GUIDE

SalesLead AUTOMATION

Creating ENGAGING & RELEVANT CONTENT

Understanding your buyer's journey is ***critical*** *when developing* ***relevant & engaging*** *content.*

If you have been paying attention by now, you have researched your ideal customer profiles, know how many leads you need to hit your revenue goals using our sales lead calculator, and have your list of prospects. But now the question becomes, how do you engage with these prospects? How do you get the attention of the people who will be buying your product or service and show them that you're the right provider to meet their needs?

Or let's put it another way. If you sell a considered purchase with an extended sales cycle, your prospect can have as many as 16 different people in charge of various aspects of the purchasing decision. They all get inundated with calls and e-mails from people looking to sell them things. How do you cut through all the noise and engage with the right people in a meaningful way that can lead to a sale?

It's all about relevance. You need relevant content that will connect with each persona involved in the buying process: what's important to them, what are they're looking for, what are their pain points, etc. This guide will help you learn how to create engaging and relevant content for new prospects throughout the buyer journey.

The Buyer Journeys & Personas

Understanding your buyer's journey is critical when developing relevant and engaging content. Statistics suggest there may be as many as 16 people involved in a major purchase decision at any given company. That number is definitely on the high end. However, realistically, you'll have to deal with three or four personas at the very least (*Researcher, End User, Decision Maker and Financial Authority*).

To engage them, you first need to know who they are and what information they will need for each stage of the buying process from:

- **Learn** | *"I think I have a problem."* The journey starts when someone realizes that something in the company isn't working the way it should or could be.
- **Solve** | *"How do I solve that problem?"* They conduct research into possible solutions—one of which will hopefully be your brand.
- **Compare** | *"Am I solving the problem the right way?"* They look at your solution to the problem and compare it to your competitors' solutions. Is one better than the other? Is one cheaper? Is the more expensive solution worth the extra money?
- **Purchase** | *"Help me make a purchase decision."* This is the moment when your company and your product become their preference.
- **Loyalty** | *"Show me you appreciate me as a customer."* This step is often overlooked. Many companies are so concerned with getting the customer to buy their product that they don't consider how satisfied they are with the product once they've made the purchase. This can lead to buyer regret and high customer churn. It takes 10 times more effort and resources to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing customer. By putting a little bit more effort into customer loyalty, you can earn their business for life.

In almost every major purchase with an extended sales cycle, your prospects go through the buying stages listed on the previous page. They might not follow a linear path from top to bottom, but they will go through all of these stages at some point. Below is a simplified content map with example content you might want to create for each stage of the buyer journey.

CONTENT MAP EXAMPLE

Keep in mind this chart is a simplified content map. You need to create specific content for each persona through these buying stages. This can also act as a good guide for getting started with your content marketing efforts. However, we strongly urge you to complete a content assessment and determine what content you have or that can be repurposed for each persona and buying stage.

Four Types of Personas

- **Researchers/Influencers** | This may be two separate people or just one person. Their job is to research the right solutions and usually pick three of the top vendors to present to the rest of the buying committee. They collect data on your product or service—and on your competitors' products and services. They will need content that covers your capabilities, pricing, comparison charts, case studies, etc. Keep in mind that for smaller companies the researcher might also be the end user.
- **End-User** | You will want content that covers the use, implementation and support you will provide. Will the product be easy to use? How difficult is the new solution to learn? What does training look like? How long does it take to learn? Will it make things difficult or be disruptive to our current processes? Is it better than what we are currently using today and why?
- **Decision Makers** | You will want content about how your product will affect their team and overall success. Will it make them more efficient? More effective? What are the benefits of this solution over their existing solution? What's the ROI? What kind of reporting for you offer?
- **Financial Authority** | You will want content that covers the actual terms and conditions or financial aspects of working with your company. What is the service level agreement? What are the Terms and Conditions? What are your escalation policies? What are your cancellation policies?

Asking the Right Questions

It's important to create buyer personas for each of these four people. But how do you know what content will work best? It's all a matter of asking the right questions. Think of this exercise as a giant F&Q project.

CONTENT FORMULA

PERSONAS		BUYING STAGES		FAQs		PIECES OF CONTENT NEEDED
1. Researcher 2. End User 3. Decision-maker 4. Financial Authority	X	1. Learn 2. Solve 3. Compare 4. Purchase 5. Loyalty	X	1. Who? 2. What? 3. How? 4. Why? 5. What's next?	=	100

The idea is to identify all the possible questions each persona will have at each stage of the buying process so you can address their concerns. There are a few ways to do this, but we prefer a phone call with your existing customers and asking them what issues they had at each stage. You can guess which questions prospects might have at each stage by putting yourself into the role if each persona, but its always better to hear directly from that persona. Some companies try using surveys to find these questions or concerns, but it's been our experience that you uncover more information when speaking directly to your ideal personas.

