Content Curation: The Other Side of Content Marketing
Content curation

In the past few years, if the Web has taught us anything it's that successful brands and marketers can no longer pump out messages and sound bites. Instead, they have to interact and engage.

At the heart of engagement lies content—blog posts, videos, status updates, tweets, white papers, e-Newsletters, articles, customer stories, photos, websites and more. Content hasn't just become king, it's become the currency of a social Web.

The thoughtful creation and distribution of this content in order to attract, acquire and engage a target audience is known as “content marketing.” It's also the art of communicating with customers and prospects without being sales-y. Instead of brands and marketers pitching products or services, they are delivering information that makes the buyer more educated. All in all, the essence of content marketing is the belief that if businesses deliver consistent, ongoing, valuable and relevant information to buyers, those buyers will ultimately reward brands with their business and loyalty.¹

While the benefits of content marketing have been proven, so too has the investment in time. Many businesses and organizations want to harness the relationship-building, thought-leadership-provoking power of content marketing, but one question prevents them from moving forward: Who has the time to create all this content?

That's where content creation becomes content curation.

In this Blue Paper® and podcast, we're taking a look at how to develop a content marketing strategy that will save your business time and effort through content curation without sacrificing the results. We'll discuss what content curation is, how to develop a strategy, ideas for tactics and what tools are out there to help your business succeed.

A story of stories

Content marketing began with the creation and distribution of original content. Today, though, things are changing²:


• Everyone is publishing volumes of content, which makes it hard for marketers to rise above the noise while continually producing fresh content.

• Customers are not looking at information from just one source—and especially not from just one company.

• Customers are increasingly consuming expert and community content as a part of the buy cycle.

These changes prompted a subset of content marketing to rise to the top: content curation. Instead of devoting all marketing resources to original content development, marketers realized that like the curator of an art gallery, they could hand select existing works thought to be of relevance and value to patrons and pass such content along through websites, email marketing and social media channels.

The result of content curation is a cost-effective strategy to advance online thought leadership, drive business, enhance visibility and ultimately spur engagement. Meanwhile, the benefit to consumers is they receive the content they want without having to search for it, or even knowing it’s what they wanted to begin with.

With that said, most marketing experts seem to agree that curation is best used in combination with creation and it’s most successful when it’s highly relevant, timely and credible. Not only is it time consuming to create content, it is almost downright exhausting to do so frequently and regularly. Small businesses, nonprofits and entrepreneurs simply lack the manpower and the budget to successfully explore content marketing. What’s more, some industries—such as financial services—require such intricate content approval processes that it’s inefficient or unsustainable to explore content creation.

When you think about it, content curation has always been what the Web is all about—a means of sharing information. According to research conducted by AOL and Nielsen, nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of all social media messages and one-half (47 percent) of industry-specific social messages contain links to content. This same research also found that:

• 42 percent of all Twitter posts contain content-sharing links; 73 percent of Twitter posts related to a specific industry (auto, tech, finance and entertainment) contain sharing links.

• 41 percent of all blog posts contain content-sharing links; 64 percent of industry-specific blog posts contain such links.

• 12 percent of all Facebook posts contain content-sharing links; 22 percent of industry-specific Facebook posts contain such links.

Additionally, according to a survey by HiveFire, nearly one-half of marketing executives use content curation—the process of continually finding, organizing and sharing relevant online content that caters to a specific audience. Among these marketers, more than 75 percent cite thought leadership as their primary objective in curation, followed by elevating brand visibility and buzz as well as lead generation.4

If your business or organization hasn’t yet considered a content strategy, now is the time. The line is blurring between the traditional Web and social sites through the ability to “Like,” “+1,” “RT” and “Share” and if your brand isn’t contributing to the conversations online...well, you’re not part of the conversation.

