

Content Marketing Integration Workbook

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Introduction

Like the Molière character who is delighted to learn he has been speaking prose for years, marketers have always created content. What's now called "content marketing" refers to a type of content that has always existed but has now gained new importance. This is educational content, meaning it provides intrinsic value rather than (or in addition to) promoting the company's brand or products directly. Educational content can attract prospects in the early stages of the purchase process, when they are most open to influence. This has become increasingly difficult as buyers do more research before contacting sellers directly.

In other words, "content marketing" is one solution to a narrow though important problem. Classic content marketing campaigns address this directly by promoting vast libraries of useful materials through "inbound marketing" or by offering nurture programs with content carefully tuned to the buyer's current position in the purchase process. Both are valuable but treat content marketing as an independent project, disconnected from the rest of marketing.

In fact, educational content can add value to all marketing programs. The challenge is finding ways to integrate it at the strategic and technical levels. This workbook provides advice and checklists to help you make that happen.

Strategic Integration

All marketing programs involve content. Some use educational materials created for "content marketing". The strategic challenge is making the best and widest use of these materials, rather than limiting their deployment to designated "content marketing" projects.

The obvious place to begin using educational content is "top of funnel" lead generation programs, which are targeted at prospects who are just starting to explore their need for the marketer's products. Such programs would be considered "content marketing" if their primary focus is offering educational material such as a whitepaper, Webinar, or video. These offers can be part of outbound messages such as emails or presented during inbound interactions such as landing page or Web site visits. Even when the primary offer is promotional content, such as a product sample, industry event, or just the ad message itself, it's still possible to offer educational materials as a supplement or alternative. This can increase response by attracting people who are not interested in the primary offer. It also provides additional insight into the interests of the responders, which can help with targeting future offers.

Educational content can also be offered to prospects at later stages in the buying cycle, or even to existing customers, to increase engagement, build more positive relationships, and help them use products they have purchased. In late-stage nurture programs especially, educational content is often offered to prospects who have not responded to more product-oriented materials. This can re-engage them rather than

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losing contact altogether. Ideally, the content would be tailored to user interests as revealed by previous behaviors or survey responses.

Here are some ways to incorporate educational content across all marketing programs:

- Add a step to your program design process that asks whether educational content can be presented as a supplemental or alternative offer within an email, landing page, telephone script, or other response mechanism. This helps program designers to consider possibilities they might otherwise overlook.
- Provide an online repository of educational contents, tagged and searchable by topic, purpose, purchase stage, audience, persona, relevant products, and other attributes. This ensures that content marketing materials are easily visible to the entire company, instead of remaining buried within content marketing archives.
- List educational content in the company's content planning matrix (an inventory that shows the content available for each buying stage and persona) and on content creation calendars used to plan new materials. This ensures that educational content is factored into the company's over-all planning for content creation.
- Ensure that responses to educational content are credited to the marketing program that offered the content, not the content piece itself. Better still, track responses by both the program and the piece, looking at whichever perspective is appropriate for the purpose at hand. Some systems require items to be tagged with a program code to do this; others do the tracking and reporting automatically. Letting marketers see the incremental benefit that educational content has provided to their programs gives them more reason to include it.
- Report on past results for educational content within marketing programs, so that marketers can see which pieces of content are most effective. This helps them decide which pieces of content to use and to understand the likely impact of adding it.

To Gate or Not to Gate?

When content is offered to anonymous Web visitors, marketers must decide whether to require the visitor to identify herself in exchange for receiving it. Although there are absolutists on both sides of the debate, the most common advice is to provide early stage content without gating, in order to start building a relationship with minimum commitment from the prospect, but to gate later stage content since prospects are closer to making an actual purchase and identifying them is more valuable.

Another school of thought is to gate content during long purchase cycles, using progressive profiling to gather a small amount of information during each interaction, but not to gate content during short purchase cycles, where it's more important to encourage immediate interaction than set up future nurture programs.

Gating is less of an issue if your system can track each customer download and other detailed behavior without requiring a log-in for each session. For systems with this capability, gating to capture the customer identity is required only once.

As always, the best approach is to test what works for you.

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Content Marketing Requirements

Most educational content is produced in the same ways as other types of marketing materials. But some formats, channels, and tasks relate only to content marketing programs. This has led to specialized content marketing tools that are isolated from the company's other systems. Marketers must both meet the practical needs of their content marketing teams and find a way to connect those teams' content products with the rest of the company.

The precise needs of each content marketing team will depend on the types of programs it runs. Here is a checklist of requirements you might want to consider.

