

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

By David Chapman



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 had more attendees than our record-breaking IFA 2017 Conference here in Vegas.

Their annual show was sold out months before the event, with 3,500+ attendees paying more than \$1,000 each, 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 Puluzzi.

This article is written in the spirit of content marketing – providing you with informative, educational and tangible ideas about how you can use content marketing strategies to accelerate your brand. No hard sell about my company, but instead links to real third-party experts and a few examples of other franchise brands that are effectively using content marketing.

Content marketing is in many ways the 2.0 version of integrated marketing (integrated marketing = 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, we all feel the incessant sales push when we 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 clothes store (guys you know the feeling) with a buyer's mindset, yet when the sales person aggressively approaches you asking if he can help, your immediate response is "No thanks, I'm just looking".

However, when I'm ready to make a purchase (after exploring different styles, price ranges, etc.), the salesperson that wins my trust by being honest, transparent and a trusted expert is the one that will ring me up at the counter.

Trust is the deal maker in today's franchise sales world. However, 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 off the names of 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.

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 most marketing plans, except with a greater focus on content strategy and content 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/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 sale 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.

"You must deliver relevant, motivational and educational content to different prospect profiles at the right time in the sales cycle on the most appropriate channels."

–David Chapman

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 real-life 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 content development strategy inside out.

Here's a shocking stat from Sirius Decisions; 70% 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 prospects 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 – prospects certainly will 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.)

In closing, here are a few franchise brand CEO's that are effective content marketers.

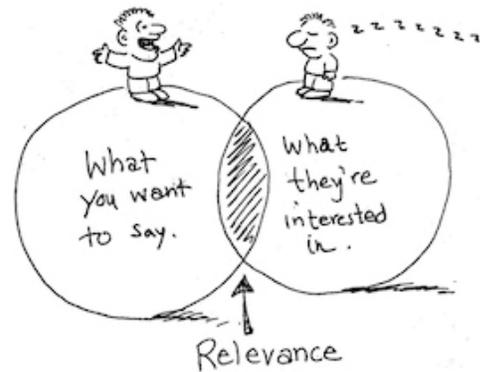
Jeff Dudan of AdvantaClean. Written two books, with a third in the works. Enthusiastically agreed to be on Undercover Boss and not afraid of losing control of the brand narrative. Pledging to offer free healthy home cleaning to young cancer patients when they go home from the hospital.

Tammy Whitworth of Window World. Putting her money where her heart is. Works relentlessly to support St Jude's Hospital, military personnel, and needy families based on her life experience of beating cancer.

Terry Powell of The Entrepreneurs Source. Was the primary author of the 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 being called career coaches versus brokers.

Ron Holt at Two Maids and a Mop. Transparency is his mission with his franchisees and brand customers, best evidenced by the brand's pay for performance operating system. Not afraid to tell the story of his humble beginnings and his empathy for others who are looking to make a better life.

Whether you are a startup 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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To learn more about [There's a race to win the hearts and minds of your franchise candidates. And you're already behind](#), feel free to email David Chapman, CEO,