



**Content Marketing
for Customer
Relationship
Management**

★ EARNEST INSIGHTS ★

Content marketing is all the rage amongst B2B marketers
eagerly prospecting for new business.

But aren't we missing a trick?

*Isn't it time to think about what content marketing can really do
to take our relationships with customers to the next level?*

This is a guide about why and how.



Why read this guide

How you market to your customer base matters more than ever. Businesses are at last waking up to the fact that the key to success now lies not only in acquiring new customers but importantly, building the loyalty and maximising the value of their existing customer base.

Don't just take our word for it, improving customer retention is viewed by 79% of senior marketing executives as the most important issue impacting their marketing strategy, according to a study by Accenture¹. A quick look at the economics explains the reason why:

- It's 6-7 times more costly to acquire a new customer than retain an existing one
- Boosting customer retention rates by as little as 5% can result in between a 5 and 95% increase in profitability²

So if improving retention and driving revenue growth within your existing customer base is a strategic goal, what part, if any, should content marketing play?

To cut to the chase, a significant one. In a Junta 42/MarketingProfs study³ on the role of content marketing, 69% of marketers ranked customer retention as a key goal – just behind brand awareness (78%) and rather surprisingly ahead of lead generation (63%).

So how can you make content marketing work for your business and its customers?

This Earnest guide explores:

- The guiding principle of the value exchange
- The changing face of CRM
- How to build your content strategy for CRM
- Ways to better understand your customers – who they are, what they need and when
- How to formulate your content for success
- Key considerations when distributing your content to customers
- Measuring success
- The Earnest 10 rules of content marketing for CRM

¹ Onward and Up: How Marketers are Refocusing the Front Office for Growth, Accenture.
http://www.accenture.com/Global/Services/By_Industry/Retail/R_and_I/Accenture-Marketing-Transformation.htm

² Bain & Co. <http://www.bain.com/>

³ 2010 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends, Junta 42 and MarketingProfs.
<http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/09/b2b-content-marketing/>



It's all about value

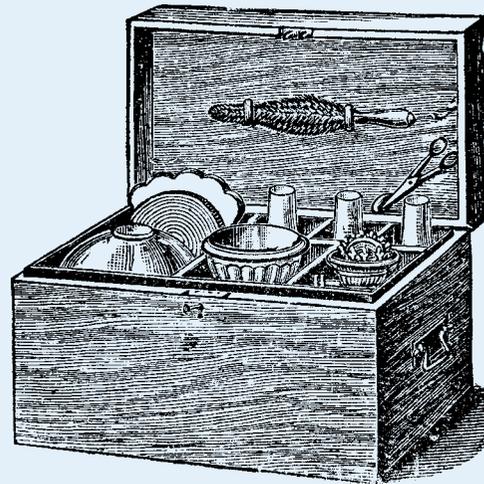
The guiding principle behind content marketing is the concept of the value exchange. Essentially everything you do should be built around offering customers content which has a perception of value. This increases the likelihood of the recipient reciprocating in some way – and in the case of your customers that may mean:

- Putting more business your way
- Becoming an advocate for your product, service or brand (whether spreading the word internally or externally amongst their peers)
- Choosing to keep their business with you

As the good folk at Junta42⁴ explain:

“The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty.”

Value is everything. Lose sight of that fact and your content marketing initiatives are more likely to perform with a whimper than a bang.



⁴ What is Content Marketing? Junta 42
<http://www.junta42.com/resources/what-is-content-marketing.aspx>



CRM but not as we know it

Customer Relationship Management is a dirty word in most b2b organisations. It's been tarnished by association with systems that have proven costly to implement, onerous to manage and are all too often the thorn in the side of many a marketing function.

For all the goodwill and investment in the world, the truth is most companies are yet to reap value from 'CRM'. They lack confidence in the quality of data held therein and the ability of the organisation to garner any meaningful insight to inform and improve their relationship with customers.

Altimeter Group⁵ gets to the heart of the problem: "Though these CRM programs started out with the goal of providing a single customer view and 1:1 relationship management, early efforts quickly refocused on automation of front office tasks and improving management visibility across marketing, sales, service and support. Because these programs have

often failed to support the front office worker's need to manage relationships, internal adoption halted as users grew to resent, and in some cases revolt, against CRM."

