



How to Choose Technology that Drives Better Content Marketing Results

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Need Help Making Smarter Content Technology Decisions?

This guide helps B2B marketers at mid- and large-sized firms approach these tools and technologies from a strategic standpoint so they can improve results at every stage of the buying and sales cycles. Read on for insights and best practices from the following industry experts:

- **Jonathan Block**, VP and Practice Director, SiriusDecisions
- **John Neeson**, Co-Founder, Managing Director, SiriusDecisions
- **Carlos Hidalgo**, CEO, The Annuitas Group
- **Rebecca Lieb**, Analyst, Altimeter Group
- **Adam Needles**, demand generation strategist, speaker, blogger, and author
- **David Raab**, VP of Optimization, Left Brain DGA
- **Robert Rose**, Founder, Big Blue Moose

On the following page, we've created an infographic that shows the various stages of the sales funnel and lists some of the key technologies used to deliver content based on the stage of the project. At the top of the funnel, marketers create content to raise awareness and draw in prospects. So content tools like blogs, display ad networks, and PPC advertising campaigns – which can have a broad reach– should be among your early-funnel consideration set. In the middle of the funnel, your content is meant to further engage those who are aware of your offerings. This is when content tools such as marketing automation software, direct mail, and webinar platforms make it easier to deliver relevant content to prospects. At the bottom of the funnel, marketing passes leads to the sales team, who rely on tools such as CRM, email, and screen sharing to share content with prospective buyers. Most of the tools and technologies listed are applicable across all stages of the sales funnel; but the intention here is to highlight the primary use cases for these tools.

Maximizing the ROI of Marketing Technologies

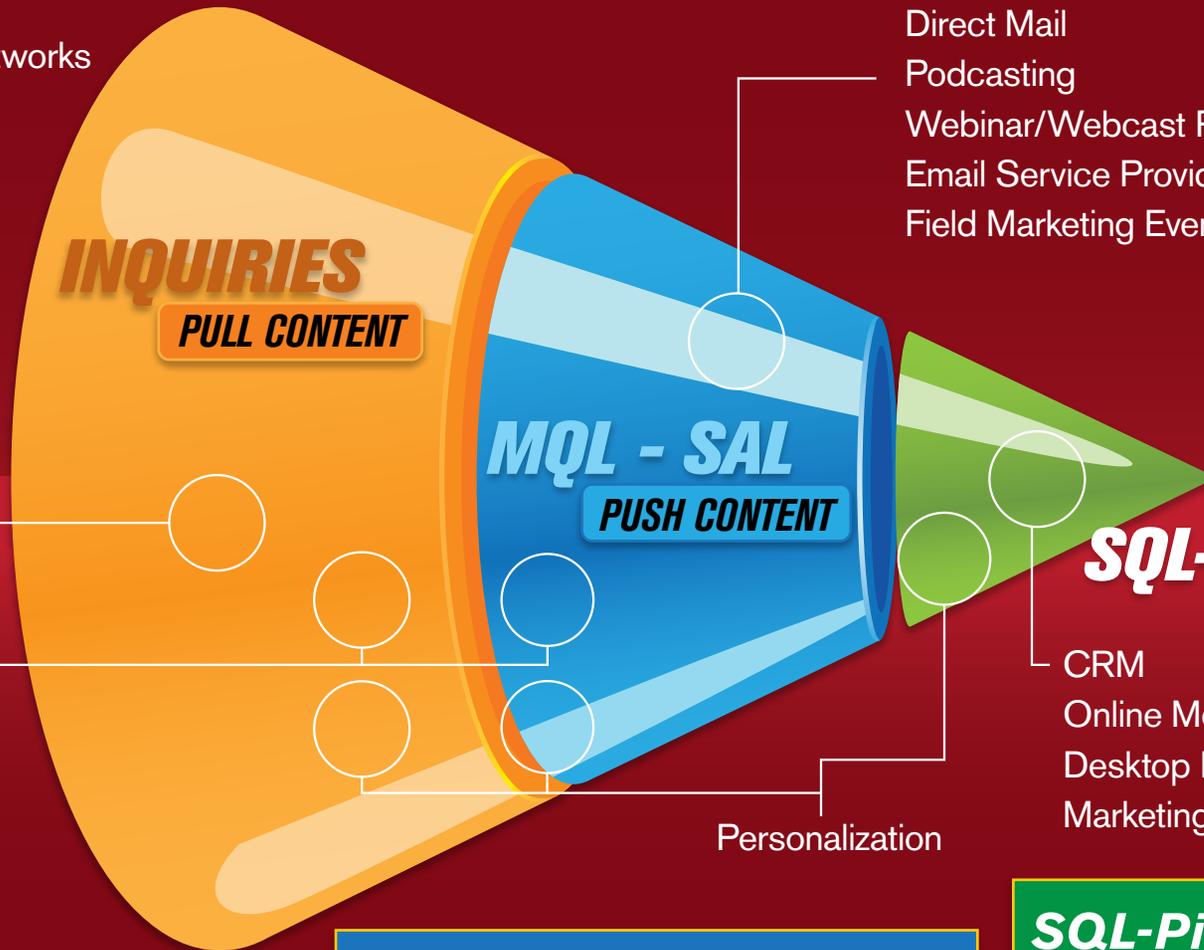
“Firms face increasing pressure to grow marketing technology investments to better engage customers and gain competitive advantage. Yet without a clear process for defining technology requirements and their business impact, firms risk selecting ill-fitting solutions, leading to fractured customer data, redundant capabilities, and competing marketing processes.” – Forrester

