Heart and Smarts: What Makes Educators Care About Your Content
We’re the Dun & Bradstreet marketing team that has connected brands to educators for over 40 years. We thrive on data, because without data, we’re just guessing. And while we can guess what educators want, we’re happy to say, we know.

We’ve created forums that give teachers and administrators a place to chat, while we listen and take notes. These online educator communities—WeAreTeachers, School Leaders Now, WeAreParents, and EdNET—give us insight into what they need. Insights we share with you.

As the education industry changes, we constantly identify new opportunities to help our clients achieve results, such as integrated marketing programs. In addition to using data to show brands how educators behave, we offer all the parts of a marketing machine. From strategy and lists to creative, execution, and ROI analysis, we can build you a marketing engine, or we can be your marketing engine.

Reports like this one are the product of our relentless curiosity about all things education and our commitment to helping brands, organizations, and educators build productive relationships. We hope you find it useful.
What is Content Marketing?

Who you are and what you offer the world as a brand or organization is expressed through content: ads that capture interest, emails that relate your value to their need, social posts that show you get what your audience cares about, and so on. Content marketing is the art of deploying that content for optimum impact and response.

As marketers, we have a healthy skepticism about the latest and greatest buzzwords that take the industry by storm. But content marketing isn’t a fad; it’s a philosophy that’s uniquely effective with educators who see a sale not as a transaction, but as the outcome of your investment in building a relationship with them.

Relationships follow a pattern: from first contact, to shared interests and values, to meaningful interaction, to long term commitment. Relationship marketing applies this pattern to attracting and nurturing customers; just as conversation is how relationships move forward, content is a means to move a prospect along the continuum to loyal customer.

Content marketing helps brands and organizations:

• Become a valuable resource
• Establish thought leadership
• Empower customers with knowledge
• Tell important stories
• Create positive buzz
• Open two-way conversations
• Inspire sharing
Educators are lifelong learners hungry for relevant, useful, and entertaining content that helps them do their jobs:

“I use a lot of social media to stay connected with what’s happening in education. Twitter...has changed the way I see the world of education.”

“I find a lot of really great, current material on Pinterest, writing prompts and creative ways to meet my students...”

Education marketers are seeing the engagement content delivers and shifting their focus:

“We are primarily doing content marketing now. We are getting really deep into writing good content and delivering that. Then getting that out through social media, through email, through all sorts of direct marketing channels that we uncover.”
- Terri Gilbreath, Mentoring Minds

As a strategy, content marketing has earned its place in the marketing mix. According to research from social content marketing agency Edge Media, a Top 3 reason people follow brands is that they offer good content. And the study B2B Content Marketing 2015: Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends – North America showed that dollar per dollar, content marketing delivers more leads than traditional advertising such as paid search.

Each year, MDR helps clients use content marketing to make a connection with educators. We assist with strategizing, creative development, and outreach through our client’s chosen channels and our educator-focused channels: WeAreTeachers and School Leaders Now. In this report, we’ll walk you through the best practices in content marketing, detail our lessons learned from successful campaigns, and share the client content that generated the biggest responses last year: 2016’s “Best Of” Content.

1 Social Media and Teachers, WeAreTeachers interview video
How Does Content Marketing Help You Reach Your Goals?

Content is a tool that helps move prospects down the marketing funnel from awareness to advocacy. Each stage of that journey calls for different types, formats, and depths of material. Before you jump into content creation, think about who you are targeting, and what information they need at each stage:

### TOP OF FUNNEL
Content is all about your customer’s wants, needs, and interests. It’s not for selling.

**AUDIENCE:** Entire Target Universe

**GOALS:**
- Grow brand/thought leadership awareness
- Increase website traffic and create awareness
- Grow long-term organic traffic
- Grow retargeting lists
- Increase engagement

### MIDDLE OF FUNNEL
Content is a ‘lead magnet’—an irresistible gift that gives a chunk of value to a prospect in exchange for contact information.

**AUDIENCE:** Prospects from Target Universe

**GOALS:**
- Grow retargeting lists
- Grow opt-in email lists
- Increase engagement
- Initiate customer acquisition

### BOTTOM OF FUNNEL
Content is about communicating with customers who are ready to buy/commit, upselling, or cross-selling to customers.

**AUDIENCE:** Qualified Prospects/Leads

**GOALS:**
- Grow retargeting lists
- Nurture customers
- Increase retention
- Increase buying frequency
Which Content Types Work When?

