The content marketing challenge

Maximize content marketing through a combination of technology and process

Contents

The confidence gap

Few marketers have found a way to fully manage and react to the massive explosion of data, tactics, devices and channels that have emerged over the past few years. Gone are the days of developing a scheduled monthly campaign involving an email, a web page and a piece of direct mail. With today's connected customer interacting with your brand across multiple channels and devices, companies are under tremendous pressure to constantly develop and deliver new and engaging content.

Consequently, business owners are continually asking marketers to develop new campaigns and assets to satiate the consumer's never-ending hunger for information. And often, those projects snowball into new projects. The initial request may be for an email campaign, but at a later date, that business owner may want to support that initiative with a social or mobile campaign, and later a visual search campaign, and later a request to replicate the information on the website, and lastly, they may want to go back and localize all of those efforts for different regions.

The logistics of supporting such an aggressive demand for information is mind boggling, and a very real challenge for most marketers. Each request requires a number of resources, such as a writer and designer, and a lengthy production cycle involving a number of edits and reviewers. Multiply that process by tens or hundreds of requests, and it is easy to see why so many marketers feel overwhelmed. So it comes as no surprise that the majority of marketers cite a lack of time (69 percent), producing enough content (55 percent), and producing the kind of content that engages (47 percent) as their top three content marketing challenges.[1]

But despite these difficulties, most marketers are doing all they can to try to keep up:

- 58 percent are spending more of their budgets on content marketing
- Most have increased the average number of tactics (such as videos, infographics, case studies, or blogs) they use to 13, up from 8 two years ago
- Many are distributing their content across more social networks than ever—six, on average[2]

Although these are encouraging signs, there is still an increasing confidence gap, with the majority of marketers uncertain whether they are using various content marketing tactics effectively. In fact, just 9 percent of marketers feel their content marketing efforts are "very effective."[3] So why is this?

This white paper will take a deeper look into the challenges and inefficiencies of today's marketing production cycle, and then explore the different ways marketers can take control of the entire content marketing process to increase customer engagement, optimize content spend performance and drive brand consistency.

The inefficiencies of the one-to-one marketing process

So much has changed over the past few years. Customers are more connected than ever through numerous devices and across multiple channels, and they want to connect with your brand more frequently and on their own terms. The upside is that you now have many more opportunities to connect with your customers. The challenge, of course, is developing enough engaging content to meet the consumer's desire for relevant information. While marketers have been trying to keep up with the demand for content, they continue to fight an uphill battle due to the inefficiencies of the traditional marketing operations process.

Most marketing operations today still employ a one-to-one process (see Figure 1). A request comes in from a business owner for a single project, like a campaign. Typically, the content is created from scratch, either by the marketing manager, a writer or a subject matter expert. Once the raw content is created, it is then passed on to the creative production management team. From that point, numerous edits and iterations are required involving a number of stakeholders, such as the marketing manager, business owner, creative manager and legal department. The end result of all of this time, cost and effort is a single piece of content.

