

THE CRITICAL CONTENT STRATEGY



Think about your content strategy. Don't have one? Think again. How do you get training, marketing and sales content to your sales reps? How do you manage that content? How do you gain feedback from those who use it? How do you improve your content and make updated versions available to your reps?

The answers to the questions above are snapshots of your content strategy. They reveal your process for creating and delivering content to your sales people. So, whether it's an official, version-controlled and color-coded plan or more of a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach, you *do* have a content strategy. And it has a drastic impact on the success of your sales team.



90% OF SELLING CONTENT IS NEVER ACTUALLY USED IN SELLING

Just how drastic of an impact? A recent study by IDC found that 90% of selling content is never actually used in selling. Another study found that instead of selling, sales people spend upwards of 40% of their time creating their own messaging and sales support tools. As a result, sales teams are not agile enough to overcome the complexities of the selling process.

You probably put a significant amount of time and energy into creating content to support your sales team. So these stats may be pretty discouraging. But they don't have to be. That's where a smart, well-executed content strategy comes into play. Done correctly, it can bridge the gap between you and your sales reps. It can ensure that you are constantly providing reps with content they need in a way they can access it easily and use it regularly. And it can enable your reps to easily provide feedback (sometimes without them even knowing they're doing it) so you can continuously improve and your content and keep it relevant and effective. How? A mix of technology, individualization and organization, socialization, feedback and measurement, and iterations will do the trick.



TECHNOLOGY

When you think about it, the basics of the information you're providing your reps hasn't really changed. It's still the same support provided to your reps as answers to common questions, materials that will help them overcome challenges and resources that help clients understand the value of your products and services. The core of your sales, marketing and training and development content hasn't changed. The way you deliver it, however, has changed drastically over the last several years, thanks to technology.

Technology has completely changed the game. It has enabled the creation of learning platforms that facilitate your content strategy for you. It helps you manage your content with a fraction of the effort that would be required without it. And it provides the

opportunity to serve and communicate with your sales reps in a way that was never before possible.

Through the power of mobile devices and the right software, you can make content available when and where your reps need it. No longer do they need to wait for the next training session for information about new products or services or wait for their shipment of updated brochures to arrive. Instead, you can deliver everything they need right to their tablet, smartphone or computer.

And, thanks to technology, you no longer need to continuously plan for how you're going to deliver your content to your sales reps. How you'll get them to provide feedback. How you'll use the feedback you collect to measure results and make improvements. With the right technology in place, you can set up a system that will do it all for you, making life easier for you and your sales reps.

That's why technology is the foundation of a solid content strategy. It makes it possible to serve your reps with content whenever and wherever they need it, while you observe what's working, what's not and where you can make improvements.

But even with the right technology in place it's up to you to ensure that the content is what your reps need, that they are able to find efficiently, and that they can use it effectively.



INDIVIDUALIZATION & ORGANIZATION

According to the CMO Council, 40% of a salesperson's time is spent searching for and/or creating content. This discouraging reality can be avoided by giving your reps the ability to curate and organize the content you provide in a way that works well for them – to individualize their learning.

You see, no two sales reps have the same learning styles, knowledge bases, skill sets or gaps in understanding. They all need different things in order to reach their greatest potential. And they all need it delivered in different ways.

For this reason, it's important when building your technology solution, to incorporate opportunities for your sales reps to individualize the way they access and use your content. This means allowing them to opt into subjects where they need help, focus on areas where they need personal improvement and subscribe to have new content in their areas of interest delivered directly to their devices. It means giving them the power to establish preferences for visual content over written content or for interactive courses over handbooks. And it means providing short pieces of content or “bite-sized chunks” of information that are easily and quickly consumed. This allows the sales rep to use the system to group together streams of information that is all relevant to their needs.

Leverage technology to provide individualized learning opportunities for your sales reps and give them the power to consume your content in the ways that are going to be most effective for their continued engagement and growth.



SOCIALIZATION

You must understand what your sales reps actually need to be more successful. The best way to do that? Ask them. Easier said than done, right? All too often, just asking your sales reps what they need isn't so simple. They're too busy with clients and prospects to

schedule time to talk with you about content. Who could blame them? Their top priority is sales, after all.