Five methods of content curation
Marketing expert and blogger, Rohit Bhargava, explains that there are in essence five methods of content curation. Sometimes, marketers use these methods in silos while other times it makes the most sense to use a combination of each. Regardless, before developing a content curation strategy, it’s important to know the difference5:

1. Aggregation

Aggregation is the act of curating the most relevant information about a

---


particular topic into a single location. While efficient, audiences quickly dismiss this type of curation if it is not extremely relevant and timely to their needs. An example of aggregation is a blog post or article like this one on the Apartment Therapy Blog, called "5 Great Resources for Tile."

2. **Distillation**
   This method is all about taking complex ideas that are of value to audiences but somewhat inaccessible due to language or length and paraphrasing or reiterating only the most relevant ideas. The benefit to the reader is that they can forgo a high volume of content for a more focused view of information—something they’re bound to be appreciative of. IBM® has pulled together a great blog based on this idea as part of its content marketing strategy. A Smarter Planet showcases how we are moving towards a world that's “instrumented, interconnected and intelligent.” On this site—a Tumblr™ blog—the technology giant regularly posts curated content from around the Web such as blog posts and videos of technology products, which adds commentary that makes it easy for readers to understand how these advancements relate to their vision of a Smarter Planet.

![A Smarter Planet](image)

3. **Elevation**
   Elevation refers to curation with a mission of identifying a larger trend or insight from smaller daily musings posted online. Encompassing much of what many trend-focused websites do, this can be one of the hardest forms of content curation because it requires more expertise and analytical ability on the part of the person or organization during the curating. The benefit is that it can also be the most powerful in terms of sharing new ideas as well. Many professional organizations, marketing firms and media companies that aim to provide content on a variety of industry related topics have started using this method of
content curation to compile e-Newsletters for subscribers. One such example is SmartBrief. The company produces 25 industry specific daily newsletters with curated content from around the Web. While they do not produce original content themselves, they add value by finding the most relevant content on these specific industries and editorializing the snippets, which are delivered by email. It’s said that their current subscriber base is now well over 3 million.

4. Mashup
Mashups occur when curators take existing content and use it to create a new point of view. An example of this is taking multiple points of view on a topic and sharing it in a single location, like this Social Media Today blog post, titled “Three Views on B2B and Social Media in 2011.”
Obviously, not all content serves this method well and it’s not always possible depending on the medium.

5. Chronology
One of the most interesting ways of looking at the evolution of information is over time, and how concepts or our understanding of topics has changed. Creating a chronology is a form of curation that brings together historical information based on time to show an evolving understanding of a particular topic. Most useful when it comes to topics where understanding has shifted, this can be a powerful way of retelling history to prove how experiences and understandings have changed. A recent example of a website that incorporates such content is the food magazine “Saveur” which features a timeline on the brief history of food blogs.

Developing a strategy
Content curation, like any other part of marketing, requires a strategic approach. While you may get the whim to share links from time to time, having an actual plan and guidelines in place ultimately serves your audiences best and meets your marketing and business goals when you have some direction.

To develop this strategy, start by taking stock of your current marketing and business objectives. Then, gather your team and ask some really important questions in order to piece together your plan.

Get the team on board
Content marketing is time consuming and requires an all-hands-on-deck attitude from the marketing team in many cases. While content curation can be more
efficient, it's most efficient when all staff members have been trained to keep their ears perked for valuable content to curate.

• Hone in on the content marketing mindset of thinking like a publisher versus someone selling a product or a service.

• Make the commitment to curating relevant and timely content for your target audiences. Determine who within your business or organization will be responsible for content curation, what your own standards of content are and making sure that this strategy is integrated with other marketing efforts.

Outline target audiences and establish goals
Add direction to your content curation strategy and set benchmarks for measurement by taking a look at the bigger picture.

• Determine who your target audiences are, what information they are seeking, what information they are interacting with, what types of content they appear to engage with the most.

• Develop goals—what is it that your business wants to achieve with content curation? How will you know when you’ve been successful? What is it that you want your audiences to do based on content curation and why this helps your bottom line?

• Determine the informational needs of your audience through observation, surveys, buying behavior and previous interactions with various types of content.

• Based on your target audiences, decide which channels—email, social networks, blogs, websites—content curation will take place through.

