

THE FORMULA FOR MODERN MARKETING SUCCESS

Five true stories of how integrated content strategies achieved business goals.



Table of Contents

Introduction: The Marketing Mind Shift
#1 - Winning the Battle for Better Google Rankings
#2 - Going From Zero to Hero with Community Relations and Social Media 11
#3 - Attracting a Niche Audience with a Content Brand
#4 - How Expertise + A Little Controversy = Content Marketing Success 19
#5 - The Power of Agency-Client Collaboration
Conclusion: Getting the Most Out of Your Marketing



The Marketing Mind Shift

Imagine a world where people enjoy and appreciate advertising.

In fact, they want it so badly potential customers seek out your marketing material. Rather than muting the audio, switching the channel, or hitting "Skip Ad" on that YouTube pre-roll, they look forward to hearing from your company and thank you for your help.

That's not a fictional world. For organizations with the right strategy, it's happening now.

Most of us tend to get annoyed by ads. That's because most of us grew up with traditional advertising. There were a handful of newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio stations where you could reach a captive audience. Advertisers interrupted the content with promotional messages, which may or may not have been relevant to those watching, listening, and reading.

Then, the internet changed everything ...

You no longer need to rely on the people who own broadcast towers and printing presses. The opportunity to reach an audience is open to anyone with a laptop and a good idea.

Tom Foremski, former journalist for *The Financial Times*, is credited with being the first to point out that:



[In the Digital Age] every company is a media company.

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Tom Foremski, former journalist for The Financial Times

The Rise of Content Marketing

Whether it's B2B or B2C, people make purchasing decisions differently today. You need a way to establish trust and authority in your organization while nurturing prospects along a buyer's journey. Content marketing can do that.

But what exactly is content marketing? A widely accepted definition of the practice comes from the Content Marketing Institute:

"Content marketing is 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."

There are some important words and phrases in that definition that deserve further explanation:

CREATING AND DISTRIBUTING

Creating content is only part of the process. You need a distribution plan that reaches the right people. Otherwise, you're wasting your time.

VALUABLE

Content needs to be worth consuming. Your prospects need to gain something from the experience. Otherwise, you're wasting their time.

RELEVANT

Your prospects must be able to apply content to their situation. It should address their pain points and problems in a clear and relatable way.

CONSISTENT

Content marketing is an ongoing process. It doesn't end after you write a few articles and produce a video or two. You must keep showing up.

ATTRACT

Content needs to entice prospects first and then earn their trust.

RETAIN

Once you earn a prospect's business and their trust, content keeps working to turn them into loyal customers.

DEFINED AUDIENCE

Before you do anything, you need to know who you want to reach and how to do it effectively with content.

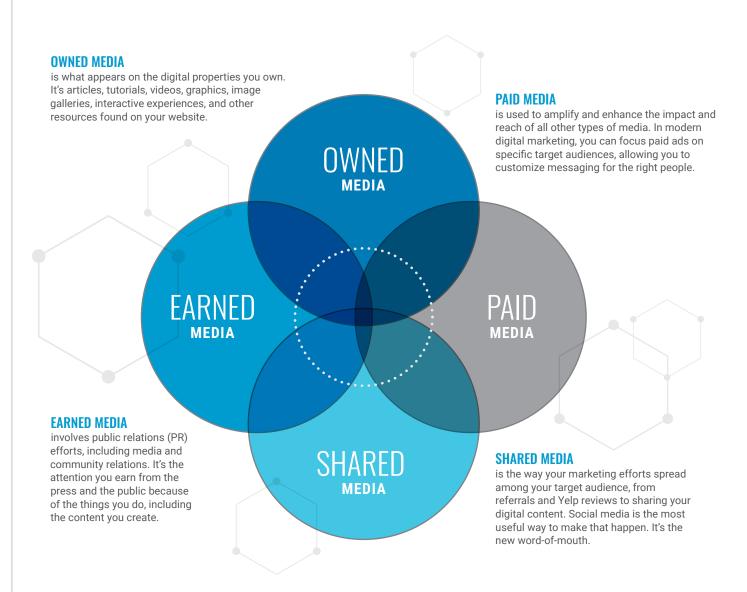
DRIVE PROFITABLE CUSTOMER ACTION

You're not creating content for fun, and brand awareness is only part of the process. Ultimately, marketing's purpose is to drive sales and grow your business.

