

Telling Your Story



Winning Customers with Considered, Compelling Content

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Winning Customers with Considered, Compelling Content



Executive Summary

The B2B Marketing Nightmare

In today's economic reality, businesses are finding it harder to gain and hold the customer's attention. Buyers are assaulted on all sides with disparate, gaudy messages at a time when business pressures give them less time to consider and respond.

It can sometimes feel like customers don't want to spend money on your product or time on your message. At the same time, marketers are being challenged to produce more sales leads, of better quality, with – at best – no more budget.

Research reveals the growing importance of a Content Marketing approach to address these issues, especially in technology and professional services markets.

Effective Content Marketing

Content marketing is of increasing importance², especially in markets where relationships of trust are critical, for example the professional services and computing/software sectors³.

White papers are an important part of a content marketing strategy, combining data, proof points and narrative to provide something of value and use to the audience, yet half of B2B marketers do not use this powerful tactic.

From a customer perspective, 72 per cent of IT professionals across the globe find white papers "extremely useful"⁴ while, in separate research, 65 per cent of US technology purchasers rated them as "very" to "extremely influential" on purchasing decisions⁵.

However, there are a number of challenges in driving a successful content marketing strategy.

Across the board, marketers cite lack of resources (people, time and money) as a major barrier to success⁶. Within content marketing specifically, they report their two leading challenges as producing engaging content and producing sufficient quantity of content.

At the same time, marketers often struggle with support and buy-in from within their organisations. Senior management does not always understand that, though effective, a content marketing strategy takes time to yield results. And, when everyone has too much to do, getting time and support from internal subject-matter experts to create material can be hard.

Those same time pressures impact customers, too. They are exposed to an ever greater array of materials and media and, while white papers are the most valued and influential, senior managers simply have less time to read *anything*.

What is Content Marketing?

"Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."

The Content Marketing Institute¹



Content marketers need to rise to this challenge with material that is obviously and immediately useful to the (potential) reader. If it does not immediately engage a busy decision maker, then it is unlikely to be read.

Considered, Compelling Content

Meeting these challenges, 62 per cent of businesses now outsource part of their content marketing and increasingly, successful marketers are designing their content marketing collateral for efficiency:

- **Efficient Production** – designing materials for re-use; taking elements of a white paper to create a blog-post or case-study for example; gaining maximum leverage from the investment in content creation.
- **Efficient Consumption** – designing materials that are visually compelling and easily accessible to the reader, quickly signaling the value available from more considered reading.

This paper explores how a considered approach to the creation and use of white papers and other content marketing materials can alleviate the challenges faced by business in today's uncertain climate. To discuss your own requirements, visit <http://burningpine.com/TellingYourStory.aspx>.

“One thing, however, shows every sign of remaining in vogue: thoughtful, informed content that speaks to prospects’ pain points and needs, offers intelligent solutions, and demonstrates that you, too, are invested in their success.”
 Source: Eccolo Media 2011 B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report, Eccolo Media Inc. October 2011. www.eccolomedia.com.

