THE 4 STEPS TO CONTENT MARKETING ENLIGHTENMENT

Abstract

More than 70% of marketers will increase their investment in content marketing in the coming year, including hiring staff, creating more content and better using technology (research by Curata, Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs). Regardless, few marketers will be able to overcome the content shock that buyers experience on a daily basis as a result of the overwhelming amount of content being produced today. This eBook will provide guidance and specific tactics that best-in-class marketers are taking to climb the 4 steps to content marketing enlightenment in order to overcome the following challenges:

- **Calibrating your goals** before you publish content (how to guide your team to produce the highest quality content that aligns with your organization’s message)
- **Adding your own insights** and guidance like an industry analyst (Four specific methods your team can use)
- **Curating the best and most unique content** for your audience to complement your own created content (tips to do more than simply regurgitating content, in an ethical and powerful manner)
- **Tapping into the power of content technology**, yet avoiding the “duct-tape” trap (a content technology map to navigate today’s technology maze)

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INTRODUCTION

Seventy-one percent of marketers are increasing investment in content marketing this year, according to our 2014 Content Marketing Tactics study. These marketers realize the value of providing readers with high quality content, but they must be careful not to be too egocentric. Our "STOP Egocentric Content Marketing" message has been resonating with content marketers who understand that readers find value in variety. The essence of this message is that while many of us are jumping on the content marketing bandwagon these days, providing content of value to our buyers, most of us are still communicating to our audience in our voice only. We are striving to be the sole source of insight and knowledge without much regard for what’s happening outside of our own domain, not to mention the fact that our audience wants to hear from other sources and perspectives.

Curata’s 4 Steps to Content Marketing Enlightenment are presented below in order to progress beyond egocentric content marketing. This model mimics Steve Blanks’ now famous 4 Steps to Epiphany. Using this framework, you can gauge where you currently stand, and identify the steps you need to better engage with your audience and increase marketing’s overall impact on your organization.
STEP 1 – EGOCENTRIC: PRODUCT OUT

Marketers at the *Egocentric: Product Out* stage have certainly bought into content marketing. Unlike some of their peers who are still solely fiddling with interrupt driven, outbound marketing, these marketers do understand the value and merits of producing and publishing their own content to attract buyers to their brands.

However, marketers at this step don’t quite understand *how* to get their content marketing to work. Their understanding of content marketing is superficial, and in many ways, naive. They hope that “if you publish it, they will come.”

**METHODS**

*Egocentric, product-out marketers will publish any content that they have readily available.* They may turn a product capabilities datasheet, that they had already created for the sales team, into a blog post. Or they may place a lead capture form in front of a sales presentation in hopes of generating a few more leads. Rather than creating new content, they often *inappropriately repurpose product-centric content that had been designed for the lower funnel, for the top of the funnel.*

**SYMPTOMS**

You may hear these marketers say something like:
“I have plenty of content already created internally by my product marketing teams. I don’t need to create new content. I just need to surface existing content and repurpose it.”

What they don’t realize is that the internal content, which had been originally created to support their products and sales teams, has little to no value to their buyers along the lead nurturing process.

Some telltale signs of egocentric, product out marketing include:

- **Has to be about themselves.** Every piece of content they produce has to have their company mentioned in it.

- **Very low subscriber rates.** Subscription rates are one of the most important content marketing metrics because they are an indicator of how valuable your content is, and how likely people are to come back to you as a trusted source.

- **Negligible inbound links.** People, unless they have a direct interest in the product (such as value added resellers), are not linking to or retweeting their content.

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**REALIZATIONS**

Egocentric product-out marketers create content with the best of intentions, but receive the worst of results. After some time of experiencing low buyer engagement and trust, these marketers experience no traction with content marketing, and do one of two things:

- **Give up.** They jump off the step altogether due to poor results and management pressure, writing off the content marketing experiment.

