

*Content: SEO's New Best Friend*

Vancouver-based Julie Bevacqua is a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) expert who understands the importance of SEO in B2B marketing programs. She says, "An effective SEO strategy helps generate and nurture leads, build brand awareness and authority, and influence purchasing decisions."

Research institute, MarketingSherpa, evaluated the role of SEO in B2B marketing in its *2012 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report*:

"Search engine optimization (SEO) [is] one of the most effective lead generation tactics for 2012. In fact, it came in just slightly behind website optimization (42%) with a compelling 38% of respondents ranking it as 'very effective.'

Content creation tops the list as the most effective tactic for SEO. As organizations increase website content, they are able to achieve higher rankings, and a greater number of listings in the search engine results pages. This ultimately leads to increased inbound traffic from search engines."

Bevacqua says, "Content-driven SEO is the future of SEO. Sharing quality content that informs and educates your customers simultaneously helps search engines, like Google, to index your pages and improve your ranking. Higher rankings lead to increased web traffic which, in turn, drives lead generation and conversion."

Fresh, quality content that helps your customers solve a problem, answers their questions, or educates them about an industry-related topic should be the cornerstone of your B2B SEO strategy. Guy Kawasaki, author and former Chief Evangelist at Apple, says, "My recommendation for SEO is very simple. It's 'Write Good Stuff.' In my mind, Google is in the business of finding good stuff. It has thousands of the smartest people in the world, spending billions of dollars to find the good stuff. All you have to do is write the good stuff; you don't need to trick it. Let Google do its job and you do your job."

Bevacqua agrees, noting, "Although many B2B marketers have previously relied on keyword density to drive their SEO strategy, there is more to effective SEO than cramming your blog posts and web copy with keywords. Quality, not quantity, of content is key. And you need content that's written with your *customers* in mind."

Google's new search algorithm, Hummingbird, is influencing the content development strategies of B2B marketers. With Hummingbird, Google has considered the growing trend of question-based queries and broadened the search engine focus to encompass the meaning and intent of the search, rather than just the individual words. Context is considered and a more meaningful search result follows.

The new algorithm also gives more weight to social signals (e.g. Facebook Likes and Shares, Retweets, LinkedIn Shares, etc.) as they are a strong indication of quality content. Pete Cashmore, founder and CEO of Mashable, says, "Looking at the number of Facebook shares and tweets and Google+ shares is actually a better correlator of where something will end up in the rankings. Google is starting to say, 'If a human votes for something, that's more valuable than an inbound link.'"

With this new holistic approach to searching, delivering quality content that answers customers' queries and fulfills their needs plays an even more important role in a company's SEO marketing strategy. By building a relationship with your customers and developing a community through two-way dialogue and sharing of useful information, you can both maximize your search engine rankings to drive web traffic and positively influence your customers' buying decisions.

Prolific marketing blogger, Seth Godin, says, "[SEO is] not a shortcut to success, at least not for 99% of the companies out there. You won't win by fooling Google into listing you first for a common search term. You will win once you figure out the simple mechanics of turning strangers into friends and friends into customers."