ONLINE MARKETING FOR THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

The latest digital trends, news, research, and tips for marketing in the industrial space.

MarketingMaven

The Industrial Supplier's Guide to Online Marketing Success

www.engineering360.com/marketingmaven

Introduction

Engineering360 is pleased to bring you this selection of marketing articles compiled from recent editions of the Marketing Maven, our monthly e-newsletter created exclusively for business-to-business sales and marketing professionals in the industrial sector.

The following pages deliver valuable and timely news, research, analysis and insights on a variety of relevant topics that can help you build your brand and your business. We've divided this booklet into four distinct sections for easy reference:

• Online Marketing Strategy

• Email Marketing

• Content Marketing

• Social Media

We also invite you to receive the Marketing Maven e-newsletter on a regular basis. **Subscribe today** and begin receiving online marketing strategies, effective practices and valuable tips.

For the latest trends in online marketing, read the **Marketing Maven blog**. You can also find us on **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, and **Facebook**.

Content

Online Marketing Strategy

Email Marketing

Content Marketing

Social Media

ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY

- Five Tips for Differentiating Your Business from Competitors
- Four Best Practices to Optimize Your Lead Nurturing Efforts
- The Early Stage Buy Cycle is Where the Relationship Starts
- Three Key Tactics for Marketing to Support Sales
- Using Buyer Personas to Find More Customers

FIVE TIPS FOR DIFFERENTIATING YOUR BUSINESS FROM COMPETITORS

Every market today is a busy, crowded, competitive market. In the industrial sector, many companies offer similar products, components and services. The quest to stand out from the crowd and differentiate from your competitors is a difficult challenge, but once overcome will help you gain a stronger, more recognizable position in the market.

Here are five tips to help you create differentiation, and distance, from your competitors:

1. Know your enemy

This saying, taken from Sun Tzu's "The Art of War", may be on the dramatic side, but for industrial companies it means that, in order to differentiate from your competitors, you must first study and know them. What are their strengths and weaknesses? How do they position their company and offerings? What promises do they make in their marketing? How are they perceived in the industry?

Getting answers to these questions allows you to focus on how you are different and what you do better than your competitors. You need to find those key attributes that set you apart.

2. Stick to your mission statement and core values

The relationship between companies and mission statements can take one of three forms:

1. The company doesn't believe in mission statements, perhaps thinking they're a waste of time

2. The company takes the time to craft a mission statement but then basically ignores it

3. The company takes its mission statement seriously, putting energy and resources into understanding the organization's purpose and core values, what it hopes to achieve, and how to achieve it.

Be that third company. A solid mission statement can help focus your company, provide a framework for evaluating whether opportunities fit your business model and strategy, establish your brand, and give your employees core values to embrace.

A mission statement should be short, simple and specific. Avoid industry buzzwords. Avoid saying what any other company might say, and instead focus on what's unique and special about your company. If you don't already have a mission statement and need inspiration, visit the websites of the companies you admire most (industrial, b-to-b, consumer or otherwise) and check out how they have positioned their businesses.

3. Be innovative

A sure way to separate your company from your competitors is to do something innovative. It may be on the product side - being first to market with a new technology or product is a huge differentiator. But there are other ways to be innovative. You could make a name for your company by implementing innovative customer service, warranty or replacement policies that are unique in your industry. You can open a "virtual university" to share technical expertise with the customers, the market or even engineering students. You can be the company that sponsors an online discussion forum for engineers.

4. Tell a compelling story

Every company has a unique and compelling story to tell. What's yours? Started by a couple of engineers in a garage? Successful merger of two unlikely marriage partners? Built from the ground up by a visionary who identified an unmet customer need? More and more these days, customers are digging deeper into a company's history before choosing to do business with it. They're looking for a company with a strong pedigree and satisfied customers. A company they can trust. A company that has that extra something special. Your company does have that extra something that your competitors don't. Find out what it is. Tell your story. Publish it on your website. Include it in communications.

5. Reinforce though marketing

You know what makes your company unique and different from your competitors. Now you need to repeat and reinforce that message in your marketing efforts. Extract those couple of words or compelling messages and repeat them through social media, content marketing, e-newsletters, banner ads, boilerplates, webinars, and other forms of marketing. Do this often enough, do it right, and back it up, and you will become known as the company that offers the highest quality products, the fastest delivery of custom orders, or best customer support. Or the company with the greatest technical expertise, the most creative problem solvers, the most experienced consultants . . . or whatever differentiates you from competitors and secures your unique position in the market.

FOUR BEST PRACTICES TO OPTIMIZE YOUR LEAD NURTURING EFFORTS

In this digital era when technical professionals have more sources of information and a broader choice of vendors than ever before, many do not contact a supplier until they are close to making a buying decision. Other potential customers contact every possible vendor that could serve their needs. In either situation, and everything in between, you end up generating leads from technical professionals who could be anywhere in their buy cycle - from early research to late stage.

To convert more of these leads to sales, to keep your sales reps happy with qualified leads, and to improve marketing ROI on your campaigns, you need a solid lead nurturing program to help prospects move along to the next stages of their buy cycle. The word nurture means to nourish, protect, support and encourage. And that's exactly what you need to do with your leads:

- Nourish - provide them healthy servings of relevant, useful information

- Protect - keep them interested so they don't abandon you for another supplier

- Support - stay in regular contact, always ready to meet their needs

- Encourage - give them offers to help them move forward in their buy cycle

An effective lead nurturing program will fulfill all of these goals. Here are the best practices you need to follow:

1. Segment and score leads

Sales and marketing need to work together to define different types of leads; for instance, leads that are sales-ready versus leads that belong in marketing's nurturing program. Use any criteria that work for your organization to segment and score leads. It could be demographics, product interest, buying timeframe, purchasing authority, budget, size of potential deal, location, digital behavior (such as website visits, webinar registrations, white paper downloads) - or any combination of these attributes. You can apply weights to different lead attributes and come up with a lead score. Example: leads that score a one, two or three belong in marketing; leads scoring four or five are ready for sales.

The way that you score leads - and adjust their scores over time - is the foundation for all other best practices in lead nurturing.

2. Maintain prospect interest

If you do a good job of segmenting and scoring leads, you will gain a solid understanding of your prospects' interests and needs. Your goal then is to feed them a steady supply of content and offers related to their needs and interests. Technical professionals are looking for information that will help them solve the problem they are facing, which is directly related to the reason they contacted you in the first place. They want to know how things work, how your product helps them complete a task, what their different options are and what are the latest technologies and newest products.

You can deliver this information in a variety of ways. New leads might be most interested in educational content such as infographics, blog posts, articles, white papers and webinars. Prospects that score a little higher would be looking for demos, product overviews and technical specs. The next level might include buying guides, ROI calculators and competitive differentiators. Get the right information to the right prospects and you will keep them engaged.

3. Watch for signs of progress

One reason lead nurturing programs exist is that the buy cycle can be long, complex and involve multiple decision makers. Prospects do not want to be pressured into making quick decisions. You must keep the long view and respect their timelines in your lead nurturing programs. That said, look for signs of prospects moving forward, and when they do, take appropriate action, such as passing them off to a sales representative or sending them a customized offer.

To do this requires that you keep track of what your prospects are doing and adjust their lead scores along the way. For example, a lead that scores one upon initial contact with your company could become a three after spending three months in your lead nurturing program, based on their digital behavior. Therefore, you must continually monitor your prospects, track their behavior and look for signs of progress that indicates a change in the status of their readiness to engage.

4. Use marketing automation

It's possible to develop and execute a lead nurturing program using manual processes or spreadsheets, but marketing automation software is becoming a common tool and an investment might make economic sense. The fact is, your prospects are everywhere on digital media - websites, social media sites, blogs, webinars, video sharing sites and more. They are downloading, clicking, reading, streaming, watching and commenting. Plus you're likely using multiple digital channels in your quest to connect with prospects.

Marketing automation software allows you to capture all of this action across digital channels. It is built to excel at lead management and nurturing. It can help you manage all of this complexity by scoring leads, creating landing pages, tracking prospect actions, triggering automatic emails, reporting on the effectiveness of various content, producing analytics and much more.

THE EARLY STAGE BUY CYCLE IS WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS

The early stage buy cycle for engineers and technical professionals is the equivalent of the top of the sales funnel for manufacturers' sales teams. It's the beginning, when a buyer becomes aware of a problem or need and then begins to conceive of and search for a solution. If your company is already known to them, or becomes visible and sparks interest during a search, that's when your relationship starts with a potential customer.

Because of the vast amount of content available from digital sources, it's easier than ever for early-stage technical buyers to discover and research information about products, services and suppliers, and to narrow down their options before getting a vendor involved.

In this early stage, you might not yet have any personal contact with your prospect, you may not even have captured their name, but this is when they enter the top of your funnel.

Generating this early-stage awareness is critically important to the success of your sales and marketing efforts. You must connect with potential customers early in order to be a contender later when they are ready to make a purchase decision. Beginning the relationship early, even an anonymous one, offers key benefits to your organization:

- **You make a positive first impression on potential customers.** If your company name comes up when they begin their search, it's only natural that they gravitate toward you. Your widespread visibility in itself instills a sense of expertise and fosters trust. For example, the engineer searching for new diode laser technologies will be interested if they keep coming across your name (especially if it's linked to quality, useful content … but more on that in a bit).