Every project is assigned creative resources which requires many iterations until final version
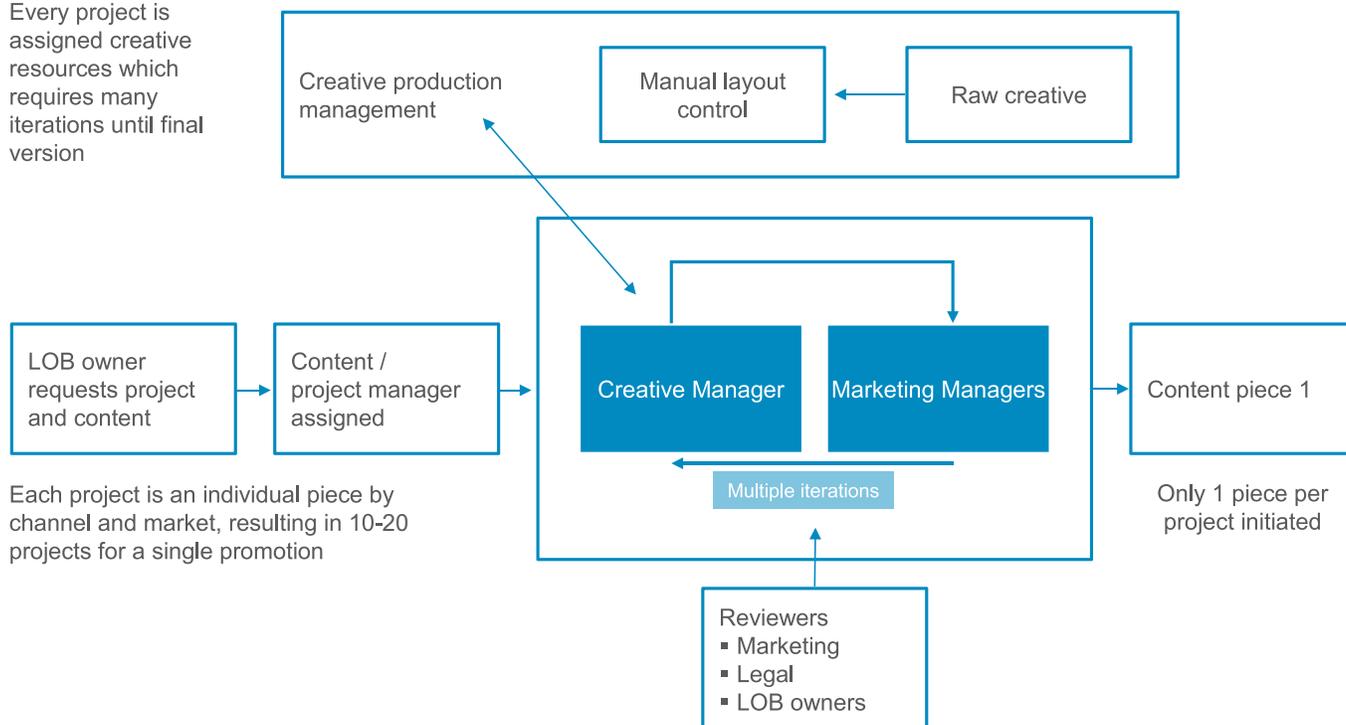
Creative production management

Manual layout control

Raw creative

LOB owner requests project and content

Content / project manager assigned

Creative Manager

Marketing Managers

Content piece 1

Multiple iterations

Each project is an individual piece by channel and market, resulting in 10-20 projects for a single promotion

Only 1 piece per project initiated

Reviewers
- Marketing
- Legal
- LOB owners

Figure 1: The inefficient marketing operations process today

As is often the case, imagine that same business owner now wants to produce a web page to support that campaign. Because that project is considered to be separate from the first request, it will be managed as an individual project. Different writers and production managers may work on the new project, and it's very likely the creative and copy used will be different as well.

The obvious issues resulting from this process are high costs and an inefficient system that requires tremendous time and resources. Marketing managers are also dependent on the production group for a majority of the work. But perhaps most disturbing is that with no strategy for reuse across projects, brand consistency will likely be compromised, and customers will receive disjointed and confusing messages.

With more tactics being created, new devices being developed and new channels coming online all the time, the traditional one-to-one marketing operations process simply cannot scale to support the growing demand for content. Something has to change.

The solution: A combination of technology and process

To improve the current system, marketers need to find ways to answer the following questions:

- How do you reduce the amount of content associated with projects? Does every new project require brand new content, or can you reuse existing content? Is there a way some of that content can be created dynamically, so you don't have to create a new project for every new iteration of content?
- How can you reduce the amount of iterations involved in the process?
- How can you reduce the amount of time the production team needs to be involved? Can some of that be done by the business owners via an automated process?

The truth is there is no silver bullet. Rather, the answer to these questions involves implementing a combination of different technologies and processes.

