

5 Easy Tips for Using Student Research to Improve Your Content Strategy



Introduction

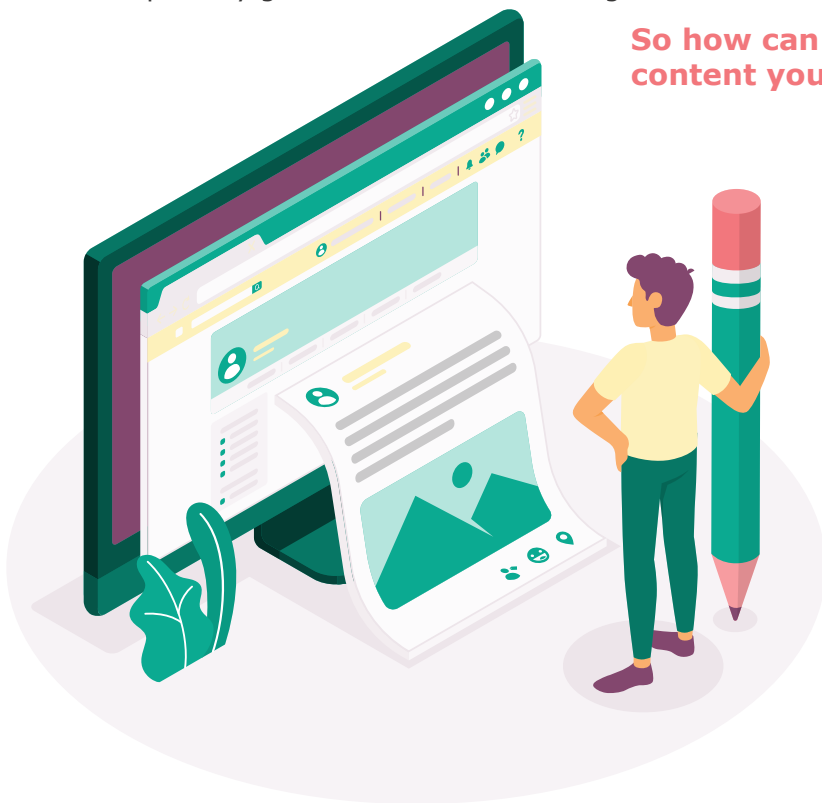
Content. Everyone needs it. Many are creating it. With 59% of 18-25 year olds spending 3+ hours each day on social media absorbing content, higher education institutions most certainly should be creating and distributing it.

But few are seeing what many view as “success” with only 1.3% of published content generating 75% of overall social shares ¹. And let’s face it, with upwards of 4.6 million pieces of content being produced daily, your odds of going ‘viral’ are pretty low. While seeing your blog, post, or video ‘break the internet’ might be the golden goose, it’s not a realistic measurement of effectiveness when it comes to determining success. Reaching prospective students with a piece of content at the right point in their journey so they engage with it is really the end game in content marketing - and that's what we’re all looking for, isn’t it?

This seems like an obvious statement, and it is -- 82% of marketing execs are actively investing in content creation. Even better news, 63% of marketers report having increased budgets in 2021 and plan to allocate 26% of that budget to content creation.² But half of marketers say that their biggest challenge in content marketing is creating content that generates quality leads or attracts more traffic to their website, which are also noted as their primary goals of content marketing.

So how can you improve the effectiveness of the content you are producing?

Sure, there is tons of content out there with research to support the best tactics to increase the ROI of your content (we get the irony of this statement) – whether to produce blogs or video, how to distribute the content and even which day of the week to post it. But how much research have you done to understand exactly what to say? Google isn’t going to tell you exactly what challenges your customers are looking to overcome, what interests them about your brand, and even, what interests them about your competitors. It’s the answers to these sorts of questions that really get to the heart of what your prospects and students want to hear and read about.



Checking in after the pandemic

Now, you may think you know your target audience inside and out at this point – you’ve done market research in the past. But there’s no question that 2020 was a year of outstanding change – and these changes gave students a whole new set of challenges they need solutions for. Changes that affected how, where, and why they learned about prospective institutions, consumed their content, and ultimately, made enrollment decisions. Only 16% of US online users believe that they will revert to a pre-pandemic sense of normalcy after the pandemic subsides, and 75% say that the pandemic and related crises will drive long-term changes in their behaviors and preferences ⁴. People are making choices very differently than the way they were in 2019 and if you don’t plan to ask your students what is important to them in this changing world, how do you plan to effectively communicate to them with the messages they want/ need to hear? And even more important, how can you ensure that they will choose you? **Now more than ever it’s time to rethink what it means to influence choice -- and the best way to do that is to let your students and prospects tell you what they want, and then act on it.**

We know. Even though you might have an increased marketing budget, those budgets are still tight. There’s lots to do and the budget never seems to be enough – especially when it comes to developing quality, engaging content. Which is why it’s extremely important to stay laser-focused on what is important to your students and why they make the choices that they make. After all, irrelevant content can end a relationship before it even begins.

Research that helps you understand the choices your prospective students make doesn’t have to be expensive or take a lot of time – especially when working with the right [market research partner](#). The learnings you will get about how students perceive your institution, what attributes are important to them, which are not, and how they view other institutions, will give you invaluable insights that guide the relevant, effective content they need and want to engage with. You can’t afford NOT to do it.