CRM goes social

Altimeter and other seasoned experts on all things CRM, including the likes of Paul Greenberg and Brian Solis, talk about the evolution of CRM and the principle of Social CRM. That 'social' buzzword aside, this is more than mere opportunism on the part of commentators trying to coin the next big thing. Instead it's a compelling view, especially worthy of consideration when informing your approach to content marketing to your customers. Essentially, the view is that if CRM to date has been about operational management of customer relationships, and is often centred around a transaction, Social CRM is about building a strategy around collaboration and engagement with the customer – in a word, interaction.

And to be clear, Social CRM isn't just about social media – but all the channels used to build customer relationships and advocacy. It's about being able to locate, educate and engage current and potential customers, however and wherever they prefer to be communicated with. The bottom line is content can play a key role in supporting and shaping that interaction and engagement – and as such, your relationship with each and every customer.

"CRM used to all be about customer transactions. Social CRM is about collaboration and engagement with customers – in a word, interaction."



⁵Customers Ignite a New Era of CRM, The Social Customer
<http://www.thesocialcustomer.com/Home/15992>

Building your content strategy

Like any good strategy, to ensure your content marketing success, you need to establish a clear set of objectives. Each objective will have significant implications for the kind of content you need to create and how you'll need to manage and distribute it. Generally speaking, objectives will take the form of one or more of the following:

Objective	Rationale	Recommended content types
<p>To maximise the customers' return on their relationship with you</p>	<p>This is the objective that is commonly overlooked and arguably the most important. They've bought a product or service from your business – but how can you give them the knowledge and insight they need to optimise their utilisation of it and/or fully leverage their relationship with your business to best effect? The rationale is simple: the greater the perceived value they gain from doing business with you, the more likely they are to stay put and buy more in future.</p>	<p>Training and educational content to improve their utilisation of your products/services</p> <p>FAQs and guidance on how to resolve common product /service related problems they may face</p> <p>Case studies and perspectives from other organisations: looking at how others are reaping the benefits of working with you</p> <p>Peer-to-peer discussions facilitated by your company: where execs from different customer organisations can share their insight on how they're addressing common issues</p>
<p>To change the way your business is perceived – achieving trusted advisor status</p>	<p>Many organisations are keen to elevate the way they are seen by their customers, moving from being viewed as a tactical supplier to trusted advisor. The belief is that by providing content that helps shape the customer's thinking and strategies, you're more likely to be engaged earlier in the buying cycle, potentially even bypassing formal procurement and pitch processes. Also, being a trusted advisor, they'll view you less as a commodity supplier, helping to maintain your margin.</p>	<p>Thought-leadership content: strategy guides, research reports and white papers that add value to the customer's role</p> <p>Practical guides: 'how to...' content that helps them address specific problems they face</p> <p>Point of view content: giving consideration to specific issues that are coming down track</p> <p>Relevant news and analysis on what's going on in their industry</p>
<p>To extend and strengthen your relationship with their business</p>	<p>Typically organisations face the challenge of their relationship being owned and managed by a specific contact or handful of contacts within the business. This raises a number of issues: Firstly, should these contacts leave, there's a risk your business could be given leave too. One leading mobile operator has responded to this by focusing on how they can create 'customer entanglement'. The thinking is the more relationships they can build within a business, the harder it is for the organisation to break their ties. Secondly, many businesses can find themselves engaged on a day-to-day basis at an operational level, but lack visibility amongst the real movers and shakers. Establishing the right relationships with senior executives can again help to engender greater approval for your organisation – and boost loyalty. Finally, the more relationships you have within the same business the greater the opportunity to sell more, especially if your existing contacts will serve as advocates.</p>	<p>VIP content programmes: aimed at senior executives, providing thought-leadership and peer-to-peer networking forums</p> <p>ROI tools and reports: helping customers to understand the value you are delivering to their business</p> <p>Case studies of what you're doing within their organisation: helping your direct contacts promote themselves and look good in front of their peers</p>
<p>To keep your brand front of mind</p>	<p>The timely provision of value adding content to your customers can do wonders for your brand – increasing familiarity and favourability. This isn't about constantly bombarding customers with content trumpeting that Doreen in accounts has just had a baby or that you've just opened your new office in downtown Slough – but providing news and insight that will be of interest and has a degree of usefulness to recipients. The desired effect is to get a response from a customer such as 'wow that was timely, we were just struggling to get our heads around how we were going to do that ourselves.' This isn't about interruption – it's about engagement.</p>	<p>Thought leadership content: that's relevant to their industry and role</p> <p>Meaningful news and insight from your company, including new wins and case studies</p>
<p>To drive cross-selling and up-selling opportunities</p>	<p>The fact is an existing customer will be far more likely to spend money with your organisation than a prospect or suspect. However, content focused around cross-selling and up-selling your wares needs to be emblazoned with a rather large handle with care sticker. Get it wrong and you can look like you're being too aggressive in the pursuit of more business, with a negative impact on your relationship. Remember, no one really likes being sold to. But if the offer of further products and services is delivered at the right time, when the contact has the budget, need and authority then they'll actually value the content and interaction.</p>	<p>Targeted content on relevant new products and services</p> <p>Business value analysis: audits, workshops and reports to help them formulate their strategy – and how you can help moving forward</p> <p>Case studies illustrating the business value being gained by others who are working with you in different ways</p>



