

# Use Content to Attract, Engage and Convert in Digital Commerce

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A critical challenge all digital commerce marketers face is finding new, cost-effective ways to deliver revenue as advertising costs and price competition rise. This note contains practical advice and examples to help you win over shoppers and drive commerce results with great content strategy.

## Key Challenges

- Today's commerce marketers rely heavily on paid advertising and promotional tactics to attract shoppers, resulting in undifferentiated experiences that often yield unprofitable customers and reduce margins.
- Most digital shopping experiences include basic product information plus limited ratings and reviews. This leads buyers to use third-party sites and social media to access more engaging and insightful content to help evaluate a product.
- Many commerce brands miss opportunities to convert browsers into buyers across all stages of their journey, despite ready-made shoppable media and abandoned cart recovery opportunities.

## Recommendations

- **Attract:** Make helpful and informative content, not promotions, the centerpiece of awareness efforts that will attract targeted buyers to your brand.
- **Engage:** Deliver immersive digital content experiences that inspire desire and help shoppers envision your products in the context of their daily lives.
- **Convert:** Increase conversion opportunities and rates by infusing more moments of truth with helpful or engaging material to overcome buyer objections and increase sales.

## Strategic Planning Assumption

By 2020, shoppable media will reach mainstream adoption with buyers purchasing 15% of their total discretionary spend via shoppable media, up from a negligible amount in 2015.

## Introduction

Once considered the realm of B2B marketers seeking a thought leadership position, content marketing is expanding beyond the considered purchase journey and into more consumer-oriented commerce experiences across industries.

Brands that are winning the hearts, minds and wallets of consumers employ innovative content marketing programs that go beyond the realm of advertising and last mile conversion discounts. Through both in-house and agency teams, companies like The Home Depot, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide and west elm have adopted storytelling throughout the buyer's journey to drive business results.

This research explores some successful content marketing strategies used to attract and engage customers, differentiate digital commerce experiences, and increase conversion.

## Analysis

### Attract: Make Helpful and Informative Content, Not Discounts, the Centerpiece of Awareness Efforts That Will Attract Targeted Buyers to Your Brand

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Well-crafted, persona-targeted content will attract more qualified audiences, differentiate a brand, evoke a lifestyle, or even surprise and delight shoppers. B2B firms like consulting company PwC's Strategy& (formerly Booz & Company) and Autodesk's Line//Shape//Space site have been using helpful content to attract audiences for years. Martha Stewart and QVC were among the revolutionaries who used content such as how-to articles and video programming like "In the Kitchen With David" to attract new audiences by helping them solve a problem or giving them a great new idea.

Search engine marketing costs are rising and conversion rates are declining,<sup>1</sup> which means that new tactics must enter the mix to improve performance across a variety of channels. More and more commerce brands are turning to content marketing to attract shoppers in this era of comparison shopping and price discounting. Even though a buyer *could* buy nearly anything on Amazon, buyers *will* shop and pay a premium at retailers they trust. As Lowe's proves with its content results, consumers will spend their dollars with brands that are helpful or entice them to consider a new product or category by appealing to their needs and emotions, not just merchandising product information or targeting them via SEM or display media with a discount or promotion.

