



# 8 Content Marketing Mistakes to Avoid



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### Executive Summary

Only a handful of marketers can hit a home run every time they step up to bat. Let's face it, we've all had our share of flops. But failures can be learning experiences; a mistake or misstep can provide insight into what to avoid in the future. Heinz Marketing's Matt Heinz suggests that you not "overthink your content marketing strategy. It's more important to have a bias for action and get rolling." In this online discussion, Matt gets things rolling by sharing some content marketing "gotchas" to avoid, and he's in good company, with input from Marketing Interactions' Ardath Albee, Babcock & Jenkins' Carmen Hill, The Funnelholic's Craig Rosenberg, and The Sales Lion's Marcus Sheridan. This list of "don'ts" can help you avoid some of the more common content marketing mistakes these experts have seen (and perhaps even made themselves!).

### Checklist

1. **Don't neglect to do the groundwork.**
2. **Don't focus on yourself—focus on the buyer instead.**
3. **Don't pitch your product at every stage.**
4. **Don't overlook calls to action.**
5. **Don't forget that effective content marketing is a two-way street.**
6. **Don't produce content that lacks substance.**
7. **Don't treat content marketing as an afterthought.**
8. **Don't underestimate the power of various formats.**

"Before you start any marketing activity (no matter how strategic or tactical), you have to know why you're doing it."

—Matt Heinz,  
Heinz Marketing

### 8 Content Marketing Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Don't neglect to do the groundwork.** Before you start any marketing activity (no matter how strategic or tactical), you have to know why you're doing it. What does success look like? How does this activity translate to immediate or eventual sales and revenue? (Heinz)

I think the biggest mistake is not doing the foundational, big-

“Nobody else cares that much about us. Our content needs a lot less ‘we’ and a lot more ‘you.’”

—Carmen Hill,  
Babcock & Jenkins

picture work. You have to know whom you’re talking to, what they need and want to know, and where their interests intersect with yours. All the other mistakes we make emanate from that void. (Hill)

### 2. **Don’t focus on yourself—focus on the buyer instead.**

I’d argue that marketers who do not build buyer insights or develop personas will forever revert to content oriented that’s around products, because that’s what they know best. Focusing on buyers is a shift to skill sets that takes applied effort. (Albee)

Think like the end user, not like a business owner. Too many business owners and marketers are writing more for “their” way of seeing the world. They talk too much about themselves; I always like to say it’s a blog, not a brag. Great content marketing is about education. It’s about teaching. And it’s about good old-fashioned communication. To be great at content marketing, the focus has to be about the reader, and not the company/writer. (Sheridan)

Try as we might, we tend to see things through the lens of our company, our product, our need to get a bunch of leads in the pipeline by the end of the quarter, etc. Nobody else cares that much about us. Our content needs a lot less “we” and a lot more “you.” (Hill).

### 3. **Don’t pitch your product at every stage.** Content marketers can be overly sales-y at inappropriate times. Whitepapers and datasheets have their place at the right point in the sales cycle. In the meantime, give the people what they want: interesting content that makes their life better. (Rosenberg)

Too many content programs focus on new features, chest-beating on company milestones, and otherwise weaving strong product tie-ins into every new piece of content created. That content has its place, but your readers (customers and prospects) will gravitate toward content that independently provides value. What are your customer’s issues? What do they need help with, right now? That’s the content that will spread like wildfire for you. (Heinz)

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—Ardath Albee,  
Marketing Interactions

4. **Don't overlook calls to action.** Every content asset should have a call to action. This does not mean “have a sales rep call me” (unless this is late stage). It means providing access to the next step. What would your prospect be interested in given the content they have just viewed? Build pathways and tell connected stories that help to build momentum through the pipe. (Albee)
5. **Don't forget that effective content marketing is a two-way street.** Creating content isn't enough. To really accelerate your audience and impact, you must devote time to responding, commenting, engaging questions and so on. If you're just a one-way communication channel, even with good content, your prospects will go elsewhere for the interaction they crave. (Heinz)
6. **Don't produce content that lacks substance.** Too often, we focus on platforms, channels and formats, rather than the substance of the information and the story it supports. At this year's SXSW, Audrey Gray of American Express advised that we put our energy into what we're making rather than the platform: “Create content that makes you feel smarter, celebrates human artistry, or that has with real-world value.” (Hill)  
  
They are afraid to produce gutsy content that actually gives an opinion. We have too many boring blogs living in the world of gray, with not enough black-and-white. (Sheridan)
7. **Don't treat content marketing as an afterthought.** Content marketing is not a bolt-on to other marketing efforts. Content marketing is a practice that integrates all of your content-driven initiative into a consistent and holistic experience for your target markets. Or it should be. I see it implemented as an also-ran with webinars, white paper efforts and social media run separately. This creates a fragmented experience for your audience. Content marketing is at its best when it's used to pull everything together so that an experience in one channel makes sense or adds value when the audience switches to another channel. This is one reason why editorial calendars are so important. (Albee)

They aren't relentless in their pursuit of producing great content. In other words, it's not a culture of the company, it's a “If we have time to write a blog post, let's try to get it done...” (Sheridan)

“Content is an asset. Using it once and then relegating it to a resource list page on the corporate website is a shame.”

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### 8. Don't underestimate the power of various formats.

Written content may be the core of your content strategy, but don't forget video. Or podcasts. Or short, embedded slide presentations. Or whatever other formats your audience naturally gravitates toward. (Heinz)

Content is an asset. Using it once and then relegating it to a resource list page on the corporate website is a shame. Marketers will benefit tremendously by embracing the Rule of 5. This means that for every piece of content developed, there should be 5 uses, applications or reinvention options for a content asset. Turn a webinar into a white paper. Then break the white paper into a series of articles and blog posts and connect them via hyperlinks. Take one topic and develop 5 different angles to approach it, creating 5 different formats of content. (Albee)

### About Act-On Software

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### In Closing

Good content marketing is an on-going commitment, not a one-time investment. If you focus on eliminating these “don'ts” from your work, you can hit a home run with every campaign. You will find that quality content builds upon itself, delivering consistent long-term engagement and creating brand loyalty within your customer base.