HOW TO *BUILD* YOUR CONTENT MARKETING HUB:

USING WEBINARS TO DRIVE A STEADY STREAM OF QUALIFIED LEADS TO YOUR BUSINESS

A DEMAND GEN REPORT E-BOOK

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Everything Is Online

For anyone serious about growing a business in the 21st century, forgoing a content marketing strategy is no longer an option. The era of companies relying primarily on "interruptive" marketing methods like ads, direct mail, and cold calls to persuade customers to buy is long gone. These days, when people want to make a decision about a product or service, they search the web, check out blogs, and put out feelers through social media. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for modern marketers to replace one-way advertising with two-way communication.

Content Marketing: Highly Effective, Highly Competitive

Google's recent Panda and Penguin algorithm updates have ensured that only sites with the highest quality content will appear in search results. Moreover, a recent survey published by the Custom Content Council reported that 78 percent of people feel companies that publish strong content are more interested in building good relationships with them and 61 percent of people are more likely to buy from organizations that deliver informative content online.

In short, organizations that create remarkable online content and deploy it strategically get the highest rankings and generate the most buzz.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of competition out there. According to a 2012 MarketingProfs study, **9 out of 10 business-to-business marketers are using content marketing as a main part of their growth strategy.**

With so many companies scrambling to launch blogs, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, and online newsletters, it has become more difficult than ever for sales and marketing material to get noticed. However, there is one form of content that allows marketers to take advantage of recent transformations in technology and customer preferences to generate a large and loyal following – webinars.

Read on to discover…

- **Why you should build a hub-and-spoke content marketing model**

- **The disadvantages of text-only content marketing**

- **The advantages of using webinars as content hub**

- **The case of a company that is getting amazing results with webinar-based content marketing**

- **How to build a successful webinar-focused content marketing strategy**

Content is "a broad term that refers to anything created and uploaded to a website: the words, images, tools, and **other things** that reside there."

-Content Rules
by Ann Handley & C.C. Chapman

First Things First: What Is a Content Hub?

One of the first companies to pioneer the concept of content marketing was marketing software firm Hubspot. Since its founding in 2006 by MIT graduates Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, Hubspot has grown 6,012 percent, and the model that they established has been used to generate billions of dollars of revenue for organizations worldwide.

In their book, *Inbound Marketing*, Hubspot's founders write that "instead of broadcasting to their users with a megaphone, the top-ranked [companies] today have created communities where like-minded people can connect with each other. Instead of 'megaphone', think 'hub'."

It is true that online marketing is, at least in part, about getting found by search engines. But the true leaders of the field pay as much attention to return visits and engagement as they do to getting visitors to drop by in the first place.

Lee Odden, digital marketing guru and author of the book, *Optimize: Win More Customers with Social Media, SEO, and Content Marketing* (Wiley 2012), also subscribes to the importance of having a "hub" that is a "deep repository of information where themed content is published." He adds that this approach only works if the hub is supported by "spokes" that are "distribution channels for promoting content and in some cases fostering social engagement."

In other words, with a hub-and-spoke marketing model, organizations can establish a message that defines them, build a central location or hub where they broadcast that message, and use supplemental content to continually nudge prospects toward that hub.

Until very recently, most content marketers found that their website or blog was the perfect hub for their online strategy. But as the virtual landscape has changed along with buyers' perceptions, relying on interactive multimedia has become far more effective than simply pumping out copy. As such, it is the webinar that has become the ideal hub for a successful content marketing campaign.

Hub: a deep repository of information where themed content is published

Spokes: distribution channels for promoting content and in some cases fostering social engagement

–*Lee Odden, author of* Optimize *and Top Rank business blogger*

The Power of Social Media and Multimedia

With so much information and education available on the Internet, potential customers are in total control. They have unprecedented freedom of how to buy, when to buy, and what to buy. As a result, a company has to be in front of prospects at all times to make sure that its name is the first one that comes to mind when they are ready to pull the trigger.

So what is it about a webinar that makes it the hub to which all other content should point?

Dr. William J. Ward, Social Media Professor at Syracuse University, recently explained in a Fast Company article that "blogs were one of the earliest forms of social networking, where people were writing 1,000 words… Then micro-blogs like Twitter came along and shortened updates to 140 characters. Now we are skipping words altogether and moving toward more visual communication."

Social media is one of the most effective ways by which an organization's content can spread virally. As decision makers' preferred means of digesting long form content changes, multimedia needs to have a central place in any workable content marketing strategy. Now, where text-based content can be most useful is as a way of building buzz for a main event like a webinar that uses audio, video, and interactive technology.

Exactly How Effective Are Webinars?

In MarketingProf's most recent survey of 1,092 marketers, 70 percent rated webinars and webcasts as effective or very effective at generating qualified leads. The method came in second only after in-person events, which are difficult to run and even more difficult to scale. As for text-heavy blogs, they were nowhere near the top of the list.

