



PRECISION MESSAGING FOR MANUFACTURERS

How manufacturers are planning — and achieving buy-in —
for a more strategic, audience-centric content marketing
strategy that delivers results.

By Robert Rose

Chief Strategy Advisor | The Content Marketing Institute



FOREWORD

Manufacturing marketers are feeling the pressure.

Customers expect personalized experiences at every touchpoint — even in the B2B space. At the same time, executives expect marketing teams to be more efficient and prove ROI. To do that, you need to deliver value across the entire customer journey. And that means offering engaging content experiences for every stage. That's a powerful takeaway for the 82% of manufacturing marketers who say they still rely on brochures. It's time to reimagine your content marketing strategy.

In the 35 years that MX has been a leader in B2B marketing, we've learned a thing or two. Atomize your content to create an omnichannel marketing experience. Put your audience first, and then measure and optimize.

Meeting — better yet, exceeding — evolving expectations is how you make true impact.

James Meyers

SVP and Managing Director of Content Marketing at MX

INTRODUCTION

Marketing in Manufacturing: Embracing New Trends and Confronting New Challenges

The marketing landscape in manufacturing companies is experiencing a significant change. Previously, the practice of marketing simply involved trying to create demand for the products manufactured. However, it has evolved beyond the traditional “make stuff, sell stuff” equation.

Emerging trends have forced marketers in manufacturing to become much more comprehensive, focusing on the *entire* customer experience, not just the initial purchase. Some of these challenges include:

1. The “servitization” of manufacturing

Manufacturers are shifting from one-time product sales to ongoing service relationships. As Patrick Crampton-Thomas, vice president of digital asset management at SAP said, manufacturers are “differentiating themselves in the modern world by adding new services to their products, or even selling their products as-a-service...to better compete and grow market share and revenue.”¹

This evolution changes the manufacturer-customer dynamic. It places increased pressure on marketing to expand how, where, and even why they optimize the customer’s journey.

And at the center of that pressure is...

2. Changing buyer expectations

Buyers now demand a much more seamless, consumer-like experience in B2B transactions. Recent research has found that 73% of B2B buyers say they want a personalized, B2C-like customer experience.² In CMI’s most recent B2B research on content marketing and manufacturing, one of the respondents – a marketing lead at a manufacturer – said, “customers now expect experiences that are similar to what they get on other eCommerce sites. We must tailor all of our solutions to meet these customers’ specific needs and preferences.”³

Modern buyers expect transparency, detailed information, easy navigation, and real-time responses before engaging with sales.

Evolving consumer demands require manufacturers to create innovative digital experiences that go beyond providing just product information, reviews, and comparison tools. It also involves interactive content such as virtual demos, 3D product tours, and AI-driven chatbots to improve and distinguish the buyer's experience in the initial phases of the purchase process.

However, all that new content costs money, and that leads us to the third trend which is...

3. New marketing efficiency pressures

Manufacturers have always had to find innovative ways to expand marketing while maintaining increased efficiency. But now these marketers are stretched thin trying to ensure they service the entire customer journey. So, the new pressure is to be able to find innovative ways of scaling their efforts and do more with less.

This trend isn't new, of course. Almost exactly a year ago industry analyst firm Gartner found that a full 71% of CMOs believed they lacked sufficient budget to fully execute their strategy.⁴ A year later, and Gartner has found that this trend continues as they found we have entered a "new era of less."⁵

From CMI's 2024 research, one of the B2B respondents, a director of marketing, said that their company is "constantly looking at new ways to build marketing automation in order to evolve and streamline repetitive tasks and improve efficiency."⁶

Considering these three trends and the broader B2B landscape, we wanted to explore how marketers in manufacturing businesses are adapting to these new content marketing realities. First, we identified the specific challenges manufacturers face in content marketing. Then, we identified four key innovations that are helping them successfully navigate these challenges.

