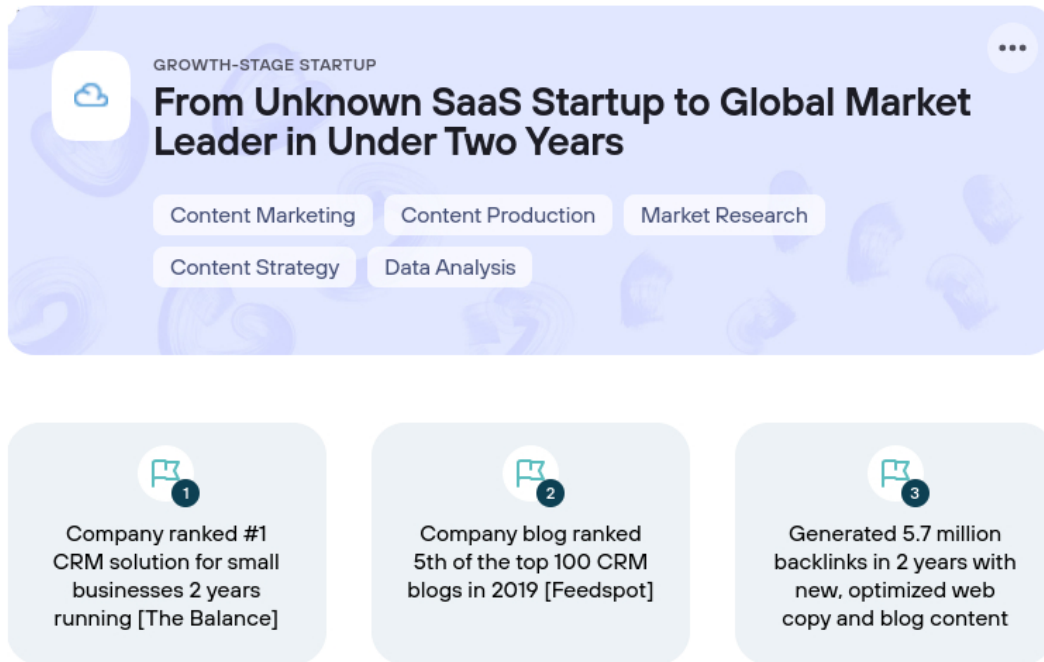




In this case study, you'll learn how Gabriel Swain built and executed a customer-centric content and growth marketing strategy to help a small CRM startup from India break into and establish a powerful presence in the US market.

BACKGROUND

A Growth-Stage Startup Looking to Build a Credible Brand Identity in the US

Agile CRM offers affordable all-in-one customer relationship management software to help small and growing businesses streamline processes and maintain a 360-degree view of their customers and prospects.

The company was trying to gain traction in global markets, particularly in the US. However, it didn't have any native English-speaking marketers on the payroll. Typos and grammatical errors on their website and blog were negatively impacting American consumers' first impressions of the company, compromising its credibility.

The company's goal in contracting Gabriel Swain was to raise brand awareness through thought leadership content and growth marketing strategies that would put it on the global radar and attract business in the US. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software is a saturated market; Gabriel knew this was a sizable challenge going in.

Regardless, he rolled his sleeves up and hit the ground running. "The monumental challenge of transforming a startup into a household name was a primary reason I took this contract," said Gabriel. "I operate at optimal capacity when I'm challenged and engaged. This project was the perfect storm. I was hungry from Day 1."

Gabriel is a strong proponent of cross-functional collaboration and possesses the ability to gain consensus within a diverse team, which proved valuable on this project.

Indian business culture is quite distinct from that in the US, but Gabriel's academic background in anthropology and diplomacy allows him to easily relate to others and build rapport across cultural divides. He was able to delicately convince his colleagues to replace tactics they wanted to leverage with alternate strategies he knew would resonate with US consumers. His ability to gently and diplomatically push back in this regard was essential to his success.



OVERVIEW

Building a Powerful Content Engine to Foster Customer Community

Market and Competitor Research

First, Gabriel needed to understand what kind of content Agile CRM's competitors were producing and where the gaps were. Doing so would allow him to identify and fill obvious gaps. This, in turn, led to market differentiation for Agile CRM by providing unique value to its audience that no competitor was delivering.

