

 : WHITEPAPER

# HOW TO LEVERAGE

CONTENT MARKETING TO POWER  
YOUR B2B MARKETING AUTOMATION FUNNEL

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# Introduction

Three of the most powerful weapons in modern B2B marketing’s arsenal are marketing automation, testing and optimization, and content marketing. Marketing automation and the ability to affordably test your brand messaging have reinvented B2B email marketing and the marketing funnel as we know it, but without killer content, marketing automation is a useless endeavor.

## In this whitepaper, you’ll learn:

- » How great content can power your funnel
  
- » Which types of content to use in the stages of your funnel
  
- » How to get the most out of the content you create
  
- » How to amplify and promote your content

Understand how content fuels your marketing automation funnel to capture more leads, improve conversion rates, create repeat customers and enhance the purchasing experience.

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CHAPTER 1

# Marketing Automation

If You Build It, They Will Come

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According to [Forrester Research](#), which defines “top-performing” companies as companies whose growth during the last fiscal year exceeded their plan, 58 percent of top-performing companies where marketing contributes more than half of the sales pipeline have adopted marketing automation.



Marketing automation transformed B2B marketing by enabling businesses, especially small and midsize businesses, to reach more people in a cost-effective, competitive manner. More importantly, marketing automation allows small and midsize businesses with fewer resources to set up automated campaigns, nurture sequences and repeat tasks that can move prospects through the marketing funnel. The marketing equivalent of Ron Popiel’s “set it and forget it” approach to cooking chicken, marketing automation lets you set your marketing on autopilot.

## Funnel 101

Most modern marketers have a good grasp on what makes up an effective marketing funnel, but for the uninitiated, here’s a quick primer.

The “funnel” is simply a visual representation of the consumer’s journey through the purchasing process, from prospect to customer and repeat customer. It’s a marketing model that traces its genesis back to the late 1890s and the Advertising Hall of Fame’s Elias St. Elmo Lewis’s AIDA model. AIDA is an acronym describing the things that occur when we successfully engage customers in marketing, advertising and sales. As anyone who’s ever seen [Alec Baldwin’s horrifying motivation speech](#) in “Glengarry Glen Ross,” in its simplest form, AIDA is:

A = Awareness    I = Interest    D = Desire    A = Action



Since the 1960s, marketers, sales professionals and advertisers have used the image of a funnel to visually represent the consumer's journey from awareness to taking action.

## TOFU, MOFU & BOFU: Marketing's Alphabet Soup

Why is a robust, optimized funnel so important to your B2B success? Because the average B2B buyer is 57 to 70 percent through the purchasing decision before they engage with a sales rep, according to [Google and the CEB](#). Add that to this finding of a [DemandGen survey](#):

"When comparing the eventual winning vendor to the rest of the considered vendors, 61 percent of respondents agreed that the winning vendor delivered a better mix of content appropriate for each stage of the purchasing process. This variety enables the vendor to touch on as many issues as possible that may capture a potential buyer's interest in a solution."

The same study went on to say,

"...66 percent of buyers agreed that the winning vendor provided higher-quality content and 63 percent said the winning vendor's content was more conducive to building a business case for the purchase."

The evidence is clear that an optimized funnel filled with great content increases your business's chance of success. So, let's take a look at what your funnel should be doing.

### TOFU

The top of the funnel (TOFU) is where the greatest number of prospects live. **People at the top of the funnel are looking for solutions to a particular problem.**

TOFU is your opportunity to capture the consumer’s attention and educate them on solutions to the problem they are trying to solve. It’s also where you can begin developing awareness of your brand, expertise and thought leadership.

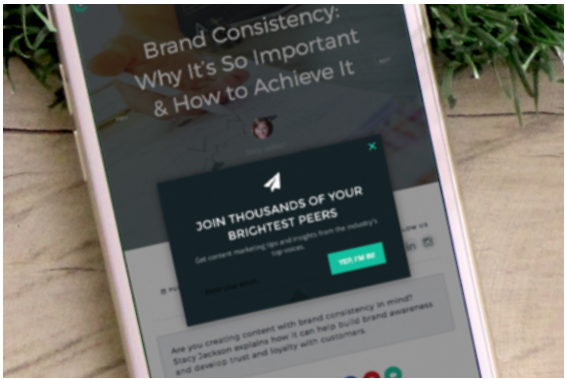
This can take the form of an email, infographic, blog, article or some other form of relevant and useful information. TOFU is abounding with emails, infographics and blog posts offering to share “10 Things All Successful...,” “The Top 5 Mistakes...,” “The 3 Most Important...,” and “How to \_\_\_ in 30 Days.” You’ve seen them all, but the bottom line is this: **Lists and how-to’s can be great TOFU content.**

Regardless of what you’re filling the top of your funnel with, the goal is to have keyword-rich (not stuffed) content that will pop up prominently in prospects’ search engine once they begin scouring the internet looking for answers.

## MOFUs & MQLs

It’s in the middle of the funnel (MOFU) where the marketing rubber meets the road. This is where we turn those who were simply seeking more information into Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs). **In TOFU, you present solutions; in MOFU, you present your company or product as the best solution.**

MQLs are now warm leads that specifically want more information on the solutions and products you have to offer. **Great TOFU content is critical to MOFU**, because it draws MQLs in with the perception that you are an expert and leader in your space. It’s also where we begin to share testimonials of happy and satisfied customers.



More importantly, MOFU is where we capture their contact information, once they raise their hand to subscribe to receive additional content such as a newsletter, ebook or whitepaper. You can also invite MQLs to sign up for webinars, consultations and free demos. This can be accomplished by a simple contact form that captures their name and email, or you can drive them to a landing page where you can capture even more detailed information.

Capturing their contact information enables you to create nurture campaigns that provide more information or offers that will continue to move them through your funnel. Though the goal of MOFU is to move MQLs down the funnel to becoming Sales Qualified Leads (SQLs), MOFU is also where you can begin making offers like discounts and free trials.

## BOFU and SQLs

Bottom of the funnel (BOFU) is for closers, because BOFU is where leads become Sales Qualified Leads (SQLs). **SQLs are hot leads that are just a decision away from becoming customers.** Someone at the bottom of the funnel is a highly qualified lead who is ready to buy. This is where you convince them that the best solution is to buy from you.



In the bottom of the funnel we find content that includes case studies, product sheets and more testimonials. If your funnel has been doing its job right up to this point, BOFU is where we close the deal. Time is vital here, because the faster we can get SQLs to a sales call or offer, the better your chances of turning that person into a customer (and then a repeat customer).

