

THE UNIVERSITY GUIDE TO BLOGGING & CONTENT MARKETING



What is Content Marketing?

Well, let's start with a simpler question first: what is content? Content is any online media that is available for consumption. It may be a blog post, a web page, a third-party testimonial, or a news article. Content is often text-based, but it doesn't have to be—photos and videos make for great content, especially when it comes to repurposing or re-imagining. Now that we have that out of the way, let's talk about content marketing. Content marketing consists of any and all materials a company creates and shares to better engage customers and prospects. Your aim as a content marketer is to tell the right story, at the right time, in the right format—helping and informing your audience in the process. This has always been the goal of marketing, but with the advent of Web 2.0 and a more empowered consumer, your current and prospective students have more ways than ever to choose how they find and engage with your information. So, you need to find more-creative ways to deliver your best content to them.

Why You Should Care About Content Marketing

Now, let's discuss why content marketing is important to you and your admissions department. You've probably noticed that your audience of prospective students has changed. They're not swayed by your mailers or brochures. They aren't interested in your student-to-faculty ratio, your state-of-the-art facilities, your school pride, or any other talking point. Why not, you ask? Because they're smart enough to know that every school loves itself. That is, they realize that you think you're great, but they're not exactly interested in your opinion.

Future students want to hear from current students—the ones who look like them, think like them, talk like them, and, most importantly, were in their shoes not long ago. They want a seal-of-approval from someone they can empathize with and relate to. Once they get this, the other statistics start to matter—but only then. This means that, in order to get a competitive advantage, you need to put your best foot forward and collect as many real-life stories from real-life students as you can.

They also want to get to know you person-to-person. Who are the faculty? What do they think about? What makes them interesting? Are they real people or talking heads? What kinds of activities do you offer? What's your institution's real expertise? Most importantly, what's the attitude and atmosphere of the school, day-to-day? Today, every prospective student has lots of great educational choices—in person, online, a combination of both. They want to find a place where they fit in and feel at home. Your content marketing will help them see the benefits of calling your school "home."

Okay, So What's a Blog?

At the simplest level, a blog (a web log) is a one-page website that is typically accessed from your existing website. All blogs list entries in reverse chronological order. Blogs are also organized by category to help readers navigate through all of your ideas. This format makes it easy for readers to see all the ideas you have to share and pick for themselves which subject they want to engage with. So, let's talk about why you should use a blog to power your content marketing efforts:

Blogging is conversational. Blogs will humanize your marketing efforts, giving you a medium to discuss your school's thoughts and ideas, while simultaneously solving your students' problems in a more natural manner. For colleges and universities, a blog gives your students, faculty, and staff a way to share their own thoughts, experiences, and ideas in their own words. (Believe us: their own words are more engaging than traditionally sanitized marketing messages.)

Blogging improves search. Every blog post becomes a new entry point for prospective students to find you via search engines. By creating frequent, relevant, focused content, you'll have more opportunities to provide value and create relationships with the people who need your help.

Blogging demonstrates thought leadership. Your faculty and staff are smart. They have tons of ideas. When they blog about what they are thinking and doing, it shows students what your institution is really all about.

Blogging is linkable and sharable. While blogs give prospective students a tried-and-true place to find out about you, they also give you a platform for promoting your content to social networks. And, they let your students share what they like with their friends.

Blogging is a more permanent repository for social media marketing. When social media campaigns are centered around your blog, they are permanent—that is, they don't disappear in a Twitter timeline or fall below the fold on a Facebook newsfeed. By using your blog to manage your social media marketing strategy, you're taking control of your content and allowing your efforts to pay dividends for you days, weeks, months, and years down the road.

Blogging facilitates the re-imagining of marketing materials. Take your press releases, brochures, sell sheets, FAQs and other documents and transform them into online content. A five-page white paper can become five blogs posts, while five blog posts can become a brand-new white paper. Student stories can even become ads! Check out Granite State College's ads here <http://www.granite.edu/students/stories/watch.php>. Online to offline. Offline to online. Blogs make it easy to give your existing content new life.

