say it's challenging to find credible content, citing too much marketing hype, lack of unbiased information, and wariness of sales follow-up as primary reasons.

On the positive side, 74% of buyers said they are more likely to consider an IT vendor who educates

them through each step of the decision process. And 63% said they have visited vendor websites or contacted vendors directly in the past three months, in response to valuable content from that vendor. Great content really works.

First-mover advantage is long gone in most markets. In a 2019 Content Marketing Institute survey, 77% of respondents said their organization has fully bought into content marketing. If you're just ramping up a content marketing initiative, you're most likely entering a highly competitive field. To win, you can't just throw a few white papers out there—you have to do it better than most of the others already clamoring for tech buyers' attention.

This guide will help.

It's chock-full of tips on understanding your audience, creating more effective content that will stand out, and measuring (and communicating!) that effectiveness.

The bottom line: Quality content wins. Read on and give your prospects and clients content that really meets their needs. ▮

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Source: Foundry's Customer Engagement Study, 2019

How to create great content for tech buyers

David is a pretty typical enterprise tech buyer. He started as an entry-level systems analyst and worked his way up to a senior manager position in IT operations, so he's closely involved in purchasing decisions around the data center, network, and cloud services.

IT marketers really want to get inside David's head.

There's only one drawback …

David is just a persona!

Personas are unquestionably useful for B2B marketers, but content marketing may be the strategy that shows their limitations. Cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner suggests people are 22 times more likely to remember a fact when it is part of a story. Specific details make stories meaningful and credible. And personas can't tell stories.

The heart of content marketing for B2B tech buyers is reader service, delivered with good storytelling. No matter what you choose to create and how you promote it, start with these four principles. If you do these things consistently, your content will stand out from the competition.

Hero assets + content formats

Whether you're producing brand journalism, thought leadership, commentary or curation, **a varied mix of content formats can help keep your audience engaged**. Starting with a 'hero asset'—a rich, in-depth piece such as an article, research study, or webinar—can yield repurposed content in many other formats to maximize limited resources.

- **Blog posts**
- **eBooks**
- **Face-to-face presentations**
- **FAQs**
- **Infographics, data visualizations**
- **Magazines**
- **Microsites**
- **Podcasts**
- **Social posts**
- **Tools: calculators, worksheets, decision trees, org charts**
- **Q&A, interviews**
- **Videos**
- **Webinars**
- **White papers**

Know your audience segments

The SVP of network architecture and the network administrator definitely have some common interests, but one set of content won't garner the same level of engagement for both. Know all the buyers involved in purchasing or approving your products, and

Valuable content leads to action

Source: Foundry

64%	63%	50%	43%	39%	34%
Research product on technology content sites	Visit vendor websites or contact vendor	Participate in a product demo	Register to receive related content, if applicable	Add vendor to your short list or consideration set	Forward the content to friends or colleagues

- **57% of ITDMs** have listened to a podcast in the last three months for business purposes.

- **94% of ITDMs** have watched a tech-related video for business purposes.

- **80%** say that their awareness of the source is important for them to click on a link.

Source: Foundry's 2019 Customer Engagement Survey

for great content marketing. And they can reality-check your content, or the assumptions and claims in that content, to make sure you don't sound naive.

For example: With a few minutes and a search engine, you can find lots of assertions that blockchain technology is "unhackable." But if you put that in an article aimed at real IT buyers, they'll laugh. Customer discussions and interviews help avoid that sort of negative outcome.

Put their needs above messaging

The core concept of content marketing is to focus on information the reader needs and will use.

Where this breaks down most often is in the review and approval process. Make sure everyone involved in the content marketing effort understands the goal, so your "vendor-neutral" white papers don't turn back into thinly veiled sales pitches.

create the right content—strategic versus tactical, technical versus operational—to serve each group.

For marketers with rich audience datasets, machine learning may allow identification of even more narrowly defined segments, whether based on behavior or title.