¹ [Future of Commerce – Servitization In Manufacturing](#)
² [Sitecore.com - Improve the B2B Commerce Experience Through AI](#)
³ [CMI B2B Enterprise Content Marketing 2024 \(Manufacturers\)](#)
⁴ [Gartner 2023 CMO Spend and Strategy Survey](#)
⁵ [Gartner 2024 CMO Spend and Strategy Survey](#)
⁶ [CMI 2024 B2B Enterprise Content Marketing \(Manufacturers\)](#)

THE CHALLENGES

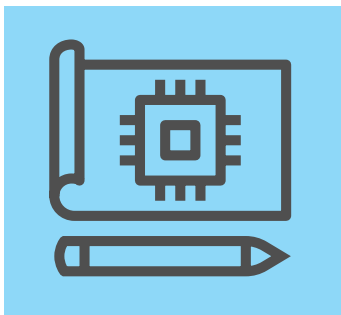
Manufacturing Marketers Are Stretched Too Thin

At CMI, we've been monitoring content marketing in the manufacturing sector for over 15 years. In our latest 2024 B2B research, we compared marketing in manufacturing with other B2B industries, especially those performing better in various categories. We found that successful manufacturers are making several changes to adapt to new disruptive trends.

It probably comes as no surprise that, overall, manufacturers are slightly behind their B2B peers in other industries. But this lag comes from the overall conservative nature of manufacturing businesses, rather than any lack of will, or skill of the marketers in those organizations.

When it comes to content marketing, the top trends mentioned by manufacturing marketers are a snapshot that captures exactly the symptoms reflected in the bigger trends. They are:

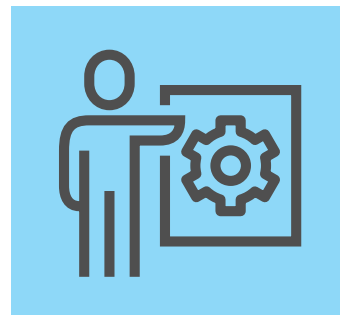
Manufacturer Marketing Professionals Top Priorities⁷



ONE:
The use of AI
in marketing



TWO:
Content
automation



THREE:
Content quality
to specific
audiences



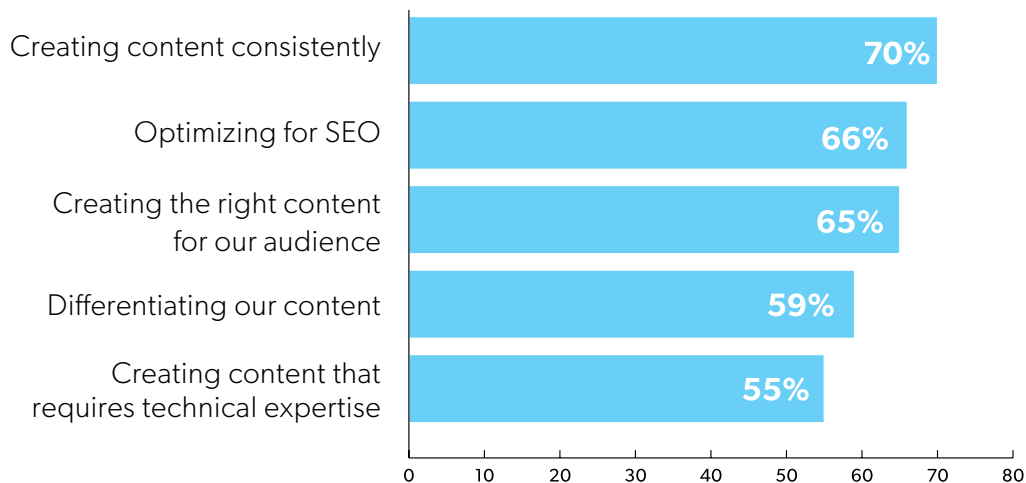
FOUR:
Adapting to changing
SEO dynamics

For example, when it comes to the use of Generative AI by manufacturers, its priority may not be surprising given how “hot” it is. However, CMI’s research found that 64% of manufacturing marketers report they currently use generative AI, as opposed to 72% of other B2B marketing teams.⁸ And, perhaps most interestingly, almost half of those manufacturing marketers that are utilizing generative AI (47%) say they primarily use it to brainstorm new topics.