Connecting the Dots

Why You Need an Integrated Marketing Strategy

Element's approach to modern marketing involves much more than launching a blog, optimizing for keywords, and posting to Facebook. We believe in a strategic, integrated approach to digital marketing involving four media types: Owned, Earned, Shared, and Paid.



Because it's all connected, each of these four media types plays a crucial role in modern marketing. As you'll see in this e-book, the most impressive results occur when all four are part of an integrated approach to content strategy.

5

But ... **strategy is the key.** Without a strategy, you're just crossing your fingers and hoping to get a positive return on marketing efforts. A strategic plan turns content marketing into an interconnected system that gets results.

You don't necessarily need the nicest looking website in your industry. You don't need more social media followers, page views, or email open rates. **You need real results.** The kind of results that help your business grow.

As Element founder Lance Peroutka explains, that's the philosophy behind everything we do ...



In this exclusive e-book from Element, you'll discover five true stories of integrated marketing success. Each story is unique, because each client is unique, and each organization requires its own marketing strategy.

STORY #1: Winning the Battle for Better Google Rankings

Meet the Client

Water-Right[®] is a family-owned manufacturer of residential and commercial water treatment systems that has been around since 1963. Their products are sold by local plumbers and well drillers, as well as through a nationwide network of dealers who offer the Evolve[®] and WaterCare[®] brands of equipment to homeowners.



The Challenge

The marketing team at Water-Right recognized the challenge they were up against, competing for online awareness with household names like Culligan. How could they outdo a big corporation with national TV advertising campaigns and a massive marketing budget?

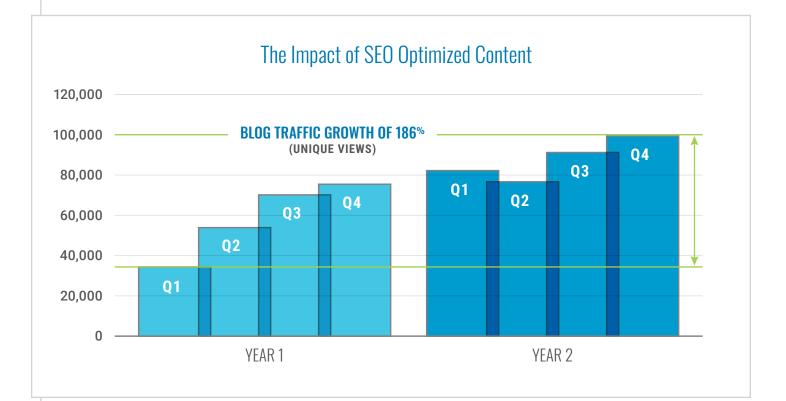
After launching a new corporate website with Element, which explained Water-Right's family of brands and businesses, Water-Right decided to give content marketing a shot. At the core of the company's content strategy was a consumer-facing blog addressing common problems and questions homeowners have about water quality. The ultimate goal was generating leads for their network of dealers.

But, are people really searching for these solutions online? And, if they are, would Water-Right's content stand out from the competition's efforts? Can blogging really make a difference?

The Results

Element and Water-Right created a collection of valuable content backed by the expert advice of Water-Right employees and a solid understanding of consumer pain points. It didn't take long before the strategy started working.

In less than a year, organic search traffic began pouring into Water-RightGroup.com. Month by month, quarter by quarter, the exponential audience growth continued as we added more articles, infographics, and videos.



