

WHAT NOT TO DO in Content Marketing

A short guide to getting ahead in Content Marketing by simply NOT DOING



Preface

A lot of great strategy just comes from knowing what NOT to do. Or, to paraphrase Charlie Munger - *“Don’t go where you are sure to die”*.

The value of accuracy is constantly at loggerheads with the need for agility in a universe where everything is changing constantly.

Fact is that we live in an imperfect world where good decision making is all about making trade-offs. About figuring out the best course of action in less-than-ideal circumstances. Consistently. Day after Day. Every day of every week.

And surprisingly, it is the things that we choose NOT to do that often illuminate and ultimately guide our most likely path to success. (And maybe happiness too, I think).

This book is about simply ‘NOT DOING’ what passes for content marketing. And, about believing passionately in everything that you DO decide to do even if it is not ‘technically’ in the purview of content marketing or any other kind of marketing, for that matter.

I believe that in a hurry to tick trending checklists or simply not “miss out” on latest buzzwords, businesses often do a halfhearted job of almost EVERYTHING, ultimately standing in the way of achieving critical mass in ANYTHING.

Chapter 1

Thou Shalt Not “WRITE” For The Sake Of “WRITING”.

With the skyrocketing popularity of content marketing, not to mention its obvious impact on SEO, most companies have hired a content marketing agency or recruited writers to help them ride the trend in recent years. Even the smallest of businesses have taken to “blogging” on social media.

But given that the easiest media to get published on is one’s own, this has translated in most cases to self-serving promotional content served on brand platforms thinly (if at all) disguised as “USER engagement”.

Goals are “likes” and “followers”, routinely amplified through promotion campaigns and declared a metric of success in themselves.

Now what could be the problem with that?

Everything.

First of all, Likes are not a REAL metric. Even assuming the likes are not fake, just because you got someone to like a page does not mean they will ever go back to it, leave alone actually make a purchase.

Second, content creation is NOT content marketing. It is just one piece of the jigsaw, and frankly the easiest to get right.



Source: maxpixel.net

OK – So, what’s the alternative? Do I miss out on the opportunity presented by social assets and a blog that refreshes my website content and makes it SEO friendly?

Not at all. Follow our 3-Step plan to make every word count.

Step 1: Have a goal.

Please, please know what you want from your content.
And, aim higher than “3 posts per day across 6 brand profiles”.

Visualize the response you desire from the audience you are seeking to engage and then create the format most likely to achieve that response.



Do you want their email id? Offer a free coupon.

Do you want website traffic? Insert a “read more” link.

There is no goal big or small, but it has to be realistic. And measurable.

Step 2: Make sure to be useful.

Talk about something you know. As a brand for a product and service, chances are you know something about that product or service that others don’t.

Be creative. You can write 100 words on the right way to apply eyeliner or include a small video. Go beyond the features and talk about how they help users.

Or offer something that only you can. You don't need a huge budget. Discounts and coupons are great for existing customers as well as those still sitting in the cart.

Step 3: Get outside your comfort zone.

You can publish something on your content assets and then drive traffic to them.

OR

You can find the audience and then try to get heard.

If your content is good, why restrict it to your own web assets?

There are several niche/hobby and specialist websites/forums where potential customers are seeking information and exchanging views. Try and take part. Show interest in others as you would in real life.

Alternatively, run the risk of writing great content that few people see if you don't have the mega budget to support it.

Chapter 2

Thou Shalt NOT Mislead The Customer.

Marketing is so synonymous with exaggerated claims and benefits that consumers have stopped taking notice of what brands have to say about themselves in their advertisements and brochures.

Unfortunately, content marketing still wears a halo. In using what are typically "non-sales avenues" to influence users, you are held to higher standards. Potential customers are unlikely to forgive paid customer reviews or free trials that are not really free and any other "trick" that your marketing cousins routinely employ in a day's work.