Understand your audience

Not all customers are equal. It pays to bring the same, if not greater rigour, to your audience segmentation as you would in support of any customer acquisition programme. Failing to recognise the needs of different customer groups can at best lead to your content being wallpaper and simply ignored, at worst it can be hugely damaging to your relationship suggesting you don't understand or value their business. As such there are some factors to consider:



The who?

Know who the key audiences are within your customer base and the role they play. Understand where it is your relationships lie and who you need to engage to open up new opportunities.

Importantly, recognise that each audience will have its own set of drivers and needs which you need to tune into when planning and developing your content. Just because your day-to-day operational contact is keen to hear news of your new widget doesn't mean their CEO or CFO will be. Buyer personas can help here – ideally created with input from account managers and sales people on the frontline to ensure they're an accurate representation of your different kinds of customers.

The what?

Harness your CRM system and any other intelligence you have to understand what customers have bought in the past and when. It'll enable you to identify those that are prime for targeting with content geared at upselling and cross-selling.

Stay up to speed with what's going on in their industry and business as it provides important context for your content. For instance, if you identify that there's new legislation being brought in with far reaching consequences for their business, consider how you can help them navigate the challenges involved in achieving compliance. But make sure to focus on the issues where you can deliver genuine value – and be clear on the implications for the different audience segments within the same organisation.



The when?

Clearly understand your customer lifecycle and map where each organisation you're looking to engage is positioned within that lifecycle. Their content needs will vary depending on that position. Also there are key points in that relationship that give you a compelling reason to engage them with new content. Bear in mind, different audiences within the same organisation may be at different stages within the lifecycle. To illustrate some of the key stages:

On-boarding: think of it in its simplest terms as a 'welcome pack' – the content that validates their choice and kick starts the relationship providing an understanding of the resources available to help them maximise the value of their relationship with you. This is also a great opportunity and excuse to reach out to other influential figures within the business. How about engaging a senior executive with a membership pack, enrolling them into your VIP community, by virtue of their organisation becoming a customer?

Anniversary of purchase: once a customer has purchased a product or service from you, why not 3 or 6 months later, offer them a free business value audit to assess how effectively they're using it? Give them valuable content they can use to help unlock further value. They reap the benefits – and you strengthen your relationship, gathering intelligence whilst understanding where you may be able to help them in future. A year into the relationship, why not surprise them with a video message from your CEO thanking them for their business?

Problem resolution: it's almost inevitable that at some point during your relationship with customers, an issue may arise. How you deal with these issues is the measure of your organisation and can actually be used to strengthen, rather than compromise, your relationship with the customer. The challenge is identifying when a customer has an issue and then providing them with the appropriate content and support to ensure speedy resolution. Social media platforms are increasingly being used by organisations

to listen out for negative comments and sentiment about their business, enabling them to directly respond to individuals and come to their assistance. This could be via customer service agents using the likes of Twitter to engage with individuals – or it could be directing people to self-service content. For instance, 'how to...' content that shows customers how to resolve common problems.

End-of-contract/End-of-life: when a customer's product is nearing end-of-life or your service contract with them is up for renewal, it pays to engage them with the right content to encourage them to keep their business with you. Again, it's an opportune time to offer them a free assessment or ROI tools that help determine the value you have delivered to their business to date. It also gives you a better understanding of their needs moving forward to target and tailor new offers.



The how?

So what's the best way of delivering your content to each of your audience segments? Here's a revelation: why not simply ask them? Get an understanding of how individuals would prefer to receive and consume their content – and keep that information up to date on a regular basis. So before you decide to develop that eBook for the Kindle platform – find out whether your customers actually have a Kindle device. If you're unwilling to ask, simply measuring how effectively different

content is being used and shared is a good indication of whether you've got the channel mix right. So if your emails are going unopened and there have been negligible downloads of your iPad app – chances are you're using the wrong channels. Well and your content may just be plain missing the mark.

