

Big data and content marketing: A match made in heaven

 By [Sadek Jake Alam](#)

19 Apr 2016

According to an [eMarketer report](#), total digital ad spending in the US will surpass total TV ad spending in 2017.

Digital marketing has already established itself as the fastest growing advertisement industry – it will grow 15.4% this year compared to TV which will only do 2.5%. It's easy to see why digital ad is growing so fast – people spend much longer staying online than they do watching TV, or may be reading a magazine or newspaper.

Traditionally, digital ad spending was focused on text, display and search advertising; an industry where Google Adwords has been enjoying monopoly for the last 16 years. While traditional display advertising had worked great for marketers in the early years, the same cannot be said for recent years as customers have reportedly developed a fatigue to display advertisement in general. More marketers crowding the few meaningful advertisement platforms also meant that cost for an action has kept going up.

Rise of content marketing

A screenshot of the AMEX Open Forum, one of the most successful content marketing effort till date.

Marketers for long had been dependent on advertisements to attract traffic to their landing pages to generate leads. Further follow-ups were mostly done through email marketing. Along the years, digital marketing has evolved in a few different directions, content marketing being one that holds large promise. Already an almost \$200bn global industry, content marketing is well set to become a \$313bn global industry by 2019, according to [PQ Media](#).

The growth and increased importance has been triggered by the rise of the different social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit, Snapchat, etc. each creating unique content opportunities for businesses. Marketers have realised that it's extremely easy to communicate directly with customers and consumers; they now have an audience that reacts, responds and takes action and all the flows can be analysed in real time. The key is to produce valuable materials that would attract, acquire and engage a carefully targeted following.

Consumers are hungry for stories, and brands can take the opportunity to become excellent story tellers by preparing coherent, relevant content customised to every need and situation. Marketers have learnt how earned, shared and acquired media assets can be consistent sources of quality organic traffic, which when boosted with paid advertising, can become a force to be reckoned with.

Big data brings big opportunities

Big data is the massive amount of data that is being created every minute. According to [McKinsey & Company](#), big data is well set to be the next \$100bn industry. Generating, mining, storing and analysing big data for insights have become economically relevant for all businesses. Many companies have always owned big data, and with increased digitisation of business and advent of technologies such as smartphones and the internet, more and more companies now possess tremendous amount of valuable data they can analyse to discern patterns and make better decisions.

And most of the big data in this world is being generated online. Think about the number of conversations taking place on Facebook, images being shared on Instagram, videos being uploaded on Youtube, articles being published on blogs and websites. Think about the data being generated by your analytics software, CRM software, third-party data companies such as Alexa.com and Buzzsumo.com. There's so much data around content, that it just seems like a no-brainer that big data will become an integral part of content marketing.

Use big data in content marketing

It's likely that you already have large amounts of data readily available to you through your social profiles, Google Analytics, customer records, sales receipts, support tickets and other platforms. But obviously having a vast amount of data is useless if you do not know how to harness its power. I will try to show you a few ways you can immediately put your data to use in order to enhance your content marketing efforts.

Big data can help you:

1. Create better content

Make use of big data to understand the topics you should talk about, the type of content you should create, and the platforms you should target to bring the best results. You do not necessarily have to be a programmer to reap the benefits of big data. This [Kissmetric blog post](#) shows you how to mine the titles of articles published on websites such as Marketo, HubSpot and Social Media Today using a simple web scraping tool, and then running the titles through a basic word counting tool to find out the buzz words that appear frequently in the titles.

To be honest, even that's too much to do when you want to learn more about current trends in a particular industry and convert them into content ideas. [Buzzsumo](#) is a brilliant content research tool that makes use of big data to crawl and index all the latest content that is being produced about any topic and generates corresponding performance statistics so that you know how each piece of content actually performed.

[Clearvoice](#) is another relatively new discovery tool that's going to receive a lot of appreciation from digital marketers in coming days. ClearVoice has developed an immense database of almost every author writing for almost every other publishing site on the internet. Apart from generating brilliant content insights and topic ideas, ClearVoice can also be used to find and reach out to industry influencers and ask them about content collaboration projects.

2. Analyse how your customers and prospects engage with your content

Use analytics and customer insights provided by the social media platforms you are already using. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and all other major social media platforms provide accurate and detailed reports about consumer insights.

See who your audiences are, what do they like most, and what are they most interested about. See if they are responding to your call to action.

3. Measure reach and awareness

Track and measure everything. Analyze page insights to track how they are engaging with your page. When you send them to your website, track the transition with Google analytics. Use a service like bitly.com as an additional tracking if you are as paranoid as me.

Want to see if the people who actually went to your landing page fill up that email form? Use a tracking pixel. Want to be able to track this user on the long term? Use cookies.

Basically, once a customer falls into your funnel, there are a lot of ways you can track his/her movement at all stages of conversion. If you are using paid promotions, measure your ROI and cost per desired action at all steps, and see what's working for you and what's not. Gradually, associate values to all kinds of actions you want your customer to take, be it a Facebook like, a share, or a retweet, and use them as benchmark for future campaigns.

Observe people talking about your brand. Use targeted hashtags, username handles, url shorteners to track subtopics, cascade customer conversations and to track individual campaigns.

Keep track of your reach. See how your content is performing across each platform. [Hootsuite](#) is a very good social media management tool and can keep track of all these things for you.

4. Optimise the buyer's journey

Gather intelligence and insights about your buyer's journey. Google Analytics is a strong tool you always have in hand – use it. Connect your Analytics account with your social accounts to better track the movement of your customers to and from your website to your content channels. You could also integrate solutions like [FunnelCake](#) to develop comprehensive insights about your buyer's journey in a more efficient manner.

5. Retain customers and build loyalty

[Remarketing](#) is an excellent advertisement feature that enables a marketer to display ads to a defined audience which has had past interactions with the brand. Think of the possibilities arising from being able to market fresh content to customers today who researched about the same topic just the previous day. Defining customers at each level of conversion and identifying their position on the buyer's journey will enable marketers develop targeted content to drive conversion.

Marketers should take a similar approach to foster loyalty. Tracking customer conversations about the brand, identifying evangelists and loyal followers and engaging with them proactively will definitely help your content marketing efforts. Hootsuite, again, is a good tool to have if you handle a lot of social accounts.

ABOUT SADEK JAKE ALAM

Sadek Jake Alam is a professional content marketing strategist and a founder and director of Marketing at the content marketing startup MediaMuse. Sadek loves working with emerging tech-enabled startups and helping them craft content strategies that add value to the bottomline. Sadek is a graduate from IBA, University of Dhaka and is currently pursuing his MBA at the Johns Hopkins University Carey Business School.

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