Feeding from that, we looked, overall, at the biggest challenges that manufacturing marketers are having with content creation.

It’s not a surprise to learn that most are using AI primarily to research new topics, because the five biggest content creation challenges were:

Manufacturer Marketing Professionals Top Challenges⁹



These findings generally align with the results from other B2B sectors such as financial services, technology, and healthcare. However, three of the top four are significantly higher for manufacturing marketers than they are for other sectors. The data suggest that manufacturers are having a much more challenging time in creating content consistently, optimizing it for SEO, and differentiating it from their competitors.

Finally, one of the other biggest areas of difference between B2B marketers and manufacturing marketers is what they measure compared to their overall goals.

That may sound strange at first, but according to our research, the content marketing *goals* of B2B marketers are generally the same across all verticals, including manufacturing. Most companies primarily focus their content marketing efforts on generating demand and converting leads.

However, when it comes to measurement, B2B companies generally value conversions and email engagement as the main measures of progress toward this goal. However, manufacturing marketers are still primarily focused only on website traffic and social media as their primary measurements.

These findings generally point to the fact that marketers in manufacturing are struggling a bit to keep up with the expanding responsibilities of creating value across the entirety of the customer's journey and the need to create more and more valuable content-driven experiences at each stage. These manufacturing marketers are struggling to balance the tension between the new expectations of modern buyers, the evolution of the business into services, and scaling their efforts to manage the complete customer experience.

So – if scale, focus, and differentiation of all of the content experiences are the biggest challenges, what are the best answers to address these needs?