Effective segmentation allows marketers to target content creation and delivery (and promotions, for that matter) for greater impact.

Talk to your customers

Less than half of marketers actually talk directly to customers. That's according to 2018 research from the Content Marketing Institute.

Talking to customers does several things that personas don't do: Customers can provide specifics and stories
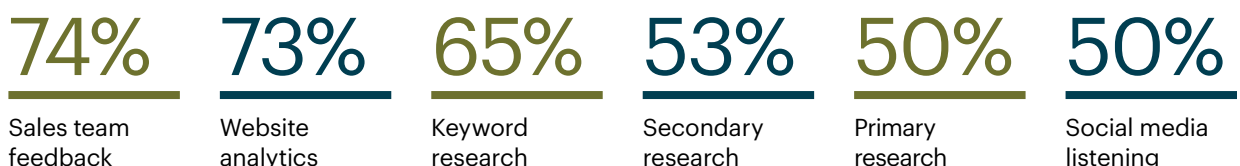
Tell real stories

Again, real-world IT is complex. Real stories avoid the 'magic wand syndrome' that most B2B case studies suffer from: making selection and implementation of complex technology sound painless and fast, with instant results, like waving a magic wand.

Leave the real-world grit in your stories, and the audience will recognize that you're reliable and credible.

Once you've developed and ingrained the habit of focusing on the audience, telling real stories, and providing useful details, then you're ready to connect with your IT buyer segments wherever they are. ∎

Techniques B2B marketers use to research their target audience for content marketing

74%	73%	65%	53%	50%	50%
Sales team feedback	Website analytics	Keyword research	Secondary research	Primary research	Social media listening

Source: 2019 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, by Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

It's all about the audience

Need help setting up a firm content marketing foundation? Want to segment your customer base more accurately? Planning your strategy for 2020 and beyond? This Q&A can help, as veteran journalist and marketer Rob O'Regan points the way toward more effective content marketing.

Rob O'Regan

Global Director of
Content Marketing Strategy,
Foundry

@roboregan

Q: How is content marketing different from traditional messaging?

Traditional messaging is about the brand. Content marketing is about the audience. You still want to tell your brand story, but in the context of what's most important to the audience you're targeting.

Q: How can marketers best understand and segment their audience?

Let the data guide you. Look at the behavioral and transactional data from your website to understand content consumption patterns. Layer your first-party data with second- and third-party data from media partners, social platforms, and other sources. This will help you better understand the buying teams that match up against your solution category.

Q: What mistakes do you see marketers make most often?

The most common mistake is focusing on tactics over a broader content strategy. With that approach, you can spend a lot of time producing blog posts and white papers and webcasts but there's no connective tissue, no coherent themes, so the message gets lost. You end up with what I've seen referred to as 'random acts of content,' which is a perfect way to describe it.

Q: What are you expecting to see more of in 2020 in terms of delivering value?

Data-driven content is the present and the future. Data has to infuse and inform every stage of content marketing, from understanding the audience to learning which types of content have the most impact at different stages of the buyer journey. You gain those insights through a combination of website metrics, social listening, focus groups, CRM data, market research, sales transactions, and many other internal and external data sources.

You need good analytics and reporting tools to make sense of all the data and, increasingly, some machine learning capabilities to find the connections that humans are likely to miss. The more granular you can get, the more effective you will be in engaging with your target audience—and helping them make better decisions.

Q: What are your top three suggestions for marketers who are starting their first content program?

First, partner with someone who understands content! That sounds self-serving but the best content marketers are trained journalists who understand the art of storytelling, the nuances of finding the right "hook," the interviewing skills to ask the right questions that lead to deeper insights, and the creative skills to turn complicated topics into compelling narratives.

Second, take an outside-in perspective. Focus on your customers'/prospects' needs and pain points and create a content strategy designed to address those challenges in ways that align with your brand proposition.