Blog content in just one month brought more than 37,000 views for year-over-year growth of 37%. The site consistently outranks competitors, including Culligan and others, for major keywords, such as "hard water problems," "how do water softeners work," and "benefits of reverse osmosis." Many times, Water-Right articles appear in enhanced search results as a Google Answer at the top of the page with an image.

The Effect of Hard Water on Cooking. Dissolved minerals in hard water can also affect the texture and appearance of food. If you boil or blanch certain vegetables in hard water, they may become tough and lose some of their color.



Is Hard Water Ruining Your Home-Cooked Meals? | Water-Right www.water-rightgroup.com/blog/hard-water-cooking-baking/

Water-Right blog post as Google Answer featured search result.

The Secrets to Success

Element conducted keyword research for search engine optimization (SEO), developed target audience personas, evaluated the competitions' content, and took time to learn about the science of water treatment from the experts at Water-Right. Then, we developed a strategy that started with the creation of informational cornerstone content.

What we *didn't do* was focus solely on creating content about specific products or services. Content marketing must revolve around the audience's needs and problems. This strategic move helped establish Water-Right as a reliable authority on residential water treatment, both in the eyes of Google and people searching for answers.

Calls to action within Water-Right's content directed visitors to locate a dealer in their area for help solving problems with water quality, boosting visibility and awareness for the client, and its Evolve and WaterCare dealer network.

Even though Water-Right is a B2B company that sells its products directly to small business owners, this client understands the importance of educating the homeowner. Being visible in search results means Water-Right can provide answers to people with a problem, point them to their local dealers, and make it easier for those dealers to acquire customers.

Water-Right also encouraged their network of dealers to adopt a content strategy. Element helped provide them with content marketing tools, such as a social shareable program, guides on SEO and social media strategy, and video content.

SEO and online content creation are the perfect partners, but doing it right is an ongoing process. When Element's digital team noticed Water-Right articles ranking well for terms including the keyword phrase "hard water vs. soft water," we adjusted meta tags in existing articles and saw a boost in search visibility. Plus, Water-Right and Element's content creation team are always on the lookout for trends and current events that spark consumer searches.

Three Key Takeaways

- 1. Content marketing greatly improves search engine visibility.
- 2. Creating useful content helps you earn trust and respect with a target audience.
- 3. High-quality Owned media can give you an edge over the competition.



"The metrics and online awareness we review daily don't lie. Water-Right could not be happier with the direction we have been coached to take on content marketing. We only wonder today ... what would be the driving force without it?" - Luke Java, Sales & Marketing Director, Water-Right



STORY #2:

Going from Zero to Hero with Community Relations and Social Media

Meet the Client

Unison Credit Union is a local financial institution that's been serving people in Wisconsin's Fox Valley since 1932. It began as a place for paper mill employees to save and borrow money. Today, Unison operates six branches across the Fox Valley with a focus on empowering its members financially and supporting worthy causes.



The Challenge

Most credit unions are small fish swimming in a pond full of big banks. But Unison Credit Union realized that because they were such a small fish, they were almost invisible. Industry research revealed low brand awareness and recall among members of the community they serve.

The team at Unison was ready to make big changes, so they turned to Element for help with rebranding and a content marketing strategy built around community awareness.

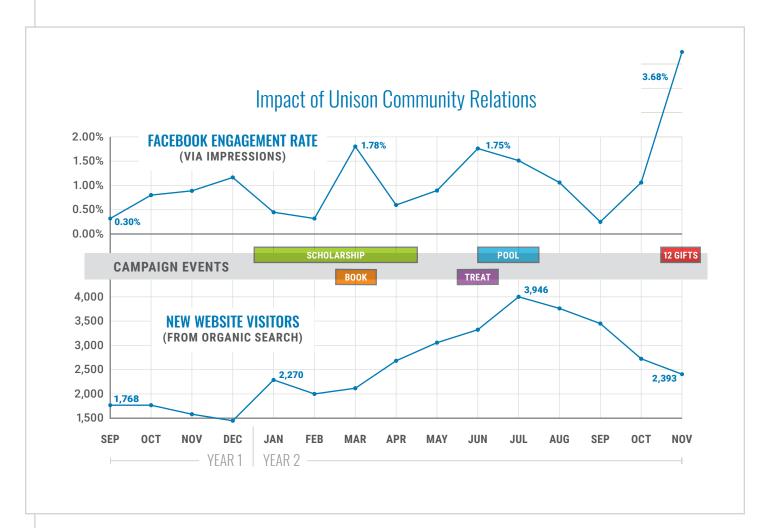
The credit union's social media presence, however, was nonexistent. We would be starting at square one, working to build an engaged audience. Unison needed social media and public relations to help spread the word about the good things they were doing in the community.