While not hard and fast rules, we’ve identified content types that are best suited to the three stages of the marketing journey and their goals:

### TOP OF FUNNEL
- Blog
- Social Media Updates
- Infographics
- Photographs
- Digital Magazine/Book
- Audio Podcast
- Video/Video Podcast
- Microsite
- Print Magazine/Newsletter
- Primary Research

### MIDDLE OF FUNNEL
- Educational Resources
- Useful Resource
- Software Download
- Discount Coupon Club
- Quiz/Survey
- Webinar/Event
- Free Sample Download
- Free Lesson Plans

### BOTTOM OF FUNNEL
- Demo/Free Trial
- Customer Story
- Comparison/Spec Sheet
- Discount Coupon Club
- Webinar/Event
- Mini-Class
How Will You Know You’re Connecting?

The three stages of the funnel also correspond to the measurement metrics you’ll use to evaluate attainment of your goals:

**TOP OF FUNNEL METRICS**
- Create awareness
- Retargeting lists growth
- Site engagement rates
- Number of inbound links
- Traffic by channel

**MIDDLE OF FUNNEL METRICS**
- # of leads/email list growth
- Offer conversion rate
- Retargeting list growth
- Newsletter email open/click-through rate

**BOTTOM OF FUNNEL METRICS**
- # of sales-qualified leads
- Offer conversion rate
- Promo email open/click-through rate
- Retargeting list growth
- Average customer value
- Retention rate
- Buyer recency/frequency
Educators are a powerful force as consumers. They make purchases for their students and classrooms, as well as for their families. And they are influencers, causing ripple effects beyond their families and schools to their student’s families and the community at large.

For educators, time is a precious resource. Today’s teachers juggle many different responsibilities in their classrooms. In addition to daily instruction, they now write curriculum, research OER options, manage multiple student devices, and purchase classroom materials. That makes them very selective in where they spend their attention, preferring content of substance and value.

Most educators see their profession as a calling; they are passionately committed to nurturing young minds, advocating for children’s welfare, and seeking out the best solutions for their student’s challenges. They don’t just want to know what your product or service can do, they want to know they can trust your brand, and that you share their commitment to kids.

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2 Teachers as Consumers: Attitudes, Preferences, and Buying Behavior, MDR
Crafting Content for Educators: Themes that Work

MDR lives and breathes the education marketplace. Each year, we assist brands and organizations with hundreds of campaigns that generate responses and results. Our experience has taught us that there are specific themes that make content successful with educator audiences:

Show them that you know them

Educators shouldn’t have to teach you about their profession or industry. Your content should demonstrate a command of the issues, opportunities, and challenges they face in education or in their corner of the district or curriculum.

Dos and Don’ts
- DO speak their language, using a more informal tone
- DON’T use educational buzzwords
- DO think about how your product or service addresses classroom problems, then provide content that focuses on these challenges instead of the product itself
- But…DON’T use a tone that indicates that you can magically solve all their problems or that talks down to them

Give them something they can use

Educators with little time and always tight budgets appreciate practical, relevant, visually appealing classroom tools tailored to their needs.

Dos and Don’ts
- DO provide practical tips and ideas that teachers can use in the classroom
- DO give them free downloads, resources and/or lesson plans that they can use
- DON’T ask them to fill out a form to get some of these resources, as this can reflect poorly on your brand as being unwilling to help
- DO consider doing a giveaway for teachers to provide them with tools or classroom items that they might otherwise have to spend their own money on
What Makes Content Click with Educators?

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**Touch their hearts and help them help their kids**

Teachers love “their kids.” Emotionally engaging content speaks to their passion for and investment in teaching. Educators also appreciate information, tools, and resources that help them advocate for children—both for their education and well-being.

**Dos and Don’ts**

- **DO** talk about students in a warm and caring way to connect with educators’ love of their students
- **DON’T** be afraid to use informal language that makes an emotional connection, referring to students as “kids,” for example
- **DO** provide information and free resources that help educators teach the whole child despite an already-packed curriculum
- **DO** tell stories of teachers who have helped kids overcome challenges or get through difficult times

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**Give them something timely or evergreen**

Teachers appreciate content that is current and topical to what they are teaching, or that is evergreen and useful from one school year to the next.

**Dos and Don’ts**

- **DO** consider what is going on in the classroom at certain times of year to provide the right information at the right time. For example, March is testing month, a very stressful time for teachers and students. You could provide information to help them and their students de-stress
- **DON’T** avoid summer months and holiday breaks to share your content. These are prime times when teachers are looking for content and planning for the upcoming year or semester
- **DO** also provide content that can be useful any time of year, such as ways to connect with parents or tips for keeping a classroom organized
- **DO** re-promote your evergreen content to get the most mileage out of it throughout the school year
What Makes Content Click with Educators?

