

DigiChat with Andrea: Content Marketing

 By [Andrea Mitchell](#)

21 Jan 2015

Anyone can create and distribute content. The key differentiator lies in creating and distributing content that's relevant, consistent; and attracts and acquires a clearly defined audience...

Ultimately, audiences are seeking content that's relevant to them, and offers some value. With the objective being much like any advertising (Awareness, Research, Consideration and Buy), content marketing is in essence much like advertising but - bottom line, marketing isn't possible without great content.

Read on for what the experts have to say.

What is content marketing?



Ido Yerushalmi, Senior Director of Business Development, EEMEA, [Outbrain](#) (represented in South Africa by [National Positions](#))

Content marketing refers to the practice of brands and companies creating and distributing relevant and valuable content in order to attract, acquire and engage consumers. Content marketing is about providing real value (interesting and not 'sales-y' content) to the reader in order to build trust.



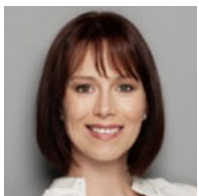
Sue Disler, Head of Digital, [Cedar SA](#)

Content marketing is not simply about creating more content, it is:

- About understanding an audience's specific interests, goals and information expectations, resulting in the creation of meaningful content that can enhance or change behaviour
- About not having to focus content on a brand (or its products) specifically, but to focus on information

that readers/users can relate to

- About continuously publishing/producing (and iterating) content that people want vs traditional marketing, which tends to interrupt the content
- An effective way for brands to reach different audiences and get customers to know, like and trust them enough to open their wallets.



Lani Carstens, Managing and Executive Director, [John Brown Media](#)

Content marketing is not new. It's essentially custom publishing, or, a term I prefer, editorialised branded content, which has been around since the 1800s. One could say it's "old old" wrapped in shiny new technology. John Brown's point of difference is that what we bring to bear is "editorial intelligence"

- we use the best editorial talent to curate and create branded content on multiple platforms from digital

and social media to print and video that will inspire and engage customers and ultimately lead to a commercial transaction.

It's about creating content that tells a powerful story about a brand and engenders a human connection. Knowing what content will capture an audience is what great editors do. It is this editorial intelligence that differentiates conventional marketing from content-based branded communication. The latter talks to (rather than at) customers in a manner that is accessible and ultimately relevant.

John Beale, MD of the [MEC Group Cape Town](#)

Content marketing is a form of marketing whereby the brand curates, syndicates or creates content around the brand pillars, to provide additional value to the customer engaging with the brand. It is also the marketing of said content from the

owne's forms into paid areas.



Lisa Grey, Head of Content Marketing, [YuppieChef](#)

Content marketing is a way of developing a meaningful relationship with a community. By creating content that inspires, ignites a little magic and adds value to a community's lives, we are given an opportunity to talk to and with them, through newsletters, our online magazine, social media channels and site. Great content will

also be shared, whether it be a video, article, beautiful visual or entertaining Facebook post, and found through the wonder of SEO. It is not about spamming people with information or cold calling - it's about adding value in the very crowded and noisy place that is our digital world and inbox.



Daryn Smith, Director, [MPULL](#)

As people or businesses move through the buying cycle or decision making process, they pursue different types of information in various formats. Content marketing is about identifying, developing and then optimising pieces of content for each of the stages in a potential customer's buying cycle, ranging from solution identification through to brand advocacy.

Creating content that is not aligned to a stage of a buying cycle is not content marketing; it is content noise.



Lori Cohen, Publisher, [TPP](#)

The best term I've heard used is that content marketing is "editorial advertising". So, it sells without the obvious sell, engages a customer with free content that is relevant to them with useful, practical or entertaining information, and encourages them to take some form of action. It provides a bridge between brand and customer, and has the edge over traditional marketing in that it can adapt quickly

and span many channels.