- **70 percent of marketing professionals rated webinars as effective/very effective**

- **Text-heavy blogs were not among the most effective means for lead generation**

70%

Webinar-Focused Content Marketing in Action

One company that has successfully used a webinar-focused content strategy to reinvent its marketing is the consulting and B2B software firm Competitive Solutions, Inc.

Competitive Solutions sells a training program and methodology that allows executives and managers to become better leaders, along with scorecard software that helps decision makers manage their processes and track their progress. The company's typical clients are very large organizations, such as the U.S. military, oil companies, and fast food corporations. Competitive Solutions' typical sales cycle is eighteen months minimum.

Over the last few years, the executive team at Competitive Solutions began to notice a shift in the buying patterns of its prospects. They observed that approaches that had always worked for them, such as establishing a presence at trade shows, were becoming less and less effective.

In describing this new reality, Competitive Solutions' Director of Marketing Connor Jordan says, "About 75 to 85 percent of buyers' decision-making processes take place before you even know them. They're going to go onto review sites, competitors' sites, blogs, social media profiles, tweets. They're going to find out for themselves, without any interaction with anybody in sales, if they care about what you have to say or not." It was this realization that led to the switch from the company's traditional sales strategy to one based on content marketing.

"We decided, let's play that game," says Jordan, "Let's constantly provide fresh, relevant, easy-to-use, simple, how to-type content so when people do go searching for answers, we might pop up. And then they might get addicted to what we have to say."

At that point, the only question remaining was what form the content should take.

Competitive Solutions' Choice

During the initial stages of developing its content marketing approach, Competitive Solutions had a number of choices regarding how to structure its hub-and-spoke model. It ultimately settled on the development of a series of once-a-month webinars. It also decided to continue to create other forms of content, but to use these supplemental pieces to point prospects to the webinars that formed the hub of its strategy.

The selection of the monthly webinars as Competitive Solutions' focal point has made all the difference in ensuring the company's success with content marketing.

"We've established a real good rhythm where everybody in our database knows that every Tuesday morning, they're going to get an email with a little piece of free content that's relevant to what they care about and to the topic of the month. And there's a free webinar at the end of the month if you want to join us. We get 400 to 600 people who sign up to each one."

–Connor Jordan,
Director of Marketing
Competitive Solutions, Inc.

Every action that the company takes from a content marketing perspective exists to drive people to its monthly webinars. Its text-based tips, emails, and tweets educate and inform, while at the same time subtly maneuvering potential customers to the main show. And all of the content that the organization produces during the week is related to the theme that the webinar will examine in detail.

As a result, Competitive Solutions comes into contact with 400 to 600 truly qualified leads every month. Many of these people choose to immerse themselves in the company's message by engaging in a dialogue with their presenters through the Citrix GoToWebinar platform. Eventually, regular attendees come to view members of the organization as trusted advisors – and people buy from people they trust.

After the Main Event

In discussing the final piece of the content marketing puzzle that has led to his company's success, Jordan describes how he takes full advantage of the survey and reporting features built into the Citrix platform. "In the webinar itself, we create poll questions in a way that we're gathering intelligence. So then later we can call them back and say, 'Hey, looks like you had issues with trying to figure out what to measure or how to use a score card.' And then on the exit survey, we ask them what else they need; what they'd be interested in seeing more of."

The company also uses the opt-in feature of the exit survey allowing attendees to select to enroll in future events automatically, which garners fifty new sign-ups each time. But the real significance of the post-show work it does is far greater than simply driving higher attendance. By continually gathering information on what is working and what is not, Competitive Solutions is able to perpetually improve all of its content, which results in more leads, better leads and, ultimately, more sales.

"We were attending about 40 trade shows per year. But, after doing an analysis, we found we reached more people via monthly web events with GoToWebinar than by presenting at trade shows — and webinars don't require all that travel and expense."

–Connor Jordan,
Director of Marketing
Competitive Solutions, Inc.

Implementing the Strategy

Here's how to create a webinar-focused content marketing strategy that will generate a steady stream of qualified leads for your business:

1. **Plan "big idea" webinars –** Begin by sketching out topics for your webinars. Make sure you choose subject matter based on big ideas in your industry that you can explore deeply. Planning in advance will ensure that you are able to efficiently marshal the resources you need to produce multimedia content on a regular and timely basis. More importantly, deciding on webinar topics at the outset will determine the overall tone of your marketing strategy.

2. **Scope out a supporting content strategy –** Once you've decided on your webinar topics, it's time to build your support plan. Will you promote the webinar with a blog post? What will the blog content include? How will it (subtly) point readers toward your webinars? The same goes for email, tweets, Facebook posts, E-books, white papers, case studies, and any other content that you plan to use to add to the conversation and support the hub.

3. **Create structure for change –** It is inevitable that market factors, conditions on the ground, and new things that you learn will make change necessary. The content you plan to create now is most likely quite a bit different than what you'll end up needing to produce in the future. Build processes to ensure that changing one part of your content strategy doesn't throw off everything else.

