



Content Production Challenges

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Hello everyone. Welcome back to Life Science Marketing Radio. Today we're going to do something a little bit different again. A couple of weeks ago, we had an episode where I talked to David Shifrin and he's helping me out with some content repurposing and that turned out to be a really popular episode right away. That gave me a hint that the audience, you all, looking for some more practical tips on content marketing. And not to say that the entire podcast series is going shift in that direction. I still have some great interviews coming up with some thought leaders, but I thought it would be nice to have a couple of more conversation with David about content marketing and it might turn into its own separate podcast, but for now we're going to keep it right here.

The topic today is producing content, and I know from a recent survey I've done that the people on my list, the thing they struggle with the most is producing content. I went to a content marketing master class from the Content Marketing Institute a couple of weeks ago and Joe Pulizzi showed their data from their B2B survey, and 70% of marketers are going to make more content next year than they did last year. If that's the case, why shouldn't we be making the most of our efforts? David, I know you have some thoughts around this. Why don't you just let us know what you are thinking?

David: Thanks, Chris. Good to jump back on another call with you. Appreciate the chance to chat. Always a pleasure. So, I think it's amazing. 70% of people are trying...70% of marketers are trying to ramp up their content efforts, and I don't know. In my mind, that

always raises the question of why. I mean, is it because everybody else is doing it and you don't want to be in that 30% or because you really have a plan? I mean, it's just... How long we have been talking about content saturation and we're still adding more at a higher rate.

But the problem makes sense to me. I see it in my own work with my clients and I see it in my own personal efforts as I try to create content both for Filament and for my clients. One of the most common reasons I get calls is because a founder or a chief marketing officer, whoever it is, whatever stage company, a lot of times it's just going to be one of the research scientists who's also in charge of some of the marketing efforts, because I work with a lot of small companies. They call and say, "We're launching this new product. We need some materials surrounding it, or we need blog series and I don't have time to do it. Can you help?" So they're doing exactly what you're describing. They're ramping up their content efforts and they're trying to figure out how to make the most of those efforts. So just from my anecdotal experience, I think this is a huge problem that people are really challenged by.

Chris: Yeah, it's interesting and it sounds like, you can tell me, these companies call you up and it's probably the case, as you say. "We're launching something, we need something." Right?

David: Yeah.

Chris: And the unspoken part is, in a hurry.

David: Oh, it's not always unspoken. Yeah, I got a call from somebody about three weeks ago and started the project last week. And I said, "So what's your timeline?" "Well, can we have this out by Christmas?" I said, "I think so. Let's get on it."

Chris: Yeah, and in that case then you're, I imagine, you're stuck with making whatever you all can think of in that short window of time. I mean that takes some time to produce but it also takes a little bit of time to think what you should be creating but maybe not enough time to think about the entire big picture. Right?

David: Yeah, that's really good point. It's usually isolated for a specific and fairly narrow project. So in this case, it's not a product launch. The product is already out on the market.

But it's a new product that hasn't gotten a lot of push yet and they're trying to, without going into too much detail, they're trying to go off with some news and some buzz that they've been able to generate and really kind of maintain the momentum. But you're right. It's not...you know, we're not sitting down and creating an entire 12-month content strategy for this company.

Chris: Let's just jump into this other observation. So in the CMI survey of the marketers who said they got better at content marketing last year, the interesting thing was the top two reasons were that they are improving the quality or the efficiency of their content production. So the quality of their content got better. Therefore, they feel like they are doing content marketing better. Where they got more efficient at it, that was all in one category. In the other category was they made some adjustment to their strategy. So, you can either...and I think both of those things are important. Right? You have to think about the big picture strategy like we just talked about, but also are there ways you can think about how you create content that will make it easier for you to execute that strategy.

David: Yeah, improving the quality or efficiency of their content. I mean, some of that honestly is...I don't know what's inside the heads of the survey respondents, but let's be honest. Some of that is probably just the fact that people, every year that you create content, you're going to get better at it. That's the whole point of all of this. So I'm a more efficient writer, I'm a more efficient podcaster now than I was a year and a half ago. But within that, there's all kinds of tools coming online and planning, just simple planning, that can I think really help improve the efficiency of content creation. And something that we've talked about a lot you, and I both while recording and on other phone calls that we've had, is thinking about why you want to do something. Is it really necessary or not? And if it's not, then...if you haven't thought about that and you try to push forward anyway, it's going to be inefficient, it's not going to fit well. It's going to be frustrating. And so, hopefully, that suggests from this CMI survey, that people are starting to think a little bit more intentionally about it.