Brands are familiar with serving their customers content in the form of emails, brochures and newsletters. But the majority of this content is promotional and focuses on communicating a company's services and successes, or a product's features and benefits. It doesn't give the consumer the information that they are interested in or find valuable. Content marketing fills this void with conversations rather than a sales pitch.

On a practical level, this means creating content that is not bloated with jargon; the content is lean and concise; it is helpful and focused on the customer and it is consistent, which means it has one tone across all channels and is served regularly.

It's also important to acknowledge that using print as a content marketing platform as part of a strategy is still relevant, effective and offers brands a good return on investment.



Catherine Murray, Business Development Director, [Creative Spark](#)

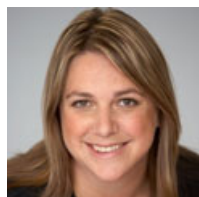
Content marketing is [formally defined](#) as "...a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."

This is fairly vague and open to interpretation, but it does recognise that the primary distribution of a digital marketing message happens via content - anything from content on a website, to social media posts, video on YouTube and Google search results.

The key word there is "valuable", which is what differentiates it from other forms of advertising. The content must add value, and deliver high-quality information that makes the end consumer feel more empowered.

Content marketing should be non-interruptive. The core idea is that if brands deliver valuable, ongoing information to consumers, they will be rewarded with the consumer's trust, business and loyalty.

Content marketing strategy covers several channels, including native advertising, sponsored content and social media marketing - though there is an overlap and grey areas between them all. There is also overlap with search engine marketing and SEO strategy.



Sam Wilson-Spath, Digital Editor: Content Strategy & Social Media, [Woolworths](#) Marketing/Online

In the days of pre-digital immersion, it was easier to define content marketing as customer publishing. Brands produced magazines, booklets, advertorials for consumer magazines... that kind of thing. It felt pretty contained. With the explosion of the concept of content though, the game has changed

altogether.

What is content today? Brand publishing, sure, but what about social conversation? Data-driven content ('if you liked that, you may like this' digital content delivery)? And when is curated product content? Is your corporate identity content? I think you could answer 'yes' to all of these questions.

At Woolworths, with the move from broadcast to conversation, we're finding content marketing is becoming less and less useful as a term - marketing itself is becoming 'content marketing'.

How does content marketing affect a brand's reputation?

Ido Yerushalmi:

Content marketing is an essential part of any brand building strategy. It draws attention to the brand, and through trustworthy content it creates brand affinity and increases engagement with the brand. The whole point is to write professional content, so people will perceive you as a thought leader. Take for example Colgate, with their great content on oral health and the [resource centre](#) they built around it. I can buy and use Oral-B or Crest products, but if I visit this website I see that Colgate is not only super professional in what they're doing, but they are also giving me value by sharing information that is useful for me.

Sue Disler:

Strategically, content marketing does not overtly try sell a brand or product, and this softer approach makes it easier to build genuine relationships with customers. The aim should be to use content to gain trust, and become an authority or thought leader that people look up and relate to - which will naturally influence your brand's reputation and increase engagement.

Lani Carstens:

Good content marketing is one of the most powerful brand building tools because it engages customers in a relevant yet evocative way, which encourages deeper brand loyalty. Once content and communication are perceived as being both genuinely relevant and useful, and customers feel heard and understood, real trust and engagement form.

We know that Edgars Club readers, for example, spend 30% more in store than non-Club readers, the only difference being that they receive the *Edgars Club* magazine. *Fresh Living* readers also spend, on average, R40 more per shop, at Pick n Pay than non-*Fresh Living* readers. Our job is to help brands form a deeper connection with their customers, whether it's online or in print.

John Beale:

It is highly dependent on the content the brand is publishing/sharing, but generally there are reputational risks attached with this approach. The content the brand syndicates/curates could be contrary to brand approach / standpoint on a subject. The creation of that content could also be misconstrued. The positives far outweigh the negatives though, allowing the brand to position its staff as experts or opinion leaders, elevating staff to become product champions externally.