Discovering Content Channels for Your Blog

Don't panic! This might seem like a lot of work, but it doesn't have to be. You might think you don't have any content channels, but we're willing to bet that you create relevant, remarkable content on a daily basis already. You just have to start looking for it. Try these places:

FAQs. You're solving your current and prospective students' problems every day, answering their questions via email interactions and phone calls. Cut out the redundancy and create a more robust FAQ section by turning all of these interactions into blog posts. Have your campus tour guides keep track of (and respond online!) to the questions they're asked during their campus tours. Put up a Q&A section on your admissions website to give prospective students the opportunity to tell you exactly what questions they have. Remember: relevancy is everything, and what's more relevant than answering real questions from real future students?

Social Media. You're probably already posting content to social media profiles. Cut that out, and start posting that same content directly to your blog; then, push it to social media from there. When you do so, you keep control of your content, and you make sure that, if Facebook or Twitter ever fall off the map, you won't have to start your content creation and curation from square one.

Press Releases. They're here today, gone tomorrow. Stop that vicious cycle and start getting more out of your press releases. Once you launch them over the newswire, republish your press releases on your blog so that people can discover them weeks and months down the road. You spent all that time creating the perfect message about your school's important update—make that effort last.

Upcoming Events. You plan events all year round. Use your blog to create awareness and provide updates about them to your students and staff. When the event is over, write blog-post recaps of your favorite moments, and ask attendees to do so, too!

Alumni Magazines and Newsletters. Somebody's taking the time to create and curate all of your great magazine and newsletter content. Make sure their efforts are republished online for the rest of us to see.

Marketing Materials. You've written plenty of great marketing materials in the past. Take all of that content and push it to your blog. Not only will this make your best work easier to find, it will allow you to introduce your past content to new customers.

Photos and Videos. iPhone and Flip cameras are ubiquitous these days. If you're capturing pictures and video, but sure to upload them to your blog. All you need to do is provide two or three sentences of context and—voilà!—you've got a blog post.

Discovering Content Channels for Your Blog (Continued)

Pretty good list, huh? And that's just the content you're already creating. Now, consider these new content channels that you can tap into:

Story Capture. A great place to get started is a story-collection campaign. When fall comes around and it's time to get back to school, ask returning students to tell you what things they're most looking forward to during the upcoming year. When it's the end of the semester, ask students about their favorites classes or the things they'll miss about campus over the summer. When graduation rears its necessary head, ask your students to share their best memory about school. Or, ask them to tell you how they've changed for the better since they started their studies. The options are as endless as your creativity.

Student Bloggers. When your students start submitting stories, you're sure to find your fair share of writing talent. Ask your favorite student bloggers to blog about the school full-time. If you're already employing a lot of students, make blogging a part of their job responsibilities. Set some expectations about how frequently you'd like them to post, and set them free to be themselves. Incentives are always a good idea.

Faculty and Staff. Recruit your best teachers and staff to share their expertise about the campus and their technical spheres. Many of them are already writing. Ask them to share their teaching or research ideas, their own personal experiences, and what being a part of your institution means to them. Again, set expectations, grant certain freedoms, and watch the good content roll in.

Well look at you now! You have the power to leverage your current content channels, combine them with new content channels, and really dazzle prospective students in the process. If you take anything away from this document, let it be this: content is everywhere, and once you start realizing that, content marketing becomes a much easier thing to do. Your school is full of stories from students and faculty from all walks of life—they know your community and culture best, and they are its most effective ambassadors. Make it easy and fun for them to share their school experiences, and before you know it, you'll have stories that all kinds of applicants can relate to.

Ready to get started? We can help!

Compendium is a content marketing platform that helps organizations build stronger, more effective stories that attract customers, amplify conversations, and build authentic relationships with content that comes from anywhere, and is readily distributed to anywhere. Call us for more information.