IT professionals want more local content

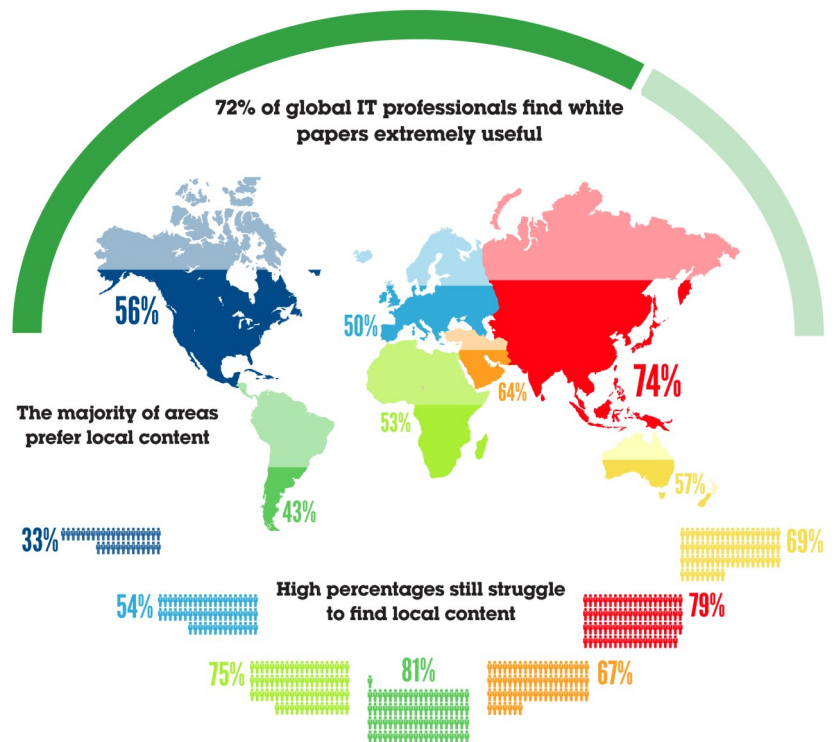


Figure 1: IT Professionals value white papers but want local content. Research and graphic by IDG Connect, <http://www.idgconnect.com/download/6608/infographic-global-it-content-survey-2011?source=connect>.

The B2B Marketing Nightmare

In today's economic reality, businesses are finding it ever more difficult to grab and hold the attention of business customers.

Sellers are focusing on the need to drive quality and quantity of sales leads while squeezing the maximum return from constrained marketing resources.

Buyers are also trying to do more with less and senior decision makers, with added responsibilities, have less time to devote to more things demanding their attention. Easily accessible, relevant information to support decisions is valued.

Trust in Tough Times

Marketing complex products and services in B2B markets has always been hard but when times are tough, it gets even harder: purchasing cycles are longer, decisions are taken higher up the chain, more information is required, everyone along the way has less time and more distractions and, of course, budgets are tighter and less certain. If a decision slips into next quarter, or next year, it may be lost forever.

At times like these, sellers look to reinforce relationships, to bolster their authority as thought leaders and to achieve the status of "trusted advisor" all of which a white paper approach is well-placed to support.

But internal tensions mount. Relationship building and maintenance take time and resource while marketers are being tasked to deliver more and better leads as their top priority⁷.

The Value of Effective Insight

Decision makers have access to ever more (though sometimes questionable) information via the web, but they have ever-decreasing capacity to consume it.

Busy executives are, necessarily, becoming increasingly selective in where they devote their limited reading time. The good news is that – according to two surveys of IT Professionals and Decision Makers - this selection includes white papers.

A survey by IDG Connect of IT Professionals (see opposite page) revealed that 72 per cent find white papers "extremely useful"⁸, even though many would prefer locally relevant content.

In a recent survey of North American IT decision makers, research and content firm Eccolo Media reported that 65 per cent rated white papers as "very" to "extremely influential" on purchasing decisions⁹. Such materials are particularly used in the pre-sales and early stages of the purchasing process.

The challenge is to cost-effectively provide decision makers with the information they require to make decisions in a fashion that allows them to consume it easily.





Effective Content Marketing

Marketing strategies are evolving to meet the challenge of efficiently providing efficiently consumable content.

On average, marketers spend between 20 and 26 per cent of budget¹⁰ on content marketing initiatives with 71 per cent reporting a year over year increase.

However, marketers face the same resource constraints as the rest of the business. Across the board, they cite lack of resources (people, time and money) as a major barrier to success¹¹. This manifests itself in a number of ways:

- Marketing Leaders lack the time to stand back and take a strategic perspective on content marketing
- Marketers lack the time to explore how to create compelling content
- Marketers lack the resources to generate sufficient volumes of content
- Marketers struggle to get necessary support from hard-pressed subject-matter experts.

To be effective, businesses need to find ways to create and distribute valued content effectively.

Alleviate Information Overload

Information overload is a significant problem for organisations, one for which poor marketing is often a contributing cause. A 2007 study found that information interruptions and handling unnecessary email cost Intel nearly \$1 billion a year¹². Another recent study found that reading irrelevant information actually clouds judgement and hurts the ability to identify important information¹³.

As decision makers, in uncertain times, take on increasing levels of responsibility, these issues will become critical. They are exposed to a growing array of materials and media and need to quickly filter that which is most valuable to them. While white papers are still the most valued and influential medium, senior managers simply have less time to read *anything*.

To be successful, marketers need to help readers quickly identify the value in the material they produce. If it does not immediately engage a busy decision maker, then it is unlikely to be read.

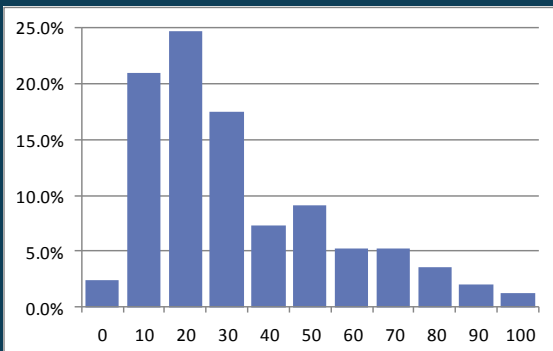


Figure 2: How much of your budget is spent on content marketing? Source: B2B Content Marketing Trends, Holger Schulze, Everything Technology Marketing.