- **Step up.** Realize their buyers’ interest needs to be earned, and move up a step to create less product-centric content that offers their buyers more value.
STEP 2 – EGOCENTRIC: CONTENT OUT

On the next step are *Egocentric: Content-Out* marketers. These marketers realize the value of content marketing similar to those on step 1; but in addition, they realize that the content they produce must be focused on buyers’ interests versus their own vendor offerings.

**METHODS**

Marketers on this step will create original content with their buyers in mind, rather than starting with their product or solution. They may employ some of the following content marketing best practices:

- **Using personas** to map out created content for specific buyer profiles and market segments. (i.e., based upon market analysis, voice of the customer interviews, etc.)

- **Crowdsourcing content ideas** from across their own organization. (e.g., querying their sales team for questions asked by buyers as starting points for content creation)

Using techniques like these, marketers can tune in to buyers’ greatest interests (e.g., related to their own company, market and/or professional career) to create more compelling content, rather than solely talking about their own product or solution.
SYMPTOMS
At this stage, while the content produced may be created with the buyer in mind, it is completely sourced and supported by the vendor. Problems that arise from this approach include:

- **Only created content.** The content is usually completely created by marketing and other teams in their organization. There are few or no outside perspectives in the form of curated content. They feel that content and perspectives which have not been created on behalf of their organization(either internally or externally) will threaten their potential to be perceived as a thought leader.

- **Censored curation.** If there is curated content, all third-party content explicitly mentions the vendor or the vendor’s product by name in a positive light. In reality, the marketer is not curating content but censoring content.

- **No dissent.** The marketing team only creates content that agrees with their organization’s viewpoint.

- **Promotional interactions.** Outside interactions when commenting on other people’s blog posts or in forums have little value add, and are aimed at getting people to click on links to their own content rather than adding new insight to a conversation.

Such marketers do offer a valuable perspective in the marketplace. But buyers quickly perceive them as an untrustworthy resource that is only interested in pushing their point of view, instead of truly serving as a comprehensive educational resource for buyers.

REALIZATIONS
After some time of achieving reasonable buyer engagement but low marketplace trust, egocentric content-out marketers may do one of the following:

- **Content Surge.** After seeing moderate success in content marketing, they often feel that what’s holding them back is not having sufficient content while in reality its their one-sided perspective. As a result, they may double down and increase the quantity of their content, but may not commensurately increase the quality of
their output, and experience diminishing returns for their effort.

- **Bring the Market In.** Or they may realize that although they are achieving some success in content marketing, they fundamentally lack buyer trust because they are not incorporating outside perspectives. Some of these marketers will go to the next level and bring the market in.

**STEP 3 – MARKET IN**

In addition to all the realizations that the predecessors on lower rungs have, market-in marketers also realize they need to incorporate other voices into their content marketing campaigns to sustain their engagement and increase their perception as a trusted source.

“Market first. Product last.” **MARKET IN** “Also curates and syndicates content”

Cite and link to www.curata.com.
METHODS

These marketing professionals may use some of the following tactics to bring the market voices into their content:

- **Regularly curate** third-party content from a wide variety of sources. Buyers seek out content from peers (other buyers), experts (analysts & trade pubs), and vendors during the buying process (refer to figure on previous page). Market-in marketers will actively seek out content from other vendors, peers, and experts to provide a one-stop knowledge shop for buyers.

- **Listen & Follow.** Rather than relying solely on internal sources such as their sales team for content ideas, these marketers will go outside of their organization for content ideas and spend a considerable amount of time listening to what the outside world is saying. This increases their ability to provide higher quality and more relevant content to their audience.

- **Value added interactions.** Because these marketers are tuned in to the market, they are able to identify relevant conversation on other sites, as well as add value through comments in those discussions. These actions not only make these marketers smarter, but it increases the value that they provide other parties, which ultimately results in reciprocation of interest and traffic.