CONTENT DELIVERY FUNNEL



- Content Management Systems (CMS)
- Corporate Websites
- Display Advertising Networks
- PPC Advertising
- Print Publications
- Live Events
- Virtual Events
- Blogging Platforms
- Content Syndication
- Video

- Marketing Automation
- Direct Mail
- Podcasting
- Webinar/Webcast Platforms
- Email Service Providers
- Field Marketing Events



Want to see some of the key providers for each of these content technologies?

CLICK HERE for CMI's Vendor List.

Inquiries

Early sales and marketing funnel stage, characterized by a growing awareness of your solutions or products.

MQL-SAL

Middle of the marketing funnel stage, characterized by an existing awareness of your solutions or products.

MQL - Marketing Qualified Lead
SAL - Sales Accepted Lead

SQL-Pipeline

Bottom of the marketing funnel stage, where leads are no longer owned by marketing and the salespeople take control of sharing content with their customers.

SQL - Sales Qualified Lead
Pipeline - Engaged in the Sales Cycle

Today's B2B organizations find themselves up against two major trends that make it more challenging than ever to build relationships with prospects and win deals.

The typical B2B buying cycle:

- Involves numerous stakeholders
- Bypasses sales reps until late in the process. According to Forrester, technology buyers are two-thirds through the buying process before they engage with vendors.

This new reality is a key reason why content marketing has become critical to attracting, engaging, and converting prospects into customers. By creating, curating, and distributing relevant content, marketers can connect with prospective customers as they're researching and evaluating potential solutions.

B2B marketers can choose from a vast universe of digital technologies and tools to deliver this content... and that's the problem. Many find it overwhelming determining where to begin and how to take advantage of all these options. Those marketers that take the plunge often focus on tactics and technologies while skimming over strategy.

Where Does Social Media Fit?

Many social media experts advocate using social media tools to fill the top of the sales funnel. But the demand-gen experts we interviewed consider these tools most useful for connecting with prospective buyers who are **already** aware of a company and its offerings. Where do you think it fits?

Tweet your answer to #CMIFunnel.

Where Does Personalization Fit?

Targeting and personalization technology can have a significant impact on the performance of content, but it isn't a delivery mechanism by itself. Personalization technology typically works in concert with other tools, like MAS or content management. Therefore, it spans multiple parts of the funnel.

How Does Technology Impact Content Strategy?

Self-empowered buyers increasingly educate themselves before reaching out to solution vendors. According to Adam Needles, marketers need to understand these buyers' channel and content preferences to deliver a holistic set of content throughout the buying cycle.

But the delivery piece is not that simple, especially for B2B organizations trying to reach and engage multiple stakeholders – each with distinct interests and challenges – at different stages of the buying journey. In fact, trying to put the right content in the hands of prospects at precisely the right moment is incredibly difficult without the help of technology.

Streamline and enhance processes

Using technology, organizations can deliver relevant content at every stage in an automated fashion. **From awareness, branding, and consideration all the way through to purchase, follow up, service, and cross-selling and up-selling, technology can streamline and enhance the processes associated with parceling out content.** And this is particularly important for organizations with distributed or global workforces contributing to content creation and dissemination, says Rebecca Lieb.

