

Creating Content that Counts



(because in B2B, it *really* needs to...)





In B2B, where longer sales cycles call for customers to be nurtured along a path to purchase, the shift from 'disruptive' outbound marketing to inbound 'valuable' marketing has not only arrived, it is here to stay.

Content marketing focuses on creating and delivering content that serves a useful purpose for its intended audience, and solves a problem for them. Although content creation is very much an art, it is not without science, and results must be measured to define impact on lead generation and customer acquisition. It's not content for content's sake after all, it's content that counts towards your business growth, and should therefore be strategically planned with your customers' needs in mind.

Done well, content marketing will spark positive conversation about your brand and increase engagement. It will not only convert your prospects into customers, it will convert them into brand advocates – and let's face it, there is no better marketing than positive word of mouth!

Whether you're new to the content revolution, or simply looking for ways to maintain momentum, the following pointers will either set you off on the right track, or help ensure you optimise business results for the long-term.

Although content creation is very much an art, it is not without science.



Our top tips for content marketing have been put together to help your brand differentiate, and create content that counts. Every time.

#1 Know your audience

Despite all the will (and budget) in the world, the key to successful content marketing lies in producing information that is valuable to its target audience. Without this, content is meaningless, and even though it may look pretty, it won't create the customer resonance you want, and it won't drive lead generation for your business.

Ask yourself: What are my customers' issues? What are they good/bad at? Where do they sit in the sales cycle? Where do they live?

Establish a clear understanding of who you're trying to reach and what would be of interest to them. Once you've identified your target segments, treat them as distinct groups – content marketing is most successful when it's created for a very specific audience. The more bespoke you can be, the better.

#2 Tell a story and create a journey

Once you know who your customers are, develop assets and activities to support them along the way. It's a safe bet that your customers will take notice if you help them to solve a problem rather than trying to flog your products.

Remembering that you want to position your brand as an advisor – as opposed to a vendor - is key.

#3 Be timely, topical drives traction

Your agenda versus that of the mainstream media or the most influential – now let me think...

Content marketing is most successful when it's created for a very specific audience.

Hijacking topical news is a great way to generate new content ideas – and depending on your industry, that in itself can be half the battle. Being timely will also ensure your brand appears on top of the media agenda and in tune with current industry trends and developments. Win, win!

#4 Create a content calendar

Think ahead! Have a content plan and tracker for the year. There will be ad-hoc initiatives that arise throughout the year, but there will also be the calendar no-brainers, which can be timed to meet your audiences' needs and wants. These can relate to events, days, legislation, and will help you build up a content bank so you're never short of something useful to say.

#5 Show your personality

If your brand is not personable, you will come across as fake rather than authentic. People want to engage with people, not brands. Incorporate as many elements of the marketing mix into your content marketing as possible. In doing so, your messaging will align more closely with your wider marketing activities, and over time, you will establish a brand personality that could set you apart from your competitors.

#6 Have an angle, and a sound bite

To resonate and be played back, you need to stand out from the crowd. Don't be afraid to be bold – or even border on controversial so long as you can justify your stance. Being different will garner attention, increase engagement and ensure your content drives traction.

Use sound bites to give your busy target audience a synopsis around what your content piece relates to. You want to make their lives easier wherever possible and in doing so, they will appreciate you for it.

Don't be afraid to be bold – or even border on controversial so long as you can justify your stance.

Mix it up and test out a variety of channels, then measure results and learn what works best for your audiences.

#7 Differentiate, differentiate, differentiate

You have to be able to sell why you exist and address pain points. You need to produce content that sets your brand apart from the competition – and that is no easy task in the mass proliferation of content that we all consume on a daily basis.

#8 Use the tools at your disposal

You aren't limited to words. Video, infographics and webinars can work really well. Mix it up and test out a variety of channels, then measure results and learn what works best for your audiences. Your content may well be brilliant, but if you deliver it in a format that does not suit your target audience, it will lose traction and your valuable marketing budget will be wasted. Moral of the story? Choose your medium wisely, it really does affect the impact of your messaging.

