CONTENTGINE
INTENT BY ENGAGEMENT

WHITEPAPER

From Content Syndication to Content Indication:

How Content-Based Marketing Is Driving Change in Demand-Generation Techniques

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the best way to begin a primer on content-based marketing (CBM) is to define it. My company, Contentgine®, defines CBM this way:

"Content-based marketing (CBM) is a new demand generation technique that utilizes content consumption as the indicator of potential purchaser intent.

"Unlike account-based marketing (ABM), content-based marketing does not infer potential purchaser interest through analysis of internet browsing activity or any other vague indicator of intent. Instead, CBM utilizes content access and consumption as an indicator that a potential purchaser is researching a particular topic.

"Because the potential purchaser must register in some way to access the content, that registration information becomes a valuable dataset from which precise, first-person data can be derived. That dataset is then made available to companies interested in potential purchasers in that category."

In this paper we intend on remembering first where the concept of content-based marketing came from — the progenitors being account-based marketing, search engine optimization and content syndication — and then a look at what marketers need to do to create a successful CBM strategy.

IN THE BEGINNING…

All modern demand-generation marketing is grounded in one universal truth: A potential buyer will search for information before making a purchase.

This is so obvious that it almost goes without saying. After all, Google has become one of the most valued brands on the planet simply because potential buyers go there to research their purchases. Anyone typing in “best dishwashers” was a prime target for firms selling dishwashers.

> **The problem was — and is — that the rest of us are not Google, and therefore we must pay Google for that information. Moreover, a web search on a topic does not necessarily indicate buyer intent — at least not immediate buyer intent.**

So, the first wave of modern demand generation started with marketers trying to optimize their web pages so that search engines like Google could identify them and make those pages available to potential buyers. With the flood of web pages being optimized to be found in search engines, however, smaller and less-trafficked websites were relegated to the backwater called “below the fold” on a browser’s page display — or, worse, to the second page or lower in the natural search index for that phrase.

Google then went straight to monetizing that disparity: It created the paid keyword search (PKS) business, which went on to drive the vast majority of Google's revenue. It was simple: Google will create a box of paid advertisers who want consumers to see their ads when they type a phrase. Who gets seen is driven directly by how much that advertiser wants to pay for that one set of eyeballs. That box will be seen before any other company is shown in the natural search index, which is the PKS advantage.

"That's gold, Jerry! Gold!" to quote an old Seinfeld chestnut.

> **Getting the art and science of search-based marketing was complex, and by itself, could not generate enough demand for marketers alone. Two other techniques — intent marketing and content syndication — became the next fashion.**

Even today, SEO and PKS strategies are a significant portion of a company's marketing budget. A whole industry of companies that help optimize search has been chugging along for years. Getting the art and science of search-based marketing was complex, and by itself, could not generate enough demand for marketers alone. Two other techniques — intent marketing and content syndication — became the next fashion.

CONTENT SYNDICATION AND THE DISCONTENTED

After arming themselves with effective but expensive search-engine strategies, demand-generation marketers began to focus on a new concept: content syndication, in which a marketer's white papers, video content and other assets are served up in digital display ads to potential buyers with the hope that they will engage with the content.

Originally, companies had to push their content out and pray that it would land. They didn't know where in the buying cycle their target customer was, unless they were issuing RFPs. They had to, instead, keep pushing content to them via a marketing automation platform or direct them to their booth or their event, all the while flying blind as to whether the content they were pushing was relevant to their buying cycle.

If they were selling something that was in constant need (leads, for example), then they could always assume that the potential buyer was interested. But that assumption could be fallacious: Just because a company continually buys a product or service doesn't mean it's always looking for a replacement.

The vehicles through which companies pushed their content were also limited: email marketing, always the high-volume/low-response way to "spray and pray" content to an audience; the aforementioned SEO and

PKS; and the growth of content syndication networks, who promised to serve up content to a target audience defined by the company.

> **Content syndication exploded for numerous reasons: It was cheaper and more far-reaching than building old display ad networks, companies could negotiate their rates, and they knew that whoever was interacting with their content was, at least theoretically, a potential target for engagement.**

Content syndication, however, which continues to operate today, is largely tolerated by marketers, rather than seen as the lead demand-generation technique. In most marketing budgets, SEO and PKS continue to dominate demand-generation budgets. Because, while content may be king, distribution is the queen with all the dragons, as a friend once told me, and SEO and PKS are still seen as more effective than content syndication.

The missing ingredient — context — is absent from content syndication in a way that it is not from search. When someone types a phrase in a search engine, they know exactly what they're interested in. But, when someone engages with content on a syndication network, the owner of that content has no context other than the fact that something triggered the action.

Thus, account-based and intent marketing was born.

INTENT'S INTENTION:
ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING

The race to find prospect context was on. The approach to finding context followed two parallel paths. The first was account-based marketing, in which marketers gain context in the target account by understanding the company, its needs, players and its goals.