Content Marketing Requirements Checklist	
Create original content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ formats supported [text, video, graphics, etc., as needed now or in the future] ✓ channels supported [Web, social, mobile, etc., as needed now or in the future] ✓ SEO grading [check keywords, tags, etc.] ✓ shared asset library [host content in a central repository across all channels] ✓ content calendar [plan content creation] ✓ templates [standard formats] ✓ content classification / tagging [simplifies search and recommendations] ✓ approval workflows [for content creation]
Discover, curate and reuse external content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ sources covered [Web, blogs, social, video, graphics] ✓ selection criteria [keywords, hash tags, multi-term queries] ✓ trends [most common topics, fastest growing topics] ✓ influencers [identify people with most followers, shared content, etc.] ✓ natural language processing [extract concepts, events, entities, sentiments] ✓ competitor behaviors [types of content offered, paid search keywords, etc.]
Distribute and promote content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ channels [distribute content in one or multiple channels] ✓ accounts [manage one or multiple accounts across multiple channels] ✓ channel versions [create versions of the same content for different channels] ✓ scheduled campaigns [publish prebuilt content on a set schedule] ✓ tag for tracking [apply tags to content to tie results to marketing program] ✓ release workflow [process and user roles to review content before publication] ✓ specialized channels [support channels such as press releases and syndication]
Target content by individual and segment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ personalized recommendations [select contents based on individual history] ✓ segmented content (e.g. newsletters) [select contents based on segments] ✓ keep individual history [track content deliveries and responses by individual] ✓ external data [append data from external sources to individual profiles] ✓ content-based targeting [use content history in selections and campaign rules] ✓ item-level targeting [reference specific items, types of items, any item, etc.]
Measure content consumption and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ traffic sources [track referral URLs, search engines, social media references, etc. that feed consumption of inbound content] ✓ results by item [offers, opens, downloads, shares, time, conversions, etc.] ✓ results by content attributes [type, format, topics, lead stage, etc.] ✓ results by campaign [results for all content items within a campaign]

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ conversion rates [correlate external events with content exposure]✓ leads [identify new leads that entered through each content item]✓ mentions [track mentions of company, brand, or product]✓ link to revenue [associate revenue with new leads acquired through content]✓ statistical attribution [determine incremental impact of content on behaviors]✓ brand metrics [relate brand awareness, attitudes, etc., to content campaigns]
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Integration Requirements

The functions listed above are often delivered in different tools for different content marketing channels. Some tools are so specialized that they perform a single function within one channel. This is most common in new channels where vendors have not yet developed comprehensive systems.

Working with multiple content marketing systems carries a high cost. Paying for the systems themselves is just the start. Marketers must also learn different interfaces, move data between systems, replicate and coordinate programs that touch multiple systems, and reconcile inconsistencies in terminologies and results. This is hard enough within the realm of content marketing. It's an even bigger problem when you integrate content marketing with other marketing activities.

To reduce the cost of having separate content marketing systems, companies need solutions that support multiple channels and functions. Capabilities that make the most sense to share include:

- Recommend content to deliver. These recommendations may cover nurture emails, Web site messages, social media feeds, display ads, and other media. Recommendations should be based on individual behaviors if these can be tracked over time. This allows targeting to include considerations such as buyer persona, current stage in the purchase cycle, messages previously delivered, and past responses. When individuals cannot be tracked, other information may still be available such as the visitor's company (inferred from their email address or IP address), behavior during the current Web session, campaign they are responding to, or traffic source. Pooling information from multiple channels and different marketing programs gives the most complete picture for guiding recommendations. Using the same data and recommendation rules to select contents across all channels ensures consistent treatment and spreads the cost of the recommendation engine across the widest possible base.
- Link content with results. This requires looking across multiple systems to build a complete record of the content presented to an individual and to correlate this content with subsequent behaviors. A complete content history allows marketers to use statistical methods that estimate the incremental impact of each contact on later behaviors. Relevant behaviors may include conversion from one sales cycle stage to the next, closed sales opportunities, product use, retention, lifetime

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value, or referrals. Such behaviors are ultimately more important than the immediate response to a particular piece of content.

- Integrate new content as it becomes available. This ensures that new content is deployed as widely as possible, reducing the need for additional items and enabling marketers to substitute more effective content for older items. Educational content is expensive, so sharing new content widely can have a significant impact on marketing efficiency.

