

Value-adding content marketing in the B2B life sciences sector

How Pharma/Biotech, Food/Beverage, & Personal Care B2B Companies Can Create Compelling Content Using a Variety of Formats

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As traditional marketing tactics decline in their power to influence, companies are shifting to content marketing.

Done strategically, content marketing has the capacity not only to inform but to capture prospects early in their buying journey.

Dr. Michael Taylor, Principal Consultant at Scienopsis, shares his thoughts on how life sciences B2B companies create compelling content that adds value and wins customers' trust.

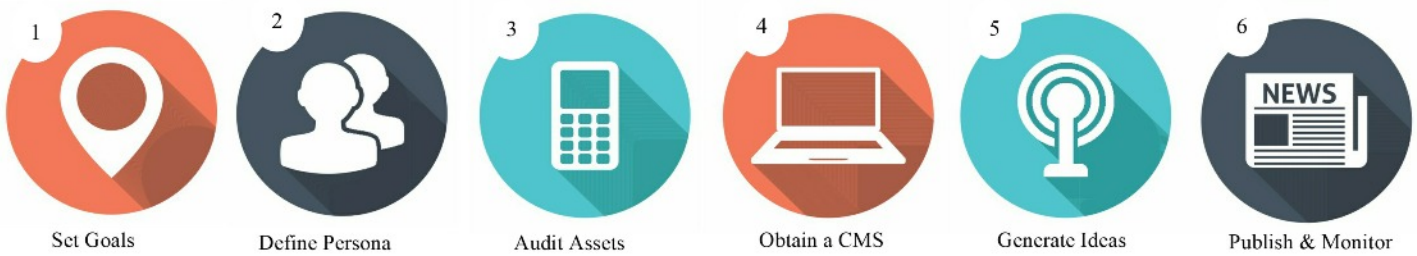
Successful products (and marketing programs) are founded on delivering compelling information to customers. Within the life sciences B2B sector, quality technical content is the bedrock of marketing communications. Think journal and trade articles, white papers, technical data sheets, case studies, brochures, etc. As channels go, they are well-established and trusted resources, and will remain so for the foreseeable future in terms of driving thought leadership, trust and action between brands and customers.

The Times They Are a-Changin

The digital era that we live in today is changing the way marketing is practiced. Thanks to the abundance of information online, customers are now more empowered, interact with brands 24/7, virtually anywhere. Their expectations of service are also higher than previously, with a greater weight placed on being able to access engaging, value adding and timely information and responses.

Against a backdrop of these heightened customer expectations, a company's ability to deliver a superior customer experience is critical: firms must provide the right information, using the right channel, to the right audience, and at the right time.

Content Marketing Roadmap



1. HAVE CLEAR GOALS

Goals bring into focus your content marketing aims and what the program needs to accomplish. Goals should clearly spell out the reasons for the content marketing program and the ideal or desired end state. Needless to say, goals should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and, Time limited.

2. DEFINE USER PERSONAS

User personas are fictional but realistic descriptions or profiles of your company's target customers. The content marketing plan should include a definition of the user persona because this assists with understanding the type of content that your target audience will warm to as well as the style, delivery strategy and target topics to focus on.

3. UNDERTAKE AN AUDIT OF ASSETS

With clearly defined goals and target personas, the next step is to do a review of the content assets and resources already available. The audit takes the form of a structured assessment in order to identify existing activities, goals and results. A meaningful audit should also benchmark your company's activities against its suppliers and competitors.

4. OBTAIN A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A Content Management System (CMS) is a software program that facilitates the creation, entry, modification, publication, marketing and monitoring of digital content. Several proprietary packages are available (e.g. Communicator, Hubspot, WordPress, Marketo, etc), and while it is possible to do content marketing without a CMS, using such a system just makes life a lot easier.

