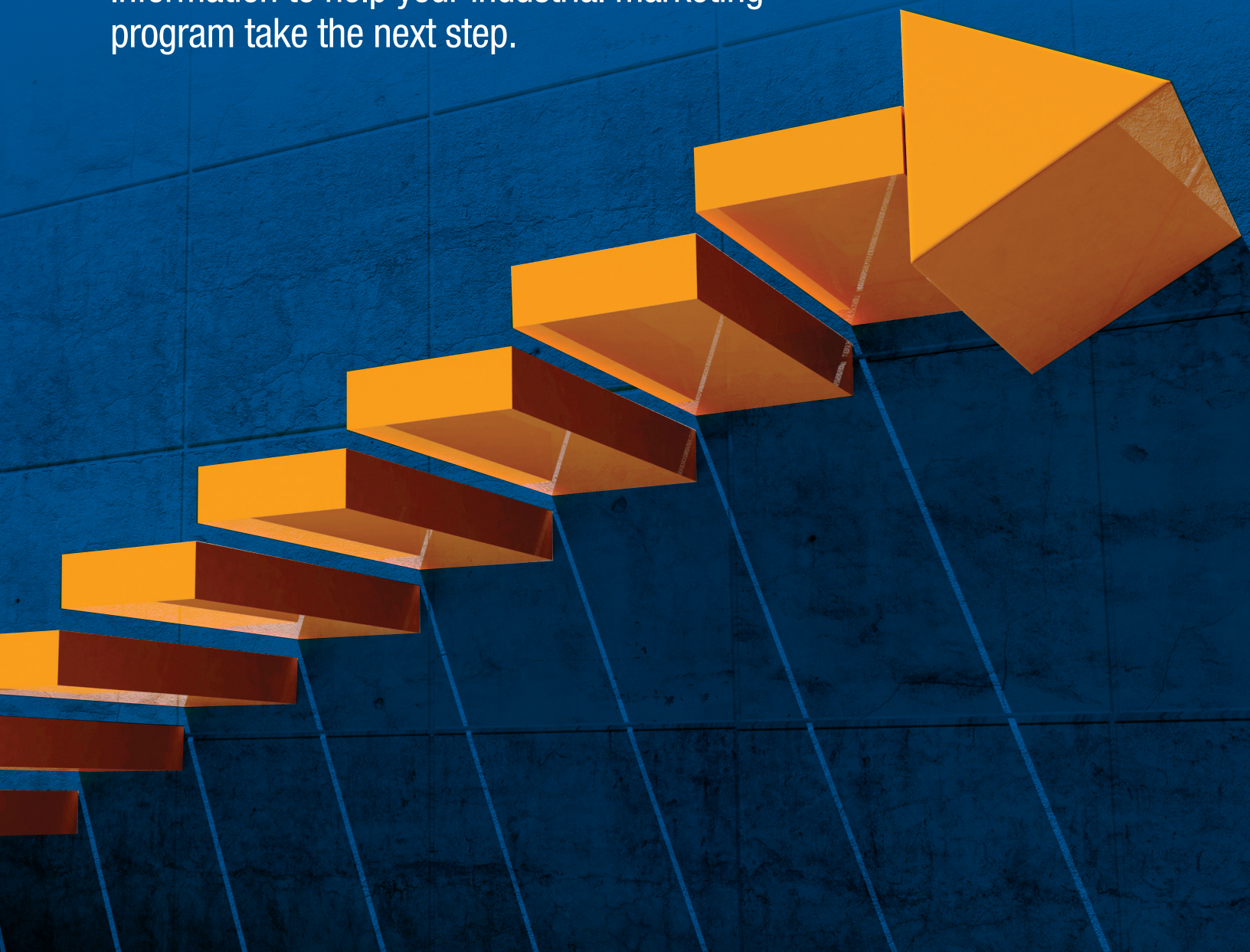




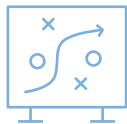
Industrial Marketer's Guide to **Creating an Effective Marketing Program**

Information to help your industrial marketing
program take the next step.





Powerful information to help you create a winning marketing strategy and program. Broken down into three specific themes, this guide features actionable tips, advice and insight. Whether you're new in your role, want to improve your positioning, or optimize your site for lead generation, this guide will help you put the proper plan in place to drive growth.



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14 Questions to Guide Your Manufacturer Marketing Strategy

As the year is coming to a close, it's time to start thinking about your manufacturer marketing strategy for next year. What worked well last year? What didn't? Where are you excelling and are there any gaps in your existing strategy that you can remedy in the new year?

Annual marketing strategy planning is stressful. It's hard to know where to start – and often that leads to reverting back to what you've always done rather than being strategic about how you can improve your manufacturer marketing strategy. Below are 14 key questions that will guide your manufacturer marketing strategy to improve your marketing and overall business performance.

Talent

As Jim Collins states in his famous business book, “Good to Great,” you need to make sure you have the right people on the bus before you can drive it in the right direction. In other words, the right people in the right roles can make all the difference, and that's

why the first questions guiding your manufacturer marketing strategy are directly related to the talent in your organization, and specifically your marketing team:

- 1 What are the roles and responsibilities of the existing marketing team?**
- 2 How are gaps in capabilities affecting performance?**

As we know, manufacturer marketing is evolving. What worked 10 years ago is no longer effective. Your marketing team needs to be up-to-date on the latest trends in not only the marketing industry, but manufacturer marketing specifically. They need to be willing to try new things and know how to track marketing campaign success. They may need training to ensure they have the knowledge needed to be successful.

Talent just might be your most important asset. You can have a killer manufacturer marketing strategy, but without the talent to implement it, it doesn't matter. Make sure you have the right people on your team and that they are living up

to their full potential in their roles. If there are gaps in knowledge that you can't fill, consider outsourcing those initiatives to a B2B marketing agency that can support your current marketing team.

Technology

As mentioned above, the importance of staying current can't be underestimated. That is why evaluating technology comes right after talent when addressing the questions that should be guiding your manufacturer marketing strategy:

- 3 What are the core components of our existing marketing technology stack?**
- 4 Are gaps in technology affecting performance? For example, is the lack of a marketing automation solution hindering our lead-to-sale conversion rate?**

You can't expect your marketing team to implement new marketing initiatives without the right technology. Technology can be expensive, but the right technology can streamline your marketing initiatives and help you track ROI.

How do you know which technology is the right technology? Different technology exists for your different needs – project management, research, sales, analytics, marketing automation, etc. With hundreds of options available at a multitude of price points, you can't explore all options. Talk with your marketing team or agency about which tools are the most effective for manufacturer marketing and your specific business. From there, evaluate which technology can save you time, make you team more effective and allow you to track your progress within the scope of your needs today and scalable if needed in the future.

Again, a marketing partner who already has the technology and expertise may be the most cost-effective option. Marketing agencies, like RH Blake, are up-to-date with the latest technologies, know

what works for the manufacturing industry and are experienced in using the technology. The learning curve to master certain technology, for example marketing automation, can be fairly steep if you don't already have someone on your marketing team with experience with that specific technology.

Strategy

After ensuring you have the right talent and technology in place, you can really dive into the questions that are going to drive your manufacturer marketing strategy:

- 5 What is our company's unique value proposition?**
- 6 What are our current target markets (e.g., verticals, geographic)? How will those evolve in the next 1-3 years?**

Your company's unique value proposition is already outlined and clearly defined for all to know, right? Your unique value proposition is a simple clear statement describing the value you offer your customers and what sets you apart from the competition. It should be the driving force of your manufacturer marketing strategy.



When developing your unique value proposition, you need to determine what your customers actually value the most about your company, not just what you think they value. This could be done through thorough Voice of Customer research. It's also important to note that you will probably have more than one unique value proposition depending on your various market segments.

Define those market segments and target markets. You should know which target markets are most profitable for your business and if this has remained steady or changed over the years. Is there any reason to think it will change in the future?

Your marketing strategy should speak directly to your target market(s), which leads us to the next questions that can guide your manufacturer marketing strategy:

7 Does your typical specifier/buyer tend to be an individual person or a committee of buying process influencers?

8 Have buyer and influencer persona profiles been clearly defined and prioritized?

Now that you understand what you can offer your target market, think about how and where you are going to reach them and with what message. Having buyer and influencer persona profiles defined helps streamline this process and also shows where you should be focusing your efforts.

Personas will help you understand buyers' pain points and how you can address them. They give you insight as to how buyers make their purchasing decisions, when and why. They address where buyers go for trusted information and what ultimately influences their decision to purchase. This process can be time consuming, but well worth it. Without personas, your marketing messages are often just hunches, and are not based on any real research into your target markets.

After really defining your unique value proposition and target markets, the next question you need to ask is:

9 What are our company's greatest opportunities for growth?

Growth should be an essential part of your marketing strategy. You want to continue to grow market share and expand in the future. Your marketing strategy should be forward-thinking, not reactive to what occurred in the past. Outline which target markets can grow, what new target markets to explore and what new product or service offerings can make your company more appealing to those audiences in the future.

Offering Strategy

Now that you have the big picture strategy questions nailed down, it's time to think about your specific offering strategy. This sounds simple, but these questions are often left out of marketing strategy planning:

10 Is your core offering a commodity product, or a customized product/service?

11 How heavy is competition within your industrial sector niche?

In order to have an effective marketing strategy, you need to know how you can differentiate your company in the market. If you don't have key differentiators, it is going to be difficult to stand out from your competitors. Identify your top 3-5 competitors and perform a competitive analysis. There may be areas where your competitors excel that you can improve on and vice versa.

Knowing where your strengths and weaknesses are in the market is half the battle. From there, you can strategize how to leverage your strengths and overcome shortcomings. And remember that your offering strategy should directly tie back to your unique value proposition.

Go-to-Market Approach

The next question revolves around your go-to-market approach:

12 Do you sell through a distributor or dealer network? Or direct to the buyer? Or both?

This question is essential to understanding your buyers. If your business goes to market through a distributor or dealer network, make sure you communicate frequently with these channel partners to understand how your customers are interacting with your offering, as well as your competitors'. Since they are the ones with direct access to your customers, their input is invaluable.

You also want to make it as easy as possible for your distributors to buy from you, just as you do when you are going direct to the buyer. The difference is your message. Distributors are going to have different needs and pain points than end-customers. Your marketing strategy will differ widely depending on your go-to-market approach.

Performance

And finally, your manufacturer marketing plan needs to be measurable. Ask yourself these key questions:

13 Do your marketing key performance indicators (KPIs) clearly reflect the achievement of overall business goals?

14 How are KPIs currently being tracked and monitored?

KPIs are essential to determining the success of your marketing strategy. Evaluate your KPIs for the past year (if you had them in place) and see if they are tied to overall business goals. While there is a

place for marketing-specific KPIs, the ones that are really important are those clearly tied to the company's goals, not just the marketing department's goals. KPIs will vary by company, but examples include:

- Website traffic
- Landing page conversion rate
- Visitor to lead conversion rate
- Cost per lead

It can be easy to identify KPIs, but tracking them can prove to be more difficult. Some KPIs, like website traffic, can be measured using free tools (Google Analytics), while more sophisticated KPIs may be dependent upon investing in technology, as mentioned above.

Once you have your KPIs in place, it's important that you regularly monitor them. If something in your strategy isn't working, don't wait for next year's marketing strategy, make the changes now. That's the great thing about real-time data – you can make changes quickly to adapt to the market and what's effective.

Conclusion

While creating a manufacturer marketing strategy is never easy, addressing these 14 questions should help guide you from beginning to end. And by starting now, you can ensure you have the talent, technology, strategy, approach and tracking in place to ensure a successful year. Need help developing a manufacturer marketing strategy? [Contact RH Blake](#) for industry-specific marketing expertise.



First 90-Days Marketing Plan for Industrial & Manufacturing Marketers

Your first 90 days are critical to building a structured industrial or manufacturing marketing program.

Maybe you're new to your marketing position and are looking for guidance with strategy. Or you just feel like it's time for a reset on your company's approach to connecting with prospects and deepening relationships with current customers.

In either case, the following recommendations should be part of your 90-day marketing roadmap to ensure that your program has the best chance for success.

Think in terms of 30-day action blocks, with each segment laying the foundation for the one to follow. Equally important is to have reasonable expectations, with your goal to drive sustainable success in the future, not in the first few days. By following these guidelines, you'll have a framework that can support growth while allowing for adaptation to industry changes.

What to focus on days 1–30?

The goal of the first 30 days is to get a better understanding of your current marketing program, marketing team, and customer base and target market. This begins with crystallizing your company's message and the value propositions of your products and services. How is your company brand perceived in the marketplace? Has it changed over the years? And how does that perception align with the one you want it to have? In other words, does your messaging match your goals, and is it the right message for the market you are targeting?

Communication is also needed between numerous departments to clarify expectations and deliverables. For example, is the marketing team and the sales department on the same page when it comes to defining leads, sales qualified leads (SQLs) and marketing qualified leads (MQLs)? Do your two systems dovetail to ensure follow-up of new leads and data tracking? Have you coordinated your marketing plans with operations and product management to confirm the new product being promoted is ready for rollout?

Current industrial or manufacturing marketing program: processes and results

Once you've completed that process, move onto looking at the plan you currently have in place. Here are some questions to help you analyze your current strategy and identify gaps in knowledge or activities:

- *What are our defined product or service offerings?*
- *What are the prioritized target markets?*
- *Who are the target customer personas?*
- *Who are our key competitors?*
- *What are our competitive differentiators?*
- *How well has our plan been performing?*

Performance metrics will depend on the extent and type of system or technology you have in place and what it is measuring. You should have a baseline in place that measures the following:

- **Lifetime Customer Value (LTV)** – the projected net profit a customer will generate during their lifetime working with you.
- **Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)** – the cost associated with convincing a prospect to buy your offering, including research, marketing, and advertising costs.
- **Cost per Lead (CPL)** – the cost of your overall marketing plan (including specific campaigns) divided by the number of leads generated.

Customer research

A key element of a marketing plan is a solid understanding of your current customer base, which you can learn from a quarterly structured research program.

Some questions to help you gather data on your customer base include:

- What drives customers to consider the offerings we provide? (Cost reduction? Performance improvement? Risk avoidance? Other factors?)
- What is the typical buying process from end-to-end and purchasing cycle for our target customers? (It's been estimated that B2B buyers complete nearly 60% of their buying cycle before contacting a supplier.)
- What are our customers' pain points? What problem(s) do they need to solve?
- How do prospects find our products or services, and how do we keep the connection viable?
- What drives prospects to continue and deepen a relationship?
- What strategies are in place to retain customers?

The last is particularly important, because the cost of attracting a new customer is five to 25 times more expensive than retaining an existing one. While customer acquisition is a driver for businesses, it's the retention figures that demonstrate your company's standing in the minds of its customers. At the same time, you need to evaluate the profitability of your customers because not all are worth retaining from an ROI perspective.

What to focus on days 31–60?

Now that you know what has been working (or not) as well as what matters to your customers, it's time to make any needed changes to your marketing plan to increase its effectiveness. What channel mix and tactics will be most effective based on the customer research you undertook in stage 1? Your strategy should align with that research and decision-making process.

Consider all the elements that will go into making the plan work: the marketing infrastructure, your team and the budget. Start with technology:

- *Do you have a well-defined online presence that is easy to navigate?*
- *Do you have software to capture leads and automate marketing responses as well as measure website analytics, marketing and lead generation results?*
- *Do all your pieces work well together or are there gaps that allow valuable information to be lost?*

Now what about your team: Do you have the right people in place to enact your plan? Do they have the training and resources they need? Should you schedule training session with your software vendor to make sure your team can maximize the technology?

And of course all this costs money – have you calculated your budget for the technology and manpower, taking into account LTV, CAC and CPL?

Just as a frame of reference, the average manufacturer spends about 2.7% of its revenue on marketing – more if products are also sold online. Compare this to other industries, such as consumer services (17.4%), service consulting (9.4%) and tech/software/biotech (8.5%), just to name a few.

Finally, based on your marketing budget, what's your expected ROI? How many SQLs and the MQLs do you expect to generate?

What to focus on days 61–90?

This is when you stop planning and start doing. It's time to execute your plan, possibly in stages, with the first focusing on the highest-priority channels or markets that promise to deliver the best ROI. Monitor results so you can make any minor adjustments on the fly. Stay in close communication with the sales team to track outcomes.

What to focus on days 90+ Review, Revise, Repeat

A common mistake when it comes to industrial and manufacturing marketing plans is to follow the “develop-implement-repeat” approach. After the plan is created and put into action, there's only minimal review of how well it is working or what changes might be required.

However, a marketing program is not a static formulaic process but a living entity that needs to adapt and change organically based on results and goals. Embedded in each of these steps and activities should be a continuous improvement loop. Build in a review process at various stages to monitor progress and create a mechanism for capturing and communicating to your team what you have learned.

“As a manufacturing business, we are intensely focused on developing qualified leads to drive our sales efforts and growth. Having a marketing partner who understands this and helps us do this is critical. RH Blake has worked with us for more than 20 years, generating leads, building brand recognition and providing strategic recommendations on best practice. With RH Blake, we've achieved a **75% lead generation** and a **8.3% lead conversion improvement**.”

Chuck Ballato, General Manager
Elesa North America

elisa





5 Key Manufacturing Marketing Trends for B2B Marketers

Manufacturing Marketing Trend #1:

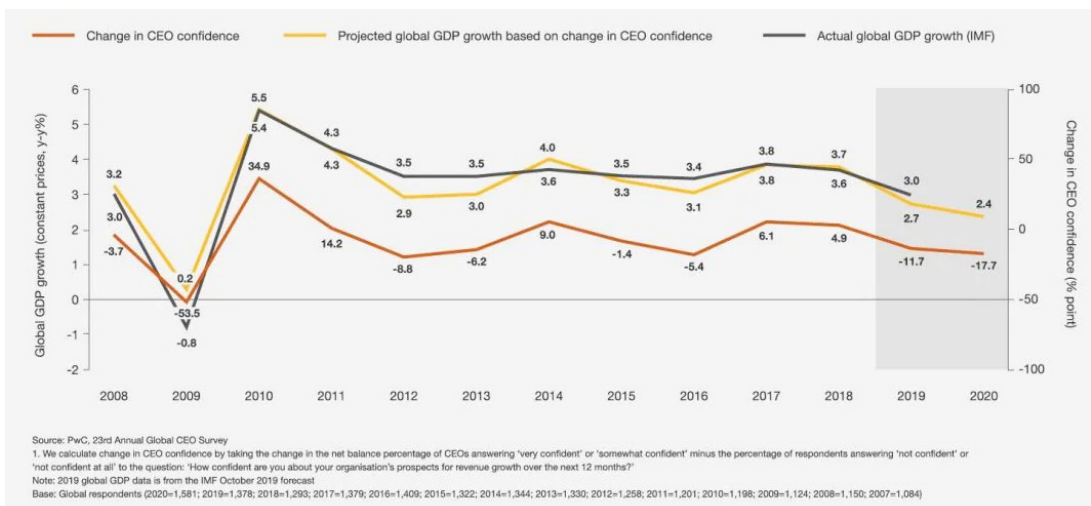
Create Marketing Content that Considers Pessimism about the World Economy

According to PwC, organizations are more pessimistic about the world economy than ever. As a B2B manufacturing marketer in an uncertain economy, you should more closely consider how your content favorably positions your offerings to help your customers increase efficiency and productivity in this environment. If you haven't already, now is the time to more precisely map out your customer journey and identify the key challenges, objectives and hesitations at each step.

According to Content Marketing Institute, only 33% of manufacturers are clear on what an effective content marketing program even looks like. If you're part of the 33%, this is a remarkable opportunity to press on the gas pedal of your content marketing program and separate yourself from the pack even further.

Our regression analysis on the change in CEO confidence implies a continued decline in GDP growth

Question: How confident are you about your organization's prospects for revenue growth over the next 12 months? (showing change in CEO confidence¹)



Differences Between Manufacturing Content Marketers and B2B Content Marketers Overall

	Manufacturing Marketers	Overall Sample of B2B Marketers*
Organization is clear on what an effective or successful content marketing program looks like	33%	41%
Organization is extremely/very committed to content marketing	49%	63%
Organization's content marketing is sophisticated/mature	19%	28%
Has a documented content marketing strategy	31%	37%
Content marketing strategy is extremely/very effective	32%	34%
Measures content marketing ROI	68%	72%
Percentage of total marketing budget allocated to content marketing (average)	23%	29%
Always/frequently considers how content impacts the overall experience a person has with their organization	64%	71%
Always/frequently prioritizes delivering content quality over content quantity	64%	76%
Agrees that organization values creativity and craft in content creation and production	64%	74%
Agrees that organization is realistic about what content marketing can achieve	55%	68%
Agrees that leadership team gives ample time to produce content marketing results	49%	52%

*As reported in B2B Content Marketing 2017: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America.

2017 Manufacturing Content Marketing Trends—North America: Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

Trend #2:

Create Marketing Content that Considers Advanced Manufacturing and Automation

How does your content leverage your customers' needs for better accuracy and productivity beyond what humans are capable of? Most new equipment or technology is integrated with data capture and processing capabilities. Machines are talking to one another and making decisions based on these communications. Plus, your customers are in the process of reducing inefficient manufacturing jobs and creating new jobs for a differently trained workforce.

Consider how your content favorably positions your business and offerings as helping your customers achieve these objectives faster. By better addressing your customers' key and significant challenges, you will outpace your competition.