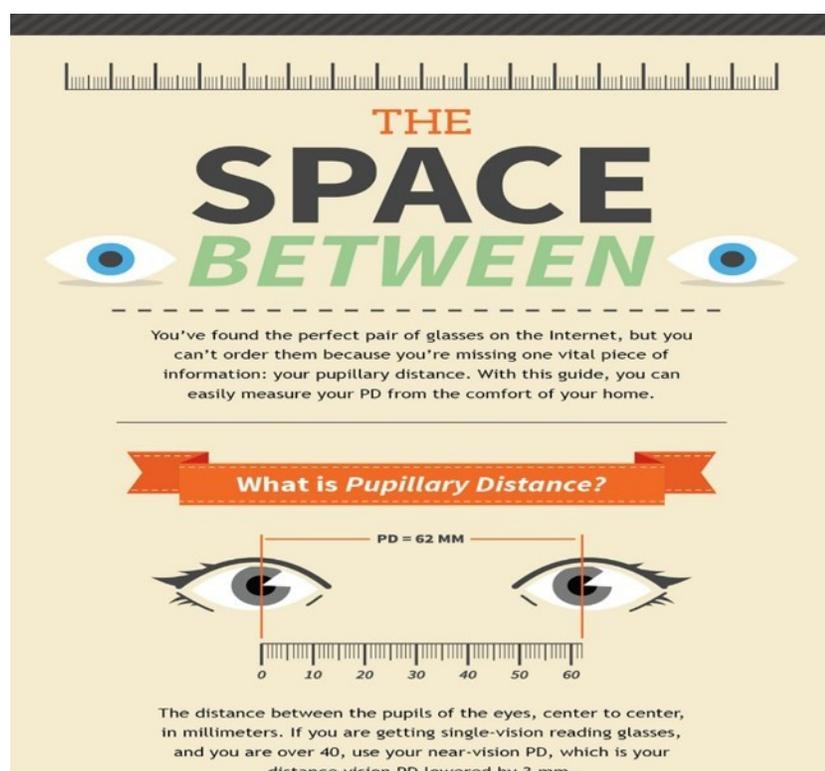
### Helpful and Informative Content Attracts at Sephora and Zenni

Ever since beauty vlogger Michelle Phan turned heads with her snappy tutorials in 2009, beauty brands have been licensing, producing and promoting helpful do-it-yourself video content to unobtrusively promote products. Sephora has invested in a triple play of informative content — [video streams on SephoraTV](#), [a digital magazine called Sephora Glossy and the Beauty Board](#), which features image-rich content that can be searched and filtered to find helpful tips and tricks. Not only does this type of information inspire trust and build a premium brand image, for Sephora,

it's an arsenal of organic search-worthy content that draws traffic from across the Web and is easily shared via organic social media.

Smaller brands with fewer resources can get a leg up with content marketing, even if they don't have a production team like Sephora. Eyewear manufacturer Zenni Optical partnered with commerce content marketing agency Wpromote to extend its team and produce a combination of informative and fashion-oriented content that was shared on its blog and through PR efforts. The company's infographic on how to measure pupillary distance (see Figure 1), that important space between your eyes that optimizes eyeglass fit, resulted in 60,000 new email opt-ins and drove a 4.53% commerce conversion rate, easily outperforming the ROI of any of Zenni's traditional paid media campaigns. The long-term impact is even greater when Zenni continues to nurture those new contacts to future sales and benefits from the social reach of its helpful tutorial.

Figure 1. Zenni's Infographic



Source: Zenni Optical

### Fun and Inspiring Content Attracts at Topshop and West Elm

In February 2015, Topshop turned London Fashion Week's digital streams into its own interactive shopping playground with the [#LiveTrends campaign](#) (see Figure 2). It combined real-time social feeds from celebrities with user-generated fashion selfies that pointed to a curated catalog of its merchandise for the ultimate in up-to-the-minute shoppable fashion. A [75% sales uplift on trends featured in the campaign](#) suggests that the video, data and rich user-generated content (UGC) had

a marked impact attracting and converting shoppers. The fun and inclusive way that the brand inspired new looks resonated with its young buyer personas.

Figure 2. Topshop User-Generated Content Featured Digitally and Out-of-Home to Attract Shoppers



Source: Topshop

Home décor and furniture retailer west elm has been shifting its brand over the years to appeal to a broader variety of shoppers, and content has been at the heart of this transformation. In addition to [heavy use of Instagram to feature user-generated design ideas](#), west elm [curates styled home interior vignettes on its blog Front + Main](#) and Instagram feeds. It offers ample how-to content that attracts shoppers as well as thoughtfully curated third-party content to expand its volume and reach. West elm has extended its brand to include local craftsmen in certain regions, including them as part of its content program to increase the inspiration factor and drive entirely new audiences for the brand.

### What to Do Next:

- Know your customers. Collaborate with your brand or content marketing teams to get access to or jointly build personas and journey maps. Use these tools to identify opportunities in the awareness and attraction stages where you could complement existing tactics with rich content.