Once you start mapping out your funnel, you'll find that TOFU content will often blend into MOFU content, and MOFU will overlap with BOFU, but don't make the mistake most do and muck up your website with a ton of BOFU offers. **People coming to your site to purchase will know where to look**, but most visitors are still in the top and middle of the funnel. In the middle of the funnel, it's OK to offer consumers the option of either more MOFU content or a BOFU offer that can lead to a sale or sales contact.



# Ageless & Evergreen

Of course, you don't want to create individual content for different areas of the funnel in a vacuum. **Successful content creators approach the creation of content with an understanding of how it works within the funnel as a whole.** As Stephen R. Covey wrote in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Begin with the end in mind."

- » Create TOFU content with a clear understanding of where you want it to lead the consumer
- » Create BOFU content with a clear understanding of what got them there

**Uniformity of messaging across all levels of the funnel binds your content and creates a more cohesive, consistent and recognizable brand presence.**

At every stage of the funnel, you should be creating [evergreen content](#). Relevant and timeless content is cost-effective and a far more efficient use of resources — and it keeps you from constantly having to create new content. It also helps build stronger SEO.

You should also look at all content with an eye toward [repurposing](#). Ask yourself:

- » Can some of your blog posts be combined to create an ebook?
- » What content can be shortened for email?
- » Are you editing longer videos or webinar content to create more easily consumed and shared video content?



A survey by the [Lenskold and Pedowitz groups](#) found companies that adopt marketing automation are 45 percent more likely to repurpose content for efficiency than companies that don't.



# Automation... Fueled by Content

Properly set-up funnels guide consumers, regardless of where they are in the funnel, step-by-step to becoming a customer. The value to business is that once you set up your campaigns, marketing automation leads potential consumers through the funnel for you, automatically. It then continues to nurture prospects who fail to take action, so you can eventually convert them into customers as well. Those who don't buy, can simply be removed from the list or saved for a re-engagement campaign later.

And if your content isn't any good, all the automation in the world won't save you.

CHAPTER 2

# Types of Content

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When it comes to types of content, you have a lot of great options to choose from. Let's take a look at what's out there.



## Email

Email is king. The [Forrester report](#) cited earlier states that email was reported as the single most-effective lead-nurturing tactic employed by top-performing B2B marketers. And remember, Forrester defines top-performers as those whose annual revenue exceeded their goals.

But the proof of email's dominance of the content landscape doesn't end there. Consider the following:

- » According to the [Direct Marketing Association](#), 66 percent of people have made an online purchase as the result of an email marketing message
- » Consumers ranked email the top communication channel for initial introduction to a product or service, for learning about a product or service, and for post-purchase follow-up about a product or service, the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) found
- » [Epsilon Email Institute](#) reported that triggered email messages, emails deployed as a direct result of the consumer's actions (welcome, thank you, abandoned shopping cart, etc.) have open rates 76.7 percent higher than business-as-usual messages, and click-thru rates 151.9 percent higher than business-as-usual emails

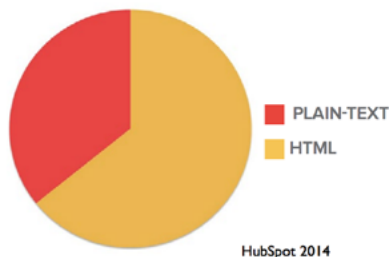
And the numbers are just as impressive when it comes to sharing and social media:

- » [McKinsey & Company](#) reports that email is 40 times more effective at acquiring customers than Facebook and Twitter combined
- » Add that to the findings of the [DemandGen survey](#) cited earlier, which found 88 percent of B2B buyers use email to share content, while 43 percent use LinkedIn and 35 percent use Twitter

The most important thing to remember with TOFU emails is that they're for educating the consumer, not selling. People at the top of the funnel are generally not ready to buy; they're looking for information to a specific question or problem. In fact, any perceived attempt at selling will likely make your content suspect and drive the buyer away.

The next question is whether your email should be plain text or HTML. This debate has raged for years, with passionate arguments to be made on both sides, but consider the findings in "[Plain Text vs. HTML Emails: Which Is Better? \[New Data\]](#)." In a 2014 survey, almost two-thirds of respondents said they preferred HTML and image-based emails, but when HubSpot put the results to the test, the opposite proved true.

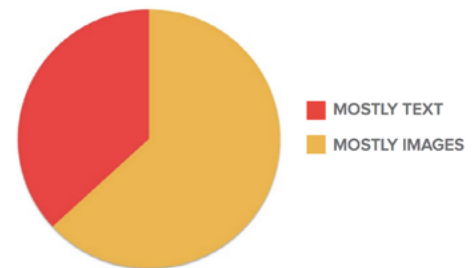
### IN WHAT FORMAT DO YOU PREFER TO RECEIVE EMAIL MESSAGES FROM COMPANIES?



In both the 2011 and the 2014 versions of this survey question, results were similar, with the majority of respondents (64% in 2014) indicating that they prefer HTML-based (rich-text) emails.

On the other hand, this also means that the number of people who prefer plain-text emails hasn't changed, either, so you need to **optimize for both**.

### SURVEY: DO YOU PREFER THAT EMAILS FROM COMPANIES CONTAIN MOSTLY IMAGES OR MOSTLY TEXT?



Not only did the HTML emails have lower open rates than their plain-text counterparts, but:

- » The A/B testing also showed that the more HTML-rich an email was, the lower its open rate
- » Adding GIFs decreased open rates by 37 percent
- » HTML emails had 25 percent lower opens than plain text emails
- » HTML emails with increasing amounts of HTML had 23 percent lower opens than HTML emails with less

Brevity is best in emails, as are minimal links. Bullet point information you want to emphasize or create a sidebar to highlight the desired action.

Most importantly, **have a clear call to action** that offers useful information to the consumer, regardless of whether or not they ever become a customer. How-to lists and free ebooks, whitepapers and webinars are great for driving them into the middle of the funnel.

Though you shouldn't sell, it is OK to include a phone number in case the reader has questions or wants specific information from you or about your product or service.

## Blog Posts

Blogging is critical — mandatory, even. Blog posts fuel both your email and social media marketing, and it's a powerful tool for building brand presence, establishing yourself as a thought leader, generating leads and increasing SEO.



