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7 Tips To Start A Content Marketing Editorial Calendar

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There are many complicated, complex, and powerful software tools that you can and should utilize for your digital marketing efforts. Software like Google Analytics, Hubspot, Salesforce, and others make your marketing life infinitely easier through the tasks that they automate and the data they provide for your decision making.

But there's another tool that can be made very simple or complex, depending on your individual needs and preferences. This tool is something you already use in your daily life to keep most, if not all, of your affairs in order, and make sure you are where you are supposed to be when you are supposed to be there. This tool is simply a calendar.

For digital marketing, and more specifically content marketing, your calendar may start off as your worst enemy, but will end up being your most reliable friend and your favorite tool of your trade. You will learn to live by your content calendar, and your content calendar will save you endless hours of frustration each month.

For those who are not yet familiar with the need and function of a content marketing calendar, the following questions and answers will be new and helpful as you embark on your path as a digital content marketer.

What is a content marketing calendar?

At its heart, it's just a calendar. But as a content calendar, by definition, it's a schedule of deadlines for various pieces and parts of content to be completed and/or delivered, either to the next party in the process or to the client or to be published. Your content calendar will be your roadmap for what you should do when you arrive in the office on Monday morning, because you'll be able to see what's due, what's done, what's coming up, what's stalled, and - most importantly - who owns each piece.

Why do I need a content marketing calendar?

The very basic function of a content calendar is to prevent you or anyone else in your organization from landing in the office, grabbing a hot cup of coffee, sitting down and your desk and saying, "OK, what shall we post and blog about today?"

As a marketing professional, your goal should be to have your content created and scheduled days, weeks, and sometimes months in advance, while today, you're watching the events of the day to see how you can ride the social wave like Oreo did at the 2013 Super Bowl. That moment wasn't planned, but team Oreo was ready.

You need a marketing calendar so you can plan your marketing year, down to the week and day, and be ready to participate in the events of the day via social media as they are relevant to your business.

How do I use a content marketing calendar?

Most organizations have some sort of seasonality. Schools have summer and holidays to plan around. Sports teams have real actual seasons. Associations have annual national events around which they plan all their activity, much like non profits have annual or quarterly fundraisers. Retail businesses, online and brick & mortar, have very specific times of the year that require a great deal of pre-planning, and that planning includes digital marketing.

What events does your business participate in?

You may consider building your marketing calendar around those events, or around one particular event that really drives your business, like a tradeshow or annual conference.

You build your calendar around these seasons or events. Also, for social media, you can engage your audience by sharing content that is related to certain calendar events like holidays or things like "back to school" or "Breast Cancer Awareness Month." Take a 100,000 foot view of your brand's annual cycle, and plan your marketing around it, then work backwards based on how long it will take to produce, approve, and launch each campaign or content.

Your calendar will fill up rather quickly, and then you'll be able to see what times of the year need to have specific content built to fill those gaps, or you may know that your entire industry basically shuts down over the holidays. Either way, when that time rolls around, you'll already have a plan, and you can then be planning for the future.

Are there existing templates, or do I have to start from scratch?

There are dozens of really, really good and simple examples of marketing calendars available at the click of a mouse when you search "content marketing calendar template". Here are just a few:

- HubSpot

- Moz

- CopyBlogger

- Content Marketing Institute

- 98toGo

Finding any template is very easy, but you should find a template that works for you, your business, and the details that you need to track.

What are the basic things I need to track in my calendar?

Once you have adopted a 3rd party template or made one yourself, there are several basic items for each campaign or piece of content that should be included.

- Date: When will this campaign or content be published? The date is most often first, simply because this is a calendar, a schedule that is, by definition, date driven.

- Name of the topic/campaign: A name for this content (blog, article, post, etc.) or the campaign name or a combination of the two.

- Owner: Who is the owner or author of the content or campaign? If there are multiple people involved in the creation of a piece of content, each person's name should be listed in this field, and it should be noted when the item changes hands.

- Status: The current status of the content/campaign as it moves through your publication process.

You may or may not want to add to these points, and that your decision based on your business needs, as well as your specific processes. The main point of this exercise is to

create a calendar system that works for you and your marketing team, to keep you aware and accountable for when each item in the marketing campaign must be completed.

Can I just use Google Calendar or a Google Spreadsheet?

Of course, you can just create a new Google Calendar account, share it with your team, and treat it just like a personal calendar. Also, you could use a Google Spreadsheet, and format it exactly the way you want it to appear.

The most important takeaway from learning about a content calendar is understanding the value of simply using a content calendar. There is no substitute for knowing and being able to share when all your events are taking place, and therefore having your team all on board, knowledgeable, and accountable for their pieces of the content marketing puzzle.

Grab this free ebook to boost your content marketing

Ready to take your content marketing to the next level? Our free ebook How To Create Killer Content That Attracts Web Visitors (along with a well planned out content calendar), can get you there. Click the button to grab your free copy.

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