Chris: Yeah, so two points you made there that I really appreciate. First of all, as you do something more and more, you're going to get better at it. I think if you're in a company and you're creating content, there is sort of a standard that you expect for a brochure or whatever. But there are some types of content that are new to people, podcasting being one of them, even blogging, and it's hard at first. But as you do it more and more, you see what

works and you get better at it and you'll never get better without starting. That's one thing. So you just, I think, you have to accept that. Not to say that you should publish crap content, but you should start doing it whether you publish it or not until you start getting comfortable with how you're producing those things.

And then the other one is, as you say, thinking about what you're doing fits in with your purpose and why you're doing it. And I think in many cases it's true that people are under pressure to create certain pieces of content for certain stakeholders. If that collection is so diverse, then none of it adds up to a meaningful story for one target type of customer, you're not going to see the results you're looking for either.

Let's go back to the root cause here. Why everyone is creating more content. What are your thoughts on that?

David: Well, I'm always a skeptic. With that caveat, I'm always wondering about the real motives and that makes me believe that some of this is probably just the rat race. Everybody's seeing everybody else writing a blog and maybe their competitor was putting out a nice article once a month and then they went down to two a month and now they're doing it weekly. So we've got to do the same thing. And, you know, maybe that is necessary because we're all still competing for the same SEO real estate on Google. But, you know, we'll talk about this more and we have talked about it. Is it really necessary? Maybe, maybe not. That's one thing I think that that's pushing people to create more content.

Another thing is there's just more material to talk about. And in that case, I think it's a really good thing. Every company is producing new products or new services and they have something to talk about. We're seeing more and more going on in the world in general that leads people to try to get involved. So just as an example of this, you know, healthcare industry where I spend a little bit of time, there's so much going on with everything surrounding the Affordable Care Act and we're six years into that and we're still trying to figure it out and now it's looking like there's the potential for massive changes there. Well, on a political standpoint, that's a huge mess. From a content creator standpoint, it's a dream. Because this means that every healthcare client that I have is thinking about this and thinking about regulation, and they all want to take their little slice of it. Whether it's something involving HIPAA or reimbursement or whatever, and there's just a constant stream of new ideas that you can create out of that.

So, I mean again, not getting into any of the politics, but sometimes bad or confusing or strange news of the world can actually be a benefit for marketing purposes. and so again, in that case, I think that's good because we all want to have something available publicly that kind of explains how our company approaches whatever this topic may be. And then, of course, this is content marketing. Right? So we fit it into our product, how can our product solve that problem?

Chris: Right. Yeah. And going back to product, the buying cycle has changed as we all know, and I think that's a large contributor to the mass of content that's being produced because everyone's doing their research online now. You have to have content online and you have to keep those people engaged and moving along through your funnel, and that's a challenge. But you're right, when you talk about the, for example, the changes in the Affordable Care Act. It may show up soon. People are going to have lots and lots of questions about what that's going to mean for them and therefore, content marketers or marketers are going to be busy answering those questions. Or at least there's an opportunity there for them to do that.

David: Right. And it's not always going to be directly tied into that company's product or service. In a lot of cases, it will be, but if you can just give somebody a new perspective on what this means to that industry or that niche within the industry. As you said, people are doing their research online. They're going to see that, they're going to find that, and they're going to learn more about you. And then when it comes time for them to start looking for a product or a service that you provide, they're going to be aware of what you have.

Chris: Right. And that really is, that's the essence of content marketing right there is to...

David: Yeah, absolutely.

Chris: Provide valuable content unrelated to your product to draw them into your ecosystem, get them into your funnel, interested in what you have to say, your point of view. And then move them along if they're the right people, to buying your product.

David: Yep, absolutely.

Chris: Let's talk a little bit more about...getting down to making the content. So I think good content creation if we're smart about it, makes the most out of existing resources. So you and I came up with the idea for this podcast. And we already have a plan for how we're going to repurpose this. This is a bit of a teaser because you're going to hear a little bit more about what we're doing with that down the road. This is a kind of partnership here between David and I creating this, but also you should be thinking if your own company who else can help you create content. What are your thoughts on that, David?

David: Yeah, well, again, this is another point that I've said, you know, in conversations with you. And I tell this to clients existing and prospects that I think just the biggest thing is any idea that you hear, whether it's from your own brain or somebody else's, needs to be written down or recorded. And that's kind of the simplest version of what you're describing here, finding ways to repurpose content and then finding people to help you create content. So a simple example of this is just as I start to write articles for people or for myself, it's not always just sitting down for a two or three-hour block and cranking something out. It'll be writing out bullet points as I think about them during the week. And then when it comes time to fill those out, well those are headings. It's a lot easier when you already have several hundred words of just kind of miscellaneous ideas to fit them back together. That's all repurposing is and so it's just depending on the scale. If you have a piece of content that's fully polished, you know, what can you do with that and find other ways to take advantage of it. But I think the big things are, again, to be taking advantage of every idea that's out there and that means really bringing people in in partnerships.