Gabriel spent days researching the competition, reading countless resources, and consuming as much information as possible.

He conducted audits of competitors' content, reading through their websites, and subscribing to their blogs and newsletters to:

1. Gauge the quality of their work and how often they released new content
2. Understand the types of content they were producing and the topics they were focused on

He methodically reviewed it all with a fine-tooth comb to identify the content types and topics that were resonating the most with Agile CRM's target audience.

To validate his findings, Gabriel went a step further and spoke with his professional network to gain added insights and confirm the conclusions he'd reached were accurate. "This preliminary work is tedious, but critically important to creating an effective, scalable growth strategy. It's the foundation upon which you build, so it must be unshakably solid and reliable."

Creating Consistent Messaging

The next step was to create company and product messaging to ensure consistent representation of the company by all internal employees. Agile CRM didn't previously have messaging, positioning documentation, or even an official value proposition.

"Prior to my arrival, these documents did not exist. I involved other teams so that everyone would be on the same page and had the opportunity to contribute their unique insights as part of the process," Gabriel said. "This built camaraderie and left my colleagues with a true sense of collaboration, as they were making an important contribution to the company's future success."

Create Branding Style Guide

To maintain this consistency, company's need an official branding style guide. However, Gabriel quickly realized that one had never been created. So, he got to work on it.

"Consistent branding is super important to a consistent customer experience," said Gabriel. Creating Agile CRM's branding style guide was a way to ensure nobody sent out content featuring an old logo, for instance, or used the wrong color scheme in a PDF. Gabriel later wrote a blog post for the company on how to create a brand style guide.

Internal Content Audit

Next, Gabriel took inventory of all preexisting internal marketing content to determine which pieces were still usable, which needed updating, and which he could re-purpose.

Data analysis was key to the audit process. He analyzed a variety of data to pinpoint the most engaging topics, then used that insight to inform the company's editorial calendar and overall, long-term content strategy.

Although high-level content strategy doesn't need to be very granular, Gabriel did need to ensure that his understanding of the audience's needs, challenges, and goals was accurate. Without that knowledge, he couldn't address those issues in the content he produced. Nor could he effectively manage and ensure high quality work from the social media specialist he hired.

An element of this was creating buyer personas and ideal customer profiles. "These aren't new concepts," said Gabriel. "But I'm consistently taken aback by the number of companies and business leaders that make the mistake of assuming they know exactly what their customers need and want. Most of the time, they're wrong.

"We can't make sweeping generalizations about our entire target audience based on a few anecdotal interactions," Gabriel continued. "It's naive at best. It's critically important to speak with your customers directly and validate your assumptions if you want to produce content that meets their needs.

Content Strategy Development

Having a roadmap (a high-level, long-term plan) to follow is critical in content and growth marketing. Gabriel created a 12-month content and inbound marketing strategy, making it flexible, as he knew it would change as he moved forward and learned from the tactics he rolled out.

"Getting started can be the most challenging part of the equation," said Gabriel. "So, I jumped in with the expectation that new insights would come to light and alter the strategy along the way. Once you have that initial skeleton, it's so much easier to move forward."

That year-long strategy was eventually broken down into monthly editorial calendars. For example, the company didn't have any eBooks and Gabriel knew he needed them. So, he added them to the strategy document, popped them onto the editorial calendar, and mapped them to appropriate stages of the buyer's journey.

Content Writing & SEO

Gabriel didn't wait for finalized messaging documents, buyer personas, etc., to start writing. He wrote the first of over 150 blog articles on his second day. "That's how I tend to operate," he said. "I like to dig right in and the company was keen for me to do so."

Since he was the only in-house writer, Gabriel outsourced perhaps five blog posts over the course of two years. Everything else, he wrote himself.

And he wasn't just writing blog posts. He was also optimizing them for search engine results and creating messaging documents and buyer personas at the same time. "It was like starting construction on a building before the blueprints were finished," he said. "And that's alright in some scenarios. For example, you can cut the glass for the windows while the plans are still being finalized, but you do't install them until the plan is complete."

In the end, Gabriel's industry knowledge allowed him to do just that without any hiccups. He works with sense of strategic urgency, although you may not notice at first due to his laid-back, calm demeanor. "I cut my marketing teeth in New York," Gabriel commented. "It's a cut-throat atmosphere there and you have to adapt to it or be eaten alive. I never adopted that competitiveness, but I'm uncomfortable doing nothing when there's work to do."