In fact, Jonathan Block underscores the fact that marketers can use technology to:

- Align content with the buying cycle
- Reach prospects faster and more effectively
- Make sense of all the data they collect about prospective buyers

Better understand prospects

David Raab highlights the fact that tools like those from [Demandbase](#) provide marketers with data that they don't normally get until prospects have shared more about themselves. Instead of inferring or asking someone to fill out a survey or registration form, tools can provide this information.

Why Take an Integrated Approach?

Organizations risk missing numerous opportunities by not taking a holistic approach to their use of technology. As John Neeson reminds us, B2B marketers are no longer marketing a specific activity like an event or white paper. Rather, they are marketing to the complete buyer's journey, integrating all their marketing efforts in a unified manner to align with specific needs throughout the decision-making process. This approach requires a very different mindset; namely, organizations need to better understand where buyers go for information and how they consume it.

Unfortunately, many marketers adopt a siloed view of the various tactics at their disposal. But as Carlos Hidalgo points out, an integrated approach is vital. After all, a one-medium approach grows stale and becomes subjected to the law of diminishing returns. **In other words, marketers that rely solely on email, telemarketing, or direct mail often struggle to maintain their prospective buyers' interest over time.**

Keep buyers moving through the funnel

An integrated – or multi-channel – approach, on the other hand, enables buyers to interact with an organization in numerous ways and choose the ones that best serve them at any given point. Carlos Hidalgo shares the wisdom of Joe Chernov, VP of Content for Eloqua, who says that marketers are fighting for buyers' attention, rather than their time. **With that in mind, a mix of content (for example, video, email, social media, infographics, and webinars) delivered via numerous channels is a better way to capture the attention of buyers and keep them moving through the demand generation funnel.**

Drive process stewardship

Adam Needles suggests marketers should strive to drive process stewardship of interactions with buyers across the entire lead-to-revenue process. Achieving this goal requires an integrated view of the process, including continuity of dialogue across channels and buying stages, lead qualification, and ownership by sales and marketing.

Three Missed Opportunities Due to Lack of Integration

- Reach
- Deeper level of engagement
- Sales productivity

- Mike Vannoy, COO,
Sales Engine International

How Can Marketers Right-Size a Solution?

So how can marketers determine the best approach for their organizations? Ideally they could tap into a single tool to handle everything from A to Z. But the reality is that it's difficult for technology vendors to provide a single solution that keeps pace with the rapid changes in the digital marketing realm. Consider, for example, the seemingly endless stream of new social media channels. According to Jonathan Block, IBM, Adobe, and larger platform vendors are coming out with end-to-end marketing solutions, but most marketers lack the required budget to adopt more than just select portions of these suites.

Know your processes inside and out

There's often passionate debate over whether to take a best-of-breed or suite approach. While each approach has its pros and cons, Robert Rose underscores the importance of marketers understanding their processes inside and out to determine what tools make sense for their organization. In fact, he says many marketing technology projects fail because this step is overlooked. **Marketers can't determine what tool will facilitate the process until they understand their process from every angle – and account for probable process changes down the road, such as the need to add support for mobile channels.**

After all, you can't automate a process that doesn't exist, as Jonathan Block reminds us. But once marketers have their processes nailed down, they won't under- or over-buy technology.

Adam Needles has found that many organizations buy technology without addressing their content, people, and process issues. It's critical to plan end-to-end demand and revenue-generation processes from a strategic standpoint. That means designing marketing programs, blueprinting execution, and redesigning the organization to address today's B2B buying processes. After all, sales and marketing aren't going to start getting along just because the organization has purchased a new tool.

Get Strategic about Your Investment

Remember, it's not about making a technology purchase – it's about defining and enabling a modern lead-to-revenue process, which requires a seamless set of interactions with prospects from the time they're just names in the database until they're happy customers. What's key is being able to intelligently stitch together all the data you collect along the way to gain a complete picture of prospective buyers. – Adam Needles

Keep the customer's experience in mind

David Raab suggests starting by documenting the customer engagement strategy, specifically the processes through which the organization needs to walk a prospective buyer. As Carlos Hidalgo points out, most B2B organizations are selling to multiple buyers within target accounts and it's vital to develop an understanding of their roles, functions, challenges, and the triggers that move them towards a buying decision. Without this understanding, any technology could, potentially, be the wrong technology since it will not get marketers any closer to a meaningful connection with prospects.