Technology options

There are a number of technologies available on the market today that can help marketers address their content marketing challenges. The most effective approach is to use a combination that includes:

1. A marketing operations system to manage the physical workflow within the organization
2. An enterprise asset content management system for the physical management, distribution and use of marketing assets
3. Third-party systems that add a degree of automation, allowing marketers to create, reuse, modify and localize content on their own, and provide the ability to deliver dynamic content

Marketing operations solutions

A marketing operations solution helps marketers align resources to objectives, streamline production processes, track budgets and expenses, and improve team collaboration. Through a combination of process, metrics and best practices, marketers are able to execute campaigns and programs faster, without sacrificing quality and results. In addition, they can track their budgets and expenses closely enough to ensure they are investing optimally without slowing everything down. The most valuable marketing operations solutions will include features such as:

- Budgeting and forecasting
- Integrated campaign planning and execution
- Expense management
- Standardized workflow
- Online approvals and electronic proofing
- Flexible calendaring
- Reporting and analysis
- Ease of integration with other applications

With an effective marketing operations solution in place, marketers will be able to streamline marketing processes and improve marketing management.

Enterprise asset content management solutions

An enterprise asset content management system enables companies to manage their digital assets on a single platform. The solution serves as a central repository for marketing materials, research documentation, graphics, source files, presentations, videos and any other digital assets. Depending on permission settings, the assets may be accessed by both internal and external stakeholders.

With an effective process in place for managing existing assets, marketing managers are empowered to quickly and easily access and store information and reuse content for future marketing projects.

Third-party solutions

Once you have streamlined your marketing operations and centralized access to existing digital assets, the next step is to leverage a third-party system to automate the process for creating, customizing and localizing brand-compliant marketing materials, and for delivering dynamic content.

For example, some systems enable marketers to leverage approved templates for projects like campaigns, email, direct mail, newsletters, and case studies. Marketers simply pull content from the enterprise asset content management system to populate the approved templates, and then leverage the marketing operations system to manage the workflow, like approvals and budgets. This kind of system greatly simplifies the layout process and reduces marketing's dependence on full-time creative resources. It also ensures brand consistency and compliance with controlled elements such as colors, fonts, taglines and logos.

Some of those systems also provide dynamic templates. Content and brand resources can be set up as variable.
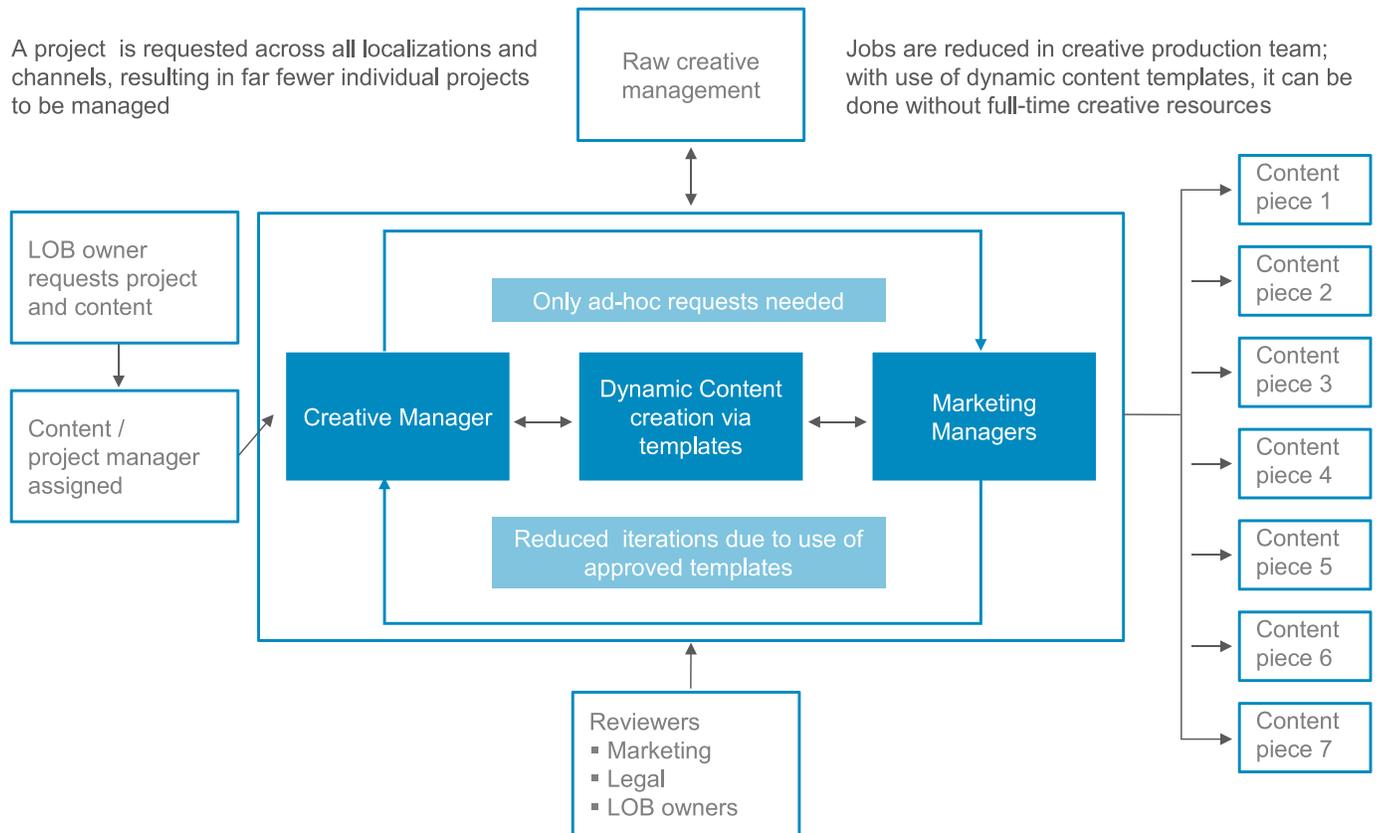
A project is requested across all localizations and channels, resulting in far fewer individual projects to be managed