- **You stay top of mind.** If you put consistent effort into branding and visibility tactics that raise awareness and help to widen and populate the top of the funnel, prospects will be exposed to you more often and will keep your company and products in their mind when they have a need.

- **Perhaps most importantly, marketing for the early-stage of the buy cycle can help to shorten the sales cycle for your sales team.** Your prospects will already be aware of your company and what you offer. They've been accessing valuable content that's helping to educate them. This means your sales people are speaking to an informed prospect and don't have to start from the very beginning every time.

The keys to early-stage success

The first thing to realize is that if a potential buyer does not know about you or find out about you in their early stage, they will not be contacting you in a later stage. They will be contacting one of your competitors. To be the brand that matters to your target audience, you should:

- **Build and maintain a strong online presence on those digital resources your customers use most in the early buy cycle stages.** Research shows that general search engines, supplier websites, online catalogs and industry-specific search engines and information resources such as Engineering360.com are the most popular digital channels for engineers and technical buyers early in the buy cycle. Diversify your presence across these channels.

- **Produce and publish a steady stream of content on digital channels for your prospects and customers.** Your audience is eagerly searching for content as they engage in their buy cycle. They are looking for white papers and technical reports, watching webinars and product demos and reading articles, newsletters, blog posts and more.

- **At this stage, your content should be educating prospects on a high level by, for instance, comparing approaches to solving problems, explaining how something works or commenting on trends.** Your goal is to get in the game by demonstrating knowledge and expertise. It's too early to be selling and trying to close the deals.

- **Recognize and respond when prospects move to later buy cycle stages, such as consideration and comparison.** At some point, either the buyer has dropped out or you will have generated an engagement opportunity, with your prospect registering for a webinar, subscribing to your blog, or initiating contact with your company.

You should have in place a plan to manage your engagement opportunities, either through ongoing lead nurturing programs or escalating a prospect to your sales team if they are giving off indications they are ready to buy. Don't waste those early stage efforts—make sure you know how to move prospects through the funnel.

Industrial marketers can sometimes overlook the importance of their customers' early buy cycle. By focusing resources on building brand and raising visibility, you'll attract more prospects at the top of your funnel, helping to ensure you have a pool of potential customers when it's time for them to make a purchasing decision.

THREE KEY TACTICS FOR MARKETING TO SUPPORT SALES

Companies continue to devote resources and effort toward creating alignment between marketing and sales teams. The more these two teams are on the same page, the more efficient your sales and marketing machine will operate and the more business you can win.

Industrial marketers have many responsibilities: creating marketing plans, selecting channels, executing campaigns, producing content, tracking results, and much more. But at the end of the day, all of their work comes down to helping make it as easy as possible for your sales team to win deals.

Whatever stage your company is in—full alignment between sales and marketing or just beginning to break down silos—here are three key tactics industrial marketers can deploy to help support their sales teams.

1. Provide dynamic access to relevant content

Marketers have become expert producers of content to attract potential customers and guide them through their buying journey. Websites, white papers, webinars, articles, videos, case studies—all good stuff. But your sales team also has a need for content, some of which you must create specifically for their needs, such as:

- "Elevator pitches" that reflect the positioning and value propositions of your company

- Collateral designed to take down specific competitors—a late-stage sales cycle need when buyers have narrowed their choices to a few contenders

- Customizable slide decks with a core set of slides that sales people can build upon for individual presentations

- Customer testimonials and case studies along product lines or vertical markets

- Email or letter templates for sales to use when corresponding one-to-one with prospects

- A library of responses to standard Request for Proposal questions

These are just a few examples of the types of content your sales team might need. The other part of the content equation is making content readily and easily available to sales people. Consider creating a dynamic document or an intranet page that you update frequently with links to content along with explanations on how they can best use the different types of content and in what situations.

2. Pass only sales-ready leads to your sales team

Your sales and marketing teams should work together to create buyer personas and a lead scoring system. Lead scoring systems are generally based on how well a prospect fits a buyer persona and their patterns of interest, as exhibited by their behavior (such as visiting your website and taking some type of conversion action).

Once a lead scoring system is in place, it's marketing's responsibility to assign scores and to pass to sales people only those leads that have scores high enough to be sales ready. The remainder of prospects goes into your lead nurturing programs until they, too, are ready for your sales team, or you are ready to remove them from your database.

If you vet incoming opportunities for your sales team, they will thank you. They won't have to waste time on leads that are not qualified and will have more time to devote to solid prospects who are more likely to buy. It's a win for everyone.

3. Communicate on a regular basis

Too often sales doesn't know what campaigns marketing has planned, what marketing resources are available to them, and the rationale for what marketing does. You can solve this problem by communicating with the sales team on a regular basis. You can produce a weekly or monthly internal email to the sales team, or send a marketing representative to sales meetings (and, conversely, have a sales rep sit in on your group's meetings).

You can introduce the campaigns marketing is working on and their goals, explain why and how you are using certain marketing channels, let them know what new content is available to support their sales efforts, and answer any questions they have.

Remember that marketing must take a proactive approach to working with and supporting sales. "How can we help?" should be marketing's mantra. Follow these three tactics and your sales department will look at marketing as an invaluable resource in their efforts at winning business.

USING BUYER PERSONAS TO FIND MORE CUSTOMERS

Buyer personas are fictional representations of your ideal customers that offer real-world benefits and are extremely useful to your marketing efforts. They can be used to develop targeted content for different customer types, craft relevant and compelling messaging, and help unite your sales, marketing and service teams by sharing a greater understanding of your customers. Buyer personas can even help guide product development efforts.

How to start

The raw material for developing buyer personas can come from multiple sources. It may be enough to rely on anecdotal experience from your sales team or other institutional knowledge regarding the goals and needs of your customers. However, you may want to engage in research or use other data to get a richer, more comprehensive persona. Many companies use demographic data as part of their buyer personas. Others conduct surveys or one-to-one customer interviews. You can also use online or offline behavior patterns to help fill out a persona. You may even have a good deal of this information on hand from other analytic efforts, such as tracking website visitors or content from case studies.

What to include

Buyer personas don't need to be complex or long. They should contain only information that is useful to your marketing efforts. Develop a separate persona for each type of customer that you have. If you only have one type of customer, you only need one buyer persona. If you have many types of customers, or if many people are involved in the purchase decision for your products (such as recommenders, influencers, users, and purchasing agents), you should develop a buyer persona for each type.

Here is some of the typical information you might include in a buyer persona:

- **Profile.** The type and title of the technical professional who is interested in your products. An engineer (design, process, production), a department head or a team lead, a senior manager, and so on. What are their professional duties and areas of responsibility?

- **Challenges.** What problem is your customer attempting to solve? How is this problem negatively impacting them? What are the consequences of not solving it?

- **Goals.** What benefits do they hope to achieve with the sought-after product/solution?

- **Obstacles/Objections.** What might prevent your customer from buying your product/solution? For example: financial constraints, strong competitive offerings, lack of confidence in your solution or perceived weaknesses, support or warranty issues.

- **Value proposition.** What solution are you offering and how does it address the challenges, meet the goals, and overcome the obstacles/objections of your profiled customer?

Create a template

Once you have decided what information you need to collect in order to develop buyer personas, create a one-page template that you can complete for each type of persona. A template is a smart choice because it allows you to maintain consistency and have the same fields for each persona, such as Customer Profile, Challenges and Solution.

Share buyer personas with your team and across teams, including sales, customer service and product development. Help everyone get to know what makes your customers tick and what's important to them so that everyone has a shared understanding. Make use of buyer personas in internal training efforts and when you bring on new team members.

Develop stronger messaging

Detailed buyer personas will help you develop stronger and more compelling messaging in support of your marketing efforts. Better knowledge of your customers allows you to target messaging to their specific needs, goals and challenges. You can more accurately position your products. You'll be able to focus on the most important benefits.

Developing buyer personas shouldn't require excessive time and resources on your part, yet the payoff can be significant. Revisit the buyer personas once a year or when your company launches new products, enters new markets or organizational changes occur such as mergers or acquisitions.

EMAIL MARKETING

- Eight Quick Tips for Writing the Perfect Email Offer
- Five Tips for Writing Winning Email Subject Lines
- Eight Point Checklist - Emails That Get Results
- A Quick Refresher to Improve Your Email Marketing
- Is Your Email Copy Helping or Hurting Conversion Rates?

EIGHT QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING THE PERFECT EMAIL

Email remains near the top of effective marketing strategies in the industrial sector, but you won't get positive results if you simply dash off a marketing email as you might any other email correspondence. Your marketing emails must be compelling, clear and concise. If you master these three C's of writing, you can get an A in email copywriting. Open up your notebooks (or open up your favorite note-taking app). Time for your lesson:

1. **Start with your subject line.**

When writing emails, we often save the subject line for last and dash off a few words that seem enticing enough for a recipient to open the email. However, along with the from line, which should include your company or brand name and/or a person's name that your audience will recognize, the subject line contains the most important few words you will write. They are also the hardest words to write. Craft a short subject line with one purpose in mind: getting your recipient to open and read your email. You can do this by being relevant, benefit-oriented and instilling a sense of urgency or uniqueness.

2. **Write clearly and concisely.**

A marketing email should be about one thing and one thing only: the offer you are making. Whether it's to download a white paper, register for a webinar, watch a video, get a complimentary needs assessment or something else valuable to your audience, get directly to the point using as few words as possible to entice your recipient to click on your offer. You should focus on the single most important message. Delete any extraneous, unrelated copy.