Trend #3:

Create Marketing Content that Considers Value Pricing

As manufacturers leverage technology advancements to gain deeper insights into their plants' and business performance, traditional pricing models are changing. As a B2B manufacturing marketer, consider focusing more of your content on performance-based pricing and value models. Your customers are increasingly expecting suppliers to share in the risk and reward of their performance – leading manufacturing marketers will use this trend in their content marketing program and communicate how their offerings provide a higher and more predictable ROI.

Trend #4:

Create Marketing Content that Considers Talent Development and Retention

The manufacturing industry currently has more than 350,000 manufacturing vacant jobs and according to recent Deloitte research, more than 3.5 million job vacancies will occur in manufacturing over the next decade. By helping your customers address this talent shortage, you will create a distinct and more concrete competitive advantage for your company.

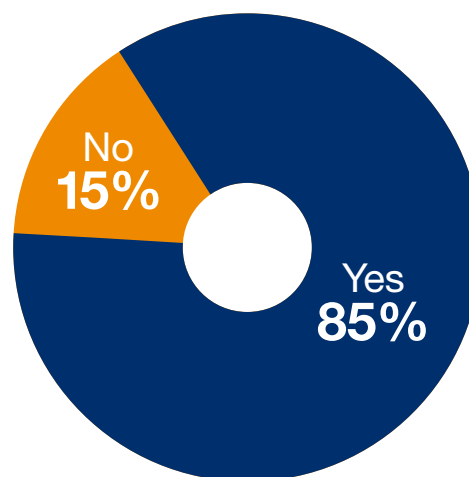
Trend #5:

Create Marketing Content that Considers the New Role of Marketing

Today's B2B buyers have more control over the buying process than ever before. Forward-thinking manufacturers are creating content that helps drive leads, educates customers and channel partners, and establishes differentiation. In fact, 85% of manufacturing marketers are currently using content marketing. And of the 15% of nonusers, 53% say they plan to launch a content marketing effort within 12 months.

With today's B2B buyers completing nearly 60% of their sales journey before contacting a supplier, forward-thinking manufacturing marketers are creating more successful content by addressing the latest manufacturing trends.

Percentage of Manufacturing Marketers Using Content Marketing



Manufacturing Marketing Trends

Merely continuing to churn out blog posts about your newest product or latest company announcement isn't going to cut it. Your competitors are creating content that takes into account your customers' needs and identifies insights for addressing them. If growth is a key objective for your manufacturing business, developing a sophisticated digital marketing and content marketing roadmap is critical to your success in the short- and long-run.

Intent-Based Marketing for Manufacturers:



How to Win in Niche Industries



As a B2B manufacturing marketer of a complex product or service offering, you uniquely understand the importance of marketing to multiple purchase influencers within an organization. According to Gartner, 6-10 people are involved in making a B2B purchase decision.

Gaining insight into when your prospect is considering a new approach, launching a new program or product, or is dissatisfied with their existing supplier is critical to winning. After all, if we wait until there's a defined RFP and Supply Chain is driving the conversation, the opportunity to differentiate your offering and value (and protect margins) minimizes.

But gaining this level of insight is challenging as customers aren't likely to proactively reach out and share these internal developments until they are ready to buy; B2B buyers typically prefer to self-educate at their own pace and then connect with a supplier on their own terms and timeframe.

Enter intent-based marketing

Rather than passively waiting and crossing their fingers that the prospect will reach out, leading B2B manufacturers uniquely understand the importance of getting into the conversation early and relying on intent-based marketing to develop new opportunities.

What is intent-based marketing?

Intent-based marketing collects and leverages information about a company or a person's online activities to better predict purchase behavior and make more effective marketing decisions.

The key driver for intent-based marketing is having context into the reason(s) why someone may be visiting your website. For example, are they visiting because they're an existing customer and need service support, are they doing a research project, comparing prices, or are they interested in learning more about your specific offerings and/or capabilities?

Intent-based marketing for B2B manufacturers can use two types of data

Internal Intent Data

Developed by leveraging any technologies your company may already be using to capture engagement with your online properties (e.g. CRM, Marketing Automation system, search engine data (e.g., Google AdWords, Google Analytics), behavior analytics technology, etc.) Examples of internal intent data may include pages visited, assets downloaded, emails forwarded, social media post engagement, time spent on a particular page/property, etc.

Leveraging these types of signals enables you to identify patterns of ideal-fit prospects that are demonstrating and indirectly communicating buying signals and then create marketing priorities.

Another way to leverage this data is through more intelligent outreach; no more marketing activities solely based on when you completed them. With intent-based insight you're able to deliver and better leverage the right marketing message to the right audience at the right time. For example, if a website visitor engaged with your experience in the oil/gas space, consider sending them a related oil/gas case study at an appropriate interval.

External third-party intent data

This is information that is collected and aggregated by external networks and industry publications and then sold. This type of data is captured through various signals including tracking of IP addresses and website data from website cookies.

Third-party intent data is uniquely valuable for identifying which articles or assets users are engaging with and/or downloading around various sites, search terms being performed, webinars attended and social media activity.

Third-party technology providers also monitor surge data, or interest spikes, in specific topics and by specific organization. By having access to a baseline of engagement, these technologies compare it on an ongoing basis to identify surges in activity. Data may include factors such as searches, downloads and level of engagement (e.g., scroll velocity).

One challenge with third-party intent-based data is not being able to see exactly who within those organizations is engaging with your content. Unlike internal data, you may have to assume who you should target based on existing knowledge of your target customer personas. Thus, there's a chance you're reaching out to people at the account who may not have expressed interest in your product or service.



6-10 people are involved in making a B2B purchase decision

source: Gartner

How can B2B manufacturing marketers use intent-based marketing to win?

One opportunity for leveraging third-party intent data is to connect it to your internal database to better prioritize your marketing and sales programs. And to do this effectively, timeliness needs to be considered as challenges being addressed this week may be different than next week. Having content created for your different personas and buying journey steps is critical.

By having intent insight, you're able to better prioritize your marketing investment; no more LinkedIn campaigns targeting hundreds or thousands of VPs of Operations! You're now able to identify the exact company and target the precise people at that company who influence the buying decision.

To begin looking into third-party intent data, identifying a technology that aligns with your target customers and internal systems is key. A few intent-based marketing technologies to consider:

- *Demandbase*
- *6sense*
- *Clearbit*
- *Bombora*
- *InsideView*

Intent-based marketing can help manufacturers enhance their marketing program

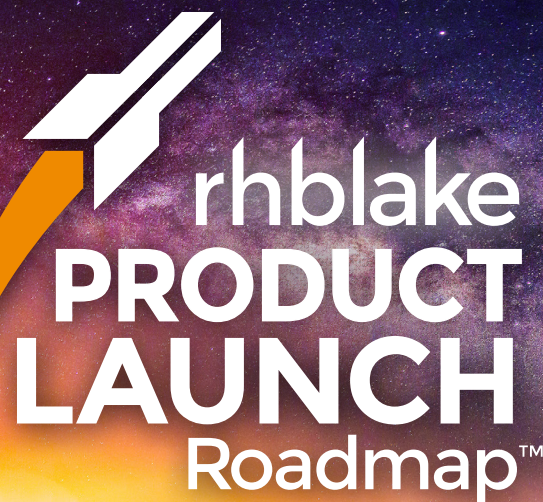
Intent-based marketing has many benefits when coupled with a deep understanding of your customers. Although much like any other marketing activity, it's not a magic bullet. It's one tool leading manufacturing marketers are using to help improve their marketing program effectiveness.



Click Here to Listen in!

*This Industrial Talk Podcast discusses the
3 components of a winning marketing plan:
Strategy | Content | Digital*





Launching a B2B Industrial Product?

Consider These Five Best Practices

Launching a B2B industrial product can be challenging, especially when your audience is engineers.

Engineers are notoriously hard to reach with marketing messages. And they are typically risk-averse. Then you have the added pressure of not wanting to reinvent the wheel with your launch, nor overlooking key considerations or steps. You want to discover the path that other successful firms have followed with their B2B industrial product launches.

To help ensure your launch is successful, here are 5 best practices to consider following. They are distilled from the RH Blake Product Launch Roadmap™, a proprietary, structured process that RH Blake developed for industrial product launches.

1 Identify/Refine Your Industrial Product Launch Market

Start by describing the business case for your new product and why and documenting how it meets a viable need in the market. Establish a budget for marketing, advertising and publicity.

Buyers: Create buyer personas for each member of the B2B buying team. Describe them in terms of their job titles, job functions, responsibilities, challenges and compelling events that trigger their search for a solution like yours.

Buyer journey: Then map out what a typical buyer journey looks like. Identify the kind of content (such as white papers, case studies, product specs and pricing information) that each persona needs at each stage of their buyer journey. Describe the unique selling proposition that will appeal to each persona on the buying team. And define value statements for each persona.

Other opportunities: Identify complementary sales opportunities, ones where you can up-sell or cross-sell other products and services while you are selling your new product.

Competitors: Because your marketplace includes competitors, describe the competitive landscape. Identify your competitors by name, describe their offerings, and assess their strengths and weaknesses. Create a simple table that lists competitor offerings and compares them with yours. Pay particular attention to market segments and niches, and the buying needs of customers in those segments.

Metrics: Before you launch, determine how you will measure your success. Establish overall success metrics, such as:

- *number of visits to the product page on your website*
- *number of sales inquiries*
- *number of sales appointments*
- *number of product demonstrations*
- *number of product trials*
- *number of products sold*

Deliverables: By the time you reach the end of this step, you should have a written Business Case for your new product, a Messaging Framework, a Marketing and Communications Plan, a Training Schedule for your sales team and a set of Product Launch Success Metrics.

2 Offering Alignment for Your Industrial Launch

Once you understand the market for your product, start planning how you are going to get that product to market.

Align with engineering and manufacturing: Make sure your associates in product development, senior leadership, marketing and sales are aligned with those in engineering and manufacturing when it comes to the availability of prototypes and the date your product is ready for shipping.

Align with sales: Decide on your sales objectives and commission structures, and how you are going to measure performance. Draw up a list of target accounts and assign your salespeople to each one. Make sure everyone on your sales team understands the sequence of events and key dates for your product launch.

Align with product management: Remember that you are likely adding a new product to an existing—perhaps comprehensive—product portfolio. So, make sure your product management team crafts a coherent positioning statement that describes how your new product fits within your existing—and future—product portfolio.

Deliverables: During this step you will be busy drawing up multiple documents to help you launch your B2B industrial product successfully. These documents include:

- *price sheets*
- *product demo scripts*
- *order forms*
- *delivery instructions*
- *installation instructions*
- *start-up and operating procedures*
- *maintenance manuals*
- *user manuals*

3 Planning Your Industrial Product Launch Execution

Now you are ready to start talking to the people who are going to launch your new product to the marketplace.

Sales training: Create seminars, webinars, on-demand videos, training manuals, product demonstrations and other education your salespeople need to complete before you launch.

If you sell through account-based marketing, collaborate with all stakeholders to define specific plans for selling your new offering to existing customers and potential customers at your existing strategic accounts.

Channel partner training: Determine your distribution strategy for getting your product to market, including the channels you will use. Do these people need training as well? Take the training materials you are developing for your sales teams and adapt them to meet the needs of your channel partners.

Headcount: Determine your personnel requirements for launch activities. Breakdown your list by department, considering every job function that plays a role in your launch.

Service: Work with your service department to anticipate the information your buyers are going to expect from them. This includes product images, schematics, online knowledge bases and troubleshooting guides.

4 Programs to Drive Product Launch Awareness and Consideration

You're just about ready to launch, and that means you need to be prepared to communicate with your potential buyers in a consistent way across all channels.

Branding: Decide what you're going to call your product. Easier said than done, we know. Go firm on the wordmark, logo, icon and other branding you are going to use to identify this product to your marketplace. Protect them by registering your trademarks or service marks if possible.

Lead generation: Because all B2B industrial sales start with a lead, not an order, draft a lead-generation plan that describes the tactics, steps and tools

you will use to generate interest in your new product from qualified buyers. Consider adding search engine optimization and paid digital advertising to the mix.

Trade shows: Do firms in your industry typically introduce products at trade shows and exhibitions? Plan and secure a launch event at the most promising trade show or other venue. Map out a comprehensive calendar of pre-, during and post-show communications, particularly social media, to reach show attendees who are prospects for your product.

Sales assets: Create marketing assets (white papers, product brochures, case studies, emails, phone sales scripts) for your new product.

Publicity: Draft media releases and send these to editors at media outlets that cover your industry. Consider reaching out to bloggers, consultants and other industry influencers to ask them to discuss your product with their audiences. Establish a social media plan, including channels and timing.

Deliverables: By the end of this stage, you will have created a list of deliverables that you need to write, design, produce and distribute. There are more than 30 things you can create, which we have identified in a Product Launch Roadmap Content Checklist. They include:

- *articles*
- *brochures*
- *channel partner presentations*
- *infographics*
- *product photos*
- *sales presentations*
- *sales FAQs*
- *webpages*
- *white papers*

5 Continuous Improvement

Launching your B2B industrial product is just the start. Once your new offering gains marketplace acceptance, you must focus on continuous improvement.

Measure: Start by measuring the success of your product launch. Review the metrics that you created in step one (above) and compare your projections with reality. Determine the success of your launch by measuring how close your results match your projected outcomes.

Listen: Talk with buyers of your new product, and if possible, some who did not buy. Using focus groups, blind surveys, interviews and informal chats, discover how satisfied they are with your new offering. Discover what you got right. And what needs a little polish.

Refine: Update your sales training, channel partner training, website content and more to reflect what you discovered by analyzing your launch metrics and by talking with your customers.

Conclusion

Launching a B2B industrial product is tough, but it's easier if you follow a tested, structured process for launching industrial products. Understand your market. Decide how you're going to get your new offering to your market. Plan your training. Create your marketing, promotion and communications programs. Then concentrate on continuous improvement.

How Manufacturers Can Generate NEW & BETTER Sales Opportunities with Consulting

Leverage Industrial Consulting to Market B2B Industrial Products



If you're focused on marketing complex B2B industrial offerings, you uniquely understand that many sales opportunities and projects are non-linear, may not be clearly defined and vary in their complexity.

And as a result, you've most likely heard your Sales team mention they'd win more business if they could only get into the customer's journey earlier and have the opportunity to better frame your value proposition.

But as an industrial marketer, this is easier said than done considering prospects are completing the majority of the buying journey without contacting a supplier. One approach to getting into the customers' buying journey earlier for many leading manufacturers – and the answer may surprise you – is offering complimentary Consulting.

By offering pertinent Consulting and expertise to a client or prospect, not only are you engaging in the opportunity earlier, you're enabling customers to get a better sense of your knowledge and level of thinking while benefiting from the recommendations your consulting offering provides.

The 3-step Solution to Offering Complimentary Industrial Consulting

1. Identify your industrial consulting offering

One of the best ways to identify the type of consulting services you should consider offering is to look at the types of questions customers and prospects ask you early in their journey. For example, are you helping customers identify the severity of their issue, confirm and prioritize their needs or navigate different approaches to solving a problem? Each of these could be pathways to consider when forming your consulting offering.

2. Position and productize

Once you've identified the types of problems your consulting offering can solve, consider how you're going to position the offering and productize the offering. This includes identifying the exact scope of the consulting offering and deliverables, pricing and identifying and prioritizing the target market. Once these considerations have been addressed, productize the consulting offering as if it were a product. For example, when you go to a retail store and see a box of cereal, you immediately see:

- *Front cover of the box with perhaps a meaningful name and branding*

- On the back cover you may see ingredients and nutritional information
- Perhaps on one of the other sides you may see happy customers (testimonials)
- And a price

Your industrial consulting offering should include many of these same characteristics:

- Name
- Background and description of desired business outcomes
- Service scope (ingredients)
- Service outcome (nutritional value)
- Testimonials
- Price

Looking for an example? Check out the [Parts Fingerprint offering](#) by ABB which is designed to help their customers better understand their parts inventory management opportunities for improvement. Which in turn may lead to incremental opportunities for other parts of ABB's portfolio.

3. Market your consulting product

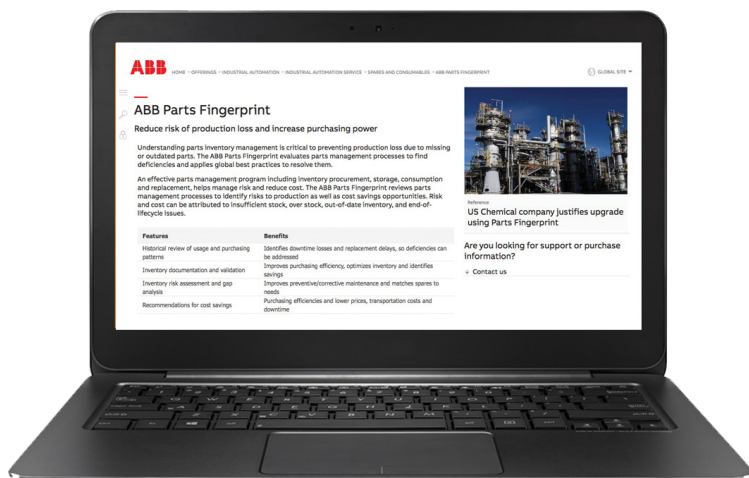
Integrate your new offering into your portfolio as you would any other product. Consider leveraging it as a lead generator with prospects and as a potential value-add to existing customers. Whether you market it with Account Based Marketing, on LinkedIn or as a call-to-action following your sales calls, having a new way to add value to customers will help you gain deeper relationships and a new revenue stream.

Summary

If you know who your target customers are for your key product offerings and don't want to wait for them to contact you on their timeline, consider developing a complimentary consulting offering and reaching out to them proactively. You'll demonstrate your thought leadership, reduce perceived risk of working with you and help guide the conversation in a framework that's most effective for your business.

So What Now?

Need help with creating and marketing a consulting offering for your manufacturing or industrial business? Contact us at info@rhblake.com.





RH BLAKE AISTECH PRESENTATION

7 Steps to a More Effective Safety Communication Program & Culture — What Every Steel Manufacturer Must Consider

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Accelerate Your Industrial Marketing Program Success

With Marketing to New Engineers



If you're an industrial firm or manufacturer that's focused on accelerating growth, reaching and engaging new customers is critical. But this is easier said than done as winning new business presents several challenges including:

- Prospects that you haven't approached before most surely already have relationships with a competing brand or supplier. Dislodging buyers from their loyalties can be difficult.
- Seeking to displace an existing supplier can be complicated. Not only must you educate the new prospect about your product or service, you must clearly position your offering as being uniquely superior. Then, you must convince your new prospect that switching to your company and product is worth the investment and risk.

Millennials are 2.5 times more likely to be early adopters of new tech and solutions than older generations.

— Boston Consulting Group

Marketing to engineers who are new in their career and/or position can be an excellent way to help displace a supplier.

There is a powerful rationale for applying time and resources towards winning over this audience. Marketing to new engineers means avoiding many of the traditional barriers that hinder new sales success. In other words, gaining business from new engineers and technical buyers can be a much more effective and straightforward proposition. Here are some reasons why:

- New buying decision makers do not bring the same purchasing and vendor biases that more experienced specifiers may cling to.
- As of yet, they are not loyal to particular brands or providers.
- They are hungry to increase their product knowledge and seek those who can provide valuable information.
- They are often more open to new ideas, trying new alternatives and expanding their ability to find new solutions than more experienced engineers.

- They are digitally savvy and are more likely to Google for ideas, presenting a further opportunity for you to more effectively align your marketing.
- They are more likely to challenge workplace norms by seeking out new solutions and gathering the research that proves their ambitions.

4 steps to effectively market to this key audience

1. Conduct Voice-of-the-Customer research

The key to connecting with an audience of new engineers and technical buyers is to discover what motivates them, what challenges they face and where they go to seek out solutions. An excellent way to accomplish that is to conduct Voice-of-the-Customer (VoC) research.

As a marketing research technique, VoC is used to generate a detailed set of wants and needs as defined by the customers themselves.

51% of Millennials are always or almost always online, with 90% online a significant part of their lives including work.

— American Press Institute

2. Generate targeted content based on VoC data

By asking new engineers and relevant buyers VoC questions, you can discover key behaviors. For example:

- *Where your audience goes to search for needed products and services*
- *How they are educating themselves*
- *Which content forms they appreciate and engage with over others*
- *What knowledge gaps they need to overcome (e.g., what questions they ask most often about a particular product, application, service, etc.)*

Once you have a thorough picture of what information your audience values, you can generate effective and targeted marketing content. You will also know what keywords engineers use most often for their online searches, so you'll be better able to optimize your own website, digital content, and pay-per-click (PPC) keyword campaigns.

3. Develop a smart strategy for your content format and distribution.

Because your VoC research has told you what online channels your audience use most, the next piece of the puzzle is placing marketing content where your audience is—and using media formats that your audience favor.

So, where do you place your content? Young engineers are online, and they use social media. According to a recent survey, engineers shared definite preferences regarding where they go to find product and service information, and what digital media they prefer.

- Online resources such as websites and search engines are the most valuable source of initial information
 - *60% of engineers get their marketing information from digital publications and articles*
 - *79% are on LinkedIn*
 - *35% are on Facebook*
 - *16% are on Twitter*
 - *95% will consider an email in their inbox (48% scan by subject line, 41% open and scan for relevancy)*
 - *71% like short articles*
 - *44% prefer brief video demos*
 - *Pre-produced podcasts and webinars were also popular*
 - *Least popular were live events and demonstrations that demanded online or personal attendance*

For new engineers, it's a progression thing. Feed this audience information they like: relevant articles, video, social media content, etc.

Once they see you as a reliable, trusted source of valuable content, they will be more likely to consume your long-format articles, white papers and case studies, and opt-in to receive your other curated content.