As you said, this is a partnership that you and I have. Essentially all we're doing is bouncing ideas around. And we've been talking quite a bit over the last couple of years just exchanging ideas about stuff we have some common interest. That's morphed into this partnership where we found the ability to create hopefully useful content for your audience just by recording these calls and throwing ideas around. But even within your organization. For Marcom managers, people on that side of the business, make sure you are talking to your R&D scientists, your executives, and taking advantage of all the ideas that they have because that's repurposing. You're just repurposing somebody else's brain and you're engaging other people. You're engaging other people in the content creation process. And you're giving everybody a stake in what your marketing department is building.

Chris: Exactly. And don't forget the sales people and ideally customers, but writing down

all those ideas and getting them in front of you and then maybe brainstorming with your team starting with those ideas, what else can you do with them and how do they fit together. Hopefully, they spark other ideas. I mean if we're doing a full-on content strategy, if I'm doing that for someone, the first day is spent figuring out what questions customers have for example and really flushing out all the things you could be talking about, from all the topics that just might cross their mind around...so for example, going back to the Affordable Care Act for example as something that your product may not fit with, but the people that you're selling to care about. That kind of content and then all the content that...now we're getting down when you get to the R&D people, how does your product work and how did they come up with this idea? What's different about it and so on? But yeah, writing down all those ideas and keeping them is a great way to make sure you always have something to talk about. I encourage people to think about it a little bit more strategically about all the things that you should be talking about. And then keep track of those ideas and see where they fit in or something sparks an angle on something for example.

David: Yeah, I think that last thing you said is really important. It hits home with me because I'll start thinking about different ideas and just grabbing them out of thin air and I want to go after whatever's in front of me. I suffer from a severe case of shiny object syndrome and that's not going to help anybody, but that doesn't mean those ideas aren't potentially useful. There's a huge difference between collecting ideas and implementing them. And so, once you have a good strategy in place, you can compare each of those ideas as you said and see if and how it fits in with everything else. And I guess then on the other side of things, once you do have the content or even when you do have the ideas, it comes down to being a ruthless editor. And so being willing to say, no matter how much somebody in your organization really, really wants to talk about whatever we're talking about, Affordable Care Act or some issue surrounding reimbursement, well, they may love that idea, but if it has nothing to do with your overall strategy, then you have to say no to it and you've got to be able to get things down. I mean once we finish recording this call, you're going to go back and cut out some of the stammering and the uhms and the ahs and the dead space. You can't just put everything out there freeform and expect it to land well.

Chris: I love what you said there, knowing what to say no to is the essence of strategy.

David: Yeah.

Chris: You can get into a lot of trouble by saying yes to everything and I've talked about this. I don't know if I've talked about it on the podcast before, but I've certainly, I think I've talked about it in my blog. Product managers and others will come up with many, many good ideas for a piece of content. Every one of them is valid, but if it doesn't fit into the thing you're trying to do, it's a lot of work for little result. So it's important to think about how all of those things fit together. Maybe no doesn't mean no forever. It might mean no for right now. We'll get to that. But I do think it's important to focus your content because it takes a lot of content just to drive home a single story. One more thing that's an outlier isn't really helping anybody.

David: Yeah, and one more thing on that that just came to mind is it's important...this may sound obvious, but what the heck. You have to make sure that everybody involved understands what that strategy is so that they can understand why you're saying no or why their idea didn't get implemented. It's one thing to call somebody up and say, "Okay. I need you to write a blog post on this." In some cases, that may be it. That's like the parent saying stop before their kid runs out in the middle of the street. You don't have time to explain why. We just need this now. Whatever. Do it. But in general, I think it's important to let everybody know what the strategy is so that they can kind of have a better feel. Again, this goes back to them having a buy in and having a stake in what's going on. and you're going to get a lot more traction I think if everybody is at least aware of what you're trying to do. So just be open with the people that you're talking to whether it's people within your organization or subcontractors or whoever. Let them know what the goal is so that they can be thinking about how to frame things for the most impact.

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great point. It may be obvious, but it's definitely worth repeating that. People need to understand what you're trying to accomplish. When you say that the thing we're not going to make doesn't fit in with that it makes sense. There is something on the other side of that that we feel is worth doing. And that's why we're making this choice. Since we're talking about other resources for creating content, I want people to not overlook the power of curating content. There is a lot of content out in the world, and some people would argue that we're contributing to a bigger problem by making more of it. If you feel that way or even if you don't feel that way, you can do people a big favorite by gathering up content that would be interesting to your audience that other people have written, and then put your spin on it, package it up. You save them the time of

looking up at multiple different sources and bring it together, and put your point of view on it, and use that to build your audience. I mean there are plenty of great websites that do nothing but curate other people's content in a form that brings together. And curation doesn't mean just collection, it means collection and editing and making sure you're serving up only the very best. And that's where you provide value to your audience.

