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**2014 Content
Marketing
Report:
10 B2B and
B2C Trends**

Content marketing is still experiencing some major growth. According to the Custom Content Council and ContentWise's 2013 Characteristics Study, 39% of overall marketing, advertising, and communications budgets were dedicated to content marketing in the last year. More than 90% of marketers have used content marketing in their plans in 2013. But do you understand just what content marketing really is?

For those who are still unsure, it's often helpful to understand content marketing in the context of another large arena—advertising. In her article, "What is content marketing?", *Ad Age* journalist Rebecca Lieb pinpoints the two fundamental ways that content marketing differs from advertising.

*First, content is owned or earned media. If there's a media buy involved, it's advertising, not content marketing. Second, content marketing is a pull, rather than a push, strategy. **Content doesn't interrupt, it attracts.***

In his article, "Content Marketing – The Real Story," *Forbes* writer Robert Wynne shared a great perspective on the subject:

"Content marketing is the publication of material designed to promote a brand, usually through a more oblique and subtle approach than that of traditional push advertising. The essence of good content marketing is that it offers something the viewer wants, such as information or entertainment. Content marketing can take a lot of different forms, including YouTube videos, blog posts and articles. It shouldn't really seem like marketing—in some cases, in fact, it should only be identifiable as marketing because the advertiser [brand] is identified as the content provider."

D Custom spent a great deal of time at the latter part of 2013 discussing what mobile, digital, social, and print marketers thought were the top emerging trends for the 2014 year, gathering qualitative insights from clients and specialists in content marketing, web development, and beyond.

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Native advertising meets content marketing

Native advertising is a form of paid media where the ad experience follows the natural form and function of the user experience in which it is placed. This can blur the defined lines between earned media (or pull marketing) and paid media (or push marketing).

Content marketers will find that their most well-written and best designed content may find a place in native ads/advertorial strategies and tactics. Here, the content must behave consistently and contextually with the native user experience, and function just like natural content.

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A return to visual editing

If you were looking at a landscape painting—details and all—you would probably notice if something was out of place, like an upside down tree or jarring color. That same principle applies to how content is regarded in print versus digital.

Visual editing is the process of taking a step back to ensure that all of the elements in a landscape work together. It looks at cross-channel, multi-device, and multicultural sensitivity in the semantic, visual design of content. In today's content world, text and images must be more harmonious than ever, and a critical eye is needed to pull them together in a single, cohesive package across both digital and print channels. With such a technology-driven content paradigm, you can say that visual editing is one of the last remaining artistic aspects of marketing.

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Data-driven content delivery

Content leaders and their brands must use data—both big and small—to create hyper-personalized content for niche audiences, based on their ever-changing needs and preferences. Data-driven content delivery offers marketers a way to observe what consumers are talking about—what their interests, likes, dislikes, and pain points are—without it feeling intrusive.

By collecting targeted data, marketers are able to consistently produce and reproduce relevant, adjacent content, ready for consumption. Brands and agencies that are “slinging content,” or working as content machines, will miss the mark on promoting quality over quantity.

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Content engineering

The technical nature of content management is moving beyond basic content management systems (CMS) as we know them today. Digital asset management system (DAM) models are also evolving to create a faster connection between digital content and the point of sale. You could almost say they're joining forces.

The new role of the Content Engineer is emerging to bridge the gap between content creation, social media management, SEO, distribution science, and web/software development. In its simplest form, content engineering considers content strategy and architecture, distribution, online environments, user social behaviors, and the final form of the content. A content engineer must be a guru of content analytics, how content shows up and behaves for audiences, and must be a master of the constantly evolving ecosystem of tools that distribute and monitor content.

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TV takes to the web (no, really this time)

If brands can launch their own print and digital magazines, what should prevent them from launching their own television-style programming online? Many consumers are “cutting the cord” and going all-in on online video. This is an opportunity for brands to create web-only series—often called “webisodes”—to grab the attention of predominantly online viewers and build new followings.

