

# CONTENT MARKETING:

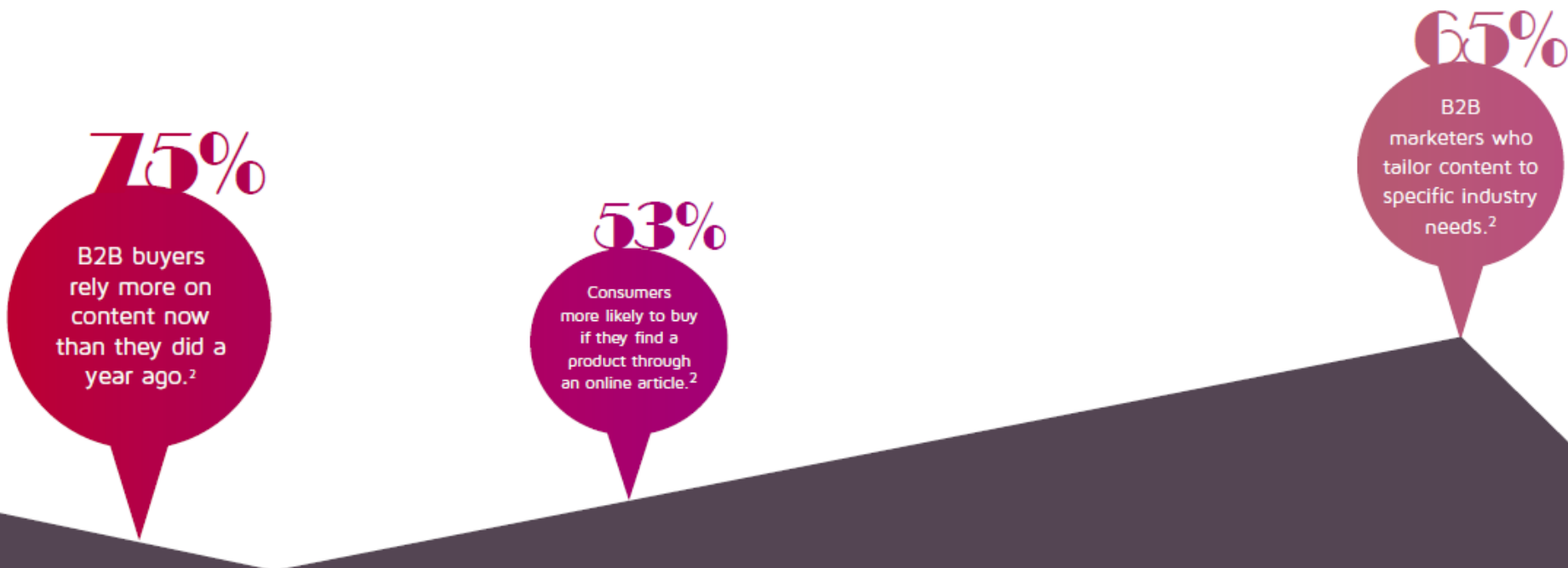
11 STEPS TO ENGAGE,  
ENTERTAIN, AND INFORM.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a marketing professional, you've heard by now that content is king, and in the ongoing shift to the digital age, this statement has never been truer. Allergic to hard sells and other traditional marketing tactics, today's customers are increasingly turning to digital channels for timely, relevant, and credible information to help them solve a problem or make a decision about a major purchase.

In fact, research from CEB's Marketing Leadership Council shows that potential business customers do not contact suppliers directly until more than half—and in some cases up to 70 percent—of the purchase process is complete. In other words, for nearly two-thirds of the buying cycle, your customers are educating themselves with no input whatsoever from your sales team. They are comparing vendors, reading product reviews, and using their own discernment to make informed purchasing decisions.

