

Transcript: Become your own content marketing expert

Welcome to another episode of Glen Eira City Council's Digital Masterclass Series, part of our Digital Enablement program for local business. Today's topic is: become your own content marketing expert – a guide to understanding and developing content on social media.

Today we will be asking: why content marketing; taking a look at the types of content that are available on digital platforms, exploring the importance of audience and purpose in creating and developing content; talking about the three main engagement tactics that are ideal for working on digital platforms; and finishing up with an examination of digital style conventions.

First of all: why should you care about content? In digital marketing we have a saying: it's that "content is king". I like to add a little bit more onto that and say that, when it is done right, content is king. There is a big difference on the internet between "click bait-heavy", meaning content that doesn't have a lot of substance, but has a catchy headline (there's a lot of that on the internet, where there's not a lot of genuine effective engaging content) that's the stuff that you need to work towards and get. When content is done right, it is the ultimate organic marketing tool. You don't need to theoretically pay anything to get engagement, get leads, get sales, if your content is properly designed and put together.

It's a really powerful relationship-building tool and it's one of the main ways that your audience will engage with your business and your branding. And of course, it plays a key role in distinguishing your brand identity. The way that you choose to engage with your audience, and the tone that you take, it all distinguishes you from others in your industry. From an SEO, perspective it is also a very powerful tool that plays quite a large role in Google's ranking algorithms.

On the internet, there are four key types of content. The one that we'll be talking about today is short form content, which is: posts, tweets, LinkedIn updates, short amounts of text (probably no more than 250 characters).

There's also the more traditional content, which is long form. Those are blogs, white papers, articles, press releases.

Images are also a significant and important part of online content (we will be talking about those today). They're pictures, memes, infographics, and product shots.

And then there's also rich content, which is a broad term for collectively anything that sits outside of those three definitions: videos, gifs, polls, things that are interactive, games, that kind of thing.

The recipe for great content: great content needs two things, both of which are equally important, and can't exist without the other. It has to be made for a specific audience and a specific purpose.

The first question is: who do you want to talk to? The more specific an idea you can have, about who it is you want to speak with and engage with, the more effective your content is going to be.

Often, a mistake that businesses make when writing content, either for their website or their social media presence, is to be writing with a very broad idea of who they might like to buy their products – which is everyone theoretically. But the people who actually buy your products, and who are actually interested in your business, you want to speak directly to them. If they feel seen and understood by your business, then they're way more likely to buy. Internet users don't really respond to generic audience call-outs anymore.

You may already have a strong idea of who your existing audience is. That could be who you want to talk to. Or, you may want to reach a new niche, whether that's a geographic one, or an age demographic, or a specific interest area.

It could be people who have already bought from you, and are loyal customers; or first-time purchasers; or you might want to be speaking to others in your industry, depending on where you position your business, and where you want to be.

The second thing that you really need to have in mind – before you even start crafting your content – is what do you want your content to do. Again, you can take a really broad approach and say, “well, I want it to do everything, I wanted it to sell, and get lots of likes, and follows, and downloads, and inquiries...” but realistically, the most effective content is content that has a really specific vision of where it wants to go, and the action that it needs its audience to take.

The more specific you can be about the precise action you need your audience to take, and the step in your sales cycle that this content is fulfilling, the more effective it is going to be, because you can make it really detailed.

I've put some examples there: I've got brand awareness, follows, clicks, leads, shares, downloads, likes, purchases, inquiries, and comments. We're going to work through an example as we go through this process, so you can understand how a content practitioner might take a local business (it doesn't have to be something that's particularly glamorous or aesthetically appealing) and take these principles, to make it into a really effective post.

We're going to take an example of a local dry cleaner. This local dry cleaner wants to create a Facebook post, so more people become aware of their business, and have it top of mind when they next need their clothes dry cleaned. In that statement of intention we can pull out audience and purpose. The local dry cleaner wants Facebook to reach users in their area, who have their clothes dry cleaned. It's very specific.

Whilst Facebook is quite a wide age demographic, we're talking to: a very local, geographically specific area; and, to people who are interested in dry cleaning. Not everybody, but rather, people who have very specific interests in keeping their clothes clean and tidy. The purpose of the post is to encourage post shares to promote brand awareness. There's a very specific action and a very specific outcome.

Having those two things in mind when you're creating purpose is going to make the resulting post a lot more effective, and a lot easier to create.

So, on to creating engaging content on the internet. Broadly speaking, whatever you create needs to do one of the following things. We've got: entertain, educate, or agitate.

