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**SPEED READ**

- Evidence shows effective content marketing works
- There are myriad ways to engage with customers
- Make sure the content is useful
- Consider how to measure the effectiveness of your content



Using content marketing to make complex products seem simple will make for better engagement with consumers, as MIKE HEPBURN explains.

# GET ENGAGED

**E**verybody's talking about it, but what is this thing called content marketing? And how can financial services brands use it to educate their customers about planning for their financial future?

The Content Marketing Association has a pretty clear definition: 'Content marketing is the discipline of creating quality branded editorial content across all media channels and platforms to deliver engaging relationships, consumer value and measurable success for brands.'

Today, content marketing has moved from simply being a corporate buzzword to a business imperative. This is because it has been proven to work. A plethora of research findings show that companies that blog receive more unique users and more business leads than companies that don't. Why is this?

**CONTENT IS ENGAGING**

Content marketing plays a very different role from traditional advertising, which works through disruptive interruption. Content, on the other hand, is engaging. It can be informative, educational, entertaining and sociable. Users actively seek content and content marketing flows with the needs and wants of the user. So if someone wants to know about something, or wants to be entertained, they'll 'Google it' or search on social media. Good content marketing means

they'll come across brand-created content that satisfies their need.

Looking at financial services, there are myriad ways for brands to engage with customers. For example, recent changes to the way people can plan and save for their retirement have resulted in greater choice for the public. But change and choice have left lots of people confused about the various options on offer – they need information and advice to help them make the right decision. Content marketing can play a role in this. ►

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## ‘UNDERSTAND WHO EXACTLY YOU WANT TO REACH AND CARRY OUT RESEARCH INTO WHAT THEY WANT OR NEED TO KNOW.’

### ► MAKE IT USEFUL

The key to content marketing is that the content needs to be useful. If someone connects with a brand through an article they've read or a video they've watched, it has built a bond between the individual and the brand. So when this person comes to making a decision sometime in the future, such as how to use the funds they've saved in their pension pot, they remember this bond and go on to choose that brand.

Content marketing has always been around in the form of advertorials and supplements. There is still a role for media partnerships on specific projects; however, it's becoming easier for brands to create their own media and reach their audience directly. This is where it becomes a little more sophisticated – developing a two-way dialogue where the brand has an expertise it can share with its customers, and customers have invaluable opinions and feedback that can help shape a brand's products and services.

So, we all agree content marketing is good for financial service brands, but how do you go about it? Quite simply, this falls into the basic phases of strategy, creation, distribution and measurement.

### ALL ABOUT THE STRATEGY

Having a plan with clear objectives and a targeted audience may sound obvious, but the devil is in the detail. Understand who exactly you want to reach and carry out research into what they want or need to know. This can be done through search and social media analytics and asking: 'Where do they get this type of information from now?' and 'How do they like to receive this information?', e.g. blogs and forums, white papers, videos or brochures.

Next, define how you are going to create content that meets this audience need. You may have the answers to your audience's questions to hand in-house or you may need to consider looking elsewhere for them.

More and more organisations and individuals are creating content, so your distribution channels need to be right for your audience to get the cut-through you need to be seen and heard. Developing an integrated distribution plan involving SEO, PPC, social media, media management and PR can help you do this.

You also need to consider how you are going to measure the effectiveness of your content. There are many different ways to do this depending on your objective. For instance, do you want your content to help you rise up Google's search rankings, or are you aiming to build relationships, capture data for leads or get your brand known in national and social media circles?

Finally look out for future trends. More people are viewing content on their mobile, smartphone and tablet devices, so make sure your content is mobile optimised. And while video content is also increasing, remember that it's just another way of delivering content and that it's important to respond to the consumption trends of your audience.

### PLAN IN ACTION

One example of content marketing in action is first direct's #MyFirstHome social media campaign. Having identified a younger audience who were considering buying their first home, we used well-known interior design bloggers to engage with them. The bloggers were invited to furnish a 'first home' while sticking to a very tight budget, as most first-time buyers have to. The project was documented through photography, written content and video. This content was then

distributed via first direct's Facebook page, exceeding average engagement rates, and shared by the bloggers to their own large network of followers.

Using your knowledge of who your customers are, and where they engage with and consume that content is key to building a successful strategy. Financial products are complex and content marketing allows brands in financial services to demystify them. Helping customers make decisions in an easy-to-understand and friendly way helps build a brand's reputation, and therefore it's worth getting it right. ■



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**FS Content Marketing: A Route Through The Noise:** Caspian Woods teaches us how to 'Tame the Content Beast', giving us insights into different channels and approaches for content marketing through examples from his company Editions Financial. "It's not about CONTENT...it's about MARKETING"

**The Future of B2B Marketing in Financial Services:** Michael Toedman explains the difference between B2B and B2C, takes us through B2B content marketing and its use within social media/engagement, and discusses the issues concerning B2B marketers.