Leaning into Your Expertise

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PROVING *Your* VALUE

Get More Clients by Explaining the Value of Your Content Marketing

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›››Margie Zable Fisher's interest in business led her to get a degree in finance and an M.B.A. Prior to starting her writing business, she worked for Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, and founded her own P.R. firm. She credits her mom, a successful freelance writer and author, as well as a generous community of writers, editors, and authors, for continuing to help her hone her craft and grow her business. Margie writes about health and fitness, business, aging and re-tirement, and lifestyle, for clients and media outlets including Parade.com, NextAvenue.org, Livestrong.com, Insider.com, Entrepreneur.com, and many more. Learn more at margiezfisher.com.

I got a referral a few months ago. The company had been thriving during the pandemic, and its clients were Fortune 500 companies. Even though the company charged its clients plenty of money, my contact wanted to pay me peanuts for content creation. We didn't end up working together.

After railing against the unfairness of it all for a day or two, I thought about it, and came to a sad realization: I was partly to blame. Why? Because I didn't give her what she wanted.



What Content Marketing Clients Want

Unlike in the journalism world (although that, too, is changing), content marketing clients don't hire writers because they appreciate the quality of our writing and our ability to meet deadlines (although they expect those, too). Ultimately, they hire us for this one reason: to create content that brings value to the company.

Most large companies and some smaller, savvier organizations understand the value of content marketing. In initial discussions, they will often already have an idea or even a fully formed strategy for content marketing, and how to measure it.

Yet many potential clients, while they know they want to use content in their marketing efforts, don't understand its value, and it's our job to educate them. This is where I failed in my discussions with the client. Since I didn't explain how the content I produced could provide value to her company, how could I ever hope to change her mind about what she would be willing to spend in return for that value?

Reader, I resolved to never let that happen again. And I don't want that to happen to you, either.

The Basics: Understanding the Value of Content Marketing

Here's a quick way to understand what marketers are looking for in terms of content marketing value.

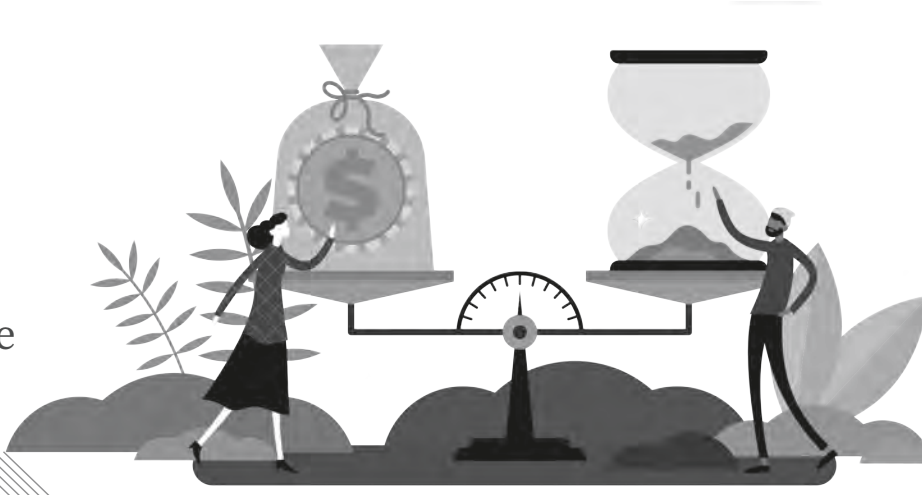
In the Content Marketing Institute's 11th Annual B2B Content Marketing Research survey, respondents shared "Goals B2B Marketers Have Achieved by Using Content Marketing Successfully in the Last 12 Months." Here are some major ones:

1. Create brand awareness - 87%
2. Generate demand/leads - 75%
3. Generate sales/revenue - 51%
4. Build a subscribed audience - 45%

While many marketing tactics can lead to these results, content marketing is generally more cost-effective—62% less than traditional marketing, according to Demand Metric.

Let potential clients know that by using content marketing, they can achieve those common marketing goals, at a lower price. Your work is done, right? Hang on. Not so fast.

When you spend money on content marketing, it can take time to see the results, and it's not always easy to determine the monetary value of those results.



The ROI of Content Marketing

The four goals stated above contribute to the ultimate number important to marketers: the return on investment of content marketing efforts. Most marketers, even those at smaller companies, will use ROI and other associated terms to make buying decisions. You'll need to understand them, too.

Return on Investment (ROI)

ROI = (Amount of Money Generated - Amount of Money Spent) / Amount of Money Spent

For example, Company A spends $100 and makes $1,000.

(1000-100)/100 = ROI

900/100 = 9, so the company achieved 9 times its ROI

ROI is usually stated as a percentage.

Multiply your result x 100 = 9x100 or 900% ROI

The reality: Measuring the ROI of some marketing activities, such as a Facebook ads campaign, is relatively easy. Measuring the ROI of content marketing, however, can be difficult. When you spend money on content marketing, it can take time to see the results, and it's not always easy to determine the monetary value of those results. That's why the ROI of content marketing is usually measured through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