Lisa Grey:

Content marketing allows us to communicate who we are as a brand. It will also start a conversation and that's got to be an important part of building a brand's reputation. Good and consistent content, whether it be product copy, newsletters, articles or competitions, builds trust between the brand and the community/customer and this trust is pretty much priceless.

Daryn Smith:

Consumers have changed. Before, you could tell them about your brand through adverts and PR. However, because brands could control this messaging, consumers became suspicious of it and instead began turning to the internet to research products before buying. While carrying out this independent research, they would find useful content that truly helped them make the best buying decisions.

The content created as part of a brand's content marketing strategy should address the various stages of the buying cycle and seek to educate the consumer, not sell to them. This is the kind of content that consumers are likely to find while researching products and solutions online, and it will help build the brand's reputation and position them as thought leaders. While the brand's useful content is doing all of this, the consumer automatically blocks out ads and PR material.

Lori Cohen:

Content marketing gives a brand personality and character - it allows it to "speak human". It transforms it from a logo or store front to a living, breathing team of knowledgeable and friendly experts. And it's with these friendly experts that your customers can have a conversation.

By engaging with their customers through content marketing, brands can inspire trust and fulfil brand promises. People are naturally reluctant to trust brands - they've been let down by hollow sales pitches too many times before. Content marketing gives brands a space and resource to reveal themselves to customers and shape the conversations people are having around their brand or products.

Catherine Murray:

Content marketing is critical to building, maintaining and evolving a brand's reputation. Because the brand is commissioning high-value content which is meaningful and relevant to the consumer, if done correctly it will build trust in and loyalty to the brand. It will also position the brand as an industry or market leader, and increase knowledge about brand history and identity.

Conversely however, the brand can also be damaged (sometimes severely) if content delivered is poor quality, irrelevant or perceived by users as being too "sales pitchy". People should want to seek it out and consume it, rather than avoid it.

Sam Wilson-Spath:

The whole reputation landscape has changed. Now that customers can speak back, in real time with minimal effort, brands have had to stop pretending they 'know their customers', and reverse the thinking to 'what do our customers really think of us'?

The socially-connected customer dictates brand reputation in a whole new way, and we've all had to change our thinking to use 'content marketing' to be part of the reputation conversations customers are already having, rather than just trying to

start them ourselves.

How important is content marketing to SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)?

Ido Yerushalmi:

Very much, but to quote Michelle Linn's article on the content marketing institute "Think of SEO this way: If a customer-focused content marketing program is the sandwich, then SEO is the mayonnaise. It touches nearly everything and enhances the overall flavour of the sandwich, but on its own, it's not very appetising." We believe that if you write for people and not robots, you will win the full value of your content. Search engine robots are always on the lookout for substantial and insightful content. If websites and blogs which come up with well-written content are visited by many people they get priority in search engines over other sites.

Sue Disler:

The two disciplines work very well together. Having quality content is highly beneficial as it will encourage higher search rankings. Having said that, if the content is not optimised, even the most brilliant content will simply be ignored. SEO should however not dictate a content strategy nor the content creation - it should be viewed as a tactic used to amplify the content along with email, social media and other channels too.

Lani Carstens:

I always feel that we are writing for people and not search engines. To quote Michael Wesch "Think beyond UX design, and start designing for the possibilities of *human connection*". "Search and Find" has become such a simple process but also exhausting and frustrating as relevance is key and in the past has not been accurately accounted for. Google have introduced a new algorithm called Hummingbird that better understands the context of your search to return results that are relevant and not just optimised based on the words you searched with. Content therefore plays a much more important role as it supports the search with contextual relevance.

John Beale:

It can be hugely beneficial in the SEO brand war, if done properly. Syndicated and curated content has to go through the correct SEO rigour so as not to duplicate. Titles and reference copy that is SEO compliant and written with the right SEO tactics in mind can help Google rankings. Backlinks, referencing and optimised sentence and paragraph structure can also increase quality scores for Google ranking and PPC campaigns.

