

Digital Marketing for Today's Manufacturing Marketers

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The manufacturing industry has gone through many significant changes over the past decade, including:

- Increased global competition
- Increased demand for customized products
- Increased preference for sustainable products
- More pressure to get products to market faster

Many manufacturers struggle with how to market their products effectively. In fact, when it comes to content marketing, **only 30 percent** of manufacturers feel their efforts are effective. This is compared to 42 percent for their B2B peers.





The Need for Change

The truth is,

conventional marketing tactics don't work as well as they used to. Historically, manufacturers have relied on reseller channels, traditional print advertisements or tradeshows to market their wares.

However, research has revealed

nearly 90 percent B2B buyers begin searching for products online. That means digital marketing needs to play a much larger role in marketing for manufacturers.



Common Hurdles to Digital Marketing for Manufacturers



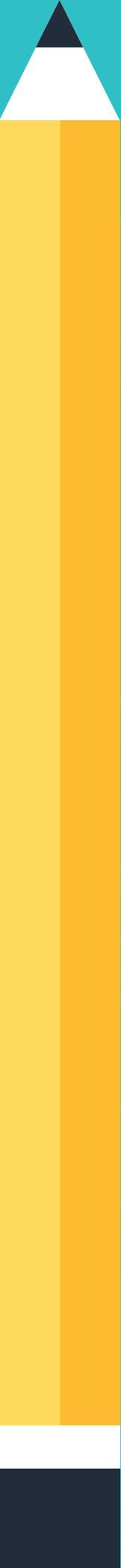
Most manufacturers distribute their products through intermediaries (dealers, distributors, agents, brokers), classifying them as B2B2C organizations. While this model might work from a logistical standpoint, it creates a chasm between the maker of a product and the consumer.

The marketing process then becomes extremely complicated, since the manufacturer has less direct (if any) access to customer information. This disconnect makes content creation – necessary for successful digital marketing – especially challenging.

Traditionally, manufacturers can be slow to adapt, especially when it comes to content marketing. [Only 26 percent of manufacturers deemed their content marketing strategy effective, down from 30 percent in 2014.](#) In addition, only 20 percent said they have a documented content strategy.

Marketers with a documented content strategy are much less challenged with content marketing, and justify a higher percentage of the marketing budget be spent on content marketing, according to the Content Marketing Institute.





Getting Started with Digital Marketing

While there is no “blueprint” for creating a content marketing strategy, considering a few questions can help you get started.

When mapping out your content strategy, consider:

- What challenges are we trying to solve?
- What are the details of each of our personas?
- What are their biggest pain points?
- What does our sales funnel look like?
- What does the customer’s buying cycle look like?
- What content do we need to create based on the engagement cycle?





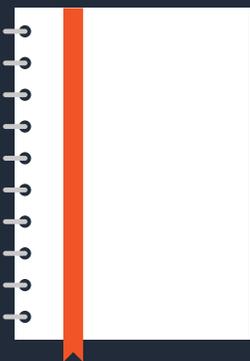
It's also important to establish a business case for content marketing. According to the Content Marketing Institute, a good business case will answer these five questions:



- What is the need? What do you hope to accomplish with your content marketing?
- How big of a need is it? Do you have a big enough audience to justify a plan?
- What is the business model? How does it work? What do we have to do?
- What is your differentiating value? Why is this more important than other things you are spending time on?
- What are the risks? What's in your way of success – or what happens if you fail?



Most traditional manufacturers are sales-oriented, dependent upon referrals and repeat business, which can make creating compelling content a **challenge.**



Any existing content a manufacturer may have likely revolves around the company and its products and is often outdated, offering little value. Even fewer manufacturers customize content for different stakeholders and make it relevant for different stages of the prospect's buying cycle. Marketing must evolve to take these new dynamics into account.



There's a new marketing ecosystem in place. Tailoring both your message and the manner in which you communicate it has taken on greater importance — today's consumers demand a relevant experience regardless of the medium they choose to communicate with your brand. Smart marketers overcome these challenges by creating campaigns with measurable results.