Third, you'll get better reach with your content development efforts if you build off of a couple of "hero" assets. Taking the time up front to create this type of asset—a research study or a comprehensive eBook or white paper—will provide a foundation for all kinds of derivative assets. It's the gift that keeps on giving and lets you maximize your resources. ▪

Making thought leadership sing

Let's be honest: Most "thought leadership" content doesn't "lead" at all. Marketers are sometimes guilty of using the term to refer to any content that features an in-house expert. And maybe you're getting some leads from that white paper or views on that blog post. **But that's a low bar for claiming success.**

Remember, you're competing for attention. Real thought leadership needs to stand out and make the audience want to come back for more.

Effective thought leadership content has three qualities: novelty, depth, and clarity.

Novelty

If it's all been said before, how is your material providing leadership? How does it make your company stand out? (Answer: It doesn't.)

Happily, a single unique thought can provide incredible value to your target customers. And a unique thought can take a variety of forms. It can be contrarian, challenging industry assumptions and conventions. It can synthesize competing notions. It can provide a new perspective, framework, or analogy for examining a key issue or task that your audience struggles to complete. It can bring in reference points from other industries, suggesting new ways to address a problem.

Depth

Okay, not every blog post or white paper will dazzle with its unique thinking. That's okay if it provides a different form of value: a level of detail, candor, or thoroughness that your competitors don't provide.

B2B tech buyers face complex problems. Marketers face the temptation to make everything sound simple, but buyers know this seldom reflects reality. Instead of oversimplifying, thought leadership content can lean into complexity and give the audience a deep-dive into how others have grappled with the same issues. This could mean conducting original research—a tried-and-true content marketing tactic—or it could be accomplished via high-quality, journalism-style interviews.

Remember that depth doesn't always refer to technical details. Half the challenge in technology implementations have to do with project methodologies, people and organizational issues, and so on. Content

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Pairing SMEs with professional writers and editors is the surest path to clarity.

that sheds light on solving those issues offers readers exceptional utility.

Clarity

Remember the old quote from playwright George Bernard Shaw—"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

Unfortunately, thought leadership content can fall into this trap, with subject-matter experts (SMEs) and marketers feeling proud of their output, but readers left feeling confused by insider jargon, academic writing, and/or new ideas explained poorly.

The content marketer's challenge is to take those unique thoughts and amazing details, and ensure they're expressed with the utmost clarity for the intended audience.

That doesn't always mean removing technical details—a technical audience will appreciate

them. But effective thought leadership takes complex ideas and makes them easy to understand by providing useful context, clear and simple writing, short explainers of tech terms or acronyms where helpful.

Some SMEs are wonderful communicators, clear and concise. Others aren't. Pairing SMEs with professional writers and editors is the surest path to clarity.

Tips for working with subject-matter experts

Again, let's be candid: Creating thought leadership is hard. Everyone is busy, and achieving novelty, depth, and clarity takes work. Here are three tips for creating the best material in the most efficient way.

Establish how much input you'll need. Veteran ghost-writers often require one SME interview to create an outline, a second to flesh out the draft, and then at least one round of SME review. One phone call might cut it—but it probably won't.

Establish who 'owns' the asset. If the SME gets the byline, most will exert a stronger level of engagement and/or control. Being clear on this point can take a lot of friction out of the process.

Push for more. Take time to find out what's already being said on the topic at hand, so you can recognize if the first pass at a thought leadership piece has only scratched the surface. Then, when needed, ask questions to extract more details and insights, so your content truly stands out. ▮

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Measuring content success

How's your content performing? It's a loaded question, because most content marketing initiatives have very basic measurement: page views for awareness, or names captured for lead gen.

Those are decent metrics, but more mature programs draw from a broader set of measurements.