#9 Join up your content channels

If you are not consistent, your content will not create maximum effect. Tailor your message so that it conveys appropriately across each channel. Don't let your marketing team work in silos – a joined-up approach is always best and your results will be amplified by simultaneous timing and optimisation of content.

#10 Provide calls to action

What is the point of your content? Where are you leading your audience to? Once you've mapped out a journey for your audience (tip #2), it's important to help them reach their destination. It's all too easy to get caught up in the content production process and forget why you decided to create the content in the first place. Without a clear call to action (CTA), your audience could be left wondering what to do with the advice you've given them. ALWAYS spell out the next step and provide your company's contact information. Where one journey ends, another begins...

A company blog can unearth a mountain of opportunities for your business.

Where to Channel your Wonderful Content

So with this content know-how in mind, which content channels should you use to optimise engagement with *your* target audiences? And how do you optimise these to create maximum impact, awareness and positive business results?

The channel(s) you choose to share your content can impact the message you're trying to convey and therefore requires careful thought and planning. You'll also need to think about the size and scope of your topic, how 'sharable' your content is, and whether it should be gated or not.

Our content channel guide below provides an overview of key platforms and explains which types of content work well on each.

Blog

A company blog can unearth a mountain of opportunities for your business. It is your brand's own publication, and your employees should be encouraged to act as editors-in-chief. Your blog is a place to demonstrate thought leadership, project opinion, show personality and incite conversation. Use it well and use it often – your brand's SEO rankings will really benefit as a result. Bear in mind that consistency and quality are key to building a strong following and provoking online conversation.

At [TheCommsCo](#) blogging is our bag, and we regularly contribute to our own publication – [Co3](#) – which covers a range of marketing and communications topics from PR to social media and content. Please feel free to [have a read](#) and let us know what you think.

We'll admit that we're somewhat opinionated when it comes to blogging best practice (I guess as a communications and content agency that comes with the territory...). Here are three examples – one content marketing, and two tech – of blogs that are doing it right and hitting the mark. Feel free to let us know about your favourites – we love this stuff, and are always happy to chat.

Ann Handley

Author, Speaker and Chief Content Officer [@MarketingProfs](#).
Ann's blog covers everything from content and creative writing, to marketing know-how and social media.

TechCrunch

Breaking technology news, analysis and opinion. [@TechCrunch](#) has a huge global following in the tech industry and keeps its readers up-to-date with latest trends and developments.

VentureBeat

A great source for news and assessment of tech innovation.
[@VentureBeat](#) spans a range of topics from social and mobile, to health tech, gaming, the cloud and more.

Here are our blogging 'do's and don'ts':

Do check your grammar and spelling before hitting 'publish!'

Do	Don't
Do create a great title for your blog. Make it a content destination.	Don't try to cover everything. Niche, specialised blogs get the best and most relevant visitors.
Do promote your blog by tweeting about new posts and also posting them to LinkedIn, Facebook and Google+.	Don't start out on a schedule you can't keep up with. If you can only post once a week, then make it a good post, once a week.
Do use the tools available. WordPress is a free blog content management platform that does a lot of the hard work for you.	Don't leave the job half done. You may be able to customise your blog URL or theme for free or very inexpensively.
Do write with personality. The best corporate blogs are the ones where the authors really show their own personality, as well as their unique expertise.	Don't use your blog to sell or push products. Your blog is one of the most powerful content marketing tools you have, so use it wisely.
Do read other blogs and reference other people's work by linking throughout your posts – they may reciprocate!	Don't brag. This isn't Facebook, this a place to share great content that helps people.
Do check your grammar and spelling before hitting 'publish.'	Don't forget to include an image in every blog post.

The popularity of webinars as a marketing tool has increased dramatically over the past five years.

