

A Brief Guide to Content Marketing Strategy



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A Tactic Is Not a Strategy

Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. - Sun Tzu

In business, it is often seen that tactics are regularly employed over strategy. Or without strategy. People love methods and techniques, programs and processes, But they are often befuddled by strategy and what may be the best strategy in a given business situation.

And, so, tactics tend to reign.

According to Erica Olsen from *Strategic Planning Kit For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, here is a good way to understand the distinction between strategy and tactics in business:

Strategy is the "what" part of the equation and helps you answer the question, "What are we trying to accomplish?" Yet your business design may not be sustainable; you may have trade-offs for how you position your business with customers and competitors.

Every business has limited resources and deals with a competitive landscape. The more it does of one thing, the less it can do of another. This concept leads to tactics, or the "how" part of the equation. Your tactics help you answer the question, "How are we going to accomplish our goal?"

But what about the tools?

Having said all that, it is interesting that an even more fundamental error is often made in connection with the marketing functions of business, especially with Social Media. That is, far too many business owners mistake tools for tactics (and, usually, the tool for a strategy!)

A good example of this is the idea that since everyone is using Facebook - that's what the gurus and marketing blogs tell us - then we need to go all in with Facebook because, by golly, that is going to turn this ship around. That is going to be our winning tactic. (And, by extension of this misplaced logic, our strategy...)

Except that Facebook is simply a tool. And, as ubiquitous and far-reaching as it is, it is neither a strategy, nor a tactic really. It is just a tool.

And therein lies the problem

Robert Rose and Joe Pulizzi, in their excellent book *Managing Content Marketing* note this failure:

Frankly, "distribution" is where most content marketing and social media plans begin. And it's why most fail. In fact, far too many small business owners are still failing to move beyond a "strategy" of simply engaging haphazardly with a few social media channels - tools - and thinking that they are utilizing tactics to accomplish some vaguely thought out objectives.

And the rub is that, at some point, they find that their "tactics" fail to gain any traction. So, because this "social media thing" apparently doesn't work, they drop them and go back to either paying for advertising or doing nothing.

Knowing How

Tools are absolutely vital and necessary, of course. Without the tools of warfare all the strategy and battlefield tactics in the world are not going to help an unarmed army in the face of one with weapons. It is even more evident with marketing: without the tools you're only talking to yourself.

And tactics are critical. Without effective tactics, developed and employed within the context of an effective strategy, the best we can hope for is random successes here and there and a lot of noise. Tactics by themselves do not a marketing strategy make.

This leaves us with the realization that marketing is a holistic endeavor that requires a strategy encompassing tactics employing tools.

And you got to know how to do that if you want to do it good

"Doing" Marketing

I had a coaching client tell me once that during the previous week he had, "done some marketing". I questioned him further only to find that he had sent out a batch of postcards to names on a rented mailing list. And while this might have indeed resulted in a few responses, I told him that he had, in fact, not been "doing marketing" but had simply engaged in a "random act of lead generation."

The phone was quiet for bit, and then he replied, "So when am I doing marketing?"

"When we have a real strategy." I said.

Why Content Marketing Needs Strategy

By delivering content that is vital and relevant to your target market, you will begin to take on an important role in your customers' lives. This applies to your online, print, and in-person communications. And this is the same role that newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, conferences, workshops, and Web sites have played in the past.

– Joe Pulizzi and New Barrett, *Get Content, Get Customers*

By now, I think most small business owners and professionals realize that "Content is King", or at least in the top-tier of the marketing pantheon. The point is that we know and understand that a vital part of what we do in our marketing efforts will involve content. And that content will consist of written words (i.e. webpage copy, printed materials, e-mail, etc.), graphics, images, and video.

Our efforts must and should be largely content driven.

But the problem too many of us run into isn't so much content creation – you can get people for that. It is having a clear understanding of what the heck you are trying to achieve with all that content and how to achieve it! The possibilities and combinations of content delivery are almost endless. The social media platforms and channels available are staggeringly numerous.

And everybody who is supposedly an "expert" has a slightly different take on what is the best way. So what is a Business Owner-as-Marketer to do?

Strategy and Plan

A strategy describes a global path to pursue a formal goal. .. A plan, on the other hand, allocates in detail resources that are necessary to accomplish the strategy.