Want to understand which social networks your customers use? There are some pretty good tools available out there. For instance, Rapportive for Gmail shows which social

networks your customer contacts are registered with. It doesn't mean you have free reign to suddenly connect with them on Facebook, but if a large number is on LinkedIn you may want to give some thought as to how you could create a dedicated group to facilitate peer-to-peer dialogue amongst your customers.

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Formulating your content

From experience, content development is the biggest sticking point for organisations, most commonly due to resourcing issues (“We haven’t got the time?”), but sometimes simply a lack of understanding of the kind of content that will resonate with their customers (“Put it in the newsletter – we need to pad it out a little”). As MarketingProfs⁶ advises, the largest challenge businesses face is ‘producing the kind of content that engages prospects and customers.’



*Struggling to generate content?
Download your copy of this free Earnest guide.*



Establish a unifying theme:

Before you start creating reams of content covering a whole manner of subjects, it’s essential to have a good long think about what you want your company to be known for. This should stem from your brand proposition and will provide a unifying theme for all your content (IBM’s SmarterPlanet is a great example).

Choose the topics you want to own

Looking at the needs of your different customer audiences, their issues and priorities, identify the key subjects that you need a view on – ideally, that your organisation can help them respond to. Perhaps it’s about a legislative change, an industry outlook or a new, emerging technology that has far reaching implications for your customers. The number of topics will depend on the scope and scale of your operation – and ability to create credible content around that subject. Better to choose three or four you can do well than spread yourself too thin across 12 different topics. Use the experts within your business to get an understanding of

what they think those subjects should be. It’s also worth surveying your customers – asking them what their burning issues are in the year ahead. Don’t forget, your topics should ideally have a link with your unifying theme.

Identify the event-triggered content needed to support your relationships

Thinking back to your customer lifecycle, you also need to consider all the different types of content required to support your customers at each stage – from onboarding to purchase anniversary, problem resolution to end-of-life/contract. It pays to have all the bases covered – and to also give thought to how you’d like to keep them informed of new (and relevant) developments within your own business.

⁶ 2010 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends, Junta 42 and MarketingProfs
<http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/09/b2b-content-marketing/>



Build a content development plan

Now you've identified all of the content you require, this needs to be prioritised, scheduled and a resourcing plan created. The big question here is really one of how you're going to develop the content. Here are some potential sources:

- Taking advantage of the experts within your business: either encouraging them to directly contribute (in word or on video) or simply providing their input, to enable the content to be developed by a third-party.
- Working with industry analysts or respected commentators: this can prove costly but adds to the perceived value and authority of the content created.
- Commissioning a research company: a good way of developing your own unique IP around a subject. It's great to give your customers an exclusive on the findings – before using it in PR, social media and other communications activity.

- Drawing on freelance or agency resource: enables you to leverage the skills and expertise of a third-party specialist to meet your content demands.
- Getting your customers to contribute: customers like to hear what their peers are thinking. By getting certain customers on side, you can uncover a rich seam of content and it's also very good profile for them.
- Leveraging a content curation platform: there are a number of specialists offering automated platforms that bring together the latest news and thought-leadership from trusted sources on the web. The content is selected based on carefully chosen keywords – including your own content and viewpoints – so you can aggregate this content and create your own branded portal for customers.

As part of your plan, careful consideration should be given to how you're going to manage both scheduled and ad-hoc content requirements. This is a question about how geared up you need to be to rapidly generate and distribute content to your customers in response to an emerging issue or requirement. If your business is using social media to engage with its customers – this is, and will become, ever more important. Let's say a new subject is starting to trend within your customer community group, it's about being able to add a valuable perspective – and fast. It's also a question of your social media policy – and willingness to let key executives engage with your customers via social networks, allowing them to interact and share their perspective online.





Distributing your content

There are two primary considerations to make when it comes to distributing your content: what form should your content take and how are you going to engage your customers with it?

According to research by the Content Marketing Institute⁷, social media (excluding blogs) is now the most popular tactic for distributing content by b2b marketers (79%). Close runners were articles (78%), in person events (62%) and e-newsletters (61%). If you were wondering, blogs were cited as a tactic by 51% of marketers.

But just because this is what the rest of the market is doing, doesn't mean you should too. As mentioned earlier, there's no substitute for asking customers how they'd like to receive content from you

and letting that dictate your distribution strategy. You may be surprised by how few want to receive paper-based communications any more – potentially saving you some hefty print and distribution cost. Or the flipside, it may come as no surprise as to how many don't want to be inundated with your e-mails and e-newsletters.