Let's say you're a manufacturer that works with customers in the power industry. You might create content that outlines new regulatory requirements, such as the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS). The companies you sell to aren't likely to buy a solution to a problem until they understand how regulatory changes will affect their businesses, so educational content is vital at the beginning of a campaign.

As your lead makes their way down the sales funnel, their needs can be determined, and you can do a better job of tailoring content to the appropriate solution by:

- **Creating compelling content online to inform, educate and motivate**
- **Positioning your organization as thought leaders in your industry**
- **Delivering consistent, customized content**

Content Creation Tips

When it comes to creating compelling content, it can be challenging to break out of the "me-first" mentality.

Make your content resonate with your audience by:

Making an Emotional Connection

Your website, content and social media efforts should be focused on your customer, not you. Don't try to immediately sell them something or brag about your accomplishments. Instead, try to connect with them, help them understand what makes you tick.

*Take IBM as an **example**.*

Making the User Experience Unforgettable

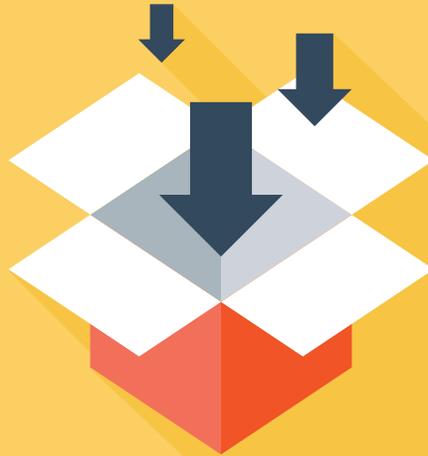
Step away from the quarterly earnings reports, and think about who makes your company great. Think beyond the executive bios and look around. What are some human interest stories you could be telling? Why do these people love coming to work? What separates you from your competitors (in addition to your product)?

Look at your site. Is it easy for visitors to find what they need? Make sure your site is easy to read on a variety of devices — desktops, mobile devices and, tablets.

Transforming Leaders into Thought Leaders

Chances are your leaders possess a lot of expertise. Ask them for their opinions on industry events and news, get their predictions for the future, or interview them for a best practices or tip sheet. All of these topics can serve as valuable content opportunities to help you reach your intended audience.





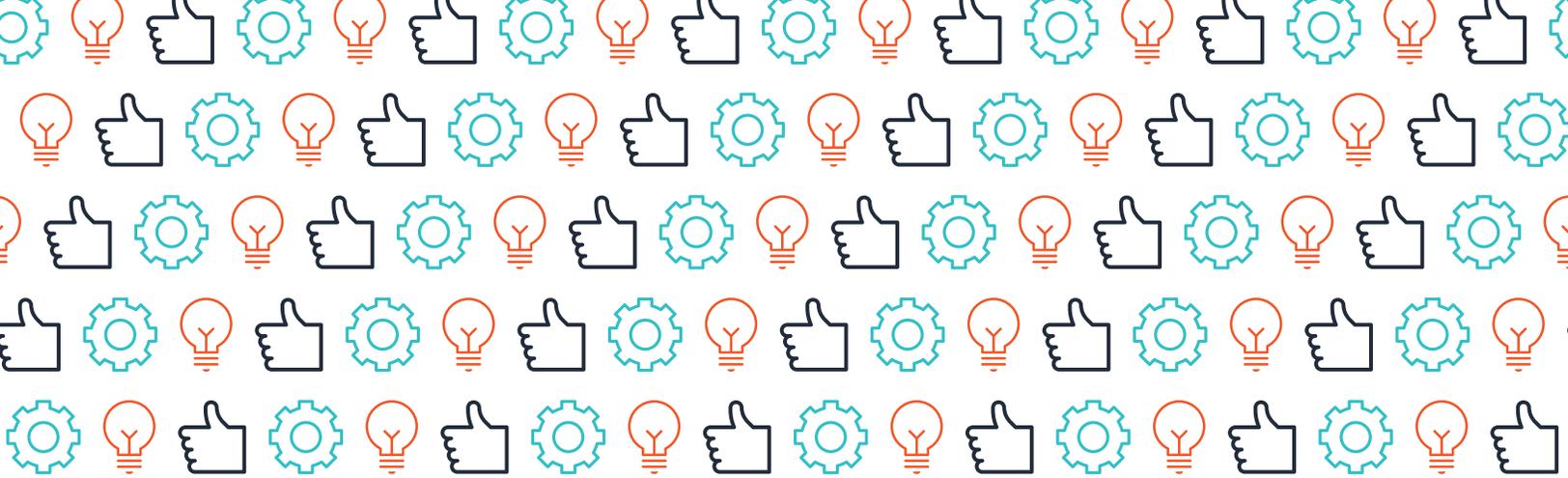
Digital marketing campaigns must include several key components that enable your company or brand to build relationships with prospects and guide them through the sales funnel:

Everyone loves freebies,

and your customers are no exception. Offer items of value (such as new regulatory requirement info) in an easy-to-digest cheat sheet.

Freebies can also come in the form of eBooks, coupons, rewards and more. Promote these giveaways on your website's landing pages along with clear calls to action (CTAs) on the homepage and the top 10 most-visited pages on your site. Double-down on the promotion of giveaways and incentives via social media and blogs.





Kicking Off Campaigns

Now that you've got content established, it's time to create a campaign to get it in front of your ideal customer.

Campaign Pieces of the Puzzle include:



AWARENESS:

Blogs, Social Media, eBooks,
White Papers, Videos



CONSIDERATION:

Case Studies, Performance Reports,
ROI Calculators, Webinars



DECISION:

Demonstrations, Free Trials, Consultations,
Quote Requests, Promotions

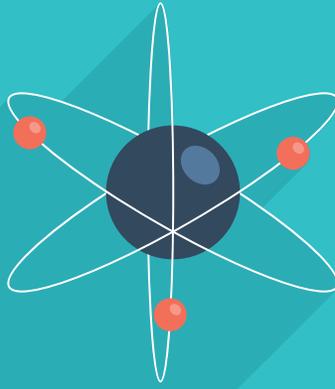
Many manufacturers still struggle with creating Awareness content that is **NOT** product or company centric.

Building relationships with leads and moving them through your sales funnel yields big benefits.

💰 According to [Forrester Research](#), companies that nurture leads will generate 50 percent more sales-ready leads at a 33 percent lower cost-per lead.

It takes an average of seven or eight touch points to convert a prospect to a customer, making lead management a critical component of any digital marketing strategy.





Better Understanding the Lifecycle Stages

Marketers in the manufacturing industry must understand how buyers differ depending on their personas and the content they need at each stage of the sales funnel.



Awareness:

Consumers realize they have a problem and begin looking for a potential solution. At this stage, marketers need to educate and motivate the buyer. A wide-format printer manufacturer, for example, knows the printing industry is moving from offset printing to web-based communications. They may offer a free ebook titled “How to Adapt and Increase Profits with Wide Format Printing,” but never mention their own printers. The ebook helps buyers understand their problem and their options for solving that problem, without feeling pressured by a sales team. In exchange for free downloads or information, ask for information about the visitor, including names and email addresses.



Consideration:

Once you’ve captured information about prospects, you have successfully converted them into leads. At this stage, the buyer begins to explore possible options to solve his or her problem, so it’s vital to provide relevant content and personalized messaging tailored to the prospect’s preferences. Ask the right questions and provide the right information. Here is where you can begin to introduce your products (such as different printer models).



Decision:

The buyer is ready to make a selection, though keep in mind the customer may “engage” with more than one brand. Continue communicating the benefits of your products and the value the prospect will receive by selecting your brand. Offer free demos, in-home trials or easy ways to speak with a sales rep.