5. GENERATE CONTENT IDEAS & GENRES

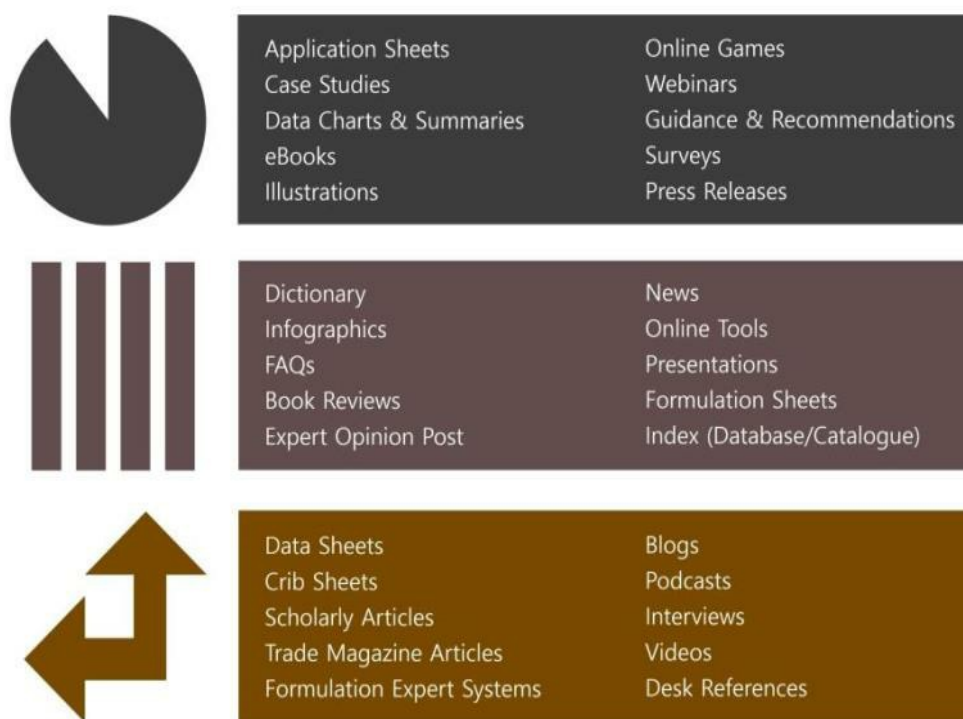
Coming up with content ideas is highly challenging even for seasoned and experienced writers. However, great ideas can come from suppliers, brainstorming, a survey of your customers (particularly their pain points) as well as examining any recent developments in your field. Popular content formats include blogs, opinion posts, review articles, and even applications sheets.

6. PUBLISH & MONITOR CONTENT

The final element is concerns the routine management of content marketing activities. This includes the publication calendar as well as how the effectiveness of the created content will be measured. A calendar ensures your publication is efficient while monitoring ensures that any content that's created remains engaging and appealing to your target audience while also communicating your company's brand values.

Which content formats should you use

Delivering more value to your audience requires that you broaden the types of content you create. A list of the most common formats is here below:



Here are ten major content genres commonly encountered within the life sciences sector:

Blog posts

A blog is a routine log of commentaries, views, summaries, etc, that is published by an individual or organization in order to attract a following. In order to be effective, blog posts should aim to captivate and deliver valuable insights so that a reader can share them on social media and other channels. There is no agreed length of a blog post, and instead, you should test out different lengths to determine if your audience favours short or long posts.

Case Studies

A case study is a description of an event, phenomenon or activity that uses real or hypothetical scenarios to communicate the complexities faced in you would encounter in the workplace. Case studies are used to assist customers conceptualise complexities of real life influence decisions. The illustrative nature of case studies makes them especially useful in B2B marketing where you often need to communicate to customers, in-depth and from several perspectives, about you're the value of your solution.

Articles

Articles are usually short papers (2 - 30+ pages) in academic journals (scholarly) or trade magazines (non-scholarly) that give an account, in some detail, of research findings or phenomenon of technical interest. Articles are published in issues or parts, and designed to appear regularly or periodically. A scholarly article has probably the highest merit and prestige within the scientific community, when compared with other content formats such as blogs, textbooks and conference papers.

Webinars

A webinar (also online seminar, web lecture or virtual event) is an online event that's typically attended exclusively by an online audience. A webinar is different from a webcast, which often includes a physical audience. Applied well, webinars can assist a company understand its customers, their problems and other issues of most weight. By providing live screen shots, video and materials to download, webinars essentially continue from where conventional slide presentations end, adding significant value to customer experiences.