Something to Consider

Often, companies develop robust buyer personas based on **how the customer interacts with the product rather than how the customer buys and what content they consume during the buying process.** Ask yourself, what frictions do I need to overcome to align with the customer's needs?

Here are some sample questions you might want to ask your prospects to gain additional insight into their buying concerns:

- **What trends or regulations are affecting the way you do your job?**
- **What's the most challenging aspect of your job?** *What can we help you with to make it easier?*
- **What does your research process look like?** *Where do you typically start? Do you assign a junior person or a senior person to the task?*
- **Who do you consult with when conducting research and making a buying decision?** *Is it one individual, influencer, consultant, or review site?*
- **What are the trigger events that put you into an active buying process?** *Perhaps a new industry regulation has necessitated a new way of doing things. Maybe their existing manufacturing process is causing damage to their product. Maybe they've just outgrown their current solution.*
- **Are you proactively looking for the latest and greatest solutions for your business, or are you reactively in the market because of a problem you've recently encountered?**
- **What sources do you trust?** *Who are your peers or influencers? Do you spend time on any online networks or media sites that may shape your views?*
- **What information is most helpful as you're researching new solutions?** *Do you prefer guides, comparison charts, case studies, webinars?*

Remaining Relevant

Let's say you have done your homework and have created content for each stage of the buying process for each persona and you have identified what puts your ideal prospects into an active buying process. You might be asking yourself; how do I stay relevant? Fortunately, there are several resources that can provide you with a steady stream of topics and issues for your prospects industry.

- **Google Alerts** | Set alerts for specific keywords in your industry. Google will then tell you whenever there's new news or content pertaining to those keywords. These alerts can help you stay abreast of what's going on in the industry and build content around it.
- **BuzzSumo** | With an archive of billions of articles and trillions of social media posts, it lets you keep your finger on the pulse of your industry and provides you with insights into what the important people in your field are talking about.
- **Semrush** | This service provides you with various tools to discover relevant keywords, improve SEO, research your competitors' content strategies, and more.
- **Talkwalker** | Talkwalker uses AI algorithms to monitor social media and the internet, providing you with a range of content alerts.
- **AnswerThePublic** | What are people searching for on Google? What questions are they asking? What topics are they interested in? AnswerThePublic monitors the autocomplete data for popular searches to determine what types of questions are being asked by any given group and provide you with relevant customer insights.

Industry Research & Guides

Now you've got a good idea of what your prospects and personas are looking for during the buying process and the issues impacting their industry, now what...

How do I proactively reach my market? Waiting on Google to index your content is like putting your destiny in the hands of Google which is madness. So, you might ask yourself, "How do I take more control of reaching my ideal prospects and the market in general while building demand for our products and services?"

No matter how good your content is you have no control over getting your content ranked in search engines. That's why we are huge fans of mass email marketing.

We are going to get into mass email in more detail in our next guide but before getting into the nuances of mass email, you must develop a demand generation (not lead generation) strategy. Generating demand for your products and services is different than generating leads. However, when done properly, you can generate both demand and leads.

Building demand starts with sharing helpful content that establishes you or your company as industry thought leaders. Demand Generation helps establish your brand in the marketplace. One of the best ways to build a brand is by sharing industry insights and helpful guides based on the information you uncovered when developing your buyers' journey. By now, you should know what concerns your marketplace.

Ask yourself what kind of guide or research can I share that would be seen as helpful?

This content is less about your company, products, and services and more about the industry as a whole. Here are some examples we created for a couple of clients.

northAmerican® Van Lines is a large moving company with a lot of competition. They hired us to support their corporate division's marketing efforts. This division supports corporate HR and Mobility executives by providing employee moving and relocation services. If you are a large company or a growing company, chances are you will have to hire and relocate employees to support your company's growth efforts.

So we broke down all of the aspects of employee moving from policy types, policy creation, household good moving best practices, regulations on what you can and can't move, winter moves, best times to move, international relocations, group moves, migration patterns, talent acquisition during a pandemic, supply chain issues and much more.

We then broke up the content into three categories, i.e. blog posts, guides, and research studies. Then we promoted the high value content (Guides and Research) using mass email targeting over 125,000 ideal prospects at companies with more than 200 employees in key industries.

The guides were written and designed to provide helpful content to a single topic. No sales jargon, just helpful content. We also didn't require anyone to fill out a form to get our guides. We simply gave this content away for free using instant download buttons. You can see examples of this content here.