3. **Include a call to action; include it again.**

This advice may seem to run counter to the command for clear and concise writing, but your email is all about your call to action. Put your offer near the top, and again in your closing. Make the call to action so compelling your recipient would be foolish not to accept it. Write the call to action in linked text and also create a linked graphic (such as a button or other image).

4. Focus on benefits, not features.

Think of it this way: It's not bells and whistles that customers care about; it's the lovely sound the bells and whistles make. That's the difference between features and benefits. Convince your audience they will benefit from accepting your offer: they will learn how to save time, they will discover a better way of doing something, or they will solve a pressing problem. Make the benefits clear (and concise). Put them in bold text or a bulleted list for easy reading.

5. Answer this one question.

If you're having trouble getting to the heart of the message you need to convey, make sure your email answers this one question that every recipient has: "Why is this important to me?" If your copy clearly delivers a compelling answer to that question, you will see your click and conversion rates go up.

6. Write different versions.

If you are marketing to more than one audience, don't send them all the exact same content. Since the call to action is the same, different versions you write for each audience might be very similar, but a few copy changes can mean the difference between success and failure. Identifying your audience by title or the type of work they do, re-wording or re-ordering the list of benefits, or changing the headline to focus on each audience's number one motivator are all good ways to optimize the different versions.

7. Proofread.

Many a promising email ends up failing when your audience discovers a typo or writing error. Those kinds of mistakes tend to undermine your entire effort, because it's like saying you're not careful or don't care, a message that your audience can connect to your company, brand or products. It's not enough to use spell check; you must also look for punctuation problems, awkward grammar, and misused words. Have someone else proofread the email. It's very difficult to catch your own errors because you're so close to the work.

8. Test, test and test again.

Following these steps to perfection will mean nothing if your link directs to the wrong landing page or is broken. While you're on your landing page, complete the process by filling out the form or downloading the content being offered. Does it work the way it should? Is the form data being captured correctly in your back-end systems? Also, how does your email look in Outlook and the other popular email clients your audience uses? Does your audience read your emails on mobile devices? If so, how does it look on a smart phones and tablets? Take the time to test, make adjustments and test again until you have it right.

FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING WINNING EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

What makes an email subject line a winner? When it motivates the recipient to open the email. That is the subject line's sole purpose. Write a compelling and relevant subject line, and engineers and technical professionals will eagerly open your email. Write a weak or boring subject line, and your email open rates will be disappointing. It really is that simple.

Look at your own email inbox and you'll understand why the subject line is so critical. You're likely swamped with emails every day. What's the first thing you do? Scan for what's important and must be opened now, what can wait until later, and what you can discard without opening. Your decision is based almost entirely on two factors: the subject line and who's sending the email (the from line). That's a lot of responsibility resting with a few words.

Follow these five tips for writing email subject lines that instill a "must read now" feeling in your audience.

1. Promise value

You're sending an email to customers and prospects because you have important news to deliver. Important to your audience means value. What are they getting out of this email? Why should they pay attention?

For example: "New RF tool accurately predicts signal loss"

This subject line has a lot going for it. The recipient gets information about a specific new product that offers a powerful and important benefit. That's value for the intended audience.

Another component that makes this a strong subject line is that you know exactly what the mail is about: this new RF tool. A reader who opens the email is likely to learn more about the product and perhaps be presented with an offer: white paper, data sheet, webinar, etc.

2. Keep it short

The ideal length for a subject line is around 50 characters. Some might be longer, but keep in mind that the first 15 characters are the most critical because many business users read email on mobile devices, which often cut off part of the subject line.

Look at the above subject line again: "New RF tool accurately predicts signal loss." Exactly 50 characters. The first 15 characters get across the main idea of a new RF tool.

3. Convey a sense of urgency or newness

There's nothing like fresh news or the feeling that time is running out to get your reader to take action. The RF subject line meets the standard by mentioning a new product. However, consider this subject line: "White paper: top ten reasons why hydraulic pumps fail."

At first glance it's a good subject line. While it's a tad long at 72 characters, it promises value in terms of a white paper and it takes advantage of the ever-popular numbered list: the top ten (see also the headline to this article).

But this subject line lacks a sense of urgency or newness. A possible revision might read: "Just published: Top ten reasons why hydraulic pumps fail." The words 'white paper' are replaced with 'just published,' providing a sense of newness. Conveying newness is more important than whether the publication is a white paper or an infographic.

Here's another example: "Solar cell expert will speak at energy conference." A good subject line, it conveys valuable information. But again, adding a time element increases the sense of urgency: "May 4, Orlando: Solar cell expert to speak." What's sacrificed is information about a conference, but if the recipient is interested in hearing from a solar cell expert, they can find out the conference information once they open the email.

4. Personalize when possible

Many email marketing programs allow you to personalize the subject line with the recipient's name. This is an effective tactic. Who doesn't like to get a personalized email? It immediately attracts attention and raises the level of importance of an email.

Compare "Last day to register for laser webinar" with "David: last day to register for laser webinar."

The second subject line hits a lot of the right buttons: personalization, urgency and valuable information. Perhaps this email is part of a multi-touch campaign promoting a webinar. An earlier subject line might have read, "Webinar to show new applications for diode lasers." But as the date approaches, the concept of time running out takes precedence over the content of the webinar.

If you're not able to personalize subject lines with the recipient's name, try to use subject lines with the words "You" or "Your" in them. "Your invitation to webinar on diode lasers." "Your complimentary pass to solar show."

5. Avoid spam filter triggers

Email marketing programs typically check for spam in your subject line and email content, but as a reminder, avoid the use of ALL CAPS (which also sounds like you're shouting), symbols such as $$ or %, and excessive punctuation marks: !!!!!

These will all increase the likelihood that your email will be tagged as spam. Certain words can also catch the attention of spam filters; for example: free, buy, cash, urgent, proposition and more.

EIGHT-POINT CHECKLIST: EMAILS THAT GET RESULTS

Email remains one of the most popular and effective marketing tactics in the industrial sector. However, to be effective with email marketing, you have to overcome a number of challenges.

First, everybody's inbox is crowded—how do you stand out from other emails and capture your audience's attention? Another challenge is making sure your email looks right. Industrial professionals read email on a variety of devices, including desktops, tablets and smartphones, and each device renders content differently. Of course, there's the entire relevancy challenge: Are you providing information that your audience wants and will act upon?

You can overcome these challenges and get better results from your marketing emails by following this eight-point checklist for success:

1. Identify a measurable goal.

For every email you send, even one within a drip campaign series to nurture long term leads, identify a goal that you can measure. This will help you create a concise, targeted email because every decision you face about crafting the email can be compared to the goal you have in mind. The goal could be number of opens, conversions, shares or any other metric that aligns with your objectives.

2. Create immediate interest with the subject line and from line.

When your audience scans their email inbox, they're quickly glancing at who has sent emails and what they are about. To capture attention, make sure the from line is identifiable to your audience. Use your company name and/or an individual's name your audience will recognize.

In the subject line, provide value to recipients, such identifying a key customer challenge you will help solve, or offer a complimentary white paper or a webinar that will help them with a work-related issue. You can also create a sense of urgency by reminding your audience that time is running out to register for an event or that an offer is only valid for a certain period.

3. Quickly tell your story.

Even the most engaged audience doesn't have the time or motivation to read through long, dense emails. Use your subject line, headline and first line or two of copy to tell your entire story, including what your email is about, why it's important to your audience and what you want them to do. Use bulleted lists and short paragraphs for easy scanning. Here are three words that always describe your marketing emails: clear, specific, concise.

4. Repeat your call to action.

You're sending marketing emails because you want your audience to do something. Make that part obvious by including a call to action (such as download, register, read, watch, etc.) in a number of places and using different styles. Put the first call to action near the top because some users will be sold right away based on your quick and compelling offer. Others will read through and then consider taking action, so you need a call to action near the bottom. Use both text and graphical buttons.

5. Add imagery, colors and graphics.

Plain text emails lack visual interest. By adding imagery such as photos, graphics, infographics and buttons, you can make your email stand out and reinforce your company's visual branding. You can even add multimedia such as video into the email. However, you should always give recipients the option of receiving plain text emails when they opt-in to your list. Tools offered by email marketing service providers will automatically create plain text versions of HTML emails.

6. Use a responsive design.

A responsive design can detect what type of device a recipient is using to read the email and will render the email optimally for that type of device, ensuring that all text and graphics look the best they can. Whether you are using an email marketing service provider or an in-house solution as your email platform, be sure you can creative emails with responsive designs.

7. Keep testing.

To get the best results from marketing emails, you should test different elements to see what performs best. The simplest tests are A/B splits, where you split your list in half and test one element in the email, such as the subject line or the placement/wording of the offer. With each subsequent test, you will learn a little more about what works and can incorporate your learning into future emails.

8. Segment your list.

This tip isn't about crafting an email, but segmenting your list will tell you what type of email you need to craft. Segment your list based on relevant criteria in your database, such as products owned, expressed areas of interest, geography or other attributes. With a segmented list you can create emails more targeted to your audience's interest and needs, and that kind of relevancy is the single biggest factor in getting the results you want from your email campaigns.

A QUICK REFRESHER TO
IMPROVE YOUR EMAIL MARKETING

How long have you been using email marketing to connect with engineers and technical professionals? A number of years, most likely. And when was the last time you cleaned your email list and made strategic improvements to your email marketing efforts? Chances are, the time has come to freshen up. It's worth the effort, because email remains an effective tactic in the industrial sector.