Make them laugh

Teachers are real people in an often underappreciated job. Sharing insider humor shows that you “get it” and want to give them a lift.

Dos and Don’ts

• DO re-share funny teacher memes or GIFs and pay attention to content to which teachers respond well
• DON’T create your own humorous posts until you get an idea of how to hit the right notes with educators—a bad attempt at a humorous post could reflect poorly on your brand

Key Takeaway: Focus on substance, not sales

Make your content informative or entertaining. You’re opening a conversation, so focus on material they’ll want to use or consume for its own sake, rather than a direct sales or promotional message that’s seen as an interruption.

Content that has utility, insight, meaning, or emotional resonance appeals to people who see education as their life’s work.
Here’s What Clicked with Educators in 2016

By sharing the “Best Of” content from last year’s client campaigns, we hope to guide you to make 2017 your “Best Of” year in content marketing to educators. Here are the top performing campaigns in key content types, identified with the stages of the funnel where they were used, and the themes that resonated with educators:

Articles and Blog Posts

Have a lot to say, or need room for text and images? Articles and blog posts give you the room to stretch your content wings or address more weighty subjects. Online articles are also easily sharable among this social media savvy audience.

269,266 pageviews
Read article

251,021 pageviews
Read article

224,493 pageviews
Read article

358,583 pageviews
Read article

126,729 pageviews
Read article

95,874 pageviews
Read article
The walls of a classroom are an opportunity for teachers to provide visually engaging, graphic, colorful posters to supplement their lesson plans. Teacher infographics can share statistics or information that is important to educators. Downloadable guides contain more in-depth content on a particular topic. All such easily downloadable and printable content types earn likes, shares, and downloads from teachers.

27,602 downloads
See download

14,357 downloads
See download

8,716 downloads
See download
Email

The workhorse of the marketing mix, the bottom line is that email needs to get opened to be effective. Educator inboxes are overwhelmed, so a subject line that can break through the clutter and earn an open is key. Our top five subject lines for 2016 were:

1. **16 Quotes to Make You Fall in Love with Dr. Seuss All Over Again**  
   *23.35% Open Rate*
2. **Free Holiday Printables for Teachers and Students**  
   *23.89% Open Rate*
3. **16 Awesome Ways to Display Student Work**  
   *23.93% Open Rate*
4. **12 Times Your Boss Will Absolutely Walk Into Your Classroom**  
   *24.13% Open Rate*
5. **18 Hilarious Winter Break Memes for Teachers**  
   *24.47% Open Rate*

Want 2017 to be your “Best Of” year for email marketing?  
We offer a self-guided tutorial that leads you step-by-step through the best practices in email marketing to educators. [Get started here.](#)
Giveaways

Educators are always pinching pennies. In fact, MDR’s State of the K-12 Market 2016 report found that teachers spend seven hours per week searching for free and paid-for resources, and five hours creating their own materials. They LOVE giveaways of curriculum, classroom, and teacher materials...or just something fun like a gift card.

11,400 giveaway entries

10,000 giveaway entries

6,500 giveaway entries
Here’s What Clicked with Educators in 2016

Social Posts

Three-quarters of educators visit social networking sites with 61% of teachers reporting they have shown their support for a product, service, or company by becoming a “fan,” “friend,” or “follower.” Likeable, comment-worthy, sharable content that hits on the themes that educators respond to can make a big “impression.”

Want 2017 to be your “Best Of” year for social marketing?

We offer a self-guided tutorial that leads you step-by-step through the best practices in social marketing to educators. Get started here.
You’ve heard the mantra about mobile first when it comes to email and web design? It’s time you add a new mantra for content: video first. In reach and viral quality, nothing beats video. In fact, Facebook’s newsfeed algorithms favor videos over text only or image posts. As our examples show, you don’t need a big production budget; slideshows can work just as well.

**Videos**

- Earned 6.2m views
- Reached 19.1m
  - Watch video
  - Earned 1.7m views
  - Reached 5.1m
  - Watch video
  - Earned 476k views
  - Reached 3.3m
  - Watch video
What These “Best Of” Results Mean for Marketers

Our “Best Of” 2016 examples make it clear: flash and dazzle doesn’t work with this audience: authenticity does, substance does. To connect with educators, lead with heart and smarts.

Being authentic with educators means entering their world, appreciating their challenges, being a dependable ally, building trust with every interaction, and forging and nurturing lasting relationships. Content marketing helps brands put value and values first; that’s what persuades educators to respond.

As you embark on your content marketing plan for 2017, we hope you’ll find MDR’s best practices and examples helpful.

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