The Results

One year after launching a Facebook page as part of their content marketing program, Unison saw their follower base grow from nothing to more than 1,000 people and counting.

Unison was already involved in supporting their community, but it was difficult to tell that story without online platforms that make it possible to create content, share advice, and promote community events. That's where Element's social, PR, and content creation teams came in.

Unison sees dramatic spikes in audience engagement whenever they hold community events or create interesting content that gets shared on social media. Now, when people in Northeast Wisconsin hear the name Unison, they associate the credit union with positive experiences directly connected to their community.



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The Secrets to Success

Digital marketing and engaging, real-world events are not mutually exclusive.

While social media may be the new word-of-mouth, you still need to do things that get people talking about you. That's why a major emphasis of Unison's content marketing strategy involved organizing, executing, and promoting unique events within the community. Here are just a few of the initiatives Element and Unison worked on together.

Charitable Giving: Kaukauna Youth Baseball (KYB)

Unison made a generous donation to a community sports complex. This resulted in earned local media coverage. But, it was also streamed on Facebook Live as the credit union's president threw the ceremonial first pitch after the check presentation.

Battle of the Books

Unison showed support for local libraries by hosting a fun social media contest on their Facebook page. Libraries chose a beloved book, and social media followers voted for their favorites in a March Madness-style tournament. In the end, each library received a donation, while Unison reached their target audience with a positive message.

Cool Treats Warm Thanks

During the summer, Unison rented an ice cream truck and visited police and fire stations in the areas where their branches are located to give free treats to first responders. We capped off the effort with an ice cream giveaway for the whole community at a local park. It resulted in lots of photos filled with happy faces and Unison's Facebook audience was eagerly engaged.

Splish Splash Pool Bash

Unison partnered with local pools to host fun family events that were promoted on social media and generated likes and shares from attendees as well as their friends and families. Local TV stations covered the excitement, including morning show live shots during which Unison's president did a cannonball from a diving board!



Building community awareness for Unison with the Splish Splash Pool Bash



To help promote and wrap up these events, Unison also published original content on their website. You don't have to rely on media coverage to tell your story when you already have an audience. This content marketing program illustrates the effectiveness of a holistic strategy involving PR, social media, content creation, and paid social promotion.

Three Key Takeaways

- 1. Don't think of digital and event marketing separately; your audience connects them.
- 2. If you want to increase audience engagement, do things worth your audience's time.
- 3. Content marketing works best when Owned, Earned, and Shared media unite under a cohesive strategy.



"We have been very pleased with the community relations strategies Element has presented to us. The events are fun, engaging, and unique. Element staff are top-notch, making sure the smallest details are taken care of. Not once have I ever had to worry about how they are representing our brand. We have received a good deal of media exposure from our community events and, as a result, noticed a definite increase in name recognition."

Abby Hopfensperger, Marketing Manager, Unison Credit Union



UNISON CREDIT UNION

STORY #3: Attracting a Niche Audience with a Content Brand

Meet the Client

Security Health Plan is a Wisconsin-based health insurance carrier providing individual and employer group coverage throughout the state. Part of Marshfield Clinic Health System, Security Health Plan is committed to helping their members improve their well-being and manage health care costs.