Raw creative management

Jobs are reduced in creative production team; with use of dynamic content templates, it can be done without full-time creative resources

LOB owner requests project and content

Content / project manager assigned

Only ad-hoc requests needed

Creative Manager

Dynamic Content creation via templates

Marketing Managers

Reduced iterations due to use of approved templates

Reviewers
- Marketing
- Legal
- LOB owners

Content piece 1

Content piece 2

Content piece 3

Content piece 4

Content piece 5

Content piece 6

Content piece 7

Figure 2: The benefits of a third-party solution

For example, a company with nine divisions will want nine different sub-brands and boilerplate content. Traditionally, this would require nine separate layouts. But there are third-party systems that allow the use of a single template with multiple variations that can be dynamically generated based on user input.

Take Figure 2, for example. A request has been submitted for a project which needs to be localized across regions and channels. By leveraging dynamic, approved templates, the marketing manager is able to reuse and modify content to produce seven different pieces of content—all without help from the creative team.

Implementing new processes

There are a number of changes companies can make from a process perspective that can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of their content marketing efforts, particularly when combined with the aforementioned technology solutions.

Establish a content marketing strategy to maximize efforts and resources

In a recent blog post, analyst Richard Fouts notes that "Gartner sees a lot of well-intended marketers dive straight into content marketing's creative process at the expense of crafting vision and goals (it's understandable; the creative side of content marketing is more fun)."[4] Yet, research shows that marketers with a content marketing strategy are 600 percent more likely to be effective.[5] And Fouts agrees: "Content marketing provides a powerful fuel for all your initiatives. But it happens best when based on a vision and a strategy."[6]

So what would that strategy look like? Marketers—and executives and business owners—need to be thinking about their projects from a more integrated perspective. Rather than initiating one-off pieces of content, they should have a long-term plan, like an editorial calendar, that maps out what projects will be developed, how and when they will be distributed, and if there are localization needs. That map should also provide a clear understanding of how those different projects are connected, if at all. Gartner analyst Jake Sorofman stresses the fact that "content marketing, like any other strategic commitment, requires discipline and consistency," and goes so far as to say "the best content marketers think like manufacturers," developing "master production schedules and blueprints."[7]

