

10½ ways to improve your content marketing

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Content marketing is fast becoming a cornerstone of a law firm, accountancy practice or Chambers' marketing strategy.

Producing good content underlines your specialisms and helps you build a following that will actively widen the circulation your content enjoys and that combined exposure will generate new fee earning opportunities for you.

However if people are going to like, share and forward your content so that you enjoy the benefits of wider circulation then your content has to be worth liking, sharing and forwarding so here are 10½ ways to improve your content marketing.

1. Keep it short

People don't have the time (or patience or inclination) to read 2000 words of in-depth technical discourse. They want something they can read quickly on a single page on their phone or tablet. According to recent studies a man's attention span is around 180 words and a lady's is about 225 so try and keep your wordcount under 300.

The good news is keeping your content short means it's quicker to write and shouldn't require long hours of painstaking research either.

2. Have a schedule and stick to it

With content, success requires consistency. Make sure you are publishing regularly and hitting the deadlines you've set.

If you are promising a weekly update or a question of the week, you need to bring something out every week not just in the weeks in which you have a bit of spare time. Similarly if you're promising a monthly newsletter, it needs to come out every month.

As your readership becomes more mature this will be even more important. People will expect – and even look forward to – your content so you have to be totally consistent as any dips in service will knock your credibility.

3. Make it valuable

If you are going to push yourself to the front of the mass of information being sent out by other firms every day, you need to capture the attention of your readers. The best way to do that is to deliver value in everything you write and make sure your readers finish your piece knowing more than they did before they started.

Every time you write something work out what the objective is, what the reader will find out by the end of your piece and then work backwards.

One good way to do this is to offer clear solutions to the problems you know your readers are likely face. This isn't about giving away the crown jewels, the reader will still need your legal or accounting skills to reach their desired outcome. This is about spelling out a problem and the required solution so you alert your readers to the fact they really do need you and explaining why and what you'll do for them.

4. Experiment with formats

Don't just employ block text, try FAQs (brilliant for SEO as they'll be built around your key search terms) and listicles (articles made up on lists, e.g. "7 ways to strengthen your terms and conditions" or "9 things people forget when they're selling a business").

Varying your approach keeps people's interest and is more likely to appeal to the various preferences of the people you want to attract.

5. Sweat your assets better

Once you've taken the time to write something, sweat everything you can out of it.

Not everyone will see your email alert so republish the piece on your website and send the link out on social media then a week or so later publish it as a posting on LinkedIn.

Not only will this send a notification to all of your contacts' inboxes (reminding them about you and what you do) but if you also add relevant tags, it'll also come up in searches being made by people you're not currently connected to but people who are looking for information on the services you are writing about.

You could also start an account on an open blogging platform like Wordpress.

This will again open you up to an even larger audience who are searching for content just like yours.

6. Have an opinion

Bland commentary doesn't work. As I said earlier there is too much information in world so you need to say something that stands out.

Have an opinion on what's going on in your profession, in the sectors you serve or in your local area and be prepared to share it. Don't just report on changes, explain the potential ramifications of those changes and alert people how to avoid those ramifications.

7. Use real life

Using real life examples from the news and firm popular culture makes your content more interesting and more readable.

Using real life examples also marks you out as someone with a personality. Yes, your clients and contacts want advisers with the right technical skills but all of the client service interviews we undertake for our clients repeatedly reinforce that they want the right services from someone they can get on with.

Think outside the firm

Don't limit publication to your website and social media accounts.

Think about the magazines, online forums and even client/contact newsletters who would be interested in your content. And that doesn't mean the local Law Society/ICAEW newsletter or your professional trade body's magazine, it means finding the titles your clients and targets read.

A cursory internet search will highlight the relevant titles to approach but if you want more insight, ask your clients what they read.

9. Invest in your circulation list

A circulation list is a living entity. If you are going to get the best return from your content marketing, you need to keep your list up to date and make sure you are adding new names all of the time.

LinkedIn is a brilliant way to stay up to date with people moving and to research key contacts at target organisations.

Yell.com is also a valuable tool and allows you to search for businesses by sector or area and if they're advertising, they'll still be operating and if they are still operating they will need professional advice.

10. Employ a lighter touch

Don't be afraid to inject a bit of humour or, at the very least, conversational colloquialisms.

Again people want advisers they can get on with, advisers they consider to be "normal" so this lighter touch will help you stand out from the dry content your competitors are putting out.

10½. Spell out the next step

The one thing we see missing from the external communications sent out by lawyers and accountants is a call to action. Make sure everything you send out tells people what to do next to continue the conversation.

Build in response buttons and include email hyperlinks into your template and test it out on a few colleagues to make sure it's completely visible on the page and that the next steps are blindingly obvious.

And give them a couple of options because people responds to different things in different ways at different times.

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