

7 Content marketing: Definition, cases, and helpful tactics

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Introduction

Content marketing, a means of digital marketing, is a relatively new concept and practice, although marketing has been long rooted in business. It was not until the 21st century that digital marketing emerged from and evolved with internet-based technology and the digital economy (Wymbs, 2011). Today, any marketing methods conducted through electronic devices can be referred to as digital marketing (AMA, n.d.).

While there are many different aspects of digital marketing, including social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), pay-per-click advertising, affiliate marketing, blogger, e-mail marketing, mobile marketing, etc., content marketing stands out as the highly preferred channel that induces consumers to make a purchasing decision online (Ramesh & Vidhva, 2019). Content marketing plays an increasingly important role in business and receives significant attention in marketing research.

It will be useful at this point to review content marketing to clarify the misconceptions of the subject and highlight some of the significant research findings from relevant literature. A clear understanding of content marketing, a relatively new and still evolving concept, will be helpful for the practitioners who want to advance effective tactics at work. Scholars and students who are interested in content marketing may also be able to spark new ideas as they seek a deeper understanding of the domain. This conceptual review is hence conducted to answer four questions.

1. What is content marketing?
2. Why is it highly relevant to hospitality and tourism businesses?
3. What are the significant impacts of content marketing on hospitality and tourism businesses?
4. What effective content marketing strategies can a hospitality and tourism business take?

Literature review

According to the American Marketing Association, content marketing is *“the publishing and distribution of text, video, or audio materials to customers online. Blogs, videos, and podcasts are common ways for businesses to engage in content marketing.”* (AMA, n.d.) The Content Marketing Institute (n.d.) defines content marketing as *“a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience – and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”* In a business-to-business context, content marketing *“involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome”* (Jävine & Taiminen, 2016).

Regardless of its forms and distribution channels, the core information presented in content marketing is usually brand- or product-related. Some typical content marketing examples include infographics, webpage, podcasts, videos, and books (Steimle, 2014).

It is critical to distinguish ‘content marketing’ from ‘digital content marketing’. These two terms look almost the same. Some research reports and studies might even mistakenly use these two terms interchangeably. Digital content marketing is essentially about the marketing of digital products.

The term ‘digital content’ is used to substitute ‘digital product’, ‘electronic information products’, ‘information goods’ and ‘virtual products’, which are bit-based objects that can be distributed through electronic channels (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Typical examples of digital content include e-books, e-journal articles, ringtones, and pay-per-view or pay-for-download videos. Digital content marketing is hence defined as *“the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels”* (Rowley, 2008: 235).

The hospitality and tourism is a significant component of the service industry. What is offered in the hospitality and tourism industry also carries the unique characteristics of a service product, challenging marketers to address the issues of intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity of quality, and perishability (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001). Thanks to content marketing strategies, hospitality and tourism companies can find ways to address some of those challenges, as illustrated in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Content marketing and the unique characteristics of a service product

Definition/description	Possible solutions w/ content marketing strategies
Intangibility	
Travelers want to enjoy the experience and the process, although tangible goods (e.g., food items) and the facility also play an essential role.	The experience and service process can be vividly described and documented into narratives. Or, they can be captured and presented in a visual format, such as pictures and videos. This kind of content can help hospitality and tourism businesses present authentic experiences to their potential customers.
Inseparability	
Travelers enjoy the experience as the service product is produced and delivered.	Consumers can share their experiences with their networks during the service delivery process (e.g., IGTV & Facebook Live), allowing their followers to participate virtually and be part of the experience. Moreover, such experiences can be shared afterward.
Heterogeneity	
Variations in service quality exist, e.g., differences in consumer perceptions and who offers/delivers the service.	Businesses can influence consumers' perceived quality of a service product by communicating the same content or consistent marketing messages with their target customers. Meanwhile, they can also address and respond to the service failure issues identified from online reviews (one type of user-generated content) to keep consistent service quality.
Perishability	
Travelers must enjoy the experience and process in a specific timeframe.	Potential consumers can better understand other consumers' experiences about a hospitality and tourism product by reading the user- or brand-generated content. Consumers can also retrieve or 'relive' their past experience by reviewing what they documented, captured, and stored themselves.

The significant impacts of content marketing on hospitality and tourism: Some real cases

According to an HVS report, a hotel can increase its price (average daily rate or ADR) by 11.2% while keeping the same occupancy or market share if the hotel can improve one-point of its user generated content (UGC), such as its online review ratings on TripAdvisor.com (Bagley & Lanz, 2014). There are many real cases about how hospitality and tourism companies benefited from content marketing strategies. Here are a few examples.

Hotel examples

Many luxury hotels, such as The Four Seasons and St. Regis, have a long history of publishing in-room printed magazines, which can also be accessed online. These magazines usually feature brand- or product-related content, such as the exclusive experiences offered in their unique properties, food and beverage offerings, local flavors, things to do in a tourist destination, wellness tips for healthy living and lifestyle, ideas for wedding and family vacation, and more. In this case, content marketing does not limit to the usage of digital media.

In another case, Sanderling Resort saw a year-to-year increase of the property's visual content on Instagram and Pinterest of 400% in 2015, citing their Millennials customers, who loved sharing photos and stories on Instagram (Smith, 2016). The resort also published 115 blogs in 2015 to highlight the weddings, the destination, and things to do in the resort.

Likewise, the corporate marketing team at The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts reported a great success a few years ago about their content marketing strategies on Pinterest. According to a Pinterest's case study about Four Seasons (Shankman, 2014), the hotel chain shared such lifestyle content as food, fashion, and travel in general, in addition to its property photos or promotions. The chain observed ten times more daily average visitors and 17 times more daily average clicks to the hotel's website. Furthermore, Shankman (2014) illustrated how Pinterest helped The Four Seasons turn visual content into real profit. The hotel chain pinned a promotion about its Private Jet Experience in Bora Bora, generating the following results:

- ◆ 8,564 re-pins and 9,121 visits to the brand's landing page of Around the World on a Private Jet.
- ◆ 463 views of 'Reservation Inquiry'.
- ◆ 483 clicks on the 'Request a Brochure' button, and 112 people requested a brochure for a trip that would cost US\$70,000 per person.