All great [content marketing strategies](#) begin with specific goals of what they want to accomplish and a solid understanding of the target they want to reach. Developing strong content (and a lot of it) is only going to be successful if you know your audience, know yourself, and have a clear picture of what you are both trying to achieve.

Once you are aligned with your target, it's time to create content. Luckily, you already have great resources at your command. If you don't know where to start, begin by repurposing content you already have.

- » Ebooks and previously published articles can be broken down to create multiple blog posts — in fact, an ebook can provide weeks or months of great content
- » Case studies can also be turned into blog content; use their stories to present consumer problems your product or service offers a solution to

- » Employees are a great way to build your content library fast — ask them to offer their unique perspective on what it is your company brings to the market
- » Listicles and how-to's are still popular blog content — “5 Things You Should Know About X” and “3 Mistakes You're Probably Making With Y”-style headlines cast a wide net that can grow your audience and strengthen your SEO
- » Guest bloggers not only help fill out your content calendar, they're also a great way to expand your network and area of influence
- » Presentations are also easily convertible into great blog content; look through your SlideShares and PowerPoints with an eye toward blogging, and you'll be surprised at how much good content bubbles to the surface
- » Look to your readers for subject matter they're interested in, and if you don't see subjects naturally arising out of readers comments, ask them what their interested in — you'll get a blog post out of the ask, and multiple blog posts out of the responses

When you understand your goals, your target and their needs, strong content will present itself. Here are some additional ways to [find ideas for blog content](#).

**Above all else, be bold.** Don't be afraid to take a stand. Don't be afraid to be provocative or controversial. Don't offend, but presenting new ideas and approaches is an effective way to stand out in the overpopulated blogging crowd.



## Social Media

Social media posts are another critical type of content. As the number of global social media users grows — that number is projected to reach [2.5 billion users by 2018](#) — the importance of a robust social media presence grows right along with it.

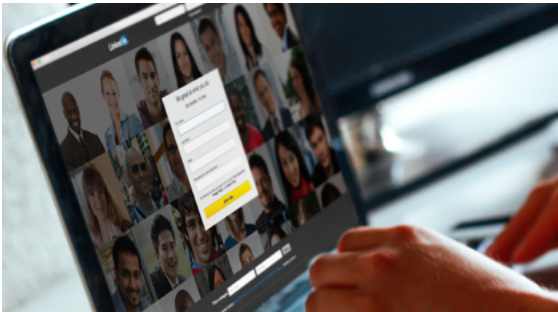


Content types that work well for social media include:

- » Blog posts (especially listicles)
- » Infographics, images and other strong visual content
- » Quizzes and other interactive content
- » Contests

When the digital marketing company [Regalix](#) asked B2B tech marketers to identify their top social media platforms for product launch:

- » 81 percent said LinkedIn
- » 71 percent said Twitter
- » 54 percent each mentioned Facebook



**LinkedIn** was also cited as the most popular social channel for B2B marketers to distribute content on in a [Direct Marketing Association](#) survey. LinkedIn Pulse is the network's publishing platform, and it has its own nuances, audience and tone. [Long-form content](#) does well here.

With **Twitter**, of course, you only have 140 characters to state your piece. Use them to link to original blog content — in fact, 16 percent of referrals to longer articles from social sites come from Twitter, according to [Pew Research Center](#). Marketers also create and post [Twitter cards](#) to link to their original content.

Seventy-six percent of B2B marketers distribute content via **Facebook**, according to the [2017 B2B Content Marketing Trends report](#) from Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs. [Facebook Instant Articles](#) is a product that enables publishers to quickly create interactive articles on Facebook, similar to LinkedIn's Pulse. It's now open to all publishers.

Shoutout to **Medium** for rising through the ranks in the past year. Eight percent of marketers plan on adding Medium to their marketing efforts, according to [HubSpot](#). The platform has earned a reputation as a place where thoughtful, intelligent people gather to read long-form content, and it even boasts its own [space for B2B marketers](#) to publish content.

## Whitepapers

According to a 2016 [DemandGen](#) survey, 82 percent of buyers relied heavily on whitepapers when making B2B purchasing decisions. Additionally, 79 percent of the same respondents said whitepapers were the content they were most likely to share.

The brainy big brother of ebooks, **whitepapers are the perfect vehicle for demonstrating your expertise** and setting you apart as a true industry thought leader. Whitepapers tend to be longer, more formal and more data-driven than ebooks. They usually require a longer time to produce, but that doesn't mean they should look or be boring.



Maybe the single most valuable aspect of the whitepaper is that, and in large part because of their reputation for being text-heavy, data-driven and more in-depth, they are consumed largely by decision-makers with high BS meters. That's one of the most important reasons you can't give whitepapers the short shrift. Whitepapers by nature must display a credible level of gravitas. **Nothing else you produce will carry as much weight at establishing you as real thought leader than a detailed, well-written and coherent whitepaper.**

A great whitepaper begins with a relevant topic targeted at a specific audience. This is not the time to fake it 'til you make it. Know your subject matter backward and forward. And be sure and **back it up with data, graphs and other authoritative sources**. Of course, the secret to great whitepapers is found in the ability to distill what can be more complex subject matter into an easily consumed and easy-to-understand final product.

# Ebooks

So, what's the difference between an ebook and a whitepaper?

- » Most ebooks tend to be lighter reads covering a more generalized subject matter
- » Where whitepapers are data- and content-heavy, ebooks can and should be more easily consumed and skimmable
- » Ebooks also tend to be more conversational in tone and much more visual and graphics- filled

Some ebooks are so design-intensive that they begin to take on the look and feel of a PowerPoint presentation or a graphic novel. They are less intimidating and more visually inviting, which is why they are so successful at attracting a broader audience.

Look at these three free marketing ebooks:

- » Optimizely's "[The Optimization Survival Guide](#)" is 47 pages, but all of the content is provided through 1-2 paragraph contributions from individual experts on the Optimizely team
- » Unbounce's "[Attention-Driven Design](#)" for creating more effective landing pages is over 60 pages but relies heavily on graphics
- » Conversely, Marketo's "[Conversations Not Campaigns](#)," takes a more traditional text-driven approach to its content, but it's only 13 pages and presents the copy in easy-to-consume bites

All three ebooks are free; all three provide valuable information to marketers; and all do a great job of capturing leads.



**Lastly, ebooks are great for repurposing.** Chapters can be broken down to become blog posts. Likewise, multiple blog posts can be combined to create ebooks. Or, as in the case of the Optimizely ebook and Seth Godin's "[What Matters Now](#)," they can draw their content from the submissions of many contributors. There are many options for producing ebook content without you or someone else having to spend days and days in front of your keyboard.