Awareness/Engagement:

- Website visitors as measured by page views, including those for content you've contributed to media or partner sites

- Views, plays, or downloads for podcasts and videos

- Content engagement metrics such as time-on-page, time-on-site, page scrolling, or percent of video viewed

- Sharing metrics: shares on social networks, emails sent

- Organic search traffic, which shows whether owned content assets and platforms are providing long-term value, versus relying solely on paid promotion

Nurture:

- Repeat visitors to your web site

- Social "follows" and email opens and clicks

Conversion:

- Form completions for downloads or gated content

- Newsletter, blog, or alert subscriptions

ROI:

- Number of content-generated leads who turn into customers, tracked via website conversion or CRM tools

- Content's role in retaining and upselling existing customers, using surveys or questions built into the sales and renewal process

Start with your business or marketing goals—what are you trying to achieve—then determine the most appropriate metrics for tracking your progress. Starting with the tools instead of the goals will limit your ability to think beyond your current capabilities and make progress toward a more effective program. Once you have clearly identified these business goals, you can select the most appropriate metrics for each particular campaign or set of assets. ▮

A few more tips on making your measurement meaningful:

● **Use two to three key metrics, not just one.** Focusing on a single metric tends to distort the choices the content team makes. For example, a monomaniacal focus on clicks will result in sensational headlines that don't match the content itself.

● **Make sure your content KPIs really match your business goals.** If you're aiming to reach a narrow B2B audience segment, setting a broad

KPI like "page view growth" is setting yourself up for failure.

If you're targeting CIOs and other executives, "email addresses captured" is going to be a tough metric to move.

Poorly chosen KPIs can result in content that serves neither its audience nor the real business goal very well.

● **Get business buy-in with constant communication and documentation.**

Selecting the right metrics is critical, but getting the marketing team and upstream executives aligned on those metrics is just as important.

Carefully document the "why" behind your KPI choices and make sure to communicate that message widely. Content programs can get derailed or scuttled if leaders don't have a very clear understanding of how the target KPIs ladder up to real business value.

Case study: Informatica and the data-driven CIO

Content strategy:

- Raise awareness of client as a leader in data-driven digital transformation
- Raise profile of CIO as an innovator and leader in this space—through the first-person perspective of leading digital transformation

Year 1:

- Podcast series, blog posts, and research

Year 2:

- Additional podcast episodes (13 total)
- Social amplification
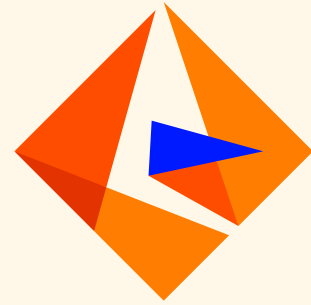- ABM targeting

Year 3:

- Playlist, with more custom content
- Webcasts, CIO interviews
- Integrated with client content

Underwriter for CIO Perspectives:

NYC April 2017

Fireside chat:

"The CIO as Chief Transformation Officer,"
Graeme Thompson, SVP & CIO, Informatica,
and Maryfran Johnson, Editor in Chief, CIO Events

Results

- **170K+** PVs
- **1700+** outbound clicks
- **80K** podcast plays
- **3X** renewals

Informatica illustrated the power of content for extending reach, establishing thought leadership, and ultimately moving the bottom line.

The company wanted to raise awareness of its capabilities in data-driven digital transformation, and spotlight the company's own SVP and CIO Graeme Thompson as an innovator and thought leader in that space.

Informatica worked with Foundry to plan and execute a multi-year content campaign using a broad range of tactics, starting with podcasts, original research and an onstage fireside chat with Thompson on "The CIO as Chief Transformation Officer" at a CIO regional event. This hero content leads into additional podcasts and blog posts, reinforced with social amplification and account-based targeting.