Informative Content Comes in Many Forms

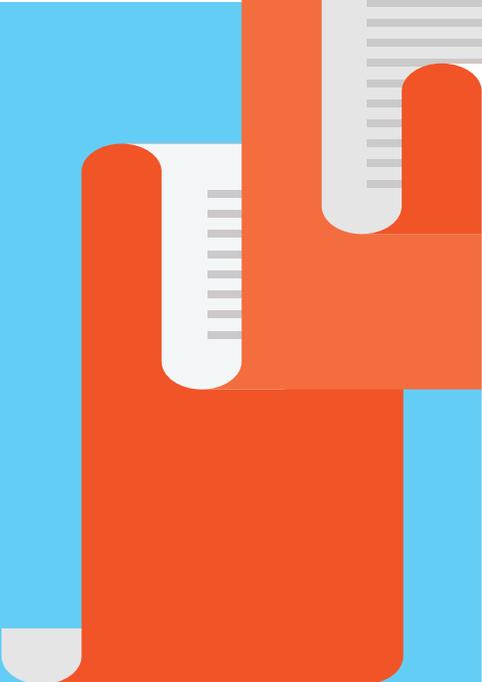
Blogs

These online articles show visitors your company is an industry thought leader that understands their pain points. Don't use blogs to pitch products, but rather to show expertise and in-depth knowledge of what's happening in your industry. By generating comments—both negative and positive—blogs pique interest and spur debate, which, in turn, leads to an ongoing dialogue with prospects. Blogs must be accurate, timely, fresh, entertaining and informative to attract visitors and ensure they will return.



For good examples of educational content, check out www.HealthCoach4Me.com run by GlaxoSmithKline and www.DoMoreWithOxygen.com run by Invacare.





eBooks

These free digital books enable companies to provide valuable, educational content to prospects in exchange for useful data: a win-win situation. A good example is a dental manufacturer that offers free information about industry advancements.

Consumers react differently to different types of information. Some are visual learners while some are auditory; cater to everyone by implementing all types of content online:



Videos

Videos remain the top piece of content manufacturers produce, with 87 percent reporting they utilize them in their content strategy. According to the [Content Marketing Institute \(CMI\)](#), YouTube is the most widely used content distribution channel by manufacturers.

Videos make an excellent content marketing option because buyers are increasingly watching online

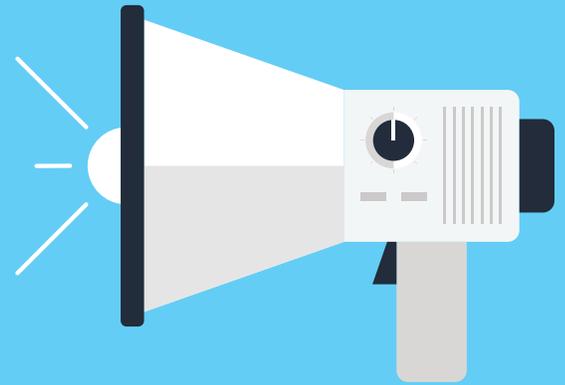
videos to educate themselves on products before buying. Not only that, they can also increase brand awareness, amp up site traffic, boost click-through rates and improve search engine results. Determine what your audiences care about, then produce videos to entertain and inform. They don't have to be expensive. In fact, you can create them in-house with minimal equipment.

For good examples of videos, check out the [John Deere YouTube channel](#).



Webinars

These web-based virtual meetings and presentations are a powerful way for marketers to build relationships with customers and prospects to create more sales. Webinars offer three powerful elements: customer or prospect interaction, audio and visual elements (video).



Podcasts

Recorded audio content available over the Internet helps companies convey relevant messages and share fresh, compelling ideas with customers and prospects. They also help position your company as a thought leader in your market.



Pinterest

Yes, Pinterest. When you think of content distribution best practices for manufacturers, Pinterest likely does not top the list. But GE has done the seemingly impossible and created one of the most visually appealing and engaging [Pinterest profiles](#) out there. And that's from a manufacturing brand.