Considered, Compelling Content

The solution is to produce considered, compelling content that is founded on two underlying principles:

- Efficient Production
- Efficient Consumption

Efficient Production

There are three aspects to efficient production.

Senior Support – Having the buy-in of senior management is important. When business leaders understand the value of a content marketing approach to their customers, they will support the allocation of resources and drive the necessary cross-silo cooperation that brings subject-matter experts and marketers together. In the report, “B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends”, the most effective content marketers were those least likely to cite Executive Buy-in as a challenge.

Outsourcing Content Creation – The percentage of organisations outsourcing part of their content marketing strategy has increased, year over year, to 62 per cent¹⁴. Using outsourced resources means hiring “expertise on demand” to augment or supplement the existing marketing team and provide additional resources or skills as needed. Skilled writers can be hired on a project basis, rather than being on permanent payroll, to produce materials that can be used (and re-used) into the future. Different skill-sets, backgrounds or perspectives can be brought in to match different audiences or to refresh a portfolio of material.

Designing for Re-Use – This approach can bring significant economies to a content marketing strategy, as well as providing reinforcement and consistency of message. Content should be written so that elements can be easily re-used. Thus, parts of a larger work such as a white paper can be easily extracted to create a shorter case study, a blog-post or re-crafted to form a presentation or speech. Similarly, a well-crafted white paper can be the basis of a customer event such as a round-table discussion event. At the extreme, a complete narrative could be created in a white paper format which, though too long for direct customer use, would be fully researched and signed off by senior management (and internal legal department if necessary) with the intention that its content would be copied and pasted into other documents as desired.

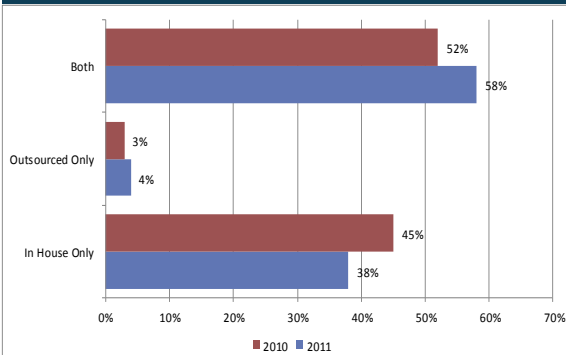


Figure 3: Percentage outsourcing of content marketing activity. Source: B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends, Content Marketing Institute



A Re-Use Case Study

Burning Pine was retained by the UK subsidiary of a major, global technology company to produce a lengthy thought-leadership paper. Over the following twelve months, the content was successfully re-used for a wide range of cases: the complete paper was “re-skinned” with a new title and introduction as a paper for the Scottish Government; pertinent sections were extracted to form the body of a letter from a senior executive tendering for a major contract; extracts were used as a “discussion paper” for a customer round-table event. The entire paper was also adopted as a world-wide “best practice” and several other subsidiaries localised the content, replacing its UK examples with more locally resonant ones.

Efficient Consumption

Designing for efficient consumption has two aspects:

- A Narrative Structure
- Visual Accessibility

A Narrative Structure – Story-telling is deeply ingrained in our society yet, as CEO of Mandalay Entertainment Group Peter Guber observes in his Number One best-selling book, *Tell to Win*¹⁵, it’s a knack that has been lost in business. People are pre-programmed to easily assimilate a narrative structure of Problem, Struggle, Resolution. Crafting white papers, case studies and speeches with this format in mind makes it easier for the audience to process your message. It is also a useful test of your messaging: what exactly is the problem you are solving?

Effective, content marketing material must, at heart, be considered and compelling.

Visual Accessibility – Leading business journals like the Harvard Business Review, or business books like Guber’s *Tell to Win*, are optimised for access, for ease of consumption. HBR uses colour, graphics, pictures and “Idea in Brief” summaries to help the reader quickly see the value in items of potential interest. Flip through the magazine, skim the graphics and call-out quotes, scan the Idea in Brief and decide which articles warrant closer attention. *Tell to Win* – a book about narrative and story-telling – starts with the final conclusion and, like many business books today, has a bullet point summary at the end of each chapter.