## Case Studies

Nothing adds credibility and proof of the effectiveness of your product or service better than someone else telling your story for you, which is why case studies are perfect bottom-of-the-funnel content.

[Infusionsoft](#) does a great job of highlighting customer success stories, starting on their homepage. You can reach "Success Stories" from the menu, plus several stories are highlighted at the bottom of the page.



Once you arrive at the case studies page, you immediately see more than a dozen success stories. Each one is clickable, taking you to their individual success story, which is an engaging and easily understood combination of video, graphics and text. Here are some tips to get you started with case studies:

- » **Do you have testimonials on your website's homepage?** If not, start there. Then pepper them throughout the rest of your site, emails and landing pages to support specific features, benefits and services.

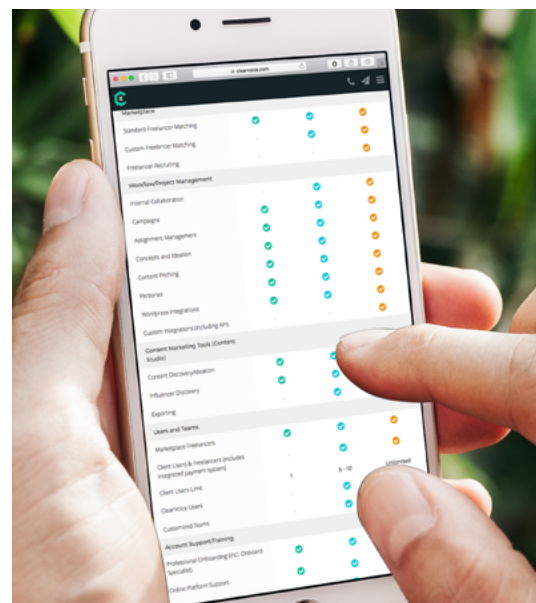
- » **What about dedicated landing pages and web pages?** Use these pages to tell the customer’s story in greater detail. Regardless of whether you label it “Success Stories,” “Case Studies,” “What Others Are Saying,” etc., this is where you can use real experiences and results to paint a much more complete picture of what their problem was, the goals they hoped to achieve, the solution you offered and the resulting success. This is where prospects can best see themselves in your existing customers — and best see how you can produce similar results and success for them.
- » **Include case studies in your blogs and articles.** First explain the challenges the consumer was facing, and then show how they overcame them with your help.
- » **Video is one of the most effective ways of sharing a customer success story.** Whether it’s a more detailed story lasting several minutes or a series of short testimonials lasting 10 seconds each, few things are more powerful than real people sharing real stories. Plus, you can use them on your homepage, throughout your website, and on dedicated testimonial and landing pages. They’re also great for social media and are easily viewable on all devices.

Create a library of these files, so members of your sales and marketing teams can easily access specific case studies for use in their emails, nurture campaigns, newsletters, presentations, webinars and on social media.

## Product Sheets

Great product sheets have four things in common:

- » They know their target
- » They know what’s most important
- » They know they can’t say everything
- » They have a strong understanding of the human eye





Einstein's advice to "Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler," should be the mantra of anyone creating product sheets.

So many product sheets fail due to lack of a hierarchy of messaging, combined with a blinding visual mishmash of too much information. When creating any product sheet, what's most important is this: **Know where you want people to look first, then drive their gaze there.**

Look at the Fitbit product sheet below. Odds are:

- » Your eyes first go to the beauty shot of the watch
- » Then bounce momentarily up to the logo and name
- » Before dropping back down to read the positioning copy that distinguishes it from the competition



The eye is then naturally drawn down to the additional product shots before moving to the list of features in the right-side column where we finish on the price. It's the perfect marriage of form and function, art and science.

The back side begins by going into greater detail about the features and benefits extolled in the positioning paragraph on the front side, then down to the upsells and additional features and benefits. Everything is set beautifully in its place. As simple as possible, but not simpler.

Most B2B product sheets won't have the brand recognition of Fitbit, so you'll want to add:

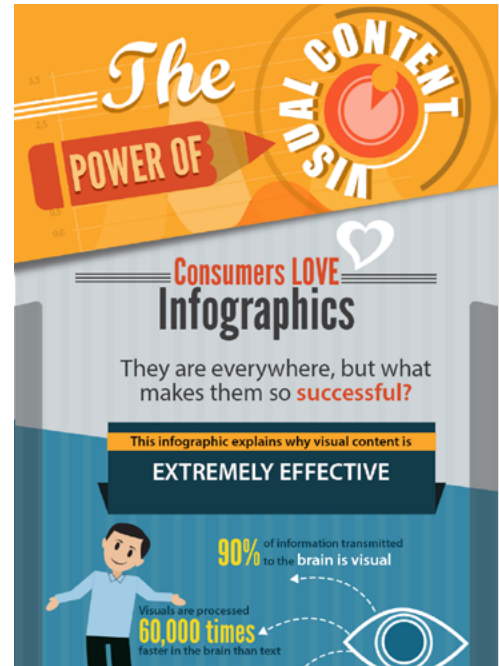
- » Social proof in the form of a testimonial or some kind of an expert endorsement
- » A clear call to action
- » Contact info



# Infographics

Humans are visual animals; we retain more of what we see. More importantly, we share what we see. [Take a look at this infographic from Marketing Domination Media.](#)

Infographics are great for **distilling complex thoughts and data into easily consumable content**. When done well, few things are more effective. The mistake most infographics make is they are poorly designed and try to do too much. The end result is just visual noise.



When you have clear messaging and a great designer, infographics are a great, highly shareable content vehicle for your TOFU messaging.

# Webinars

B2B marketers rank webinars just behind product demos as the **most effective method for lead-generation marketing**, according to BtoB Magazine's "[2013 Lead Generation: Optimum Techniques for Managing Lead-Gen Campaigns](#)" report.

Webinars are to the middle of the funnel what infographics are to the top. That's because, like infographics, they're great at visually conveying information and generating qualified leads.

Live webinars also have the added advantage of letting you interact with consumers in a way other types of content don't. Then there's the added advantage of being able to be repurpose your webinar as streaming content that can live in your funnel for years. And with today's technology, they are also affordable.

The key to successful webinars is **clear, focused messaging and a strong, compelling call to action**.