Engineers spend 8.3 hours per week online and on their mobile phones consuming engineering content.

—engineering.com

Idea: *There is a further strategy to boost the effectiveness of your content marketing to new engineers and similar buyers. Work to establish a presence at colleges and universities that are known for their engineering programs. This serves to instill name recognition and establish trust at the earliest career stages of students and graduates who may become your customers.*

4. Implement continuous improvement methodology

A critical element of any content marketing strategy is to implement a program that enables you to learn from your marketing efforts and improve their effectiveness. This involves tracking the performance of your content and its channels.

Once you've gathered the information you want, the next step is to analyze it. This analysis will provide answers to such questions as:

- Which marketing programs and campaigns worked best for you?
- What should you change about your messaging and the type of information you provide?

There are many strategies and methods you can employ to capture the minds and hearts of today's new engineers. This is an audience that is hungry for information on the latest products, services and application solutions.

It makes perfect sense then, that your content marketing remains relevant —and that it follows young engineers through the steps they take to make purchasing decisions and identify their long-term suppliers and partners.

Are you ready to start a conversation with a leading industrial and manufacturing-focused marketing agency? We'd love to discuss how we can develop your niche customer base and build your company into an industry leader.



RH BLAKE FABTECH PRESENTATION

A Proven Framework for
Effectively Marketing to
Engineers Along the
Buyer's Journey

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**We Know
Them**

**They Won't
Let Us
Down**

Brand Marketing for Industrial Manufacturers

**We Trust
Them**

Leading manufacturers are increasingly focused on brand marketing to help drive differentiation and margin expansion. In fact, according to a recent Content Marketing Institute Manufacturing-focused report, 82% of goals for content marketing over the next 12 months were focused on brand awareness.

Should Brand Marketing be a focus for you this year? Knowledge of these three key aspects of branding can give manufacturers the leverage they need for success.

1. Driving awareness is a critical challenge for industrial manufacturers

When it comes to branding for industrial manufacturers, the company's efforts must create awareness of its brand. This is about more than just logo recognition. It's about creating a brand that is a trusted industry name and source. Messaging and deliverables must be consistent and of top quality to be effective. Brand marketing conveys what a particular industrial manufacturer can offer its customers. It communicates what the business is all about, how you do things, and why your manufacturing company is a better choice than the competition.

Achieving this isn't an easy task. The industrial marketplace is a crowded space. Branding must effectively make potential customers take notice of the manufacturer's brand and place the company in a position to stand out from competitors.



Two of the biggest challenges in this arena are a lack of leads and a pool of prospects that haven't heard of the company. A marketing spending report from **engineering.com** reveals that a need for more leads is the top challenge for engineering marketers, faced by 56% of the group. Over a third reported struggling with being unknown to prospects. A manufacturer must overcome these obstacles by generating greater brand awareness.

Signs of Success

How can you know if your efforts to drive awareness have been effective? Solid branding is characterized by recognizable traits:

- *The brand is asked for by name.*
- *People think of the brand rather than the product.*
- *The brand conveys personality.*
- *People will pay a premium for products labeled with the brand name.*

Due to the significant effort required to achieve this level of brand awareness, it's important to understand how it benefits the manufacturer.

2. Brand awareness offers significant benefits for industrial manufacturers

Those who have embraced brand marketing for industrial manufacturers understand the impact it can make. This is why manufacturing marketers have started to shift their focus to brand awareness. According to the Content Marketing Institute's report, *Manufacturing Content Marketing-Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends-North America*, 82% of goals for content marketing over the next 12 months were focused on brand awareness.

It's easy to understand this focus when you examine the benefits brand awareness achieves. When you are successful at driving brand awareness, you gain:

Trust: Effective brand marketing for industrial manufacturers lets customers know the company is worthy of their trust. You are viewed as an established, legitimate company with consistent products and services.

Accelerated sales cycle: From the first touch point to closing the deal, a sales cycle could last several weeks. According to research by Salesforce, B2B sales cycles average 102 days. Why wait weeks while potential customers research and weigh their options? You can close this loop by providing a brand that customers already know and trust. When this is the case, multiple interactions to draw customers into the business are not needed. The customer is ready to make their purchase more quickly. They don't hesitate to do business with the familiar brand.

Easier prospect entry: Imagine never making another cold call. Strong brand awareness turns every cold prospect into a warm lead. Before you make any effort to do business with the customer, they are already aware of your company and have some familiarity with your offerings. Your branding awareness has broken the ice.

Reduced perceived risk: A customer's reasons for choosing a company typically go beyond price and product availability. Customers want to do business with someone that won't let them down. When your company is well branded, your customers feel a sense of security. They view you as an established industry brand that will serve them well. In this low-risk environment, they feel safe to move forward with their purchase.

3. There are 5 key elements of a winning brand marketing strategy

Of course, not every marketing effort can achieve this level of brand awareness. The strategy must be intentional and focused. It should include:

Clear positioning: A potential customer needs to know immediately if they have come to the right place to meet their needs. The longer they have to linger and try to figure out what you can do for them, the less likely they are to stick around. Effective brand marketing conveys a precise message about your offerings. No one wonders what industry you serve, what products you offer or what projects you complete. Your marketing efforts have clearly communicated to your target audience what you bring to the table and what they will walk away with if they do business with you.

Differentiation: Do you stand out from the competition? Bland, generic messages have no place in an effective brand marketing strategy. Marketing efforts must differentiate your business from everyone else in your sector. Your company's logo, mission, personality and campaigns must be distinct from other brands. Potential customers must know who you are and what you do. Your [marketing strategy](#) must communicate why you are different and why you are the clear choice.

Customer-centric approach: Deloitte reports that customer-centric brands are 60% more profitable than those which are not. According to a Gallup study, B2B companies that have high customer engagement achieve 50% higher revenue than their competition. A customer-centric approach that involves listening to your audience and offering a proactive approach to their needs is a core tenet of a winning brand marketing strategy. Marketing must consider your customer's goals, frustrations and motivations. It moves beyond simply discussing your company and talks about what matters most to the customer.

Improvement analytics: What works and what doesn't? A winning brand marketing strategy successfully analyzes efforts to answer this question. This data should shape ongoing marketing and operations efforts and drive improvement in both areas. Repeated analysis will uncover what matters most to your audience and what can push them further along the sales cycle. Appropriate use of analytics shapes the brand identity, further increases brand awareness and leads to business growth.

Consistency: One-off efforts won't cut it. Brand marketing must be consistent. All facets of your marketing efforts must be aligned. Web pages, social media ads, print, sales materials and all other marketing efforts must echo the same messaging, in the same style. Your message also must be repetitive and easy to understand and remember. These simple, recurring communications will brand your company into the minds of customers.

Brand Marketing: Foundation for Success

Branding is much more than a marketing effort – A well-crafted brand marketing strategy is one of your most effective tools for leveraging business growth.

To build your winning strategy, partner with the marketing experts at RH Blake. We offer three decades of experience in brand marketing for industrial manufacturers. Our full-scope marketing efforts consistently result in enhanced brand awareness and business growth.

Are you ready to start a conversation with the leading marketing agency for industrial manufacturers? We'd love to discuss how we can build your brand into an industry leader. Contact RH Blake today at info@rhblake.com.

We first started working with RH Blake on project work, and they rapidly became a core part of our marketing team. They know our industry, they are attentive, responsive and professional, and, perhaps more importantly, they are time-efficient, a very important asset in an intensely dynamic environment.

Dave Biros

Marketing Communications Manager
ABB Industrial Automation



MARKETING FOR MANUFACTURERS

20

Customer Insights
to Fuel Your Growth Strategy

As industrial and manufacturing marketers, we all understand the value of customer research. It can help us enhance our product launches, better position sales approaches and capture feedback on marketing activities.

But, too often, we look at customer research as a singular activity; something we do, at most, once per year and many times is just a part of our annual ISO certification program.

Yes, Net Promoter Scores are important and sending out a survey to see where you can improve is good, but these activities are now table stakes.

After decades of industrial marketing experience, we continue to see a pattern unfold – manufacturers who view customer research as a strategic component of their marketing programs – one that is critical to fueling growth – are the ones that are most successful.

“If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near.” — Jack Welch

This is one of my favorite quotes and nowhere is it more applicable than with customers today. Your customers are changing at an increasing rate (just think about your business). Their buying process,

their business model, their competitors, their expectations...all are changing more quickly than ever before. If you're not in tune with how your customers are evolving and your business isn't aligning with these changes, then, as Jack put it, you're closer to the end than you may think.

Marketing for Manufacturers

In our experience, the manufacturing and industrial firms that are consistently outperforming their competitors are the ones that also have a structured customer research program in place. The program doesn't have to be overly complicated or expensive; just a consistent process in place to ensure you're reaching out to the right audience, at a regular frequency, to uncover insights that may help grow your business.

Your customer research program should be like any other marketing activity; budgeted, evaluated and refined. In our experience, industrial and manufacturing firms that have a deep understanding of their customers' businesses are **investing at least 10% of their overall marketing budget** toward capturing these insights.

What's the ROI of Customer Research for Manufacturers?

This question reminds me of a similar question: “What’s the ROI of a basketball?” The answer – for many – is zero. But for an NBA player, it’s millions. The point being is that capturing the insights isn’t enough; what you do with them is what makes the difference. **Here are 20 ways you could consider using customer research and insights to grow your business:**

- 1 Uncover your value proposition and differentiators as perceived by your customers.
- 2 Discover which benefits or services your clients appreciate most, and why.
- 3 If selling through distribution, identify best practices your distributors see from other manufacturers.
- 4 Identify which business challenges your customers are facing. These should be transformational in nature; not directly tied to your business.
- 5 Check your marketing messages to see how well they align with what your customers really want to know.
- 6 Identify how well your salespeople or channel partners are educating end users.
- 7 Find out what your customers think about your company.
- 8 Uncover your direct and indirect (including internal) competitors.
- 9 Better understand how, why and when your customers make specification and buying decisions.
- 10 Identify what your customers expect from your products and your company.
- 11 Capture the top reasons why a customer or prospect decided not to move forward with a purchase.
- 12 Prioritize which weaknesses you need to fix right away.
- 13 Learn how well known your brand is in the marketplace.
- 14 Explore why some customers chose to buy from a competitor.
- 15 Get a deeper understanding of how important your initial price is and how your pricing compares to the competition.
- 16 Identify opportunities for a new product or service or related offering (e.g., training program).
- 17 Determine what issues you should be writing and speaking about to engage your audience and build your visibility.
- 18 Learn how your customers find you.
- 19 Uncover ways you can make your business “stickier” or more valuable and harder to displace.
- 20 Discover the one thing your customers would change about your business.

We have found that customer and prospect research can offer significant insights for businesses and provide the roadmap for how to market their offerings. Furthermore, for many manufacturers there's an inertia against doing something different. This type of research presents demonstrable proof to help support a new direction or cause.

Oh, and there's one more benefit. When done right, your customers appreciate it! They are tired of filling out online surveys or ranking items 1-5, Providing the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation about them and their business reaffirms you care about them, not just their PO.

Content Marketing

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Industrial Marketing Best Practices:

How to market to multiple customer personas in one organization.



Many times, one “customer” for marketers of complex industrial offerings is actually multiple individuals with different roles and responsibilities within a targeted organization.

The sales cycle for these types of solutions is typically long, and it can carry a relatively high price tag. It’s clearly understandable why these purchases are normally evaluated by multiple stakeholders before a decision is made. Further, they’re often advances that represent a new way of thinking, so educating and competing against the status quo are also critical parts of the selling process.

Further complicating the sales opportunity, these stakeholders often view the purchase through their own, distinct lens. Their marketing personas are different...if not contrasting. Therefore, each one might require a distinct targeting and engagement approach.

Herein lies the challenge for industrial marketers: selling one offering to one organization, but needing to effectively educate and position your offering to multiple stakeholders, each with their own agendas, personalities and levels of influence in the organization.

As an industrial or manufacturing marketer of complex offerings, a key target is likely someone in Engineering as they’re the ones initially primarily focused on solving operational challenges for their business.

But how do you market and create relationships with others in the organization who also require buy-in on the purchase without compromising your main contact?

These others might have a more direct impact on the purchasing decision so they can’t be ignored. Their motivations in how they evaluate the offering are likely different, too. Considerations could be price-based, quality and reliability-based, safety-based or track record-based. Or they could simply have a strong loyalty to the existing supplier.

It’s a delicate line to walk to avoid the perception that you’re minimizing your contact’s authority and influence, but it’s imperative to keep the sales process moving along...and in your favor.

Successfully navigating this dynamic requires thoughtful and helpful Manufacturing content marketing.

When done right, you can actually collaborate with your Engineering contact on your relationship building efforts. Consider arming them with the tools – and words – to strengthen their recommendation and help communicate your offering further and wider in the organization.

Here are two best practices to consider:

1. Persona-based content

Develop content for each stakeholder that specifically discusses their challenges and how your solution can help address them (e.g., “5 things every CFO needs to know about offering X” or “How offering X can minimize risk for CFOs”). Offer these content assets to your Engineering contact to share within their organization.

Identify relevant stakeholders and develop target customer personas for each. A customer persona is a snapshot of a target audience based on common traits that are validated by data.

Going through this exercise will help you determine the right messaging and the most appropriate deliverable for each one. For optimal results, it's best to customize and personalize content to where a person falls in their respective buying journeys. Then execute.

2. Peer-to-peer stakeholder contact

As part of your sales process, develop and communicate a step that includes connecting your stakeholders with the prospect's stakeholders. For example, after an identified level of interest has been shown by the primary target persona, take an additional step that connects your CFO to the prospect's CFO; peer to peer.

Position it as part of the overall education process to ensure fit. “Can I arrange a call between our respective CFOs? I'm sure there are some cost-benefit questions your CFO has that ours can answer for them. Over the years we've found that involving other functions in the education process of what our offering provides – including from a total cost of ownership perspective – may help identify fit and overcome potential obstacles.”

As a side benefit to this strategy, note that **44 percent of B2B buyers switched sellers in the past 12 months (Accenture)**. By tactfully developing relationships with other stakeholders, you have the opportunity to better demonstrate the value you're providing to the customer. In turn, you're reducing the risk of the customer looking for a different supplier.

For effective results,
customize content based
on where a person is in their
respective buying quest.

When facing this manufacturing marketing challenge, you don't have to go it alone.

RH Blake helps manufacturing and industrial organizations navigate long sales cycles every day through a blend of strategic marketing strategies and programs that apply to all stops along the customer journey.



6 Ways Podcasts Provide a Unique Lead Generation Opportunity for Industrial & Manufacturing Firms

For industrial firms selling solutions with lengthy and complex sales cycles, demonstrating expertise and establishing trust are critical to winning business.

The more effective you are at helping customers define their challenges, navigate different approaches and offer distinct insight, the more likely customers are to choose you as the partner to help move their business forward.

But finding opportunities where ideal-fit prospects are early in their decision-making process is a significant challenge for many manufacturing marketers. And then meaningfully engaging with them is always easier said than done.

Enter podcasting. But not just as any podcasting, a strategic approach that leverages podcasting as a vehicle to help you engage with target prospects and position yourself as an expert, while creating meaningful relationships (and leads).

Why Strategic Podcasting for Industrial and Manufacturing Firms?

Podcasts have exploded in popularity in recent years and are now a common way to connect with target audiences. RH Blake's Voice of the Customer research component of the RH Blake Growth Roadmap™ indicates that approximately **62% of engineers under 40 listen to podcasts on a regular basis**. Edison Research just announced that the majority of adults in the U.S. have listened to a podcast. In fact, over 90 million have listened in the last month. Edison's Infinite Dial report also indicates that online listeners spend nearly 17 hours a week soaking up information.

RH Blake's Voice of the Customer research indicates that approximately 62% of engineers under 40 listen to podcasts on a regular basis.

One model, and the one you most likely thought of when you read the title of this article, revolves around building an audience where the main objective is to maximize the number of listeners. And although this model can be an excellent approach to helping drive marketing opportunities, this article focuses on a different method. Our method focuses less on the quantity of listeners then on driving meaningful conversations with high-value prospects.

We call this model **Targeted Podcasting**.

Targeted Podcasting enables manufacturers to get in front of ideal prospects. Rather than sending multiple pieces of content over time and crossing your fingers while you wait for the right prospect to contact you, Targeted Podcasting takes an entirely different approach: You ask the prospect to communicate their company's expertise by interviewing them on your podcast. This approach has several advantages:

Key Benefits of Targeted Podcasting for Industrial & Manufacturing Marketing



Accelerate Establishing Trust

For marketing certain industrial and manufacturing offerings, establishing trust is critical. By having a conversation via a podcast interview, you have an opportunity to:

- *ask thought-provoking questions (and follow-up questions)*
- *express your understanding of your customers' business and challenges*
- *develop trust quicker than you could with many alternative cold outreach methods*



Relationship Cultivation

When you invite someone to be a guest on your podcast, you have an **opportunity to build rapport** through conversation that doesn't exist in traditional outreach efforts and express your admiration of the interviewee which may further deepen your relationship.

Plus, podcasts may offer additional reach opportunities as your guests are also likely to share the episode with their network which many times includes similar companies and potential opportunities for you.



Enhancing Authority

One important aspect of expertise is credibility. Your interviews allow you to **showcase your knowledge** on topics relevant to the interviewee, demonstrating your expertise on subjects that impact their business.

Plus, potential customers can see that others in their industry respect your brand enough to be part of your program, potentially making them more willing to have an initial conversation with you.

Additional Benefits of Targeted Podcasting

As an expanded form of content, podcasts are engaging and offer value to listeners. In addition to achieving the primary goal of establishing relationships with target prospects, podcasts deliver additional benefits:



Increased Exposure

Podcasts are discoverable by people across the globe through podcasting libraries and services. Plus, once transcribed, podcasts provide SEO benefits and help drive organic traffic to your site.



Enhanced Brand Loyalty

As demonstrated by the growing number of individuals listening to podcasts, this can be a great method to build a loyal audience. Offering high-value content attracts these listeners and helps build brand loyalty.



Efficient Content Development

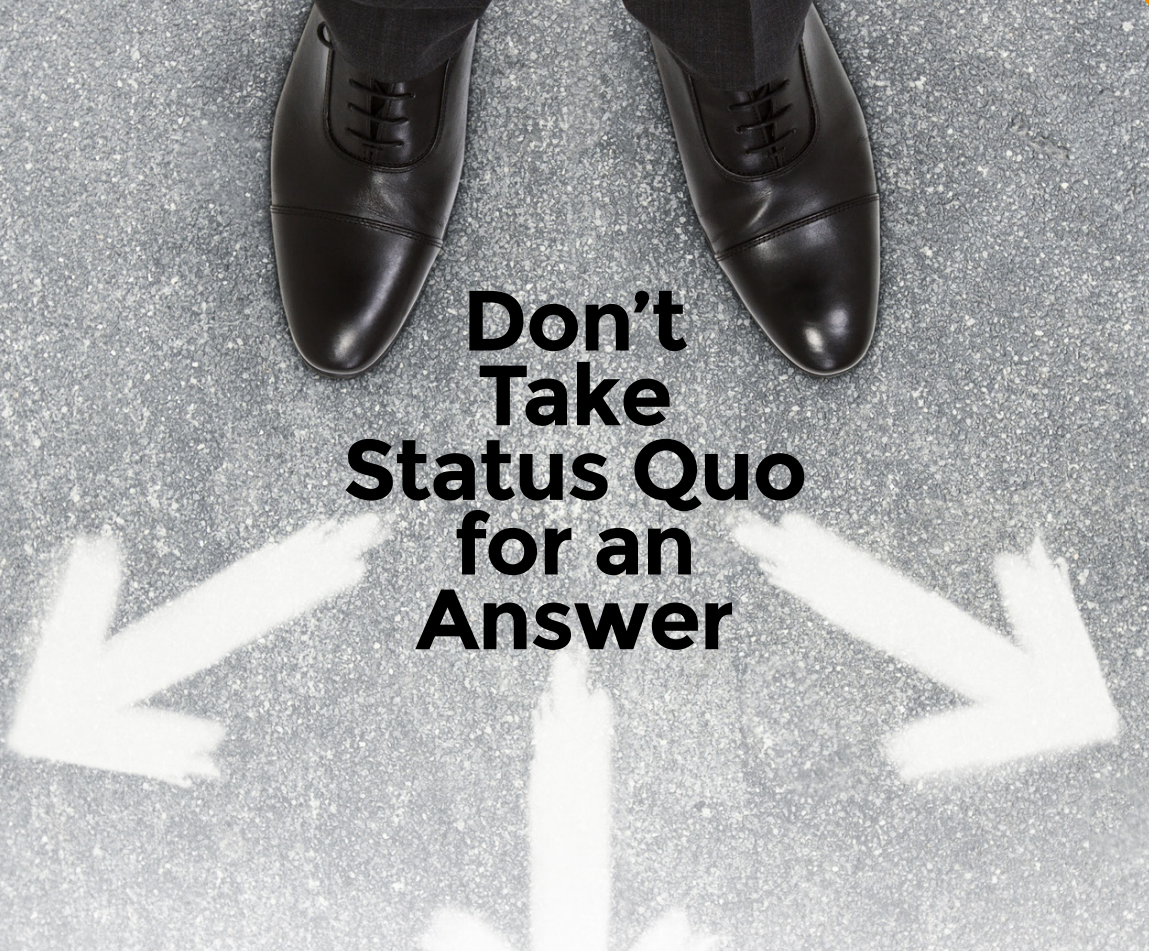
Podcasts allow you to multiply your marketing efforts. For example, once you've recorded a podcast, you can leverage the content from your episode and share in other marketing channels, such as social media and email.