First, Clean Your Email List

If you are emailing to a stale list, you are likely incurring damage in terms of low response rates and brand reputation. You might even be risking having your account suspended by your email service provider if you incur a large number of spam complaints, undeliverable messages or unsubscribe notices.

There are several ways to clean an email list. You can send emails out asking recipients to verify their address and their desire to continue receiving emails from you, but if your list is poor, you'll get a poor response and this tactic won't help much. You can manually go through the list looking for problem addresses, which could take a long time and still not produce the results you need.

If you choose to manually validate and clean your email list, look for and remove:

- Duplicates

- Improperly formatted addresses

- Syntax errors

- Role accounts like sales@, support@ and info@

- Accounts with words like spam, junk, abuse, etc.

To increase the likelihood that your email list will stay cleaner longer, use only an opt-in strategy when building your list. Also, consider using email to fulfill downloadable offers; sending the recipient an email with a link to download a white paper, for example. This ensures you have a valid email address.

Also, going forward, keep an eye on bounces and unsubscribes. Make sure they are removed from your lists and suppressed from future mailings. Most email service providers will do this automatically for you.

Use Analytics to Improve Performance

With a clean email list in hand, it's time to freshen up other aspects of your email marketing efforts. Your number one tool in this is analytics. Most email marketing platforms can help you create more targeted campaigns and improve results. For example:

- Identify highly engaged recipients who most often open or click on your emails, and then offer rewards in terms of early access to a new white paper or industry research, special offers or a sneak peek at new products. Be sure to note in your copy that they are receiving the discount or special offer because they are a valued reader.

- Identify recipients who tend to ignore you and try to re-engage them. Give them a reason to pay attention again: discounts, an invitation to a special event, or a just-published white paper or video.

- Split your list in two (called an A/B split) and test various aspects of an email campaign, such as subject line, headline, copy, layout and graphics, and call-to-action. Change only one variable at a time when performing a test. Incorporate the successful changes into subsequent emails and you will get closer and closer to optimizing your email campaigns.

Incorporate these Proven Strategies

Industrial marketers have years of email marketing experience and many have learned what works and what doesn't. Here are some proven strategies and best practices that other industrial marketers have incorporated into their campaigns:

- Use an email marketing service offering responsive design templates that will automatically render well on different user devices, including mobile phones and tablets.

- Include only one offer in each email and repeat it several times, making it easy for your readers to understand and take action. Include both text links and buttons for your offer.

- Visually break up copy and make scanning easier by using subheads, short paragraphs and bulleted lists.

- Get to the point quickly by keeping important information, including the first mention of your offer and a call to action, near the top of the email.

- Include the offer (webinar, white paper) and/or action verbs (register, download) in your short and sweet subject line.

- Create synergy between your email and landing page by repeating key copy points and using the same colors and graphics. Landing pages are a great place to put social sharing icons, allowing your audience to share the content on their social media platforms.

IS YOUR EMAIL COPY HELPING OR HURTING CONVERSION RATES?

You probably have measurable conversion goals for your marketing emails. For example: download a white paper, register for a webinar, watch a video, complete a survey, enter to win a contest, and so on.

While email design, graphics, and sending date/time all influence conversion rates, the single most important factor determining success is copy. Your copy carries your message, tone, personality, and style. It announces your call to action. It broadcasts your benefits. Strong copy will increase your conversation rate; weak copy will hurt it. Sometimes it's that simple.

Here are five ways your copy could be helping your email conversion rates - and five ways it could be hurting them.

HELPING

1. Appeal to the interests of your audience.

The first rule of copywriting: Know what your audience wants and give it to them. If you are writing to engineers, focus your copy on their concerns. They are trying to solve problems, improve designs, increase efficiency, find the right components. If you're writing to executives, you might focus your copy on economic messages and return on investment.

2. Create a sense of urgency.

There's nothing like the sense of time running out to get people to take action. Phrases such as: Only one week left to register for the webinar; the first 50 respondents get a free sample; the trial period ends in 30 days. You get the idea. It's easy to put off taking action, unless you give your audience a reason to make a decision quickly.

3. Vary your calls to action.

Even within a single email, you should write your call to action in different ways, whether the words appear on a button or in plain text. That's because people respond differently to different language suggestions. What works for some may not work for others. For example, here are three different ways to word the call to action for the same offer: Download your complimentary copy; Click here for your white paper; Get the report today. Notice that each of them includes an action verb: download; click; get.

4. Keep your copy short and to the point.

While you don't want to sacrifice meaning, and of course you're a great writer, you do want to keep your copy concise and on point. Technical professionals are busy; they will scan your email to pick up important, relevant information. The great mystery writer Elmore Leonard had this advice to writers: leave out the boring parts. You should too.

5. Make the email come from someone.

This tip refers to two things. It's better to use an individual's name than a company name in the from line of the email, or even something like 'Brian Jones at Company Name.' But also consider writing the body copy as if it were coming from this individual. This helps you write more personally and conversationally, and helps develop rapport and trust with your audience. Don't forget a signature at the end.

1. Insider language loaded with jargon.

Every industry has its own terms that professionals understand, but you should perform an audience analysis to make sure your reader knows what you're talking about. Stay away from terms that you use only internally, keep industry jargon to a minimum, and spell out any acronyms you use. An email your reader doesn't understand is an email quickly headed for the recycling bin.

2. Long blocks of copy.

If any paragraph is more than three or four lines, it's too long. If any sentence is longer than three lines, it's too long. Long sentences and paragraphs are visually intimidating and difficult to read. Revise copy into shorter chunks. Use bulleted lists. Add sub-headlines.

3. Sales-oriented copy.

Your audience is looking for useful, educational information that will help them do their jobs better, not a hard sell. If your copy is too sales-oriented and pushes your customers to make a buying decision before they're ready, you may lose conversions. It's fine to sell your offer of a white paper or webinar, but do so by promoting benefits. Marketing emails that try to aggressively sell products in the B2B space typically fail.

4. When it's about you.

"Our company is the first . . . We offer the only . . . Our products are better than . . . We are the market leader in . . ." Guess what? Your audience doesn't care. Don't write copy about your company and products. Write copy about how you understand your audience's needs and can help fulfill them.

5. Mistakes.

Grammar police here. We're watching and we care. Grammatical and usage errors, misspellings, typos and factual errors not only hurt your conversion rates, they do harm to your company's reputation. If I can't trust a company to write clean, mistake-free copy, can I trust them enough to give them my business? Seemingly small errors can have large consequences. Have someone proofread all email copy before you hit the send button.

CONTENT MARKETING

- Two Types of Content That Must Be in Your Marketing Mix
- Six Ways to Make Your Content Stand Out in a Crowd
- Nine Tips to Make Your Marketing Videos More Engaging
- Five Questions to Help Guide Your Content Marketing Plan
- The Eight Keys to Content Credibility

TWO TYPES OF CONTENT THAT MUST BE IN YOUR MARKETING MIX

Content marketing is an essential strategy now that buyers do so much of their research online before contacting a supplier. Industrial marketers know that technical professionals crave a constant flow of useful content that helps them do their jobs better. But not everyone knows this content should fit into one of two categories: informational content or decision-making content.

You need both types of content in order to match up to the different stages of your customers' buy cycle. Early in the buy cycle, when customers are becoming aware of their needs and researching how to meet them, informational content plays a big role.

Informational content is more educational in nature. This type of content might enlighten your audience on a problem it faces, such as an article on "Five Ways to Avoid Pressure Sensor Failure." Another might be a webinar titled "Evaporation Methods Used in Industrial Coatings." These types of content are focused on providing your audience with information that will help clarify their needs or point them toward further research in finding an appropriate solution.

Informational content would also include general information about a type of product or industrial process: "Breakthroughs in Diode Laser Technology" or "How Motion Sensors Work." Background information on your company, product lines or services would also come under the realm of informational content.

Your goal in producing informational content is to help answer the initial questions your customers might have in the early stages of their buy cycle and to get them on the path to purchasing:

- "How does X work?"
- "What types of products should I consider to do Y?"
- "What are the common approaches to solving problem Z?"
- "Which companies offer. . . ?"

Informational content sets the stage for your potential buyers. It helps build awareness and affinity for your company and products. It puts you in the position of being an expert. It delivers insight and value to your audience, without putting pressure on them to buy before they are ready.

Decision-making content is designed for the later buy cycle stages, when customers have narrowed down their choices to several possibilities and are close to making a buying decision. With decision-making content, your goal is to answer your customers' final questions and put you in position to win the business.

- Does this product have all the features I need?

- Will it do everything I need it to do?

- How much does it cost? What will be my return on investment?

- Why should I buy this product and not that product?

- Why should I choose this company and not that company?

- What kind of customer support will I get? What warranties?

At this point, buyer's guides that walk customers through the factors to consider when making a purchase are useful content. As are specification sheets, competitive differentiators, product comparisons, ROI calculators, warranties and customer service policies.

A catalog that buyers search by specification can offer you an advantage by helping customers quickly find exact products that meet their needs. A responsive web page that details important product features would be directed to an audience in the late stage of the buy cycle. Any potential customer close to making a purchase decision is sure to be spending time on your company website looking for that "X" factor that will sway them one way or the other.