4. **Produce –** While planning is important, action is even better. Launch your first webinar sooner rather than later. If it's not perfect, the next one will be an improvement. Get the word out to whatever list you have now. If it's small, it will get bigger. The great thing about online marketing is that it doesn't have to be polished. In fact, it's sometimes better if it's not. Unlike print material, TV commercials, and magazine ads, there's very little risk involved in trying a content marketing approach, testing it, refining it, and then trying again.

5. **Use webinar intelligence –** Take full advantage of your webinar platform's polling, survey, and reporting features. Ask webinar attendees to tell you what they liked, what they didn't like, and what they would like to see more of. Inquire about whether they want to enroll for automatic updates. If you get more and more attendees to keep coming back without having to think about it and are able to continually improve your content based on real world findings, it won't be long before you have more qualified leads than you can handle.

Checklist for developing a webinar-focused content marketing strategy

PLAN "BIG IDEA" WEBINARS ☐

SCOPE OUT SUPPORTING CONTENT STRATEGY ☐

CREATE STRUCTURE FOR CHANGE ☐

PRODUCE ☐

USE WEBINAR INTELLIGENCE ☐
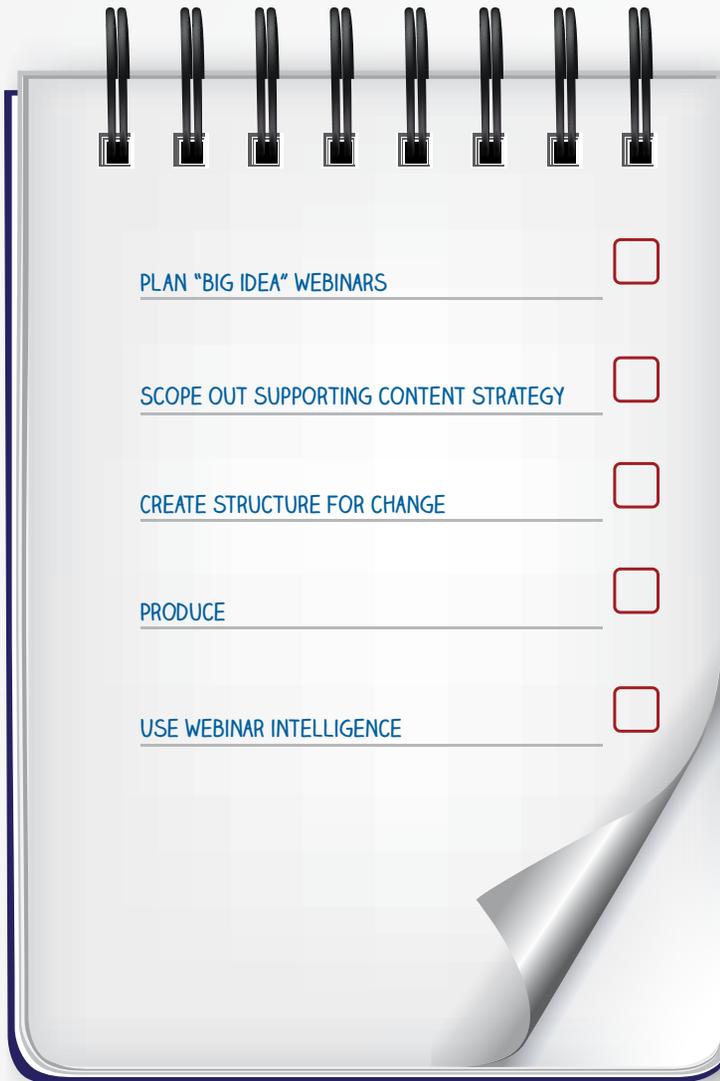
The Final Word

According to MarketingProfs, 46 percent of B2B companies use webinars as a primary part of their marketing strategy. And over the past year, there has been a 27 percent increase in the use of webinars as a marketing tool – a growth rate second to no other form of media.

Online marketing has come a long way from the time when simply picking the right keywords would get a company maximum exposure. Today, organizations that want to get noticed need a sophisticated approach that strategically uses multimedia supported by a full range of accompanying content.

Connor Jordan had the following to say about the success of Competitive Solutions' webinar-focused content marketing initiative: "About half of the business we have now is because of this. So you can only imagine what would have been if we hadn't made this transformation."

In a world where consumers and search engine algorithms become more sophisticated every day, no organization can afford not to have a content marketing strategy. And in an online environment that is becoming increasingly oriented toward audio and video, building a plan that places webinars at the hub of your marketing is the most sensible approach to spurring growth both now and in the future.

DemandGen Report is a targeted e-media publication spotlighting the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and, ultimately, drive growth. A key component of our coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts. For more information, visit *www.demandgenreport.com*.

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