Podcasts also provide another tool for your sales team to leverage in their sales efforts. In addition to the typical static marketing assets, podcasts enable your sales team to reach out to targeted prospects with engaging, recent content by sharing the episodes that are relevant for them.

Lastly, the podcast subject matter itself can also further your growth efforts. Your podcast conversations may cover vital topics in-depth, refine your thinking and assumptions, and help make you more knowledgeable about numerous topics.

Podcasting as a lead generation tool isn't for every manufacturer

Certain manufacturers and industrial firms could benefit more than others from this approach. To explore this idea further and see how it could fit into your [Industrial or Manufacturing Marketing](#), feel free to contact RH Blake at 216-595-2400 or info@rhblake.com.



Don't Take Status Quo for an Answer

Content marketing's role in addressing the risks of inaction with high-stakes B2B buying decisions


B2B manufacturing companies that market long sales-cycle offerings, particularly complex ones that challenge the status quo, often leave out a critical selling point in their marketing materials – addressing their target customer's risk of NOT making a purchase decision.

In other words, you're not just selling against your conventional competitors or the supplier who currently has their business. You're also competing against inaction...or the customer making no supplier decision at all.

Too often we as marketers get caught up in the tangible selling points of bigger, faster, stronger, more efficient, more productive, less cost, less waste, etc. The better marketers even hit the "what's in it for me" angle from the customer's perspective. But many times, we fall short of acknowledging the various forms of risk the customer is facing as they consider the purchase. We miss out on the opportunity to help clear them of those mental hurdles.

Risk is causing nearly 6 out of 10 complex, high-stakes buying decisions to end with the customer concluding that the easiest (if not always necessarily the safest) thing to do is to simply stick with the status quo (source: Sales Benchmark Index). That's not acceptable. We need to change that mindset.

Making things even more challenging, the more expensive and impactful of a solution you're selling, the more likely that "risk" is your top competitor blocking you from making the sale.



Risk is causing nearly 6 out of 10 complex, high-stakes buying decisions to end with the customer concluding that the easiest (if not always necessarily the safest) thing to do is to simply stick with the status quo.

3 Types of Risk Driving Your Customer's Mindset

Risk can be broken down into three categories: personal, professional and business.



Personal

If your target customer makes the wrong decision, how will this impact how they feel about their career? How could this impact their family?



Professional

If your target customer makes the wrong recommendation, how will it impact their reputation in the industry? How will it impact their job security and trajectory? How will it impact their influence within the company and within the industry moving forward?



Business

If your target customer makes the wrong decision, how will it impact their department, their organization, their bottom line, their shareholder value, etc.?

Communicating the Cost of Inaction

To minimize risk across these categories, leading industrial and manufacturing marketers are focusing on creating marketing programs and content that effectively communicate the implications and costs of inaction.

In essence, industrial and manufacturing marketers must help their potential buyers answer two important questions:

- Why is it important for me to address this problem?
- Why should I address it now?

Then B2B marketers must create content that addresses these concerns head-on. Think visually. Keep your messaging straightforward and easy-to-follow. For example:

Content Piece A Quantitative

The “calculator” graphic



Develop a visual demonstrating the financial benefit of your solution. Extrapolate out that savings over a meaningful timeframe. Let's say your solution provides a cost savings benefit of \$10,000 per month. Create a visual that conveys this.

Content Piece B Qualitative

The “What if?” Infographic



Create a visual that addresses the personal, professional and business risks your potential buyers may be sensing.

Content Piece C Quantitative & Qualitative

The “iceberg” image



Create content that incorporates your solution benefits along with the non-financial benefits for your customer contact.

Address the Risk of Maintaining the Status Quo

Creating meaningful content that specifically addresses the risk facing your potential buyer is an excellent way to compel them to take action. Help them overcome that risk by first acknowledging it, and then clearly communicate to them how maintaining the status quo is an even greater risk.

B2B Email Lead Generation for the Manufacturing Space



Inbound and content marketing for industrial businesses is an excellent way to drive leads. But what do you do when a prospect recently experienced a compelling event (e.g., launched a new product, experienced a safety issue, received a promotion, etc.) and you want to reach out to them quickly? Or you sell an offering that your customers don't know about? Or you want to stay top of mind with a targeted client or strategic partner?

In these instances, outbound marketing should also be your focus. And although there are many different tactics to consider, one that's growing in effectiveness is combining well-crafted emails with video.

On average, we send and receive 122 emails per day! So how do you meaningfully differentiate your emails from others?

Including video in emails doubles click-through and engagement rates, and enables you to create a deeper connection with your prospect more quickly (it shouldn't be a surprise that marketers who use video grow revenue 49% faster than non-video users). Consider the idea yourself, we tend to trust a person more after seeing their face.



There are several best practices to consider when including a video in an email:

- *Shorter videos have higher engagement. As a result, try to keep your introductory videos between 30 to 120 seconds.*
- *Develop a script that's conversational yet succinct.*
- *Include a specific call-to-action.*
- *Smile and have fun with it!*

So the next time you're looking to reach out to a prospect with another standard text-based email, consider whether video could help you better accomplish the goal.

Have a question on whether [video](#) could help you? Contact us – we'd love to help you.

Driving more leads is ranked
as the number one content
marketing priority for
B2B and manufacturing
marketing leaders.





How to Develop a Powerful B2B Logo

“I need a logo!” What a loaded statement that can be. Many B2B business owners don’t realize the significance of having a well-thought-out, professional, creative and memorable logo.

After all, what is a company’s single most important marketing tool? That’s right, your logo. Once designed, approved and implemented, it’s out there for everyone to see—immediately provoking a visceral response while becoming the face of your business. However, if your logo is ill conceived or poorly executed, the initial and long-term perception of your company may suffer greatly. Therefore, it’s critical that your logo is well designed in order to take advantage of the countless marketing opportunities that occur every time your logo is viewed.

Anyone can design a logo. A middle school student can design a logo. Your neighbor can create a logo too. There are even websites that have hundreds or thousands of designers just waiting to produce a practically free logo for you. However, do any of these people understand your business? Are they interested in a long-term relationship that will ultimately help your B2B company thrive? Will they take the time to know you, your business and its goals? More than likely, the answer to these questions is “no.” This is why it is imperative that you invest in your company’s future—identify, interview and hire an experienced B2B marketing agency to design your logo.

Client research and discovery are essential components in the process of developing a logo. This is where a B2B agency can truly shine. A collection of seasoned marketing professionals will take the time to understand your company and business goals. An agency will ask questions and then ask even more. Yet don’t be afraid to be your own advocate—help the agency understand your business, process and product or service. Make sure you communicate everything that is special and unique about your company, its history and what makes it tick.

Another step in the process is to determine what you do and don’t like in a logo. The best way to do that is to closely examine logos (even your competitors’ logos) that are all around you. Do you like illustrative, symbolic logos or type-only treatments? Compare examples of each. For instance, do you prefer the Nike swoosh or Google’s type only logo solution? What about color? Do you like the look of a clean, solid black logo or would you prefer something bright or multi-colored? These are valuable questions to consider and the answers may be instrumental in the development of your new identity.

Now it's time for the exciting part—concepting and creating your company's most essential marketing tool. After seeing some rough (pencil or computer generated) initial concepts, identify what “feels right” and narrow the options down to a few promising concepts. As these rough ideas become more refined, pay close attention to typography and color palette. Do you prefer a serif or sans serif font for your logotype? Not sure? Ask to see some examples of each. Your input and feedback are vital throughout this (and every) step of the design process.

Once finalized, it's time to ensure that the integrity of your new logo is maintained. This is arguably the most important and most difficult (it's never-ending) step in the branding process. Always be certain your logo is correctly utilized, without changing proportions, scaling too small or altering the color. Consider developing brand guidelines. They can be an invaluable tool—offering guidance during logo implementation challenges (e.g., How should your logo appear on a white background vs. a darker colored background?) or vendor requests.

Establishing logo usage rules from the beginning will go a long way toward keeping the face of your business unaltered and your brand intact. You may also find it beneficial to assign someone in your company to become a logo “sheriff.” That individual would take ownership of your logo and enforce its proper usage while being the “go to” person when questions arise.

So, do you need a logo? Make sure you take the necessary steps to do it right. Don't be afraid to dig deeper into the heart and soul of your business and carefully consider how you want your company to be perceived. Most important, make sure your agency is focused on understanding your business and providing a long-term support system. If all goes well, you'll end up with not only an impactful and memorable logo, but also a great B2B agency relationship that will pay big dividends in the future.

Attracting Your Niche Customer



Inbound Marketing for Industrial Manufacturers

Many traditional industrial marketing approaches are becoming less effective due to changing buying behaviors. Customers are taking control of their marketing exposure – knowing what they want to learn, and when and how they want to learn it.

Why inbound marketing for industrial marketers?

Here are a few fast facts that should guide the answer.

70%

B2B customers are nearly 70% through the decision-making process before ever contacting a supplier.

90%

90% of B2B consumers never respond to cold outreach.

61%

61% of B2B transactions start online.

20%

Engineers invest more than 20% of each week consuming content online.

94%

94% of B2B buyers use online research to make purchase decisions.

Industrial customers are taking control of their marketing exposure

Manufacturers must insert themselves into this space with content that aligns with prospects' unique interests. That content must not only capture attention, but guide the customer through the sales cycle to close the deal – and then help continue to foster the relationship.

How? Following are several basic questions and answers concerning inbound marketing for industrial manufacturers.

Who – and which types of industrial manufacturers should focus on inbound marketing?

Who should be concerned about inbound marketing and its latest trends? Any industrial manufacturer who wants to generate leads in a more purposeful and scalable way than referrals.

Strategies that worked in the past are simply no longer effective. Manufacturers desiring to entice niche clientele and grow their businesses can't ignore this move toward online content that attracts, converts, closes and delights. This four-part cycle is key to future success for any industrial manufacturer competing for customers.

What exactly is inbound marketing for industrial manufacturers?

What exactly is inbound marketing? This strategy focuses on attracting prospects to your website, converting those visitors to leads, nurturing them, turning them into sales and providing value after their purchase to delight them and invite them back.

The heart of this strategy is to meet the needs of your potential buyers. Rather than shout the praises of your company, it offers engaging content that is helpful to prospects. It covers topics of interest to your niche market. This content draws them to your site, where they can learn more and discover what you have to offer – at their convenience.

When should industrial marketers consider implementing an inbound marketing program?

When is the right time to implement new inbound marketing strategies? To achieve the best ROI from marketing efforts, industrial manufacturers must immediately shift their dollars to better align with how their customers research, compare and buy.

Catalogs, collateral and cold calls aren't going to be the solution to growth the way they once may have been.



Where

Jumping into creating content without a strategy isn't efficient. To attract the right customer, your efforts must be intentional. Inbound marketing for industrial manufacturers must offer a cohesive strategy that incorporates these online tactics and uses them effectively.

To do this, a comprehensive plan must look to the following places to attract the right prospects.

Website: Inbound marketing starts here. Concise, targeted headlines, clear imagery, and simple navigation are key. The site should include an eye-catching and inviting home page, as well as helpful resources, landing pages, thank you pages, and a blog. Each piece should incorporate the best SEO techniques to maximize engagement of the ideal customer for your offerings.

Blogging: This piece often makes the biggest impact on site traffic. The average company that blogs gets 97% more inbound links. Smart, valuable content gets shared and promotes your brand. This tool establishes your company as a thought leader in the industrial manufacturing industry, where your niche customers are looking for experts.

Advanced Content: These additional resources are provided to prospects who click on a CTA. Prospects supply their email in order to receive a pamphlet, a tip sheet, an e-book, or a how-to guide. Other resources could include a free webinar, a podcast, templates, and research reports.

Video: In the next two years, researchers are estimating that videos will make up 82% of consumer internet traffic. Industrial manufacturers can use this tool to provide demonstrations, tours, and testimonials that attract customers who are interested in their specific services.

Social Media: An effective inbound marketing plan leverages the best social media tools to reach target audiences. For industrial manufacturers, Facebook is effective for promoting culture to recruit team members, and LinkedIn is a top choice for engaging potential customers.

Email: This marketing technique allows manufacturers to promote their blog and share advanced content pieces. Intentional campaigns maintain communication with the best leads based on properly segmented audiences and effective sequences.

Why should manufacturers consider inbound marketing?

Why should an industrial manufacturer make efforts in each of these areas? An effective inbound marketing strategy creates:

- **A full funnel.** Gated content puts more warm leads in the sales funnel and pushes them toward close.
- **Thought leadership in the industry.** The manufacturer becomes the expert that prospects turn to for reliable information.
- **On-target prospecting.** Intentional inbound marketing puts a laser focus on marketing efforts to attract the right customer to your brand.
- **Informed communication.** Sales calls that offer a personalized pitch based on prospect interests, downloads, and viewings have far more impact than cold calls.
- **ROI.** When marketing efforts are targeted and effective, manufacturers experience efficient marketing that decreases costs.

How

How can an industrial manufacturer create a successful inbound marketing program? The answer varies based on your industry, level of competition, customers and objectives. RH Blake may be able to help – Leveraging more than 30 years of experience building and executing successful marketing strategies for leading B2B manufacturing and industrial firms. Key elements of our campaigns include:

- *Marketing Strategy & Consulting*
- *Website Development*
- *Content Development*
- *Digital Marketing*
- *Channel/Distribution Marketing & Awareness*
- *Direct Marketing*
- *Sales Support Materials & Creative Design*
- *Trade Shows & Events*

“We value our 20-plus-year relationship with RH Blake. They have a unique understanding of our engineered **services and products** and collaborate with us to help us stay 'on message' to grow our business in our one-size-doesn't-fit-all marketplace.”

Steve Ostanek, President
Neundorfer, Inc.





Creating industrial content takes a significant amount of resources, expertise & focus. In fact, according to Industrial and Technology Marketers' Budget Survey, content creation is at the top of the list of challenges facing marketers. To help ensure your content achieves maximum reach and exposure, it needs to be easily shareable.

What Makes Industrial Content Shareable?

A study conducted by a team of UCLA psychologists found that people have an inherent desire to share information. But not all information gets shared equally – there are certain common content characteristics that enhance shareability. Ultimately, these shareability characteristics are aligned with one or more of these components:

Valuable: Does your industrial content deliver meaningful and unique answers, solutions and advice?

Emotional: Does your industrial content evoke a reaction?

Tied to Identity: Does your industrial content provide readers the opportunity to feel connected?

Trending: Does your industrial content relate to a recent topic or burning issue?

In addition to these components, here are 7 best practices to consider when developing industrial content:



Approach: The Industrial and Technology Marketers' Budget Survey noted that there has been a shift to customer-centric over product-centric content. Thus, if you want to promote your latest product enhancement, be sure the message illustrates how it will improve efficiency, productivity or provide some other business benefit.



Headline: A compelling headline is key to capturing the reader's interest at the start, encouraging them to both read the article and then share it with others. Ideally, you should use your headline to show the value—what the reader will gain or learn. Write it in second person (“you” or “your”) and use keywords that are most likely to capture the attention of your target audience. To help, here's a headline analyzer tool.



Images: They say a picture is worth a thousand words. But even if you need that many words for content such as case studies, compelling images can help pull the reader along, as well as support and enrich the story.



Videos: Videos are another popular method for connecting with your audience and encouraging sharing, with 69% of B2B marketing professionals already using them. While shorter is better, you can get around that 90-second timeframe by creating a video series—especially useful when introducing a new product line or service. (The Animoto website has a handy chart illustrating the ideal video length by type—from customer testimonials to product videos.)



Infographics: Regardless of how important statistics can be, slogging through a list of numbers, percentages or data points can cause your audience to rapidly scroll down the page—or worse, hit the ‘X’. That’s where infographics can make all the difference as they invite your reader to look more carefully at the information you are communicating, and are more easily shared than tables and text. Designing an infographic? 5 Elements You Must Include has useful tips.



Structure: Use short paragraphs, bulleted lists and sub-heads to make the content easier to read and more likely to be shared. Callouts are a useful tool because they prompt readers to share the content via one click. Your callouts can be interesting facts, industry statistics or key pieces of advice. Then, remember that your content will be engaged with on numerous devices – design it accordingly. Organizing content where it’s easily scannable and has a clear eye path drives engagement.



Social Sharing: While technically not part of the content, social “share buttons” still play an important role.

By including them with each piece of online content, you will not only drive relevant traffic to your website but also increase the opportunity for natural (organic) backlinks, which will also help your SEO program.

Creating Industrial Content? Start with Yourself.

Ultimately, if you’re creating something you would want to share yourself, you’re most likely headed in the right direction. Hopefully the above information will help you develop content that drives better results for your industrial or manufacturing brand.

Marketing to Manufacturing C-level Executives – Two Best Practices on How to Engage



Reaching a C-level executive is typically a key objective for B2B marketers and business development professionals. After all, C-level executives are usually the ones with the most power, influence and budget within a company – getting engagement and a positive response at this level can make a significant impact on a business. However, C-level executives are constantly being hounded for their time. And to make things even more challenging, they only spend 2% (that's less than an hour a week) of their time on new suppliers, and are increasingly difficult to reach through conventional marketing channels.

Why the manufacturing C-level executive isn't your typical audience

Before we can identify how to best engage C-level executives, it's important to understand the mindset of the C-suite as this will help you develop a meaningful approach and more effective content. For example, although generalizations, here (top, left column) are a few common characteristics of C-level executives (source: vitoselling):

- *Power, control and authority are important.*
- *They are brief and direct in communication.*
- *They are self-assured and results-oriented.*
- *They are highly accountable; they are used to accepting responsibility.*
- *They are passionate and highly competitive; they love to win and hate to lose.*
- *They uniquely realize that time is the most important asset.*
- *They are highly knowledgeable about their industry.*
- *They have an "early adopter" mentality; they look for fresh information that will provide a competitive edge.*
- *They are risk takers.*

As a B2B marketer, one goal could be to meaningfully leverage the characteristics above in your campaigns. For example, knowing that C-level executives are generally competitive, one way to leverage this is to target multiple executives within a company and let them know who else in the company has received this campaign. This campaign can create an internal competition between executives on who will be the champion of your proposed initiative.

B2B Marketing to C-level executives requires in-depth research

Keep in mind these are general characteristics. The most successful C-level campaigns typically involve a deep, targeted research component that uncovers individual characteristics, goals, hobbies and fears that can be meaningfully applied in the campaign.

Best types of content to engage C-level manufacturing executives

Leading B2B firms realize that every time they create a piece of content, their reputations are on the line. And nowhere is this truer than when you're creating content for the C-level executive.

According to the recent Quartz Global Executives Study, the top two types of content most likely to be shared are long-form articles (84% of executives are likely to share) and charts and data (47%). Furthermore, the top two types of content formats that draw executives in to a piece of content are data visualizations (68%) and charts (52%). And what time of the day do executives consume new information? Early morning (74%).

One takeaway could be to ensure your C-level marketing campaign does an excellent job of telling the story not only through text but through engaging graphics. And if you plan on leveraging Search Engine Marketing, consider only running the campaigns early in the mornings as this is when C-level executives are most likely consuming new information.

Content to engage C-level — Direct mail marketing best practices

Another way to effectively engage C-level executives is with direct mail – in particular, dimensional mail. Dimensional mail uses unique packaging (e.g., a box, tube or oversized envelope) and can be customized to the recipient.

A personalized dimensional package shows the prospect a company has taken interest in them to a higher level than a standard envelope with an impersonal appeal; the B2B marketer has put additional thought into how its solutions can help the prospect's company improve. Furthermore, like any other marketing activity, dimensional mail campaigns must be well-conceived and executed to secure a successful ROI. Simply catching a C-level prospect's eye isn't enough; once your package is opened, you want them to quickly understand your offering so they can respond in a way that helps accelerate them along your sales cycle. Here are 8 best practices for executing a dimensional mail campaign that targets the C-suite.

Marketing to manufacturing C-level executives – Success can be a gamechanger for you and your business

As a B2B marketer looking to reach and engage the c-suite, you must identify ways to make your target rethink how they do business and conclude that you can help. Although not easy to do, hopefully this article can be a resource in your efforts.

1-hour Complimentary Workshop: Marketing to Manufacturing C-level Executives

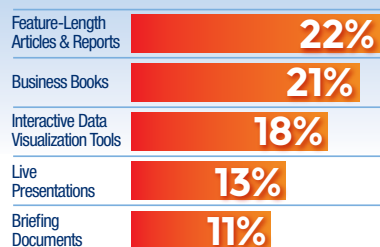
Need some fresh ideas on how to market your offering to C-level executives? Join our complimentary workshop, 'How to Market to C-Level Executives'.

The Qualities of a C-Level Executive[†]



C-Level Exec's Preferred Format for Business Insights

Based on a global survey of nearly 300 CEO's (June 2017)*



Webinars, Videos, Slide Decks, Podcasts & Blogs totaled 14%

What Content is More Valuable for C-Level Execs?



Executives value **business expertise** four times more than conversations about products and services.**

When is C-Level email engagement highest?

**Sunday
7-9 AM**



Thought Leadership is The Secret Weapon to B2B Manufacturing Content Marketing Success



According to a recent Edelman survey of more than 1,300 U.S. business decision-makers, 63% feel that thought leadership is one of the best ways to get a sense of the caliber of thinking an organization is likely to deliver, and almost half (45%) said that thought leadership has directly led them to decide to do business

with a company! Thus, as a B2B marketer for a manufacturing or technically oriented firm, if you're not focused on creating content that positions your firm as a thought leader, you're missing opportunities to create sustainable differentiation that impacts your top and bottom lines.



What exactly is the definition of thought leadership?