Then we launched a series of industry surveys and again used mass email to invite our ideal prospects to take the survey for a chance to win a free $250 amazon gift card and a copy of the research. Each survey was specific for certain personas i.e., HR and Mobility titles we targeted for a study we called Relocation and Delocation in the Post-COVID Era. This study was designed to help these personas understand the attitudes of new hires when it came to the type and location of a new job offer that require moving (Talent Acquisition). We shared insights into how people were reevaluating their work life balance and how that was impacting company's mobility efforts.

Another research study "Supply Chain Strategies & Mobility Planning" was designed to help HR, Procurement, Supply Chain, and Mobility understand the impact Covid19 was having on their mobility efforts and budgeting.

We did another research study on Supplier Diversity where we collected information on how other companies where adopting and expanding their supplier diversity efforts including how they tracked the roi of their efforts. Originally, we thought HR executives played a big role in their supplier diversity efforts, but the data suggested otherwise. Procurement, Operations and Supply-chain executives played a larger role in supplier diversity while HR played a larger role with corporate diversity. This also impacted the types of prospects we put into our marketing campaigns.

You might ask yourself what supplier diversity has to do with moving employees? northAmerican has a high number of certified diverse suppliers i.e., women owned, veteran owned, and minority owned van lines. By showcasing our research, we wanted to let the marketplace know if they have any interest in expanding their supplier diversity efforts to consider adding northAmerican as a vendor.

So sometimes you must think outside of the box to come up with new ideas on how to position your company.

Another client, The Hope House, which offers substance abuse treatment wanted to expand their marketing efforts, so we recommend a research project that asked both employees and HR professionals to share their attitudes and personal experience with alcohol and substance abuse. We wanted to see if or how Covid19 was impacting both HR departments and employees when it came to substance abuse. We also wondered if an employee would approach HR if they or someone else in their family was struggling with substance abuse. When HR was asked if they felt their employees would approach them about these issues the responses were overwhelmingly yes. HR thought of themselves as very approachable but yet employees had tons of reservations or barriers to seeking help. These kinds of insights are perfect examples of how to establish yourself as a thought leader in your space. You can find the study here if interested.

The point is to create content that engages your target audience and establishes your brand as a helpful thought leader.

Results?

We sent close to 2 million emails for these two brands and generated thousands of clicks, downloads and leads with only 3 spam complaints.

It would be nearly impossible to get the same results using seo tactics and it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in paid media, especially a pay per click campaign where it isn't uncommon to reach $25 or $50 a click.

That's why we are big believers in mass email. However, you must be committed to sending helpful thought leadership content or risk high number of spam complaints, and potential damage to your email reputation and brand.

Bottom line no one minds receiving an unsolicited email if it's helpful or relevant content and we can prove it.

Here are some ideas you can use to create your own guide or research study.

Satisfaction surveys are great for collecting information not only about your product or service but your competitors as well. One of the most successful pieces of content we ever created for northAmerican is their Relocation and Moving Satisfaction Study. We created this study in 2020 (two years ago) and still get downloads and leads from that piece of content.

Another important issue is the environment. What's your company's carbon footprint? How much waste do you produce? Do your products biodegrade? Are they easy to recycle? A study on your company's environmental impact can be eye-opening—and open the door to easing the minds of a lot of your potential customers who are concerned about climate change.

Years ago, I did a benchmark study on the average cost per lead companies were paying for sales leads. We broke the cost per lead data down by industry and marketing channel. That research is still be used today and its nearly 6 years old!

These are just a few examples. Collecting this sort of data can be invaluable to your company and provide a cornucopia of insight into your customer base and how best to reach them.

Marketing campaigns tend to ebb and flow. Some are successes, others are failures. It can be a bit of a roller coaster ride. However, with this kind of market research, you can help level your results in a more predictable manner.

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

By understanding what's important to your customers and where they're coming from, and creating content around that, you can make campaigns that are steadier and more reliable.

Creating Content

There are a few basic questions to keep in mind as you create your content: Who, what, how, why, and what's next? If you can satisfactorily answer all of these questions for your prospects, you'll be well on your way to converting them to sales.

So let's break down what we've got so far. There are at least 3 or 4 different buyer personas you need to create content for. Each of those personas go on a five-step buyer journey. And at each stage of the buyer journey, you have five questions to answer. That's 100 pieces of content—and that's just the beginning.

It all begins with research. Knowing who your customers are, what's important to them, and how best to reach them. By keeping that research going at every stage of the process, at every level of the buyer journey, and for every piece of content, you'll be able to engage with your prospects in a meaningful way.