It's a paradigm shift in marketing, and it's changing the relationship between businesses and their customers. In this new arena, content marketing is about developing meaningful conversations and relationships with potential customers. If businesses can deliver consistent, valuable information, customers are more likely to reward them with their business and loyalty.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.executiveboard.com/exbd-resources/content/digital-evolution/pdf/Digital-Evolution-in-B2B-Marketing.pdf>

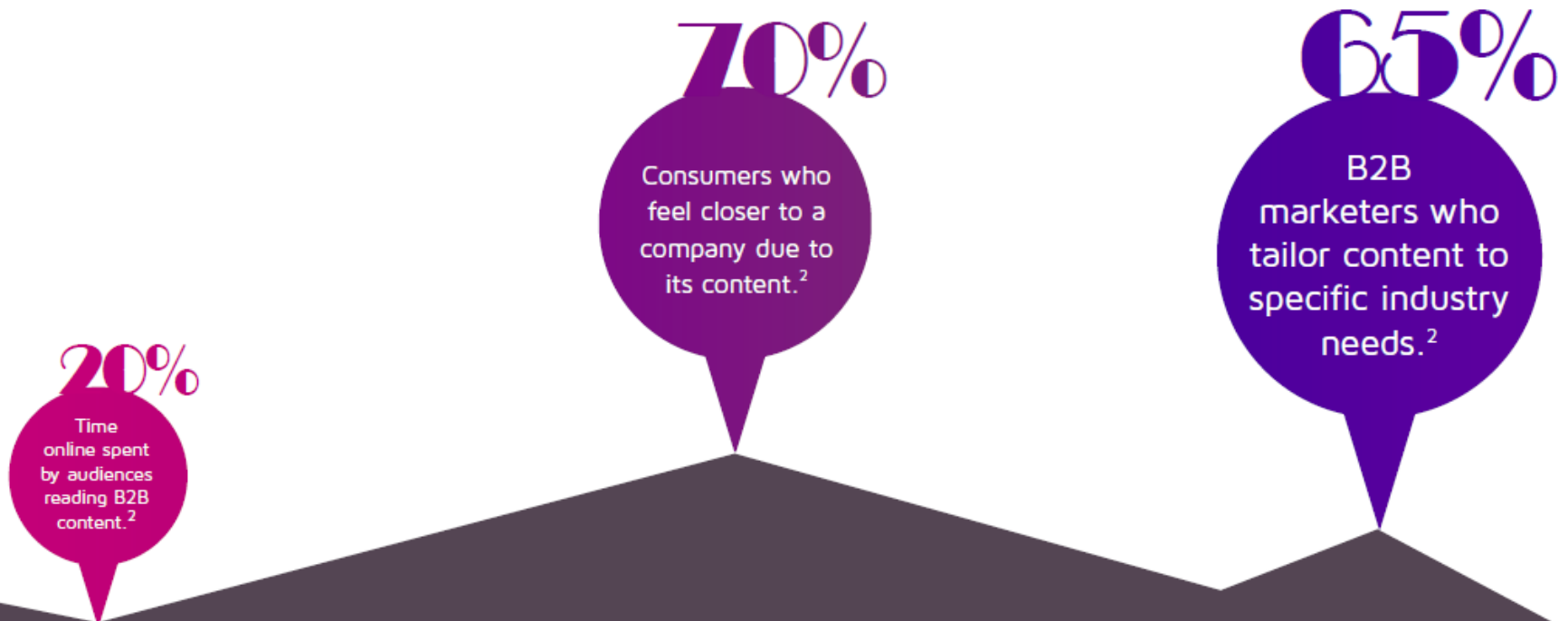
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dmnews.com>

As a smart marketer, your mandate is to make sure various digital channels are populated with content that educates these potential customers and helps them make a decision. This content can be in the form of video demonstrations and interviews, educational webinars, case studies, white papers, blog posts, and so on. Further, it can be syndicated to related digital contexts as a full article, snippet, link, or thumbnail to ensure more potential customers discover your content.

It's not just any content however that wields this power. To be effective, content must engage, entertain, and inform. Only great content does this, and it comes from the heart. It establishes a direct connection to a reader, via emotion. It offers a story that grabs readers by the lapels and demands their attention.

Great content shows that you understand the customer and their problems and that you want and are able to help them. Freely give away advice and information. If you can address the issues your prospects care most about with a solution or perspective in which your company has real expertise, customers tend to respond positively, becoming loyal supporters, even evangelists.

