
Are you keeping your customers in the loop?

The importance of producing informational and educational marketing material

By Tom Johnson

As a culture, we are adrift in marketing and advertising. A typical consumer is so assaulted with advertising that they treat it like white noise. They have learned that they cannot trust what they are hearing and must do their own independent research in order to find the best product or service. Think about the last time that you went to buy a new car. Did you just watch a few commercials and head down to the car lot or did you get on the internet and start researching reviews and testimonials?

Many people do not realize that the internet is filled with misinformation and believe everything that they read. That is why it is so important that you inform your audience through your marketing rather than just try to sell them. If you are not producing quality material to educate them about your company then be assured that someone else will. Competing companies, hackers and scam artists spend a lot of time trying to fool people into believing what they say. This white paper will explain how you can keep your potential clients informed and still make the sales that you need.

The changing market

Advertising and marketing has been around for as long as there have been products to sell and the basics have changed very little. It is still all about getting your message to an audience as clearly as possible but the way that you do that has changed a lot. In the 1920's a standard tactic was to buy time on a radio show or hire a person to wear a sandwich board proclaiming the best diner to frequent. Those same tactics are still used today by people dressing up as a roman legionnaire to sell Little Caesar's Pizza. In the 1950's and 60's the best way to get some publicity was through the use of a yellow page ad or a television commercial. Until the introduction of the internet, all of the biggest marketing venues were passive. There was no one to disagree. No one breaks into a commercial to give an editorial or post comments onto a yellow page ad. All of these marketing practices are still used today with varying degrees of success but the advent of the internet has pushed them into the background. Now a potential client has the ability to do independent research so they no longer have to take your word for how good your product is. The only problem is that the person doing the research is more likely to be misled and confused than informed. There is so much biased and misleading information masquerading as truth on the internet that it is hard to find dependable sources.

Causes for the confusion

You have to be very careful to check your sources before trusting anything that you read on the internet. The four main causes of misinformation on the internet are:

SEO Tactics

SEO or search engine optimization is big business. It deals with different ways of getting your website to appear as high as possible in the search results for certain terms. For instance, let's say that a company wanted to appear very high in the list when someone types "White Paper" into Google. That depends on a lot of factors, one of the most important being inbound links because the more outside pages that link to your website using that term, the higher that you will rank in the search engines. So, to get a lot of links with the correct keywords a company will write articles on those specific subjects. Then they will seed those articles throughout the internet in free directories and social networking sites. Those articles are generally not well researched and can be filled with inconsistencies, errors and exaggerations because they are not meant to be read, just to be compiled by search engines. If a person was to go looking for information on white papers and their uses, they will likely find these articles in abundance and will be completely misinformed on the subject.

Phishing

Phishing has been around as long as the internet but it really saw a boom around the turn of the century. phishing is a term describing the practice used by hackers and con artists to steal sensitive information and data from people. They will usually send an email that looks like it is from a well known company and maybe one that you use on a regular basis, like your bank. They may even provide a link back to a fake web site that looks exactly like the real thing. Then they get you to input data like your social security number, bank code, username and password. Since they are trying to convince you to give them your information they can be very convincing and will tell you anything that they think you need to hear in order to execute the scam. It is very easy to be duped by these phishing techniques and many people are not even aware that they are happening. If you do not have enough information on your company's website then it is easy for a client to get taken in by phishing when they go to find out more about your company.

Corporate mud slinging

Websites with reviews and ratings for companies are especially susceptible to being misused. There is no way to prevent someone from posting a fraudulent review and once it has been posted, there is no verification process. Many smaller companies will have someone post bad reviews on local search engines and similar websites. You may think it is to give the company a bad name and drive the customers to the competition but often that is only a side effect. The real reason goes back to SEO practices. Many local search engines will place a company higher in the search results if they have more positive reviews. With so many bogus reviews floating around the internet it is hard to find the truth about a product or service. That is why you should provide case studies for potential clients.

