



2021 Content Marketing Playbook

Top trends that will dominate
the year & tips for success



Why Content Still Matters

To put it lightly, 2020 threw us some curveballs. By March we had all thrown out our detailed 2020 marketing strategies, scrapped most of our content in-progress, cancelled our in-person events for the year and started working remotely full-time. All while balancing a pandemic, a struggling economy and a social justice movement. So much changed very quickly.

But one thing remained constant....connection and community still mattered. Purpose-driven business still mattered. Relevant, relatable content mattered.

Entertainment kept us from going stir-crazy and the content that evoked emotions still created discussion.

To grow as content marketers, we must constantly learn and evolve. So what can we take from 2020 to make 2021 our best year yet?



#1: Test & Learn

There was no algorithm for successful content in 2020. Experimentation was what helped uncover what worked and is the key to keeping your content strategy from growing stagnant.

"Create content the way a comedian does. Comedians draft their jokes, then refine them over many performances based on audience feedback (i.e., laughter or silence). Most of the benefits I provide to my clients come from refining content this same way over time, based on feedback from the audience for the content."

-Dan Shure, Owner, Evolving SEO



[Watch this event on-demand for more SEO predictions](#)

How you can experiment with content:

- Target a slightly different audience
- Find fresh voices for subject matter experts
- Be more inclusive with the voices you represent
- Incorporate fun activities (i.e. cooking class) into virtual events
- Test new channels regularly
- Improve landing page copy
- Ungate gated content
- Consolidate a collection of prior articles/videos into a long-form piece
- Experiment with social media trends
- Try a new format
- Use SEO to identify new topics
- Create vertical-specific content
- Include a collaborative component
- Crowdsource ideas for content
- Turn podcast into video content
- Turn video audio into a podcast
- Test different headlines or social captions
- Incorporate humor
- Republish old content with new insights

#2: Be Inclusive

Does your audience look at your brand and feel represented? Do your values align with those that matter most to your community?

51% of all consumers
and 58% of
multicultural
consumers are more likely to buy a product or service if that brand is perceived as standing for issues important to them



Dad helps transgender son shave for the first time in this Gillette ad

How to get started with inclusive marketing:

- *Understand what that means for your brand. Do you feel like you know your audience and have a connection to their identity, ethnicity or culture? If not, it's time to do your homework.*
- *Use your own consumers and customers in your marketing. How better to reflect reality than to show real people?*
- *Show the variety of individuals you serve - size, age, race, background, etc*
- *Don't do it just to be trendy - it's not a trend. People want transparency and authenticity from the brands they buy from and will recognize the difference.*

#3: Create Community

Are you creating a space for your community to interact, learn, and share? In a virtual world, this connection is critical to creating brand fans.

"If you're not speaking to your audience on a regular basis then you are doomed to create content that is not going to resonate. Listen to them to get feedback. You will learn something from them every time - whether it be new trends or new keywords." - Alex Yakubov, Expanse



[Watch this event](#) for more tips on optimizing content in a virtual world

Tips to build a successful virtual community

1. Identify who the community is for
2. Embrace a **common purpose**
3. Offer a **compelling reason to join** (i.e. free events, resources, tools, networking, etc)
4. Post **consistently** + show your face often
5. **Provide opportunities** for learning, adding value and supporting each other
6. **Add value** then add MORE value
7. Focus on the majors - **do more of what works**
8. Be **responsive**
9. **Feature members** of your community + share wins
10. Allow for **organic discussion** amongst members



#4: Virtual Events

It's not enough to just host a webinar anymore. Events must be interactive, entertaining and foster community to replicate the in-person experience.

In 2020, the number of organizations planning a virtual event doubled and 91% of respondents chose “Keeping members connected” as a primary goal of virtual events.



Make your next virtual event more interesting

1. **Send swag to attendees** who register
2. Provide **1:1 networking opportunities** (i.e. schedule a coffee chat)
3. Host **small roundtables** after main event
4. Include **interactive component** like a cooking class or meditation
5. Include **live polling**
6. Encourage **live tweeting** with an event hashtag
7. Include a **virtual photo booth**
8. Host a **happy hour** after the main event
9. Hire a **comedian**
10. Host **trivia**
11. Host a **virtual awards ceremony**
12. **Specialized content** by track (if large conference)
13. Play **buzzword bingo**

Watch our on-demand virtual events [here](#)

#5: Video Still Thriving

Video is still going to dominate marketing channels but it's important to get it right from a tone, length, and accessibility standpoint.

84% of people say they've been convinced to buy a product or service by watching a brand's video.