Develop an action plan for implementation
The “doing” part of the curation strategy, this is where your team should lay out parameters and processes for content curation. This lays the foundation for the sharing phase of the strategy.

• Use the B.E.S.T. formula—created by content marketing specialists, Junta 42™—to simplify your content curation efforts for all of your online, print and in-person communications:

  ° Behavioral—Everything you communicate with your customers has a purpose. Ask: What do you want them to do?
° Deliver information that your best prospects and customers really need to succeed at work or in life.

° Strategic—Your content curation efforts must be an integral part of your overall business strategy. Link content to bottom line results.

° Targeted—Target your content precisely so that it is truly relevant to target audiences.

• Flesh out a content calendar that will help your editorial team prepare certain methods of curated content in advance in order to ensure a steady stream of timely work.

Considering these questions and following these initial steps will help your team pull together a vision for what it is that content curation within your business or organization looks like. Fleshing out the big picture plan will ultimately help guide the development of thoughtful tactics while identifying useful tools.

Getting tactical

Content curation expert, MarketingProfs.com contributor and founder of HiveFire, Pawan Deshpande, thinks that anyone can master content curation by following three steps: identify, organize and share.

Identify

“The first step in content curation is identifying the information that is most relevant and valuable for customers,” said Deshpande. According to his article on MarketingProfs.com, research shows that people are more apt to click on a news article they agree with than one they disagree with: 58 percent of the time versus 43 percent. Offering information that the target audience agrees with and is looking for will ensure they become frequent visitors of the company’s content channels.

Deshplande recommends asking yourself these key questions when identifying relevant material:

• On what topic do you want to be the go-to authority? Identify a critical and specific topic that your customers want to hear from you about every single
day. Make sure that you can be a trusted and unique resource on this topic without having to compete with other online resources.

• Who are the sources and influencers on this topic? You can then follow these outlets for their insights via email, Twitter or news feeds and selectively pick the best content for your curation strategy.

• What can you leave out? The tendency is to want to include too much, which can overwhelm your audience and drown out your own message. As a curator, focus on the 5-10 most relevant articles, posts and tweets daily.

Organize
“The next step is to organize the information so that customers can easily consume that content,” said Deshpande. “As you build a rich library of relevant content, the need to organize and structure that content will grow; therefore it’s best to organize your content as an integral part of your curation practice.”

A few aspects Deshpande urges marketers to consider when organizing curated content include:

• How do I segment my content? All your customers may not be interested in every nugget of content. If possible, you should categorize your content along the lines of your customer base. For example, if your technology is used both by cardiologists and by ophthalmologists, categorize your content accordingly so that your customers can easily get to the most relevant content quickly and directly.

• Where should I archive this information? If you curate items every day, then in a year you will have several thousand pieces of content. As a curator, you should not lose this rich repository that you have built up. Give content a home in public form—whether it’s corporate blog or a dedicated microsite. This repository can enhance your search visibility and your stature as a trusted resource.

Share
Deshpande believes this is the easiest aspect of the curating role. Marketers just need to think through the following:

• How often should I share? Just as with a good friend, sharing needs to happen regularly. If you do not share content regularly enough, you will not be considered a reliable source.