In our experience of observing B2B and manufacturing firms that have established thought leadership dominance in their category, thought leadership is creating authority on a particular subject by continually providing deeper, more insightful information than anyone in their space. These firms have done a better job of consistently answering their customers' questions and helping their customers grow by connecting information from numerous – and at times disparate – sources. Ultimately, these firms have done an excellent job of making their audience feel smarter about a specific topic.

Should your B2B manufacturing business aspire to become a thought leader?

It seems like every B2B marketing team wants to become a thought leader – but this isn't always the best use of resources. One way to help identify whether you should work to become a thought leader is to reflect on how complex your product or service offering is. The more the complex the offering, the greater the opening for you to exhibit thought leadership.

Customers looking to purchase a complex product or solution that has far-reaching implications for their business are more likely to want to take the time to educate themselves, which in turn provides you greater opportunity to communicate your insight.

How do you create great thought leadership in the manufacturing and B2B spaces?

Simply churning out content that's elementary or thinly disguised product promotions won't work. Consider that there are nearly 2 million blog posts being written every single day. Thus, when you're looking to develop thought leadership content, you're not just trying to carve out your space from your competitors, you're competing against any source looking to be in front of your customer.

Thought leadership content marketing examples for manufacturers

Many manufacturers feel challenged to consistently say something unique and insightful because they tend to operate in mature industries and are not typically drivers of new, transformative technologies. So what can you do to create thought leadership? Below are a few ideas:

- *Perform and communicate independent research that's valuable to your customers and the industry*
- *Communicate a recently developed patent to trade publications and at relevant events*
- *Make bold predictions and provide unique insight on where your industry will be in 5, 10, 20 years*
- *Uncover strategic challenges your customers are facing and work to address them in a deeper, more complete way than currently exists*
- *Participate and speak at industry conferences and symposiums on a strategic topic*

Keep in mind that establishing your manufacturing firm as a thought leader requires consistent effort. Thought leadership is cumulative.



Where to communicate your thought leadership?

Your company blog should be the hub of your community and thought leadership building efforts as this is the one place you have complete content control. In addition to your blog, it's also necessary to discover other audiences by distributing your thought leadership content on other platforms. For example, Medium and LinkedIn are excellent options. Another way to reach additional audiences is by offering to provide content to other blogs, conferences and news sources.

Best thought leadership manufacturing-focused examples

To help you get started, here are a few examples of manufacturing-focused thought leaders to consider learning from:

- **Jabil** is a global manufacturing partner, combining expertise in engineering, design and supply chains for the world's biggest brands.
- **Parker Hannifin** is a global leader in motion and control technologies.
- **PricewaterhouseCoopers** focuses on audit and assurance, tax and consulting services.
- **Robert Atkinson**, president and chief executive of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF)
- **Peter Holicki**, senior vice president, manufacturing and engineering, environment, health and safety operations, and emergency services and security at The Dow Chemical Company
- **Frost & Sullivan** is a growth partnership company focused on helping their clients achieve transformational growth as they are impacted by an economic environment dominated by accelerating change, driven by disruptive technologies, mega trends, and new business models.
- **Deloitte Manufacturing** is a leading provider of audit, consulting, tax, and advisory services to many of the world's most admired manufacturing and non-manufacturing brands.
- **Sanmina Corporation** is a leading creator of innovative optical, electronic and mechanical products.
- **Rethink Robotics** developed the world's first robot with common sense for manufacturing and research.
- **David Simchi-Levi**, Co-Director, Leaders for Global Operations, MIT
- **Richard Sade**, vice president and chief operating officer, S&S Hinge; member, board of governors, the Manufacturing Leadership Council; and vice chairman of the Precision Metalforming Association (PMA)

Being a thought leader may seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Hopefully this post helped you get a better sense of what it takes to become one.

Need help with developing your content marketing and thought leadership roadmap? Contact us – we'd love to help.

The One Thing Every Digital Content Marketing Strategy for Manufacturing and B2B Companies Should Include

Consider that 85% of B2B marketing content developed by companies is never used by their sales forces. ***Read that again – 85% didn't just not work – it was never even used!*** As a B2B marketer for a manufacturing company or technically-focused firm, this is unacceptable and discouraging. But, and it hurts me to say this as I'm a marketing guy, this isn't the Sales Department's fault – it's Marketing's problem. We've gotten so focused on the activity (e.g., number of blog posts created per month), that we've lost sight of the ultimate business outcomes this content is supposed to be driving.

And unfortunately, this is only going to get worse as B2B firms are expected to continue and crank out more content – 70% of B2B marketers expect to produce more content this year than they did last year.

So as a B2B marketer, what can you do? Before you consider developing a digital content marketing strategy, create a formalized process for evaluating and prioritizing new content creation needs. At a high level, this could be similar to a phase-gate process for new product development. But specifically, this process should meaningfully answer the following questions:

- **Do we need to create new content to accomplish the desired objectives?** Have you performed a content audit? Do you have an existing piece of content that's similar? If yes, can it be leveraged to create this content?
- **Do we (really) know what our customers want and how they consume information?** Deeply understanding what customers want is critical to ensuring successful content. This means asking them, researching competitors and observing

85% of Marketing Content
Never Used?

source: salesforce.com

how they interact with the content you've already provided them. It's also about understanding the challenges they face across the buying cycle, the formats they prefer and who is in their sphere of influence.

- **If we develop this new piece of content, how will we measure the business outcome it produced?** If you can't measure it, don't create it.
- **If we develop this new piece of content, how will the sales cycle be impacted?** Communicating new content to sales and helping them better leverage it in their work is a critical component of the content marketing program.
- **Is the new piece of proposed content significantly better and more targeted than anything available?** Browse the competition using tools like *Buzzsumo* to identify content on the same topic. Is what you're proposing easier to understand, more detailed and helpful, more in-depth and up to date? If not, the desired business outcomes may not be realized.

Once you've performed this exercise several times, you'll notice that your standard for creating content will be significantly higher than ever before. Leading B2B manufacturing companies and brands have a streamlined process for creating successful content. They understand it's wasteful and costly to create new content without first performing the necessary steps to helping ensure the content will be successful.



- **Best practices** – do customers ask how to apply your offerings for their application?
- **Installation and service** – What typical questions are asked during and after installation?
- **Competitor comparison** – How does your offering compare to a competitor or to doing nothing?
- **Company history and future direction** – communicating your company overview including culture and community involvement can be a differentiator in your customers' eyes
- **Engineering expertise** – How is your engineering team uniquely better at solving specific problems
- **Production expertise** – what materials or configurations do you use to solve known applications issues?
- **Quality system** – do customers ask about your quality program?
- **In-house capabilities / Outsourcing** – exactly who will do what is an issue many customers want to understand
- **Level of distributor/partner support**
- **Typical ROI/payback**
- **And many more**

How B2B Manufacturing and Engineering Firms Can Create Ongoing Content

I'm guessing you're thinking the following: *Sounds like it can be a good idea but who's going to capture all this information and convert it into meaningful content on an ongoing basis?* The answer to this is different based on organizational needs – but for many B2B firms, establishing a content development team that includes different functions and meets at a regular interval can be one approach. If you ask each member of the team to write down every

single customer-facing question they hear on a daily basis, by the end of the month you'll have more content ideas than you'll know what to do with. And if you don't generate a wealth of ideas, consider researching associations in your space to see what kinds of FAQ information they already offer to get a sense of what your customers may benefit from.

Once you've identified interesting FAQ-related content ideas, there are several ways to leverage this new content:

- **Utilize it across your entire marketing program** including social media, newsletters, targeted videos, outbound lead-generation emails and blog posts. And don't forget to repurpose each FAQ into different formats as well – such as video or infographics.
- **Drive organic rankings.** Another advantage of having a great FAQ page is because the content is extremely focused on one specific topic, it will almost self-optimize for that keyword phrase and help improve organic rankings.
- **Create a lead-magnet that supports relevant FAQs.** Is there a tool, template or document you can create to help someone overcome or be better informed regarding an FAQ? If so, this would be an excellent opportunity to drive leads.

Successful content development is challenging for most B2B manufacturing and engineering firms – especially those that sell highly technical products or services and have limited marketing resources. Better leveraging your internal resources for content development ideas and converting them into a robust FAQ section is an excellent way to overcome your limitations.

Leading manufacturers
are creating data-driven
marketing programs
that leverage marketing
technology to deliver
personalized,
intelligent content.



How Manufacturing-Focused Firms Can Create Content That Gets Backlinks (And Leads)

Most B2B marketers recognize the value of creating meaningful content. And in theory, developing content sounds straightforward: identify a unique differentiator about your offering, provide educational information or compelling company news, communicate it to your audience in an impactful way and watch the quality backlinks and inbound traffic pile up.

And in practice, this works for a period of time. But after a while, identifying new and interesting topics becomes more challenging. Your monthly newsletter becomes quarterly. Your editorial calendar that was once jam-packed with ideas now looks sparse. And in turn, the number of qualified inbound leads begins to decline. So what do you do now?

Content marketing generation idea for manufacturing-focused businesses

One approach to helping generate new ideas for content that drives leads and backlinks is by one-upping existing content. Although no one likes having a friend that's a "one-upper" personality, in marketing, this is one case we should make an exception.

At a high-level, by one-upping, I mean:

Find successful content

How do you find successful content? One way is to leverage Buzzsumo, a tool that identifies the most shared and linked content for a particular topic and keyword. Another way is to search for a targeted



keyword in Google and then leverage Buzzsumo to identify how many quality websites have shared and/or linked to the content.

Make the content even better

Once you've identified a piece of successful content, you should work to improve it: make it more in-depth and comprehensive; more current; more engaging and more interesting. Your goal should be to improve the existing content in multiple ways.

Communicate your new content to the right people

Once you feel your content is significantly better than the original, leverage a tool like AHREFS to identify which websites are linking to the original piece of content and reach out to them explaining that you now have something more valuable for their audience.

Effective content marketing is an ongoing opportunity to drive quality visitors to your website – we hope the outlined technique will help accelerate your growth efforts.

How B2B Manufacturing and Technically-Oriented Firms Can Leverage FAQ's in Their Content Marketing Programs



FAQ's = Content

Leading B2B marketers recognize that having a consistent and meaningful content marketing program is critical to driving inbound demand generation and communicating thought leadership. But if it's so important, why are so many B2B firms and manufacturers struggling to do it successfully? In fact, only 34% of B2B firms claim to have an effective content marketing program.

One key reason our marketing agency comes across is that identifying new and effective topics becomes more challenging as the content program progresses. All too often, B2B firms run out of material after only a few months – 49% of B2B marketers attributed their content development stagnancy to content creation challenges – and once the content marketing program loses momentum, getting it back and allocating necessary resources is even more challenging than before.

B2B Content Marketing Tips for Manufacturing and Engineering Firms

One way to help ensure your content development program stays on course and keeps momentum is by developing a robust FAQ page. That's right! A page that's often overlooked in website planning can be the difference between a successful content marketing program and one that loses momentum and fails.

Many B2B firms already have an FAQ page but typically it includes items like who to contact for emergency service, sales territories, credit terms, shipping restrictions, industry certifications, or minimum order requirements. But an effective FAQ section shouldn't just be quick answers to logistics-related post-purchase questions; it can be a section devoted to value-added information including:

- **General offering overview** – e.g., 'What is rollforming?' or 'What is an Asset Management System?'
- **Product details and dimensions** – are there certain product questions that keep coming up?
- **Industry applications** – what questions do customers ask about your offerings in their specific industries?



B2B Marketers Reveal Which Channels Drive Highest ROI Leads

Generating more qualified sales leads is a challenge industrial marketers look to solve daily.

In a typical B2B environment, however, the [lead generation](#) and sales process is anything but quick and straightforward. Industrial marketers are faced with varying product cycles, distinct target customers, multiple offerings with numerous stakeholders and quickly evolving technologies.

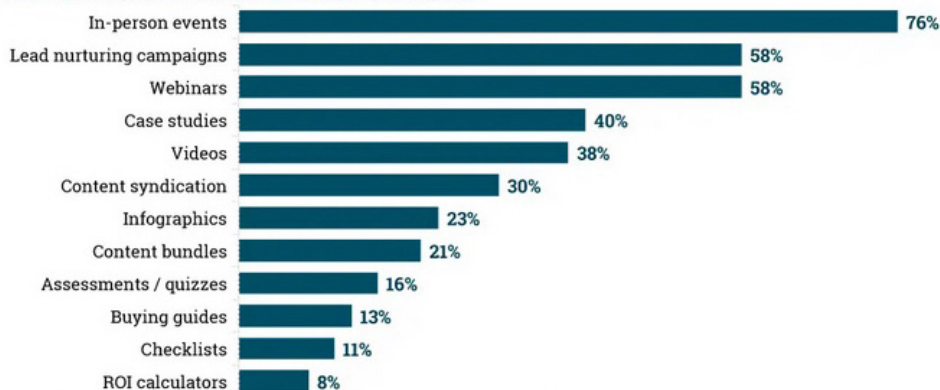
And for each offering, industrial marketers are expected to consistently deliver targeted and ROI-generating marketing programs. To make things even more fun, we must achieve this while keeping in mind that approximately 60% of the buying cycle happens before a prospect contacts a supplier.

So what works? Recently *Chief Marketer* conducted a survey with more than 200 B2B marketers that revealed Email is the channel producing the highest ROI leads with Live Events, SEO and Content Marketing coming in relatively close behind.

This research reminds us B2B customers still read and respond to email – though leading industrial marketers realize that this channel can't be viewed in a vacuum. To generate positive ROI for an overall marketing objective, rather than just a marketing channel, marketing activities should be aligned around how and where the customer consumes information and sequenced together like Tetris across the customer's buying journey.

One way to achieve this is by developing [quality content](#) for each phase of the sales cycle. Once this content is developed, industrial marketers can then leverage the different channels to accelerate customers through the sales cycle and generate more qualified leads.

Most Successful Top-of-the-Funnel B2B Demand Generation Tactics



Published on MarketingCharts.com in February 2019 | Data Source: Demand Gen Report

Q: "Which engagement tactics were most successful for you in 2018 in terms of generating qualified leads for the top of the funnel?"

Based on a survey of more than 150 B2B marketing practitioners (most based in the US). About half are from companies with at least \$50 million in revenues.

DIRECT MAIL BEST PRACTICES

for Manufacturers Targeting C-Level Executives

Manufacturers selling products and services that have long sales cycles, a relatively high price tag and a significant impact on their customers' organizations frequently face a unique and difficult marketing challenge: how to meaningfully capture the attention of c-level executive targets and successfully move them further in the sales cycle.

With traditional marketing efforts continuing to produce dwindling response rates and even poorer response rates when targeting senior level executives — who have less time to digest and respond to communications — manufacturers must look for unique ways to cut through the noise and effectively market their offerings. Plus, considering the hyper-competitive manufacturing market, businesses don't have extra resources to waste on marketing efforts with little to no ROI; manufacturers must reach customers efficiently and effectively.

One excellent way many leading manufacturers market their solutions to c-level executives is with dimensional mail. Dimensional mail is a promotional piece that usually arrives in a unique package, often times a box, tube or oversized envelope.

Dimensional mail shows a unique level of time and resource investment into the customer's business from the supplier. Variable data printing technology has provided a new level of personalization, allowing individualized messaging. When a prospect receives a personalized package, it shows them a company has taken interest in them to a higher level as it has put extra thought into their business and how its products can help them improve.



In order to further establish key differentiation and a unique value proposition relating to reliability in critical applications, an instrumentation manufacturer executed a dimensional mail campaign targeting operations and maintenance leadership at chemical plants and power utilities.

Like any other marketing activity, dimensional mail campaigns must be well-executed to receive a successful ROI. Simply catching a prospect's eye with fancy packaging isn't enough; once dimensional mail is opened, you want them to respond in a way that helps move them along in the sales cycle. And after creating and executing many successful dimensional mailing campaigns, we've identified several proven steps to helping achieve success.

1 Develop leading and lagging indicator campaign goals

Leading indicators like percentage of packages delivered to the right person and percentage of call-to-actions completed are critical to helping you understand whether your dimensional mail will drive lagging indicators like campaign ROI, revenues and gross profit.

2 Develop a list of targets

You will need to develop a list of campaign targets that leverages existing market research and buyer personas. Make sure to gain a deep understanding of your target customers including any ongoing or future company initiatives, their customer's challenges and your specific target's personality traits.

3 Identify competitive differentiators

Senior-level leaders pay attention to ideas that add value to their day and want to see results like increased efficiencies, revenues, return on assets, market share, shareholder value and optimization of fixed and variable costs. If you want your dimensional mail to create the right type of response, it must demonstrate how your product can uniquely add value and impact these kinds of metrics.

4 Pre-qualify your list

To pre-qualify, consider contacting your targets' assistants to confirm mailing details and alert them that a package will be arriving on a particular day.

5 Develop effective dimensional mail

Your dimensional mail must drive the desired call-to-action. If you've done everything up to this point perfectly, but your content isn't appropriately engaging, your campaign will not yield the desired results. For the best ROI, stick to the Seven Cs.

- **Clear:** The headline or primary message must immediately grab your prospect's attention and include a strong and balanced call to action. For instance, if you're going to claim your product reduces cost, it can't be at the risk of reducing productivity. Thus, the message should be *'product x will reduce cost by x while improving productivity by x.'*
- **Concise:** Keep it to the point without using industry jargon or buzzwords.
- **Compelling:** Create an experience that generates excitement for your product while proving your credibility.
- **Consistent:** Use colors, logos and other details that are consistent with your branding.

- **Continual:** If your call-to-action is that you will be following up with them, make sure it states the exact day and time you'll be calling.
- **Convenient:** Get creative with your mailer's shape and size, but keep in mind the price and logistics of mailing your package.
- **Competitive:** One way to help ensure you receive the attention of your targets is by mentioning in the dimensional mailer that you've sent similar packages to their colleagues, mentioning their colleagues by name. Most senior level leaders are driven by being first and so this typically causes one of the internal targets to discuss this campaign with others — hopefully motivating them to take the next step.

6 Get a signature

Send the package via a method that requires proof of delivery with signature.

7 Follow up

Don't let your dimensional mail die due to lack of follow-up. If part of your campaign is that you're going to follow-up, do so within two business days.

8 Reap the benefits

Enjoy great ROI as your effectively engaged leads convert and increase your bottom line.

Forward-thinking
manufacturers are creating
content that helps drive leads,
educates customers and
channel partners, and
establishes differentiation.



MORE ENGAGING BLOG CONTENT

Develop Content That Turns Visitors Into Leads



Business-to-Business (B2B) marketers are intensely focused on executing inbound marketing activities to help drive business. This is because:

- *Today's industrial buyers complete nearly 60% of their buying journey before contacting the supplier;*
- *71% of B2B influencers looking for a solution start their research with a generic search;*
- *And 90% of B2B influencers looking for a solution use search to research business purchases.*

Furthermore, today's marketers generally understand that having an ongoing blogging program that favorably differentiates your brand and drives opportunities is a critical component of any meaningful B2B inbound marketing program.

But recently there's a significant challenge many B2B marketers are facing, especially when you are marketing engineered and industrial manufacturing solutions – those blog posts you've been writing aren't working like they used to. Or worse – not working at all. What happened?

If it makes you feel any better, you're not alone. Marketers are blogging **800% more today** but are getting nearly **100% less engagement**. There are several key trends that are causing this effect:

More direct competition



As with any advancement, success breeds increased competition. As more of your competitors grasp the value of inbound marketing, creating unique content that captures the attention of your shared target customers is increasingly more difficult. No longer can you simply write a generic 400-word blog post about your latest engineering accomplishment and expect customers to see and act on it. Marketers now spend significantly more time planning and executing in order to create blog posts that resonate. In fact, twice as many marketers are now spending 6+ hours on their average blog post compared to just last year! (That's a lot of work!)

More clutter



Attention is the new currency for marketers. Everywhere you turn, there's a new struggle to capture engagement. For example, there are nearly 2 million blog posts being written every single day adding to the clutter of content. Thus, when you're developing a blog post, you're not just trying to beat your competitors for attention, you're battling against every attention-seeking source looking to be in front of your customer.

Reading takes (more) time



43% of people admit to skimming blog posts. And this percentage will only continue to climb as we're driven to multitask more and our attention is increasingly splintered. Just look around you right now – you most likely have a smartphone within arm's reach, a monitor (or two) with five to seven tabs open, and several urgent to-dos on your desk. If you have the option of reading a lengthy blog post or viewing an image/video instead, you're going to naturally navigate towards the image/video. And not only because of distractions, but because we're wired this way. In fact, 90% of information that comes to the brain is visual and processes 60K times faster than text. As marketers, we must adjust to our target customers' behaviors and find creative ways to derive more value from our activities.

Lack of strategy and focus on the right metrics



When developing blogs, many marketers focus on activity metrics rather than business-growth targets. For example, you may be measuring the number of blog posts created per month, number of visitors to each blog post compared to a previous timeframe and number of shares across the relevant social media platform compared to a previous timeframe. As a result, marketers have gone all-in on creating blogs without taking the time to evaluate meaningful business impact metrics such as number of new organic subscribers to your email list, product demonstration/solution assessment sign-ups, leads and sales. In order to develop the right metrics for your business, you should create target “customer personas” or marketing identities you're selling to that include how and where your customers engage with [technical content](#). While focusing on developing blogs is a good thing, many people have mistakenly made traffic numbers the goal and lost efficiency (and success) in the process.

90% of information that comes to the brain is visual and processes **60K times faster than text.**

Subject Matter Experts/Engineers are busy and expensive



Your customers are seeking technical content to help them make better informed decisions.