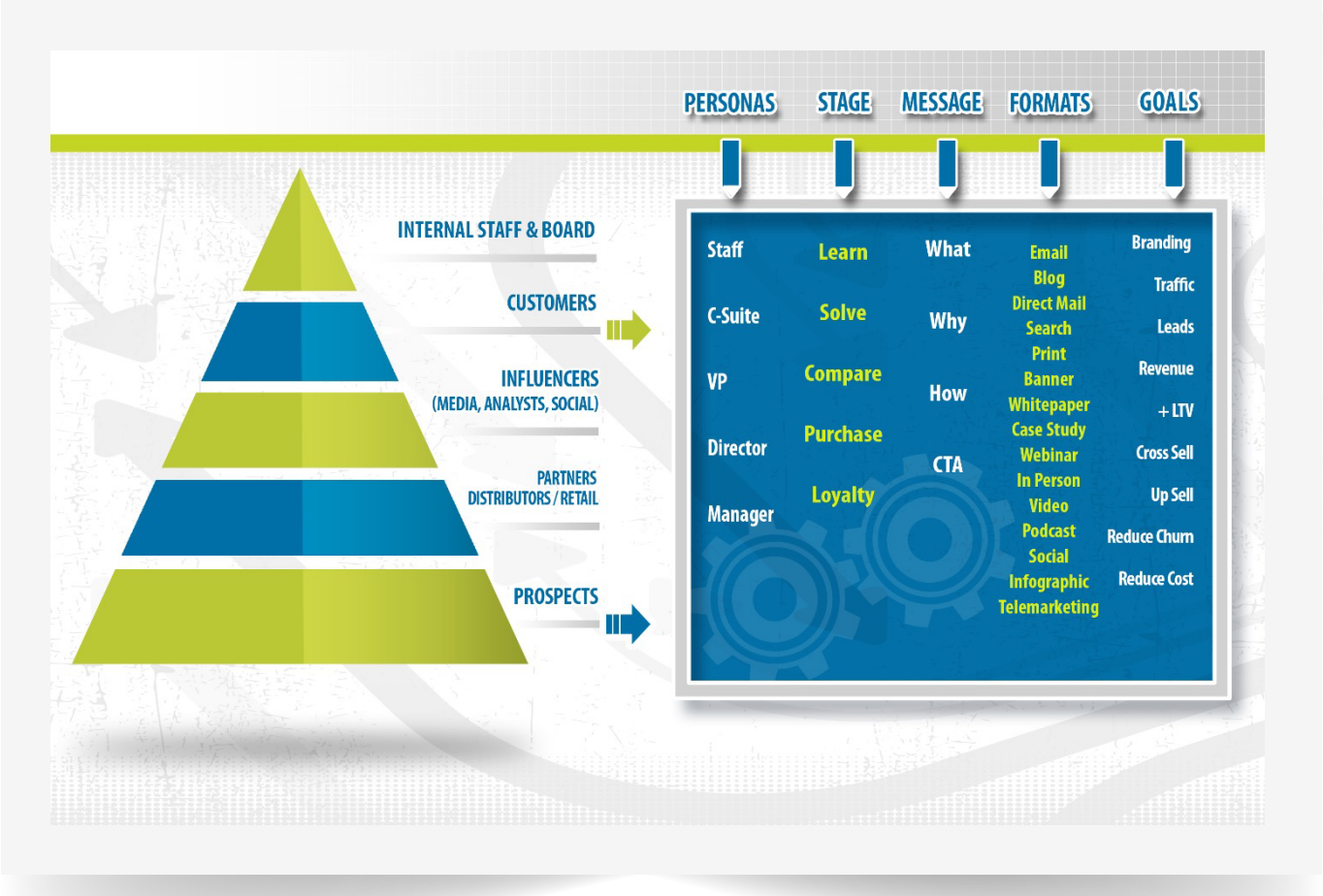
Content Marketing Roadmap

It's not just a matter of creating content and showing it to your prospects. It's about making sure your brand is something they'll want to engage with. We've talked about the buyer's journey towards making a purchase. Now let's talk about your journey towards engaging with your employees, existing customers, resellers, industry influencers and prospects. And to go on that journey, you'll need a strategic roadmap.

Here are the important destinations on the road to engagement.

