

CONTENT MARKETING THAT SELLS

4 ways to ensure that salespeople use the content that marketers create for them.



By Michele Meyer

That slick brochure, detailed whitepaper, and tip-packed PowerPoint that the marketing team painstakingly crafted for its sales colleagues? Most likely nobody read them. Just one of 10 marketing materials are read—despite a voracious thirst for knowledge that leads salespeople to devote 30 hours monthly to hunting for or creating their own materials, according to the American Marketing Association.

It's time for marketers to stop wasting time and effort—theirs and their sales team's—and implement these four paths to irresistible sales-targeted content:

1. Team up with your sellers from the start

Marketers should ask sales reps what they need and in what form, and then keep them looped in throughout the creation process. The easier marketers make it for salespeople to share their thoughts, the more successful they'll be in creating content that salespeople will use, says Brian Cleary, chief strategy officer at bigtincan, which creates mobile engagement programs.

"Millennials are very comfortable with social collaboration, plus its incredible feedback," Cleary cites as an example of one way to elicit input from salespeople. "You get access to knowledge that otherwise might be locked in people's laptops and heads."

Auction.com, an online real estate marketplace, turned to bigtincan's platform when it realized its top performers' techniques weren't filtering down to the overall workforce of 900 spread across 18 states. Now auctioneers can see in real time which marketing materials their colleagues used and how, and get instant updates from operational managers. As important, the marketers who created the materials can see that information, as well, and use it to inform what other materials they'll create.

Results: Eighty-five percent of Auction.com's employees share on its content hub, leading to a 20% drop in escalations and a 30% decline in emails to managers.

2. Don't sell products; solve problems

Top sales performers address what prospects care about: resolving their challenges. Content that marketers create for salespeople to use needs to support those efforts.

Indeed, Motorola Solutions found that pitchy instead of educational marketing materials led to low usage of its extensive videos, brochures, and PowerPoint presentations touting its latest products. The company also learned that salespeople were interested in materials that would inform and prepare them for client engagements, not just collateral they could leave behind or send links to.

"We'd failed to appreciate that content is more than a conduit of marketing," says Gary Van Prooyen, senior director of North American marketing for the data communications and telecommunications equipment provider. "The sales team has its own needs: selling solutions to

customers' burdens, not 'gee-whiz' features."

Corporate Visions, a sales training consultant, helped Motorola create situation-based one-pagers and cue-card decks that guide salespeople step-by-step through the sales process for specific solutions and scenarios.

Results: Reps were 47 times more likely to view the new kits than other marketing content; 94% of the reps deem the kits practical and 75% call them "critical to success." Indeed, the solution-targeted tools led to \$1.675 million in closed deals and an estimated \$7 million in new opportunities, Van Prooyen says. "The new kits paid out in spades."

3. Keep it fresh—and top-of-mind

No surprise here: Marketers should be continuously producing content salespeople can use. "By being live with fresh content demands, you give salespeople what they need," says Dela Quist, CEO at Alchemy Worx, an email content marketing company. Otherwise, he says, salespeople may download what they need on a given day from their company's site or intranet, "come back in three days, find nothing new—and never return."

Along with producing a stream of fresh content, marketers should ensure that salespeople not only know that new content is available, but also know what it is. An email newsletter sent to the sales team that includes the latest tips and updates is one way to keep salespeople engaged and in the know. "We've found that our most popular content is the content we promote the most," Quist says.

The newsletter should be well-crafted yet succinct, "focused on the quickest, yet most intelligent ways to the deal," Quist says. And it should be timed daily, weekly, or monthly, as preferred by the recipients. "Salespeople only use it if they love it."

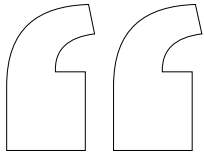
Results: Alchemy Worx's own sales team heads first to the newsletter and only then to its archives.

4. Show, don't just tell

Content for salespeople doesn't always need to be content they can share with customers. Sometimes marketers can use content to help salespeople improve their skill-set or encourage them to buy in to adopting a new tool. For example, including videos of top sales performers using new technology can help adoption rates soar.

"It's far more powerful—and practical—to see one of their own use technology seamlessly, rather than just read about it," says Janelle Johnson, director of demand gen at Act-On Software, a marketing automation platform. This worked well with the ROI calculator the company introduced in April. "The top producers could walk their peers through with real-life examples of how they'd used the tool in the field, and how effective it was," Johnson says.

Results: Within weeks, the adoption rate rose to 60% of reps. A briefly broken link thwarting access to the tool underscored its value, Johnson says: "We were flooded with requests to fix it, which is a telling sign they rely on it." ■



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