Mini E-Book Series

Maximizing Audience Engagement

Find, Hook and Involve Your Online Audience

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MAXIMIZING AUDIENCE ENGAGMENT

INTRODUCTION

You've typed up a long paragraph, perhaps even two or three, proofread the piece, and hit 'Post'. Five minutes go by. Ten minutes. No notifications appear on your screen. You refresh the page, but still nothing. Where is everyone? Why aren't they responding?

Unfortunately, *"If you post it, they will come,"* doesn't work online. The biggest time sink you can fall into with content marketing is to simply produce content for the web because everyone says you must. What counts is publishing pieces that are targeted for the right audience at the right time. Quality content will help you move the needle on company targets and keep your audience coming back to learn from the expertise you have to offer.

Our first e-book in this Mini-Series, **"Maximizing Audience Engagement"**, is crafted by the content marketing experts at MintCopy Inc. Our goal is to offer tips, tricks, techniques and best practices that will help your company define and implement a content marketing strategy. We want your content to drive greater results and more profits to your business.

Read, enjoy and share! Thank you.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Publishing content that connects with your customers is not an option, but a priority for successful businesses of all kinds. Whether you are offering intangible services to other companies or selling material goods, finding your audience online will serve to expand your business in innumerable ways. From your measureable bottom line to your invaluable reputation, connecting with people online is a winning move, but you have to keep playing it over and over!

Staking your claim in the digital space and maintaining your influence over an audience is a marathon, not a sprint. It can be helpful to be aiming towards a more defined finish line: your content on the screens of the right people at the right time.

This mini e-book will outline the following three steps to help you connect with your audience:

1. **Knowing Your Audience**
   The best way to engage people is to understand their unique needs and motivations. This chapter outlines how to discover who comprises your audience.

a. **Internal Conversations:** Turning to experts within your company is the best place to start. Marketing, sales, customer service, and other departments can help you start to establish who your clients and customers are and what they are interested in.

b. **External Information:** Using your existing digital channels to provide data will validate your existing ideas or illuminate new information about your audience. Understanding your existing audience's demographic makeup and behaviour patterns can help you meet their needs faster, better.

c. **Defining Personas:** Don't let all the data you have collected bury the real people behind the screens. Establishing the unique perspectives and motivations of your audience will allow you to create content that is relevant to them. Remember that **while we all aim to please Google, Bing, Yahoo and all varieties of search engine spiders, spiders don't buy, people do!** *(Click here to Tweet this)*

2. **Planning Your Publishing**
   Creating a plan for publishing content will help you create targeted, goal-oriented and relevant content.

   a. **Key Content Considerations:** For your content to be effective, it needs to address not just who, but where and when you are speaking to people. Consider the technology, timing, consistency, responsiveness and resourcefulness that will make your content most effective.

   b. **Facilitating Factors:** When establishing a content strategy or calendar, take into account frequency, realistic timelines, measureable goals and the input of other departments. These factors will help you create a comprehensive plan that allows your team to focus on creating audience-centred content rather than internal stakeholders. It's easy to think of a million things you want to write about; what's challenging is actually writing the one thing your audience really cares about and wants to hear!

3. **Designing Content that Connects**
   All your knowledge is for naught if it doesn't translate into quality content.

   a. **Elements of Share-worthy Content:** It sounds simple, but not that easy to do. To engage readers, your team needs to produce unique, easy-to-read, unexpectedly interesting, and honest content. If and only if they truly love it, will they want to share it with others.

   b. **Techniques You Can Use to Create these Elements:** In order to create content that has these qualities, your team should use the power of storytelling, focus on customer needs and concerns, employ humour, demonstrate knowledge, and simply ask for interaction. Think of it like playing in a live band at a party. Your audience may absolutely love the music but many people won't

get up and dance until you ask them to. Once they do, then you just have to keep up the quality of your music and the party will go on!

Read on to dive deeper and start connecting better, faster, and more consistently with your audience today.

CHAPTER 1: KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Do you have someone in mind when you post online? Engaging and enlightening your audience can only start once you know who you are addressing!