66% of consumers prefer watching a video to reading about a product.



What counts as Video Marketing?

- Vlogs
- Video Interviews
- Tutorials
- On-Demand Webinars
- Product Demos or Reviews
- Video Testimonials
- Recordings of live stream
- Social Media Reels, Stories and Live Streams

Top tips for success

- Keep videos under 3 minutes
- Always include captions
- Be mindful of tone/voiceover - informal and chatty is most popular
- Optimize for mobile (70% of Youtube consumption happens here)
- Create derivatives for social
- Use mobile video editing apps to reduce complexity and time spent editing

#6: Run the Show

With "Zoom fatigue" on the rise, think about how you can create powerful audio content - such as podcasts and audiograms. And don't forget about repurposing the video and audio you already have.

50% of all U.S. homes are podcast fans and 24% of the U.S. population listen to podcasts weekly.

On Twitter, the average engagement for an audiogram is 8x higher than a non-audiogram tweet.



How to take your podcast to the next level

1. **Maintain consistency.** Don't fall victim to the 7-episode rule.
2. Invest in equipment to **improve sound quality** - and ensure consistency throughout
3. **Provide guests promotional assets** to promote your episodes via social assets/copy or audiograms
4. Include show notes to **optimize SEO of each episode**
5. Sound better on air - **making your audience feel as if you're really there telling them a story** is a skill. Practice making alternative voices to open up new pitches and tones.

#7: Content Knows All

To be a content marketer is to be well-versed in all aspects of marketing - from buyer personas to content development, campaign execution, paid media, social and more. This will become more prominent in 2021 as organizations recognize that content drives ROI and need to be set up for success.

Critical roles for a successful content marketing team

Content Editor-In-Chief

- Overall content strategy of brand
- Oversees content projects
- Ensures overall brand alignment

Analytics Lead

- Tracking performance of content - including views, engagement rates, leads generated etc

Content Strategist/Director

- Strategizes content projects
- Develops content in conjunction with SME's & stakeholders
- Responsible for ensuring proper placement and promotion of content once complete

Graphic Designer

- Creates visually compelling content to help set it apart
- Integrates brand visuals to ensure consistency across content

Community Manager

- Distribute content across social channels and communities
- Engage online communities
- Face of the brand with customers, prospects, etc

SEO/Paid Specialist

- Keeps tabs on emerging trends and keywords for improved organic reach
- Gets new eyeballs on your content through paid search and paid media

Contractors/Contributors

- Team of subject matter experts/specialists that can assist with writing, photography, design, etc
- Find new freelancers at nDash.com

#8: Educate

Educational content serves many purposes - informing, inspiring, building loyalty and answering common questions from your current and potential customers. If content marketing is the vehicle, educational content is the fuel.

High-quality educational content increases a prospect's likelihood to buy by 131%

36% of content marketing teams considered implementing more "how to" guides and educational content as an efficient tactic.



Answer these questions about your content:

- Is it providing value? If you don't know why you're doing it, stop doing it and re-evaluate.
- Does it provide a helpful experience that people can learn from? Is it inspiring?
- Is it interactive? Can people engage with it in some way to make it memorable?
- Can you personalize the experience?
- Is your content segmented appropriately? Are you sending the same content to new customers and current?

#9: Content Ops

In 2021, content operations will become critical to reduce employee burnout, speak in one voice, optimize promotion, ensure aged content is retired, and track ROI of assets.

"Make less matter more. Take the time to be organized internally, even if that means producing less content. But that [less] content will matter more because we're all on the same page internally and can be more effective externally."

-Toby Murdock, Author of Mastering One Voice



[Read this blog](#) for more content ops tips

Questions to orient your ops around:

According to Kapost in their new book, Mastering One Voice, the questions a team should orient themselves around are:

- What do our customers want to see?
 - What are they seeing today?
 - How do they see it?
 - How can we optimize our processes to give them more of what they want?
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Goals of Content Operations:

- **Stop reacting** to internal requests and align around a common, proactive strategy
- **Increase visibility** into what others are working on instead of just wondering
- **Reuse or repurpose existing content** instead of always net new
- Build **structured, strategic plans** instead of ad hoc projects
- **Produce less** but make it matter more