This has already commercially, legally, and technologically impacted major networks, cable providers, and current online channels like YouTube and Vimeo. 2014 will see more brands collaborating on online video and creating custom program development and distribution than ever before.

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Content overload

Thanks to social media, always-on mobile technology, and what seems to be the limitless power of the Internet, people can get content anywhere—and they’re sick of it. Content fatigue creates a new roadblock, as massive amounts of poorly developed, uninteresting content makes it more difficult to reach the good stuff.

In 2014, brands will be testing new ways to combat content overload in order to get (and keep) their audiences interested in what they have to offer by trying out new channels and methods of content creation and refining their targeted messaging.

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Audience-driven micropublishing

User-generated content is hot, hot, hot right now. In 2014, more brands will partner with customers to build niche communities, and they're letting their biggest fans be their brand journalists. This trend takes the engagement allowed by social media, blogging, and commenting to a new level.

Micropublishing will help big brands and multi-brand retailers develop even more followers, and will allow consumers to get more involved than ever. Customers will become advocates and create mini-followings within brand-sponsored online publications. Therefore, the customer (and in this case, the writer) develops a series of stories and followers, all attached to the parent brand, making them a micro-publisher of sorts.

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Tech-smart content curation

Customers have increasingly turned to trusted brands for the news they want to know, and this star will only continue to rise in 2014. More tools, services, and apps than ever will be available for brands to curate the best content across the web, all tuned to each customer's preferences. Online content "coopetition" will be strong with self-promotion in mind, as brands curate content from other peer companies, even competitors.

Brands who have not been content curators before will jump in the deep end, and brands who have already jumped on the trend will try new services, ways, and sources to provide the best content on the Web to their ravenous audiences.

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Near-field content

As technology continues to adopt features like near-field communication, next-gen GPS, and location-based targeting, content will be delivered as people enter, leave, and pass stores. Digital content will become more tied to the physical world through use of beacons, device-to-device networks, and other low-power Bluetooth offerings.

Brands will have to be prepared with content that goes beyond another coupon or promotion. Things like on-the-fly recommendations, custom offerings based on user preferences, and interactive shopping lists will allow brands to create an in-store content experience that draws in new customers and deepens relationships with loyal ones.

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Editorial in a new SEO world

Google shuts down more and more avenues for SEO research with every new update to their algorithm. This means marketers must rely on quality content for visibility, rather than gaming the system for rank. Value and relevance will rule over quantity and content-farm style gimmicks.

But all hope is not lost. Google Webmaster still remains a valuable tool for insights and analytics, and other services exist that will help you with organic keyword and referral data research that will help you hone your content for the best visibility while also providing the most relevant information to your audience.

BONUS TREND

Social marketing shift

Surprise! We just had to sneak in a bonus trend. Here's the secret: social media marketing is actually audience development. It's easy to focus on gaining likes, shares, memes, and losing sight of why you're on social media to begin with—to give your brand depth, humanity, and richer engagement with your audience.

To really develop a brand past your Twitter account, you need a web presence, SEO, engagement mechanisms, media tactics, and more. Social media marketing will continue to evolve as the practice moves further into holistic brand development.

About D Custom

D Custom is an integrated content marketing agency located in Dallas, Texas. We work with B2B and B2C clients around the globe to help them drive sales through content. Brand journalists at heart, we develop your message and deploy it across channels to connect you to your audience online, in print, and beyond. D Custom is more than just marketing—we take a custom, hybrid approach to every client's needs, merging technology, technique, and strategy in order to reach our clients' customers and prospects to build relationships, drive sales, and create loyal brand advocates.

We don't want to replace your marketing team—we want to refresh, illuminate, enhance, and amplify what they're doing by filling the gaps and adding depth and dimension to your marketing plan. D Custom has a history of success working side by side with brand marketers to translate their messages into compelling, engaging content using a variety of media. Our story is our clients' story. Let us help you tell yours.

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