To be effective, content marketing material must be considered and compelling but it must also be succinct: accessible, digestible and shareable. This means including the following elements:

- Graphics, charts, tables and infographics
- Colour and photographic imagery
- Bullet points and summaries
- Crisp, meaningful headings and pull-out quotes

A compelling white paper for today’s audience is considerably less white than its political antecedents.



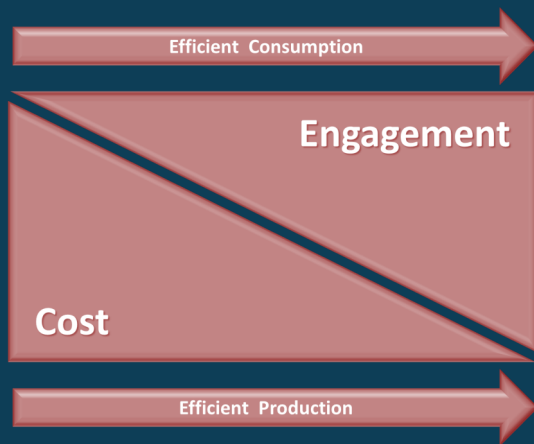


Figure 4: Getting it Right. The combination of Efficient Production and Efficient Consumption yields greater audience engagement at lower cost.

Conclusion

The market is tough and B2B marketers face the substantial challenge of providing customers with valued information that will build trust, demonstrate thought leadership and drive revenue.

In achieving this, they need to manage two sets of issues.

Within their own organisations, resources are tight. Leaders lack the time to take a strategic perspective on activities. Their teams lack the time to create considered content that is sufficiently engaging or in sufficient quantity to meet customers' needs.

Customers suffer from information overload. Less time to consume more information leads to bad decisions. Customers need accessible, trustworthy sources.

Create Considered, Compelling Content

The solution for many businesses is to focus on creating considered, compelling content grounded in two principles: efficient production and efficient consumption.

Efficient Production requires:

- Senior Support – prioritising resources and ensuring cross-silo cooperation from subject-matter experts
- Outsourcing Content Creation – supplementing internal resources with on-demand expertise
- Designing for re-use – considering in advance how materials can be re-cut and repurposed for greater leverage.

Efficient Consumption makes white papers less white. It has two dimensions:

- Narrative Structure – writing to the readers' natural ear for story-telling
- Visual accessibility – providing easy cues for valuable content: graphics and charts; colour and photographs; bullet points and summaries; meaningful headlines and quotes.

Burning Pine specializes in creating considered, compelling content. Get in touch to discuss your own requirements at

<http://burningpine.com/TellingYourStory.aspx>.



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References

¹ The Content Marketing Institute ,

<http://www.junta42.com/resources/what-is-content-marketing.aspx>

² A recent survey by Everything Technology Marketing (see:

<http://www.slideshare.net/hschulze/b2b-content-marketing-report> found 71%

of B2B marketers doing more Content Marketing than a year before. Another survey, by the Content Marketing Institute found that 60% of B2B marketers planned to increase their spend on Content Marketing in the coming year.

³ B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends, Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs,

http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/B2B_Content_Marketing_2012.pdf

⁴ IDG Connect, <http://www.idgconnect.com/download/6608/infographic-global-it-content-survey-2011?source=connect>

⁵ Eccolo Media B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report, Eccolo Media, Inc. October 2011. www.eccolomedia.com

⁶ 2012 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report, MarketingSherpa LLC,

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article.php?ident=32022>

⁷ 2012 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report, MarketingSherpa LLC

⁸ IDG Connect

⁹ Eccolo Media B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report

¹⁰ 20% per B2B Content Marketing Trends, Technology Marketing; 26% per B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends;

¹¹ 2012 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report, MarketingSherpa

¹² <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1973/1848>

¹³ Harvard Business Review's Daily Stat column

(<http://web.hbr.org/email/archive/dailystat.php?date=022212>) reported that "research participants who had read useless information about future negotiation partners were 46% less likely to identify important issues in the negotiation than people who had been told nothing".

¹⁴ Up from 55% in the previous year, B2B Content Marketing: 2012 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends

¹⁵ Tell To Win, Peter Guber, Profile Books 2011; <http://www.telltowin.com>



The Burning Pine Advantage


Burning Pine Ltd. was founded in 2007 to support CEOs and senior executives in matters of messaging, strategy and operations. Drawing on twenty-five years of international business experience across a range of technology and services industries, we offer a deep understanding of business dynamics and communications combined with a sheer love of words.

Burning Pine ignites your communications, internal or external: white papers, case studies, strategy papers and business plans.

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