



# How to Close The Effectiveness Gap in B2B Content Marketing



**WalkerSands**  
digital

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top, those that are less adept at the creation, distribution, amplification and management of content risk losing the attention of prospects and key influencers.

The ability to successfully navigate the content arms race is a key competency for all B2B brands. However, most brands are encountering a gauntlet of challenges that threaten their ability to convert content into business advantage.

**Getting Noticed.** The sheer volume of content being produced and distributed in the B2B marketplace is dizzying. But what most B2B marketers fail to understand is that they aren't just competing against other B2B firms for their audiences' attention—they're competing with every piece of digital, interactive and traditional content that their audiences consume everyday.

**Quality vs. Quantity.** Is it better to generate a large quantity of mediocre content or a lesser quantity of truly exceptional content? Limited resources make this an extremely relevant question for B2B brands. Ideally, brands need to develop creative strategies for sourcing high volumes of high quality content to target audiences.

**“It's not just about content anymore—it's about developing, distributing and refining content in a more sophisticated way. And for many brands, that means rethinking the mix of components that comprise the organization's content marketing agenda.”**

**Channel Inconsistency.** It's not unusual for growing B2B brands to suffer from channel inconsistency, i.e. conflicting content residing across various channels and touch points. Frequently, content creation and management is siloed, leading to a scenario in which teams and departments are completely unaware of the content that is being distributed by others across the organization.

**Misaligned Messaging.** B2B brands can't afford to spend time and resources on content that doesn't connect with the right audiences. But without market segmentation and the linkage of key messages to clearly defined personas, the brand's content marketing efforts will be hampered by message misalignment and limited returns on content investments.

**No Clear Content Strategy.** Too often, content strategy is simply lumped into the brand's overall marketing strategy. Integration with the brand's marketing strategy is important. But the absence of a carefully developed and documented content strategy can make it difficult to convert content investments into business improvement.



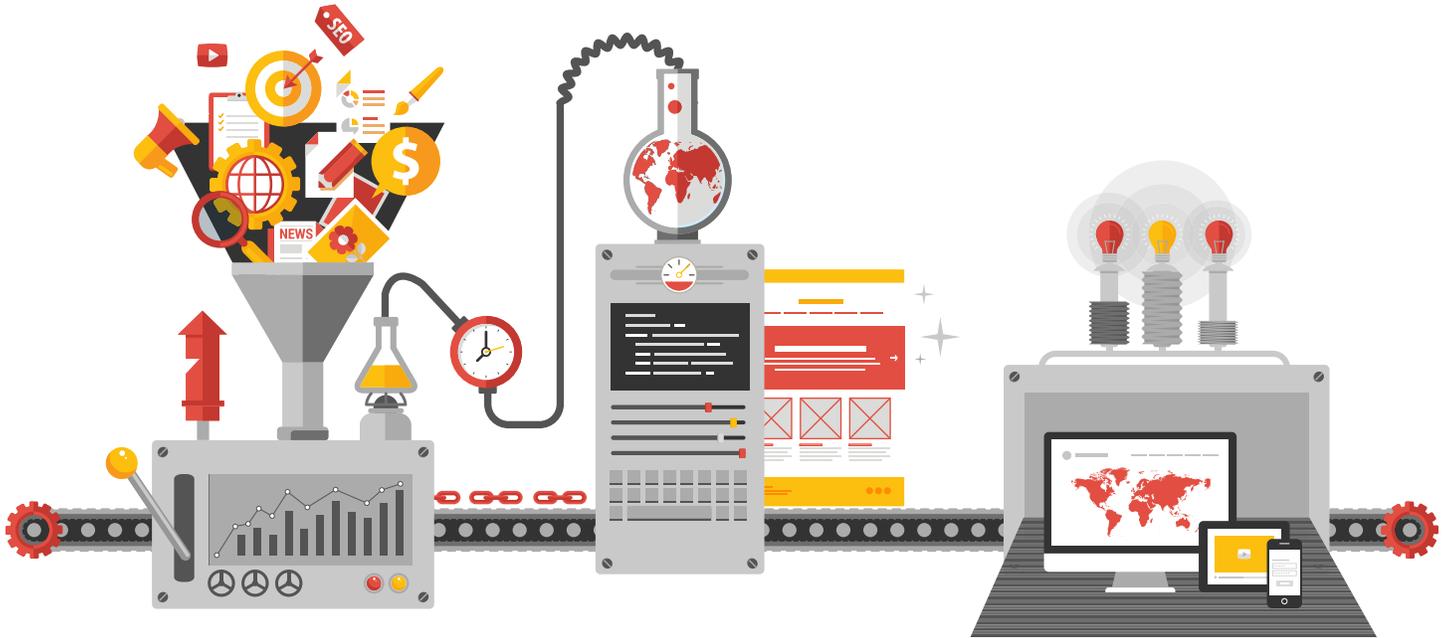


# Essential Content Marketing Components

Effective content marketing isn't a single activity—it's a collection of activities that contribute to the achievement of important business goals. Although every brand has different needs and requirements, there are at least five essential content marketing components that need to be considered:

- 1 Content Strategy:** If content isn't driving revenue, it's time to create or revamp your organization's content strategy. When it's done effectively, content strategy shifts the focus of your content agenda, away from a mad dash to meet deadlines and execute tactics toward a smart, coordinated approach that delivers consistent business improvement. In essence, strategy enables your organization to take a proactive (rather than a reactive) approach to content development, creation and distribution.
- 2 Buyer Persona Development:** Accurate buyer personas are the foundation for effective content marketing. If you don't understand your buyers, it's impossible to create content that connects with them in relevant and meaningful ways. By clearly identifying various personas of buyers for your products and services (why they shop for your products, what criteria they use in making purchase decisions, what types of content resonate with them, etc.), you can craft content that speaks directly to the people who are most likely to buy your product.
- 3 Content Audits:** Content audits highlight gaps and opportunities in your existing content catalog. Over time, it's not unusual for B2B brands to accumulate massive amounts of online and offline content. A thorough audit process evaluates each piece of content according to a range of criteria. The result is that your organization gains visibility into the continued usefulness of existing content and identifies gaps or opportunities where content can be used to achieve granular business objectives.
- 4 Topic Analysis and Ideation:** Coming up with compelling ideas for content creation isn't easy. And choosing topics that convert prospects to leads and drive other business outcomes is even harder. Topic analysis and ideation eliminates the guesswork by developing a better understanding of buyer personas and mining search engine analytics data for audience-based insights. The result is a strategic, measured approach to topic selection and a smarter approach to your brand's editorial calendar.
- 5 Content Creation:** Professional content creation is often the best (and in many cases, the only) way to tackle both the quantity and quality challenges associated with exceptional content marketing. According to CMI research, 73 percent of content marketers are producing more content than they did a year ago. Website copy, SEO pages, white papers, blog posts, contributed articles, e-books, videos and more—experienced copywriters and content creators can help you keep up with the content arms race by crafting content that expertly aligns the right messages with the right audience.





## Content Marketing Amplification Strategies

The development and creation of high quality content is just the first step in the content marketing process. Content should be the foundation for all of your marketing tactics. Yet, B2B brands often fail to adequately promote the content they have invested in creating.

Content marketing amplification strategies maximize the ROI on your investments in content development and creation, and optimize the delivery of messages to target audiences.

**Email Marketing:** Email marketing is one of the most underutilized content strategies in today's marketplace, even though it generates high ROI and marketing impact for most B2B firms. When combined with exceptional design, a robust email marketing platform and A/B testing, quality email content remains an effective way to generate new leads and sales for your business.

**Social Content and Promotion:** Social media makes sure your content appears before the right audiences. On average, B2B content marketers use six social media platforms, up from five platforms in 2012. A smart social content and promotion strategy identifies the platforms that are right for your brand and optimizes social content to highlight key messages and the other pieces of Web-based content that are driving your content marketing program.

**Website Promotion:** Company websites are ideal distribution and amplification vehicles for many different types of content. By adding calls to action throughout your site, you can funnel audiences to specific pieces of content. Based on desired outcomes, you can either make the content freely accessible to all site visitors or (for higher value content) require site visitors to provide contact information for access.

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At Walker Sands, we've found that a hybrid strategy is best—offer a portion of the content for free, but require lead information from visitors interested in viewing entire reports.

**SEO (Search Engine Optimization):** You've invested in a content asset and placed it on the website so it can be indexed by popular search engines, increasing the likelihood that you will receive organic search traffic to the site for related keyphrases. Now it's time to create five to seven supplementary website pages, each optimized for a keyphrase that will drive new business. These can be shorter write-ups featuring excerpts of infographics from the larger content piece. But by creating SEO content, you've moved from having one fishhook in the water to six fishhooks, significantly improving the lead generation potential of your content initiative.

**PR:** Strong content creation results in high-quality messaging that is interesting and relevant to prospects—the kinds of stories that journalists across a range of media outlets can't resist. To make sure your messages and content are visible to the right journalists, it's important to tightly integrate your content marketing agenda with your PR agency's media relations plan. This enables your business to leverage the dynamic relationship between content marketing and public relations for added value and exposure.

**Video, Graphics and Webinars:** Some prospects prefer to read content; others prefer to view it. Rather than forcing audiences to choose, consider catering to both audiences by converting written content into video content and graphics. In some cases, it may even be appropriate to use an important piece of content as the anchor for a webinar or other event.

**“The best results are usually achieved when all content marketing functions reside under the same roof – by agencies or organizations with capabilities that span the entire content marketing/content amplification spectrum.”**

The amplification of content is a multi-disciplinary exercise that requires close integration between content marketing and various other digital and PR activities. It's possible to pursue a piecemeal approach to content marketing. But the best results are usually achieved when all content marketing functions reside under the same roof—by agencies or organizations with capabilities that span the entire content marketing/content amplification spectrum.

## Best Practices in B2B Content Marketing

Although it's important to understand the various components that go into a robust content marketing agenda, business outcomes hinge on your ability to leverage the right mix of components in a coordinated and integrated way.