However, unless you're the unicorn of marketers, chances are you need to work with engineers or other professional subject matter experts and to develop this level of technical content. And because most engineers don't have 'creating new blog posts' in their personal goals or job description, you're faced with having to nag them to provide input, draft copy or review your drafts, which in turn can delay the process and cause frustration. Plus, most business owners and P&L leaders feel that engineers provide the most business value when they're focused on core activities; every minute they are reviewing a blog post is a misused resource in their eyes.

Increasing impact on SEO



As Google's organic search algorithm advances, the variables that impact organic ranking are changing as well. For instance,

user engagement once someone visits your website is now a more critical variable than ever. And as a result, marketers must develop landing pages with stronger and more direct appeal to their target audience.

What's the takeaway?

When you consider these trends and address them head on, the conclusion is to publish content that is faster and easier to digest, cuts through the clutter and is more appealing to the audience, reduces subject matter expert participation and takes maximum advantage of their knowledge.

One excellent way to do this is with video. Stories told directly by engineers can be compelling and focused. In addition, companies using video enjoy 41% more web traffic from search than non-users. Plus, with YouTube being the second most visited search engine after Google, effective videos should be a key component of any SEO program.

Need help with your content development? Learn more about our new lead-generating video offering [RH Blake's Engineered to View™](#).

How to Get More Out of Your Existing Blog Posts



Repurpose Your Blog Posts into Engaging Content

If you're like many B2B marketers, developing blog posts to drive inbound leads is a key part of your job. But let's face it, creating a meaningful blog post that resonates with your target audience takes a lot of time. In fact, twice as many marketers are now investing an average of 6+ hours on blog posts compared to just last year!

Only 29% of marketers systematically reuse and repurpose content – this is a huge opportunity for you to differentiate and generate more productive marketing results. If planned and executed correctly, your archived blog posts are a goldmine for future content development. The following page discusses several excellent ways to get more out of your blog posts.

How to repurpose your blog posts into engaging content?



Group into a meaningful list

Review your blog posts, categorize them based on similar topics and develop a targeted list. Lists are a great way to compile information into an easily digestible format for your readers to engage with.



Develop a supporting infographic

90% of information that comes to the brain is visual and processes 60K times faster than text. Infographics are an excellent way to tell your story without having to gather new information.



Develop a supporting short-form video

Companies using video as a pillar of content development enjoy 41% more web traffic from search than non-users. Since you've already invested a significant amount of time in creating your blog content and getting it reviewed and approved, developing a short-form video is an excellent way to leverage your hard work.



Create a lead-generating product

Blog posts are an excellent source for not just driving inbound traffic but repurposing content into a lead generating ebook/tool. One way to do this is by grouping blog posts based on customer personas. For example, you could develop 'The Beginner's Guide to...', 'The 5 Things Even Product X Experts Don't Know About', 'The Ultimate Guide to X for New Engineers', etc.



Improve SEO and conversion

Google's algorithm changes every couple of months. Thus, chances are, those blog posts you wrote last year or the year before are not aligned to the latest SEO and conversion best-practices. To help prioritize which blog posts need the most help, review your analytics to identify the blog posts that drive the most traffic but aren't converting into leads. Once identified, implement the latest conversion best-practices.

But don't stop there – once you've identified your most visited blog posts, leverage the keywords visitors used to find them and update other archived, relevant blog posts.

With producing engaging content being the top challenge for B2B marketers (and for good reason as it's more difficult than ever to achieve desired results) leveraging existing content should be a critical, ongoing tactic for leading B2B marketers.

B2B Email Lead Generation for the Manufacturing Space



Inbound and content marketing for industrial businesses is an excellent way to drive leads. But what do you do when a prospect recently experienced a compelling event (e.g., launched a new product, experienced a safety issue, received a promotion, etc.) and you want to reach out to them quickly? Or you sell an offering that your customers don't know about? Or you want to stay top of mind with a targeted client or strategic partner?

In these instances, outbound marketing should also be your focus. And although there are many different tactics to consider, one that's growing in effectiveness is combining well-crafted emails with video.

On average, we send and receive 122 emails per day! So how do you meaningfully differentiate your emails from others?

Including video in emails doubles click-through and engagement rates, and enables you to create a deeper connection with your prospect more quickly (it shouldn't be a surprise that marketers who use video grow revenue 49% faster than non-video users). Consider the idea yourself, we tend to trust a person more after seeing their face.

There are several best practices to consider when including a video in an email:

- *Shorter videos have higher engagement. As a result, try to keep your introductory videos between 30 to 120 seconds.*
- *Develop a script that's conversational yet succinct.*
- *Include a specific call-to-action.*
- *Smile and have fun with it!*

So the next time you're looking to reach out to a prospect with another standard text-based email, consider whether video could help you better accomplish the goal.

With producing engaging content being a top challenge for B2B marketers, leveraging existing content should be a critical, ongoing tactic.



How Manufacturers Can Use Content, Mobile Tools and More to Drive Sales

For many manufacturers, selling through distributors is a critical pathway to growth as it enables them to reach markets an internal sales team can't address effectively. And to ensure the distributor/manufacturer relationship is mutually beneficial in the long-run, manufacturers must provide distributors the sales tools and opportunities to help them grow and profitably build their own business.

But generating sales opportunities and developing successful sales tools is easier said than done as today's industrial buyers complete nearly 60% of their buying journey before contacting the supplier, according to Google. To help manufacturers overcome this challenge, the following are three proven, yet often overlooked digital approaches manufacturers should use to help their distributors and themselves grow.

Drive leads with objective and educational content

The fact that prospects are more than halfway through their buying journey before contacting a supplier gives businesses a unique opportunity to develop content that effectively and consistently differentiates their business and products while helping guide customers through the buying journey.

The first step in this approach is to determine the different "personas" or marketing identities you're selling to and identify their distinct buying objectives and challenges. For example, engineers visiting your website may be looking for information to help them spec a project while safety managers may be more interested in how your product affects their people.

Once you have a clear definition of each target persona, including identifying where they are in the buying cycle and their expected purchase motivations and potential objections, you should create content that appeals to each of them, accelerates them through the sales cycle and has the potential to generate leads for distributors through website landing pages.





One effective way to do this is to create meaningful and useful content (potentially available through both the manufacturer's and distributor's websites). The initial portion of the content can be made available without requiring the user to enter their contact information but should reference supporting powerful tools (e.g., ROI calculator, checklist for implementation, etc.) from the company that can be accessed when the prospect registers with contact information through the distributor.

For example, in an effort to drive leads and further establish themselves as an industry thought leader, an instrumentation manufacturer recently developed an in-depth, easy-to-understand guidebook that interprets complex industry regulations and how they may impact their customers.

Grow sales with distributor-focused mobile sales tools

For many manufacturers selling via distributors, margins are razor thin – there's no room for losing sales, especially when it can easily be avoided. Leading organizations realize this and rely on mobile sales tools that can help distributor salespeople close more business more efficiently by providing product specifications, quotes and even accepting mobile orders while on-site with the customer.

In addition to driving sales, having an effective mobile sales tool enables distributor salespeople to spend more of their time selling and less time performing data entry. For example, consider the time one salesperson spends adding and updating customer contact details into their smart phone. With a properly designed mobile sales app, accessing a complete and up-to-date address book is a click away.

One more key benefit of a distributor-oriented mobile tool is for the salesperson to be able to

quickly look up order and account history before or during a sales call, with no need to contact the back-office to check on where their shipment is.

Improving your organic ranking with a quality backlink strategy

According to Google, 71% of business-to-business searches begin with a generic search, excluding any mention of brand or company name. Leading manufacturers understand that search engine optimization ("SEO") is critical for helping them drive organic, non-branded visitors to their website.

Over the years, the activities behind what it takes to get you on the first page of Google have changed dramatically. For example, in the early days of SEO, the number of websites pointing their visitors to you was a key variable: the more backlinks to your site, the better. Today, the quality of backlinks is significantly more important than quantity as it helps search engines better identify relationships between websites. If search engines see that a high quality website is pointing their visitors to you, they assume your website is also high quality.

One approach many manufacturers can use to build additional quality backlinks is developing and executing a linking strategy between their supply chain, including OEM, distributors and partners. By mapping out all of the key parts of your supply chain's websites, analyzing which ones have an authoritative website by search engine standards and then facilitating each organization to meaningfully link to each other through effective content, it will help strengthen everyone's website value in search engine's eyes and further improve your organic ranking.

What is a Marketing Sales Funnel?

As a B2B manufacturing marketer, chances are the sales cycle for your offerings is closer to months and years than days, and includes a multitude of influencers each with different functions, objectives and hesitations. The process of marketing your offerings throughout the sales cycle to the right people with the right message at the right time is the marketing sales funnel, and can be a key business growth differentiator.

Is it really a funnel?

The funnel analogy is not quite accurate however. In a funnel, everything that goes in at the top eventually comes out the bottom. In B2B marketing, this isn't exactly (at all) accurate.

Thus, for our purposes, let's consider a sales funnel as the series of review stages customers go through to evaluate their specification and purchasing options, with the result becoming qualified leads. These stages vary by target audience and their respective point in the sales cycle. Leading manufacturing marketers define each of these stages and develop pathways that they'd like to guide their ideal prospects through, turning them into customers.

A critical idea behind creating a sales funnel is that you must deeply understand your ideal customers and consider precisely the next step you'd like your potential customers to take. Once this is defined, your job as a B2B manufacturing marketer becomes easier and more effective.

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Sales Funnel Best-Practices:

Step 1, Identify the End Goal

In a perfect world, what does success look like for this program? And simply responding with "leads"



isn't good enough. How many leads per month? Where in the sales cycle are the leads? Which offering are the leads for? And what's the expected ROI? Document these metrics as part of your marketing dashboard. Although not a direct part of the sales funnel, consider how much each qualified lead is worth (lifecycle value) as this will help you better measure success.

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Sales Funnel Best-Practices:

Step 2, Identify Your Specific Audience

Who is your target audience? For example, if you answered "metal fabricators," get more specific. If you answered, "newly appointed VPs of Engineering in U.S. metal fabrication shops that are hiring welders and have between \$25 to 100M revenue," you're much closer. The more specific you can be at this stage, the more successful you'll be with guiding prospects through your funnel.

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Sales Funnel Best-Practices:

Step 3, Build the Perfect Landing Page

At a high-level, the perfect landing page has two components: The “Learn Magnet” and “Lead Magnet.” The learn magnet will be the key pain point that you’re addressing for your target audience – this insight should have come out in Step 2. The deeper and more specific you’re addressing the pain point, the better. Your target audience should feel like you’re inside their head as they are learning about your insight. All too often, manufacturers default this activity to a blog post but this isn’t always the best medium. To identify the right approach for your learn magnet, consider researching what’s already developed on this topic and how you can make it better – more timely, more-in-depth, more specific, more engaging with video, etc.

The second component, the lead magnet, should be an offer that complements the learn magnet content and helps move the prospect through the sales cycle. The more relevant the lead magnet is to the learn magnet, the better the results. For example, if you’re educating your prospects on a recent safety regulation change and the call to action is “Contact us,” your results won’t be as successful as a more relevant call-to-action such as an accompanying industry regulation summary guide. There are also several structural best practices you should consider when developing a landing page, [click here to learn several of the critical ones](#).

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Sales Funnel Best-Practices:

Step 4, Drive Traffic to the Landing Page

Now that you know who you’re targeting and their objectives, and have developed content that helps them overcome their pain points, it’s time to drive quality visitors and prospects to your landing page with organic and/or paid methods. Leveraging the findings in Step 2 will help you better prioritize which approaches make the most sense.

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Sales Funnel Best-Practices:

Step 5, Scale with Continuous Improvement

As your sales funnel program unfolds, you should focus on reviewing progress and making incremental improvements. Isolate each variable (the ad, message, landing page, offer, etc.) and continue to test and improve. Once you’ve achieved a successful outcome and ROI (e.g., for every \$1000 we invest, we receive 10 leads which turn into one sale with a lifecycle value of \$10,000), depending on your business goals, pour gas on the fire and drive more leads!

B2B Manufacturing Marketing Best-Practices for Creating Industrial-focused, Targeted Sales Funnels That Scale:

Summary

Today’s sales process is far more complex than a simple funnel model may suggest. However, if the steps outlined above are executed correctly, you will have the recipe for creating similar sales funnels for all your target audiences and offerings at different buying and educational stages.

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Digital Marketing for Manufacturers:

5 Insights You Can't Ignore



One thing manufacturing marketers can agree on is the quickly changing landscape of digital marketing. As industrial buyers increasingly turn online for help with identifying and selecting quality suppliers, there are new challenges and opportunities for industrial and manufacturing brands. Below are five digital marketing insights that every industrial marketer should take note of and meaningfully address if they want their organization to stay competitive in this changing landscape.

1 The Industrial Buying Process Is Longer

The sales cycle continues to grow longer and more complex. The buying team is more sophisticated and the process of demonstrating your value to them to complete a sale is more involved. This means navigating multiple opinions, priorities and goals. You need to address them all. This is made even more challenging by the fact that you may not clearly know all of the people involved in the purchasing decision and what they view as most important.

Additionally, the role of distributors and channel partners is being threatened. While word of mouth used to be the main driver of manufacturing purchases, in certain instances decision makers are now trusting Google just as much as, if not more than, their distributor suppliers. Potential customers

are spending more time and using more sources to research a purchase. For certain offerings, buyers are even arriving at their purchasing decision before reaching out to the supplier.

While this obviously makes things more difficult for sales – your word is no longer enough – it also opens your company up to new customers that can find you online. It is more important than ever to provide high quality content online to help customers determine whether your company is the right choice. And it is essential that marketing be actively engaged in the sales cycle.

Furthermore, to keep your company top of mind as buyers move through their buying quest, you need to make sure your information is easy to find online – that includes through Search Engine Optimization (SEO), digital advertising and a strong brand with clear thought leadership.

2 SEO for Manufacturers Is Changing

If you want buyers to include you in their research for a partner, you need to reach them through search and send them to your website. That's not as easy as it sounds, especially now. Social networks and even Google are no longer sending as much traffic to your website.

Social media used to be an ideal way to increase traffic to your website. However, with Facebook and LinkedIn and other network algorithms prioritizing their content to keep users on their networks, social media is no longer a surefire way to increase traffic to your website. In fact, Facebook referral traffic has become nonexistent for many organizations.

While the decline of social referral traffic is disappointing to most brands, even more detrimental is the fact that Google is now sending less organic traffic to your website as well. Google is increasingly answering more search queries without clicks. Instead, you see a featured snippet at the top of the search results. These snippets are extracted from a website, so users can see the answer to their search query without actually going to the site. You may have noticed this if you Google your organization's name and see your phone number, address and reviews appear without having to click anything. The same is often true if you ask a question. Featured snippets tend to come from big brands or sites like Wikipedia.

So what can you do? Understand that brand searches are more important than ever and focus on building your brand. Google gives preference to known brands and people are more likely to click on a site they recognize in search results. Compare your website and online presence to your competitors'

to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Also, it's more important than ever to make sure your website is mobile friendly. Google has moved to mobile-first indexing, meaning it uses the mobile version of your site for indexing and ranking. If your site isn't mobile friendly, it won't see much traffic from Google.

The good news is that the work you do to improve your organic search traffic will also help improve the ROI of your digital advertising.

3 Digital Advertising Costs for Manufacturers Are on the Rise

As more companies shift their advertising and marketing budgets to digital, digital advertising becomes increasingly expensive. Paid search, through Google or another search engine, is one of the most popular types of advertising for manufacturers. As Google Adwords proves effective for many manufacturers, the competition for attention grows. You and your competitors are bidding on the same keywords to reach potential customers, driving the cost of paid search higher.

The same is true for social advertising. LinkedIn is an effective B2B lead generator for many industrial marketers, but it doesn't come cheap. And as online ad costs rise, the ability to prove ROI becomes more difficult.

That's not to say that manufacturers should abandon online advertising – but it does mean you may need to shift your approach to it. Bidding on broad industry keywords isn't going to produce the same results for the same budget. Get to know your customers and create a digital advertising strategy tailored to them.

4 Branding and Content Marketing for Manufacturers Is More Important Than Ever

Does your company have strong brand recognition? Your brand is how your customers and potential customers perceive your organization. A logo and color scheme is not enough. To stand out from the competition, your company needs to have a differentiated brand message and value proposition. Your brand needs to be consistently communicated across all media – both on and offline. Your brand includes everything from your logo to your website, social networks, newsletter, signage and corporate office. It is the entire customer experience.

Brand consistency across all media conveys to your audience that yours is a brand they can trust. Trust is essential when it comes to making large purchasing decisions. It will also make your company stand out in customers' minds over your competition. A strong, consistent brand allows small and mid-market firms the opportunity to compete with larger firms.

Developing thought leadership content is an excellent way to demonstrate your expertise and value, and enhance your brand recognition. Manufacturers that create a thought leadership-focused content marketing program will continue to win. Your content needs to go beyond just your brand; you need to be strategic and answer how you can solve buyers' problems and address pain points. Your content needs to be high quality, visual and should speak directly to buyers' needs, so it is important that you have a comprehensive understanding of who your buyers are and what explicitly they are looking for.

5 Opportunities for More Effective Measurement and Reporting

The amount of data created from all of the above activities is substantial. So while this large amount of real time data may be helpful, the typical industrial and manufacturing marketer has found organizing, understanding and acting on this data to be a challenge.

Company leadership is understandably focused on ROI. It's not enough to produce leads; Marketing, in many instances, is now partly responsible for revenue generation, and marketing decisions need to be based on data. Consequently, industrial marketers tend to be focused on short-term product-oriented marketing rather than long-term brand marketing. Today's industrial marketers need to find the right balance between short wins and long term success.

Additionally, the number of marketing technologies available is vast. With so many options with multiple features at various price points, it's difficult to find the right mix or stack for your business. Yet if you don't have the right tools, your effectiveness may suffer. And if you are like many industrial marketers, you don't have a large marketing team, so it's essential to make the smartest decision possible. You can't waste time or money.

Furthermore, marketing responsibilities have changed drastically in the last several years, and today's industrial marketer needs to be both strategic and tactical. It's also important that marketers have a broad understanding of both marketing and business. Taken together, it's hard to find the perfect person to fill that role. That's where training comes in. In order to ensure you are making the most of the data available with the team you have, you need to have a training plan in place for your marketing team. Identify the gaps in your team and then train according.

The change in the digital marketing landscape and the changing role of marketing in general presents both challenges and opportunities for industrial and manufacturing marketers. Those who are able to create a [winning SEO and digital advertising strategy](#), build a strong brand and thought leadership program, and use data to continue to modify their manufacturing marketing strategy will succeed in this changing marketplace.



**“RH Blake has helped Factivity
increase organic traffic by over 50%
and transformed organic lead generation
from a seldom and sporadic event to
a frequent and consistent process
for improvement.”**

John Leibert, President
Factivity

FACTIVITY





What do you do?

Benefits

Business case

Do I trust you?

Engineering Marketing:

**It's Time
to Think
Backwards**

Manufacturing Marketing Website Best Practices: How to Engage Engineers

For many manufacturing marketers of complex offerings, creating awareness and preference with engineers is a key goal. Typically, the primary objective includes capturing engineers' attention and then driving their interest to / back to your website where they can learn more about the potential value you can provide.

Although for many manufacturing marketers this is the right approach, we frequently see significant opportunities for engagement and lead generation improvement once an engineer

lands on a website page. Too often, manufacturing-focused brands overlook how to best align their websites to this distinct engineering audience. And as a result, lead conversion, and ultimately profit potential, suffers.

To help ensure your manufacturing-focused website is maximizing opportunities with engineers, it helps to first clearly understand engineers' motivations and their distinct preferences.

10 Common Engineering Persona Attributes – May Include a Combination of:

1. Extremely risk averse – personal, professional and enterprise impacts
2. Part of a larger team
3. Focused on learning new ideas/ways to solve existing challenges
4. Prefer self-educating – 75% of engineering decision makers don't want to hear from suppliers until they are in the later stages of the buying process.
5. Invest 8.3 hours per week consuming content online
6. Relatively more hesitant to provide contact information online
7. Their favorite content types are accurate, visual, and well-cited
8. Heavily leverage existing relationships to gather insights and inputs into decision making
9. Prefer to work with facts and binary decisions
10. Avoid making recommendations unless they have a great deal of certainty

Once you have a deeper sense of how the engineers you're looking to create relationships with think, feel, learn and communicate, the next step is to consider how to best align these insights with your website structure, organization and content.

The following are 3 key steps every manufacturing marketer should consider taking to ensure their website maximizes engagement opportunities with engineers.

1. Build trust with direct and indirect proof points

Leading manufacturing marketers understand the value of case studies and references. However, we also understand that getting end-customers to agree to provide their project information is easier said than done.

One way to build proof points on your website and in your marketing program is through an organized award program that recognizes specific customers for attributes that would be helpful for them to share broadly. For example, perhaps one of your customers experienced a safety milestone, engineering breakthrough, or a more effective way to manage suppliers and partners. Consider creating an award that recognizes this action and see whether your customer would be willing to share this news

externally including on your website. Not only will this help your customer reinforce or enhance their position in the market, it will give you the opportunity to indirectly communicate you work together. A win, win.

While named testimonials are also extremely valuable for trust-building, it may not be possible or practical to get a major customer to agree to be identified on your site. In that case, offering unidentified application stories that mention valuable customer attributes such as "Leading material handling supplier in the Northwest (and the specific problem they were facing)" can be extremely persuasive. And because engineers appreciate "prove it to me" more than "tell it to me," consider incorporating visuals including videos, infographics and engaging presentations to accompany the case study text.