Webinars

Hosting a webinar is a great way to position your company as a thought leader, and generate and nurture leads. The popularity of webinars as a marketing tool has increased dramatically over the past five years as more and more brands use them to drive customer and prospect engagement. With this increasing popularity, comes a greater need for businesses to deliver exceptional webinars that really differentiate. That's no mean feat and involves a lot of groundwork, however the rewards can be highly beneficial if the topic is right, and the process is managed effectively.

Here are our webinar 'do's and don'ts':

Do	Don't
Do create a punchy title for your webinar that will grab your invitees' attention.	Don't leave promotion of your webinar to the last minute (we recommend giving yourself a month).
Do promote the event via your blog and social media channels, email campaigns and PR.	Don't bore your attendees – make the presentation visually appealing as well as topically relevant.
Do create a great landing page on your website for registrations.	Don't forget to leave time for questions and invite your attendees to participate.
Do shout about the credentials of any expert presenters – whether they're internal to your company or external guests, this is a great way to validate the quality of your webinar.	Don't be salesy – there's no quicker way to disengage an audience.

Continued - webinar 'do's and don'ts':

Do	Don't
Do consider time of day when scheduling the webinar (especially if you want to recruit an international audience).	Don't underestimate the power of poor audio-visual quality to ruin your hard work – test your technology in advance.
Do record your webinar and share as a follow-up post event.	Don't start late and don't over-run – respect your attendees' time.

The e-newsletter allows brands to deliver on-target messages to its audiences in a timely and consistent manner.

Email Marketing & Marketing Automation

Many brands use monthly or quarterly e-newsletters to keep their customers and prospects informed about latest news, achievements and thought leadership initiatives.

As a regular permission-based communication, the e-newsletter allows brands to deliver on-target messages to its audiences in a timely and consistent manner. It also has the added value that it can promote a variety of different content types through embedded links to brochures, whitepapers, infographics, and video – all of which drive traffic back to your website!

The e-newsletter is therefore very versatile and can be moulded to fit with the particular content you want to showcase at a given time. Now that's handy!

Many companies also still actively use dedicated, multi-touch email marketing campaigns as a way of marketing to their databases, which helps keep contacts 'warm' and informed.

However, while email may not be considered a cutting edge digital marketing practice, it is very much part of 'joined-up' marketing, where channels such as email and social media are used to direct recipients to useful web based content.

When good content speaks for itself, a website becomes a useful resource and begins to produce 'inbound' leads, which means the customer is reaching out to you, rather than the other way around.

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When good joined-up marketing and inbound marketing activities are combined with an effective marketing automation (MA) strategy and the appropriate MA software, the results can be powerful.

What is marketing automation exactly? MA software enables you to send out email campaigns to the contacts in your CRM, normally using the 'inbound' approach of pointing to an 'asset', or piece of content that you'd like people to view.

Marketing Automation has given a whole new meaning to marketing analytics.

By asking people to register to view the content by requesting their names and email addresses, companies are able to then score contacts against a lead scoring system, and to monitor whether that same contact downloads the next asset in the next email campaign.

MA-based campaigns scale personalised marketing, which means that they often consist of several emails around a general industry problem or issue, before moving on to educate and nurture prospects through their buying cycle until they're 'sales-ready.' This non-invasive, educational approach has been shown to be very effective in transforming contacts at the top of the funnel into qualified leads at the bottom.

MA has given a whole new meaning to marketing analytics. And remember, whether it's an e-newsletter or a wider email marketing campaign, you must measure results to optimise your ongoing spend.

With MA set to grow by 50 per cent in 2015 (SiriusDecisions), you've got nothing to lose by finding out more. Our partner, CleverTouch, is Europe's leading authority on the topic and we'd be happy to introduce you (they're really quite friendly!)

Here are our marketing automation 'do's and don'ts':

Do send personalised emails and not mass emails to large groups.