- **Content teams.** Enlightened marketers know that content is not a part-time job. It requires a dedicated team led by a content executive, whether they’re a Chief Content Officer, VP, or Director of Content. Content teams typically consist of a content manager, specialist and a staff of writers. It’s best practice to hire writers with a journalism background, rather than a traditional marketing background, who are better able to craft strong storytelling narratives.

SYMPTOMS

The market-in approach works well. These marketers are able to achieve strong results in their content marketing campaigns because they are able to build engagement and trust. However, there are still some barriers that prevent them from reaching the final step of true, content marketing enlightenment:

- **Lack of Differentiation & Regurgitation.** Market In marketers at times get away with simply regurgitating third-party content and perspectives that they come across. Many times they may not take the effort to add their own perspective and
contextualize their content. As a result, their digital marketing content becomes commoditized and easily replicable.

- **Struggle to Capitalize.** Sometimes these marketers get carried away with the market perspective and struggle to capitalize on the industry following they have built. They may find themselves feeling reticent to share their company’s perspective in the midst of the industry conversation they have created with the fear of coming across as too self-promotional. More simply, they have to better market their marketing.

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**REALIZATIONS**

Market-in marketers are often in a position of envy with respect to their competitors, however, they may not realize that there is still **opportunity for improvement.** Key drivers for change typically occur when one of two things happen:

- **Management pressure.** They face management pressure to capitalize on their content marketing success and translate that into more high quality leads and ultimately sales dollars.

- **Competitive pressure.** They face pressure from competitors who start to replicate their “market first” content marketing strategy, and quickly lose their first-mover advantage.

And to step up their game, they finally reach for enlightenment.

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**STEP 4 – ENLIGHTENMENT**

Enlightened marketers are at the pinnacle of the content marketing path of realizations. The final realizations they make are: 1) think and communicate like an industry analyst; 2) maintain a laser focus on quality and not quantity, which includes a significant amount of content-related strategic planning; 3) curate content in an ethical manner; 4) market your marketing; and 5) apply a measurement strategy with the goal of driving continuous improvement across the entire span of content supply chain and distribution processes.
ENLIGHTENMENT IN ACTION

Becoming an enlightened marketer takes more action than occasionally publishing a popular piece of content. Here are steps towards attainment:

Think and communicate like an industry analyst. Buyers value the insight and guidance by industry analysts as a result of several things that they “bring to the table”: independent viewpoints; intellectual horsepower; and primary research conducted on topics (and companies) of importance. No doubt, vendors are inherently limited in their ability to meet at least a couple of these demands. That said, enlightened content marketers have begun to take the following steps in an effort to “be the analyst”:

• Propose innovative theories and/or take controversial positions that, although risky, drive innovative thought for your audience (e.g., if you introduce three unique ideas to your audience, and they find one of those ideas beneficial and the other two crazy, then you’ve done your job)

• Hire smart people to spearhead your content marketing strategy.

• Tap into your product and solution marketing teams to produce great content; however, do note that you’ll need to push them to be focused on your audience and not your own products.

• Conduct (and leverage) primary research. This will take time and smart staff; however, it will be worth it.
Focus on quality, not quantity. This means writing content for customers, not for search engine bots. Content marketing does not just mean creating more content to increase metrics such as search visibility or keyword driven traffic.

Content you publish should aim to add as much value as possible for readers, keeping their interests and goals in mind. Performance metrics such as search and awareness are important, but they must be taken into consideration in parallel with quality during the content development process. Plan aspects such as titles, linking and distribution methods ahead of time. This ensures that content will meet your readers’ standards and help you reach campaign goals.

Calibrate your goals before you publish. What is the intent of this piece of content? Does it revolve around your topic AND provide information on your buyers’ goals and expectations? Have you planned accordingly for optimization? Every piece of content you publish should be part of a larger content marketing initiative. Set up metrics you’d like this piece of content to reach beforehand. Content has to be engaging for audiences and move you closer to your content goals as well, whether that be a certain level of audience engagement or lead capture.