#10: AI in marketing

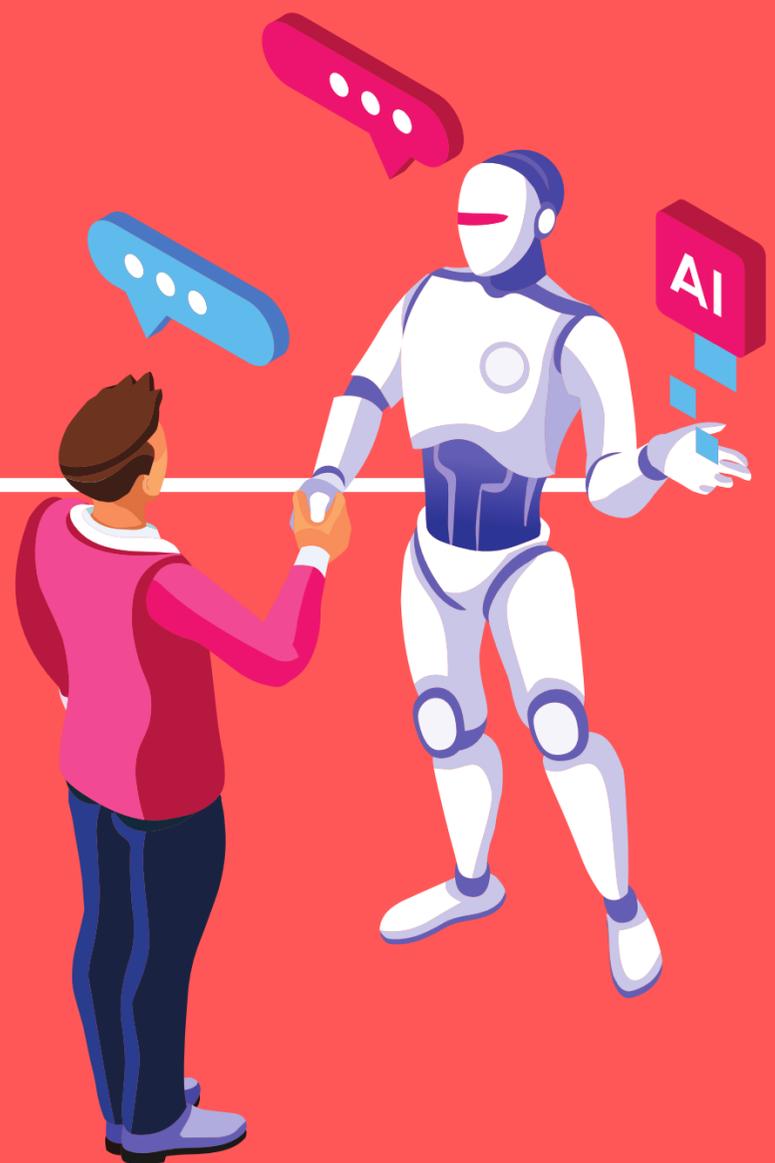
As content budgets decrease and teams stretch resources, artificial intelligence will play a larger role in understanding customer data, accelerating content creation and personalizing experiences.

72% of business leaders say AI can enable humans to concentrate on more meaningful work

But wait....won't AI take my job?

According to Marketing AI Institute, "Marketing managers have a very low chance of being automated. In fact, their roles may become more productive, effective, and rewarding because of AI's ability to automate certain tasks that distract from real performance driving activities."

There are many repetitive tasks that can be automated but creativity and context isn't one of them. Language is layered and nuanced and cannot easily be replicated by a machine to the level content requires. AI can start a draft but your team still provides the tone, creativity and ensures interpretation is accurate.



What won't change?

While change is good, some things will remain the same.



Be where your audience is

No matter how sexy new platforms are, if your audience isn't there...don't prioritize it.

Build trust

Trust and credibility are still fundamental to driving buying decisions. Be authentic and avoid pandering.

Eliminate the noise

Make less matter more. Retire old content, focus on quality over quantity, and listen to the metrics.

Measure, Analyze, Test

Test everything. From headlines to image placement to CTA's. What works best is always a moving target.

Be Agile

Learn and iterate quickly. We saw why this matters in 2020 but it's what has set marketers apart for several years. Just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it will tomorrow.

Showcase the ROI

Though the perception is changing, we still have to make the case for content marketing. Showcase content wins - whether it's engagement, leads generated or revenue.

Be prepared for anything

While 2021 can seem daunting with so much still up in the air, there's never been a better time to prioritize, experiment and build an operational backbone to your content marketing efforts.

No matter what external factors arise, you will be prepared with a strategy built around resilience and agility.

"There's no algorithm for content development, especially in 2020, so you have to be ready to keep testing and learning. You need to start with a basic understanding of your audience and what they want, but the tactics of how to engage them are always going to change"

-Theo Berenson, Director of Content Development, CBS Boston



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