Entertain is pretty straightforward, it's just to amuse.

To interest, educate, to learn something: that's a particularly big one.

Agitate is one where you want to draw out of your audience a reaction, whether that's provoking thought or provoking emotion. It can be a really powerful way of engaging people, but it's something you need to be careful about. You need to think very carefully about how you go about doing it, because it can go wrong. It can make you put your brand in a less than desirable light if not done properly.

On the left-hand side of the screen I've got three examples of different kinds of content engagement strategies at work. We'll go through the three.

The first one: a diagram of how closed loop recycling works. If you could put that on one of the three, which would you choose? It is educate. The second one is a poll on Daniel Andrews' lockdown 2.0. That one would be: agitate. A video of cats in strange places is, of course, an entertainment engagement tactic.

Keeping those three principles in mind (and going back to my local dry cleaner) I've decided to go with educate as the option for our local dry cleaner post. What we're looking for here, with a Facebook post, is information that is shareable. If you remember back to the example, they want to create a post that increases brand awareness through shares and engagement. Something that's educational is very easy to do, because it's something that people will share with one another. It appeals to existing dry cleaning customers because they like taking care of their clothes. They like nice clean clothes, but it also can draw in a much wider audience because everybody has suffered a coffee stain catastrophe at some point.

Additionally, it demonstrates the industry expertise and authority of the dry cleaning brand which, in the long term, is going to build customer loyalty and brand credibility.

The next step is thinking about the platform that your content is going to be placed on. Every digital space has different style preferences and conventions. When it comes to content, understanding the conventions is really crucial for engagement. A Facebook audience is going to know very quickly if the content you're creating is for Twitter and you're just copy pasting it across – it's not going to work particularly effectively. Equally, a LinkedIn audience is not going to be too impressed if you post your weekend selfie from Instagram.

I've provided a handout with details on style conventions for the main social media platforms used in Australia. These are: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. They will be linked below this webinar, if you'd like to download those.

Keeping content conventions in mind, we're going to look at what suits dry cleaning the best. As a Facebook post, the most effective content is video. It gets around 59 per cent more engagement than any other post type. That would be the best practice option there because it's guaranteed to get a degree of engagement.

A second option might be to create graphics for an image carousel. This is where a series of images are scrolled through. Images perform very strongly on Facebook as well, but not quite as strongly as video.

A third option would be creating an infographic, conforming to Facebook's preferred image size. Although I've put this in, I wouldn't actually recommend it, because the way that people engage with Facebook, which is almost continuously scrolling, they don't really pause to look at things for very long. Something like an infographic, with a lot of detailed information, is probably not going to perform particularly well, and it doesn't really suit Facebook's image dimensions either.

The last option is the simplest: it's just a written post including instructions and an image. Every Facebook post that is created should always come with an image. It just boosts engagement astronomically compared to a pure text post. If you can't create video, always make sure you have an image. There are many free image sources that you can get copyright free images from, online. Or, you can use your own content, that often gets more engagement (something that's authentically yours and of your own business).

I finally decided, taking all those options into consideration, to go with the last option, which was just an image and text. This is the, so a few things to note here: we've got our "how to remove a coffee stain" but the content is broken down into what we call "sentence chunks". These are just things that people can scan very quickly. They don't have to stop and read, they can get the gist of what is going on in that sentence in a second or two. They don't need to pause or really focus, and that really suits the way that people use Facebook.

The instructions are simple and easy to follow: they could screenshot them, keep them on their phone for later, which is really straightforward and isn't very detailed. There's not a lot of scrolling involved and we have two calls to action at the end as well. So we've got "tag your coffee spill-prone co-worker" and "share the knowledge". That's encouraging people to share, as was the intention of the post. Then we're putting more of a long-term call to action as well, at the end of the post, which is "got a more serious stain situation? Our Main Road store is open until 9pm and we offer a local discount, so drop by next time you have a coffee catastrophe".

What we've done there is put a short-term call-out, which is "tag your friend, share the knowledge" and then a longer term one: "keep us in the back of your mind next time you need something dry cleaned, and we offer a discount". It's sweetening the deal again.

Finally, down the bottom I've downloaded a very simple but attractive image from a free stock image website. I've edited it into Facebook's required image dimensions.

That is the end of our "becoming your own content marketing expert webinar". Thank you so much for listening and if you have any questions, please send an email to cityfutures@gleneira.vic.gov.au. Thank you.