– Arnold Oskar Picot, Prof. Dr. Dres. h.c. Ludwig-Maximilian-University of Munich

What is needed first and foremost is a STRATEGY. When it comes to content marketing this is commonly thought of as your editorial mission statement. In other words, when you are dealing with putting content out into the world you are, in effect, now a publisher. And no self-respecting publisher functions without a clearly articulated and documented statement of what their publication stands for.

And neither should you.

Content marketing is not about “what you sell” it’s about “what you stand for.” The informational needs of your customers and prospects come first. Although there must be clear marketing objectives behind the mission statement, those should not be outlined here... To work, your mission statement has to be all about the pain points of your readers and followers or it simply won’t work.

– Joe Pulizzi, Founder of the Content Marketing Institute

Based on your editorial mission statement you can then develop an effective strategy for accomplishing your company’s goals and objectives through content and content marketing.

And once you have a clear, documented content marketing strategy you can craft a plan for carrying it out.

In other words, think: Vision, Strategy, Tactics.

Send Lawyers, Guns and Money

But here’s the best part: it doesn’t have to be complicated. In fact, it shouldn’t be. Life and business is complex enough without adding on additional layers of complexity. Keep your goals simple, your plan straightforward, and be ready and willing to shift and pivot as needed.

This means you must have processes in place to track, monitor, and quantify your results. You have to have a set budget of both time and money to invest – regularly and consistently. You got to be all in, but you don’t have to be in over your head.

Content marketing is an approach that can be strategically scaled up as the need increases and resources become available. Done well and done right, content marketing can become both the cornerstone and foundation of your company’s promotional strategy.

And it can be fun to do!

A Sample Marketing Plan Using Content in an Inbound Marketing Strategy

Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it can be confusing to understand content marketing versus inbound marketing. Here is a good definition from Hubspot, one of the pioneers of the "inbound marketing" approach:

*Inbound marketing is about using marketing to bring potential customers to you, rather than having your marketing efforts fight for their attention. Sharing is caring and inbound marketing is about **creating and sharing content** with the world. By creating content specifically designed to appeal to your dream customers, inbound attracts qualified prospects to your business and keeps them coming back for more.*

So one could argue (and many do!) that content marketing is the same thing as inbound marketing. Or, you could simply view content marketing as the core, or foundation, of inbound marketing.

Either way, the fact is that content is what drives this approach to marketing.

A sample marketing plan for inbound marketing will give you one of the most powerful and most cost-effective approaches to marketing. Compared to traditional marketing methods, inbound consistently outperforms and typically costs far less.

A few stats from [Hubspot](#) illustrate this fact:

- 57% of businesses have acquired a customer through their company blog.
- 42% of businesses have acquired a customer through Twitter.
- 57% of companies have acquired a customer through LinkedIn.
- 48% of companies have acquired a customer through Facebook.
- Inbound marketing costs 62% less per lead than traditional outbound marketing.

Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that inbound marketing, while having a number of consistent components and tactics, is not a "cookie-cutter" approach to marketing either. Each strategy and subsequent plan is unique to each user.

Your Company Is Different - Just Like Everyone Else

Your business is like no other. Really. Your goals, your challenges, your offerings - they are all unique to you and your business. Even if you think you are simply a commodity. And because your business is unique, your marketing plan shouldn't be generic either.

We can offer a sample marketing plan, but the goal is to adapt it, modify it, and make it your own. What might work well for your competitor across town may not be exactly the plan that will be most effective for you. Your marketing strategy should be crafted with your vision, your objectives, and your customers in mind.

Now that we've established that not all businesses are the same, nor are all effective marketing plans, let's look at a generic approach to inbound marketing.

A Sample Inbound Marketing Plan Checklist

A typical inbound marketing plan will consist of the following steps:



1. Determine Your Marketing Strategy Goals

2. Create Benchmarks for Current Sales and Marketing Metrics

3. Define Your Ideal Lead or Customer

4. Define Your Buyer Personas



5. Research and Select Keywords

6. Review Your Search Engine Optimization checklist

7. Delegate Website Management and Content Creation

8. Launch and Develop Your Business Blog



9. Create Landing Pages with Lead Generation Content

10. Set up Social Media Accounts and Build a Presence

11. Delegate Social Media Monitoring

12. Set up Email Marketing Campaigns

13. Measure and Analyze



Marketing your business alone can be
difficult.
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“[Content Marketing] is the only marketing left.”
- Seth Godin