- Engage with your content team on its editorial calendar to influence programs that can support your quarterly business goals. This could include requesting that certain categories of products be featured or certain personas be targeted to align with merchandising plans.
- Partner with an agency to identify opportunities to attract customers and pilot content marketing initiatives if there is no individual or team in your organization responsible for content marketing. This should include initial persona and journey mapping work (see "How to Build Segments and Personas for Digital Marketing").

## Engage: Deliver Immersive Digital Content Experiences That Inspire Desire and Help Shoppers Envision Your Products in the Context of Their Daily Lives

Product information pages (PIPs) have not evolved much since the early 2000s. Copywriters devote hours to craft a perfect headline copy that will inspire confidence in a product, and, although photography has improved, the biggest additions to most product pages have been product videos or buyer ratings and reviews. These are critical to the shopping experience and are now considered table stakes for a modern digital commerce experience.

In order to stand out, brands are becoming veritable publishing houses in their own right. They are using in-house talent as well as happy customers to publish continuous and well-rounded streams of engaging content that inspires action (see "How to Tell Memorable Marketing Stories").

### Inspiring Desire With Content at Starwood and Vera Bradley

Social sharing of vacation content fills many social feeds with wistful envy of a great getaway. Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide and other hospitality brands are letting guests tell their stories and embedding these unfiltered images on their owned Web properties to lend a more personal touch to the brand. Using [Starwood's Guest Gallery](#), shopping for a Hawaiian vacation hotel becomes truly immersive when browsers encounter a deluge of alluring and authentic, un-retouched traveler images, effectively using social content for digital showrooming before they buy.

At fashion brand Vera Bradley, [an interactive lookbook lets would-be travelers imagine themselves in exotic locales with bags and towels bearing the brand's iconic prints](#). The book embeds video snippets to make the content come alive and offers a number of ways to engage with the content directly, via social media or through a link back to shop the featured items. This immersive content is much more engaging and inspiring than a catalog page and serves to bring the bags to life in a way that inspires consumer desire.

### Showcasing Possibilities and Solving Problems With Content at The Home Depot, Lowe's and Kraft

Do-it-yourself home improvement projects provide a perfect opportunity for experts at both The Home Depot and Lowe's to serve customers who need sound advice and education on a large variety of projects. Both brands have invested heavily in written tutorials, buying guides, videos, and, in The Home Depot's case, calculators to estimate the cost of certain projects (see Figure 3). The problem solving nature of this segment allows for in-depth and unique content crafted by the

expert staff and buyers for the brands. Most companies have an untapped library of helpful knowledge in their own employees' brains, which could become a competitive advantage if they were first movers to help their clients with rich content. Not only can this type of material drive engagement on owned properties, it can also be used in social outposts, like Houzz for the home-improvement set, to drive awareness and attraction — allowing one piece of content to serve many steps in the buyer's journey. Lowe's cleverly shared this type of tribal, home repair knowledge in its "Fix in Six" Vine video campaign in 2014, proving that content need not be lengthy to drive engagement and results.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3. The Home Depot Fence Estimator

**Fencing Project Planner**

Get Inspired Learn Estimate

Material: Wood ✓  
Use: Privacy ✓  
Style: Board on Board ✓  
Region: Texas ✓  
Please provide your state for a more accurate estimate.

Linear Feet: 70 ✓  
# of Gates: 2 ✓  
Height: 6 feet ✓

MEASURING TIPS

CLEAR SUBMIT

Shopping List PRICE RANGE \$686 to \$1,968\*  
GET IT INSTALLED Get It Installed Print

You will need 9 fence panels:  
Here are the key items and quantities for your fence project. Products pictured may vary from the selection at your Home Depot.