# Video

A marketing strategy that doesn't include video is severely lacking. Consider these stats:

- » Brands that use video increase revenue 49 percent faster than those that don't ([Vidyard](#))
- » Companies using video reported seeing an average cost per marketing-generated lead of \$93, as compared to \$115 for companies that didn't use video ([Aberdeen](#))
- » Using the word "video" in an email subject line boosts open rates by 19 percent and click-thru rates by 65 percent ([Syndacast](#))

As [Mark Zuckerberg told](#) the German newspaper *Die Welt am Sonntag* in early 2016, "I think video is a mega trend, almost as big as mobile."

Video is effective and popular content at all stages of the funnel. Create:

- » How-to videos, thought leadership video blogs and videos that showcase company culture at the top of the funnel
- » Product demos and video case studies in the middle of the funnel
- » Post-sale instructional videos, product FAQs and videos tied to drip campaigns at the bottom of the funnel
- » Testimonials work at any level of your funnel

The beauty of video is that it has become far more cost-effective. Full-length feature films are now being shot on smartphones. Your laptop has a camera. Your phone has a camera. A good one. With free editing software and a modest investment in a low- or mid-priced camera, and yes, even with the newest model smartphones, everyone can shoot and edit broadcast-quality video. Of course, for many products, it's worth the investment to hire professionals, but the barrier to entry has been lowered dramatically.

CHAPTER 3

# Content Use Cases

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Now that you're more familiar with the types of content that can power your marketing automation, let's take a look at some specific ways they are used.

## Email Subscriber Program

When it comes to TOFU content, your email subscriber program is your chief player. And **people at the TOFU are looking for information**, not calls to action to buy.

This is where someone visiting your website, reading your blog or consuming other content has raised their hand to be on your mailing list to receive more information such as newsletters, blog posts, how-to's and upcoming event information. These are emails that are scheduled to go out on a regular basis.



Though almost every type of content can be appropriate for your subscriber program, by far the most common TOFU content will be your blog articles. These are great because they drive the customer to your blog for valuable content, where they can also receive additional offers for ebooks, whitepapers and other free content that will drive them into the middle of the funnel.

Though there shouldn't be formal calls-to-action here, your signature should contain contact information and a soft CTA link to a free demo, test drive or more information specific to your product or offer. This usually takes the form of a P.S. or a simple sentence along the lines of, "Start your free demo and find out how quickly we can help grow your business."

## Email Education Drip

Education drips are (obviously) for educating the consumer, so you can use every form of content previously discussed, depending on where and when the content falls in the drip.

Unlike a subscriber program, where information is sent out on a regular, recurring schedule, a drip campaign sends out emails based on:

- » Predetermined time intervals
- » The action taken by the lead
- » Or a combination of both



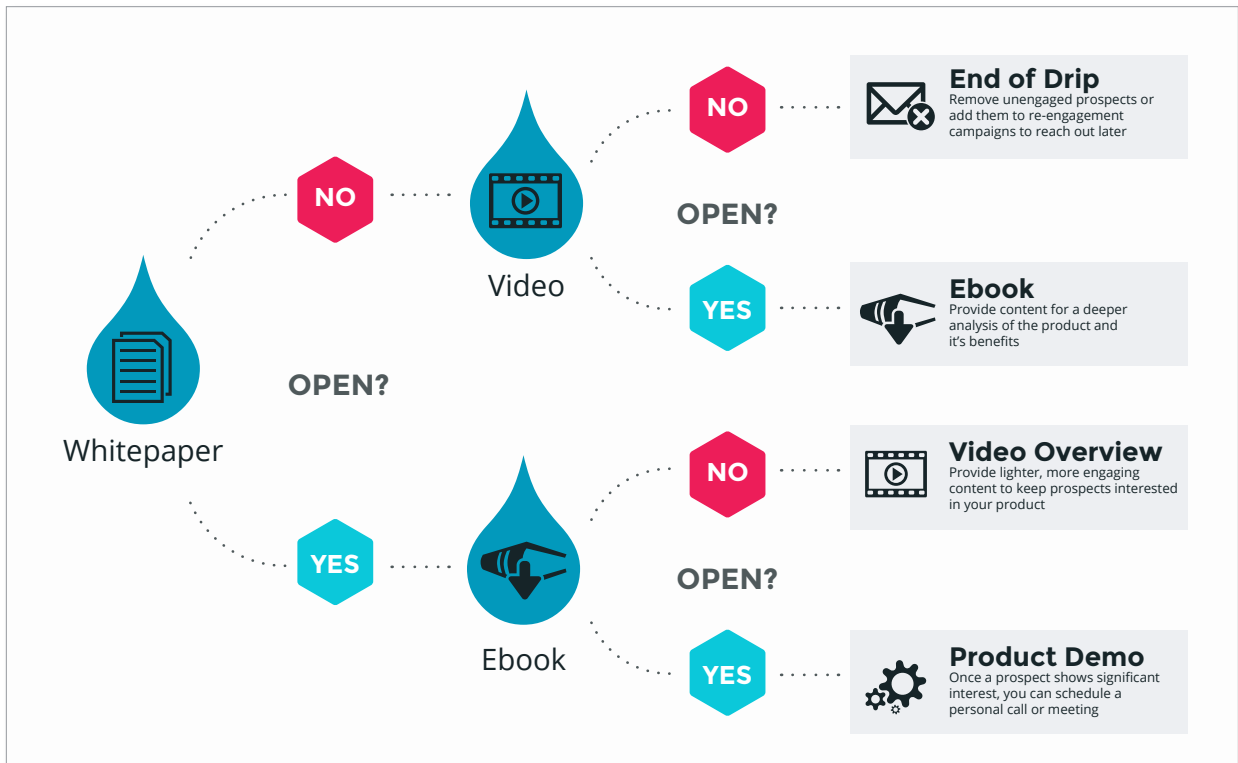
This is an efficient use of your resources, because it means you can automatically nurture prospects from the top of the funnel to the bottom, without involving members of your sales and marketing teams until the lead is ready to buy.

You should already have an understanding of who's responding to your marketing, and an added benefit of an education drip is that the triggering action gives even more specific information about what the lead is interested in. This allows you to be more focused and specific when choosing which content will be most effective for subsequent emails.

Let's take a look at a basic education drip:

- » Say that the triggering event for the drip was the lead asking for a whitepaper about the effectiveness of A/B testing
- » You know they're interested in testing, so if they open the whitepaper, you can follow up by sending them an invite to a webinar that dives a little deeper into the subject
- » If they don't open the whitepaper, you automatically send them an easier-to-consume video or ebook on the same topic.

