

SALUTE TO INDEPENDENT AGENTS

Informative Storytelling and the Bottom Line

By: *Doug Coombs*

How can a content marketing strategy help insurance agents grow their business? Ask any marketer for the best means of promoting a business, and they will likely respond, “Content is king.” If this is so, then content marketing is akin to a kingmaker.

What is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is the use of facts and narrative to engage and retain an audience. Through content marketing, insurance agents can create and consistently share valuable, relevant information with their audiences. The goal is to meet the audience's need for information while positioning the agency as an insightful resource.

What is the Value of Content Marketing?

Traditional marketing pushes messaging at consumers. Advertising shouts it. Content marketing, over time, helps insurance agents create a space where they can consistently engage with their target audience. This is especially useful for insurance agents looking to differentiate themselves in crowded markets or establish their expertise with a particular niche.

Like many people, insurance consumers often begin their search online. Whether it is to purchase insurance, compare products and pricing or simply to better understand the insurance they have or the risks that are covered, insurance consumers seek out information. And they are frequently starved for information. This is especially true for new insurance consumers or those considering a change to their insurance coverage after years on auto pilot, having paid little or no attention to anything more than the monthly premium. These consumers seek out information — content — that has the potential to drive their thinking and help their purchase decisions.

Rather than relying on static advertising, cold calling or word of mouth, independent insurance agents can use content marketing to better reach audiences looking for ways to engage with valuable insurance information. It can also support the search engine optimization of an insurance agency's website, which further enhances the ability of consumers to find those agencies.

Sixty percent of marketers measure the

success of their content marketing strategy through sales, and 82% of marketers are actively using content marketing to drive their business, according to Hubspot's “State of Marketing 2021” report. Agents should follow their lead.

How to Build a Content Marketing Strategy

A good content marketing strategy begins with identifying the audience or audiences the agent wants to reach. An insurance agent selling auto and home, as well as commercial business insurance would likely target more than one audience, including drivers, homeowners and business owners — potentially targeting multiple business audience types as well. The trick is to figure out what information or product each target audience is seeking.

Examples might include tips to lower homeowners insurance premiums, recommendations on how to save on auto insurance, finding ways to improve workplace safety, equipment maintenance advice to reduce breakdowns or repairs and recommendations on how to select or interview an insurance agent.

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With the audiences identified, insurance agents need to think like publishers. Building a content calendar takes the guess work out of what to publish and when. If the agent has a good understanding of the audiences that need to be reached, a content calendar can be created with weekly or monthly themes and/or topics. Popular approaches include lists (e.g., Top 10 lists, Five Rules to Selecting Insurance, etc.), how-to pieces, anecdotes and — of course — cautionary tales. Consumers concerned about a particular topic, perhaps cyber exposures for small businesses, will follow with interest content that offers advice as well as cautionary tales.

One approach to consider in the example here is to follow the news headlines full of stories of cyber attacks involving businesses. Linking to that coverage, including a short paragraph summary (being sure not to copy and paste, which violates most copyright laws) and citing the source gives agents an opening to then write their own short article about what else small-business owners need to consider and what coverage is available. They should recommend what questions to ask when considering the coverage in question and what to look for or avoid in a standard policy. But, putting together the content is just part of the work.

Questions to Consider When Building a Content Calendar

- How frequently should this content be available to audiences?
- In what format should this content appear? Video? Blog? Podcast? Social media? LinkedIn articles? Newsletter? A regular column in a local newspaper or business publication?
- How much time should be dedicated to researching, writing and editing this content?

- Who will develop the content, especially if multiple formats are part of the plan?
- How will this content be used to help the agent's website SEO?
- What is the best way to promote this content among the agent's intended audiences?
- What can be done to recruit others to help promote and share this content?

Converting Readers to Customers

Just because you create it, doesn't mean those consumers will automatically convert to clients.

First, the content must be substantive and address a real concern or need.

Working with what is typically called a content mill — companies that provide generic content insurance professionals can pay to put their brand on — fails on several fronts. Because the content isn't unique, Google's search algorithms deem that content to be of lower value and make it less likely to populate anywhere near the first or second page of a Google search. If an agent is offering the same exact messaging as every other agent, the likelihood consumers will build trust with that agent is diminished.

If the content isn't interesting or attractive to the intended audience, it serves very little purpose. Therefore, original, well-written content is of the utmost importance.

Second, a call to action is required.

Each piece of content marketing should speak to a particular question, challenge or issue. That content must include some practical advice — something

that offers a benefit to the consumer whether they engage with the agent or not. However, it should also include something to motivate the consumer to also engage the agent. It can be an invitation to a free consultation. Perhaps by providing contact information, the consumer can download a free webinar or short video of a prior video presentation by the insurance agent on that topic. Most importantly, the call to action must demonstrate value to the consumer and not serve solely as an opportunity for the agent to sell.

Finally, the content must be of high quality, consistently delivered and be acknowledged as a long-term lead-nurturing campaign.

One blog post or even a viral video does not immediately translate to new business opportunities. Trust between consumers and agents, like in all relationships, takes time. One sure-fire way to build trust is to provide substantive, helpful and well-produced content. Additionally, consumers need to know they can rely on some frequency of content. Long gaps between content or random publishing of content that doesn't follow a discernable timetable will turn consumers off as they seek more reliability elsewhere. Further, regular frequency provides some forgiveness for that instance or two when a direct call to action is not appropriate.

Insurance agents who are willing to invest their time and resources in a quality content marketing strategy can build a reputation for themselves as reliable solutions providers. Doing so not only helps attract an audience over time but can become a sales lead generator that turns smart thinking into real earning potential. ■

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