Shop Styles

Also needed:  
12 Posts  
2 Gates

Source: The HomeDepot

Kraftrecipes.com showcases the manufacturer's products with beautiful, hunger-inspiring imagery. Not only does the site provide tips, ideas and inspiration for a healthy or festive meal, it continues to be helpful by using geolocation data to point out deals and products on sale in a shopper's local grocery — taking a home cook from idea to execution. This combination of alluring and helpful content is on target with Kraft's busy mom persona who is always looking to feed her family something healthy and affordable. Kraft uses this content not only to engage, but to get

continuously smarter about its audience, for both marketing and product development purposes. The company's content marketing yields four times better ROI than traditional advertising spend.<sup>3</sup>

### What to Do Next:

- Interview customers to find their greatest points of friction in the day-to-day activities related to your product or service. Mine this information for content ideas that could let your brand speak to solutions — even if you aren't overtly pitching your product. Being a source of helpful insight and inspiration wins brand trust and engagement.
- Tap expert employees in your customer service and support groups as sources for seed content to build out informative content that your customers will value.
- Identify what types of content your customers and users are creating, and pilot the infusion of their voices and content into your owned properties. Use A/B testing tools to determine how experiences with or without UGC perform, and optimize from there.

## Convert: Increase Conversion Opportunities and Rates by Infusing More Moments of Truth With Helpful or Engaging Material to Overcome Buyer Objections and Increase Sales

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Heightened competition for finite mind and wallet share has begun a race to seize consumers' moments of truth on the buying journey. Increasingly, competitive advantage is less about product or brand than it is about the ability to intercept a buyer at these precise, often fleeting, moments of need. Brands that get there first with a relevant offer are in the prime position to drive conversion.

Data-driven techniques combined with intelligent orchestration of offers help marketers hone in on these moments of truth (see "Magic Quadrant for Digital Marketing Hubs"). For commerce marketers, this is particularly important since competition is just a few clicks away.

The answer is often the aggressive pursuit of buyers with retargeted ads and email offers based on high fidelity signals of intent, such as abandoned shopping carts, and lower fidelity signals driven by observed browsing behaviors, engagement with content assets and other behavioral inferences.

These techniques, while still effective in practice, can overstep the line of intrusive and even be perceived as creepy when deployed without care. Over time, this may alienate consumers or cause them to block and filter out messages that they see as overreaching and interruptive. Instead, they may choose to engage with and consume other content that they see as higher value and less commercial.

Progressive commerce marketers are moving away from purely promotional content to content that's focused on the motivations, needs, goals, values and beliefs of the buyers themselves. Here, the techniques often remain the same, but the content itself is more authentic and less commercial.

Sometimes, it is utility content, such as an ROI calculator, a quiz or a self-assessment, that helps a consumer answer an important question or refine a field of options. Many retailers and brands, for example, have developed planning tools, configurators and augmented reality tools that allow

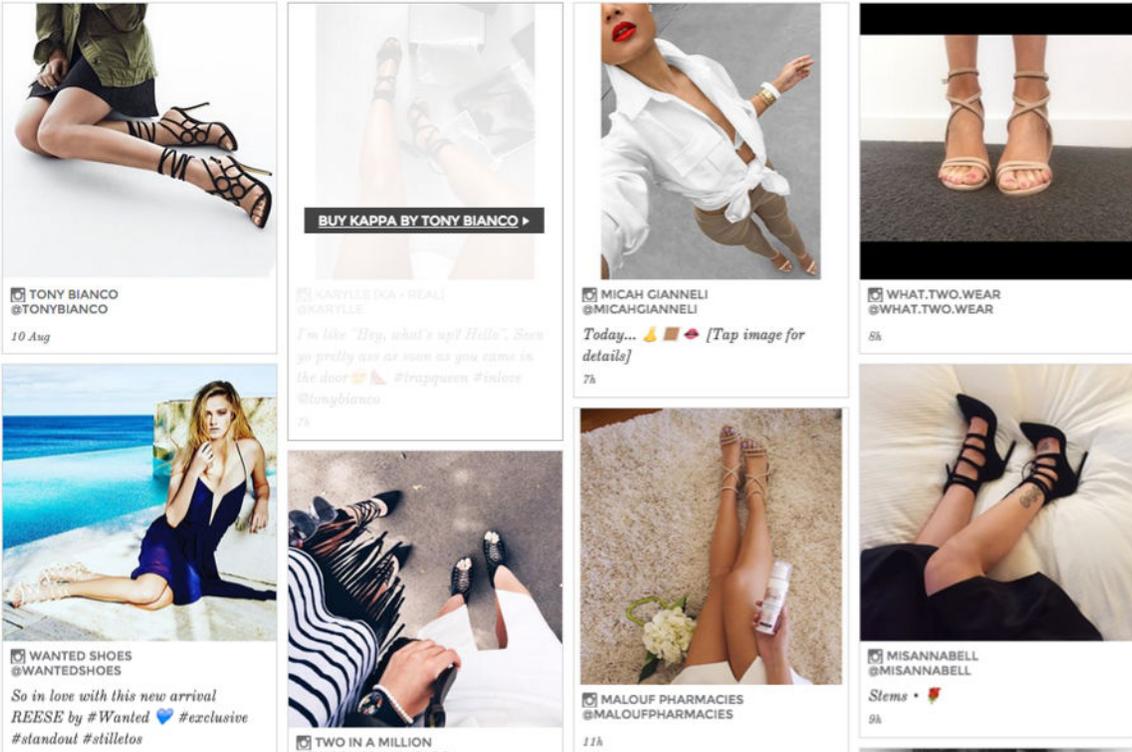
consumers to see or envision product-related content in the context of its intended use. For example, Ikea provides a mobile app that allows consumers to see how products will look in their living space. For the commerce marketer targeting home décor and design enthusiasts, this is a powerful way to build purchase conviction through more authentic, less overtly commercial engagement. Providing such a powerful tool at the moment of decision making can mean the difference between a click-to-buy action and wish-listing an item to revisit later.

