



Meet The King Of Content Marketing

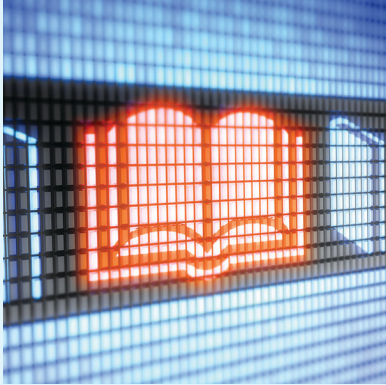
Founder of the Content Marketing Institute, Joe Pulizzi built a successful business from scratch – and it all started with a blog.

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Meet The King Of Content Marketing

One thing you can say about Joe Pulizzi is that he has always been ahead of the curve. He first started using the term “content marketing” in 2001 when he left his executive position at Penton Media to launch a specialist consultancy that helped custom publishing firms find clients. In the right place at the right time, Pulizzi was perfectly positioned to capitalize on the wide range of opportunities presented by the emergence and growth of digital and online content, and social media.

However, after deciding that his time was better spent serving the needs of the marketer instead of the publishing agency, Pulizzi flipped his business model and launched the Content Marketing Institute, which has since evolved into the leading online and event resource for content marketing. In addition to managing Content Marketing World, which takes place each September in Cleveland, Ohio, and launching Chief Content Officer Magazine, Pulizzi has authored several best-selling books and spoken at more than 200 seminars around the world. He took time out of his hectic schedule to talk to Nick Wright about his business and how companies of all sizes and in all industries can use content to attract customers, build loyalty and grow sales.



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Q. You are well known as an authority on content marketing. Tell us a little about how you came to specialize in this field.

Joe Pulizzi: When I first left the corporate world to venture into content marketing, I launched a company – Junta 42 – which matched custom publishing agencies with potential clients. We paired more than a thousand projects over a two-year period, but we didn't really achieve the revenue growth we were looking for. In 2009, we decided that instead of targeting agencies as our clients, we should target the marketers – the companies that needed to solve their content creation problems. So we switched our whole model and focused on creating educational products/solutions that eased their pain.

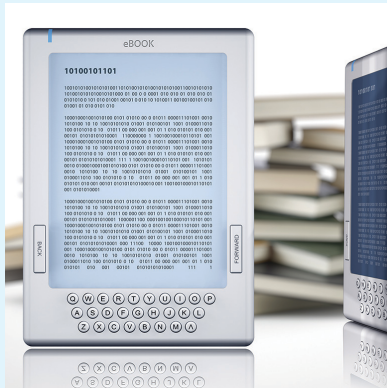
Our blog was pivotal in the process and remains very important. It's the magnet or the hub of our whole model. Everything that we have comes into our website through our blog. We get about 135,000 unique visitors a month. It took us five years to develop our audience, but it's growing really fast now. What's really exciting is the "share" numbers that we're seeing on the blog posts.

Q: So what were the first steps in reinventing yourself?

JP: We started with a daily blog on our Content Marketing Institute website, which now has more than 150 contributors. We then launched Chief Content Officer Magazine, a quarterly print publication that is mailed to 22,000 executives in North America. Once we built our audience, we developed our event series, which comprises domestic and international workshops. Content Marketing World is our flagship annual event. That takes place in September in the USA. In March this year, we held our first Australian event.



Once we understood what our clients needed, we created and distributed content through multiple channels to solve those problems.



Our Online Content Director and Print Content Director collaborate on a regular basis.



Q: You've done an incredible job of taking the content marketing space and making it your own. How did you use content to grow your business and what lessons can companies learn from your experiences?

JP: We did the very same things that we ask our clients like AT&T, Petco and Allstate to do today. We simply focused on the pain points of our customers. We identified our key clients as corporate marketers that were looking to create “owned” media practices within their organization. Once we understood what our clients needed, we created and distributed content through multiple channels to solve those problems.

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Q: What kind of role does print play in your marketing?

JP: Print is a huge competitive advantage for us because we are the only player among our competitive set that has a print publication. You can tell everybody in the world, “Hey, we have really good content online,” but for instant credibility and authority, nothing beats being able to hand somebody a copy of a magazine. I recently attended a CMO event and handed out our magazine to everybody in the room. Every single person read it and subscribed to it. That’s huge.



Q: What is your strategy in creating your print and online content?

JP: Our Online Content Director and Print Content Director collaborate on a regular basis. In the past, we made the mistake of taking our print magazine content and putting it online without any editing. That wasn’t smart because it didn’t add any value. In fact, it made it much more difficult for customers to read our material. We edit and repackage all of our “print” content so that it is either a little shorter or a little punchier for the web. But the call-to-action is always a subscription. We use the print magazine to drive our database growth.