From that, a complete "surround-marketing" program could be built: information could be fed to the account that was specific to the perceived need. The "accumulated snowfall" of repetitive messaging to the company was employed to ensure that their brand values that were specifically tailored to that company's needs were seen as broadly and often as possible. You could also buy digital display ads and content syndication that targeted roles and personas inside the account. The only thing that was still missing was where the account was in the buying cycle.

So, clever marketing companies quickly gleaned an idea: What if they could track an account's collective digital footprints in their browser and other online activities, piecing together that activity into a score that indicates they are in research or buying mode. If they could do that with accuracy, they could score that account, set a level of activity in specific research categories that indicates high interest and provide that account scoring to the marketing department. After lots of "false positives," the formulae seemed good enough that client marketers began to buy

intent-scored leads in large quantities, and they were soon integrated into the new ABM platforms being offered by companies like Demandbase and Triblio.

These companies took ABM to the platform level, much like content management platforms had coordinated content outreach programs for email, digital display, et al in the first wave of content marketing.

ABM platforms, though, used this intent data to offer marketers a dashboard of accounts indicating interest, scoring and tracking those accounts via the intent lead providers' scoring method, then integrating into campaign management platforms like Pardot and Hubspot to create targeted outreach campaigns aimed at those accounts.

> **Once a "surge score" or some other indicator of high interest had been reached, the marketing machine could be aimed at that account with the expectation that the account was ripe for engagement, as its indicators seemed to say they were in buying mode.**

These platforms became the next hot thing in demand generation. The ABM platform was seen as a way to at least derive some context from an account's activities, that context hopefully being they are looking around for a particular company's solution. All they had to do was to figure out who inside the account was ready to hear their story.

And that proved to be so much harder than anyone anticipated.

That was the case for two reasons. First, account-level activity was still a general indicator of interest, but it lacked the critical context indicators of who and what. While the intent lead provider could tell a company the account was "surging," it couldn't tell it who was driving the surge or what the activity was that indicated high interest. The account may be researching and downloading information in their market, but who was doing that? Was it a group of individuals or one person on a research binge? Was it one department or multiple departments? There was no first-person information; companies were not getting names, roles or other precise data from which they could do effective outreach. You only knew somebody — or some persons — were engaged.

Second, the secret formula that the intent lead-scoring company used was a mystery as well-guarded and vague as the herb recipe for Kentucky Fried Chicken. Listening to those companies describe their complex equations for indicating account interest could be effectively used as a sleep aid for the restless. It became a bit of a joke among marketers to sit at happy hour and each take a turn making up the most ridiculous "surge score" formula they could think of, for the amusement of their colleagues.

But, therein was the bugaboo of intent marketing: guessing who companies needed to get to was a total hit-or-miss prospect, and the very real chance that they missed on an account that is genuinely interested was real. Everything was only based on their ability to effectively guess who they needed to get to and what they needed to say.

So, the state of intent marketing and ABM remains a necessary evil, not yet displaced by a better demand-generation technique, but kept around because, as we like to say, bad breath is better than no breath.

However, that is all now changing, and changing for the better: Content-based marketing has arrived.

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CONTENT AT THE CENTER AND IN ASCENDENCY: CONTENT-BASED MARKETING (CBM)

The progenitor of content-based marketing is the venerable company TechTarget. Wikipedia defines the company like this:

> **TechTarget is an American company which offers data-driven marketing services to business-to-business technology vendors. It uses purchase intent data gleaned from the readership of its 140+ technology focused websites to help tech vendors reach buyers actively researching relevant IT products and services."**

Utilizing hundreds of writers and editors covering thousands of IT topics, the company was able to build an audience that engaged with that content, in a way that far surpassed any marketing group's efforts to be found in search engines. TechTarget thereby created the value that was lacking in older intent data and content syndication: They knew precisely who was interacting with precisely what content. That data could also be sold to interested companies, which proved for them to be a winning formula.

However, another idea grew from that one: What if the content being offered wasn't an article or editorial written by an industry expert but was instead a library of all the world's top business cases and other business content, written by the companies themselves? If such a library existed, all that was needed was to curate it by industry and solution type, make it searchable and all forms of content available for free. A "Kayak for business content," as the library's founder has described it.

By doing that, anyone "checking out" the content, as it were, would exchange an email for download access to that content. The value proposition to any company wanting to know who that person is would be simple: They checked out their or their competitor's content, which indicates they are most likely in buying mode. In fact, the best indicator of intent to buy may be that one can glean short of someone filling out a "Contact Me" form.

"Contentgine announced that it acquired the world's largest business-to-business case study library, called Contentree®."

This technique has suddenly taken on even more value. The reason is a recent announcement that Google is ending all third-party cookies that were part and parcel of the intent creator's formulas for deriving intent. The intent-lead providers that fed modern ABM platforms relied heavily on cookie analysis to figure out where that potential prospect had been browsing the internet. It's now unclear how they will proceed.