Providing these shared capabilities adds another checklist of technical requirements to consider when evaluating marketing systems:

Integration Requirements Checklist	
Shared customer data	<p>Provides a foundation for decisions and analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ gather customer and prospect information from all sources ✓ integrate data to build a complete profile for each individual ✓ support large data volumes ✓ easily accommodate multiple data formats ✓ support unstructured data such as text ✓ support semi-structured data such as Web interactions
Shared descriptors for behaviors, contents, and metrics	<p>Ensures that data from different systems can be combined effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ customer attributes such as title and industry ✓ behavior attributes such as conversions and purchases ✓ content attributes such as topics and formats ✓ easy to add new descriptors ✓ easy to add new categories to existing descriptors ✓ easy to classify items using existing categories.
Shared decision engine linked to channel delivery systems	<p>Applies a single set of rules to all content selections to ensure consistent treatment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ decisions are made outside of channel systems ✓ decisions are applied across all channel systems ✓ decisions can execute multi-step marketing programs ✓ decisions draw on shared customer data and shared descriptors ✓ combine predictive models with user-specified business rules
Shared content repository with channel-specific versions	<p>Allows decision rules to select the best content regardless of current interaction channel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ multiple versions of same content, suited to different channels ✓ all versions share a common identifier used by the decision engine ✓ all versions share descriptors used to classify and select content ✓ content may reside centrally or in each channel system
API integration to connect the central and channel systems	<p>Allows channel systems to easily send data to the central database and decision engine, and for decision engine to easily return the content it has selected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ APIs to load data from channel systems and update central database ✓ APIs to request decision from central system and receive results ✓ APIs to extract data from central database for analysis, reporting, etc. ✓ APIs provide adequate response time, especially for real-time interactions.

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Integration Solutions

There are many ways to meet the integration requirements listed above. Options include:

- System-to-system integration. Marketers can use separate systems for different channels and functions and connect them as necessary. This is the least elegant approach but may be practical if a company markets in only a few channels and therefore has only a few systems to connect. At the other extreme, companies with very large content marketing programs may have advanced needs that can only be met by specialized systems. Either way, this approach becomes increasingly expensive over time as new content marketing channels and methods are added to the mix.
- Integrated content marketing systems. Products designed to handle all content marketing functions across all channels are beginning to appear. But content marketing is still evolving too quickly for one product to be truly comprehensive or to provide best-of-breed features across all channels and functions. So while marketers may find a system to replace several individual products, they should also ensure any system they choose can be integrated with other products to fill the inevitable gaps. Also bear in mind that a complete content marketing system might increase the isolation of content marketing by replicating functions that would otherwise be shared across the marketing department. Again, the way to avoid this is to ensure that the system is open to integration.
- Core marketing platforms. It may be possible to run content marketing programs through core marketing systems such as marketing automation, Web content management, or email marketing. This solves the integration challenge but only works if the core system has adequate content marketing features or can integrate with specialized content marketing products. Many core marketing systems have been opened to this sort of integration to some degree. Marketers need to define their exact requirements to ensure these are met by any product they are considering.
- Hybrid approach. You may be able to combine several strategies. One option is using channel-specific systems to create and discover content and feed it into a shared content library. A central customer database and decision engine would access this library to execute marketing programs by providing distribution, targeting, and measurement. These shared features could reside in a marketing automation, Web content management, or digital asset management system. Content in some channels would still be delivered by external systems, a type of integration that is relatively easy on most core marketing platforms.

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Making a Choice

The right approach for your company will depend on a combination of factors. Issues to consider include:

Solution Assessment Checklist	
Scope of content marketing programs	Companies with small content marketing programs pay a lower price for poor systems than companies with large programs. Factors impacted by program scope include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ cost of running disconnected systems without integration✓ cost of integrating disconnected systems✓ ability to use functions provided by core marketing systems✓ need for functions provided by specialized systems✓ functions that can be provided by shared central systems
Existing systems	Your ability to justify new investments depends in part on what content marketing systems are already in place. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ ability of existing systems to integrate with each other and shared solutions✓ costs of replacing existing systems that cannot be integrated✓ likely need to replace existing systems for other reasons
Available resources	Be realistic about you company's ability to deploy upgraded content marketing systems. Assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ financial and technical resources available to deploy an integrated solution✓ feasibility of integrating only certain functions or replacing only some systems✓ ability to define a target configuration and ensure that all future investments move you towards this goal
Cost of inaction	Inefficiencies from current systems can be hard to estimate. But even rough estimates will give some idea of how much you can invest in improvements. Factors to consider include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ costs of wasted labor, duplicate content creation, and data integration✓ missed business opportunities resulting from disconnected systems✓ increases in these costs as your use of content marketing expands

Summary

“Content marketing” is important but that doesn’t mean it should be isolated from the rest of your marketing program. Quite the opposite: content marketing campaigns should be integrated with other marketing campaigns, and the educational content created for “content marketing” should be reused throughout your organization. Achieving this integration requires both strategic and technical changes in marketing organizations. Such changes are not free, but the reward is reduced waste, greater effectiveness, and higher return on content investments.

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About Raab Associates Inc.

Raab Associates Inc. is a consultancy specializing in marketing technology and analytics. Typical engagements include business needs assessment, technology audits, vendor selection, results analysis, and dashboard development. The company also consults with industry vendors on products and marketing strategy. It publishes the B2B Marketing Automation Vendor Selection Tool (VEST), the industry's most comprehensive independent guide to B2B marketing automation systems.

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