No channel dies; it just evolves and changes. In my opinion, there is a huge opportunity in print right now because there's less physical mail being sent. You can get more attention in the post than ever before.



Q: What's the number one takeaway?

JP: The key thing is that when you launch a magazine, it's important that it's integrated with and complements the content that you publish online. We want to play off hot topics together and attack them from different angles. Here's an example: We decided recently that we needed to become an authority on native advertising. We immediately released several fairly short blog posts. For our print magazine, however, we needed a more in-depth, more insightful and more thoroughly researched piece. So we developed a content strategy that leveraged both platforms.

Q: What is it about print that still makes it a viable communication tool?

JP: I think it is important to realize that this evolution in media has happened many times before. We've heard that radio is dead. It's still here. We've heard that TV is dead. It's still around and as popular as ever. Shoot, I've even read articles that said the Internet and social media are going away. And of course, we're constantly being told that print is dead. No channel dies; it just evolves and changes. In my opinion, there is a huge opportunity in print right now because there's less physical mail being sent. You can get more attention in the post than ever before.



Q: Given that brands can now create and distribute their own content, what does that mean for regular publishers?

JP: We are living in very interesting times. Let me start by saying that there is no way that traditional media companies will be able to compete with large corporations in creating content in the long-term. Second, publishers need to come to terms with the fact that corporations will continue to reduce their ad spend in magazines. That is a big problem for traditional publishers because a significant amount of their revenue comes from advertising. It's not a content problem; it's just that the financial model has changed. People are still reading Newsweek, for example, but advertisers aren't supporting the magazine like they used to.



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The more innovative publishers understand that they need to move away from the sponsorship of a paid circulation model. Take Inc. and Fast Company, for example. Their subscriptions, newsstand sales and advertising revenues are dwarfed by their events businesses, which creates the majority of the money for those titles. Once you have built a critical mass of an audience, as a publisher you need to start looking more closely at what you can sell to those people.

In the old days, there used to be a clear divide between brands, media and consumers, but today we're ALL creating content to attract and retain consumers. The customer is simply buying different things.

Q: When content marketing was in its infancy, it was easy to capture people's attention. How can companies stand out from the crowd with the massive amount of free content available online these days?

JP: I think it's always going to be that way and there's no doubt that it's getting worse. So we have to do two things: One, we have to tell a different story. A client recently asked me how he could stand out and be noticed in an industry where everybody is talking about the same things and targeting the same keywords. I told him that he simply needed to tell a different story. Sure, he might need to target some of those same keywords, but he could offer a different point of view, be more informative, be more entertaining.

Another tactic is to build an “influencer” network. Give a lot of content “gifts” so that you build relationships with the people who like to share material. Most brands don't do enough of that. Deliver content to the networks where you know your customers are hanging out when they are not on your site.

Q: What other reasons are there for creating content? Explain to a small- to medium-size business the reasons for creating good content?

JP: Companies of all sizes need to be using content to drive prospects through the sales funnel. Why? Because, today, we're going online to find the solution to ALL of our problems. Let's start at the top of the funnel, where the consumer is just gathering information. They may not even be aware of your company yet, but they do know they have a challenge or a problem that needs to be solved. The key question is whether, when these potential customers type a relevant question or keyword into Google, they will find your company? If you are not creating relevant, informative or entertaining content, then you might as well be invisible to the search engines.

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The key, again, is to focus on the solution, not your products and services.

So you now know that at the top of the funnel, you need to answer your customers' basic questions. What next? It's what I call "the messy middle." That's when somebody has filled out a form on your site, for example, or has opted in to receive your newsletter. In other words, they've transitioned from being just a casual visitor to a warm lead. How are you going to move this potential customer through the buying process? The next step might be a comparison piece highlighting your firm against your competitors. If you are a B2B company, it might be a really in-depth white paper. You have to figure out what type of content is going to help them. It could even be a piece of content that they can hand to their manager so they can sell your product or service into their organization. The key thing is that you are not talking about your product; you are talking about the solution. Many companies also make the mistake here of talking purely about themselves and their services. However, an explanation of the features and benefits of your product is really only a very small part of the buying process. It's certainly not going to help you at the very top of the buying funnel.



Q: So what's the next step?

JP: So we know that we need to create interesting stories and to answer our prospects' questions at the top of the sales funnel. The goal now is to move them through the funnel toward a purchase. Hopefully, you will have collected the email addresses of people who have signed up for a newsletter or requested more information. The next step might be to offer some comparative information. If you're a B2B company, say, that might mean creating a series of white papers or PDF downloads, or a piece of content that a buyer can take to his or her manager to help sell your product into the organization. The key, again, is to focus on the solution, not your products and services. Identify the pain points for your customer and use your content to explain how you're going to solve them.



