



# CONTENT MARKETING

## NEW TOOLS FOR DISTRIBUTORS TO ADD CUSTOMERS

**W**hy do contractors buy their supplies from you? It's a simple question at first, but one that might really make you think for a while. After several cups of coffee, you'll probably have a few answers: Trust. Price. Quality. Availability.

Honestly, the truth might live in all of the above. But the most important thing is that you're a known resource to your customers. They know you because they've bought from you before.

But what if they haven't bought from you yet? How do you capture these customers? This is where a new form of marketing has entered the building to help solve this age-old business question.

Content marketing.

Companies in B2B and consumer-oriented industries today look to content marketing as the vehicle that can help establish thought leadership, which is the main ingredient in customers viewing you as an industry expert.

Marketing with thought leadership-rich content generates three times as many leads and costs 62 percent less than other marketing methods, according to Demand Metric, a research firm for the marketing industry. And according to the research firm Aberdeen Group, companies that produce thought leadership content through their marketing channels realize overall revenue that is six times higher than everyone else.

What exactly is content marketing, and how can it help suppliers grow their business?

PHOTO: RVL/SHUTTERSTOCK

## CONTENT MARKETING ALLOWS SUPPLIERS AND DISTRIBUTORS TO POSITION THEMSELVES AS EXPERTS AND ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH THEIR AUDIENCES.

Before the dawn of the Internet, companies would take out advertisements across print, outdoor or broadcast media. These were the three primary forms of advertising and marketing for companies in every industry.

The Internet enabled companies and professionals to become their own publishers as a way to tell their stories through websites and blogs. And when social media began in the early 2000s, companies then had the ability to distribute their own messages, stories and marketing offers.

Today, there is still great value in marketing through traditional media, especially since they continue to cater to loyal and targeted audiences. More specific to suppliers, traditional marketing is effective because your customers respond well to mailers, trade show brochures and advertising in a variety of publications.

Content marketing allows suppliers and distributors to position themselves as experts and engage directly with their audiences, and when this segment of followers grows, so does their perception of your company.

By far, the single most popular question I'm asked by executives

from the construction and remodeling industry is: "Why should I be on Facebook or Instagram? My audience isn't on social media." Don't be so quick to judge.

First, understand that content marketing and social media

expands far beyond Facebook and Instagram. While these two social platforms are extremely popular, with Facebook at 1.19 billion users and Instagram at 150 million, there are many other platforms also in use today that are common for B2B companies.

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by John Sternal

TODAY, THERE IS STILL GREAT VALUE IN MARKETING THROUGH TRADITIONAL MEDIA, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY CONTINUE TO CATER TO LOYAL AND TARGETED AUDIENCES.



Have you ever connected with an industry prospect or colleague on LinkedIn (259 million)? Are you aware that every industry now has a large presence and following on Twitter (232 million)? Did you know that participating on Google+ (540 million) can actually help your search rankings on Google? Of course, if you see no value in having a good search ranking on the Internet, then

this type of marketing may not be for you.

If you're a supplier that deals directly with consumers, though, Facebook might just be your best bet.

Every successful content marketing program has three basic elements: a company blog; social profiles for content distribution; and a

demand-gen component to maximize sales funnel potential. Let's look at each in more detail.

Your company blog is simply viewed as your brand's publication. This is where you provide thought-provoking commentary and news that appeals to your readership. Suppliers might write about the latest industry trends, offer how-to

guidance on certain upgrades or showcase products in action so prospects can see their value.

Suppliers that take content marketing a step further would also produce their own videos and host them either on their own website or on a YouTube channel. These videos could be interviews with other contractors or realtors discussing product trends, or videos of supplies in action on the job site.

Over time, prospects, customers and website visitors would view this content and begin to see your company as a trusted resource and industry leader.

Step two is to promote this content in front of your audiences. After you've secured a healthy following

on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+, you can then share this content so prospects can engage with you, comment on the content and share with others in their professional network.

If you don't have a need to connect directly with consumers, LinkedIn is arguably the top social profile for B2B audiences. Every industry is represented by a series of targeted groups, such as the Construction Supply Chain Management Group and the Building Products Industry Group (there are dozens more).

Once you join these groups you can share your company news, participate in discussions and showcase company promotions. Over time, other professionals in the group (your

prospects) will see you as a "thought leader" and turn to you for advice when they have a question about a certain product, tool or piece of equipment.

With content marketing as a tool in your toolbox, you'll have a leg up on the competition in building trust with your customers. **CS**

*John Sternal is the director of public relations and social media for Merit Mile, an award-winning agency for builders and designers. For over 15 years John has been helping companies build awareness and expertise in facility design, moisture barriers and product launches. For more insights, download the report: [www.MeritMile.com/Reports/Content-Drives-Leads](http://www.MeritMile.com/Reports/Content-Drives-Leads).*



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