Other brands and retailers are creating an array of shoppable content experiences that provide buyers low-friction onramps to purchase while experiencing their products presented in a lifestyle context.

### Wanted Shoes, West Elm and Target Hit Their Marks

Australian fashion footwear retailer Wanted Shoes cultivates user-generated content using Stackla, which it then monetizes by overlaying a click-to-buy feature — taking full advantage of that moment of truth (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Example Wanted Shoes' User-Generated Content Calls Shoppers to Buy Now



Source: Wanted Shoes

Similarly, home furnishing retailer west elm co-opts user-generated content on Instagram together with Curalate's click-to-buy capabilities to allow consumers to buy the look. Here, community content drives the inspiration that west elm capitalizes on precisely in the moment of truth.

Target has taken this technique one step further by making video content shoppable. Its short film series starring Kristen Bell, "[Falling for You](#)," provides a rich, plot-driven look at an A-list actress modeling the retailer's fashions along with free entertainment. A shopping pane dynamically serves up the look available for purchase as it's displayed in the film.

For its part, Mondelez International has partnered with Facebook to combine targeted video content with the social network's recently announced buy-now button. The goal in each of these examples relies on rich, brand-neutral content experiences to serve audience's motivations, goals, values and beliefs, and, at the same time, create and capitalize on the moments of truth that drive conversions. As competition for these moments of truth intensifies, it's the retailers and brands that are savvy about embedding commerce in otherwise useful and valuable content that will have a distinct conversion advantage.

### What to Do Next:

- Review your customer journeys to identify the moments of truth where rich content can drive conversion. Reorient your content strategy to these moments, focusing on content assets and experiences that are less promotional and instead deliver value to your customer.
- Investigate shoppable content tools and helpful applications as potential tools to infuse helpfulness or inspiration at the moment of conversion.
- Test and prioritize content investments with bounded A/B tests.

## Gartner Recommended Reading

*Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.*

"Content Marketing Comes of Age"

"How to Build Segments and Personas for Digital Marketing"

"Move Over Big Data, Here Comes Big Content"

"Cool Vendors in Content Marketing, 2015"

"How Content Marketers Use Visual Storytelling to Engage Audiences"

### Evidence

This research is based on conversations with successful commerce brands practicing content marketing and secondary research sources evaluated by Gartner analysts.

<sup>1</sup> M. Ballard, "[Is Google Showing Fewer Ads Per Search?](#)," Search Engine Land, 30 April 2015.

<sup>2</sup> T. Nudd, "[Ad of the Day: Lowe's Rolls Out Eight More Charming and Useful 'Fix in Six' Vines, DIY Tips Never Looked So Good](#)," Adweek, 3 November 2014.

<sup>3</sup> R. Hatch, "[Food for Thought on Content Marketing ROI](#)," Proteus B2B, 22 September 2014.

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