Account for data continuity

According to Adam Needles, it's critical to determine what it takes to ensure continuity of the information associated with prospective buyers – including their lead status – as the data follow the prospect from stage to stage. Without this mapping, organizations will fail to tap into all the data they're collecting.

First, break the process down by stages in the buying (or selling) cycle and by the content to be delivered at each stage. Next, determine the data that need to be added and passed on at each stage to effectively engage, nurture, and convert prospects. Don't forget to outline what downstream processes, such as lead handoff, look like from the sales perspective. By thinking through the step-by-step process, marketers will understand what's needed to ensure continuity from beginning to end while avoiding adding complexity.

Consider:

- What's your business?
- What's your product or service?
- Who are your customers?
- What does the buying/sales cycle look like?
- What systems are in place for data sources (CRM, marketing automation, web analytics, etc.)?
- What's the size of your data stores, number of customers, and quantity of process workflows?

Narrowing Down Technology Options

With an understanding of business processes and goals, marketers can consider technology options. Carlos Hidalgo and David Raab recommend focusing less on features and more on what the technology can do for the organization. **Ask the following questions of the vendor:**

- How many of your customers have achieved better overall customer engagement by using your solution? Can I speak with them to get a better understanding of how they accomplished this?
- How do you use your own technology for better buyer interaction, and how do you measure your success?
- What best practices can you share on how an organization should approach content marketing and buyer engagement?
- What support (either internally or via your partner ecosystem) can you provide my company as we look to enable our content marketing strategy with your solution?
- What resources, skills, and time do we need to gain value from the tool?
- How does your solution help me make use of all our data sources?
- Do we generate the volume of data required to justify the use of this tool?
- What services are available, including training, support, and sharing of best practices?
- Can you or your partners help optimize the process we want to automate?
- How much will this cost, and what's the likely return?
- What are your financials and vision roadmap?

Don't Overlook Migration and Integration Pains

Migrating from an integrated solution to another platform can be painful. On the flip side, getting best-of-breed solutions to work harmoniously can be like trying to put together a train set the night before Christmas. – Rebecca Lieb

Make a shortlist of potential solutions

Narrow down the list of vendors that can help solve the organization's business issues before bringing in IT. While the ultimate decision comes down to how well the solution supports the organization's processes, required budget and in-house skills and sophistication also come into play.

Consider free or low-cost solutions

Rebecca Lieb advises organizations just experimenting with content marketing to consider free or low-cost solutions, such as Twitter, Facebook, WordPress, and Google Analytics. That said, she warns that they shouldn't get fooled into thinking content marketing is free as a result. Content marketing does have costs in terms of salaries and the resources needed to create and publish content, moderate related conversations, and measure the impact. And no technology, regardless of price, can succeed in a vacuum. Google Analytics will provide mountains of data, but without resources dedicated to parsing, analyzing and acting on it, the value of the tool diminishes.

Tap into IT's expertise

The IT group can lend expertise from a vendor evaluation perspective, such as by determining how well the tools in question integrate with the existing IT landscape. Jonathan Block highlights the need to understand just how the integration happens. For example, does the vendor handle it, or does a partner need to get involved?

Keep your options open

Rebecca Lieb says the one word marketers should keep in mind during the technology selection process is *open*. Technology should be modular and easily integrate with future as questions about integrations are just as important as the ones about features and benefits. It's also important to understand the process for migrating from the tool under consideration to another one in the future.

Don't Get Distracted by Shiny Objects

It's critical to prioritize when considering solutions. For example, though a tool may look slick, it's not worth the investment if it will only apply to a small portion of a process. Determine how much business any given tool can impact. – David Raab

Justifying the Purchase

To secure buy-in for the purchase, most marketers will need to justify the investment. One option is to present both the cost and estimated amount of incremental business the solution can possibly help generate, such as by sharing vendor case studies and surveys from industry analysts.

Determine what's at stake

According to David Raab, the real investment is the opportunity cost. In other words, what could staff be working on if they weren't bogged down by repetitive, manual tasks? As a result, the business case is often less formal – marketers know they need to more efficiently and effectively interact with prospects and may be unable to do so without adding these tools.

