

Accelerate Your Brand with Content Marketing Strategies

BY DAVID CHAPMAN



Delivering your brand story to the world via content marketing will give you a leg up in the race to win the hearts and minds of franchise candidates.

There's a race to win the hearts and minds of your franchise candidates. And you're already behind.

Content marketing is the next nuclear arms race for franchise brands. Don't believe it? Consider that the 2016 Content Marketing World Conference in Cleveland attracted more attendees than last year's record-breaking IFA 2016 Conference, as well as more than the number of visitors expected at this year's #IFA2017.

The annual content marketing show was sold out months before the event, with 3,500-plus attendees paying more than \$1,000 each, coming from 60 foreign countries and 40 of the Fortune 100. The content marketing revolution is being led by a growing roster of sales and marketing experts, including Matt Heinz, Ian Altman, Marcus Sheridan,

Jay Baer and the Content Marketing Institute's founder Joe Pulizzi.

This article is written in the spirit of content marketing, providing informative, educational and tangible ideas about how you can use content marketing strategies to accelerate your brand. And it includes information about real third party experts and a few examples of other franchise brands that are effectively using content marketing.

TRUST: THE DEAL MAKER

Content marketing is in many ways the 2.0 version of integrated marketing which is essentially a clear brand positioning and personality, consistency delivered across all marketing programs, all marketing activities integrated and working together — except for one major difference.

Unlike the traditional TV spot, print ad, direct mail, and even digital ad where the brand is pushing a promotional message to an audience, content marketing is non-interruption marketing, where the consumer seeks you out to learn, evaluate and build confidence in becoming a franchisee versus going back to work for someone else.

As consumers, you feel the incessant sales push when you consider buying a car, a mobile device or a slick new suitcase for the trip to the IFA show. It's there when you walk into a clothing store. The salesperson aggressively approaches you asking if he can help and your immediate response is "No thanks, I'm just looking."

However, when you're ready to make a purchase (after exploring different styles, price ranges, etc.), the salesperson that wins your trust by being honest, transparent and a trusted expert is the one who rings you up at the counter.

Trust is the deal maker in today's franchise sales world. But when you put on those new clothes and go to work as a franchisor you suddenly transform into that stereotypical clothing store sales guy. Franchisors pay list brokers to get "leads" that are pounded into submission, run misleading PPC ads that poach the names off competitors and then wonder why prospects quickly drop off when they arrive at your landing page.

When a prospect comes to your website, instead of positioning your brand as a problem-solving resource and your people as trusted experts and innovators, the web content is poorly written sales babble that reads like a script for a used car salesman.

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WINNING THE RACE

Here are four steps to get you running faster in the content marketing race:

- **Develop a content marketing plan. This should follow a similar structure** as do most marketing plans, except with a greater focus on content strategy and development. A major factor in the plan's ultimate success is the development of insightful profiles or "personas" of your prospective franchise candidates.

How do you develop your brand personas? A good starting point is to survey your current franchisees on both demographic and psychographic levels. You can also pull credit card data based on address and phone numbers to get deep profiles. Other resources are also available.

- **Create your winning brand story.** There is no blueprint or cookie cutter approach to creating and telling your brand story. However, your mission statement should be the starting point to developing a unique, ownable, compelling and authentic brand story that gets prospects excited and confident that your franchise opportunity is the gateway to the next chapter in their lives.

There are several questions to answer as you develop and refine the brand story: Is your brand story different and compelling? Do you know what's missing from your existing story? Is it single minded and simple to understand? What's the experience you are trying to create? Is it relatable to the kinds of prospects you want in your system?

- **Map content to the sales cycle.** Franchise brands need to develop better content for different buyer personas as they move within the sales cycle. As you know, prospects for the same brand can be very different people (e.g. age, ethnicity, decision making process, motivation for making a change).

For example, while many website prospects prefer to read blog posts and profiles, an increasing number prefer to watch videos. Some

prospects love to comb through financial details, others want an infographic. Third party validation (from media coverage, awards, etc.) is a critical component to validation and confidence.

- **Other content strategies to consider:** Create content that answers the top 10 questions prospects have; create content around keywords that drive leads for you, tell the authentic stories of real people with a strong passion for the brand (franchisees and your founder) versus the usual staged conference videos with franchisees looking bored and ready for cocktail hour.

TURN YOUR STRATEGY INSIDE OUT

Here's a shocking statistic from marketing intelligence firm Sirius Decisions: 70 percent of the buying decision has been made before online prospects reach out to a sales person. That means that you've probably won or lost the sale in many cases before the prospect reaches out to you.

It's all about creating relevancy and trust. If you haven't developed your sales content from the prospect's point of view your chance for success is shrinking by the day.

Be bold enough to do a review of your brand versus the competition because prospects will certainly do it as they get deeper into the buying process.

Also, don't be afraid to proactively address your weaknesses (bad SEO reviews, a bad Item 19 two years ago, growing pains when the system grew too fast, etc.)

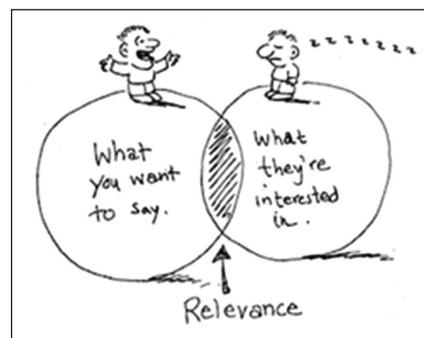
VIEWS FROM THOSE WHO KNOW

Study these approaches used by franchise brand CEOs who are effective content marketers, to tell their brand stories to the world via philanthropy, authorship or transparency:

- **Jeff Dudan** of AdvantaClean authored two books, and has a third in the works. He appeared enthusiastically on the popular TV show *Undercover Boss* without fear of losing control of the brand narrative. His franchise offers free, healthy home cleaning to young

cancer patients when they return from the hospital.

- **Tammy Whitworth** of Window World puts her money where her heart is. She has devoted countless resources to the creation of the Stinger, an Indy race car auctioned to raise money for St. Jude's Hospital. She created a book about the Stinger to build interest and bids, and she partners with Veterans Airlift Command to fly wounded military members and veterans. Her brand story is about giving back.



- **Terry Powell** of The Entrepreneur's Source is the primary author of *Your Career 2.0: A Survival Guide for The Battered Career and Investor Syndrome*. The company's entire approach is customer centric, down to his franchisees, called career coaches versus brokers. He clearly defines his target customer "persona" as battered career sufferers.
- **Ron Holt** of Two Maids and a Mop employs transparency as his mission with his franchisees and brand customers, best evidenced by the brand's pay-for-performance operating system. He proudly tells the story of his humble beginnings with empathy for others who are looking to make a better life.

Whether you are a startup franchisor or the category leader, telling your brand story to the world via content marketing will give you a leg up in the race to win the hearts and minds of franchise candidates. ■



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