Do	Don't
Do send your emails from people, and not 'info' or 'marketing' email addresses.	Don't send spam. Always include an 'unsubscribe' link at the foot of each email campaign.
Do send personalised emails and not mass emails to large groups.	Don't write too much! 150 words is usually more than enough to convey even the most complex of messages.
Do include calls to action (CTA) to ensure people click through or respond the way you intend.	Don't forget to add link trackers and check your links before sending.
Do use well thought out, concise subject lines.	Don't get caught in the spam filter by using exclamation points or ALL CAPS in your subject lines.
Do consider time of day when sending the email (especially if you want to reach an international audience).	Don't forget to send the email to a test list first to ensure it appears the same in Outlook and web browsers.
Do check analytics after you've sent your campaign to see what your open and click through rate is.	Don't forget to ensure your email marketing software excludes any unsubscribes next time around.

When it comes to content marketing, whitepapers often top the list in terms of return on investment.

Whitepapers

When it comes to content marketing, whitepapers often top the list in terms of return on investment. They are especially effective for technology companies looking to be known as pioneers in the use of new technologies, or simply to become known for the most innovative use of a given technology.

Whitepapers work well because they can be hosted on your company website, and are easily distributed via email campaigns. They also work well with an inbound approach, and they are one of the most popular assets companies are creating to use with marketing automation, multi-step campaigns. Once someone downloads one whitepaper from your website, you can begin setting up lead scoring to determine the significance of other actions they perform on the site.

However, for many companies, setting aside the time to get a decent thought leadership led whitepaper out often seems an impossibility. For others, there may be enough in-house knowledge to produce some interesting material, but without putting the time and effort in to conducting research, the resulting whitepaper may end up sounding anecdotal.

This is where a good survey can really come in handy. A survey can be a straightforward and economical way to get new information together – often from your prospects themselves! If you don't have the time and expertise to run the survey yourself, a good agency will have relationships with firms that specialise in researching different industry sectors.

Dedicating enough time to do the research is also a great way of generating some interest in the upcoming whitepaper. Sometimes, the research itself becomes valuable enough to get some press coverage of the whitepaper itself.

Take this example from Caplin Systems, which conducted its 'e-Trading' survey over two months and reached 150 people. Being well known for producing high quality whitepapers, Caplin's 'Trading On The Move' whitepaper was very well received.

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2014

New Caplin Survey Finds Gaps between Supply and Demand for Banks' FX Mobile Trading Offering

Patrick Myles, CTO and lead author of the white paper said, "The appetite for mobile dwarfs any preceding technology. Buy-side and corporate traders expect to be able to replicate the desktop experience on mobile."

Posted on **October 13, 2014** by **Avi Mizrahi** in **Technology, Traders**
■ 1 Comments



The e-distribution specialist and single-dealer platform technology provider, Caplin Systems, announced today that it is launching a new white paper called Trading On The Move, which evaluates the demand for mobile trading technology in the capital markets, and discusses the challenges in delivering a reliable, secure, compliant mobile channel. The white paper also includes the macro trends for mobile devices, advice on overcoming security concerns and technical advice for building a mobile trading app.

The paper draws on the results of a recent Caplin e-Trading survey highlighting the disparity between buy-side enthusiasm for mobile trading and sell-side reservations. There were 150 respondents to the survey, which was carried out from April to July 2014. Of the sell-side participants, the majority (56%) were regional banks, followed by global banks (30%), the remainder being made up of smaller local firms. The buy-side was split between corporates (74%) and institutions/funds (26%), 72% of companies were based in the UK and Europe, 14% from the US and 14% from Asia.

Here are our whitepaper 'do's and don'ts':

Don't forget to factor in time for layout and design for the whitepaper once the writing is complete.