2. Minimize asking for contact information (initially)

As a manufacturing marketer of offerings that may require long sales cycles, you know that a lead can be worth hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. This, coupled with the fact that many manufacturing executives use lead generation as a key marketing evaluation metric, means you may tend to place a heightened emphasis on lead capture throughout the site.

RH Blake's Voice of the Customer data shows that engineers are approximately 60% less likely to provide you their contact information compared to non-engineers. As a result, if you're overly ambitious and early with asking for contact details and not considering the value-exchange fit, you're likely impacting the long-term success of your marketing program. Engineers will feel skeptical earlier than most people. Instead, ask for contact information after value and engagement has been delivered.

Engineers are approximately **60% less likely** to provide you their contact information compared to non-engineers.

For example, rather than asking for contact information to view a webinar, consider letting the engineer view the webinar for a short period and then ask for their contact details. This way, the engineer would have already understood the potential value of the remaining webinar and in return is more likely to give you their contact data.

A similar approach can be used with technical guides, cross-reference databases and CAD drawings. Provide the engineer a chance to see the value and if your content is valuable enough, the engineer is more likely to provide their contact details.

3. Provide certainty with expert, data-driven content

Engineers are naturally more hesitant than most to believe supplier claims; to better demonstrate your expertise, capabilities and thought leadership, data-driven, solution-oriented content is critical.

In fact, 62% of engineers said that showing them a new way to solve an established problem would get them to rethink their business needs.

To do this, consider how you may be able to minimize risk for your customers with data. What decisions are your customers making based on hunch, "best practice," experience, or just plain guessing? By offering engineers a way to be more certain in their decisions, not only will you be able to develop deeper relationships with them, you will also help them educate others in their organization with more authority, and in turn, help you take steps toward earning the business.

Say your solution helps customers improve their production throughput while minimizing cost. Consider interviewing your last 50 customers to

uncover why certain customers were able to gain more value out of your solution than others. What specifically are the leading businesses doing that the others—including your prospects—could learn from?

In addition to these types of insights, consider how you could segment this report in a way that makes it easy for your engineer prospects to communicate your value to others within their organization. These types of insights create differentiation, build trust and help you win opportunities faster.

Conclusion – To engage engineers, start with trust, not features or benefits

Manufacturing marketers looking to displace suppliers or create meaningful awareness with engineers in the hopes of becoming top-of-mind on the next project face significant marketing challenges. Engineers are hard to reach, challenging to engage and difficult to convince. Having a marketing program and website that deeply understands and addresses the nuances of how engineers think, act and feel in their respective target industries will help ensure the next time you're driving traffic to your website, it has a higher likelihood of converting into an opportunity.

SEO Alone Isn't Enough

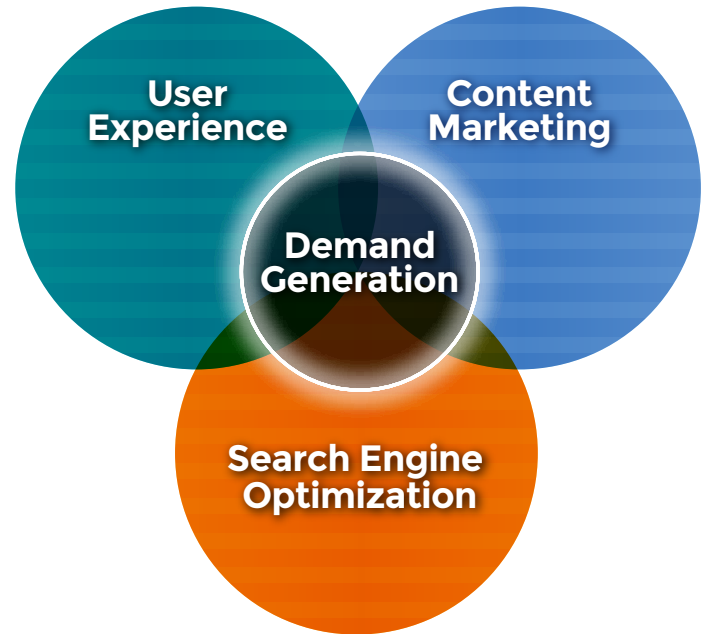
Best Practices for Manufacturers Looking to Grow

With B2B buyers nearly 60% through the sales cycle before contacting a supplier and engineers investing the equivalent of more than one full workday per week consuming content, leading manufacturers are increasingly realizing the value of having an effective marketing and demand generation strategy.

Yet while search engine optimization (SEO) will improve organic ranking and can increase their leads, today (and moving forward) manufacturers are discovering that SEO alone does not make a successful strategy. Focusing on SEO alone overlooks the opportunity to maximize its value.

Historically, the main goal of SEO services was to drive more traffic to a website. Today that's only 33% of the puzzle, as more traffic does not necessarily mean more demand for your offerings, which is the key business objective for most manufacturers. To profitably and sustainably meet and convert customer demand, it's up to manufacturers to be visible with the right audiences, educational and persuasive at the right times, and provide an effective user experience that accelerates customers through the sales cycle, delighting them along the way. It's a tall order.

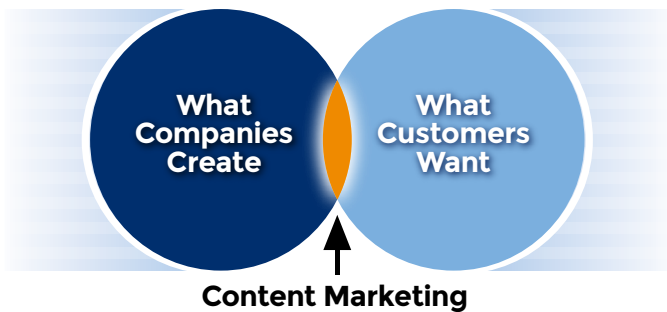
To maximize your marketing investment and generate profitable demand, leading manufacturers are leveraging SEO, Content Marketing and User Experience to work together and drive demand. Only then will your marketing be a competitive differentiator. *If your SEO strategy is to simply rank highly on relevant keywords, it's greatly missing out on the real value of SEO and wasting marketing dollars.*



What is Search Engine Optimization?

Effective SEO is critical to helping your content be discovered. It's focused on aligning your online presence to the latest search engine algorithm requirements, which in turn drives traffic to your website. With 75% of people never looking past the first page of search engine results, this is a critical component to a manufacturer's demand generation strategy. In fact, 57% of B2B marketers stated that SEO generates more leads than any other marketing initiative. And it's no wonder: 61% of marketers say improving SEO and growing their organic presence is their top inbound marketing priority.

But simply focusing on driving visitors to your site overlooks the business objective of accelerating those visitors through the sales cycle and meaningfully converting them into customers. After all, if a prospect visits your site because you rank highly for 'precision manufacturing for aerospace' and then quickly realizes the content on your website isn't valuable and/or the website offers a poor user experience, they will leave the site. This in turn sends a signal to search engines that your site didn't do a great job of addressing the query and will negatively impact your organic ranking for that search term.



What is Content Marketing today and beyond?

As the associated graphic shows, Content Marketing is the intersection of what we create and what customers want. If as a manufacturer you are creating content that's of minimal value to your customers, it's just noise. Similarly, if manufacturers are creating content to only address customer concerns without considering how this will benefit your business, it's charity.

Leading companies focus on the sweet spot that provides customers the education and value they're looking for while incrementally helping their company move in the right direction.

But for maximum effectiveness, Content Marketing must work in conjunction with effective SEO and user experience. After all, if you create the most amazing content that perfectly addresses your customers' and business needs, but if it's not found by your target audience, it's resources wasted.

What is User Experience today and beyond?

Have you ever visited a website and immediately been confused, annoyed or unsatisfied with the resulting experience? 79% of people who don't like what they find on one site will go back and search for another site. Thus, as you're establishing your Demand Generation strategy and implementing SEO and Content Marketing, it is critical that your strategy considers User Experience and Cross-channel Marketing. In the end, if you've invested in ranking highly for the right keywords, developed effective content for each phase of the buying journey, and then your perfect customer leaves your website and goes to a competitor due to a poor experience, you've lost.

SEO alone isn't enough; Demand Generation requires optimizing and integrating SEO, Content Marketing and User Experience

As with most marketing initiatives, having a clear understanding of your target audience and their buying journey, your competitive differentiators and measuring the right analytics will help drive success. And with demand generation it's no different. Your demand generation strategy must ensure the right audience is able to find the content they're looking for and this content must then drive and accelerate desired business results.

Industrial SEO Best Practices

TOP 3 Organic Ranking Factors



With engineers investing the equivalent of one full workday a week consuming content and B2B buyers completing nearly 60% of the buying cycle before contacting a supplier, ensuring your industrial-focused website is appearing high on relevant search terms is critical. But given the continual evolution of Google's algorithms (500-600 annual updates) that in turn affect rank factors, this is no easy feat.

SEMRush, a leading competitive intelligence platform for digital marketing, recently released a ranking factors study that researched the top 100 positions for more than 600,000 keywords and identified the top 17 factors.

We took this information and tailored it to the specific goals of manufacturing and industrial markets to develop what we believe are the top three organic ranking factors to consider to maximize the impact of your online presence. This is, of course, assuming that your website is technically sound and has the basic fundamentals, including effective landing pages. (More information is available in our '7 Steps to Improving Your Online Presence and Search Engine Ranking' webinar.)

While this article focuses on the top three factors, the remaining 14 also rate some attention, depending on your specific business, growth goals and marketing strategies. (If you want to review the full list, [click here](#).)

But for now, let's start with the top three that we believe can help drive your industrial marketing success.

1 Industrial Website Traffic Sources: Direct and via Search Engine

Direct website traffic—visitors who typed your domain name into their browser or followed a bookmark—is the most influential ranking factor according to the SEMRush study, because Google recognizes the domain has both high authority and value. In other words, if your company doesn't have meaningful brand recognition or isn't sufficiently differentiated from your competitors to attract visitors, the odds aren't in your favor that you'll rank highly on relevant keywords which in turn will impact leads and business generated.

Industrial SEO Best Practice
What does this mean in terms of your SEO strategy?

Enhancing your brand recognition and communicating targeted valuable content should be a key part of your SEO objectives more than ever. It will not only grow your direct traffic audience, but also improve organic ranking of your domain.

2 User Engagement on Industrial Websites

When we consider user engagement, there are many factors to focus on including overall time spent on the site, the number of pages visited per session and the bounce rate. According to the SEMRush study, all three user behavior signals will affect website rankings, because they indicate to Google how engaging and useful your website and content is for a particular search.

Time spent on site and number of pages visited is relatively straightforward – Bounce rate, on the other hand, represents single-page sessions divided by all sessions. If, for example, visitors stop at your homepage rather than going on to pages featuring additional information, this will translate to a high bounce rate and is a good indication that your site structure or content needs a thorough evaluation.

So what would be a “good” bounce rate? Based on SEMRush's analysis, the bounce rate for domains in the top three positions is approximately 49%.

Industrial SEO Best Practice
What does this mean for your industrial website and SEO approach?

How can you improve your bounce rate? Perform Google analytics research to better understand which pages are being visited most frequently and which pages are driving the most conversions (e.g. downloads, click-throughs, navigating to a specific page, etc.), Consider coupling this research with insights from your Google Console as this should have more meaningful search query information. These steps will help you better identify the type of content that is of most interest to your site visitors.

3 Total Referring Domains, Backlinks and Total Backlinks

One significant factor in Google's algorithm that determines search results is the number and quality of referring domains (where the backlinks originated). This latest research from SEMRush reinforces that the higher the domain's position on the search result, the more referring domains it has. Plus, every domain that ranks for a high-volume keyword has, on average, four times more referring domains than domains from a low-volume group.

Industrial SEO Best Practice
What does this mean for your industrial SEO best practices approach?

Identifying and prioritizing relevant domains and executing a strategy to achieve a backlink is a must for any industrial manufacturing SEO program. A good first step could be to use a third-party tool like Moz or SEMRush to identify websites that point visitors to your competitors that rank highly for relevant search terms. Once you've identified and prioritized this list based on domain authority and business value, create a targeted plan for each opportunity. For example, if you're a manufacturer in the oil and gas industry, you may want to reach out to thought leaders in this space and see if they'd be willing to participate in an article you write.

Then, execute a publicity strategy to maximize the article's impact. You want it to appear in meaningful and relevant places where your market base is most likely to read it. Research appropriate placements such as industry publications (print and online), reach out to the editorial contact and submit your article, ensuring that it meets the editorial guidelines. Include the full article or an abbreviated version on your social media channel such as LinkedIn or post it on your own company blog. And include information about your company or a bio line that has a link back to your company website.

Industrial SEO Best Practice
How can we help?

Driving the right types of traffic and generating the right kinds of leads with SEO is a focus for many industrial firms. But with increasing competition for organic search results, leading industrial and manufacturing firms must stay on top of SEO best-practices to generate successful results.

“For more than 15 years, RH Blake has been helping us develop successful business strategies and programs across multiple platforms to support our diverse marketing initiatives.”

Dennis Daniel
Division Marketing Services Manager
Parker Hannifin



SEO for B2B Manufacturers – What Every Industrial Marketer Should Know



With 71% of B2B customers starting their search for a solution with a generic, non-branded query, Search Engine Optimization has never been more important – Read about the latest key trends you should know about.

Better Content Organization

User experience is a critical factor Google considers when evaluating organic ranking. The clearer and more intuitively structured your information is, the easier it is for Google to index your data and return clearer information to users. One way to help ensure your content is structured successfully is with schema markups – code that you put on your website to help search engines return more informative results. In essence, schema markups tell search engines what your data means, not just what it says.

For example, let's say the phrase “custom manufacturer” appears on your site. The search engine sees this purely as two words but with the right schema markup around the expression “custom manufacturer,” you can indicate that this is your focus industry, not just a couple of random words.

Do you have relationships with suppliers or distributors? Schema markup enables you to tell Google how one business relates to others.

There are many ways for industrial manufacturers to leverage schema markup in their SEO. To get started, visit Google's Structured Data Markup Helper.

Enhanced Security

You've probably noticed certain websites with the HTTPS designation (HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure). These secure sites typically are ecommerce related or financial institutions, as the added level of security helps with data encryption, authentication and data integrity. But did you know that switching to HTTPS can give a ranking boost to non-ecommerce websites as well?

User and website security is directly linked to user experience – thus it's to everyone's benefit to protect privacy by keeping information confidential and secure. If you're considering making the switch to HTTPS, please visit this excellent article by searchengineland.com.



Better Content Organization



Enhanced Security



Voice Search



User Engagement

Voice Search

Traditionally, the first step in Search Engine Optimization programs is identifying relevant keyword phrases and topics. However, this initial research shouldn't just focus on what users are searching for, but rather how they are searching.

According to a recent Google study, over half of U.S. teens and 41% of U.S. adults use voice search on a daily basis, and those percentages are growing. The benefits and attractiveness of voice search are obvious: it's hands-free, faster and enables multitasking.

So what does this mean for your SEO program? Rather than solely focusing on short tail keywords, content needs to be written in a more conversational tone. Leverage the fact that typically people who type a query and people who ask a question into voice search often have two different search intents. For example, a typer is most likely doing research while the voice searcher is most likely looking for a quick response that will be followed by an action. Content on your website should align with both types of search. One excellent way to do this is with an FAQ page that answers “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “how” and “why” questions in a conversational tone.

User Engagement

Google's primary goal is to return relevant search results. If they see visitors entering a webpage but either leaving immediately or not navigating further, this signals that the result they clicked on wasn't extremely relevant. Google then uses this engagement (or lack thereof) to update their rankings accordingly. Metrics such as bounce rate, length of time on webpage, number of webpages visited, site speed and actions taken all help Google identify whether your website is relevant for that particular search phrase.

To help enhance user engagement, provide content that directly addresses the searcher's likely query. Because 43% of people admit to skimming, video is an excellent approach to providing valuable content that is effectively consumed and engaged with (90% of information that comes to the brain is visual and processes 60K times faster than text). For example, including a video on a landing page can increase conversion by 80%. (RH Blake's Engineered to View™ is a solution to the engagement opportunity).

17 Can't Miss B2B Lead Generation Website Ideas for Manufacturers

According to DemandWave's "The State of B2B Digital Marketing" report, generating quality sales leads is the number one priority for B2B and manufacturing marketers. And as additional reinforcement that lead generation is critical, according to Content Marketing Institute's recent report, driving more leads is ranked as the number one content marketing goal for B2B and manufacturing marketing leaders for the next 12 months.

Identifying effective B2B website lead generation ideas for manufacturers is challenging.

As a B2B or manufacturing marketing leader, creating website content that converts quality leads can be more challenging than in the B2C space where you can simply show a pop-up that screams "20% off" for the next 24 hours. We must be creative, knowledgeable and insightful when developing lead generation tactics that convert website visitors into qualified leads.

Here are 17 B2B lead generation website ideas every manufacturer and B2B firm should consider using in their marketing program and website.

To help you get your lead generation juices flowing, we've compiled a list of 17 B2B lead generation ideas and best practices that you could consider implementing on your website. As with any piece of content, what you offer needs to be relevant to your target audience and provide enough value to evoke meaningful action.

1 Request a quote

One of the most common calls-to-action on manufacturing and B2B websites, but also one of the most incorrectly developed. The main culprit is asking for non-critical information – research shows that anything more than 3 fields causes a significant drop-off in completions. Another frequent error is not having enough white space – the moment a user gets overwhelmed or confused is the moment you've lost a qualified opportunity. To get a better sense of how visitors interact with your website, consider installing a tool like Hotjar.

2 Pop-up/Expert video chat

One of your most valuable resources are your engineers – why not offer your website visitors a chance to ask them a direct question? An excellent tool (and offers a free option) for this is Drift.



3 Ebook/Guide/Whitepaper

Once a visitor has landed on a particular page, offering them a related ebook, guide or whitepaper is an excellent way to move them further along in the sales cycle and convert them into a lead. The key to increasing the effectiveness of this tactic is providing content that's extremely relevant to the audience. For example, if your landing page is focused on issues that impact a VP of Operations, consider offering an ebook that also focuses on this title e.g., 'Here's what we've learned after implementing 1000 ERP installations: A must-have guide for the VP of Operations'.

4 Catalog

If you're manufacturer that sells standard products, offering a catalog that includes relevant lead generation magnets is an excellent way to draw additional attention to lead generating content.

5 Webinar

Webinars are an excellent way to demonstrate your thought leadership while driving brand awareness and leads. Is there an industry regulation change approaching? Perhaps your engineers recently solved a reoccurring issue? Is there an opportunity to partner with an industry thought leader or relevant association in delivering this presentation? Once you've identified a meaningful topic, promote the webinar event across channels that your prospects access as this will also help enhance brand awareness. Another benefit to webinars is SEO as you'll be able to transcribe the webinar text and couple it with any content.

6 Valuable directory/resource (search function)

Do you offer a research function on your website? This could be a great opportunity to consider gating this content. For example, limit the number of times users can use your tool per day/week or return limited search results until users provide their contact information.

7 Independent research

Edelman's recent survey of more than 1,300 U.S. business decision-makers determined that 63% feel that thought leadership is a great way to get a sense of the caliber of thinking an organization is likely to provide, and nearly half feel that thought leadership has directly led them to decide whether to do business with a company. Independent research is an excellent way to develop and highlight your thought leadership in a specific space.

8 State of the Industry report

Develop content and partner with an association or complementary brand to publish the definitive report for your industry. Although this tactic can take a significant time to develop, it's one of the most effective approaches we've seen to drive leads and help position your brand as an industry thought leader.

9 ROI/Comparison tools

B2B and manufacturing firms typically offer products and solutions that have longer sales cycles and relatively high initial price tags compared to many consumer purchases. As a result, the lifetime value of your offering is typically where you'd like to focus your discussion. Consider adding a gated ROI tool to your website. In addition to driving leads, this will help you defend your price, accelerate your sales cycle and increase your average selling price. One excellent source for this is ROI Selling.

10 RFP/Buying Guide

Help your prospects make a more informed decision by creating an RFP template or buying guide they can use in their purchasing process. This is a great opportunity for you to highlight all of the items your customer should consider when purchasing your solution that impact their business.

Almost there – 7 More B2B lead generation website ideas every manufacturer and B2B firm should consider

11 User-friendly explanation of an upcoming industry regulation change

Nearly every industry has new regulations that have varying degrees of impact. Unfortunately, not every industry has an intuitive resource to help companies navigate how this regulation impacts them – this is a great opportunity for you to create something valuable for your audience.

12 Create educational videos that help existing customers and prospects solve a challenge

43% of people skim blog posts and articles. And this percentage will continue to grow as we're multitasking more and our attention is increasingly divided. Short-form videos have higher engagement rates, are recalled more and are difficult for your competitors to duplicate. Consider creating a series of related videos – some gated and others not.

13 Demonstrate what's working for you

If you're a manufacturer, chances are you may be selling to other manufacturers who may be experiencing similar operational and growth challenges as you are. Consider communicating how you were able to solve an internal challenge that helped improve your safety, margins or culture.

14 Create a useful spreadsheet

Many times when onboarding a customer or providing customer support, B2B firms and manufacturers create one-time spreadsheets or tools to help solve an immediate need. One idea to generate leads is to examine how you can leverage these spreadsheets for your other customers and prospects, then package and market them appropriately.

15 Create a process chart/ infographic that simplifies a process

Similar to creating a summary of an industry regulation change, is there information your customers could better benefit from if it was in a chart or infographic format? Perhaps this is something your customers could share internally to support their role or objectives as they relate to your offering?