Whilst pushing content to customers is still accepted within reason, many now want to source the right content from you, when they need it. The more you can do to support these new rules of engagement the better. In recognition of this, interest in marketing automation platforms is gathering pace amongst the b2b marketing community. If correctly deployed, marketing automation can provide a highly effective means to target content according to specific customer needs –

either stated or implied by the way they behave, such as in their interaction with your website or emails. It's a big 'if' though, as it can also be a white elephant unless time is taken to understand and define the processes needed to deliver effective automation.

“Marketing automation can provide a highly effective means to target content according to specific customer needs – either stated or implied by the way they behave.”

⁷ 2010 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends, Junta 42 and MarketingProfs
<http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2010/09/b2b-content-marketing/>



Time isn't on your side

Bear in mind the amount of time at your customers' disposal. Short, snappy, soundbites delivered via social media – ideally in rich media format, whether animations, video or infographics, will secure their attention more so than long, wordy tomes that are destined to sit on their desk unread. Webcasts are right for certain customer audiences within reason, but there's no substitute for pressing the flesh when you can through face-to-face, intimate events where they can meet and exchange views with likeminded professionals.

With smartphone and tablet device adoption rocketing, mobile is becoming a viable channel for engaging with customers. Not the intrusive SMS campaigns of old, but enabling content to be provided via the mobile web, email, social networks, video and apps. As b2b mobile marketing consultant Christina Kerley⁸ advises, "A best practice is to start with a mobile site to track and analyse which devices (and mobile operating systems) your business customers are use)." Mobile isn't the next hot thing, it's already here.

Whatever channels you choose, integration matters. The more joined up your communication mix, the more 'surround sound' you can create – and the easier you can make it for your customers to engage with your content.

Short, snappy soundbites ideally using rich media will capture their attention more than long, wordy tomes (like this)



⁸ B2B Mobile Marketing: 10 Step Starter Guide for Integrating Mobile into the B2B Marketing Mix, Christina "CK" Kerley <http://www.slideshare.net/ckEpiphany/b2b-mobile-marketing-10step-starter-guide-2882873>



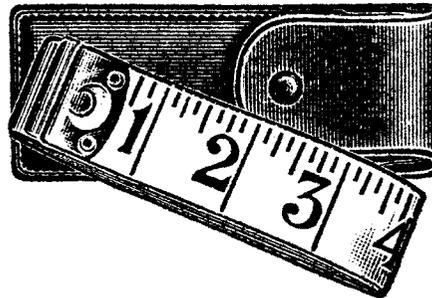
Measuring success

As content marketing becomes ever more digital, it provides far greater scope for measurement and ongoing refinement. There's really nowhere to hide. Creating a performance dashboard – with measures in place for each and every element of your content marketing programme may seem onerous, but it will help to give you valuable insight into what's working and what's not.

As well as quantitative measures, such as open rates, click through rates and downloads (plus the bigger ones, such as customer spend and attrition rates), you should also put in place qualitative measures – asking customers to score and feedback on the usefulness and quality of the content.

Bear in mind, not everything will work. What's important is you know what is and isn't working so you can drive continuous improvement in your content marketing programme.

49% of B2B marketers confess to not measuring ROI





The bottom line

Content marketing can play a significant role in helping you get closer to your customers – driving retention and increasing your profitability. The success of any content marketing programme for CRM depends on having a clear set of objectives and a thorough understanding and recognition of the needs of different audiences within your customer base. It will allow you to create and manage content in a way that truly engages and strengthens your customer relationship, using their preferred channels.





The Earnest rules of content marketing for CRM

1. Establish your objectives – and never lose sight of them
2. If it isn't relevant and valuable to your customers, don't do it
3. Develop content with reuse and repurposing firmly in mind
4. Just because you've done it before, doesn't mean you should do it again
5. Chances are your customers are using social media, if you're not, your competitors may well be
6. The richer the media, the richer the engagement
7. Use your content to support outbound AND inbound engagement with your customers
8. Ensure a degree of serendipity – give them what they want and need, but also occasionally give them something they're not expecting
9. Measure everything. Learn. Refine. Measure. Learn. Refine
10. It's not about you. It's about them at the end of the day.





*Want help formulating your content strategy
for CRM? Drop Earnest an email today:*

info@earnest-agency.com



Earnest, who?

Earnest is a full service marketing agency combining game-changing strategy and creative to deliver real results for clients in the business-to-business space.

We specialise in helping brands stand out from the crowd; devising high performance marketing strategies; and developing campaigns that surprise, engage and perform in equal measure.

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