David: Yeah, there are a number of really impressive examples of this that I think especially us in the life sciences and healthcare industries can take advantage of. One example of this is Stat News, that's S-T-A-T News and they're a full-on journalism outfit. They've got a group that does a lot of original reporting as well as curation. They've got a fantastic podcast, but they send out a daily digest, often times an afternoon digest, and some of it is original stuff, and as I said other times it's curated. They'll highlight different studies from medical journals or things coming out from the government, interesting things down in Florida for example with Zika virus. Local news about what's going on there and they tie it all together in this big picture way so we can understand what does Zika mean for the community and reproductive issues on kind of a personal, social level. But then also they tie it back into gene editing because we're looking at modifying mosquitos with crisper in order to combat the virus. Things like that. That's one example of I think what you are talking about. You know, putting kind of their own spin on it. These are examples of really high-level curation. They're putting a lot of resources into this. It can be pretty simple. It can be as simple as just setting up a good, a couple of good Twitter searches so that you're alerted to whatever topic that you're interested in.

Chris: I love that idea. And those are, as you say, full blown media organizations. But of the content marketing people that I follow, so Joe Pulizzi, Robert Rose, Brian Clark, they're constantly talking about media and essentially becoming a media company within your own company. They're often even talking about large companies buying media companies to do that. But even a small team can think about it. You don't need to publish at the frequency or the amount and quantity, but you can publish for some frequency. And as you say, setting up the right alert Twitter searches can bring that news into your feed and you find what's most relevant, most well-written, and interesting for your audience. There's value there.

David: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, so you're right. Another one I just thought of is SynBioBeta over in the synthetic biology space. They do the same thing where they've got a weekly digest

that is always beautifully done and they have a combination of original blogging, and they're using primarily undergrad and grad students with a few professional journalists kind of overseeing it. But essentially interns create this content and curate it. So it doesn't have to be a massive, full-on journalistic effort or like you were describing.

Chris: Yeah, so that can be done. Any other thoughts on other sources of content? You know, people are struggling to make a lot?

David: Well, I think one of the things that you've done really well, Chris, is implementing ideas from outside the Life Sciences industry. And so...I'm trying to think how to tie this in for Life Science Marketer specifically, but in your case, you're taking ideas, tools, strategies from people like the Content Marketing Institute and figuring out how those tie back into marketing mass spec devices and PCR reagents. It's not a direct correlation. It's not things that we would necessarily think about immediately to go out and look elsewhere. But you've done that really well finding...and being able to integrate ideas from slightly outside our specific industry. I guess I don't know what this would look like specifically for somebody. You're going to have to kind of think about it and do your own homework, but find ideas that are way out there and think about how you can implement them and new things to try.

Maybe an example of this, again it's kind of the far extreme, but in working on the project, the podcast repurposing project that you and I have been doing. Last week I was reviewing the interview you did with Joanna Rudnick from the Lioness Group and the documentary film making that she produced for GE, especially the western blotting and people can go check that out, that interview as well as the ad. It's kind of a weird idea, this combination of art and science and nature photography. And I think it's Ireland and automated western blotting products. But they went out and they figured out his unique way to approach things and found a real tie-in between those topics to make a really engaging piece of content. So long way of saying just be willing to try new, random, strange ideas, and ideas for content can come from anywhere as we've already said and the same thing as far as ideas for how to implement them.

Chris: That was a very interesting story and her film is different than what you would typically see in our industry. I think the Linus Group did a great job of going out and finding someone like Joanna to create that kind of content. Other interviewees on the podcast have

suggested the very same thing. I think David Salmon, who was at Roche and is now in Abbott suggested how he's looking outside the life sciences mostly to tech companies to look for marketers. Hrisi Samartzidou is doing the same thing, trying to bring in new skills in content marketing. So there are a number of people in our industry who I think are very forward thinking who are looking for new kinds of skills and new ideas, and that doesn't mean that people inside the industry can't look outside at what others are doing and make something great happen.

David: Yeah. And I guess one other thing that I would suggest, I had a quick conversation on this the day before we recorded this podcast. Off the record was personal experience and anecdotes. You may have something that ties in. It may not have anything to do specifically with using that product but just something that ties into the subject. And always be looking for those things too because those are ideas for content. People love a story and use those personal events as ways to kind of introduce a subject.

Chris: I love it. Well, David, thank you again for joining us on the podcast. I'm looking forward to doing more of these. I want to make sure everybody who enjoyed this gets on the mailing list because in case this podcast moves to another channel, shall we say, or becomes a separate podcast, the best place to make sure you know if that happens is lifesciencemarketingradio.com/lsmr. You sign up to the list there. Then if something changes or we have some special announcements, which I think you'll be interested in in the future, you will be notified. Thanks, everybody. Thanks again, David.

David: You bet.

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