Here's an example about how you could map out one such a drip campaign:



Those responding positively to each new piece of content will be eventually be guided to the bottom of the funnel and an offer of a demo or special discount. Those who remain unresponsive to all offers will stop receiving emails altogether, while those in the middle of the funnel will be guided down different nurture paths that will either end at the bottom of the funnel or an end to the drip.

The bottom line is this: A well-designed education drip **triggers the most relevant content according to a lead's specific desires and actions**. That's important, because triggered email messages get [151.9 percent higher click-thru rates](#) than business-as-usual messages, Epsilon reports.

The point of an education drip is to educate, so make sure you're sending new and valuable content that provides the lead with **additional, relevant information** at every stage of the drip. Don't make the mistake of rewrapping the same gift in a different box by simply rewording the same offer and information in every email.



# Cold Sales Nurture Drip

This drip campaign is designed for leads that have gone cold. These are generally leads who are familiar with your company and have directly engaged with you in the past.

Because it's safe to assume they know your company, these emails should take on a more personal tone than other campaigns might. Make them plain text emails from a sales or marketing rep. Because the lead is already familiar with you, the content you use can be much more product/service-specific.

Here's an example of what a simple four-email drip may look like and the types of content you may employ:

- » **Email 1:** Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Here's some information (ebook, infographic, product video) I thought you'd like. Take a look and give me a call.
- » **Email 2:** Hi. Me again. Here's a real-world example of how we can help (case study video). When's a good time to talk? P.S. I also included a link to a (whitepaper, webinar, ebook).
- » **Email 3:** Me again. Don't know if you had a chance to take a look at what I sent before, but we have an amazing offer right now that is ending soon. And here's a link to (whitepaper, product sheet) I thought you'd like.
- » **Email 4:** I get it. As much as I hate seeing you miss out on this offer, I can take a hint. I don't want to waste either of our time, so this will be my last follow-up. Best of luck, and feel free to call me when you think you're ready.

Your drip may include fewer emails or more, but you get the general progression.

Though there are exceptions to every rule, these emails are best kept to two to three short paragraphs. Use catchy and informal subject lines. For example:

- » Email 1 could begin with a subject line like, "Saw this and thought of you"
- » Subsequent subject lines could be along the lines of "Checking in," "Just wanted to follow up," and "When's a good time to chat?"

- » If they've tried a demo of your product before, try a subject line like, "Things have changed" and include content that speaks to new product enhancements

Don't be afraid to use their name in the subject line, and remember to keep the copy, tone and subject lines personal.

## Lead Sales Nurture Drip

Sales nurturing is about building relationships and rapport. By now you have a grasp of drip dynamics, so let's take a look at what content works best for nurturing sales leads.

**Begin your drip** with educational content like a blog post, whitepaper or other useful content that also supports and demonstrates the value of your product. For the purposes of this ebook:

- » Assume that all the emails we're discussing are plain text emails coming from someone in your organization
- » They should look and feel like personal emails that were written by the sender
- » The key here isn't to sell, but rather to establish yourself and your company as a reputable and reliable source of information

In all drips, when you send each email is important, but that will be discussed in a later section. Here we are simply focusing on which content is more effective and appropriate during different stages of the drip.

**The next email** in the drip could be in the form of a "checking-in" email that serves as a follow-up to the previous email. It's also a great opportunity to offer additional content that adds to the content in the first email. It could be another blog post, a webinar or a case study — any content that supports and builds upon the content in the first email.

**The following email** could link to another blog post, ebook or video designed to push them further down the funnel toward making a decision.

At this point, the hottest leads have been opening your emails and reading your content. If they haven't reached out to you yet, now would be the time to put them on a different drip sequence designed to move them to the bottom of the funnel.

If they haven't been reading the content, it's probably time to send them a final check-in email and end the drip.

## MQL Nurture Drip



Remember when we discussed the Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL) earlier? An MQL is simply someone who has raised their hand to receive some type of marketing content.

And remember when we discussed the funnel? It's important to remember that the middle of the funnel gets progressively narrower toward the bottom, and the content within MOFU should do the same. That is to say, the further along the funnel they go, the more the content becomes more specific to your product offering.

For example, say someone at the top of funnel had responded to earlier emails by reading a blog in one email, clicking on a link to an infographic in another, and then raised their hand to receive an ebook or whitepaper. The action of raising their hand has made them an MQL and triggers moving them into a new drip, similar to the one discussed in the section on Education Drips — a drip that will continue to guide them through the funnel based on their actions. Ideally, it will lead them to the bottom of the funnel and a sale.

**The first email they'll receive** in this drip is a "thank you" email that provides them the link to requested content. At this point, they should be regarding you as a trusted authority, so the content here — be it ebook, whitepaper, webinar or testimonial video — should provide information specific to whatever problem they're trying to solve, and more specifically, how you can help solve the problem for them.

**Those who don't open emails** will be guided down a pathway that will either re-engage them or result in the end of the drip.

**Likewise, opening content triggers** the sending of more detailed, product-specific content. If they open the whitepaper, they may receive a video or webinar. A positive response to that will probably result in offering a test drive, free trial, consultation or product demo — something that will move them to becoming a Sales Qualified Lead (SQL) at the bottom of the funnel.

## SQL Nurture Drip

These are your hottest leads. They are primed to buy and the faster you can get them to a salesperson, the better your chances of converting them into a customer. Your offer(s) of a free trial, consultation, evaluation or test drive enticed the customer into trying your product or service. Now it's up to a salesperson and/or a strong offer to close the deal.

Leads that don't convert to a sale can remain in your subscription program, where one of two things will happen:

- » Your content keeps you top-of-mind for when they are ready to buy
- » Or, they'll simply become cold and saved for a cold lead nurture campaign, in which you may be able to re-engage them at a later date

CHAPTER 4

# Content Intelligence

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So you've created great content, but what's it worth if it's not being seen by the right people in the right place — if it's being seen at all? The fact is, more than half of B2B marketers have no idea if the content they're creating is working. According to the 2017 "B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends— North America" report, only 41 percent of B2B marketers say their organization is clear on what content marketing success looks like.

Enter content intelligence.

Google "content intelligence" and if you're lucky, you'll find a simplified definition along the lines of, "a combination of semantic technology and information science."

For the purposes of this discussion, think of content intelligence as a deep dive through your current data and content to find the data and insights that will enable you to create more valuable and effective content.