Do	Don't
Do sit down and create a table of content that can act as a structure for your whitepaper.	Don't forget to factor in time for layout and design for the whitepaper once the writing is complete.
Do consider how you'll get the information you will need to write the whitepaper. Interviews? A survey?	Don't forget to create an editorial schedule that includes time for 1st, 2nd and 3rd drafts.
Do consider imagery throughout the whitepaper. An image per page is a good goal.	Don't forget budget to buy or source images.
Do get creative and consider multiple sources for the whitepaper. It doesn't have to be a single author.	Don't try to sell. Whitepapers are meant to be informative and educational. Good thought leadership is naturally good content marketing.
Do think about distribution. How will people find your whitepaper? Will they need to enter their details to download it? Set up your infrastructure.	Don't forget about your whitepaper marketing campaign. Get creative with your campaign to maximise the number of people who download the whitepaper.
Do post your whitepaper in a 'resources' section of your website so that people can find it for a long time to come.	Don't forget about printing. A few printed copies of a whitepaper are great for tradeshows.

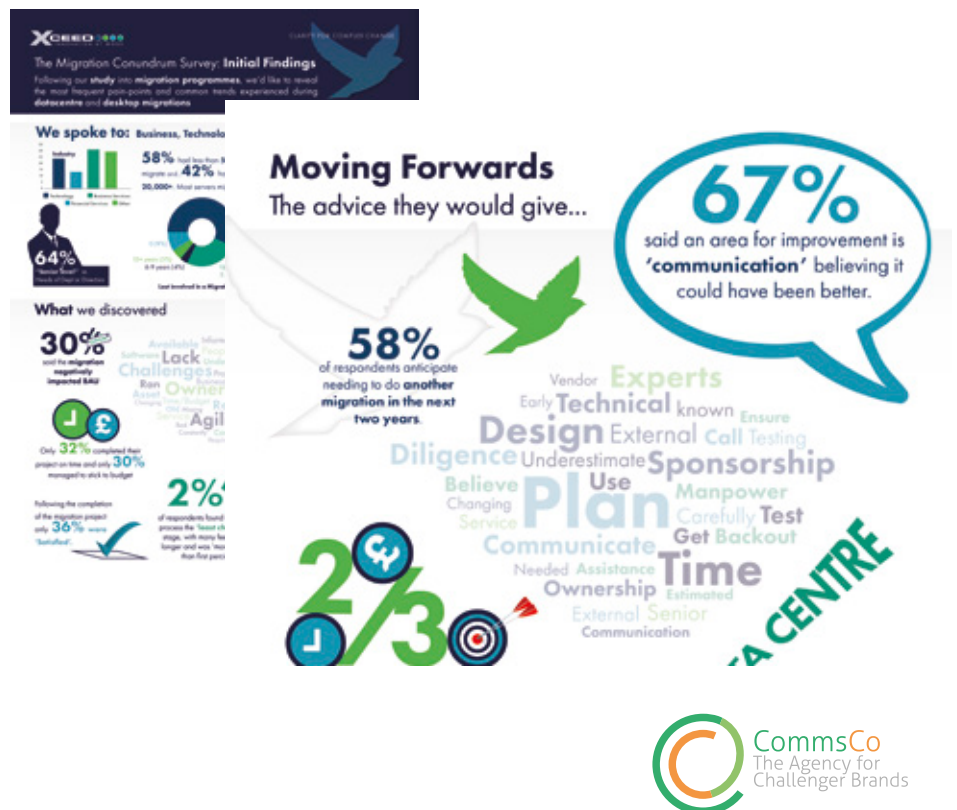
Infographics

Infographics are graphically designed visuals used to present complex information, data and statistics, so that they can be more easily digested and understood by key audiences. Infographics are normally presented in a 'top down' fashion, making the best use of screen space.