Technical professionals tend to use a variety of digital resources during their buy cycle journey. Supplier websites and online catalogs are used during all phases. E-newsletters and webinars tend to attract technical professionals earlier in the buy cycle when education and awareness are critical. Choose the channels that work best for you and develop both informational and decision-making content to increase your opportunities to connect with potential customers at all stages of their buy cycle.

NINE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR MARKETING VIDEOS MORE ENGAGING

The use of video as an information source is growing among your target audience. About half of technical professionals use YouTube or other video sharing sites for work-related purposes, making video a strong channel for industrial marketers.

Video belongs in your marketing mix. But just because you can create a video doesn't mean it will be visually interesting or engaging to your audience. Follow these tips to deliver more powerful videos that your customers and prospects will watch from beginning to end and be more likely to remember.

1. Give technical professionals what they want

Not all video content is equal in the eyes of your audience. Technical professionals aren't looking for big-budget, flashy marketing videos with all the bells and whistles. They simply want information to help them do their jobs better. The three most-watched types of videos among this audience are product demos, how-to videos/tutorials, and training videos. What's common among these video types is they are focused on how to use something or do something practical and relevant to their work.

Your audience also likes educational videos that present information on new trends and technologies.

2. Length doesn't matter - but keep it short

The assumption is that if your content is compelling enough, your video can be long as you want. But let's face it: none of us are Steven Spielberg or Quentin Tarantino. And attention spans in the Internet age are notoriously short. A good rule of thumb is to keep your video under five minutes in length - and even that might seem long. If you have a multi-step or complex how-to video, you can break it down into several shorter segments.

3. Provide good lighting and a neutral background

If you're filming product demos, you're likely showing computer screens. But if you have people talking in your videos, you need to be aware of lighting and background. Avoid casting shadows or uneven or harsh lighting. Make sure your subject is well lit. Don't have anything that's visually distracting in the background such as items on a desk, papers on a wall, or people passing by.

4. Eliminate noise, improve sound

There are two ways you need to deal with sound. One is to eliminate background noise: humming machinery, traffic, talking, the soda machine, etc. The other is to use a good microphone to clearly capture your speaker or narrator's voice. Also, give your video some life by adding introductory, transitional and closing music. You can try lowering the volume and keeping the music throughout the video to provide a pleasant and subtle aural texture (as opposed to background noise). Most video editing software comes with music clips you can add.

5. Follow basic principles of composition

The "Rule of Thirds" has you break down the image window for filming or photography into sections so that you can better frame your subject and provide greater visual interest. Apply these principles and you'll notice a difference in your video quality.

6. Brand your video

Make sure to include your company name/logo at the beginning and end of every video. Use other brand elements such as colors in a consistent fashion so that your videos all have the same brand identity. Perhaps choose a few pieces of music that becomes part of your brand - if your audience consistently hears the same few pieces of music they will associate them with your brand. Use branding elements during video transitions.

7. Include a call to action

At the end of the video embed a call to action to a landing page or other resource. Ask your viewers to do something: watch the next video, download a white paper, attend a webinar, or learn more. Thinking about a call to action will also get you in the frame of mind to consider how any one video is integrated into and complements your overall marketing mix.

8. Share your videos

You need to spread the word about your videos. Post your videos on YouTube or other video sharing sites. Create thumbnail graphics and link to them in your email newsletters. Add them to your Engineering360.com supplier profile.

9. Track performance

Video sharing sites such as YouTube offer metrics you can track to analyze how well your videos perform. Number of views, number of shares, and length of viewing are all important. If you find that viewers are not watching your entire video, you may need to dig deeper and do some testing. Is the content not relevant? Is the video too long? Use the metrics to gain insight on how you can improve your video production. Maybe you do have some Spielberg in you.

THE EIGHT KEYS TO CONTENT CREDIBILITY

Your audience of technical professionals seeks out content to help them do their jobs better, stay up-to-date on their industry and make more informed and confident buying decisions. You can help them on their journey - and position your company as a trusted authority and go-to resource - by maintaining a high degree of credibility in your content. Here's how:

1. Be useful and relevant.

This is the most important factor. Give your audience information that's helpful to them, such as explaining a technical process, comparing approaches to solving a problem, or analyzing a trend in their industry. If you can establish your expertise in specific areas and educate your audience, you will be able to build trust, and customers and prospects will return to you repeatedly.

2. Use three types of content.

Thought leadership is content that your company produces, typically educational in nature. Curated content is produced by others that you share with your audience, such as analyst reports or third-party articles or blog posts. And promotional content focuses on your own products and services. Each type of content has its place in your mix. There are no rigid rules about the mix, but we think a balance and appropriate breakdown looks something like this: 30 percent thought leadership content, 50 percent curated content, and 20 percent promotional content.

3. Be objective and professional.

You can and should establish a position and point of view in your content, but you should also discuss alternative points of view. Education is all about having a broad and deep 360-degree view of a topic. If other positions and points of view didn't have validity, no company would take them, so don't simply dismiss them outright. Instead, acknowledge alternative approaches and demonstrate why your position is the stronger one.

4. Cite sources and references.

If you're producing a white paper or technical article, perform research and use credible third-party sources such as industry experts, analysts and other publications to support your key themes. Cite sources in footnotes and/or a list of references at the end of the piece.

5. Ensure your content is fresh.

Content can get out-of-date quickly. You need to continually produce fresh content and put a publication date on it to show your audience that the information is current. For example, have you clicked on a company's blog link only to discover the last entry was months ago? What kind of impression did that leave on you? Another thing to watch out for is content containing information that is no longer accurate or relevant given any changes or trends occurring in your industry.

6. Avoid amateur mistakes.

Along with out-of-date content, mistakes can hurt your credibility. Typos, grammatical errors, fuzzy imagery, poor rendering on mobile devices, long download times, poor sound and other mistakes reflect poorly on your credibility. Proofread and test before publishing.

7. Produce content in a variety of formats.

Technical professionals have demonstrated an appetite for all types of content: white papers, webinars, videos, technical briefs, data sheets, blog posts, articles, case studies, product catalogs and more. The company that creates a wide variety of content in different formats gains credibility by giving its audience options. Remember that you can re-purpose content from one format to the next; for example, turning a white paper into a webinar.

8. Distribute and promote through the right channels.

Every company publishes content on their website. However, technical professionals use many digital sources in their search for content, including industry websites, directories, e-newsletters, catalogs and more. When your content appears in respected and widely accessed industry resources, your credibility increases. And when you promote your content using the channels that your audience uses- such as e-newsletters, banner ads on industry sites and directory listings- you will reach a greater number of targeted technical professionals.

Engineering360 offers a portfolio of content marketing services, providing you with a targeted audience and offering high visibility for white papers, technical briefs, articles and other content. You also can take advantage of solutions to drive your customers and prospects to your content. If credibility is important to you- along with building brand visibility and generating engagement opportunities through content- visit **www.engineering360.com/advertising** to learn more.
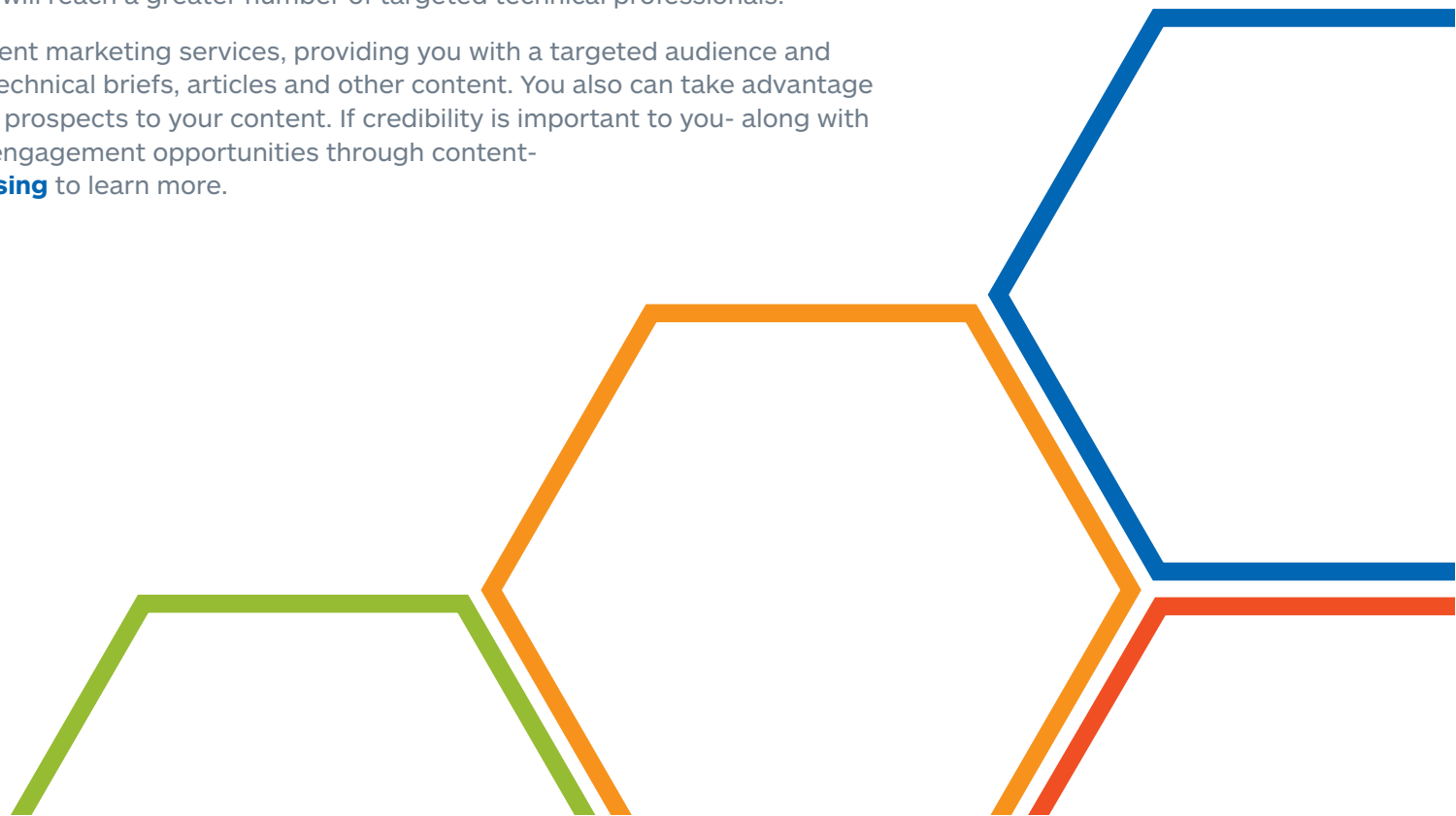
FIVE QUESTIONS TO HELP
GUIDE YOUR CONTENT MARKETING PLAN