**Content intelligence sifts through your content and content performance** to tell you things like:

- » Who your actual audience is
- » How they're consuming your content
- » Where they're consuming your content
- » Key phrases and words they're looking for to find it

Content intelligence is your single most powerful tool for bridging the chasm between what businesses think they know and what customers actually want and experience.

Let's take a look at three kinds of content intelligence you can put to work for you right now.

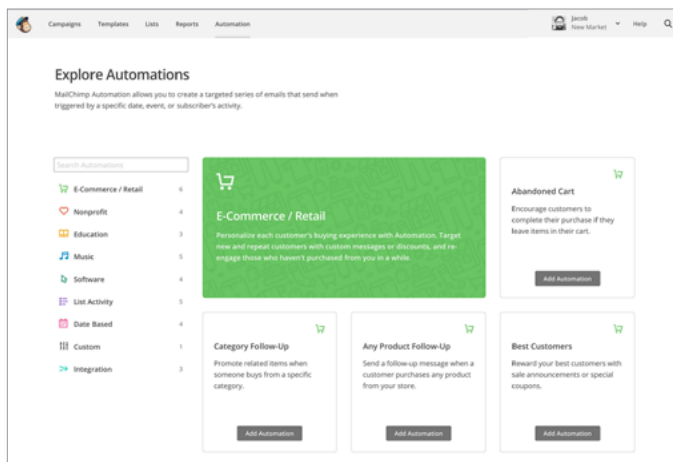


# 1. Timing

When it comes to content distribution, timing really is everything. How often should you be delivering content, and when is the best time or day to deliver it? Is Friday better than Monday? Is morning better than afternoon? Does it differ depending on the type of content? Does it differ depending on the type of drip?

Numerous studies have looked at this data, including:

- » [MailChimp's](#) send time optimization data
- » [Customer.io's](#) study on the best day to send emails
- » [WordStream's](#) data on the best time to send email newsletters
- » [HubSpot's](#) report on the the best times and days to send business emails



These studies provide a great starting point, but real success comes from understanding exactly where and when your specific subscribers are responding to your content.

Companies like [MailChimp](#), [iContact](#) and [HubSpot](#) not only give you open rates, but they can also tell you who opened what, when they opened it, and exactly what they clicked on after

they did. Just as important, they can tell you what content isn't working for certain targets or simply not working at all. **Gather this data and use it to inform your distribution timing strategy moving forward.**

Timing also refers to when and where specific content falls in your funnel, and one of the most important tools at your disposal here is an editorial calendar. Creating an editorial calendar lets you align your delivery to your goals and resources. Use it to map out your strategy and plan for the content you need.

Different types of content and drips have differing frequencies of delivery. A newsletter may go out once a week or once a month. A blog once a day. And the length of pauses between emails in a drip could be anywhere from one to 30 days, again, depending on the specific goals of specific campaigns. A calendar lets you track all this, as well as plan for guest bloggers and [influencer partnerships](#).

To create a content calendar, you can use any of the many free templates available or build one in a spreadsheet. Your best bet is to use content marketing software such as [ClearVoice](#), which has an editorial calendar built right in. This way, you can plan and manage your calendar in the same platform where you ideate, create and dispatch assignments and collaborate with writers and editors.

Best practices are a great starting point, but they're just that — a starting point. In the end, **data will tell you what's really working and what's not**. Listen to the data, then test, optimize and test again. The email marketing service you're using may provide A/B testing, or you can employ services like [Optimizely](#) to see which content is working better than others, as well as for whom and where.

## 2. Relevancy

Arguably the single biggest key to content success is the ability to deliver relevant content. In fact, [72 percent of marketers](#) in an Ascend2 survey said that creating relevant content is the most effective SEO tactic. In an age where it's easy to unfollow or unsubscribe from brands, you have to be hypervigilant about understanding what content you're sending to whom. That's relevancy.

With content relevancy tools, you can find out:

- » The words, questions and phrases associated with your target keywords
- » The demographic information about the people asking the questions
- » How customers are engaging with your content (and that of your competition)

Knowing what works and what people want will help you consistently create timely, relevant content that people will consume and share.

[Google Analytics](#) is the best tool here. Google Analytics can tell you:

- » Which content is driving the most traffic and conversions
- » What your best- and worst-performing content is
- » What people are searching for on your site and what they're clicking on once they get there
- » And much more — it can even be coded to check your email open rates



[ClearVoice Content Studio](#) is another content intelligence tool. Use it to search for content by keyword or topic, and then sort the results by date, publication or social shares to learn which content performs best online. It also helps you brainstorm ideas for content by seeing what's trending in your industry and identifying the top influencers in your field.

### 3. Context

When it comes to context in content intelligence, it's all about the journey, not the destination. Presenting content out of context, regardless of how good it is, is like asking the buyer to navigate New York City with a map of Chicago. Lack of context creates a missing link in your content marketing chain.

We touched on context a bit in the section on relevance. Context is about presenting content that is consistent with previous content and consistent with the content they'll receive next. Lack of consistency and context creates confusion, and confusion rarely results in conversions.

Understanding context begins with understanding your target audience and their behaviors, then using the data you find to more successfully engage and influence them through their buying journey. For example:

- » Does your content reflect the SEO keywords and phrases they search for and respond to?
- » Does your content reflect the content they like to consume?
- » Are you using geo-location targeting?
- » Are your guest bloggers and influencers the ones your targets follow and listen to?

Google Analytics can tell you what's driving traffic, and your email marketing service can give you a lot of data as to what's working, when it's working and for whom it's working, but you may also want to employ a heatmapping service like those provided by [Crazy Egg](#), [Clicktale](#) or [Lucky Orange](#).

A heatmap takes the guesswork out of trying to figure out how customers are engaging your content. It shows you what people are moving their mouse to, what they're clicking on and what they're trying to click on. Some of the services even provide video recordings of every visit, so you can see exactly how consumers are engaging with your content. Heatmaps offer a clear picture of what people want to see, what they care about and what they don't.

Content intelligence is as close as marketing comes to mind reading. If you follow the data, content intelligence can allow you to meet the consumer where they are, with what they want, exactly when they want it. Ignore it at your peril, because great content only has value if it's being read by the right person, in the right place, at the right time.

CHAPTER 5

# Amplification and Promotion

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Visit [Worldometers](#) to see how many blog posts have been written so far today, the day you're reading this. The day we published this, it was over 3 million. That's a lot of competition for eyeballs.

