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Making Content Marketing Work

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Professionals have been hearing a lot about content marketing lately, but many are unclear on what it is and why they should consider it as part of their marketing program.

If you do a Google search, you will find content marketing has many definitions, all of them having the same essence—providing informative and valuable material that will attract and engage your audience. While the term itself is seemingly new to the professional services lexicon, given this definition, content marketing is not actually new at all.

Instead, it is simply a fresh term for something most professionals have been doing quite regularly throughout their careers. Even in the pre-Internet age, lawyers and others marketed their services by sharing their knowledge, educating clients about the issues and challenges that should concern them and their possible remedies.

Seeing Clients as Content

While content marketing has indeed been around for a very long time, there are some new aspects to consider. Content marketing has become the connector between lawyers' substantive work on one side of the office and the marketing/public relations department on the other side. Previously, lawyers were generating client work—"content"—without thinking of it as such.

At the same time, public relations professionals were focusing on increasing the

firm's and lawyers' visibility via press releases and developing relationships with the media, but it was not connected with this substantive material. Now professionals are seeing that their knowledge and work can be "repackaged" and leveraged as content their public relations department can use to enhance the attorneys' expert positioning.

The results of this process can range from being quoted in the media to publishing articles, and all these materials can be remarketed in the online world—via websites, blogs and other social media channels.

Content marketing is indeed new to some industries. For example, content marketing has likely been a far less familiar content to those marketing products. Millennials and those following in their footsteps want to be educated before making a product purchase, and now product marketers are learning they



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have to expand their repertoire of informative material to support the products they are trying to sell.

It's All Social

Content's role transformed and content marketing officially commenced with the proliferation of distribution vehicles, particularly social media. Because the potential distribution vehicles have flourished and need to be fed, you cannot market today without informative and engaging content for your website, blogs, and other social media vehicles.

Some of this material may be about you and your firm, such as biographies or intriguing case studies. But promotional or sales material gets old very quickly. For instance, an e-newsletter must contain worthwhile information that your audience wants to read.



Making Content Marketing Work (continued)

It is very important to match the content with the concerns of your marketplace. As your marketing team considers your thought-leadership documents, they will ask themselves if it matters to the client and the media. Good, relevant content is the fuel for effective public relations.

While the idea of creating content for the myriad distribution vehicles now available may seem daunting, the good news is that you are already sitting on a treasure trove of valuable material. Deals you have done, mediations, settlements and victories are all worthwhile to share. It's a given that you will maintain client confidentiality, but much of your work revolves around noteworthy issues, precedent-setting matters, trends, etc. It is that kind of subject matter you want to work with and share. It is also the material that can help tame what seems like an insatiable media monster and give you a means to systematize your process.

Content Creation 101

To begin, think of social media as a vehicle for information distribution—one that can benefit you by magnifying the number of prospects and referral sources who see your information and understand you are an expert. Then, start with one piece of content. This can be something yet to be created, an article topic that has been on your mind, or perhaps something that already exists, such as a recent blog post you authored.

Draw yourself a social media pipeline chart with the distribution options that are meaningful to you across the top. These topics can include posting about your article publication on your firm's website, blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and any third-party content syndicators your firm may subscribe to. Down the side, list your first

piece of content. Next, systematically work the information through the pipeline. If the article is already published, and presuming you are complying with the publication's content ownership policy, post the article on the firm website, your blog, other social media channels and all the other relevant vehicles on the pipeline chart you've created. Repeat the process with your next piece of content and continue from there.

Creating a pipeline chart can give you control over what may seem hard to get a handle on. By tracking the outbound flow of your content, you can follow it through the pipeline, identify any missed opportunities and consider how to magnify it even further. For example, you could transform a recent presentation into an article.

Remember social media is "social," requiring interaction—you can't just be focused on outflow. Your goal is to engage your markets in conversation, so it's important to respond to any comments on your subject matter. You also want to look for opportunities to comment on others' material, whether on their blogs, LinkedIn or other social media sites. Again, you can systematize this by developing a list of the five outlets you most want to visit and comment on.

Content marketing is tailor-made for lawyers and other professionals whose work is overflowing with material that can be repackaged and distributed. By creating content systems, you can master the social media monster and maximize your opportunities for success. ■

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