16 Create a training course

If you've executed several of the activities on this list, you could have numerous videos, ebooks, guides and tools that when combined, are an opportunity for a powerful training course for your prospects and customers.

17 Assessment

When qualifying a prospect, do your salespeople tend to ask similar questions that help determine what level of value your offering will provide? Consider marketing these questions as an assessment tool on your website.

Implementing the right website lead generation ideas on your manufacturing-focused website is critical.

Successfully implementing the right B2B lead generation website ideas will help reduce average cost-per-lead for manufacturers and other B2B industries. According to HubSpot's "Demand Generation Benchmarks Report", 'Industrial & Manufacturing' has the fourth highest cost per lead. The complete breakdown:

IT & Services: \$369.88

Healthcare & Medical: \$285.82

Financial Services: \$271.54

Industrial & Manufacturing: \$235.09

Media & Publishing: \$191.07

Consumer Products: \$182.37

Marketing Agencies: \$172.72

Education: \$65.69

Nonprofit: \$43.36

As a B2B manufacturing marketer, you're constantly being asked to drive more leads while maintaining or reducing expenses. Identifying the right lead generation ideas can make a significant impact on the ROI of your marketing program. Hopefully the above list will help you consider how else you can couple content with your website to drive qualified leads.

How Manufacturers Could Use Marketing Automation to Increase Customer Engagement & Sales



It's all about the numbers. The typical B2B buyer is nearly **60%** through the purchase decision before engaging a supplier sales rep, at which point only one out of ten are ready-to-purchase. As for where the buyer's journey is taking place, **67%** of it is done digitally. Even more challenging is another number — **12%** — the amount of the customer's total mindshare industrial marketers have across the entire B2B purchasing journey.

To win, leading manufacturers are creating data-driven marketing programs that leverage marketing technology to deliver personalized, intelligent content. The result? A growth in customer engagement, qualified leads and increased demand.

A marketing automation platform (MAP) can be used to create an automated, customer-driven trail from the initial contact to final purchase, linking your marketing programs to your customer relationship management (CRM) technology. It's efficient and effective, according to research conducted by the Aberdeen Group, noting that firms that use marketing automation improve lead conversions 107% and have a 40% greater average deal size of 40%.

Marketing automation also provides industrial manufacturers with a cost-effective and agile way to keep their distributors updated—and an engaged distributor is a powerful sales partner.

In short, marketing automation takes those activities that were once done manually—customer segmentation, customer data integration and campaign management—and automates them. Here are three key ways that marketing technology is helping manufacturers create a more effective, ROI-driven marketing program and some common roadblocks to a successful implementation.

Using Marketing Automation to Provide Manufacturing Customers Personalized, Relevant Informations

If a manufacturing buyer is searching on Google for sources of industrial fans, for example, and visits your fan page, you don't want to lose the momentum and engagement generated at that initial touchpoint if they leave without engaging further. By employing a marketing automation solution, you can plan for that buyer to automatically receive a follow-up email with fan-related information such as a specifications list, buying guide or relevant case study.

Create a More Efficient Manufacturing Lead Nurturing Process

How would you like your sales teams to spend their valuable time: cultivating leads that are still in the very early stages of the sales cycle or contacting qualified leads who are more likely to convert? Winning manufacturers use an automated process that intelligently identifies qualified leads based on a predetermined criteria and sends them to Sales at the most appropriate times. For example, if your Sales and Marketing teams have agreed that a prospect who downloads a case study and then visits the Contact us page is a qualified lead, this information would be immediately communicated to Sales. Arming your sales team with insight into what webpages a customer visited and which digital assets they engaged with often helps them understand more about what kind of challenge the customer may be faced with and be more prepared to add value in the initial conversation.

Marketing Automation Allows Manufacturers Additional Visibility into the Sales Pipeline

It's not enough to separate the marketing qualified leads from sales qualified leads. You also want a way to track marketing qualified leads as they move through the pipeline on their way to becoming sales qualified leads and then customers. A robust marketing automation program can do just that.

For example, you can distill a conversion percentage based on A/B testing of various marketing approaches. Another benefit the system provides is the ability to update the data you have already accumulated, enabling you to refine your marketing approaches to better meet your market's needs, goals and interests.

In short, by implementing an all-in-one marketing automation platform, you can have access to a comprehensive overview of your prospects and current customers, and develop targeted strategies to increase conversion. Once your organization understands how to use the tool, the benefits can be dramatic.



How to Create an Effective B2B Landing Page that Converts

For many B2B firms, a qualified prospect visiting a relevant page is a highly-valued opportunity – especially when you consider the lifetime value of your customers and strategic implications to other aspects of your portfolio. Whether you sell industrial components or consulting services, putting your best foot forward in converting visitors into leads can be a significant opportunity to grow faster than your competitors.

A major challenge with creating a landing page that converts for B2B manufacturing and technical firms is that your typical customer isn't a single person. Frequently, B2B sales are resource-intensive, complex and collaborative. This is why your customers typically are a team of influencers and decision makers from different departments, each with distinct professional and personal objectives – yet all looking to make the best informed decision and feel confident about it.

But that is where many B2B firms fall flat. They create a basic landing page with all the right components (clear call to action, headline that clearly communicates the product benefit, intuitive layout, proof of trust with testimonials, etc.) but they haven't used a strategic B2B approach. To help, here are three key steps to help improve your B2B landing pages:

Align landing pages to different stages of the sales journey

The first step is to identify the distinct steps your target customers follow in their sales journey. In general, there are 3 key phases of a sales journey: Awareness (learning more about their problem or symptoms); Consideration (evaluating solutions to their needs); Decision (identifying the right solution for them – which can be to not do anything at all).

Each phase of the sales journey offers B2B firms an opportunity to capture a lead or a sale with the support of an effectively executed landing page. The goal for each landing page is simple – guide your prospect at least one step further down the path to becoming a customer. This goal should help you crystallize your landing page including offer, layout and content. It's enticing, especially during this step, to focus only on the sale – but this will undoubtedly return less than desired lead and conversion results.

Develop landing pages that engage different stakeholders

Once you've identified the different steps your target customers follow in their sales process, create landing pages for each of your target customer personas. For example, a Plant Manager typically has different buying criteria than a Purchasing Manager or Safety Manager. As a result, you should identify content and create a landing page that's of value for each segment.

A content and headline formula that tends to work is 'We do X for Y so they can Z'. As an example, if you're an engineering firm, this could translate to 'We provide engineering solutions for [target title/industry] so they can [enter key benefit].

Leverage video/images to educate on complex ideas and value propositions

As a B2B firm, your product or solution can often be better explained with an engaging video or infographic. Not only will this help your target customer better understand how you can help them, but engaging imagery is proven to increase conversion rates (up to 80%!).

Identifying the key target personas and your value proposition directed to each of them in each phase of the buying cycle will produce a roadmap for you to follow for landing page and supporting content development.

P.S. Don't make a telephone number a required field in your lead capture form as only 33% of buyers are open to providing it.



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How to Build a Successful Digital Marketing Roadmap

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What's Working in Manufacturer Marketing?

3 Tips *from a* Specialized Industrial Marketing Agency

“What works for your other clients?” is a question we are frequently asked by clients, prospects and other partner agencies. And although it seems like a straightforward question, I’m always struggling with how to answer it – not because we don’t know what’s working for other clients, but rather every client is in a different point in their growth journey, with distinct objectives, budgets, resources and offerings. And just because a campaign is working for one client, doesn’t necessarily mean following the same steps will lead to similar results.

However, there are common themes we’re seeing that tend to produce superior results across our client base. And so, here are the three themes, or “secrets,” that you should consider in your marketing program:

Customer Discovery for Industrial Firms and Manufacturers

We’re seeing a direct correlation between industrial clients that have an ongoing Voice of the Customer research program and Marketing success. What’s interesting is that the levels of sophistication of the Voice of the Customer programs vary but they have an impact on Marketing outcomes. Intuitively it makes sense. The quality and depth of a company’s insight into their customers’ businesses – including company and category challenges, short and long-term growth objectives, and buying journey – help ensure industrial and manufacturing marketing leaders are making wise decisions.

While some industrial and manufacturing leaders view all this opinion-sharing and advice-giving as bothersome, intrusive or even risky, savvy individuals see vast potential.

There’s also another benefit we’re seeing for companies that perform this type of research – increased engagement.

This is especially accurate when customers feel their insight matters (positive and negative) and can help improve your marketing, sales and service operations or refine your R&D approach.

Content Development Approach for Industrial Firms and Manufacturers

Creating valuable content for a target audience is an excellent (and profitable) long-term, sustainable customer relationship strategy for many manufacturers and industrial firms. But just as it is important – it’s also just as challenging. In fact,

a recent report from Forrester Marketing states that 50 percent of B2B content marketing goes unread! Read that again – it's not that it isn't effective, it's that it's not being consumed. The question of how to create valuable, relevant content is top of mind of leading businesses and marketing executives.

We're seeing industrial firms that focus on one objective – how to get their customers promoted and favorably recognized by their peers – as having the more successful content marketing programs.

How are they doing this? They are focused on several functions:

Company's Product Development and Support Teams

Who are the people within your organization that deeply understand your products, their nuances and how they help specific markets and/or applications? Who are your company's product champions? The ones involved in designing, engineering and identifying product enhancements? This cross-section of people is a great place to start your content strategy as they are the ones who will uniquely understand the current and future needs of your customers. And this is the type of valuable content that your customers crave and will help create profitable relationships.

Company's Channel Partners and Supply Chain Partners

If your business goes to market through an indirect channel, consider asking these front-line folks how your customers are interacting with your offering and your competitors' offerings and what overall business challenges are your end-customers experiencing? These inputs are a fantastic resource for content ideas.

Alongside your product champions is the product support and service team – the folks that hear and see the solution shortfalls and are in tune with creative ways customers are using your products to solve their challenges and under what “uncommon” circumstances. All of these insights are great content – especially valuable for your customers and their ambition to grow within their companies and careers

Company's Most Knowledgeable Customers

Who are your most knowledgeable customers? Sometimes these customers may even know more about your products than your own internal teams. These customers have a sincere interest in helping your business succeed – and while they may expect better service and performance than your other customers, they will also work with you to help ensure you get things right. This component should be the biggest slice of content ideas and the one you invest the most amount of time exploring.

Although not all of these segments may be right for every industrial firm, focusing on them will likely significantly improve your content program effectiveness.

“Collecting customer feedback can increase upselling and cross-selling success rates by 15% to 20%.”

— Gartner Research

Marketing Technology to Drive Efficiency for Industrial Firms and Manufacturers

Did you know there are more than 6800 different marketing technology solutions? (An increase in 27% from just last year!) As a marketing leader for a manufacturing or industrial firm, a key responsibility is building your foundation and systems to help successfully scale your activities.

So which marketing-related technologies are the leading industrial and manufacturing firms using? Although this is by no means every solution we see, here is a list of the ones we are coming across more frequently than ever (if you're looking to evaluate any of these, check out g2crowd.com):

Project Management

- Trello
- Asana

Communication/ Lead Generation

- Drift
- AdRoll
- Hootsuite

Analytics/ Measurement

- Google Analytics
- DOMO
- Hotjar
- Optimizely

Research

- Builtwith.com
- Screaming Frog
- SEM Rush
- Moz
- SpyFu
- Buzzsumo
- Meltwater

Website Security & Performance

- GT Metrix
- 1Password
- Google Developers

Sales and Business Development

- Proposify
- Docusign
- Prezi

Contact RH Blake, A Specialized Industrial and Manufacturing Marketing Agency

Hopefully these ideas will stimulate your thinking on how to improve your industrial manufacturing company's marketing program. Looking to see which of these ideas and activities could help in your particular situation? [Contact us](#) for an exploratory conversation.

Learn How to Optimize Your Website to Drive Quality Leads

*Request a copy of our recent webinar,
**'7 Steps to Improving Your Online Presence
and Search Engine Ranking'**
(in partnership with the Industrial Supply Association)*

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7 Proven Industrial Content Marketing Strategies to

Accelerate Prospects through the Sales Cycle



Industrial and manufacturing specifiers and buyers, from engineers to operations to purchasing, largely follow a predictable journey when researching products, services and solutions: Engagement > Education > Research > Evaluation > Justification > Purchase.

Potential buyers very quickly make judgment calls as to whether to continue on your site or take their search elsewhere. In fact, according to recent research, the human attention span now averages between eight and ten seconds.

Since the majority of B2B sales begin online, it's key that your website provides the right type of information, in the right context, and in the right format to actively nurture prospects. Let's follow a typical search of an industrial/manufacturing buyer to demonstrate content strategies that work to accomplish this.

61% of B2B transactions begin online.

Source: Accenture

Make sure your website is seen

Most buyers first turn to Google for their initial search for industrial or manufacturing products and services. To ensure that you rank highly among Google's results, it's imperative to apply [SEO strategies](#) to your website and content. This enables prospects to easily find and choose you.

When prospects visit your website, presumably the main repository of your content marketing, you must not only sustain their interest, but actively lead them to increasingly engage with your brand and ultimately become buyers. Following are strategies and techniques that can help elicit this result.

1. Maximize the “stickiness” of your site by eliminating content dead ends

What are dead ends? They include web pages and content that do not explicitly delight your reader or provide an opportunity to perform a logical next action. If readers have decided to visit your site, they have demonstrated a hunger for your particular information. The worst thing you can do is let them down with marketing content

that is anemic...that doesn't inspire them to learn more, engage more, rule out your competitors, and buy.

There are several ways to do away with dead ends on your website. These include:

- *Developing customer personas,*
- *Categorizing your existing content to these specific personas,*
- *Developing content tracks or recommendations to usher readers through the sales funnel, and*
- *Intelligently implementing dynamic content such as video.*

The more time prospects engage with your brand's content, the more likely they are to move through the sales cycle.

2. Develop customer personas

A customer persona is a snapshot of a target audience based on common traits that are validated by data. The goal here is to know your customers and sales prospects – to know who they are, what positions they hold in their organizations, how much they spend, and more – including how they buy and/or research purchases – then group them by common characteristics into distinct personas.

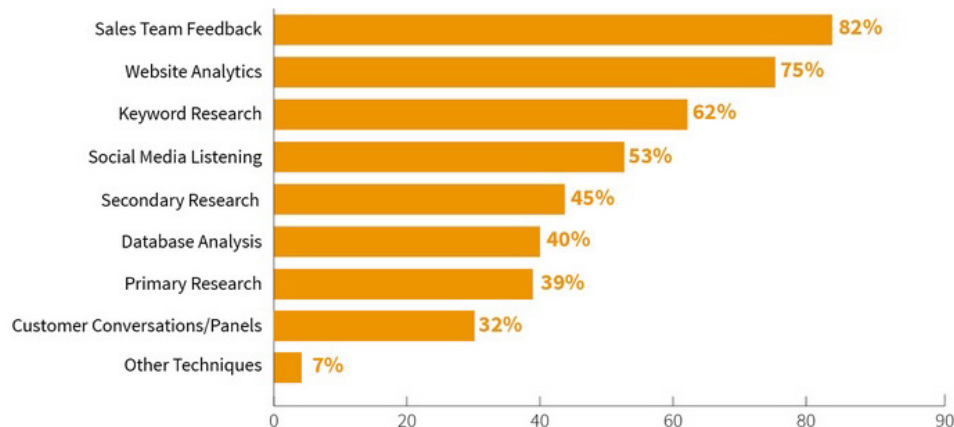
For example, some of your customers may buy after doing little research, because they are knowledgeable about the suppliers in their industry. Others may conduct more research, because they report to various organizational layers or other departments. Your marketing content must speak to both of those customer types at all points of the buying journey.

To know your customer means leveraging information that is available to you or through research you've conducted. Every time a customer buys or a prospect actively engages with your content, ask them for some additional lead information. This can be achieved through myriad data gathering methodologies. Exploiting existing research may also include Google Analytics reports.

One caveat about asking customers and prospects for information:

Be transparent. Make it clear that the reason you are asking is to better serve them, not to use their data to sell ancillary information they did not request. Also, keep the 'ask' short and sweet. Research shows that over a third of buying prospects complain that marketers routinely ask for too much information¹.

Techniques Manufacturing Marketers Use to Research Their Target Audience for Content Marketing



Manufacturing Content Marketing 2019: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

3. Customize and personalize content

Once you know more about your customers and sales leads, you can customize and personalize your website content based on where they fall on their respective buying journeys.

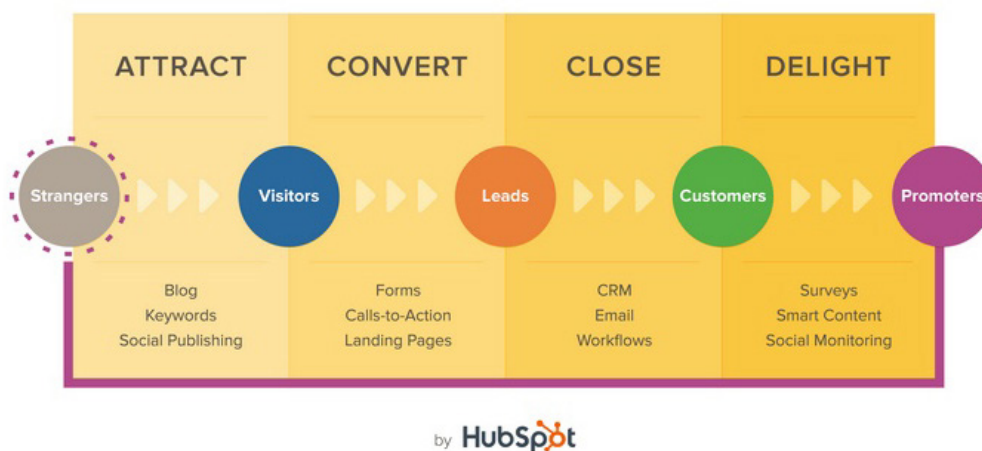
- *For those visitors who are researching products and services, provide content that is informative (that answers questions, satisfies curiosity and provides novel product/service insights).*
- *For visitors who are further along and are looking for reasons to buy, deliver content that is thought provoking (that demonstrates solutions and heightens buying considerations).*
- *For those who are ready to make a buying decision, effective content encourages action (by offering product/service comparisons, providing satisfied customer reviews and incentivizing the purchase).*

Delivering relevant content based on what you know about your prospects and leads (their demographics, industries, locations, buying intent, the type of technology they purchase, etc.) represents a prime opportunity to convert potential visitors to loyal buyers.

4. Document and categorize your existing online content

To help identify evaluate content effectiveness, it helps to classify your existing marketing content not only by customer persona, but according to visitors' current buying stages: stranger, visitor, lead, customer, promoter and brand ambassador. So, now in addition to delivering personalized content, you will be able to provide information that is explicitly designed to either attract, convert, close, or delight.

Taking an accounting of your existing content will also reveal those areas of the sales funnel where you have sufficient messaging, and where messaging still needs to be developed.



5. Provide content tracks and recommendations

A key to ultimately converting online visitors to productive buyers is to motivate them to engage with different types of your content. Provide reasons for them to consume more information. This can be achieved through content recommendations that offer visitors ‘the next best thing.’

- *If a visitor clicks on a link for a particular product, the offered information should also include a link to view additional relevant information.*
- *If a lead is viewing one of your videos, an invitation to view other related videos should always be extended.*

Providing content tracks or paths helps empower your prospects by enabling them to self-select their additional content consumption along paths that you’ve curated...paths that help accelerate them through the sales cycle.

17% of web page views last less than 4 seconds.

Source: pathfactory.com

6. Motivate prospects to binge on your messaging

If prospects perceive you can provide a solution or help them solve a problem, they are more likely to binge on your web content – if given the opportunity. That ‘opportunity’ certainly involves offering personalized content and ongoing content recommendations/paths.

In fact, consumer data reveals that a prospect who shows signs of content binging is two times more likely to convert from being an MQL (Marketing Qualified Lead that must be nurtured further) to an SQL (Sales Qualified lead likely to buy)².

7. Use video to its maximum effect

A full 60 percent of people who go online would rather watch a video than read³. That trend holds true for anyone – including cold and hot buying prospects – who turn to your website. In fact, using video on your site can elicit some profound results.

- **90% of users** say that product videos are helpful in their decision process.
(Source: Hubspot)
- After watching a video, **64% of users** are more likely to buy a product online.
(Source: Hubspot)
- Companies using video enjoy **41% more web traffic** from search than non-users.
(Source: SmallBizTrends)

So, does this mean you should place videos everywhere on your site? In a word: No. Using video as marketing content must be done wisely. Here are some rules of thumb:

- **Provide valuable content quickly.** More than 20-30 percent of viewers will click away from a video in 10 seconds or less⁴.
- **Keep short videos to a minute or less.** Most viewers drop off at the 60-second mark. If you do have a long video, **include something special around the 5-minute** mark to help retain viewership.

Engineers spend more than 1 day per week consuming content online.

Source: engineering.com

There are several instances when using video represents the best way to market your content. Use videos to:

- *Show off new products*
- *Notify customers of upcoming specials*
- *Welcome visitors to your website*
- *Introduce your executives and employees*
- *Communicate your company's values and mission*
- *Demonstrate how to install and use your product*
- *Create a series focusing on different search terms or customer personas*
- *Include promo codes to reward viewers and motivate buying behavior*

Imagine having the power to not only boost awareness of your organization's brand, products and services – but better engage, lead and convert online prospects. This is the power that can be realized by applying these and other smart content marketing strategies to your website.

The three most effective video types are:

- **customer testimonials (51%)**
- **tutorials (50%)**
- **demonstration videos (49%)**

Source: Curata

Sources: ¹ eMarketer.com ² pathfactory.com

³ Forbes Insights ⁴ Ad Age



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