Meanwhile, Contentgine did exactly that: In February 2021, Contentgine announced that it acquired the world's largest business-to-business case study library, called Contentree®. Its express intent was to utilize the almost 400,000 pieces of business content to find potential buyers for those companies' products.

Much like Kayak or YouTube, Contentree didn't own any of the content it hosted and curated. That content was publicly available, but organized by industry category and solution type, so that finding what users were looking for was fast and easy. And all that was required to download a business case was their email address.

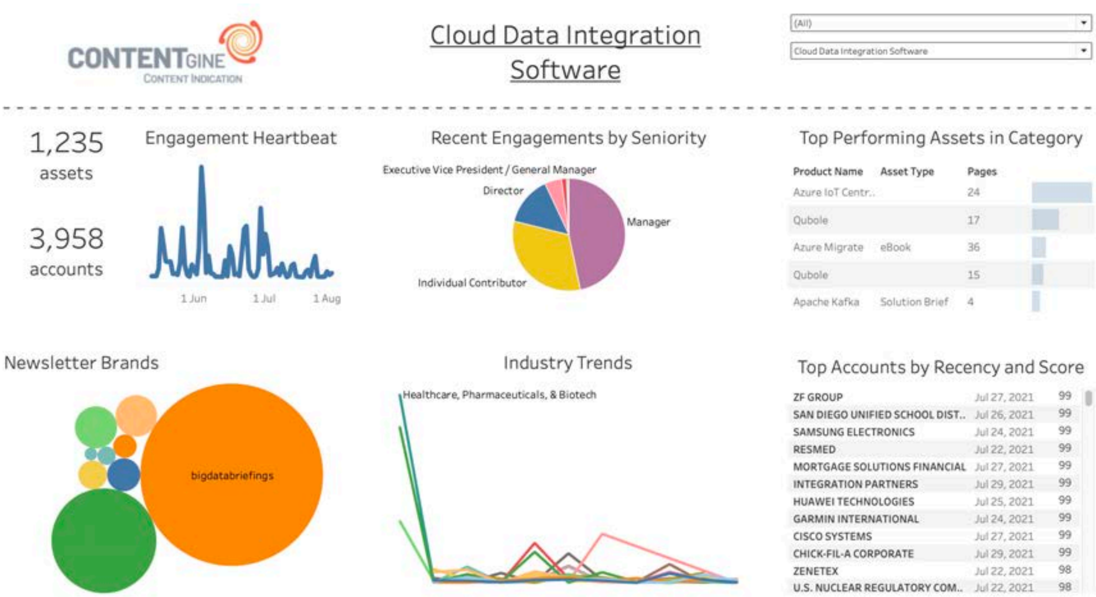
That has proven to be a very winning formula for the company. From that interaction, combined with constantly serving up curated content to a potential audience of over 100 million from the library, Contentgine can track analytics that show not only who is interested in any given account, but who else and how much that company is being researched. That data would prove invaluable to CMOs and other strategic marketers who would like to know how their and their competitors' content is being received in the market.

THE FIRST CONTENT ANALYTICS PLATFORM: CIP®

Since Contentgine knows every interaction with content in the Contentree library, it can provide three valuable assets to the content marketing and lead generation professional: it can tell the marketing group who checked out their company's content based on name, role, frequency, etc. It can also tell them who checked out their competitors' content using the same first-person and account-level information. Lastly, it can provide an analysis tool that shows how content is performing.

In the summer of 2021, Contentgine announced it was bringing to market the world's first true content analytics SaaS platform, called CIP® (Content Indication Platform). The platform can do what no other platform to date has been able to do: Tell marketers how well their content is being received in the market, both as a demand generator and as a competitive analysis.

Thus, a powerful combination of first-person leads derived from interaction with business content and a tool for analyzing that interaction means Contentgine can deliver on the most important aspect of content-based marketing, that being context. If companies know what the potential prospect wants to read, who they are in precise detail, whether they've read their competitor's content, and how often over time they've had these interactions, they have achieved the highest level of intent indicators that can possibly be achieved. At least, for now.



A sample content analysis page from the Contentgine CIP platfrom.

PUTTING CBM IN MARKETING TOOL CONTEXT

Content-based marketing does not supplant other demand-generation techniques, like SEO, nor does it end the need for ABM platforms.

It needs to be thought of as a way of putting content first and foremost in the marketing department's strategies, the end goal being that a company can create content worthy of driving demand with high content effectiveness. ABM platforms can easily integrate CBM lead data, and having the CIP platform as a tool that allows for constant improvement of content performance, any company engaging a CBM strategy can be assured that it lives up to the famous saying that content is king. CBM becomes the "Knights of the Garter," if you will, which ensures the king's long and fruitful reign.