Since the majority of marketers face resource and budget constraints, one strategy is to change your approach to project development. Rather than focusing on one-off projects, marketers should focus on the big picture and long-term effects. For example, put your resources towards developing just a couple of large, high-impact pieces of content, like a white paper, video or eBook. Then map out a series of other pieces of content that can be developed based on that existing content and theme. For example, if you develop a webinar, you can support that project with a white paper, a web page, a video, or a campaign—email, social or mobile. Not only do you now have multiple pieces of content, but those pieces all reinforce the same branding and messaging.

Increase the number of tactics and social media platforms targeted

Another best practice for improving your content marketing is to leverage more tactics and social media platforms. The most effective marketers employ more tactics than the least effective (15 versus 10 on average) and leverage seven social media platforms (versus only three for the least effective marketers).[8]

If you put an effective strategy in place for developing content, as discussed in the previous section, leveraging additional tactics across channels, like an infographic or blog, should put little strain on your resources while providing another valuable point of interaction with your customers. See Figure 3 for an example of how other leading marketers are using the variety of tactics available to them.
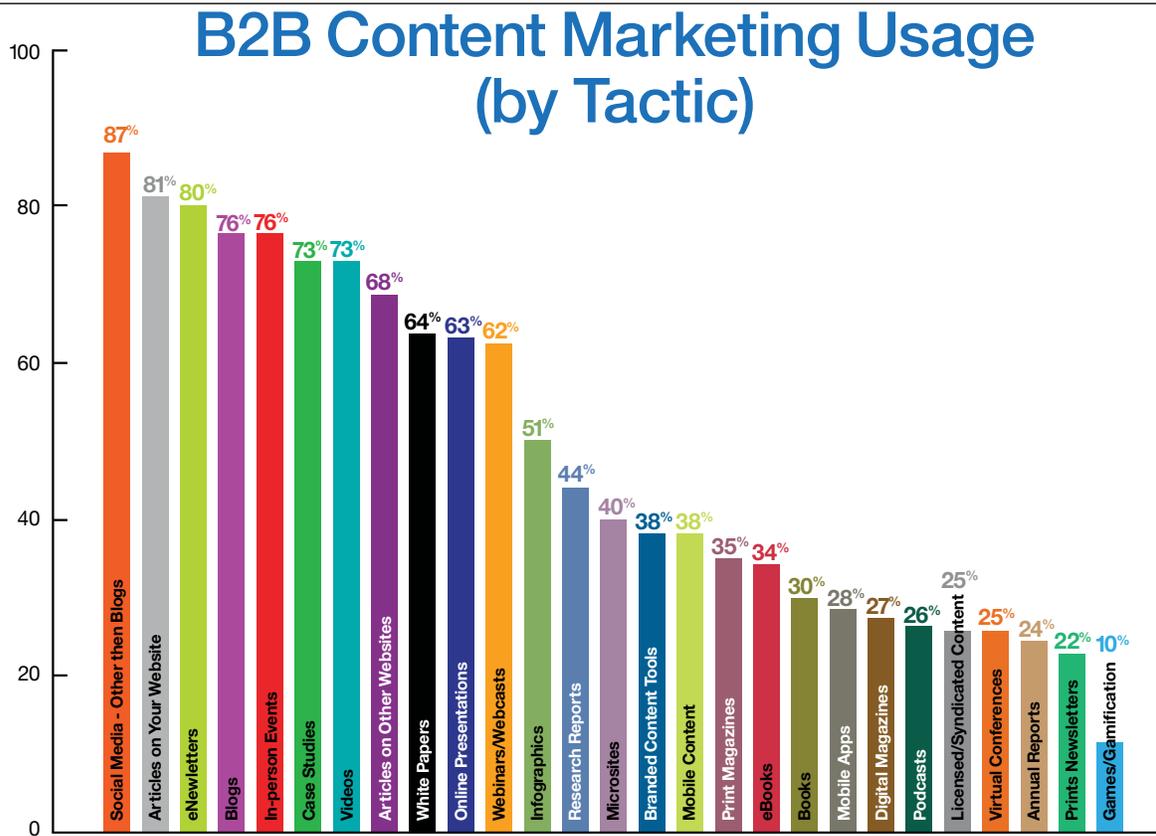
B2B Content Marketing Usage (by Tactic)