Content Mills

Content has always been king on the internet and the content mills have been trying to usurp the throne. They are websites that accept articles on diverse different subjects. Some will pay for the articles but many are free and accept submissions from anyone. They use the massive amounts of content to draw in visitors and links from other websites. Some will use the traffic to send visitors to websites that pay for the service and others sell advertising on the site itself. Some of the websites have good content with well researched subjects. Others are no more than incoherent rambling with no information to back up the contents. Since there is so much content it is easy to wind up on a site like that while researching a product or service.

The argument for informative marketing

The only way to avoid having your audience form the wrong idea about your company is to tell them the truth. For some people marketing is synonymous with lying but it doesn't have to be. If you produce a quality product or a valuable service then people will want to purchase it. I am about to tell you something that may blow your mind: People DO NOT care about you or your company. They only care about what you or your company can do for them. That means that you should have advertising material that talks about the client and informs them about how the product or service can help them. It should not talk about how many clients you have, how long you've been in business or that your product only weighs .4 ounces. Those are all features and are not what persuades someone to make a purchase. Now you may say that you would buy an mp3 player because it is only .4 ounces. But really you would be buying it because it fits easily in your pocket or because you don't notice it when you jog. All of those pertain to how the light weight of the mp3 player benefits you.

Protect potential clients from article mills and SEO articles by offering a choice

If you have a product that is technical in nature then you may feel that you have to list the features. How else will the client know how good it is? Well, you can write a White Paper about it. Since you are reading a white paper now, I will assume that you know what one is. The benefits of a white paper are:

- They inform the reader about your product and then offer details about how they can purchase it. There is not much selling involved so the reader will be more apt to trust the content.
- It is all about educating the client about how the subject of the White Paper can help them in their daily life.
- It can be given away on your website to inform your audience and also to help attract people to the site. If it is well written and relevant then other websites and blogs may link to it. That will make it much easier for a potential client to find information on the subject.

If someone is searching for information on a service that you provide, would you rather them end up reading an SEO article or reading a well researched white paper offered on your site?

Case studies can prevent people from being misled by bogus reviews.

If your company has been dealing with unwarranted negative reviews then a case study might be the answer. The reviews found on local search sites and similar websites are often no longer than a few sentences. They have no backup or related data to prove their validity. A case study is a lot like a research paper. A company will ask one of their clients if the study can be done. Then the client is interviewed and the interaction between the client and company is recorded. That data will produce an in-depth analysis of how the client benefited from the service or product. It is backed up by evidence and can be verified if necessary. A case study is a great way to put a face on your company and show the benefits that you are able to provide.

Do your clients know what your company will and won't do?

Phishing is hard to detect in the best of times and only education will save someone from making a costly mistake. Does your marketing material or website explain how you do business? If your policy is to never ask for a username or password from your client then they need to know that. That way if someone pretending to be from your company asks for that information, they know it's a scam. Your website should provide a resource for your clients to fall back on and answer their questions. It could be in the form of a knowledge base, an article section or even a FAQ, a frequently asked questions page. If your company or clients have been targeted by a Phishing attack then an alert should go out in the monthly newsletter. You should do whatever you have to in order to give your clients the information they need to protect themselves.

Need someone to do the heavy lifting?

Many people find themselves too busy earning a living to take on the added tasks of informational marketing. If you want to hire someone to do the work for you then the contractor should be:

- An experienced writer
- Comfortable with writing about complex technology and business topics
- Familiar with writing for SEO and website content
- Able to explain difficult topics in a way that everyone can understand
- Be able to write compelling and interesting content with light elements of persuasion, without focusing too heavily on sales
- Capable of doing the research required and not require constant supervision
- Able to meet deadlines

How can Content Creations help you?

The slogan for Content Creations is “Inform to sell”. I believe that you can be completely honest in your marketing material and still make the sales that you want. I have a long history in sales and marketing and have been a commercial freelance writer for about 4 years now. I am tech savvy and very dependable. I can help you to create marketing material that will inform any potential clients about why you are the person to use. If you have any questions or would like more information then you can visit my website at www.abusinesswriter.com. If you would like to email me directly, my address is tjohnson@abusinesswriter.com