SecurityHealth Plan

Promises kept, plain and simple.®

The Challenge

Whether you're an insurance provider, an agent, an employer, or an individual in need of coverage, navigating the topic of health care is complicated. When this program started, the future of health care in the United States was uncertain. Plus, research from ReviveHealth showed trust in health plans receiving a failing grade of 59%, an all-time low.

Security Health Plan had expanded into new territories and needed a marketing strategy that helped the insurance carrier reach human resources professionals in charge of making decisions about employee benefits for Wisconsin businesses. The company wanted to be viewed as the top choice among organizations looking to switch insurance carriers for employer-provided health coverage.

They needed a brand awareness strategy targeting a much different audience than members of its Medicare and individual health plans. Of course, the ultimate goal was content marketing that generated viable leads for their sales team.

The Results

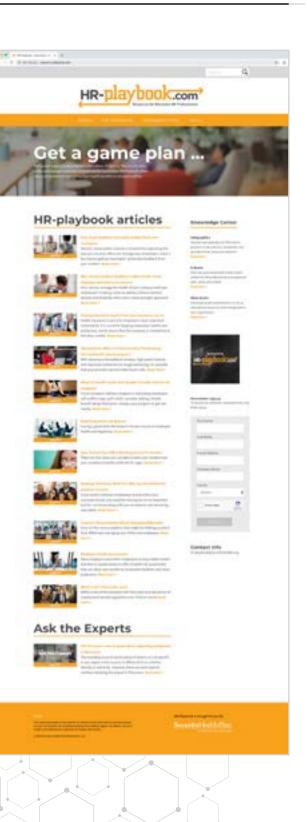
Following in-depth market research involving audience insights, competitive research, and asset development, Security Health Plan and Element launched a new web property, HR-Playbook.com, designed to attract, nurture, and convert their target audience.

HR-Playbook.com has their own web domain with a unique design, brand voice, and mission statement. It consists of resources with helpful advice for Wisconsin-based HR professionals, covering everything from managing remote workers and recruitment tips to creative ideas for employee perks and wellness programs.

HR-Playbook presents Security Health Plan as the website's official sponsor, which is true, as the insurance carrier is funding the creation of the content. The site includes a wide mix of resources such as listicles, infographics, and curated roundups. Subject matter experts from Security Health Plan and their parent company, Marshfield Clinic Health System, contribute to an "Ask the Experts" series. Paid digital campaigns and links within content point visitors to gated premium content, which is used for lead generation.

Within months, HR-Playbook content, including an article on how to explain health savings accounts (HSAs) and high deductible health plans (HDHPs) to employees, was ranking on the first page of Google search results. HR-Playbook began generating referral traffic and capturing leads for the sales team.



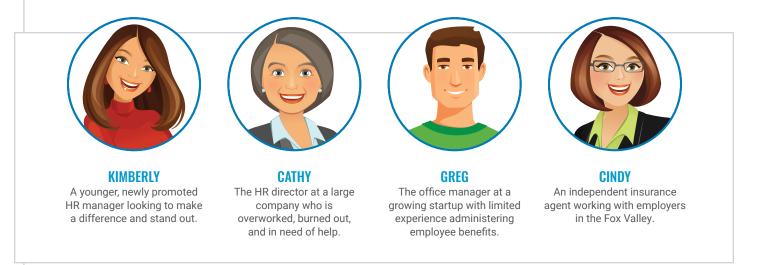


The Secrets to Success

Anyone can write and publish blog posts, distribute press releases, and post to social media accounts. What takes work is developing an effective integrated marketing strategy.

Security Health Plan took their content marketing to the next level by launching a content brand instead of simply producing branded content. Taking this approach means your content doesn't always have a direct connection back to your products or services. That's because you're focused on attracting an audience and earning trust. Rarely does anyone read a blog post, see a social post, or watch a video and immediately make a major purchase. Security Health Plan wisely chose to invest in their target audience by providing value and building brand equity.