7. CMI 2024 B2B Enterprise Content Marketing (Manufacturers)

8. *Ibid*

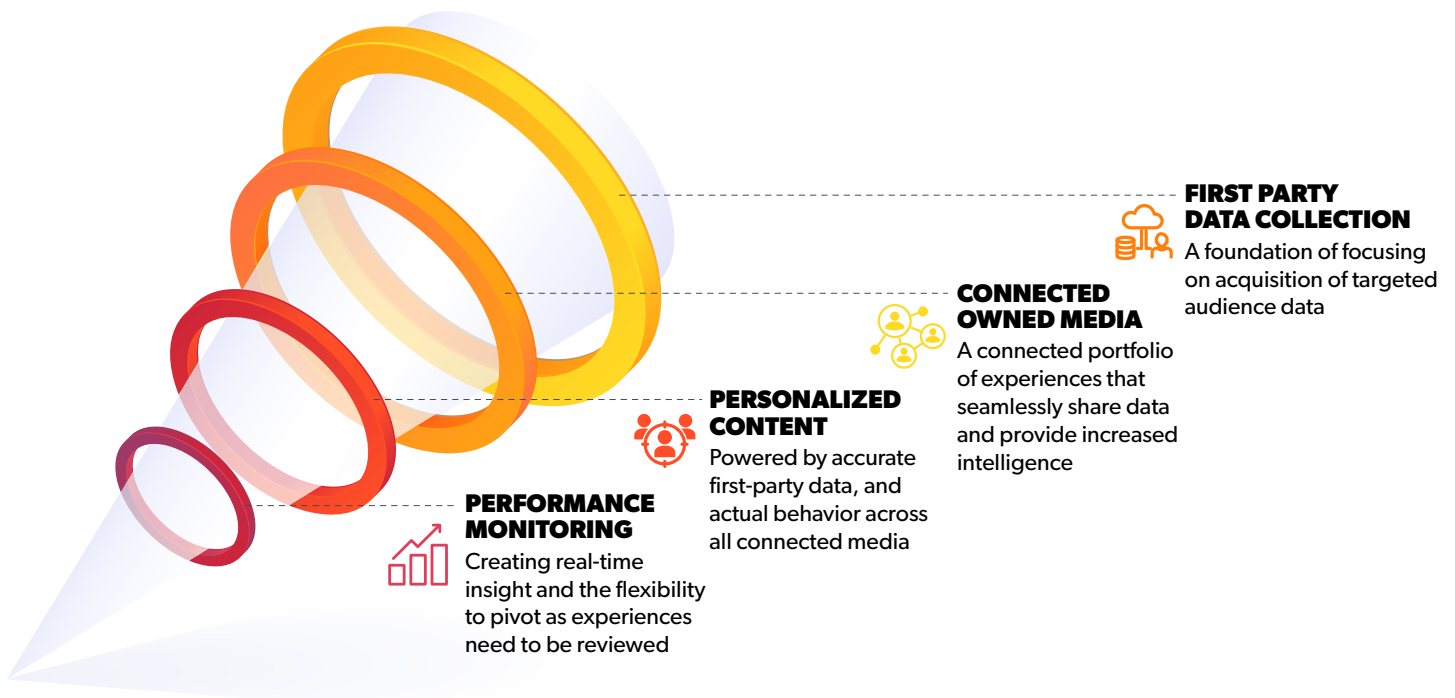
9. *Ibid*

THE SOLUTION

A Precision Messaging Approach

We identified four major areas that, directionally, form the foundation for a new, balanced, approach to modern content marketing for successful manufacturing marketers.

Precision Messaging



1. First-Party Data Collection & Connection

The foundation of enabling the right content to the right audience at the right scale

Why it's important: Connecting digital experiences throughout the customer's journey requires an infrastructure that can collect and connect customer data from the website, blogs, email newsletters, and any other digital customer touchpoint. This data will enable manufacturing marketers to create personalized content experiences at multiple touchpoints with the company.

Why it's so difficult for manufacturers: With the deprecation of the third-party cookie from Google and privacy regulations, there is increasing emphasis on protecting and utilizing first-party data in a common way. This can put legal and technology pressures on manufacturing marketers.

Additionally, finding the right technology solutions that seamlessly integrate data connection efforts can be challenging to obtain approval for and require complex implementation projects. Considering from CMI's research that only about 40% of manufacturing marketers believe their leaders understand what they're doing, even building the business case for this new technology-driven approach can be overwhelming.¹⁰

How manufacturers can address this challenge: This initiative involves both a change in process (gathering audience data and marketing lead data), and applying the right technology tools that can capture data effectively without compromising user experience or privacy.

In our B2B Research, one of the CMI respondents — a VP of Marketing at a manufacturer — said to us that:

“...building a business case required a phased approach. First, I conducted a detailed analysis to demonstrate the potential return on investment (ROI) by showcasing how similar companies benefited from such technologies. Then, I had to align the proposed technology with our company's strategic goals (and their timing), showing how it would enhance our competitiveness. Most importantly, I didn't try to do it all at once. I proposed a phased implementation plan with clear milestones, emphasizing how the technology could provide valuable insights in the early stages to drive better decision-making and get some quick wins.”

¹⁰ CMI 2024 B2B Enterprise Content Marketing (Manufacturers)

2. A connected content strategy process

A portfolio of digital experiences built to connect the entire journey

Why it's important: Manufacturing marketers need to strategize how content is created, managed, and leveraged across the omni-channel ecosystem. A robust content strategy will ensure that the company meets customer needs with content throughout the journey and leverages (or repurposes) a few “big ideas” into many “little ideas” while laddering up to your marketing and business objectives.