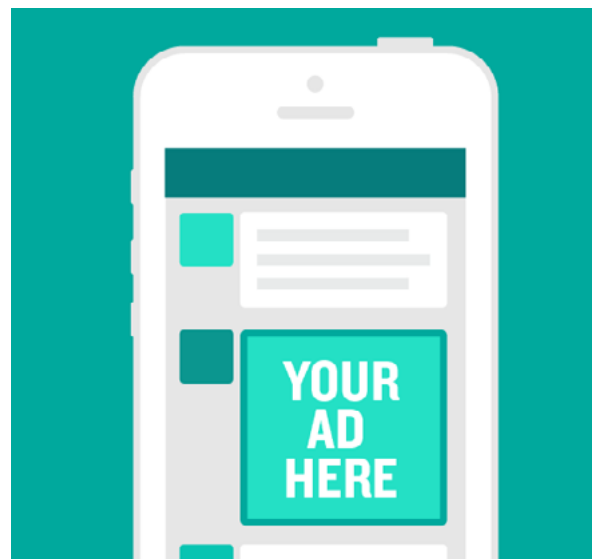
Enter amplification and promotion, the processes by which you will help your content reach a wider audience. Below you'll find some of the most proven and effective ways to amplify your reach.

## Paid Social (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)

If you're hesitant to use social media to amplify and promote your content, consider the following:

- » 72 percent of adult U.S. internet users visit Facebook at least once a month, according to a Pew Research Center [report](#)
- » 313 million people are considered [active monthly users on Twitter](#)
- » 106 million users [log in to LinkedIn](#) each month

Paid social is exactly that — the ads you see on social media that are labeled “sponsored” or “promoted,” and they can increase your reach significantly. With just a little effort and money, you can take the information gathered through content intelligence and buy advertising that targets those most likely to be interested in your product or service. Social networks will only promote your ads and articles when and where your target audience is most likely looking.



# Email List Rental/Borrowing

According to a [MarketingSherpa survey](#), 72 percent of consumers chose email when asked how they prefer companies communicate with them.

However, most experts agree that paying for an email list is a bad idea (for more on why, read [this HubSpot post](#) or [this one from OptinMonster](#)). A better idea: renting or borrowing an email list.

What's that? That's when you ask a brand with a significant, relevant audience to send its own subscribers an email, one that encourages them to subscribe to your newsletter, download one of your gated assets, etc. This can work two ways — you can pay the brand to do this, which is considered list *renting*, or you trade the favor, which is list *borrowing*. Both can help you grow your own list quickly and substantially.

# Native Advertising

According to a 2016 [study](#), consumers interact with native ads 20 to 60 percent more than they do with standard banner ads, and The New York Times [reports](#) that their readers spend the same amount of time on paid native posts as they do on news stories.

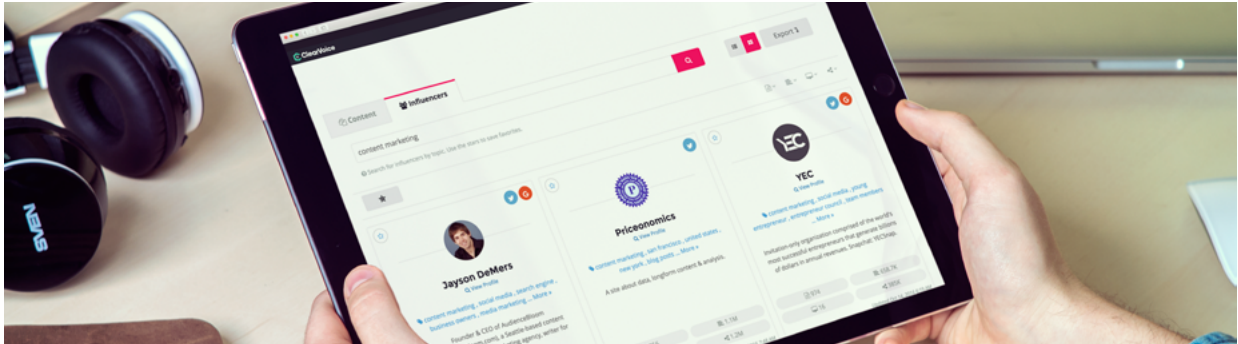
So, what is native advertising?

Think of the infomercials and advertorials that look like news programs, talk shows and print news stories. Those are classic examples of native advertising. Today, native advertising companies like [Outbrain](#) and [Taboola](#) promote your content to the top sites online, then redesign your content to conform to the editorial standards of where it appears.

Native advertising is a kind of content camouflage that makes your content look and feel like the ads, articles and content surrounding them. Your blogs and articles look like the articles, stories and ads consumers would expect to find on the site they're visiting. And even though they may be subtly labeled as some form of sponsored content, they are most often not recognized as sponsored content by the reader and are more likely to be consumed.

Besides the benefit of reaching a larger audience, the other great thing about native advertising is that when consumers engage your native ad or article, it drives the traffic to your blog or site.

Native advertising enables you to present your content to a greater audience, on premium websites, in a nonintrusive way. The end result is more eyes, bigger brand awareness, and a higher probability of consumer engagement.



## Influencer Marketing

[Influencer marketing](#) is when you partner with people who have public sway and an audience similar to yours and get them to recommend your product or service across their sphere of social influence. A successful influencer campaign begins by [identifying the influencers](#) who create and share content that is relevant to your target audience as well.

Next you'll want to develop a relationship with them. Do this by:

- » Following them on social media
- » Liking, linking, retweeting and sharing their content
- » With a little luck, they may begin talking about you on their own, but more than likely you're going to have to pay for their praise

A typical influencer campaign will have them evangelizing for you on their personal social channels and in the content they create. This can be an effective way to grow your brand, credibility and audience.



# Conclusion

Seth Godin once suggested that content marketing is the only marketing left, and we believe he's right. The good news is, there are lots of resources out there to help you.

Here are some tips to remember when creating content to fuel your marketing funnel:

- » Know your audience. Know yourself. Who are you trying to reach? What are you trying to accomplish?
- » Draw from experience, expertise and knowledge of your staff, guest bloggers and influencers
- » Take advantage of the sea of technology, talented writers and services that can help you create, manage, analyze and share the content you create

Careers and companies have been made by the ability to consistently produce timely, relevant and shareable content, and there's no reason you can't do the same. Few things will produce better returns than investing your time, resources and money into the creation of a robust funnel filled with content people will read and share. Then test, retest, and test again. Follow the data and you won't go wrong.