While every part of a content strategy should consider the people consuming the content, an especially useful tool for impactful marketing efforts is persona development. Element worked with Security Health Plan to develop four personas based on the types of people who'd most likely to use HR-Playbook content. They included:



Element developed detailed narratives around customer personas that emphasize psychographics (attitudes, aspirations, fears) over demographics (age, gender, education). Personas are instrumental in guiding content marketing strategy because they help you get into your customers' heads.

After we understand your audience, we develop a buyer's journey or path-to-purchase, which outlines the way personas consume content as they progress through the process of identifying a need, conducting research, comparing options, and making a decision.

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Three Key Takeaways

- 1. Persuasive content puts your customer at the center, not your products or services.
- 2. Chances for content marketing success greatly improve with a detailed content strategy.
- 3. Personas and paths to purchase help define an integrated marketing strategy.



"Element's content marketing plan helped us think differently about how to generate fresh leads and position Security Health Plan to potential and current customers." - Rebecca Normington, Marketing Communications Manager, Security Health Plan



SECURITY HEALTH PLAN

STORY #4: How Expertise + A Little Controversy = Qualified Leads

Meet the Client

Birko Corp. is a family-owned company headquartered in Colorado that has been providing science-based food safety solutions to food processing companies since 1953. They offer sanitation chemicals and food safety automation equipment. Birko supplies sanitation solutions to 90% of the beef processors in the United States.



The Challenge

Birko is well respected as a leader in food safety and sanitation. The tight labor market, however, had some of their customers and prospects looking for new ways to handle sanitation in their processing plants.

Because it is difficult to find workers to fill an in-house sanitation crew, some food processors were looking to outsource that labor. While Birko provides innovative sanitation solutions, training, and consults their customers on food safety compliance, they do not provide labor.

Some of the competition, however, was providing contract labor and chemistry bundled together under one bill, an offering that removed price transparency from the equation. Birko believed food processing companies were getting confused by a deceptive sales tactic that could present food safety concerns to the public and cause irreversible reputation damage to brands.

Birko needed a content marketing strategy that warned their prospects of the risks of bundling sanitation labor with chemicals and pushed them toward smarter decisions, which provided transparency and reliability.

The Results

Birko worked with Element to develop an in-depth e-book designed to expose the risks and reality of what happens when food manufacturers work with organizations that bundle.

The e-book, *The Dirty Truth About Contract Sanitation in Food Processing*, includes examples of how food companies learned they were getting less than what they paid for when they no longer had separate invoices for labor and sanitation.

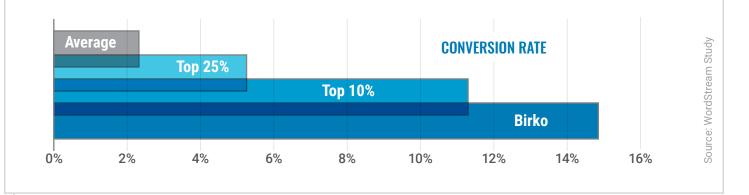
The content hits on pain points backed by trustworthy research detailing the lasting financial impact of a food product recall. There are insights and advice from Birko subject matter experts as well as options for better ways to address the labor shortage.

Birko sales reps use this content as a persuasive tool and a valuable touchpoint when working directly with prospects. Element also developed a lead-generating landing page for the e-book where visitors could enter contact information and download the content for free. The landing page has a **15% conversion rate**, which is much better than average. It even beats the performance of landing pages in the top 10%.





Landing Page Conversion Rate Comparison



In addition to being a topic of interest to Birko's target audience, editors at key trade publications also wanted to hear more, much to the chagrin of the competition. The campaign surrounding the e-book attracted qualified leads with substantial buying power that weren't even on Birko's prospect list yet.

The Secrets to Success

The biggest factor in this content marketing campaign's success was that Birko wasn't afraid of taking on a somewhat controversial topic.

Even though the content didn't mention competitors by name, it still held them accountable for being deceptive and suggested that some in Birko's target audience were making a mistake. The idea of finding out how they could be getting cheated was just too intriguing for many prospects to pass up.