Why it's difficult for manufacturers: Some manufacturing marketers look at their audiences in very siloed ways, so the result is that many “waypoints” across the customer’s journey are segmented with varying degrees of content quality. In other words, a particular type of content might be great at the beginning of the journey but work much less effectively in the deeper parts of the buyer’s journey (or the other way around). Because of this, content isn’t optimized across the journey and has to be re-invented every time. For example, many manufacturing marketers still focus heavily on “brochures” as the main marketing output. In the CMI research, we found that 82% of manufacturing marketers, versus less than half of regular B2B marketers, focus on this content type for the earliest parts of the journey.¹¹

Manufacturing marketers are also more likely to feel pressure on bottom-funnel activities and mistakenly believe that content marketing is only a top-funnel strategy. Thus, when it comes time to address other parts of the journey, the marketing team is rightfully frustrated that they, as one survey respondent said, “just don’t have the content to address it properly.”

How manufacturers can address this challenge: Content marketing is essential for the full buyer journey, from awareness through conversion and post-conversion into brand loyalty. Each touchpoint requires tailored content that meets audience needs and mindsets. Additionally, research shows that manufacturers are more receptive to an omnichannel marketing approach versus more standard formats such as brochures.

The answer is to shift focus to messaging and content that can be leveraged across multiple areas of the content journey. This means creating an infrastructure for a holistic and connected set of digital content experiences that can reveal the right content to the right persona at exactly the right time.

¹¹ CMI 2024 B2B Enterprise Content Marketing (Manufacturers)

It also means inserting collaborative workflows that can connect experiences so that consumers are orchestrated through their journey and their attributes retained. For example, not every customer who downloads a resource should be considered a “lead”. However, once they have downloaded that resource and perhaps attended a follow-on webinar, perhaps they are ready for an automated – and targeted – sales/marketing message. Achieving this means that each of the various content platforms is connected and can interact with one another and that there is a “single source of the truth” for managing the relationship with these audiences.

3. Content Personalization

Targeted content not for individuals – but for similar audiences

Why it’s important: There is no doubt that personalization – or precision messaging – is more effective than general messaging. And B2B consumers are increasingly expecting it.

According to research from consulting firm McKinsey, 71% of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized interactions. And even more importantly: 76% are frustrated when this doesn’t happen on modern digital experiences.¹²

Why it’s difficult for manufacturers: Without the right data and the will to manage pre-existing resistances to build a robust, connected content strategy, precision messaging isn’t possible. Even if some of these challenges are addressed, to be successful, investment is necessary to ensure they have the scale and capacity to deliver targeted content at scale.

This means that content must be treated as an integrated and strategic function in manufacturing and that people, processes, and technologies must be in place to make it work.

CMI research found that manufacturing marketers are more likely than other B2B marketers to have difficulty creating content consistently and focusing on differentiation (65% versus 58%). Thus, focusing on “more content” for personalization can be just too overwhelming for already-strained teams.

¹² [What Is Personalization – McKinsey](#)

How manufacturers can address this challenge: Manufacturing marketers should create a content customization strategy and roadmap to help quantify and define content needs across multiple areas. This happens step-by-step – focusing first on the data and infrastructure – and then building out the automation processes that can handle each content platform.

At CMI, we worked with a manufacturer to reboot their entire content marketing approach. Our first project was to help the company invest in an advanced marketing automation system that allowed them to segment their audiences and tailor content to different personas based on their behavior and engagement history.

Then, we focused on helping the organization build a robust data infrastructure, integrating various data sources to gain a comprehensive view of their customer. This integration allowed the company to develop detailed customer personas and predictive models, ensuring the content was always relevant and timely to the context in which it was consumed.

Finally, we worked with the manufacturer to roll this out one content platform at a time, prioritizing the post-sale and customer enablement journeys (because we had the most data there) and then moving up until we connected it to the earliest parts of the buying experience.

It was a complex — and highly cross-functional — collaboration, but we were able to leverage insights from different departments to enhance our personalization efforts.

