

What is Content Marketing?

By David Evans, PhD, MBA



Roper Public Affairs recently reported that 80 percent of business decision-makers prefer to get information about a company from a series of articles rather than an ad, and 70 percent say that content marketing creates more of a connection.

The first reported modern-day content marketing campaign was launched by the American tractor company, John Deere. Instead of focusing on product sales, the company introduced a magazine called *The Furrow*. The magazine focused on how farmers (Deere's customers) could attain larger profits. Its articles discussed issues that affected individuals who used tractors, but did not discuss the tractors per se, and it worked. *The Furrow* helped John Deere become an extremely profitable company and ensured its place in American popular culture.

What is content marketing?

At its heart, content marketing is the creation and distribution of unique, valuable and relevant content. The goal is to subtly encourage your prospective patients to think or act differently, and this approach touches on all facets of an Internet marketing campaign. On social

media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest or Instagram, the goal is to gently encourage fans to read, like, comment on and share your posts. From a search engine optimisation perspective, Google, Yahoo! and Bing like educational content more than obvious sales pitches. Content+ reports that blogs give websites 434 percent more indexed pages and 97 percent more indexed links. Press releases, too, are more likely to get noticed if the copy is informative and not overly self-congratulatory or a thinly veiled advertisement. Online patient reviews are perhaps the definitive form of content marketing because consumers learn about you without being sold.

Genuine reviews

Reviews should be genuine, not artificial or contrived. Is it really possible for any surgeon to have 1,000 five-star reviews? It is unlikely. Everyone, including surgeons, has a bad day or a really difficult patient. No practice avoids negative reviews altogether and surprisingly; this is to a practice's benefit.

According to studies from Stanford Business School, "When consumers get mild doses of negative information about a product or service, news about the blemish may actually strengthen their positive impression". This is valuable counsel. It applies to all forms of content marketing—not just to reviews. If something sounds too good to be true, consumers won't believe the positive information they obtain.

Content marketing for your practice

To get started, think about your patients, and then try to think like your patients. What issues and topics appeal to your target

demographic? What magazines do they read in your waiting room?

From here, you can select a theme and develop articles around that theme. For example, outdoor activities that are more enjoyable with great vision may be of interest to your patients. For example, you might develop articles on great sunglasses for skiing, golf and other sports. Importantly, these articles don't sell anything to anyone. They just educate or entertain.

Connecting the consumer

The content connects the consumer to your practice, and in doing so it makes the next leap an easy one to take. It's not a bait and switch — it's more of a courtship. It is also not a one-and-done endeavour. To be successful, a content marketing campaign involves a steady stream of well-written articles on various themes. What are you waiting for? It's time to start that blog you always meant to.

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