The campaign has already garnered more than 170,000 page views and 80,000 podcast plays, ultimately yielding a 3x improvement in product and service renewals. ▮

Case study: AccessData earns awareness and leads

Program Strategy and Solution

MarketPulse Power Pack:

- Custom research with 10–15 survey questions and 100 respondents
- One, four-page white paper based on MarketPulse research results
- Audio on-demand webcast based on MarketPulse research results and syndicated for lead generation

Visual Snack Pack:

- Standard infographic, infogram and mini motion graphic based on MarketPulse research results

3-Month BrandPost co-branded with CIO editorial brand:

- Program content is promoted natively across Foundry editorial feeds

Business objective:

Faster insights, trusted answers and better results. Our proven approach to forensics gives you infinite benefits, no matter the challenge.

AccessData makes powerful forensic software used in compliance, investigation, and litigation. The company turned to content marketing for increased market awareness and to meet ambitious lead-generation goals.

Their approach started with an Foundry MarketPulse custom survey, which yielded a white paper plus an on-demand audio webcast covering the results. AccessData also turned the results into a series of infographics, including mini-motion graphics.

To further support the effort, the company used a three-month BrandPost program, co-branding with Foundry's CIO brand and promoting the content natively across Foundry's editorial feeds.

This concerted approach helped AccessData gain valuable new traction with C-suite customers. ▮

"Working with [Foundry], I was able to quickly and easily create new content to aid in our marketing efforts, driving increased brand awareness for AccessData among key C-level audience targets and generating new leads for my sales team."

—**Jessica Carter,** former senior director, North American Marketing, AccessData

How Foundry's marketing services team can help you

Communicating your value proposition to tech buyers is not easy. Understanding who to target, crafting the right story, and connecting through the right channels are all critical. **Our deep domain expertise and first-party relationships with the most important tech buyers and influencers make us uniquely positioned to help you identify and tailor your marketing efforts across the tech buyer ecosystem.**

No matter the topic or distribution platform, our team is committed to producing the highest quality content and user experience that resonates with your customers and moves them to action. Leverage our relationships to amplify your message with tech buyers and get your sales team ready for deeper conversations.

Content
Quality content, leveraging deep industry knowledge and journalistic expertise to tailor messaging to engage and inform buyers.

Research
Hear directly from tech buyers about their challenges, interests and investments with exclusive research that can be integrated into your campaign for the best engagement.

Social
Capture and leverage insights from industry influencers to amplify your messaging and engagement.

Native
Integrate your message into one of our premium editorial brands to build awareness and credibility with Foundry's loyal audiences.

Video
Explain your perspective or complex technologies through a variety of interactive video programs. We understand this medium, know what works and how to generate the best results.

Webcasts and podcasts
Deliver thought leadership and reinforce your message to buyers seeking content to inform their purchasing decisions.

Community
Create and participate in niche communities with hyper-targeted messaging to gain mindshare for emerging topics or specific verticals. ▪

For more information

Stay up-to-date with the ever-changing tech landscape and what's important to tech buyers …

- Sign-up for Foundry's newsletter and receive our proprietary research, product and event information from across Foundry brands direct to your inbox: https://www.foundryco.com/newsletters

- For trending research, content and industry news, follow us on Twitter: @FoundryIDG

- Visit us on LinkedIn for research, services and events announcements

- For more information about Foundry and our content marketing services, contact your sales executive or send us a message at https://www.foundryco.com/contact-us

About Foundry | **Foundry connects the world of tech buyers** with insights, intent and engagement. We are the world's largest media, data and marketing services company that activates and engages the most influential technology buyers. Our premium brands, including CIO®, Computerworld®, CSO®, InfoWorld®, Macworld®, Network World®, and PCWorld® engage a quality audience of the most powerful audience of technology buyers providing essential guidance on the evolving technology landscape.

Our global data intelligence platform activates purchasing intent, powering our clients' success. Foundry Marketing Services creates custom content with marketing impact across video, mobile, social and digital. We execute complex campaigns that fulfill marketers' global ambitions seamlessly with consistency that delivers quality results and wins awards. Additional information about Foundry, a privately held company, is available at https://www.foundryco.com.

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