MCDONALDS BIG MAC

ADVERTISEMENTS

ACTUAL BIG MAC

- ROTATED TO MOST ATTRACTIVE ANGLE



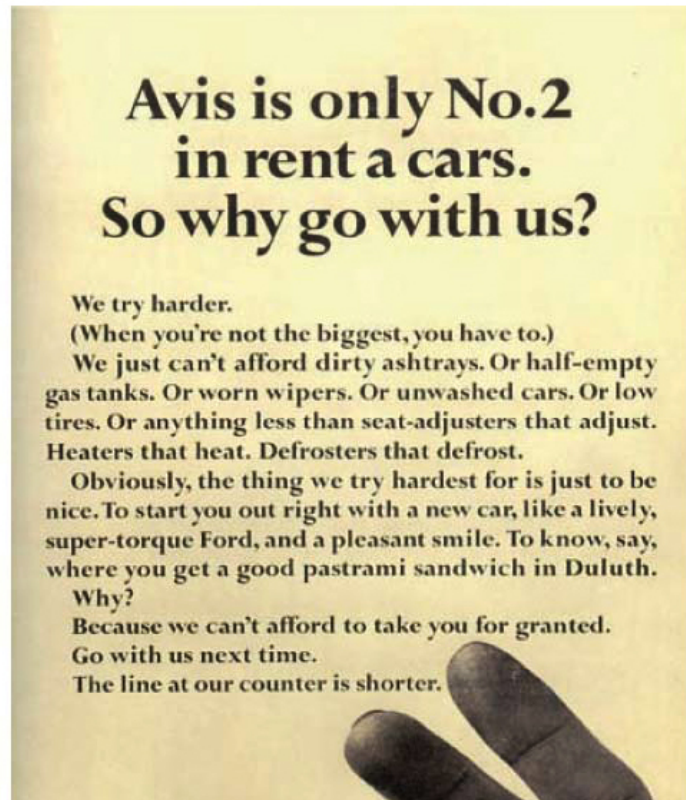
Content marketing is rooted in TRUST.

It is supposed to care. And if you don't, then maybe it's not the right strategy for you.

Tried being honest?

In a rather unique day and age where we all compete to post "filtered" images of lives in a bid to compete or at least keep pace with "expectations", just being yourself can be a great break-

through strategy for just anybody. Admitting imperfections can be a great start to building



**Avis is only No.2
in rent a cars.
So why go with us?**

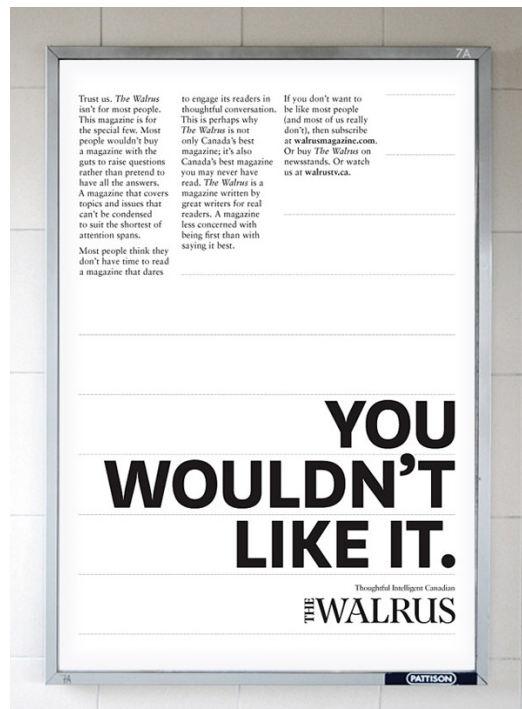
We try harder.
(When you're not the biggest, you have to.)
We just can't afford dirty ashtrays. Or half-empty gas tanks. Or worn wipers. Or unwashed cars. Or low tires. Or anything less than seat-adjusters that adjust. Heaters that heat. Defrosters that defrost.

Obviously, the thing we try hardest for is just to be nice. To start you out right with a new car, like a lively, super-torque Ford, and a pleasant smile. To know, say, where you get a good pastrami sandwich in Duluth.

Why?
Because we can't afford to take you for granted.
Go with us next time.
The line at our counter is shorter.

dialogue and yes, TRUST.

The above advertising by Avis is a great example of content marketing. By admitting their place in the pecking order, not only did they stand out in a marketplace where everyone proclaims



they are No. 1, they also set the stage for communication.

And, this approach is not new; it is often called reverse psychology or contrast marketing among other things. But the point is not to find ways to pretend. It's about being upfront about what you ARE and also ARE NOT. That's refreshing. So far.

The only edge that Content Marketing has over traditional marketing tactics is in its ability to build a meaningful relationship using an information based approach rather than hard sales.

An approach that make your brand more relevant to a user's life.

While creative storytelling to make an impact or break through the clutter is acceptable, misrepresenting facts is not.

Remember to create messages that you would be happy to receive yourself.