Tactic	Usage
Social Media - Other then Blogs	87%
Articles on Your Website	81%
eNewsletters	80%
Blogs	76%
In-person Events	76%
Case Studies	73%
Videos	73%
Articles on Other Websites	68%
White Papers	64%
Online Presentations	63%
Webinars/Webcasts	62%
Infographics	51%
Research Reports	44%
Microsites	40%
Branded Content Tools	38%
Mobile Content	38%
Print Magazines	35%
eBooks	34%
Books	30%
Mobile Apps	28%
Digital Magazines	27%
Podcasts	26%
Licensed/Syndicated Content	25%
Virtual Conferences	25%
Annual Reports	24%
Prints Newsletters	22%
Games/Gamification	10%

Figure 3: Content marketing usage by tactic

Source: 2014 B2B Content Marketing Trends–North America; Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs

Assign a content marketing owner and establish a content marketing budget

Most companies do not yet have a budget for content marketing. Consequently, few companies have developed a role responsible for their company's content marketing efforts. Those marketers that are responsible certainly understand the value of the various technologies and best practices that could optimize the process. But without a budget, they may not be in a position to pull resources aside for something like a third-party content management system.

But research shows that having an established budget and person responsible for the content marketing strategy can have a significant impact. The majority of the most effective marketers (86 percent) do have someone responsible for content marketing strategy, versus only 46 percent of less effective marketers. In addition, the most effective B2B marketers spend a higher percentage (39 percent) of their budgets on content marketing than their least effective peers (16 percent).[10]

As with any effort, having a clear strategy, owner and budget dramatically increases the chances for success.

Educate executives of the value of content marketing

Of course, getting approval for that budget and developing a new marketing role requires buy-in from an executive. Those marketers that are able to sway management to support a structured approach to content marketing are more successful than their peers. Research shows that the more executives understand the value of content marketing, the more effective their content marketing programs are. In fact, fewer than 10 percent of effective marketers who use content marketing have an issue with executive buy-in, but almost 25 percent of less effective marketers cite this as a challenge.[11]

The benefits of a controlled approach to content marketing

By implementing a combination of technology solutions and best practices, today's marketers can stop playing catch up and gain control over the entire content marketing process. Doing so will ensure significant returns on their marketing efforts:

- Increase and improve customer engagement. Marketers can effectively manage ever-increasing volumes of content within marketing, while also driving brand consistency.
- Reduce content production. Marketers can easily support the unique needs of multiple regions or divisions by customizing or localizing content dynamically, rather than manually creating separate assets.
- Optimize content spend performance while budgets are cut and demand for results increases. Marketers can meet the dramatic increase in content production—across multiple devices and channels—with limited marketing and creative production resources.
- Manage costly and time-intensive marketing creative production. Marketers can centrally manage and efficiently fulfill requests for portfolio assets across all channels, including approval cycles and marketing content production.

The content marketing challenge will only continue to escalate with the evolution of new devices, channels and tactics. But with the right strategy, process and technology in place, marketing managers can turn that challenge into an unprecedented opportunity to reach more customers with relevant, timely and engaging content.

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IBM ExperienceOne helps you attract, delight and grow the loyalty of customers by enriching the ways you engage each of them. IBM ExperienceOne provides a set of integrated customer engagement solutions that empower marketing, merchandising, commerce and customer service teams to identify the customers and moments that matter most, and to rapidly apply those insights to develop and deliver personally rewarding brand experiences.

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IBM ExperienceOne solutions are delivered in cloud, on premises, and in hybrid options.

For more information

To learn more about IBM ExperienceOne, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: **ibm.com**/experienceone.

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