- **Internal** | At the very top of your strategic road map is your internal communications. Everyone in your company, from the janitor to the CEO needs to know your value proposition—essentially the elevator pitch. The idea is if you can't internalize your message, you can't externalize your message.
- **Existing Customers** | Who are they and what are they concerned about? What content do you have for each stage of the buying process? What content do you give them to make them feel good about their decision to pick you from your competitors?
- **Influencers** | Who are the movers and shakers in your industry? Who are the people everyone listens to? Media executives, industry analysts, social pundits, etc. How can you communicate with these people and engage with them? If you can get their attention, they can help you get the attention of a lot more people.
- **Resellers and Distributors** | If you have third party resellers, how are you supporting them with their sales efforts? What insights can you give them into your value proposition? Is there any training you can provide them, or a guide that will help them boost their sales of your products and services?
- **Prospects** | By the time you get to this point, if you've gone through all the previous steps, it should be a lot easier to reach them, to understand them, and to engage with them. If you go to your prospects directly, it's expensive and time-consuming, and your success rate will be low. But by taking this journey, step by step, top-down approach, your content and message will have a trickle-down path to your prospects, allowing you to reach them better and engage with them more effectively, across multiple channels—for less money.

Here is a graphic that illustrates this road map.



You will notice the two arrows next to **CUSTOMERS** and **PROSPECTS**. The point is to identify each persona and take them on a journey from Learn, Solve, Compare, Purchase and Loyalty. What do you want to say to each persona, why, how and don't forget to tell your prospect or customer what you want them to do next (Call to Action).

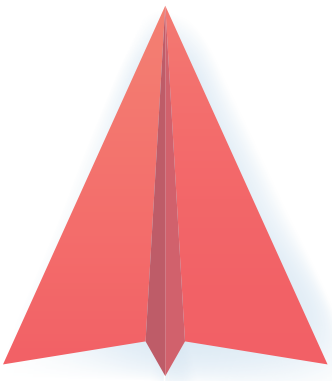
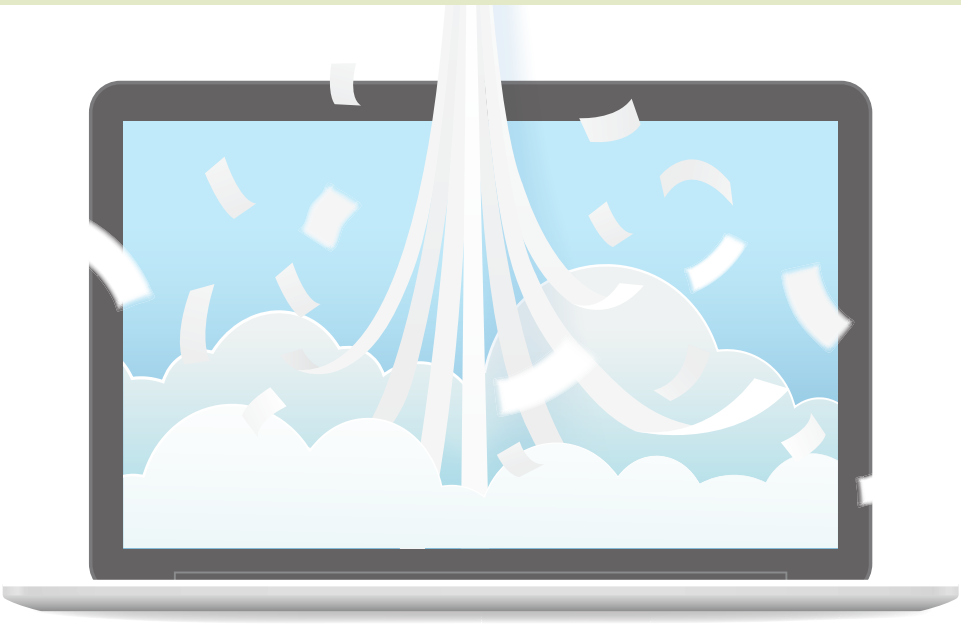
Then pick the format you want to use to share this content and assign a goal for each piece of content. Goals can range from increasing your brand awareness to driving traffic, leads, increasing the lifetime value (LTV), Cross sell up sell, reduce customer churn or reduce cost per customer acquisition.

You will be hard pressed to find a scenario where this model doesn't work.

SUMMARY

Through it all, don't forget: It starts with being relevant. That's the only way you can really reach anyone with any effectiveness. You can bombard them with e-mails, but if it's not something they're interested in or relevant, they will simply hit the delete button or worse complain that you are a spammer.

But if you can provide your prospects with the content that interests them, that really speaks to something they find important, then they'll stop to look at it. They'll engage with your brand and begin their journey that hopefully ends with them as a loyal customer—as long as you can stay relevant to them. **It all starts with relevance. If you can tap into that, then your content will soar.**



IF YOU NEED HELP, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT SHAWN ELLEDGE AT Selledge@SalesLeadAutomation.com