White Papers

According to Hubspot, a white paper is "a persuasive, authoritative, in-depth report on a specific topic that presents a problem and provides a solution" Within the life sciences, white papers are published either online or in print to educate and inform audiences developments and benefits of a specific technology, product/service or approach. In simple terms, they are a troubleshooting guide. The scholarly style adopted by white papers makes them ideal for capturing leads, particularly if they address customers' pain points.

FAQs

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are a collection of the most commonly asked questions with the answers provided. Usually, FAQs are a distinct page on the website (distinct from about us) and aim primarily to allay common concerns, questions or objections that customers may have. When done properly, FAQs are highly effective content strategy in earning customer trust and delight through proactively dealing with their issues. This also relieves the burden of answering questions by an over stretched customer support function.

Infographics

Infographics (hybrid of information and graphics) are visual representations of information, typically combining text, images, diagrams/charts, and, possibly video, whose purpose is to explain a complex concept in a visually appealing and easy to follow format. Infographics are a fantastic way when requiring to share lots of information in a concise way. They are also powerful story-telling tool and universally popular, helped by their high aesthetic appeal.

Videos

Video has variously been described as the future of content marketing, and for good reason. It's been reported that video will account for up to 80% of website traffic in the near future. This aside, video is one of the most versatile content formats that life sciences marketers can use today. As a story telling format, video's blend of visual, motion and sound means that it has the ability evoke emotions and communicate powerfully better than most other formats. Perhaps the only downside to video is that they require a much larger investment in terms of time and resources than any other format.

eBooks

For life sciences marketers, eBooks are a long form of content marketing (longer than a White Paper), offering the opportunity to provide detailed information on a specific subject or topic. They are therefore a fantastic way to demonstrate thought leadership. Used correctly, eBooks can help establish companies as authorities in their respective fields, deliver engaging information to a target audience and help capture prospects when they are most primed to buy.

Data Sheets

A data sheet (also specification sheet, applications sheet, technical specification sheet, etc) is a document that provides a summary of a product's performance features. Some data sheets also include guidance on usage, in which case they are referred to as application data sheets. Technical specification sheets tend to focus on showing quantifiable technical parameters.

There are defined rules on what should go into a technical specification, nevertheless, products data sheets should include physical and technical details, complemented, as necessary, by functional and performance parameters, purpose and capacities of the product.

Is social media even a good idea for life sciences B2B?



- Facebook 2,000 million active users
- YouTube 1,500 million active users
- Instagram 800 million active users
- Twitter 330 million active users
- Reddit 250 million active users
- Pinterest 200 million active users
- LinkedIn 100 million active users
- Google+ 100 million active users

To the uninitiated, social media might initially appear to be the playground for B2C marketers. However, according to recent research, not only does social media represent an important tool for promoting content to your niche, it could actually be the most important channel currently. The particular social media chosen depends on personas and specific social media platform characteristics.

LinkedIn is particularly relevant to B2B life sciences customers, and it is not difficult to see why. Research shows that sixty-four percent of social referrals to corporate websites come from LinkedIn, compared to 17% from Facebook and 14% from Twitter. LinkedIn also has the highest proportion of university-educated, higher income users compared to any other social platform. This makes it of greater significance for B2B technical marketing than the other social networks.

Do not ignore search engine optimization (SEO)

Including SEO into your content will help make a good impression with search engines and boost your content's ability to be discovered online. Therefore, it is a good idea to start thinking about the use of keywords early on, how to earn natural links, as well as the inclusion of videos and pictures, and above all, how the content will be informative.

There are plenty of resources elsewhere on SEO, so this issue will not be reviewed in this White Paper.

“It is a good idea to start thinking about keywords early”

With a content marketing plan in place, social media and SEO fully taken care of, the next stage is to create the content itself. In the following sections, I review the four essential ingredients that make content informative, authoritative and compelling for life sciences customers:

The four essential attributes of compelling content

compelling

[Kuh m-pel-ing]

Adjective

1. Tending to compel, as to force or push toward a course of action; overpowering:
2. Having a powerful and irresistible effect; requiring acute admiration, attention, or respect

#1. DEMONSTRATE EXPERTISE

Expertise is a primary element of trust. We are more inclined to comply with a suggestion from an expert than from a non-expert. This is especially so within the science fields.