Content marketing is one of the most important and essential marketing strategies in the industrial sector today. In this article, we'll define content marketing and relate its key benefits, then offer guidance on an effective content marketing plan.

Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as "a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."

The main benefit is clear in the definition: profitable customer action. When content marketing is done right, you can establish your company as a thought leader, build brand awareness, and generate engagement opportunities for your sales team. You can become a "go-to" resource for technical professionals, improve your results in search, and help to foster a trusted relationship with customers and prospects.

Your audience of industrial professionals is hungry for relevant content that can help them do their jobs and make better buying decisions. According to the **Engineering360 Industrial Buy Cycle Survey**, 83 percent of buyers review up to three pieces of content before making a decision on purchases under $1,000, while 70 percent of buyers review four or more pieces of content on purchases greater than $10,000. This desire for information on the part of technical professionals means that manufacturers need to step up their content marketing strategy. It all starts with a solid content marketing plan.

Your answers to these five questions will help you build a solid plan.

1. What are your content marketing objectives?

2. What resources will you devote to content marketing?

3. What content will you produce?

4. How will you get content to your audience?

5. How will you measure your results?

1. What are your content marketing objectives?

Your objectives could be short term and specific, such as educating prospects about a new technique or process that your company pioneered, or long term and broader, such as positioning your company as a thought leader and respected information resource in your industry. For either of these objectives, or others - driving web traffic, building a community, generating leads - your overall goal is to be relevant and valuable to your audience. If you aren't, they won't pay attention or give you the respect you are trying to earn.

Another important and universal objective is to integrate content marketing efforts with your overall marketing plan. Content marketing intersects and overlaps almost all of your other initiatives: website, social media, newsletters, directory listings and more. Once you understand your objectives and how your various marketing tactics work together, the next four questions will be much easier to answer.

2. What resources will you devote?

You may not need extensive additional resources to execute an effective content marketing plan. You already are engaged in content marketing, even if you're not calling it that. Publishing an e-newsletter, promoting a white paper, producing a video, hosting a webinar, writing a blog post or article - these are all content marketing. Now you need to take the next step and integrate the tactics under a set of defined objectives and target them to a specific audience. Depending on your in-house capabilities, you may need to hire professional writers, designers or other experts to support you or your team.

3. What content will you produce?

If you understand your objectives and audience, the content you need to produce should become readily apparent. Articles, blog posts and industry research are examples of content that help build thought leadership. Diagrams, product demos, and case studies help potential customers through the early stages of their buy cycle.

Some of the content you may already have on hand, so the first step is to audit your current content library, identify gaps and then fill in missing pieces. You'll likely be able to re-purpose existing content into other formats, such as writing an article based on webinar content, or creating a written customer testimonial from a video interview.

It's also important to consider format. All content should be easily downloadable and viewable not only on a desktop or laptop computer, but also on a mobile device. Avoid large files. Use PDF format rather than Word for documents.

4. How will you get content to your audience?

You can push your content out to your audience through tactics such as email, press releases or e-newsletter advertisements, and you can make your content discoverable by promoting it through banner ads or posting it on your website, online directories, or through digital media platforms such as Engineering360.com. The key is to place your content on the same online resources that technical professionals use to search for and discover information.

5. How will you measure results?

Some basic metrics include traffic to the content on your website or blog, and how visitors arrived at your content (social media, e-newsletter advertisement, banner ad, search engines, etc.). You can measure downloads of white papers or registrations for events.

You should also examine how long a visitor spends on a page, watches a video, or participates in a webinar. Length of view helps measure how relevant and engaging your content is. You can track shares, likes and comments on social media platforms.

Another valuable resource is the white paper,
"Content Marketing for Indsustrial Marketers" from Engineering360 Media Solutions.
Download your complimentary copy today.

SIX WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CONTENT STAND OUT IN A CROWD

Content marketing isn't just a hot topic, it's a must-have strategy in the industrial sector. A whopping 93 percent of B-to-B marketers now use content marketing, and 73 percent are producing more content than they did a year ago, according to recent industry reports. With all of that content being produced and distributed, how do you make your content stand out in the crowd and resonate with your target audience? Here are six tips to help you:

1. Understand what your audience wants.

Every marketing initiative must start with having a thorough understanding of your audience. Content marketing is no different. If you don't tailor your content to a specific audience, your efforts will be ignored or quickly forgotten, your valuable resources wasted. So step one is to analyze your audience needs. Are you trying to reach executives? Then produce content that talks about their business concerns such as return on investment. If your primary audience is technical professionals, you'll want to develop content that educates them on ways to solve the engineering and technical problems they face in their work.

2. Tap into industry trends - uniquely.

If there's hot news breaking in your industry, jump right on it. You can write a quick blog post, initiate a social media discussion, or distribute a press release that offers your company's point of view on what's happening and what it means to your customers. You'll gain the advantage of your content being timely and demonstrate that your company is tuned into the market. But remember, you need to offer a unique perspective. Otherwise you'll just end up saying what everyone else is saying and your content won't stand out. Take a stand, be unique, and foster your own voice to attract an audience for your content.

3. Distribute content on channels your audience prefers.

Two effective channels for distributing content are e-newsletters and webinars. According to Engineering360's **"Digital Media Use in the Industrial Sector"** research report, technical professionals subscribe to an average of 4.4 digital publications versus only 1.4 printed publications. In addition, nearly two-thirds of technical professionals said they attended at least one webinar or online event last year. Thirty percent said they went to four or more.

Also consider social media as a distribution strategy. Reading work-related content is the most common activity for technical professionals on social media. The most popular social media platform among this audience is LinkedIn, with 66 percent having an account. Distributing your content through your company's LinkedIn page or through a LinkedIn Group that you host is a good way to connect with your customers and prospects.

4. Use multiple content formats.

Produce content in the formats that match your audience's preferences. Some want to read white papers and articles, others prefer to watch videos, and others want pictures and diagrams. Visual formats such as infographics can grab attention and are gaining in popularity. Most successful content marketers re-purpose content from one format to another. This not only helps you match up to your audience preferences, but saves time and allows you to maintain a consistent voice and message.

5. Make content easy to share.

Be sure to include 'share' buttons on website articles and blog posts - and don't be afraid to ask your audience to share. It's easy to add a sign off that says something like "Did you like this article? Share it with others." Also, format content so that it can be easily viewed on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, which are increasing in usage among technical professionals.

6. Visually brand all content.

A visual identifier, graphic, and consistent look and feel can help your content stand out in the crowd. This goes beyond simply adding your company logo to content. It involves coming up with a distinctive identity that threads through all of the content you produce. It could be using the same colors and fonts, or using images that have unique shapes or styles, or any other graphic approach that stamps that content as belonging to your company. You want anyone who sees your content to be able to say: "That's from Company X."

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Five Way Your Sales Team Can Effectively Use Social Media
- How to Use Social Media With a Purpose
- Seven Steps for Cleaning Up Your Social Media Presence
- Keep Social Media Channels Alive with Fresh Content
- Social Media Use Holding Steady in the Industrial Sector

FIVE WAYS YOUR SALES TEAM CAN EFFECTIVELY USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has an established presence in the industrial sector. Technical professionals use social media to search for contacts, keep up on news and technologies, find product reviews and new suppliers, and for other work-related activities. If your sales team isn't using social media yet as a tool to help uncover engagement opportunities, you can get them started.

While not a one-to-one tactic such as email correspondence or a phone call, social media has a number of advantages as a B2B selling tool. It fits with the way buyers conduct research today: They go online and use a variety of digital resources to become informed about solutions that can meet their needs. Social media is also asynchronous, which means it is non-disruptive; you can use it to establish connections and help educate customers and prospects without interrupting them. In addition, intelligent and judicious use of social media can help establish a salesperson's credibility and authority, and help to raise the visibility of your company and its offerings.

However, many salespeople don't know how to effectively use social media in support of their selling efforts. It's marketing's job to educate salespeople and make them comfortable using social media. Here are five ideas to make it easier:

1. Develop internal guidelines for posting, sharing and responding on social media channels, and train your salespeople on the guidelines. Important topics to cover include frequency of posting, how to respond to tricky questions, how to avoid getting into online arguments, what company information can be posted and what is confidential, and where to find relevant content to share. It's a good idea to hold social media training sessions, such as a "lunch-and-learn" or internal webinar.