Grabbing people's attention in person is hard enough, but it's even harder online when you can't see them or gauge their reactions. Your marketing content needs to address their needs, align with their values, and bring them joy. Without identifying your target audience, you run the risk of addressing everyone and saying very little—or worse, speaking to no one in particular and saying too much, a.k.a. babbling. ☹

There are three ways to find and get to know your audience: internal conversations, external information, and by creating defined personas. This chapter outlines how you can use each of these methods to figure out who your audience is and what they want to hear.

INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS—THE WATER COOLER AND COFFEE STATION ARE STILL GREAT PLACES TO FIND NEW STORIES AND IDEAS!

It is easy to overcomplicate things but often, we already have the answers and resources we are after.

The first place to turn when trying to identify your company's audience is your internal teams. You could be sitting on a content gold mine and not know it! The marketing and sales departments are good places to start, but don't forget about other customer service representatives and public relations professionals who interact with or have insight into your clients and customers.[1]

Here is a good way to get started—just ask these 5 simple questions:

1. Historically, who has marketing/sales targeted?

2. What demographic do your customers or clients fall into?

    a. Consider age, gender, race, location, and lifestyle among other factors.

3. What concerns do your current customers or clients share? How do you help solve them?

4. What level of understanding do customers have of your products or services? What knowledge do they need to influence decision makers?

5. What stage of the buying process are they at when they consume the most content? Is content their first move, last, or somewhere in the middle?

NOW START LOOKING OUTSIDE

You have laid the groundwork by speaking with the teams who create touchpoints for your customers or clients. Now you can use external data to help fill in any remaining questions and get more insight into how your audience behaves.

You should have various data pools on your existing clients. They are likely simple to filter and will allow you to uncover new information about who you are selling to and already interacting with online. Using Google Analytics and other metrics tools, you can easily see how your existing content is performing, identify who your audience is and discover what has caught their attention.

Data sources to check include:

- Email lists

- Social media

- Website traffic

- Website activity

These existing channels may provide more, unexpected insights into the type of attention your company is receiving online. It doesn't really matter if this data matches up with the knowledge of your internal teams.[2] If it brings to light new information about the audience and function your digital content is fulfilling, you will be better equipped to speak to people and hold their attention. Share your findings with other teams and you can all learn about who has already found you online and those who likely will in the future.

In order to make the most of your existing data sources, you'll want to pay special attention to:

- Demographic information

    o Don't forget to consider job title, industry, company size, budget or income, marital status, and other indicators that can help you understand their position and perspectives

- Geographic location

- Time of day for activity

- Technology

    o What devices are people using to access your content?

- Types of content that are most successful

- Common factors

    o Think outside the box! Take a look at other profiles or pages your audience engage with, recurring user behaviour on your homepage, and other less obvious (but often very telling) commonalities

GIVE 'THEM' NAMES—DEFINE YOUR PERSONAS

Once you have had internal conversations and analyzed your existing data sources, you will have a lot of information and numbers. Don't lose sight of who you are talking to online: REAL PEOPLE! It is important not to think of your audience in terms of statistics, and instead refocus on their human emotions, perspectives and behaviours.

Many designers, marketing departments, and sales teams find it beneficial to create customer personas.[3] Giving your blank audience a face and personality can help you create content that speaks to people rather than to no one.

Whether you have one ideal client or many types of people that interact with your product and digital content, making a persona or several different ones can help.

Outline the following details to help you tailor your content:

- Where are they located and what do they do?
  - Briefly outline how their days are spent and what kind of decision-making power they have
- What are their major concerns?
  - State what problems your product or service can solve for them
- What motivates them?
  - Understand what purchasing factors are most important to them
- How and when do they access content?
  - Are they at their desk or on their smartphone on the commute?
- What other expectations and influences shape their choices?
  - Keep your definitions narrow, but don't forget the bigger context

When you are looking for content ideas that connect with your audience, you will be able to turn to these personas for inspiration. Keeping your audience's real motivations and concerns top of mind will help ensure that the content you produce is not only high-quality, but also highly relevant.

CHAPTER 2: PLANNING YOUR PUBLISHING

It's great to know who you are speaking to. It's better if they actually get to see your content. Understanding your audience should also touch on some useful information to help you plan a publishing schedule so that you can make the most out of their online activity.