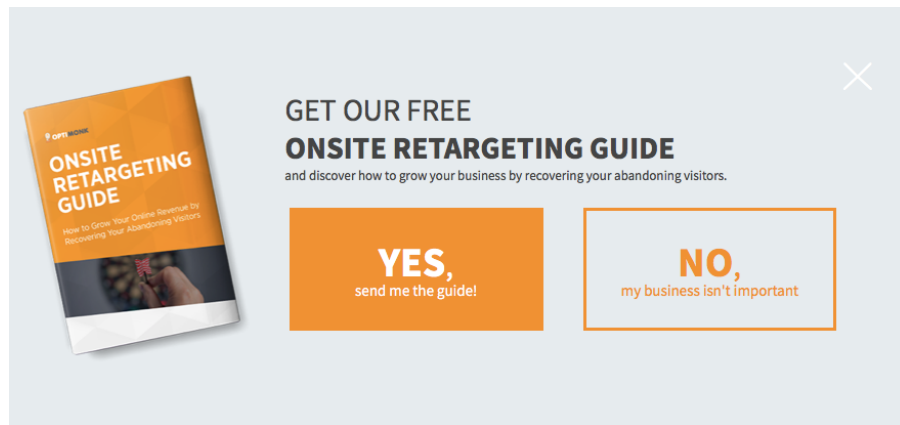
Chapter 3

Do NOT Use MANIPULATION To Buy Love.

We are all guilty of wanting more. To keep expecting and asking for more. Even if it means showing hard-earned users disruptive pop-ups less than 5 seconds after they start reading our page.

These often come with an irritating “close or x” option or, worse, a cheesy message that I have to choose that often says “No, I don’t want to be smarter” to close or “No, My business isn’t important” like the one below.

This is not content marketing. It is not any kind of marketing. It’s just manipulation.



Why do we think we have the right to spam users for the rest of eternity because they really did want to download that e-book we made them give up their details for?

We marketers (especially content marketers) frequently use content as bait to lure users into parting with their email IDs. While a person may want to read “5 breakaway content trends in the food industry”, they may not necessarily want to sign up for a strategy consultation or get weekly reminders why their life is incomplete without one.

Do everyone a favor. Take a minute to introduce yourself and ascertain interest. And have the decency to RETHINK the subscription STRATEGY if it comes to that. Everybody in the bar has not come to meet you. Some just want to enjoy a drink. Let’s NOT interrupt the person who we worked so hard to attract in the first place.

Ask yourself the below:

1. Did they really opt-in?

Putting aside all the jargon on “opt-ins”, “confirmed opt-ins”, and “double opt-ins”, research shows that almost 25% of all subscriptions are a result of “auto-subscription” which can be traced to a support request, job interest, or downloading a file.

While you may have covered the legality in the fine print what you actually created is “dissatisfaction” with your brand, nothing more.

2. What did they opt-in for?

Now while companies have mastered the art of getting a person to surrender their email address, they still don't really know what to do with it. Rarely is the content mapped and tailored to user preferences. Yes, they opted in. But what did they opt in for?

Would you try and con a stranger into buying you a drink?

Corporate social profiles are not managed much better than personal profiles. We post pictures of ourselves in all our filtered perfection sharing only the best and brightest that we can offer. We shamelessly “beg” for likes, even offering freebies, rebates, and discounts to buy affection. If that doesn't work, we try to “guilt” them into supporting hungry kids and sick people like Kellogg and Durex did in their content below:

Kellogg's UK @KelloggsUK

1 RT = 1 breakfast for a vulnerable child

311 RETWEETS 24 FAVORITES

4:00 PM - 9 Nov 13

I think it's time we stop subscriber lists (likes, with people who are interested.

Or just keep ticking "marketing boxes" of the carnage we leave fooling, anyway?

Durex
December 1, 2012

40% of all new adult HIV cases in 2011 were people aged 15-24 yrs. We need your help to prevent new HIV infections. "Share" or "Like" our image to donate a condom to an HIV prevention charity this World Aids Day:

#1SHARE1CONDOM

40% OF ALL NEW ADULT HIV CASES IN 2011 WERE PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YRS.

1ST December is World AIDS Day 2012.