Lisa Grey:

SEO and great content are inseparable. Search engines want to provide their users with the best experience possible, which means matching quality content to relevant search queries. This is why search engines will reward producers of quality content with higher rankings in their search results pages. The converse is also true, in that sites with poor quality content will be penalised, and pushed down the rankings.

Daryn Smith:

It's very important, because the social importance of a web page is one of the key factors that determine how it is ranked on search engines. Great content will be shared, and as a result the social importance of the web page is increased.

Secondly, to get more return on investment from content marketing, brands need a great distribution plan. If you are only distributing via social media and email, you are missing out on a large portion of organic traffic that can be acquired by optimising your content for keywords.

Lori Cohen:

I read a great piece that summed up how the two disciplines can complement each other. "Think of content marketing and SEO like chocolate and peanut butter - two great tastes that go great together." So while content has a lot to contribute to SEO, the fixation with keywords has created a glut of content that offers customers very little value and it's becoming increasingly frustrating for them to find relevant and useful information among all the clutter. However, with Google constantly evolving its algorithms to penalise spammy content, quality content will become increasingly sought out by brands and effective for them. To master this, digital agencies and content marketing agencies will need to work more collaboratively in future, and it's an exciting space to be working in for us as an agency.

Catherine Murray:

The question we should be asking here instead, is "How important is SEO to content marketing?" This is mostly because content strategy should come first. The phrase "content marketing is the new SEO" is bandied about a lot, but the impact of good SEO primarily comes from creating and sharing good, optimised content, and has always done so - this is nothing new.

SEO is the process of making a web site more accessible to search engines. A website usually only forms part of a brand's content marketing strategy, albeit an important one. Technically building a usable web site with basic on-page SEO best practices which is accessible across mobile devices, is the other equally important part of SEO, which should not be ignored.

Sam Wilson Spath:

The interplay between SEM (Search Engine Marketing) and SEO has become very interesting, and a science in itself. At Woolies, we work both with traditional digital content (recipes, style guides, etc.) for long term/ long tail SEO efficacy, whilst understanding that competition for retail SEM keywords is both fierce and dynamic. It's a dance... and an ever-evolving one.

How is content marketing measured?

Ido Yerushalmi:

There are a few levels for measuring. The first and most basic one is if you have a conversion of some sort on the site: downloads, signups, anything you could plant a pixel on and count the conversions. However, not everything can be measured directly (or you don't always have access to this data, i.e. when promoting earned media pieces) so there are other techniques you could use to follow: Amount of visitors before/after the launch, time spent on the site, pages per visit, geography, device, bounce rates, click pattern analysis and social measurements like comments and social shares.

Sue Disler:

No matter what you do make sure every part of the journey is tracked so you can analyse interaction and behaviour on a daily/weekly/monthly basis - this is very important, as you will need to see if the strategy (and its content) is working. Some areas you need to make sure you are monitoring are: who saw it, how many times it was viewed, how they got there (email, social, web, mobile etc), how much time was spent on it and what they did next (page levels, e-commerce purchase, lead conversion etc). Armed with these sets of data, you will be able to calculate attention (fairly new) and engagement metrics.

For more on attention metrics see the following article [*How the 'Attention Web' is Changing Content Marketing Metrics*](#)

Lani Carstens:

Through tracking of shares, reach, conversion, feedback and analytics (Google and Social) - our job is to create a space

for conversation and curate that conversation thereafter because, while one can track with data, a more true reflection is a returning, reader, viewer and customer.

John Beale:

On all the work I've done, we've looked at content engagement. That level of engagement can include time read, shares and or comments.

Lisa Grey:

This depends on your business goals. You can drive traffic, signups, downloads, awareness, sales, leads etc., all of which are very measurable using a set of good web analytics tools.