So, how do you get there? What are the elements of great content? What tactics do successful content marketers employ to achieve this powerful effect? Great content that results in loyal fans can be achieved, if you consistently follow a few rules of thumb.



<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dmnews.com>

## START WITH...

1

### **Understanding your customer.**

Envision your ideal customer and think deeply about their problems and challenges. Really put yourself in the reader's spot to understand their position. How do they feel? What do they need? How can you help them now? How can your product or service help them down the road to be more successful, productive, or happy?

2

### **Creating a strategy.**

Create a content marketing strategy that ties directly into your company's overall business strategy. How will your content marketing efforts help you achieve your overall business goals? What is the over-arching story you want to tell? What does your company stand for, and how will your content systematically and consistently convey your values and position? In addition, to a content marketing strategy, craft a content marketing mission statement that takes into account your customers' pain points as well as your desired outcome.

3

### **Maintaining a content editorial calendar.**

A content editorial calendar helps you plan your content for the months ahead, ensuring it reflects your overall business strategy, targets the right audience, and takes into account your contributors, stakeholders, and distribution channels. It can help you coordinate publication with related events and business milestones, provides an opportunity for brainstorming and research, and helps you identify ways to build on or cross-promote existing or future content.

4

### **Being authentic.**

Great content is original. When you're authentic, you're much more likely to offer a fresh perspective that engages people and arouses their curiosity. Surprise them, touch them, and they'll want to learn more about you. The best way to do this is to believe in your product or service. If you possess an unflinching conviction that you can help the customer, it's easy to demonstrate that you are the expert in your market and can be trusted. Your passion and dedication shine through.

5

### **Telling personal stories.**

Stories are about facing struggles and overcoming challenges. Connect emotionally with your audience using stories about others like them who are struggling with and solving problems. Recount your own experiences or paraphrase those of your customers. By tapping into emotion, good stories build trust and can move people to action. As with any story, make sure you have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Be purposeful, not merely descriptive.

6

### **Writing naturally.**

Be conversational and warm. Write simply. Avoid fancy words and omit anything that is not necessary. Try to tap into readers' emotions. Imagine you're talking to a friend, and write with that kind of ease. Later, you can remove sentences and words that are unnecessary or revise sentences for clarity.

## THEN FOCUS ON...

## ENGAGE, ENTERTAIN, AND INFORM BY...

7

### **Focusing on one point.**

What is the purpose behind the content you are writing? Are you educating, motivating, or entertaining readers? Determine the key point you want your readers to take away with them after reading your piece. Don't try to do too much. Keep a sharp focus on this objective, and make sure your supporting points all contribute to this one main point.

8

### **Using strong headlines.**

Relevant and compelling headlines trigger interest and invite readers in. Many writers write the headline first as an aid to help them structure the rest of the material. Deliver on the promise implied in the headline. Write several possible headlines, and then adjust or combine them to create a winner.

9

### **Making your content easy to read.**

Make sure your content is easy to skim. Your reader should be able to glance through the material, understand the main points, and decide whether or not to dig deeper. Use structural elements such as bullets, headings, sub-headings, numbered lists, and bolded call-outs to achieve this.

10

### **Including a call to action.**

Everything you write for your customer should have a purpose. What do you ultimately want them to do? Download material? Request a call or demo? Tell them—with short, simple calls to action. Offer links to more information, such as websites, blog posts, articles, or case studies. Deepen the engagement by inviting them to share their thoughts, for example, in a comments section.

11

### **Finally, Go the extra mile.**

Don't just be helpful. Be exceedingly so. Start by answering questions about your industry, products, and services, but go further. Give away information and advice. Potential customers sense when you're going the extra mile for them and will reward you with their patronage and loyalty. Once you've gained their appreciation and gratitude, you can deliver your call to action. Chances are, they will listen and respond.

Now that you've crafted compelling content, it's time to make sure that content is working for you as hard as possible through content syndication. By pushing your content out onto related third-party sites, content syndication increases exposure to your brand, boosts traffic to your website, and leverages every possible opportunity to grow your business.

**If you'd like to learn more about how to improve your content marketing strategy, feel free to send us a note at [b2bleads@netline.com](mailto:b2bleads@netline.com), or you can also reach us at 408.340.2200.**