Get involved in the mission to create an HIV-Free generation: [Share this image on Facebook](#), and we'll donate a condom to charities who run HIV prevention projects in communities across the world. For more info: [1share1condom.com](#)

trying to bulk up our followers, and more) simply NOT

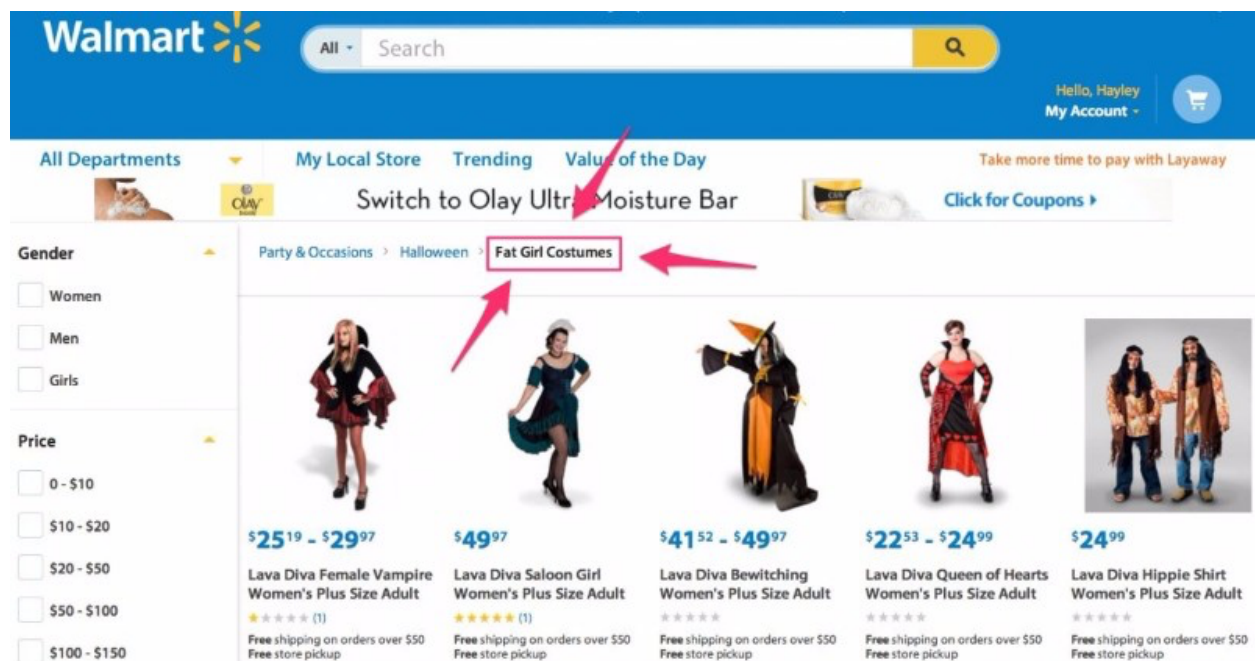
away these relentlessly oblivious behind. Who are we

4. Thou Shalt NOT Behave Online Like You Would NOT Behave Offline.

Every time you write, ask, or respond over mail, chat, or via social platforms, remember that the basic rules of social and human etiquette still apply! Hidden behind our screens, we seem to forget that REAL people receive our messages and will form REAL opinions that will impact what they think of us.

When you write a mail or a post or create a landing page that you want to drive traffic to, keep it honest.

Don't bait, guilt, or behave inappropriately to get what you want.



It could backfire.

You simply cannot disrespect people in the name of creativity. Or, bend the rules of regular social behavior because the person is not seated next to you.

Have a look at my personal checklist for what NOT to do

1. Beg for or buy likes, followers, and other patronage.
2. Tell everybody how great you are.
3. Vent, bully, bicker, or shame.

Even taking sides on emotional political or social issues is usually a no-no, but there are times when I think brands can help, but you must tread carefully.