2. Educate salespeople who aren't yet comfortable using social media on a simple three-step social media process: find, listen and engage. Salespeople should start by finding their customers and prospects, as well as relevant industry sites, by seeking them out on LinkedIn, Twitter, Google +, Facebook and other social platforms. Next, they should "listen" by following their customers and prospects on social channels to discover their interests and concerns. Finally, salespeople should begin to engage customers, prospects and industry experts by responding to their posts, participating in discussions, answering questions and creating their own original posts.

3. Your sales team is busy; they can't use every social media platform, but you should encourage them to use the ones they are comfortable with and that their customers and prospects use. Hint: Your entire sales team should taking advantage of LinkedIn; it's the most popular social media platform for engineers - 66 percent of technical professionals have **LinkedIn accounts**.

4. If salespeople use a social channel, they should engage with it to its fullest. For example, on LinkedIn, they should keep an up-to-date profile that includes information and links about your company and its products and services. They can use LinkedIn to find and connect with key decision makers at customer and prospect companies - especially important when multiple people are involved in making a purchase decision. Your salespeople can follow customer and prospect pages (as well as your own company's page), join relevant groups, and participate in discussions by adding their expertise and answering questions that demonstrate their problem-solving knowledge. At the same time, it's important to be a helpful participant without shilling for your own products and services.

5. If a salesperson uses Twitter, they can follow their customers and prospects, respond to their news, and retweet their news to their own followers. They can also follow industry news and retweet it to their followers. With any social platform, the more you use it, the wider your network and influence will grow, increasing your visibility and reputation - all benefits for a salesperson.

6. As a marketer, you should provide your sales team with content that is ready to share on their social media accounts. This might include offers to register for webinars, links to whitepapers or relevant articles, new videos, press releases, blog posts and more. Not only are you helping your sales team with some of the most challenging aspects of social media use - generating ideas and deciding what to post - you're also maintaining some control over the message.

HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA WITH A PURPOSE

Social media use among technical professionals is holding steady, and social media should have a place in your marketing strategy. Recent research shows that the majority of industrial companies now use social media, yet many still do not have a clear purpose, goals, or means of defining or measuring success. Wherever your organization is on the social media scale - ignoring, listening, or regularly contributing - you're at the right place to step back for a moment to assess your strategy and to plan a logical, effective path forward.

Set realistic goals and objectives

Social media is oriented towards interaction, dialog, education and networking, and therefore may not be a direct driver of sales. But before you shut down your social media efforts, you should realize that technical professionals regularly participate in social media and in particular find it useful at the early stages of their buying cycle.

Recent research shows that the top three uses of social media among technical professionals are to keep up with the latest company news/products/technologies, to find product reviews, and to find new suppliers. These are all activities related to the early buy cycle when customers are engaged in gathering information and surveying the supplier landscape.

So if you are investing in social media in order to generate fast leads and sales, you may be disappointed. However, if your social media goals are to build thought leadership, foster a community, and generate brand awareness that will lead to engagement opportunities, then you may experience a high level of success.

Hang out with your customers

Doesn't it seem like there's always the next latest and greatest social media platform getting all the attention? It's hard to keep up. And it's almost impossible to spread your social media efforts across every platform available. That's why it's important to know which social media channels technical professionals like to use and to concentrate your efforts on one or a few of those channels.

According to Engineering360's **"Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector"** research report, LinkedIn is the most popular social media channel among technical professionals. Facebook and Google+ are next in usage, although in the past few years Facebook usage has stagnated and Google+ usage has increased among technical professionals. Twitter has yet to see widespread adoption with this audience.

Use this information to help direct your social media efforts. Establish company pages on these channels if you haven't already. Post news and content to it. Invite customers and prospects to follow you. You'll learn pretty quickly the types of content that resonate and you can start customizing each channel's content to its audience.

Deliver useful content on social media

One of the biggest challenges technical professionals report about using social media for work-related purposes is that there is "too much noise and not enough substance." The company that can rise to the top in social media is the company that provides "substance" in the form of useful information about new technologies, how to solve problems, relevant news and more. Use social media to deliver this type of content. You can post and link to white papers, articles, webinar invitations, interviews, news alerts and more.

Video is also a popular medium for social media users. Technical professionals use YouTube and other video sharing sites for work - related purposes. They're looking for product demos, tutorials, how-to's, and training videos. Establish an account on a video-sharing site and link to all your videos from your social media platforms.

Use metrics that matter to measure success

Technical professionals are passive users of social media. That means they prefer watching a video to creating and posting one. They prefer reading discussions more than contributing to them. Their most common activity on LinkedIn is to search for contacts. On Facebook and Google+, it's to find and follow other groups or businesses within their industry.

By understanding what your audience is doing on social media, you will be able to define the metrics that are important to track. In this regard, the number of relevant people following your company on social media is what counts. If this number is increasing, you're probably doing it right, and are increasing your brand visibility and gaining a reputation as a thought leader.

Integrate with other marketing efforts

Social media is one component of your marketing strategy, and like all components, needs to be integrated into your overall plan. Technical professionals still consider other online resources more valuable than social media for researching a work-related purpose: online catalogs, general search engines, supplier websites and Engineering360.com all rank high. Therefore, make sure that your social media presence is integrated with these other marketing channels. For example, links to your social platforms should be highly visible on your website. Or you can take advantage of integrating your social posts and videos on your Engineering360.com supplier profile page.

SEVEN STEPS TO CLEANING
UP YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Many industrial companies got started with social media by having dedicated employees with social media skills experiment with various platforms - LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others. There might not have been an overall strategy or vision attached to social media efforts. Some social media accounts may have languished, while others stayed active. In addition, other people in your company might have opened new accounts: customer service started their own, an executive or two took to Twitter, human resources began recruiting on LinkedIn.

You can see how easy it might be to end up spread out on social media, with no centralized control or guiding strategy. It's time to change that. With social media having established itself in the industrial sector, your company needs a unified social media strategy, a consistent brand and a relevant message. Here's how you can clean up your social media accounts and get the most out of your social media efforts.

1. Perform an Audit

The first thing to do is take control by identifying and documenting all of your social media profiles, both official and unofficial. The easy ones to find are your official company page on Facebook or LinkedIn. But did you try out Instagram once and never return? Start a YouTube channel and then forgot about it?

Look also for unofficial accounts by performing a general search for your brand on all the major social networks. You might find accounts that have been set up by well-meaning employees or even by rogues and spammers.

2. Check Your Social Media Strategy & Goals

Once you've compiled a list of all social media profiles associated with your company, see how each one fits with your social media strategy and goals. Are you trying to build thought leadership, get the most followers possible, interact with customers and prospects, or generate engagement opportunities? Ask how each existing account fits in with your goals, and prune out the ones that are not essential.

3. Understand How Your Audience Values Social Media

How does your social media presence align with the way your customers and prospects use social media? For example, LinkedIn is the most popular social media outlet with 66 percent of engineers and technical professionals maintaining an account on the platform, according to the Engineering360 research report, **"Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector."** For technical professionals researching a work-related purchase, Google+ and LinkedIn ranked highest in value of all social media platforms. Facebook, SlideShare and Twitter have the least value.

4. Choose the Accounts to Keep

Based on steps 1-3 above, you can decide which social media profiles you should keep active and which you should close down. If you have followers for some of the accounts being closed, you will need to notify them and ask them to follow a different account. Some social media platforms, such as Facebook, offer the ability to merge accounts and pages that you manage.

5. Identify Your Social Media Team

Depending on the size of your company and available resources, your social media team might be one person or it might be a cross-functional team of people. You'll need to know who's on the team and what role each person will play. It's also a good time to determine login credentials and permission levels for the various social media accounts. You probably don't want a free-for-all when it comes to posting social media updates. If you don't have a set of guidelines for social media publishing, now is the time to create one, to help ensure inappropriate content is not publicly posted and that all published content is aligned with your social media goals.

6. Update All Profiles

Time to freshen up. Banners and backgrounds don't have to be the same on every social media account, but they should complement each other and work with your brand. Make sure company descriptions are clear, consistent and offer value to your audience. Don't just describe your company - give people a reason to follow you, such as promising tips & tricks, or a new how-to article every week.

Fill out all the fields on your profiles. Update bios and photos of contributors. Check all links to other pages (also check the links on social sharing buttons on your website).