If, like most life sciences companies, your company have accumulated a unique body of knowledge over the years around what you sell, you no doubt possess unique know-how of your field, and therefore the ability to authoritatively assist your customers improve their business operations.

Successful companies use their market positions to share insights, ideas, research findings, tricks of the trade, etc. with your customers, which elevates them beyond simply being sellers of things into a valuable, go-to resources. This deepens their relationships with customers and engenders trust. This is why content should foremost demonstrate mastery and thought leadership to be compelling.

A good example of this is Merck & Co, the US multinational healthcare company, which has been publishing Merck Manuals since 1899 as a service to the healthcare community. These reference manuals are highly trusted as sources of medical information the world over.

Dow Corning, another US company, provides a technical library loaded with great content, covering applications, formulation sheets, case studies, FAQs, product selection guides, and journal article reprints.

As these examples demonstrate, expertise can change a companies fortunes, by helping cement them the go to authorities in their respective fields.

#2. GO BIG ON EDUCATION VALUE

Customer education is an incredibly powerful tool, and one that'll work for just about any company. Get it right and it will do wonders for your business.

So what constitutes customer education and how does it differ from advertising, I hear you ask? Well, customer education is about providing customers knowledge, skills and competencies for them to be more knowledgeable purchasers. Advertising aims primarily to persuade buyers, often on an emotional level, to drive a purchase.

Life sciences companies have historically been cautious about educating their customers. Many believed that giving away too much information removed information asymmetry, tipping power towards customers.

Of course we now know that there are many advantages for improving customers' knowledge, not least, the ability for a company to enhance trust in its brand and product. Customers today are looking out for genuine insights, and actually, customer education is equally as effective at influencing buying decisions as traditional marketing or advertising.

Colorcon Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of pharmaceutical excipients to the world's leading pharmaceutical companies, offers dozens of workshops and seminars, some free and some paid, to assist its customers learn about the features and capabilities of its products. As a result, it has been able to build a leadership position, carving out a market share in excess of 60% in its film coatings business.

To provide an indication on the value of educative content, research shows that education and learning videos earn 4X the watch time of animal videos on YouTube. Educative content is better at engaging audiences than any other type of content. An important tip about successful educational content is their entertainment value - content should address topics obscure and be humorous, not an easy thing to do, though.

If your company wishes to implement successful customer education programs here are three important considerations:

Begin with the customer. Before you draw up your education plan, it is important to remember that the purpose of any content you create is to attract customers' interest. So start with looking at the informational needs of the personas you created to help develop educational content that's more customer-centred.

Develop alluring content. Content is king, particularly if you want to create a sustainable, quality stream of visitors to your website. Therefore, aim to create unique, high-quality and utterly authentic content that is entertaining, useful and interesting for consumers. This can include text, video and infographics, webinars and podcasts, etc.

Personalise. Customers today want personalization. One way to achieve this is to employ personalized marketing techniques, by creating and delivering content that is individualized, relevant and actionable for each customer's circumstances.

#3. PRACTICALITY / USEFULNESS



If your aren't taking the customer experience seriously, the time to take action is now. Customers today want answers yesterday, not next week, and they expect their needs to be attended to now.

Research also shows that customers want to manage their own experiences when interacting wiith organizations and do not necessarily like interacting with a human. If you company provides sub-par customer service, you will not only impact customer retention and loyalty, but also your bottom line.

The Banking industry doesn't sit well in many people's good books at the moment however, one thing they do very well is provision of online customer tools. Many banks now provide online loan calculators that help customers determine what repayments will be and the loans will be affordable.

Closer home, Lonza, the Swiss chemicals and biotechnology multinational, provides its online visitors product selection tools, FormulaProtect® and Preservation Connection™ which allow customers to easily identify preservatives that best match their specific formulation needs.

Such tools can generate a lot of goodwill for companies, and unquestionably help drive new business. They are simple, easy to use and very helpful.

Whatever tool or help you wish to provide your customers, it helps to ask these questions in order to build an understanding of your customers' purchasing journeys:

- What are their most common pain points and how does your solution help address them?
- What are the common buying triggers that set customers off in search of solutions?