A strategic content plan will help you measure the impact of changes you make. It will also turn your information into actionable techniques and tactics to connect with your audience. This chapter will outline the important factors to design a content plan: content considerations and facilitating factors.

GET (AND STAY) ON THEIR RADAR WITH THESE KEY CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS

Use your audience information to plan your content marketing calendar, considering the following:

- **Technology: Use the format that is best for your audience**

- o If you found that your clients engage with your content on tablets, prioritize publishing content designed for mobile and tablet devices. Be practical: consider how developing optimized content will impact your publishing timelines.

- **Timing: Understand when your audience is active**

  - o Consider when (and where) your audience is most active and maximize when you publish to make conversations happen. For instance, if you notice that most Facebook activity occurs over the lunch hour, schedule posts to go live during this time or slightly beforehand so they make a bigger impact.

- **Consistency: Be active and stay top-of-mind**

  - o Quality trumps quantity, but being active counts online and can be made easier with a content calendar. Ensuring your website and social profiles are updated and evolving makes your company seem more exciting and in-tune with the demands of your clients and prospects. If you are engaged online, it will encourage your audience to be engaged.

- **Responsiveness: Remain flexible and quick**

  - o If something exciting happens in your industry, make sure you offer your perspective on it.[4] It doesn't matter if you are not the first one to comment on the news, as long as your post is timely.

- **Resourcefulness: Play to your strengths**

  - o If your strong suit of communications is not content writing, focus and highlight whatever it is you are good at. It may be video, photography, graphics or curating relevant articles from around the web. Find your niche—being authentic and using your team's unique resources can help generate trust and traffic.

DON'T FORGET THESE FACILITATING FACTORS—PUT IT IN PRINT AND GET EVERYONE ON BOARD!

Ever tried navigating a new city without a map (or app)? It isn't easy and it definitely isn't time or cost-efficient. Your publishing plan is a map to guide your team and audience towards a clear goal and message.

No two plans are the same. Your content plan may vary in duration depending on the goals and nature of your business. It could cover the next month, quarter, or entire year. Once you have determined the duration, include the following details:

- **Frequency:** Establish a schedule that maintains a steady number of posts or updates. Whether you have found that blog posts, more informative web pages, or a higher level of Twitter activity will suit your audience's needs, be sure that your content frequency is suited to the platform. Publish often enough to keep your customers engaged, without over-saturating their digital channels.
- **Timelines:** Be realistic about how quickly your team can turn around content.[5] Make sure your plans for frequency don't put a strain on content producers or sacrifice quality. If needed, seek help from a marketing content agency. It's great to be ambitious, but be cautious not to set yourself up for failure.
- **Goals:** Attach goals to your content in order to measure engagement, test what works for your audience, and maintain a focus for your publications. You could determine high-level conversion goals for a new webpage or specific social media activity metrics that you want to achieve. No matter the scope of your goals, checking in on your plan will help you continue to strengthen it over time.
- **Other departments:** While marketing may own the strategy, the goals of other teams should also be reflected in the content you are producing. Whether these are static or may change over time, have conversations with key stakeholders to ensure your digital content is serving the entire company. In return, the content will engage and help your audience by offering the information they need, when they need it.

Providing your team with a clear picture of where your content is headed and how you will get there is a sure-fire way to improve your digital channels. Your team will appreciate the direction and your audience will enjoy thoughtful and timely content.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGNING CONTENT THAT CONNECTS

Now that you have a plan detailing the type, scope, frequency, and location of your content, you can shift your focus to the fun part: creating content!

This stage can also be the most challenging—bland, boring and been-there-done-that content just won't work. Engaging content has to be useful, pertinent and interactive. It does not need to be edgy and definitely should not offend anyone, but it does need to get people thinking.

ELEMENTS OF SHARE-WORTHY CONTENT: DON'T BE SHY—STAND OUT!