Daryn Smith:

Content marketing should be measured based on the number of sales or qualified leads and customers it generates. To do this, brands need to use marketing automation technology to track visitors on their website from initial visit, through to conversion to a lead, through to conversion to a customer. This software can also be used to serve the right content to the lead at the right time.

For any business to be successful, it needs new customers. Be wary of any provider that measures content based on views, likes or number of comments - anyone can create content that achieves this.

Lori Cohen:

Measurement starts with a brand identifying what "success" looks like to them. Is it about increasing Facebook "likes", increasing page views; is it about organic growth, or is it about improving their influence, visibility, credibility and desirability? There are many measurement techniques, and if the brand objectives in a content marketing strategy are clear, these can be put in place to ensure they are achieved. When the objectives are not clear however, you can still weave together data such as number of retweets, emails opened, and videos viewed to build a narrative on the success.

A challenge is that there is no standardised way of measurement, apart from Google Analytics. It is the most obvious measurement tool, but without access to your competitors' data, you can only really use this information to provide insight into how to improve your content marketing by looking back on what you have already done and how it performed.

Content marketing is organic, and it takes time to gather data, so if short-term measurability is what you are after, it's not going to work for your brand.

Focusing your metrics on behaviour, as well as data aggregation, is also crucial. There are new forms of measurement coming onto the market all the time - one of the most exciting being listening tools like BrandsEye that pick up conversations people are having about your brand and give you a better picture of how your content is performing and engaging customers.

Catherine Murray:

Firstly, go in with a clear set of objectives. This sounds like stating the obvious, but you'd be surprised how many clients struggle to answer the "What exactly do you want to achieve from this?" question. Setting clear goals makes it easier to identify the best methods of content marketing measurement for your project or client.

Secondly, measurement involves collating metrics from a range of different sources, woven into a cohesive narrative of how well the campaign is working.

Proper measurement tools, like Google Analytics and SproutSocial, are critical, and broadly you would need to track at least two or more of the following:

- *Consumption metrics* for brand awareness and website traffic (e.g. page views, bounce rates, video views, downloads, social media buzz)
- *Sharing metrics* for brand awareness, sentiment, reach and engagement (e.g. Likes, shares, Tweets, email forwards, inbound links, comments)
- *Lead generation metrics* for nurturing ongoing relationships with clients and customers, and understanding more about them (e.g. Data capture forms, email subscriptions, blog comments & subscriptions)
- *Sales metrics* for customer acquisition goals (e.g. ecommerce sales, online quotes)

Sam Wilson-Spath:

We use a range of measures, tracking through a number of different measurement tools - from Google Analytics, Radian 6 to Socialbakers among others. The challenge is then to distil this data into useful weekly reports for the rest of the business.

What advice would you give brands, publishers and site owners in terms of content marketing?

Ido Yerushalmi:

I think the best tip would be to make sure you're focusing on what matters: adding value, not selling your stuff. Write for people and not for robots, and keep the conversation going either in the comments box or in social platforms in order to show readers that you are interested in hearing what they have to say. Content marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. If you find some interesting posts that fill a new niche, and design an attractive, captivating place to interact with your content - the audience will come.

Sue Disler:

Provide value, not noise.

Lani Carstens:

Invest in the best editors, designers and journalists you can - great editors will create the magic, whether you are communicating your company vision through a staff magazine to a factory worker; inspiring fashion-savvy customers with the latest trends or demonstrating your latest chicken recipe on YouTube. A reputable content marketing agency who has strategic vision and editorial intelligence, will add tremendous value and ROI to your brand.

A final point is, write for the fish and not the fisherman. A great content marketing agency will apply the science by understanding the client's brand and marketing objectives and convey the brand message in a well thought through, editorially crafted way that will appeal to the audience. We know that customer magazines are read for an average of 28 minutes (CMA Advantage Study) and what we say to clients is, if you had 28 minutes to talk to your customer in their living room about your brand, what would you say? You'd probably want to tell a great story, demonstrate your uniqueness (your authority to publish) and entertain and inspire. Great content does that - on multiple platforms to multiple markets in multiple ways - to communicate a single message that is platform and audience relevant.