The answer here is socialization. As part of your technology solution, you can provide a community for your sales reps to interact. Encourage them to ask questions of each other about things like how to overcome recurring roadblocks, tips for managing challenging situations, helpful resources for certain parts of the buying cycle, answers to frequently asked questions, and techniques that work (as well as those that don't).

Give your sales reps a place to talk to each other. Your reps value each other's opinions and can learn a lot from each other's successes and missteps. Providing a community and encouraging socialized learning allows your reps to see what content their peers are using and how they're using it. This communication adds credibility to your content, as it shows that it has been vetted and qualified not only by you, but by members of the community.

Socialized learning empowers reps to help their peers, while also making it possible for you to observe their interactions, yourself. This will provide valuable insight about what content to create or modify to best meet your reps' needs.



FEEDBACK & MEASUREMENT

Once you have your content created and in the hands of your sales reps, it's imperative that you get their feedback. Without it, how are you to tell what's successful from what's not?

Feedback is critical, but it's no secret that gathering it can be quite a challenge. The best way to ensure you get it is to eliminate any and all barriers that could possibly stand in the way of your reps providing it to you. It must be absolutely effortless.

This is where technology comes in. With the right system in place, your sales reps can provide feedback without even realizing they're doing it. Your system can collect data about what content is most popular, as well as when it's being used and by whom. It can be set up to couple feedback with analytics in ways that will really work hard for you.

For example, it can tell you if your visual content is more popular than your written content or that content about widgets has been more popular in the last month than content about gadgets. Of course, it can also collect comments and suggestions offered up by your sales reps, but when your feedback feeds your analytics, these comments become really delicious icing on the cake instead of critical (often out of stock) ingredients.

Once you establish technological solutions to help you collect feedback effortlessly, it's important to use it. The data collected through the analytics is the most important information you'll receive about your content strategy. In fact, it's so important that it should be the key driver in your strategy.

Think about it, when you have transparency about the who, what, when, where, why and how of your sales reps' usage of your content, you have all the information you need to adapt, iterate and continuously improve your content.



ITERATIONS & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Gathering feedback and collecting measurements is only effective if you do something with the data. It's imperative that you apply what you learn through your feedback channels to continuously make improvements, adjustments and modifications to your content, the technology that delivers it and your overall strategy.

Listen and learn from the feedback your reps provide about the content you deliver. Take advantage of every opportunity to improve your content and further mold it into the supportive resources they need.

As you make improvements, release them. This is an iterative approach to managing content and it's an effective way to get the freshest, highest-impact content into the hands of your sales reps as quickly as possible.

This iterative approach not only helps you get good content to your sales reps swiftly. It also helps you fail fast and quickly identify the "bad" content. Perhaps it's about a previous generation of product, the messaging is outdated, or the entire piece just isn't working. The combination of technology and an iterative process helps you identify it early and expire it. Holding onto bad content will just make it harder to find the new iterations of fresh, quality content. And this could damage a sales rep's user experience and possibly his motivation to find and use your content.

CONCLUSION

Whether you realize it or not, you *do* have a content strategy. It's just a matter of how effective and manageable it is. With the effort you put into your content, isn't it worth ensuring that it doesn't fall into the 90% that is never even used?

Remember these key points:

1. Leverage the power of technology to design and develop a platform that works hard for you and for your sales reps.
2. Empower your reps to individualize the content they want to receive and organize it in a way that works for them.
3. Create a community where they can socialize the content and encourage them to share thoughts, insights and ideas with their peers.
4. Build into your technology solution feedback channels that are effortless for your reps.
5. Enable that feedback to drive analytics and help you measure what formats, topics and features are most effective, as well as what areas of content need more work.
6. Apply the insights gained from this feedback to continuously improve your content.
7. Take an iterative approach to constantly releasing fresh, new, even more effective content and expire the content that just isn't working.

It may sound like a lot of work, but with the right technology in place, it's seamless and simple. It makes content management easy so you can focus on content creation.

Just imagine what a content strategy like this could do for your company. How much more could your sales reps accomplish without spending 40% of their time searching for or creating content?

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