Practice selective and valuable curation. Enlightened marketers do not simply regurgitate common market insight and opinion, but they are selective about what they choose to publish and how they add value to that content. More specifically, they contextualize most of the third-party content that they engage with, adding commentary or value added annotations. In most cases, the insight they provide is more valuable than sourced third-party content.

Implement ethical best practices when publishing content from third-party sources. A few of these practices include:

- **Creating a new title** for your curated piece so as to not detract from the search value of either piece
- **Using only a thumbnail** of the original image or including a new one altogether
- **Clear attribution** to the original author with a link back to the article featured in the curated post
- **Giving more than you take** - your annotation should be longer than the excerpt taken from the original post
• Limiting the number of articles you curate from any single source

For more details on these practices, and for more information on ethical content curation, download our authoritative eBook, Content Marketing Done Right: Curata's Definitive Guide to Executing an Ethical Content Curation Strategy.

Market your marketing - reuse, repurpose and promote. Great content marketers reuse and repurpose content in various forms. Curata’s Content Marketing Pyramid provides information on how to turn one piece of content, such as an eBook, into an entire content campaign. EBooks can be turned into a series of blog posts, blog posts into an infographic, and infographic into Twitter fodder - and related curated content can support each created piece of content along the way. Also, just because content was published doesn’t mean you’re done with it. Not everyone checks the same places for information, so distribute content through multiple channels: email newsletters, social media, blogs, etc. This pushes your content out to a wider audience and increases brand awareness.

7. Measure with intent, and course of action in mind. Measuring the impact of your content is a very important step, and one that enlightened marketers never miss. If you’re not paying attention to what content works and which types of content don’t resonate with your audience, you could be creating more of the latter, while losing money - and readers. Listen to readers and keep an eye on the types of content that generate higher audience engagement through site views, shares, comments, etc. Although measurement is the final step of the content marketing process, it’s also the first step in improving your content strategy.

8. Tap into the power of content technology; yet avoid the “duct-tape” trap. Technology for content marketing is still in the innovation phase. For marketers looking to ramp up their content efforts, this makes experimentation with content marketing tools important. Implement content technologies into your workflow to see what fits into your strategy. Perhaps you need a marketing automation platform or a content management system. Maybe you need both. Be careful, however, not to fall into the duct-tape trap. Too many marketers use Google and other applications coupled with highly manual cut and paste tactics to leverage content marketing. Your content technology should allow you to manage your content workflow in one central hub for maximum efficiency.
A RESPECTED INDUSTRY CENTERPIECE

Enlightened marketers are able to attain both high buyer engagement and trust and become the go-to destination for their audiences. Their goal is to serve as a vendor voice, a forum for peer/user discussions and as an industry expert themselves. Over time, buyers may even solely rely on the enlightened marketer’s content as the starting and ending points for their journey.

Once you’ve attained content enlightenment, there’s no more effective way to provide value for readers, improve your nurture process and build a strong reputation as a go-to source of information. Take the appropriate steps to ditch a product-centric ego, start providing readers with value-added third-party content and become a go-to source of information for buyers by following this path to effective content marketing.

If you’d like more information on transitioning to an enlightened content marketing strategy, read our latest research in Content Marketing Tactics Planner; download our eBook, Stop Egocentric Marketing; and/or get a free demo of Curata’s content marketing solution.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CONTENT MARKETERS

• **Content Marketing Tactics Planner** Find out how to adjust your content strategy to fit the best-in-class content mix: 65% created, 25% curated and 10% syndicated.

• **Content Marketing Done Right: Curata’s Definitive Guide to Executing an Ethical Content Curation Strategy**

• **Curata’s Content Curation Look Book** Examples of curation in action. (e.g., Oregon Wine Board, Adobe, IBM)

• **Five Simple Steps to Becoming a Content Curation Rockstar**

• **How to Feed the Content Beast (without getting eaten alive)** A process for developing and executing a comprehensive content marketing strategy.