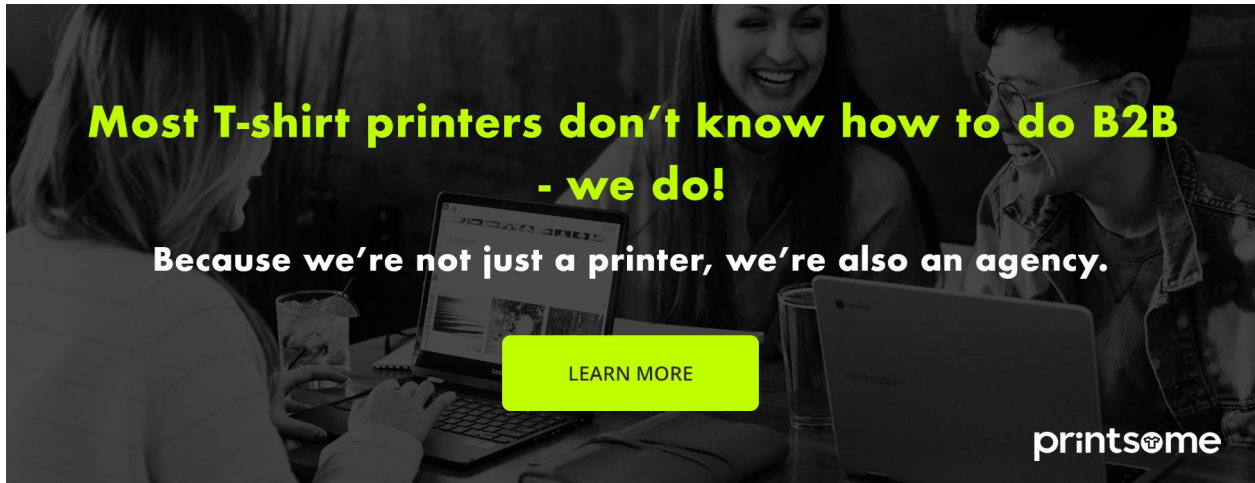
There are some great advantages of the internet that you should definitely explore in content marketing.

On the other hand, please do keep in mind the below:

- You have the ability to segment and draft customized offers and communication to your users. It could be as broad as first time users vs. regular purchasers or further broken down by browsing and purchase history. The options are endless, limited only by your imagination and budget.
- Offline campaigns are almost always expensive and time consuming. Online content allows you to leverage current events, incorporate trending keywords, and make your content as relevant as possible to the immediate political and social reality of your user base even as you time it to make the maximum impact.
- You know when you score and how much. It is far easier to measure the effectiveness of online content vs. offline content. And it is sooo much easier (not to mention cheaper) to make the changes you need... as many times as it takes.

The internet allows you endless advantages but bad manners is not one of them. Treat people politely and respectfully, and not just as a number on a scoreboard.

5. Don't try and RULE a kingdom - Invest in a Community.



Most brands choose to take the stage in their content engagement.
WE have an announcement to make.
WE have a joke to tell.
WE know the 70 ways towards world peace.

Instead, talk about your intended customers, or, better still, talk about US - Ask questions, run polls, and re-share customer experiences.

More people are interested in content that relates to them as compared to content that relates to you... this stands true in all conversations... offline or online.



This quote below sums up an aspect of content marketing that is often misunderstood.

The moment we stop viewing content marketing as a campaign or list of action items in itself, we will harness its true power. It's more a philosophy of support and transparency in marketing more than a new type of marketing tactic per se.

Try on the below ideas for size.

Expert Opinions and Insights

Usually under-leveraged (maybe because marketing people are not product experts themselves), this is perhaps the most powerful way to build recall and engagement. Just surf every message board related to your product and post answers to questions - there will be usually 4-5 that dominate. Create threads for these questions on your own forum/web assets, if possible. Chances are you will build a lot more equity for your brand in a week than you would with 5 weeks of "Why our detergents wash whitest?" posts.

Customer Reviews

Customers typically are not interested in what any brand has to say about itself. They would, however, be interested in knowing what other users have to say about their experience with your product category. Most people would prefer "If anybody over 60 has managed to build muscle mass with training and how" against a list of your "supposed" product benefits.

Curated Content

If you don't have something interesting to share, it is ok to point your readers towards someone else's great content. There is value in consolidating news, offering links to other websites, and generally being helpful. And yes, it's better to retell someone else's joke than sit around with a mopey face.

Remember - The goal is to be PART of a community, and not necessarily run it.

5. Do NOT hand over your Social Media to an Intern.

Unfortunately, we've all been there.

We know that all social content is a priority but we simply don't have the resources or time to dedicate to it. It is just one more channel in a rapidly multiplying "have-to-do" checklist. So, despite all common sense, we outsource it to freelancers, interns, or junior recruits that are still figuring out the way to the nearest restroom.



What's worse is that we go as far as to applaud effort usually characterized by reports that enumerate the number of profiles x posts per day. Sometimes along with the word count. Weekly updates also include the likes/followers that the post has garnered. Almost all of us are caught in this repetitive exercise week after week, not really expecting anything but yet, spinning the wheel endlessly. Why?

Advertisements, sales collateral, and other marketing material are routinely outsourced to agencies . And backed by a strong brief, well, that can work. But content marketing by its very definition needs to be the brand's opportunity to connect with its user base. Trying to use a proxy for that is basically not doing content marketing at all. It is just one more meaningless transaction distracting you from the stuff that's really important.