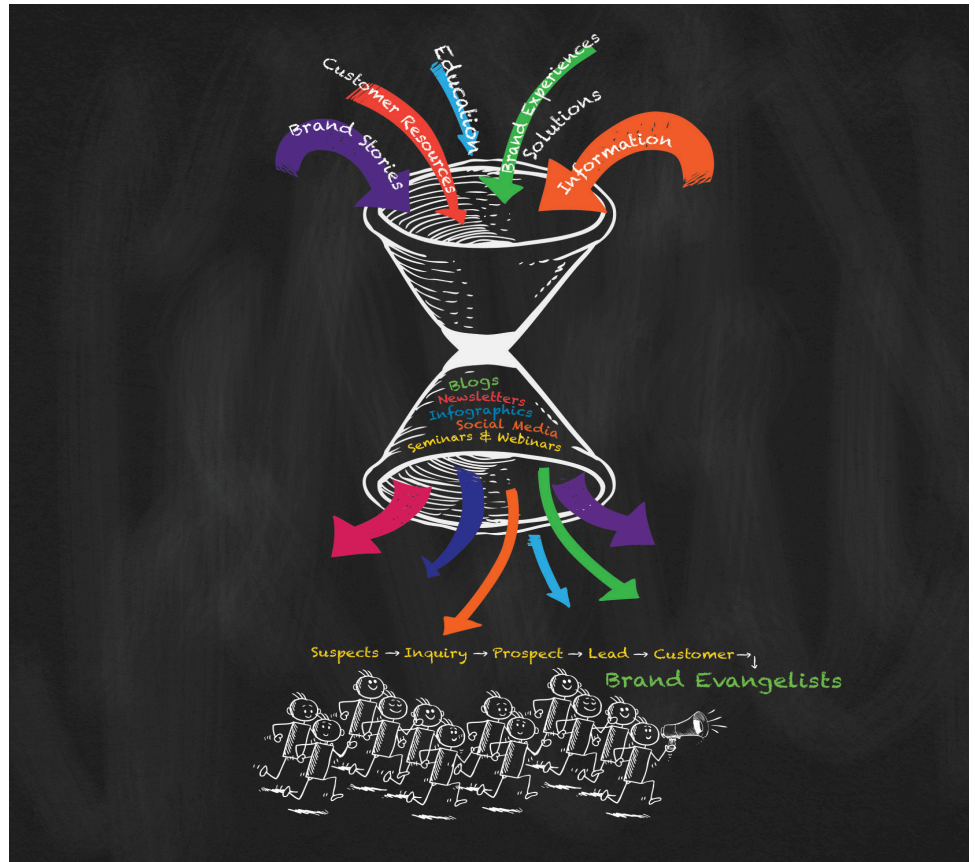
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90 percent of your content has to focus on your customers' needs, not on yours.

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I actually prefer to think of the process not as a funnel, but as an hour-glass. After you've nurtured a prospect and converted them into a customer, you want them to become an evangelist and to go out and spread the word about your company. Well, you've got to empower people to be able to do that, so give them the tools and the ammunition to be able to talk about you and to share your content among their network. The secret is to look at what your customer needs at every single step of the buying process and then develop and distribute content that addresses those needs.

Q: Is there one golden rule?

JP: If you take just one thing away from this interview it should be that customers don't care about you or your products. They care only about themselves. They will only care about your product during a very small portion of the buying process. That means 90 percent of your content has to focus on your customers' needs, not on yours.



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Q: Not only do you have to create content, you need to understand how it will be shared, and how you will distribute it right?

JP: Exactly. Many of the brands with whom we work have made the mistake in the past of jumping straight to the channel without giving any thought to the content, the strategy or the audience. Even now, I'll have clients say to me, "Joe, we need a blog" or "Joe, we need strategies for Facebook and Pinterest." But they are jumping the gun. The first question they should be asking themselves is, "What are the needs of my customers?" Then it should be, "What is our story, how are we going to tell it and will the people care about it at all?" Only then can you even think about what channel or platform to use.

Q: The new world of social media has made us all a little obsessed with the medium, right?

JP: Recently, a prospective client was telling me about the number of Facebook fans her company had and she was asking my advice on how to grow the audience. When I asked the woman to explain to me why her company was on Facebook, she couldn't tell me. She didn't know. I said, "Shoot, if you don't know why you are on Facebook, then you shouldn't be asking how many likes or fans you have because it doesn't matter!" That is just Marketing 101 in the traditional media world, but for some reason social media has warped our brains!

Q: It has been said several times recently that content marketing is replacing SEO as the main driver and key influencer of Google rankings. Is that true? If so, does that make creating content for SEO purposes very challenging for companies these days?