Keep in mind these elements that characterize share-worthy content:[6]

- **Unique:** Nobody likes a broken record or copycat. Don't repeat what every competitor is already saying on their website or blog. Think about new ways to approach old information or leverage new formats to make your content as useful and original as possible. Not

every piece you publish has to be ground-breaking, but taking time to make it original will make your company seem different. Plus, it will connect your audience to your unique perspective.

- **Keep it short:** People are short on time and attention, so your content needs to cater to their needs. Make it easy for them to skim, takeaway the information they are looking for, and share it quickly on the networks they are using. Details are great, but simplicity is best for clickable content.

- **Unexpected:** An element of surprise is always appreciated by online audiences, as many of them are bored of reading the same old, same old. Switching up formats, bringing in new perspectives, offering incentives through contests and partnering with thought-leaders can help keep your content fresh.

- **Honest:** Be authentic and transparent. You will only create distance between you and your audience if your content is misleading, dishonest, or simply untrue. Keep this in mind for all content, but especially when accessing the data and personal information consumers share. If you are asking your audience for something, be sure you are providing clear value in return.

BUT HOW DO YOU GET THOSE ELEMENTS IN YOUR CONTENT? USE THESE TECHNIQUES TO CREATE BETTER CONTENT

Creating "good-looking" content is very different from producing quality content that people want to read and share.

Keep these tips in mind to create content that is engaging and share-worthy:

- **Tell a story:** Everybody loves a good story. What your content needs is a strong narrative, with elements of intrigue, anticipation, and a clever solution. Your audience must feel they are with you, sharing your brand experiences and living the emotions you are trying to evoke. Consider the youngest user of your product or service, or even the oldest, and how your brand has influenced their life. Use different perspectives but keep it subtle! Also think about motivational speeches by CEOs, think tanks and innovators.
- **'You' not 'Us':** Your content should not be all about your company and how great it is. Focus on outcomes and value rather than product details and specs. Show off your unique position and authority through creativity, not a bulleted list of your company's benefits and perks. Place the user and their concerns at the centre of your content, rather than your company and its achievements.
- **Use humour, wit, and smarts:** Leverage what others are craving to be on social media.[7] Individuals want to look witty, funny and smart. Provide them with the type of content they can share and appear to be all of those things. **In essence, you want your audience to think, "I'm going to share this company's content because it makes me look good."**

- **Just ask for it:** Request your audience to share your content with their social media circles. It is not taboo—but be nice about it and give them a compelling reason to share. A reader should be able to easily say to a friend or co-worker, "You're going to love this—check it out!" Plus, most people trust content found through family or friends more than if it is discovered through a company.

Shareable, click-worthy, and useful content doesn't happen by accident. Checking in with your personas, staying in line with your publishing plan, and using foolproof techniques when producing content will help you make your mark online!

CONCLUSION

Digital technology has opened up a world of opportunity for marketers. More channels and data have ushered in a new era of marketing. Unfortunately, your company isn't the only one producing content, pushing their products, and competing for attention. The result can sometimes seem like a lot of noise for consumers.

For that reason, it is crucial to identify, find, and maintain the interest of your audience online. Don't waste time and resources publishing without a plan and speaking to the unknown, blindly hoping that something will stick. The key to engaging digital content marketing is making it count by making it deliberate.

Lay the foundation by discovering as much as possible about your audience. Who they are, what they do, where they come from, and what motivates them—it is this knowledge that will help you overhaul your existing content. It will also allow you to tailor new digital material to meet their needs, reach them when and where it counts, and offer value.

Establish a plan that takes into account the information you have gathered. It should give your team enough time to ensure quality, leave space to account for the unexpected, and maximize your strengths. Work with your resources, establish a publishing schedule that amplifies the impact your content makes, and work as a team to determine realistic goals.

Take time and be strategic when creating marketing content. From small details like CTA buttons to long-form whitepapers and short Tweets, your audience should understand who you are, why your expertise matters, what your company offers and that you truly care about solving their challenges.

Start engaging your audience with better content today. Whether your company needs a full website overhaul to suit your audience's needs, an influx of content to stay relevant, or a jumping off point, contact the copywriting professionals at MintCopy. With the guidelines above and a team of content experts delivering compelling copy that converts, you can boost audience engagement and your business success.

REFERENCE SOURCES

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