We have to know and believe in the fact that content marketing is ultimately just another tactic which may or may not be the best strategy available to us for our goals. If we don't have the

bandwidth to put into the strategy and delivery of it, why do it at all? Bad content is worse than



no content. So if you're not ready, just don't do it.

Source: <https://www.authorityhacker.com>

Why not try this checklist instead?

1. Examine the scope for optimization on existing channels, profiles, and web assets. Even a single unanswered query or poorly managed chat or pop-up function could be causing greater harm than good. Fix that first.
2. Don't add more channels (FB profiles/listings or "shop in shops") unless you have the bandwidth to manage them. Choose the ones that complement your existing portfolio and best fit with your long-term objectives. One at a time.
3. "Integrate" content marketing or relevant consumer-speak in existing areas like customer support, marketing material, and newsletters, to name just a few. It should not exist as a separate channel in a silo of its own where it doesn't help anybody.

Content Marketing is a powerful tool but only if it is used the way it should be. Used carelessly, it can even be damaging for your brand.

6. Don't forget that Content Marketing is 2 words one of which is marketing.

Enough has been said about this but I'm going to say it again anyway.

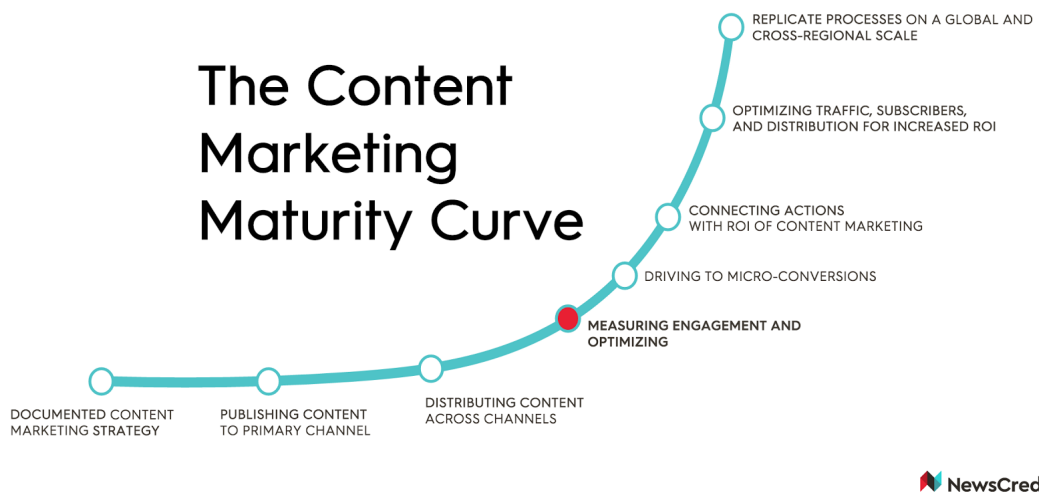
Writing is the first and usually the easiest part of the process.

Getting it published on something that you do not own, definitely harder.

Viewed by a target segment, definitely a win of sorts.

But the true test of successful marketing is the ultimate engagement.

Did they share, click, or buy? How much? How many? Repeat purchase or just that one time? It



is time we treat content marketing like every other marketing effort.

For some strange reason, while content marketing contains within it the word “marketing”, more and more brands show a skewed focus towards the content end. Great content WILL NOT ORGANICALLY RISE TO THE TOP and solve your marketing woes. It may not even STIR unless you work in the “why so special pitch” to your “intended audience” basis available distribution budget/strategy from the very START.

It takes more than one “exposure” to close a sale so the idea is to monitor a trend and not response to a single post or article. But you need to “know the metric” you can and will measure progress against, so that you can work it into the article content.

Which kind of brings me to the last and final point I want to make.

Content Marketing despite the buzz around it is not new or immune to the problems of, well, regular marketing. It does build a lot more focus around creating user friendly content as

against hard sales tactics. But it is ultimately a “type of content” that still needs to be delivered to the audience in the best possible way like every other “marketing communication”.

A single minded focus on “production” of better and better text, designs, and infographics does not absolve you of the responsibility to ‘market’ it in the regular way. Like any other message that you want your audience to consume or act on.

Content Marketing simply provides you with a better chance of success having taken the time to build relevance RIGHT FROM THE START. It is just one more item in your tool box and while you can use it as an overarching principle for everything or custom create projects around it... **You simply cannot expect it to do your marketing for you.**