JP: Google's recent Panda and Penguin algorithm updates place more emphasis on social media generated content. What that means is that companies now need to develop a "social" play to make it into the search rankings. It's really a natural progression. We have reached a point where any company with a decent understanding of content marketing is using the correct URL strings, incorporating meta-tags, creating the right type of headlines and leveraging the necessary keywords. So how do you differentiate yourself when every company is doing the same things? Through sharing.

At the Content Marketing Institute, we've seen first hand how important it is to have a network. We can target a keyword and because we are shared by more than 200 credible sources, we can quickly become visible in the rankings.



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Q: You talk about how companies need to identify different buying personas when creating content. Can you explain?

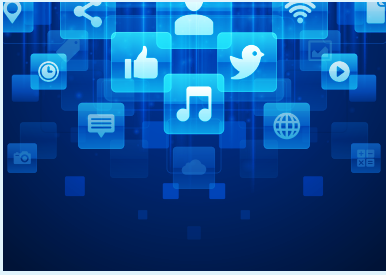
JP: It's very rare for a business to have just one type of customer. In fact, most businesses have an average of seven different decision-makers involved in the purchasing process. This means that, in an ideal world, you should have seven different content strategies built around the individual needs of those people. For example, you might need to create content for a business owner, the CFO, the COO, the IT Director or the CMO, all of whom might have a key role to play.



We have the technology these days to create and tailor content specifically for different audiences. It's just a matter of thinking about those audiences and their needs at the start of the content creation process. At this stage, you can more easily identify opportunities to repackage and edit your content to make it relevant to more than one audience. For example, if you have a 10-page white paper, you may be able to extract pages 3, 7 and 9 and create an entertaining blog post. Of course, before you even look at crafting your content, you have to know who your customers are.

Q: So the content marketing strategy can be as complex as you want to make it, depending on how far you want to drill down?

JP: That's right. If you are going to get started, start simple. Start with one buying persona and create the content for your most important buyer. Perhaps start with a blog and supplement that with a white paper program or a print newsletter program. Consider hosting a small event; something regular that you can easily commit to. Start with one, ask for feedback and then you go from there.



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The more prospects you can drive into that sales funnel, the greater the competitive advantage you will enjoy.

Q: How do you deal with the client that doesn't want to put their ideas out there?

JP: These days there are NO secrets. Your competitors know everything already. The only way to differentiate yourself is through the way in which you communicate. Your competitors can copy everything else that you are doing, but they can't copy the way you talk to and engage with your customers. However, let's say that you put your "secret" out there. Do you really want the kind of customer that would take your ideas and not pay for them? You want customers who look at what you do and know that you have the answers for everything. The more prospects you can drive into that sales funnel, the greater the competitive advantage you will enjoy.

Q: In 10 years' time, do you think this social environment will have calmed down, and we'll all look at each other and say, "We did WHAT to generate interest in our companies?"

JP: That is such a good question. To be honest, things are moving so fast, I don't know what it is going to be like in six months, let alone 10 years. It's moving way faster than I ever anticipated. However, I am a history buff and so there is one thing I'm certain of: the companies that have been able to tell compelling and helpful stories throughout the years have always had great brands and they've always survived. While the tools and platforms will change, storytelling will always be here.

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Joe Pulizzi On...

1. Applying ROI to content marketing

“I actually prefer to think of this as ‘return on objective.’ The most important thing is to clearly state your goal. Let’s say you want to improve customer retention. Put a number to that objective. Once you add that metric, you immediately start to focus on how to achieve it. First, you make your hypothesis, then you put content against it.

Here’s an example. At the Content Marketing Institute, I know that an email newsletter subscriber is five times more likely to sign up for one of our Content Marketing World Events than somebody who is not. Therefore, it is very important to me that those people get their content so they can share it, believe it and get excited about being part of our community. So what’s our goal? To generate the type of content that will enable us to grow our email newsletter subscriber base.”

2. Finding a content success formula

“Creating content is time-consuming and resource-intensive so you need to know that what you’re doing works. Once you and your team have identified your objectives and specific metrics, commit to the content development for six months and then review your results. I love what Joe Chernov used to do at Eloqua. He discovered that once somebody had engaged in 10 individual pieces of content on the Eloqua site, they were 80 percent more likely to become a customer. First, that’s incredibly powerful data. Second, it’s a great motivator for producing content because it’s a proven model.”

3. The power of the long, long keywords tail

“Just like everybody else, we get most of our search traffic from the way, way long tail. For example, while we might want to target ‘native advertising’ as a keyword, we are mindful that somebody searching for information on the subject might type in “native advertising definition” or “native advertising measurement tools.” Search has changed so much because of the advent of social platforms. But at the end of the day, you have to ask yourself why social works. It only works if you have a great story to tell, so that’s why it all comes back to content marketing.”