The key is figuring out the value if, for example, a tool will help boost the response rate of nurture programs by 10%. If marketers are making the case to dedicate resources to inbound marketing, they should compare the costs to what is spent on outbound marketing. Or if 80% of inquiries do not receive the proper follow-up, how much money was spent – and wasted – generating those inquiries? If properly managed, how many of those inquiries would have converted to a sale, and how much does that equate to in revenue? As Carlos Hidalgo points out, a properly defined process combined with an enabling technology can close those “leaks” and makes for a very compelling business case. In other words, the most valuable inquiries become worthless if a lead capture form is broken or if the mechanism that delivers the content misfires.

Be sure to spell out why it's necessary to apply a specific solution to the challenge at hand. For example, does the scale of the company's business demand a sophisticated marketing automation system versus a more basic email system?

Make It an Open-and-Shut Case

Trying to prove ROI before you've made the investment is a fool's errand. You can make the numbers work out however you'd like. It's about building the business case, not proving ROI. – Robert Rose

The business case starts with the lost revenue or revenue that is being left on the table by not having the right process and right enabling technologies. – Carlos Hidalgo

Model the ROI of integrated technologies

While marketers often need to sell the vision and make a persuasive argument rather than project the anticipated payback of such an investment, the CFO might demand an ROI spreadsheet. In those cases, consider the following options:

- Present the pros and cons of going with a best-of-breed approach versus an integrated suite, and underscore the anticipated ROI of the preferred solution.
- Collect conversion rates from beginning to end of the demand creation waterfall or sales funnel to demonstrate the potential impact of using technologies to plug the leaks and increase conversions.
- Determine Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – such as number of content downloads and contribution to revenues – and model how the technologies will help improve the KPIs.

In Carlos Hidalgo's experience, once the case is presented, it changes the discussion from "Should we?" to "Why wouldn't we?" He also feels it gives marketers insight into where they stand. If an organization won't invest in the technologies needed to secure better buyer engagement and higher revenues, it may be time to start looking for a new role in another company.

How to Get C-Level Sign-Offs

Focus on process and business goals to drive justification for the purchase – that's the language the CTO and CFO understand. – Jonathan Block

Conclusion: Plan for Success

Savvy marketers are adopting a content marketing mindset and defining a strategy to help their organizations connect with empowered, self-educating buyers throughout the buying cycle. But for companies trying to attract and engage multiple stakeholders over a lengthy time frame, failure is almost certain without the use of technologies that automate the delivery of some or most content. That said, marketers are best served by thinking strategically when evaluating, selecting, and justifying needed tools.

Just as B2B customers go through a certain set of stages when considering a purchase, B2B marketers do the same. Follow these steps for a strategic approach to using technology:

- Define a content marketing strategy
- Document associated needs from a people and process perspective
- Assess solutions that help address these needs
- Create a shortlist and engage IT for evaluation
- Make the business case
- Plan, implement, and execute
- Repeat the cycle to improve

Personalization Tools from Demandbase

Account-based targeting and personalization of content forms and offers has become a key component to increasing web engagement and converting more of the prospects visiting B2B websites. For more information about Demandbase, or to request a complimentary audit of the forms or content offerings on your B2B website, please go to www.demandbase.com/techguide.

The Typical Process for Selecting Technology Tools

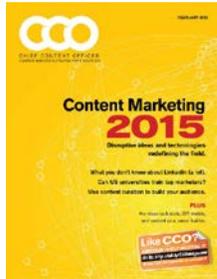
1. Decide and buy
2. Implement and integrate
3. Manage and maintain
4. Upgrade and enhance

Keep Change Top of Mind

The purchase of marketing technologies to support processes is about a change in thinking and operations. Change takes time if it is going to be made permanent. Be patient, go for some quick wins and evangelize the wins as you go.

– Carlos Hidalgo

Essential Content Marketing Resources



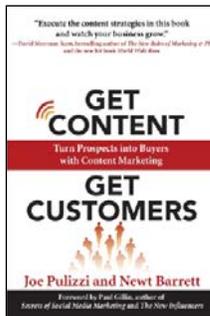
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2012 B2B Content Marketing Research Report

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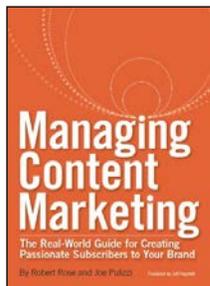
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