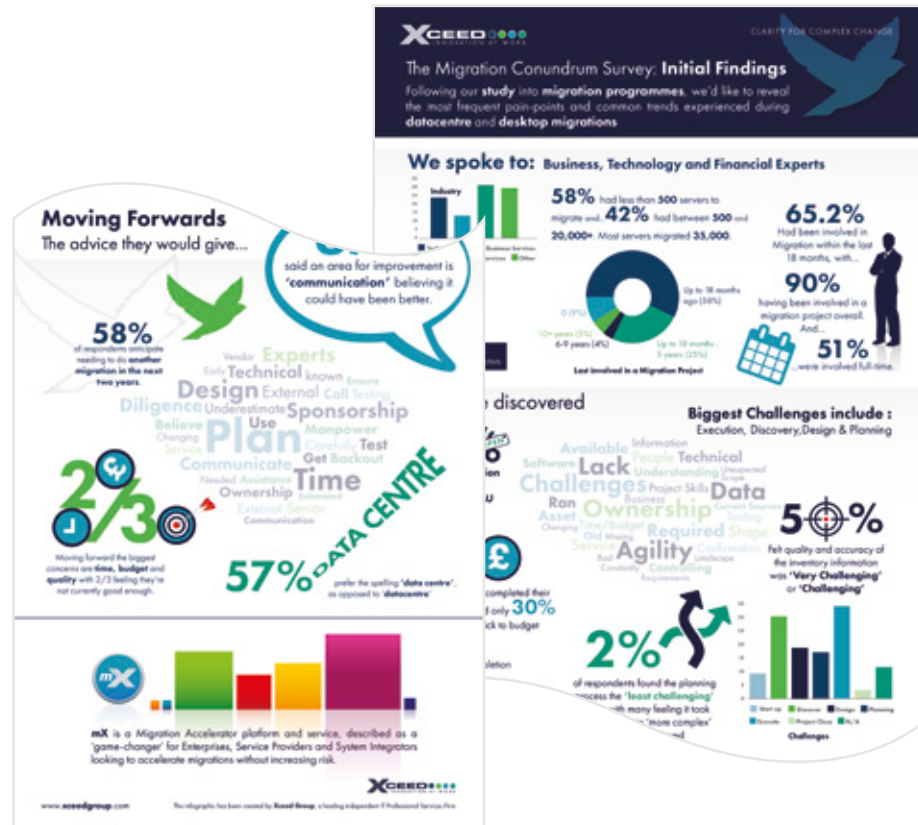
Infographics are a popular and effective means of informing and educating customers, employees and shareholders.

In the technology space, where businesses need to communicate with a wide spectrum of stakeholders – from technophiles to technophobes, and everyone in between – infographics are a popular and effective means of informing and educating customers, employees and shareholders. One of the best examples we could find of a good and effective infographic was from our client Xceed Group, whose 'Migration Conundrum' infographic was produced off the back of a survey the company did to enquire about the state of datacentre migrations.

The infographic caught the attention of journalist, Hugh Wilson, who later contacted Xceed about migrations, before including comment from the company's Practice Director in The Telegraph's SME section.



Check out a few of our favourite examples here:



Designed by www.holmandesign.co.uk

[Email Marketing Cheat Sheet](#) (Marketo)

[Tumblr Numbers: The Rapid Rise of Social Blogging](#) (Mashable)

[The Rise of Wearable Tech](#) (The Guardian)

[Social Media Winter is Coming](#) (Hootsuite)

Remember! Don't forget to use your business' tech experts to help you simplify communications around complicated tech products and services – those who understand it best, can help you (as a marketer) to better promote the benefits it will yield for your customers.

The good news is that it is relatively cost effective to produce a great looking infographic, and although most brands use a content agency to manage and optimise their creative, a number of free online D.I.Y tools are available for those on a tight budget. We particularly like infoqr.am, easel.ly and piktochart.

Here are our infographic 'do's and don'ts':

Do put as much time and effort in to the design process as possible. If you can afford to hire a designer, do.