7. Consider Using a Social Media Management Tool

If you're making a commitment to cleaning up your social media presence and plan to integrate social media with your other marketing efforts, you might want to use a social media management tool to plan and schedule posts across platforms, track followers and monitor your results. There are a number of tools available to help you with this task, based on your individual social media needs.
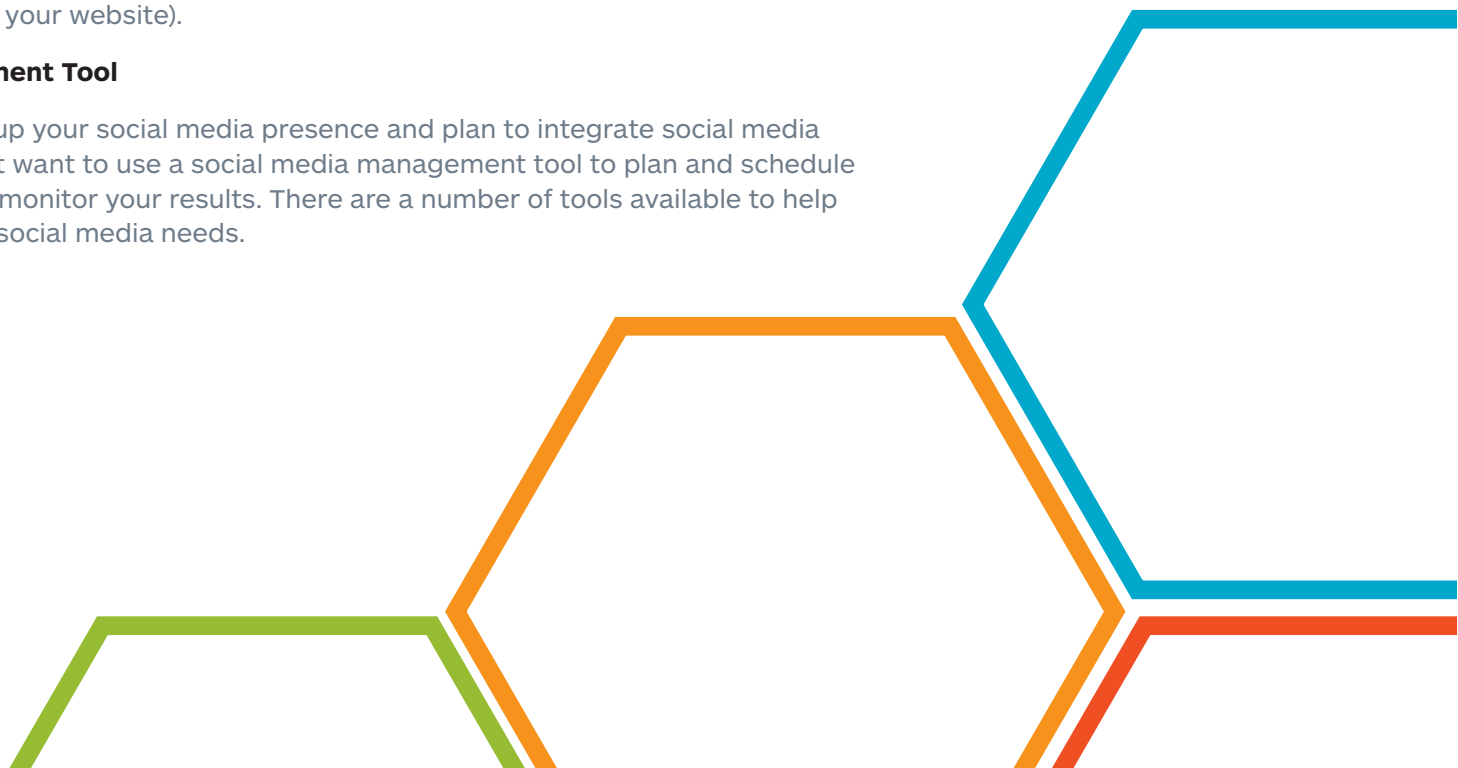
KEEP SOCIAL MEDIA
CHANNELS ALIVE WITH FRESH CONTENT

It's great to be a listener on social media. You can find out what your customers are saying and learn more about their interests. Listening is also a great way to test the viability of a social media channel for your marketing efforts. But at some point, to use social media effectively, you have to participate as well as listen. Participating means posting, and posting means you need content.

Content is the fuel that you must feed social media channels. Without content, your social media program will wither. Have you ever visited a company's social media account and discovered it hasn't been updated with fresh posts in months? No doubt you came away with a negative impression: This company can't keep up or doesn't care. It's better not to have a social media presence at all than to have one you let die on the vine.

The way to use social media effectively and maintain a fresh, lively and relevant presence on your social media channels is to keep the content flowing to your followers. Here's how:

Start with a content marketing strategy

Make a list of key topics you want to address in your content marketing. Then determine the various types of content you will need to create on your own or curate from other sources to support your marketing objectives. It could be original white papers, webinars, videos, articles, and blog posts. You could also work with third parties and partners to distribute their content. Another option is to follow industry news and trends and point your subscribers and followers to this content.

There are other types of content to consider. Infographics combining text and visuals have become increasingly popular as a way to explain complex ideas or processes. You can create online polls and share results, or quick surveys. Stage a contest. Create a game. What about contracting with a partner to produce a mobile app? There are apps that calculate pressure drop, estimate pipe size, calculate volumetric flow, connect with other engineers, and many more.

While you should know what themes and messages are important to get across as part of your strategy, you don't have to plan every piece of content you'll post. For instance, you can have a monthly content slot allotted to a topic of interest that is generated by comments or questions you get from your social media followers. Or you can have a content feature based on the most important industry or company news of that month.

Develop a social media publishing calendar

At the beginning of every year or quarter, develop a calendar for publishing content to your social media channels. This way you won't be scrambling trying to come up with ideas for social media updates.

Work your calendar from the general to the specific, starting with your broad themes (perhaps theme-of-the-month), and filling specific content into publishing slots. Be sure to account for any major milestones that may require intensive content publishing, such as promoting your presence at an event, a product launch, or a key announcement.

Match content to social media channel

You might be using multiple social media channels as part of your program. LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google+ are the most popular among technical professionals and engineers. You might require a slightly different type of presence on each channel. For example, you might host a group or start a weekly discussion on LinkedIn. This might be a place to distribute more traditional content such as white papers and technical articles. Facebook might be your go-to channel for lighter fare, such as quirky news items, giveaways, polls, or contests.

You should have content lined up for each channel that you use. Some content may work across all social media channels, but other content might be specific to a specific channel, or needs to be re-purposed for other channels. For example, a customer interview on YouTube might be re-purposed to a written case study you post on LinkedIn and announce on Twitter. A webinar can be uploaded to SlideShare.

Investigate social media management tools

Even for organizations with a modest social media presence, and definitely for industrial companies with a robust social media strategy, using a social media management tool might make sense. There are many free or low-cost options to help schedule content publishing, coordinate across multiple social media accounts, and measure the effectiveness of your efforts. A few to consider include **Hootsuite**, **HubSpot**, and **Sprout**.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE HOLDING STEADY IN INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

Social media has value among engineers and technical professionals, although not as a top resource for researching work-related purchases. This is one of the key takeaways from the Engineering360 annual "Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector Survey." You can download the **white paper** here.

Over the past few years, the use of social media by technical professionals for work-related purposes has stabilized. Engineers have determined how to integrate social media into their work activities and have chosen their preferred platforms. However, engineers prefer general search engines, online catalogs, word of mouth, and supplier websites to social media for researching work-related purchases.

How Technical Professionals Use Social Media for Work

Sixty-one percent of technical professionals spend less than one hour a week using social media for work-related purposes. The most commonly performed work-related activities on social media are reading content or product/industry news, watching a video, searching for contacts, and following a company or group.

Fifty-seven percent of engineers and technical professionals use social media to find product reviews. This is the most popular use of social media sites. One trend worth noting is that significantly more engineers used social media sites this year than last year to contact a supplier or service provider (42 percent vs. 29 percent), to find expertise (44 percent vs. 29 percent) and to find product reviews (57 percent vs. 49 percent).

One-third (33 percent) of technical professionals report sharing or posting news or information about their company to their social networks. The age group of 18-34 has a slightly higher rate (37 percent). This low percentage represents an opportunity for industrial companies to recruit their employees to be social media ambassadors and to help spread the word on their social media networks.

Preferred Social Media Platforms

LinkedIn is the most popular platform among engineers, with 66 percent having an account. Facebook and Google+ are the next two most widely used. In the age group 18-34, Facebook is slightly more popular than LinkedIn.

Forty-six percent of engineers follow 1-5 work-related company profiles on LinkedIn. The majority of engineers (56 percent) belong to 1-5 groups on LinkedIn. Ten percent belong to more than 10. Most technical professionals are passive members of LinkedIn groups. Sixty-eight percent read discussions, but only 27 percent participate in discussions. Technical professionals prefer to read and watch on social media as opposed to posting and commenting.

Fifty-one percent of technical professionals use YouTube or other video sharing websites for work-related purposes. When segmented by age demographics, use of video sharing websites among engineers under age 50 is greater than those 50 and older. The most common work-related content watched on video sharing websites are how-to videos/tutorials, product demos, and training videos. Customer testimonials lag, with only 14 percent of engineers watching them.

The Value of Social Media for Researching Work-Related Purchases

The most valuable resources for researching a work-related purchase are general search engines, online catalogs, word of mouth, and supplier websites. These findings are generally true across all age groups. Among social media platforms, Google+ and LinkedIn ranked highest for researching a work purchase. Facebook, SlideShare, and Twitter have the least value.

Why isn't social media used more for work? Sixty-seven percent of engineers and technical professionals say the biggest challenge is that social media is inefficient when compared to other methods such as search engines, supplier websites, and online catalogs. Forty percent say they can't find useful content on social media.

Recommendations

Many industrial marketers are not sure what role social media should have in their overall marketing efforts. However, social media is no different from other marketing initiatives, and as such, you should approach it with a clear purpose and defined goals that map to your other marketing and business objectives.

To help you optimize your use of social media and better understand the level of resources to devote to it, download a complimentary copy of **"Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector Survey."** The research report includes all survey results represented in chart form, along with analysis of the findings and recommendations on how industrial marketers can optimize their use of social media. Get your copy today.