Too often, organizations avoid taking a stance on issues, or they water down a message to make sure no feathers are ruffled. Even worse, companies create gated content that provides no value to the audience because it is solely promotional. Birko's content marketing strategy effectively combined eye-opening information, expert insights, and persuasive calls to action urging the audience to learn more.

But, it wasn't the e-book alone that made up this content marketing campaign ...

When you approach content marketing with an "If you build it they will come" mentality, you're pressing your luck. Experienced marketers know you need a holistic plan behind pieces of premium content.



Before the landing page went live, Birko and Element developed a strategy.

It launched in conjunction with an industry trade show. There were pieces of sponsored content in key publications as well as a blog post on Birko's site previewing the e-book. Element's social media team developed shareables for LinkedIn and Facebook, and there was even an animated video trailer for the e-book. Finally, paid digital media campaigns targeted specific audiences with relevant messaging so qualified leads continued to come in through Birko's website.

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Three Key Takeaways

- 1. Don't be afraid to take a stance and create content covering controversial topics.
- 2. Make sure gated premium content provides tangible value to attract qualified leads.
- 3. Develop integrated marketing campaigns around major content to amplify your efforts.



"Element did a wonderful job presenting our perspective to the food safety industry. They helped us tell a story about an important topic and raise awareness around the stance we are taking. We thoroughly enjoy working with the Element team." – Kelly Green, President, Birko Corporation



BIRKO CORPORATION

STORY #5: The Power of Agency-Client Collaboration

Meet the Client

Breakthrough is a pioneering company that provides data-driven transportation and supply chain solutions to the nation's largest shippers. Their core service offering is a fuel management strategy that uses data and industry expertise to help shippers reduce fuel cost, consumption, and emissions.



The Challenge

Breakthrough initially reached out to Element during the process of finding an agency to redesign their website. But, their marketing team wanted to use that new website as a sales tool to help them attract, identify, nurture, and convert a list of top prospects, which included some of the most recognizable brands in the world. Content marketing was the perfect fit.

Breakthrough's marketing challenge was different than most. Their business model and unique fuel management solution meant they didn't have direct competitors. The real problem was getting the target audience to realize they had a problem Breakthrough could solve and convincing that audience of the value in the solution.

The company was already creating valuable content, including fuel market reports and webcasts, but these were primarily used to educate and inform existing clients. The next step was transitioning to an external-facing marketing strategy that moved leads down a sales funnel using persona-based audience insights and a path-to-purchase.

This was a complex topic in a niche industry. Getting the most out of this content marketing effort would require a lot of teamwork.

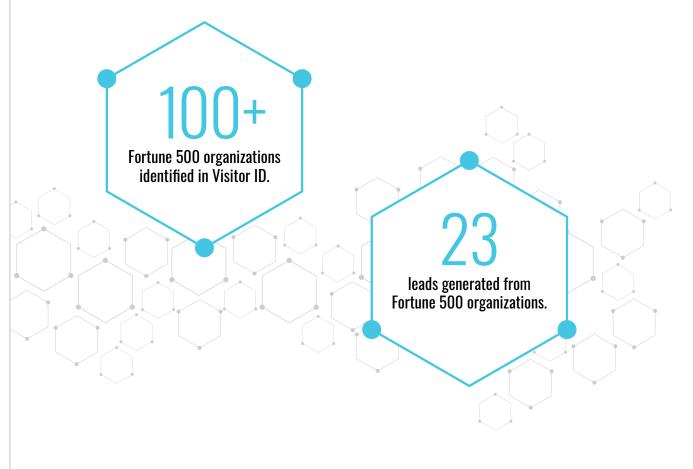
The Results

After a year working with Element, Breakthrough found one of the biggest returns on their investment in a cohesive digital strategy was a shortened sales cycle. Prospects had a better understanding of Breakthrough's solutions and benefits before speaking with the sales team. Plus, content provided increased awareness through improved visibility on search engines, allowing prospects to discover the power of Breakthrough's services.