Do	Don't
Do give your infographic a title. We loved "The Migration Conundrum" and so did everyone else.	Don't try to create an infographic without doing the research first. Infographics work well with numbers.
Do put as much time and effort in to the design process as possible. If you can afford to hire a designer, do.	Don't make your infographic look cluttered. You might have gathered some great stats, but do you really need them all?
Do think about where you'll put your infographic. Is there a natural place for it on your website?	Don't use cheesy clipart.
Do get creative in the way that you display your infographic. Graphs, charts and visuals all work well together.	Don't forget about your corporate colours and fonts. Your infographic should reflect your corporate brand.
Do remember to check your spelling – once, twice, three times!	Don't forget that infographics look great printed out. Share them at tradeshow.

Video

The power of video is huge! DO NOT underestimate its effectiveness in B2B marketing. Video not only allows you to tell a story, it enables you to dictate the images, sounds, and narrative that your audience consumes, and is a great way to drive awareness, generate leads and procure the positioning you want.

**If your video goes viral,
well you've just hit
the content jackpot!**

In recent years, the popularity of video in content marketing has soared, and according to Hubspot research – which shows that the use of video in B2B marketing increased by 8 per cent to 58 per cent in 2014 – this shows no sign of abating.

Video can also be easier to digest than two-dimensional marketing tools such as reports, and is therefore particularly useful in the technology space where marketers often struggle to communicate complex messaging in a comprehensive but understandable way.

The real advantage with video is of course the 'shareability' factor. It can be embedded into an email or e-newsletter, published on a blog or website, and/or posted to social media. And if your video goes viral, well...you've just hit the content jackpot!

Here are a few videos that we really like:

Eloqua: [Introducing Modern Marketing](#)

Intel's '[Look Inside](#)' Campaign

Method CRM: [An Entertaining Tutorial](#)

Quality is also crucial in video production, and must always remain at the forefront of the marketer's mind. Poor audio and shaky editing will undoubtedly damage perceptions of your brand amongst those you want to impress most.

We recommend using a professional (*ahem* did we mention The CommsCo provides video production services?) but if you want to test the waters first, online tools such as [Camtasia](#) and [WeVideo](#) can help you create basic video content.

Here are our video 'do's and don'ts':

Do	Don't
Do think about the purpose of your video. What do you want to achieve?	Don't make it too long (or too brief). Strike the right balance for your target audience.
Do strive for long-term engagement – create a series, don't be a one hit wonder.	Don't talk too much. Explain visually wherever possible.
Do think about tone. Do you want a voiceover or background music? Ensure this fits with your brand personality.	Don't rely on your technology too much – you'll need to ensure good light and acoustics if you want a quality result.
Do make it personal for your intended audience. People connect with other people, not brands. Use humour where appropriate.	Don't be salesy. Ever. You want to position your brand as a thought leader, not a vendor.
Do make it real – include customers and show how they are benefitting from your products/services (but don't be salesy).	Don't forget to include a clear CTA. What do you want your audience to do next?
Do maximise your ongoing video spend by creating a branded video template that can be re-used.	Don't forget to share your videos on social channels and respond to any comments you receive.

Do strive for long-term engagement – create a series, don't be a one hit wonder.

These are just
some of our
favourite reads!

Recommended Reading:

[Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide To Creating Ridiculously Good Content](#) (Ann Handley, 2014)

[Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars \(and More\) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business](#) (Ann Handley & C.C Chapman, 2012)

[EPIC Content Marketing: How to Tell a Different Story, Break through the Clutter, and Win more Customers by Marketing](#) (Joe Pulizzi, 2013)

[Content Marketing: Insider's Secret to Online Sales & Lead Generation](#) (Rick Ramos, 2014)

[Digital Body Language: Deciphering Customer Intentions in an Online World](#) (Steven Woods, 2009)

Want to know more about content marketing and how it could support your business growth? Please do get in touch – we really are a friendly bunch (and we're not bad at content marketing either!)

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