#4. NEWSWORTHINESS

If you are looking for ways to appeal and engage your customers, I suggest you devise a way to share stories, insights and trends about your sector that are newsworthy. This approach is a powerful way to educate, entertain, inform and inspire your customers.

In fact I go as far as saying nothing does wonders for building awareness about your business like a regular blog or newsletter or other news Feeds.

Studies show that companies that succeed with this approach are able to drive up to 50% higher conversion rates from visitors who view this type of content compared with those who view only product-centric content.

Do the same by providing up-to-date, newsworthy content to your customers via a blog, newsletter, sector report, market trends, white papers, podcast, social media feed, etc. Go further and distribute the content through multiple channels, including your own site for maximum exposure and reach.

One company that's used this technique well is GE Healthcare, the multinational conglomerate. As both a B2B and aB2C, GE Healthcare understands that telling it's stories to its core constituents is a fundamental aspect of building its brand, and that this helps shape how people view it.

All the captivating news items, behind the scenes pictures and content on YouTube, Instagram and other social media channels work to draw customers into your world, helping to increase awareness of the scope of what you do and showcasing positive experiences about your brand.

If this is of interest, try and find ways to weave storytelling into the content you create. Do it well and you will significantly increase the odds that your brand will be able to break into your prospect's mind to leave an indelible but positive impression.

Aligning content to buyer needs

The final aspect in the creation of value-adding content is alignment. Aligning is important in the life sciences sector because customers go through various stages in their purchasing journey: gathering information, identifying alternatives, weighing evidence, evaluating alternatives, etc. By tailoring content - not just the types but message, you are aiding their decision-making and improving the chances of winning their trust. Here below is a guide on what content might be required when:

	Sales Stage		
	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	DECISION
Prospect want to:	To define the problem	To assess available options	To try/negotiate/purchase
Role & Relevance of Information	To educate & reinforce prospect about problem	To demonstrate your solution's suitability	To affirm your credibility & support decision to buy
Marketer's role	Educate prospect	Validate proposed solution	Convert prospect
Information needed to engage & build prospect's trust	Trends & Statistics News Coverage Benchmarks Articles & Blogs Videos, Webinars Expert opinion	GAP analysis Comparisons Road maps Case Studies Application Guides White Papers	Technical Spec Sheets Pricing Business Case RoI Testimonials Certifications
Typical query words	Troubleshoot, Formulate, Improve, Issue, Optimise, etc	Supplier, Technology, Tool, Providers, Service, etc	Review, Assessment, Approved, Pros & Cons, Best, Prices, etc

How can technical marketing assist?



Technical marketing agencies, like Scienopsis, Techmark or Fastfloor, are a special type of marketing agency in that they primarily focus on the executorial aspects of B2B technical sales.

Combining outsourcing and marketing ethos, technical marketing agencies are pitched as an extension of in-house marketing teams, offering both traditional and digital marketing services, as well as value-adding solutions like lead generation and sales fulfilment.

Compared with generalist agencies, the blend of creative and technical competencies means that technical agencies to deliver services and campaigns that are most likely to best meet needs of technical customers.

Summary

If you are looking to turbo-charge your content marketing campaigns and to improve user engagement, it is worthwhile putting your efforts into polishing up your content marketing plan. The content plan should primarily focus on content preferences of your target niche. Online content that caters to your target niche can be distributed out in many different formats (infographics, e-books, brochures, videos, podcasts), the choice of which depends on specific characteristics of your content and industry. Whatever you go with, make sure it is the type that gets them involved and shareable in order to boost your brand reach.

ABOUT SCIENOPSIS

Scienopsis is a London-based, full-service technical marketing agency that assists life sciences B2B companies with sales and/or marketing implementation of complex, technical products, solutions and technologies.

We are experts at crafting winning marketing strategies, PR & content marketing, trade shows/experiential, customer events, sampling and, lead generation, contract/outsourced sales and marketing services, that unlock deep loyalty and customer acquisition.

Our core clients are manufacturers and distributors of excipients, fine ingredients, technologies and solutions for pharmaceutical, cosmetic and food sectors.

If you'd like to learn more about any of our services, please, please contact us for a confidential, no obligation consultation.



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