This meant sales could spend less time explaining and educating people on how Breakthrough's Fuel Recovery program worked. Instead, leads were proactively reaching out to sales with a baseline understanding of the company, asking what they needed to do to get started.

Thanks to Element's advanced Visitor ID tracking, the Breakthrough sales team could also see what content pages companies in their top prospects list were visiting. This provided valuable insights to shape conversations with potential clients. If a visitor converted into a lead by filling out a form, the customer relationship management (CRM) program showed the digital path the individual took, delivering a better understanding of visitor behavior and the life of the lead.

Breakthrough and Element worked together to create a collection of content, including videos infographics, e-books, articles, and press releases. Each piece played a role in attracting the target audience and moving them through the different stages of the buyer's journey.



24

The Secrets to Success

Breakthrough had plenty of in-house marketing talent as well as subject matter experts who were already working to produce content and eager to share their knowledge beyond the current client base to help generate leads.

What they really needed was a marketing partner that helped them achieve the following:

A documented content marketing strategy

Before kickoff, Element and Breakthrough worked together to establish goals, define the target audience, and identify ways in which Owned, Earned, Paid, and Social media would function as a well-oiled machine.

Marketing experts who could provide creative ideas and analytical insights

Breakthrough and Element meet monthly to discuss results, brainstorm ideas, and divvy up duties. We also regularly review analytics to help fine-tune the overall marketing strategy.

Help filling marketing gaps in talent, time, and resources

Both Breakthrough and Element contributed to efficient content creation efforts based on our separate strengths and capabilities:

- The Breakthrough team could quickly publish content on the blog based on current events while Element produced long-form articles and evergreen blog content.
- On social media, Element concentrated on Owned and Earned content amplification, while Breakthrough created shareables focused on corporate culture, company news, and recruitment.
- Element provided video production services, giving social media videos featuring Breakthrough's experts a highly professional look and feel.
- Element's PR team collaborated with Breakthrough thought leaders to identify topics that could be pitched to trade publications for Earned media opportunities.
- Element focused on getting prospects into nurture tracks, while Breakthrough's sales and marketing team worked to qualify leads and follow up.

Another key aspect of Breakthrough's success was implementation of targeted paid promotion. Paid LinkedIn campaigns to specific audiences and retargeting ads were used to drive return website visits and send prospects to the right content at the right time.

Three Key Takeaways

- 1. An agency partnership complements in-house resources to support a multi-faceted marketing strategy.
- 2. In-depth analytics, tracking, and CRM tools take digital marketing to the next level.
- 3. Don't overlook the potential for Paid media to amplify and enhance your content marketing efforts.



"Element is a valuable partner for Breakthrough in the development and ongoing execution of our content marketing program. Partnering with an external agency was a crucial step in getting a content program off the ground and took our marketing efforts to the next level."

– Erin Blaha, Marketing Director, Breakthrough



BREAKTHROUGH

CONCLUSION: Getting the Most Out of Your Marketing

When should your company invest in marketing?



When business is slow and you need to find a way to grow?

When you introduce a new product or service?

When you want to get noticed or change the perception of your brand?

The truth is ... no matter what your current business goals might be, marketing needs to play a crucial role in how you achieve them. That's because marketing is directly connected to practically everything a business does.



When you have a problem to solve or people to persuade, you need marketing.

But, without a plan of attack, there's a good chance you'll work hard without getting the results you want. That's why an integrated marketing strategy is absolutely critical to success.

At Element, we understand that every client's goals and challenges are unique. We've built our agency to focus on problem solving through strategies that are driven by data and fueled with creativity. We use different tools, tactics, and insights to create the right modern marketing formula for the task at hand.

View additional case studies for more examples of the many ways we're helping our clients achieve their biggest goals and reach their full potential. **Contact Element today.** Let's start exploring ways to formulate an integrated marketing strategy for your company.