Build a Team of Content Producers

Though research reveals more than half (55 percent) of manufacturers outsource content creation, it's possible to create an in-house team.

The first step

is to assemble a solid troop of content producers, starting with the chief content officer or VP of marketing who will serve as “chief storyteller.” Other key players include a managing editor tasked with staying on top of day-to-day activities, content creators or writers and content producers or designers, the ones who make the content compelling and engaging visually.

When the grind of cranking

out engaging content becomes too much, marketers shouldn't fear looking outside their corporate walls to outsource talent. Outsourcing helps marketers complete tasks they don't have the ability to do in-house while maintaining control of their campaigns.



Use the Right Tools to Automate Marketing

Once you have your content strategy in place, you'll need a content distribution plan.

Marketing automation tools help marketing teams manage targeting and timing in response to prospects' online behaviors. This helps convert prospects to Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) more quickly.

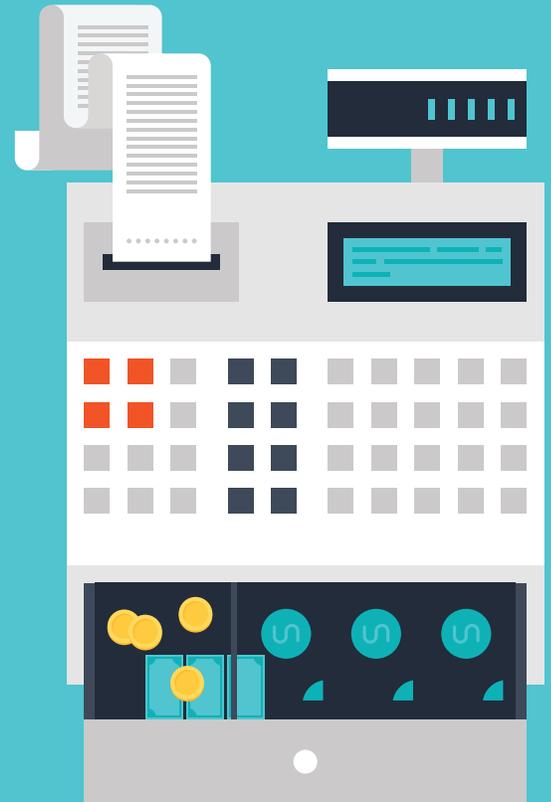
Lead scoring helps marketers gauge where buyers are in the buying process. This helps marketers understand if leads should be handed off to sales or if an email campaign deployed over several months might be more appropriate. Use marketing automation tools to create email workflows, a series of automated actions you can trigger to occur based on a person's behavior or contact information. For example, someone fills out a form on your site and is automatically added to a segmented list based on his or her title.



Proving Return on Investment (ROI)

As digital ecosystems become more complex, it can become more difficult to understand how all the elements contribute to the overall success of your campaign.

However, the C-Suite demands you try. Start by analyzing what mechanisms, digital marketing channels and methods you have data for, then create a single measurement index that links all of them.



All-in-one automation solutions, like [Hubspot](#), can provide attribution reports to reveal how many leads, marketing qualified leads and opportunities were the result of content distribution via blogs, web pages and social media



Just as each product has a different buying cycle, each customer takes a slightly different journey in the buying process.





Predicting the Future of Digital Marketing for Manufacturers

Manufacturers that recognize the business case for content marketing will successfully position themselves as partners, rather than simply vendors. To succeed, they must deploy tools and techniques to promote content and nurture leads. Despite the challenges we discussed earlier, manufacturers have a unique advantage in that their product distribution networks can greatly facilitate the distribution of their content.

Distributors, dealers, re-sellers and manufacturing representatives can all be valuable conduits for sharing good content to build better relationships with prospects and customers. As a manufacturer, you might think your job is to sell products. While that's true, look beyond that idea and position your company—through informative content—as a thought leader responsible for educating customers about future product trends and regulatory compliance. The end result? You'll be viewed as a partner and your competitors will just be “another vendor.”

If you're interested in seeing examples of content or case studies please [contact us](#) today