Content marketing is a rapidly evolving field. But there are a handful of content marketing best practices that leading brands consistently use to outperform the competition and convert content investments into business advantage.

**It's about strategy, not tactics.** Many B2B brands take a tactical approach to the content marketing challenge. That's a mistake because like any other marketing discipline, content marketing needs to be strategic. In addition to integrating your content marketing activities with other marketing, PR and business initiatives, it's critical to generate added value by exploiting the synergies between various content marketing components.

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**Know your capabilities (and limits).** B2B companies often underinvest in content marketing based on the misguided belief that a full range of content capabilities already resides within their marketing departments. Unfortunately, that may or may not be the case. Well-rounded content marketing programs require specialized skill sets and organizational bandwidth. If your marketing team lacks the time or skills to execute various activities, you'll need to outsource all or part of your content marketing program to an experienced B2B agency.

**Think beyond industry trends.** Nearly all content marketers segment their content, but two-thirds tailor content based on industry trends. Industry trends can be useful, but they're not the only game in town. When developing content, it's important to go beyond trends and consider how content might be tailored to connect with audience segments based on buyer personas, stages in the buying cycle, competitive positioning and other variables. Survey prospects and customers. When your content does require insights on industry trends, consider surveying prospects and customers to identify the issues and subjects that are important to your audiences. When appropriate, you may also be able to convert survey responses into content that is fit for marketplace consumption (e.g. testimonials, blog posts, product reviews, etc.).

**Curate the content of others.** Content curation enables B2B brands to increase the quantity of content available to key audiences without sacrificing quality. By expertly identifying, sorting, arranging and re-publishing the content of others, you can present relevant messaging to prospects and influencers in a meaningful and organized way.

**Leverage perpetual content assets.** Striking the right balance between quality and quantity means that you will need to find ways to create captivating content with the least possible effort. Perpetual content assets allow you to translate an initial investment into a steady stream of content and thought leadership. For example, rather than creating a one-off market report, consider developing a quarterly market report that is repeatable and easy to update. Over time, it's likely that prospects, customers & even journalists will view your brand as a subject matter authority.

**Establish specific goals and desired outcomes.** Most B2B marketers cite "brand awareness" as their primary content marketing goal. But here's the problem: brand awareness is often a catchall category that is notoriously difficult to measure. In many cases, it's symptomatic of a content marketing program that hasn't taken the time to establish specific business goals and outcomes they want to achieve from their content marketing investments. Savvy content marketers, on the other hand, connect content marketing strategies to measurable, bottom line business outcomes, improving their ability to leverage content for business results.

**Measure your progress.** The creation of targeted goals sets the stage for the use metrics & analytics in content marketing. Content marketing needs to be tracked and measured. In addition to providing insights that enable you to make your content more effective for target audiences, measurements help build a business case by demonstrating the ROI of content marketing investments.

The use of content as not only a marketing tool, but as a driver of measurable business outcomes is growing. In the B2B universe, there is an expectation that brands will provide buyers with the information they need to make more informed buying decisions. In most cases, this information will be delivered via one or more content-related vehicles, giving buyers the ability to access information on a device and in a format of their own choosing.

Although content marketing is a relatively young discipline, the creation, distribution and amplification of content is not. The difference is that the brands that will succeed in today's B2B marketplace will be those that approach content in a more strategic and multi-disciplinary way.

# About Walker Sands

Walker Sands is a full-service PR and digital marketing agency with comprehensive content marketing capabilities. Our team of in-house copy and content experts routinely develops, creates, distributes and amplifies results-driven content for growth-stage companies and large enterprises.

We utilize the most current and effective digital marketing tools, tactics and methodologies available in today's business world. More importantly, our content marketing solutions are supported by a range of industry-leading services, including:



PR



Digital Strategy



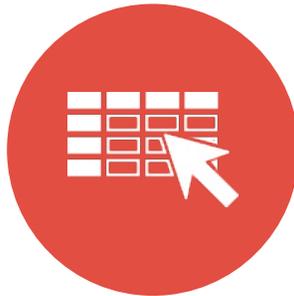
Website Design  
& Development



Content Marketing



Search Engine  
Optimization



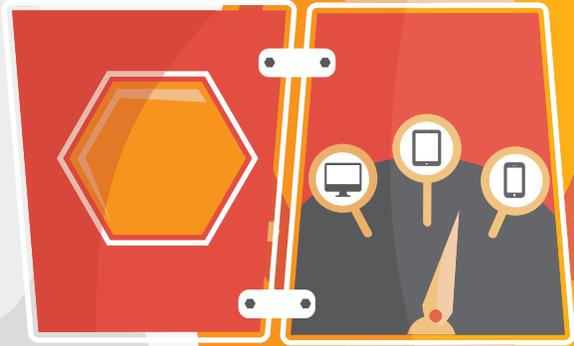
Pay-per-click  
advertising



Social Media  
Promotion

Our unique combination of content, digital and PR services sets Walker Sands apart as one of the few agencies capable of providing a complete, integrated and value-added response to your organization's most important content needs and challenges.

**Ready to do more with content? For more information about Walker Sands' content capabilities and other services, give us a call at (312) 267-0066.**



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