John Beale:

For brands - Make sure you have set up your framework based on what you will and will not publish. It needs to be closely aligned to your own brand story, so make sure your content team is highly skilled.

For publishers - they need to make sure the models and engines used to push additional content through suggested reads are in line with their editorial policies and don't detract the reader or move traffic off page thus lowering time on site

Lisa Grey:

Get a grasp of your company's mission. Make sure you believe it and feel it in your gut and the content or at least ideas for content (articles, newsletters etc.) will come more naturally. Get a plan in place so you and your team know what's coming up. Brainstorm ideas and then chuck some out. Be prepared to spend time on great content even if it looks really simple in the end. And don't fret if you feel overwhelmed, there's one huge amount to learn but it can be rewarding and also a lot of fun

Daryn Smith:

Brands shouldn't expect success overnight. Content marketing is an approach to marketing and not just a tactic. It needs a long-term commitment and brands need to constantly create high quality content to see results. Marketers need to evolve from thinking about their 'target market' to thinking about their 'audience'.

Publishers and site owners need to expand their offering beyond banner advertising and rather come up with solutions around the distribution of content. Because brands are penalised when their content appears on multiple sites, the solutions offered need to go beyond the press office. In addition, publishers need to offer brands mechanisms to convert readers into known leads.

Lori Cohen:

A detailed content marketing strategy is essential. This defines the audience you want to target, what your tone of voice is, and what your goals are.

- *Commit to quality content as part of your strategy*

Brands need to understand that quality content will earn and grab your customer's attention and hold onto them. Sharable content is great, but it lacks depth and will only deliver short-term success. (Enough of those kittens already!)

- *Don't try to be everywhere*

There are so many channels available, but it's important to identify those that are most relevant to your customer and focus your efforts (and budgets) on these. When you have mastered these and know what works for you, you can broaden your reach by moving your content into other spaces.

- *Be a storyteller*

You want to have conversations with your customers and sell them information, education and inspiration. By building trust and a relationship, people will choose to take the next step and buy your product.

- *Put your customer first*

Give them content that will benefit them, is relevant and interesting to them, and most importantly, is sincere.

- *Be consistent*

Once you start talking to customers, you need to keep the conversation going. Keep delivering quality content, in the right places. Content marketing is not about a single campaign; it's about an ongoing relationship with your customer. The main reason content marketing fails is because it stops.

Catherine Murray:

Be authentic, be honest and be unique. Engage meaningfully with your audience, in a way that makes them feel self-empowered. Admit mistakes and fix them straight away, without making excuses. Set clear, measurable and manageable goals, and don't be afraid to experiment!

Sam Wilson-Spath:

The real challenge is agility. We all say we aren't just broadcasting anymore, but are we reacting quickly enough to incorporate customer feedback into our marketing matrix? At Woolies, that's a real focus.

Conclusion:

How ever you define content marketing and whether it forms part of your social, PR, publishing, marketing or advertising initiatives, it's clear that identifying and setting long term measurable goals that help drive the strategy, are crucial. In addition to this, is acceptance that content marketing is not about a one way conversation, but rather about providing quality content that is useful to audiences, and preparing yourself for the control which sits at audiences' fingertips.

ABOUT ANDREA MITCHELL

Digital Marketing "veteran" specialising in training, mentoring, coaching, digital strategy and PPC

- DigiChat with Andrea: Content Marketing - 21 Jan 2015
- DigiChat with Andrea: Search engine marketing - 29 Sep 2014
- DigiChat with Andrea: Social media ROI - 26 Aug 2014
- DigiChat with Andrea: Mobile Advertising & Marketing - 23 Jul 2014
- DigiChat with Andrea: Programmatic Digital Media Buying - 20 Jun 2014

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>