4. Performance Monitoring and Optimization

Using measurement to drive system learning

Why it's important: Robust reporting programs are crucial to ensure your strategy is working, and to prove the value of marketing to management.

Why it's difficult for manufacturers: From our research, one of the biggest areas of difference between B2B marketers more generally and manufacturing marketers is in what they're measuring vs. what their main goals are with content marketing.

As it turns out, the goals are largely the same (Generate Demand and Leads). However, B2B marketers generally value conversions and email engagement as indicators of success. Manufacturing marketers are still mostly focused on the highest level of engagement including website traffic and social media engagement. These findings suggest that while both groups are setting the goal of brand awareness and lead gen for content marketing, manufacturing marketers aren't measuring content performance beyond the vanity metrics.

How manufacturers can address this challenge: As capabilities to deliver more precise messaging over the entirety of the customer's journey expand, the team will need to set the appropriate metrics and KPIs to measure the effectiveness of personalized content. This will also include continuous monitoring and tweaking of strategies based on performance data to optimize results.

Interestingly, success in this area doesn't come from the more complex analytics or data tools (though those help). The success simply comes in designing a clear measurement plan for the right kinds of analysis.

Integrating customer feedback for qualitative data, implementing A/B testing to determine what is resonating best (and effect automation), and implementing dashboards and real-time reporting are the biggest factors of success here.

Put simply: success with measurement is much less about how complex the measurement can be, and how simple and easy to make decisions based on the insight you get.

As one director of marketing in manufacturing told us for our B2B research "we had the right KPIs, but the real win was having a cross-functional transparency that allowed us to quickly identify trends, make informed decisions, and demonstrate the value of our more targeted content efforts to stakeholders."

CONCLUSION: PRECISION MESSAGING

Delivering The Market Experience

If there's a theme from the above best practices, it is that navigating the complexities of the manufacturing customer's journey needs a focus on simpler, more connected ways of working.

It's essential to move beyond fragmented marketing efforts, driven by internal silos – and instead focus on creating a cohesive and connected portfolio of engaging brand experiences.

Any one of those modern digital solutions, whether it be first-party data collection, to connected content experiences, personalization, or holistic real-time measurement can be an overwhelming, disruptive effort for any manufacturing marketing team.

The key is streamlining. Examine each of the initiatives on their own – and whether the decision is to do a holistic “rip and replace” or take one small step at a time – understand the whole journey that you're about to embark upon. The goal is to be able to deliver a connected customer experience throughout the entirety of their relationship with the business.

With a focus on unity over fragmentation and clarity over chaos, the path to growth in manufacturing lies in crafting the content-driven experiences that resonate deeply, so that we develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with them.

About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute (CMI) exists to do one thing: advance the practice of content marketing through online education and in-person and digital events. We create and curate content experiences that teach marketers and creators from enterprise brands, small businesses, and agencies how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. Global brands turn to CMI for strategic consultation, training, and research. Organizations from around the world send teams to Content Marketing World, the largest content marketing-focused event, the Marketing Analytics & Data Science (MADS) conference, and CMI virtual events, including ContentTECH Summit. Our community of 215,000+ content marketers shares camaraderie and conversation. CMI is organized by Informa Connect. To learn more, visit www.contentmarketinginstitute.com.

About MX

The MX Group is the second-largest independent, integrated B2B marketing agency in the U.S., with a mission to impact the marketplace for companies that impact the world. For over 30 years, we've created meaningful end-to-end buying experiences for B2B brands. Our clients are leaders and innovators in automotive, financial services, food, legal services, oil and gas, industrial, packaging, trade associations, technology and SaaS who rely on our expertise to influence and grow their businesses. Our relationships with our clients and people are why B2B Marketing recognized us as Agency of the Year in 2022. Our headquarters are in Chicago, but our reach is global. Whether a client is an established or startup B2B brand, we have the people and perspective to be a strong partner that makes a difference.

Learn more at mxagency.com.