Community Management & Metrics

Gabriel also owned community management, which revolved, in large part, around responding to blog comments. This kept the blog's readership engaged and coming back for more. The blog became quite popular, with some posts receiving over 40 comments.

"If someone takes the time to read and comment on your brand's content, but no one responds, you're likely to lose that reader," Gabriel explained. "And rightfully so; no one likes to be ignored — it's a horrible customer experience. Furthermore, many blogs don't receive any comments at all, so each comment is a compliment that deserves acknowledgment."

To continue covering topics of interest to the audience, Gabriel monitored blog metrics every day. This allowed him to see which blogs were shared the most, which generated the most comments, and so on. He used this knowledge to validate ideas for new content, ensuring subscribers always had fresh insights to look forward to.

 agilecrm.com/blog/increase-brand-awareness-social-media/



GABRIEL SWAIN

Gabriel has nearly a decade of content and digital marketing experience in the software and technology space. He also has over 13 years of professional writing experience—both in the nonprofit and corporate spaces. His goal is to help small and growing businesses maintain insight into emerging trends and best practices, provide a stellar customer experience, and remain highly competitive in their respective industries.

RELATED POSTS

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- > Our Full-Fledged Social Media Management Tool That We Built For You – Here's Why

48 COMMENTS



ANNIE

about 2 years ago

Great tips! So happy that I found this blog, this is some valuable content! Another hack that I personally use for boosting brand awareness is always sharing branded short links on my social media accounts. I create them by using Capsulink and later share them on twitter, facebook, LinkedIn etc. I've noticed that branded links get more engagement since they're a lot more eye-catching and seem more trustworthy.

REPLY



GABRIEL SWAIN

about 2 years ago

Thanks for the positive comment! And double thanks for your tip—it's a good one! Welcome to our blog community. I hope you continue to read and chime in with your comments. We love the dialogue created here and you definitely seem to have extra value to offer so please keep commenting and sharing your insights with our audience. Cheers! :-)

OUTCOME

In Less than 2 Years, Small Startup in India Becomes a Global Leader in Most Competitive B2B SaaS Market

- ✓ Company ranked #1 CRM solution for small businesses 2 years running [The Balance]
- ✓ Company blog ranked 5th of the top 100 CRM blogs in 2019 [Feedspot]
- ✓ Generated 5.7 million backlinks in 2 years with new, optimized web copy and blog content

The quality of the content quickly started to improve, traffic grew much faster, and brand visibility began to spread in the US.

After one year of writing virtually every blog post the company published, Gabriel was surprised to learn that the blog (his baby) was ranked 5th out of the top 100 blogs on CRM by Feedspot, a content ranking site and reader app with over 4 million users. By then, brand awareness was well-established and Agile CRM began to appear on top 20 lists published by G2 Crowd and Capterra.

"I was particularly shocked when the Feedspot article came out," said Gabriel. "The blog that I'd written almost entirely myself outranked blogs from Microsoft, Insightly, Kapture CRM, Pipedrive, Nutshell CRM, and every other competitor except Salesforce."

In 2020, Gabriel saw The Balance Small Business, a renowned publication focused on helping small businesses grow, rank Agile CRM as the number one CRM for small businesses, beating Salesforce, HubSpot, and Zoho. It held that position again in 2021.

Despite the fact that Gabriel has since moved on, the content he created continues to rank in Google's top 10 search results for hundreds of keywords. In fact, his content still drives the majority of the organic traffic visiting the Agile CRM site.

"The company has a strong product at a great price point — that can't be overlooked," said Gabriel. "However, I don't believe it would be ranked so high, or at all, without the brand awareness and exposure generated by the content I created for this project."

During this 22-month project, 77 new web pages were created and 46 more were updated or

rewritten. Nearly 6 million backlinks and over 5,000 referring domains were generated.

"The success of this effort was driven by a customer-centric mindset," said Gabriel. "Anyone who's paying attention to today's market trends can easily see that the customer should now be at the center of every B2B SaaS business's growth strategy—that's the nature of the subscription-based economy. And that's not changing anytime soon."