• How should I share? You can share your content through a website or blog, social media channels, or email newsletters. The folks at HiveFire have also
created a **handy-dandy matrix** for helping to decide which channels are most appropriate for your content curation efforts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Who should use it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Widget</td>
<td>Blogs into existing websites</td>
<td>• Not indexed by search engines</td>
<td>Organizations that want fresh content to “touch up” a site, but not interested in gaining a readership or SEO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very easy to implement</td>
<td>• Minimal real estate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unlikely that visitors will come for latest curated content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsite</td>
<td>Full fledged immersive experience</td>
<td>• Requires more attention to maintain</td>
<td>Organizations looking to become an authoritative destination for a topic to position themselves as a key resource or thought leader, or to drive traffic and visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can become a hub for a topic</td>
<td>• May require you to market microsite as a new online destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indexed well by search engines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May include original content also</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rich archive built up over time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Page</td>
<td>Easy to get up and running and are indexed by search engines</td>
<td>Only few pages indexed by search engines.</td>
<td>Individuals or cost conscious non-profits who want to create an information resource who are not too concerned with branding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Usually free</td>
<td>• Offer less control over the branding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Newsletters</td>
<td>“Push” medium for curation</td>
<td>• Not suited for real-time curation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can continually deliver curated content, does not require audience to come to a web property</td>
<td>• Not indexed by search engines.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• May require an existing audience to get started.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Well suited for time-sensitive topics and real-time content</td>
<td>No archive built up over time.</td>
<td>Curators with topics that are high volume, time sensitive or likely to be shared virally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy for audience to virally share content</td>
<td>• Not indexed by search engines.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeds</td>
<td>Connects people with feed readers who are return visitors. Not indexed by search engines</td>
<td>Little room for annotating curated content.</td>
<td>Curators with an audience that prefers this medium such as a technical crowd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some search engines crawl feeds</td>
<td>Older content is wasted when it removed from the feed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whatever you decide, consider your audience and how they consume content.

**Tools for content curation**

Content curation is an efficient form of content marketing, in part, because of the wide array of tools that exist to help streamline the process of identifying and sharing the content your target audience craves. Consider these popular tools:

**Google News**

Google News, in and of itself, is curated content. It can also help your business or organization keep track of industry trends, topics and timely articles that can be considered for implementation of a curation strategy.

A few ways to harness this power:

- Go to google.com/news and click on the “Add a Section” link on the top right to choose keywords you are interested in. Doing so will ensure that relevant articles are displayed to you or added to your reader.

- If there is a certain blogger or journalist who consistently provides relevant content on topics your audiences will appreciate, search their content regularly. While in Google News, do an author search: [Author:“authors name here”] into the search box to find all articles by a particular person.
• Set up Google Alerts on topics that interest you and your business in order to be automatically alerted to new articles and content.

**Summify**
When you sign up for an account with Summify, you have the option of adding your Twitter, Facebook and Google Reader accounts to receive an email digest of the top five stories that have been shared in your social network. The email also gives you information on network sharing, comments and engagement. This helps your business or organization avoid focusing on curated content that is oversharred while at the same time offering an indication of what it is your audiences are interested in.

**Paper.li**
Paper.li lets you use the links shared by people on Twitter and Facebook to publish your own “daily newspaper.” You can add the content from any of these five sources:

- Links from your Twitter feed or your followers
- Links from a single Twitter follower
- Links from hashtags
- Specific keywords
- Links from your Twitter lists or lists created by other users

**Storify**
Storify is a way to tell stories using social media such as tweets, photos and videos. Once you sign up for an account, this platform allows you to search multiple social networks from one place, and then drag individual elements into a blog post of sorts that becomes your story. You can re-order the elements and also add text to give context to your readers. An easy way to compile content that can then be automatically updated (for those curation methods that are chronological) and shared by embedding in an existing blog or website, or linking from other channels.

**Measurement**
As you finalize your business or organization’s plan to curate content, keep the end in mind. In order to assess the effectiveness of your efforts, you have to look at whether or not the goals of your strategy were achieved and measure what impact curation efforts may have had on overall marketing and business. A few ways to go about this:
• **Tracking sales lift** of those who receive the content curation program versus those who do not.

• **Tracking conversions** for online content products or print subscriptions and measuring new or increased sales.

• **Online readership studies** to determine the impact of the content project, as well as the acquisition of customer informational needs and trends.

• **Measuring engagement** (time spent) through online research or by using analytic measures on eNewsletter or Web portal products.

• **Pre-/post-awareness study** to measure the impact of the program. If possible, separate out a control group that does not receive your content initiative. Without that, it’s challenging to tell if the project made the impact, or if it was something else in your marketing arsenal.

**In sum**

Content curation is a proven way to harness the power of the Web to increase visibility, enhance thought leadership and ultimately provide value and relevancy to target audiences. Consider incorporating it in your business’s strategy today.