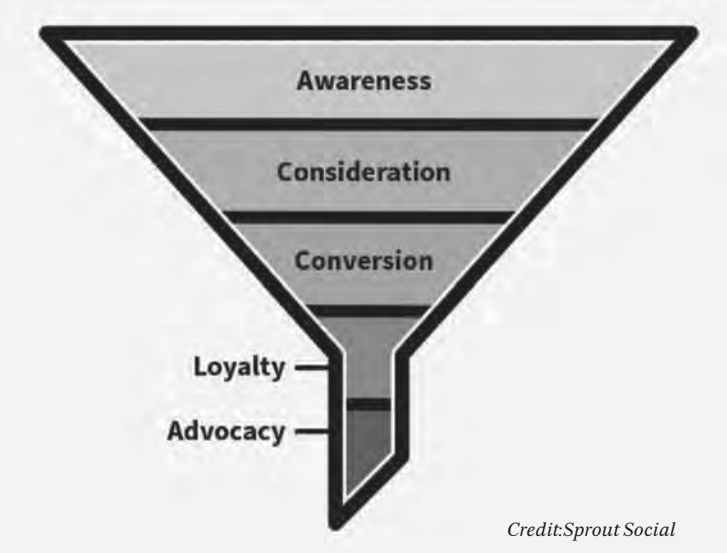
KPIs are measurable values that show progress in reaching a specific business goal. For example:

- KPIs to increase brand awareness include new website visitors, return visitors, time on site; SEO, measured by keyword position ranking on search engines, SEO traffic, and domain authority
- KPIs to generate demand/leads include gated content signups, demo request signups
- KPIs to generate sales/revenue include new sales
- KPIs to build a subscribed audience include newsletter signups

KPIs are often tied to activities associated with the Marketing Funnel, which is a visual representation of the stages of marketing in the buyer's journey. At the top of the funnel are marketing initiatives that aim to provide awareness about a company's products and services to a large number of people. In the middle of the funnel, other marketing activities help potential buyers learn more, and gain trust as they consider buying those products and services. Finally, at the bottom of the funnel, marketing tactics are used to convert those prospects to buyers, then to loyal customers, and, finally, advocates.

"Content can be used to create value for all parts of the marketing funnel/buyer's journey," says Jordan Teicher, director of content at Contently, which powers the content marketing programs of American Express, RBC, Marriott, Dell, and hundreds of others. He shares examples of types of content, and the area of the funnel where they usually fall:

- **Awareness/Top of Funnel:** blog posts, infographics, e-books, social media posts, videos
- **Consideration/Middle of Funnel:** case studies, white papers, webinars, newsletters
- **Conversion/Bottom of Funnel:** customer stories, testimonials, one-sheeters, sales decks, self-assessments/quizzes



Credit:Sprout Social

Measuring Success

In order to determine the value of content marketing activities, you must be able to measure them. There are several tools that can help you do that. The most important one is Google Analytics, which shows how users find and use your website. The best part? It's free.

"I couldn't do my job without Google Analytics," says Andy Crestodina, chief marketing officer and cofounder of Orbit Media Studios. "I use it to tell me exactly which of my articles are getting read, which ones get people to subscribe, which articles to promote on social media, which ones that are losing traffic from SEO and need to be rewritten, and more."

Crestodina also uses SEM Rush, an SEO tool that provides keyword research, runs SEO audits of a blog, looks for backlinking opportunities, and more. All of the content marketing experts I spoke with use it, too. You can try it for free, and plans start at $120 per month.

Other tools can help you measure the value of your content marketing efforts. Email service providers, examples include MailChimp, Aweber, and Constant Contact. Prices range from free to $20 a month and more. Social media analytics software, such as Buffer, is another tool, with prices ranging from free to $99 per month.

Putting It All Together

To determine the ROI of content marketing, you'll need KPIs that you can measure. Those KPIs will be tied to content marketing activities, at various levels of the marketing funnel.

Wondering where to start? Here's a process you can follow — marketing goals, KPIs, content, timeframe, tracking, measuring, and tweaking:

"The first phase of our partnerships usually starts with a content strategy, during which time it's incredibly important to establish marketing goals and quantifiable KPIs against which we can measure our content marketing efforts," says Caila Ball-Dionne, director of editorial operations at Masthead Media, a full-service content marketing agency serving brands in technology, healthcare, travel, apparel, home goods, and more. "We then determine the content needed to achieve those KPIs, track and measure those KPIs, and adjust the content strategy as our partnerships continue - making tweaks as needed if we aren't meeting the KPIs at the desired pace."

Ball-Dionne shared two examples of this process that Masthead might use with clients:

1. Marketing Goal: Build brand awareness

- **KPI**: Improve ranking on target keywords within a specific, priority topic cluster - moving rankings from page 2 to page 1 (results 1-10 in Google Search)
- **Content**: 20 SEO-optimized blog posts
- **Timeframe**: 12 months
- **Tracking/Measurement tool**: SEMRush
- **Potential Tweaks**: Six months in if we are not seeing fast enough upward ranking movement, we might recommend optimizing and republishing previously posted content within that topic cluster. In addition to making sure past content has current information and well-targeted keywords during this update, we would link it to the newer content we are creating to further boost it.

2. Marketing Goal: Lead generation

- **KPI**: Add 100 new email addresses to internal list
- **Content**: Gated White paper
- **Timeframe**: 12 months
- **Tracking/Measurement tools**: Google Analytics + newsletter software (Google Analytics can show if people clicked "sign up for a newsletter" but not if they follow through and enter their information to actually receive the newsletter.)
- **Potential tweaks**: If we are not on track to gain 100 new emails by month three, we might change the call-to-action wording, or suggest an additional content piece to drive traffic to the gated white paper, such as a blog post or infographic.

Moving Forward

From now on, when you meet with potential clients, remember to give them what they want: a clear explanation of the value that content marketing will provide to them and their organization. Speaking the language of ROIs, KPIs, and marketing funnels shows that you understand their needs, and will help you close more sales.