Performing ongoing research to inform the content you create eliminates the guesswork, enabling marketers and copywriters to produce content that answers the exact questions your target audience has about your institution so it’s easier for them to choose you.

Here are 5 easy ways you can gather research to produce relevant content that will make your brand your customer’s number one choice.

1. Ask your audience

Yes, conducting interviews takes time. But there is no better way to get the answers and insights you need than straight from the horse's mouth. You don't have to perform 100s of interviews to get great feedback – even just ten interviews will give some great feedback. Be sure you are engaging with qualified interviewees and ask open-ended questions that are short and focused. This is also a fantastic way to build and strengthen your relationship with your students – interviews allow them to feel heard. And bonus points if you make them feel listened to by using their feedback to make changes. Talk about building loyalty and advocacy!

Need sample question ideas? Use a mix of direct and indirect questions.

- What are you hoping to achieve in your time here?
- What was an obstacle that almost prevented you from enrolling?
- What sort of kind of content would you like to see more of?
- What is the main reason you'd recommend us to other prospective students?

Pro tip: Using a third party to perform the interviews will give you the honest answers your students may not share if speaking directly with someone from your institution. Record the interview so you have a transcript of the conversation.

2. Send a survey

This is perhaps the easiest way to get feedback. But it's important to remember that your students are busy, and more than half won't spend more than three minutes on your survey. Surveys should be short, focused, and a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions. If you are emailing your survey, remember email best practices to be sure to get opens and engagement with your survey.

Pro tip: Working with a market research service company will ensure that you get the number of responses you need from a qualified audience.



3. Scope out the competition

Peruse other university and college social pages to see what sorts of content they are posting and getting the most engagement with. You can even go a step deeper and see what their followers are following, posting, or tweeting – this will give you some info as to what sorts of topics they are interested in. Be sure to pay attention to the formats (video, static posts, statistics, guest posters) that get high engagement too!

Pro tip: Check out the lowest performing content also, so you don't waste time and energy on topics your students and prospects don't want to read about.

4. Check out comments and reviews sections

Check out popular higher education blogs, publications, and websites' comments and reviews sections. This can be a highly insightful exercise as to how students feel about you and other schools – both the good and the bad – since it is an unprovoked area where people give honest opinions. Oftentimes, students will write about their challenges and pain points in detail – now it's up to you to create content that shows how your institution addresses those concerns.

Pro tip: Stay away from fake reviews and those that seem to be sponsored. More often, it's the middle-of-the-road reviews that are real – and you can get the most insight from.



5. Google it!

Search the keywords related to higher education and scroll the related terms that pop up in the search bar. This will give you a sense of what other information people are looking for when searching for college information. Make sure you take a peek at the questions that populate, these are great idea-starters for content. While googling you'll likely come across some articles including industry trends and stats – these are also a great source of inspiration. For example, before writing this piece, I stumbled across a stat that only 42% of marketers believe they are effective at content marketing⁵ which identified an opportunity to write a piece about how research can improve your content strategy! Addressing gaps in industry trends makes for consumable content.

Pro tip: It's easy to go down a rabbit hole with this one. While no idea is a bad idea in the brainstorming phase of content development, be sure to gut-check that the topics you find during this task are focused on your objectives. More general content is great to provide to your students as a glimpse into your institution's personality but remember that you want them to see you as an expert in the information you give them.



Conclusion

In conclusion, performing research to inform your content strategy or development doesn't have to be complicated or cost an arm and a leg – so there are no excuses to not explore your prospective and current student's interests on an ongoing basis. The end result is relevant, effective content that students actually want to engage with – positioning your institution as their first choice in a higher education.

If you're looking to better understand your prospective students and why they choose to engage with the content they do, please reach out to Vennli for information on how we can help. We have years of experience helping our client partners build deeper relationships with their customers and increasing revenue. We look forward to speaking with you!

SOURCES:

- (1) backlinko.com/content-study and BuzzSumo 2019
- (2) Hubspot "Not Another State of Marketing Report" 2021
- (3) semrush.com/blog/content-marketing-statistics/ Jan 2021
- (4) "The Consumer Behaviors That Will Endure After The Pandemic", Forrester March 2021
- (5) neilpatel.com/blog/38-content-marketing-stats-that-every-marketer-needs-to-know/

We Help You Win.

We work with you to deliver market research insights and innovative strategies to beat the competition, measure loyalty, identify your most profitable segments, communicate brand value, identify the ideal pricing strategy, differentiate offerings and services, and win in the workplace.



Creative Testing

Communicate more effectively by testing creatives, including messages, images, and videos, that highlight your competitive advantages by understanding what resonates with and influences decision-making.

Satisfaction & Segmentation Analysis

Identify how best to improve so you have strong advocates for your brand and organization. Drive growth by segmenting your audience and finding the most effective ways to reach them.

Sales Effectiveness

Discover how to “win” at each stage of the buying process, grow your brand, increase market share, and ultimately earn new business on the right terms and in the right timeframe.

Enrollment Analysis & Elevation

Identify student enrollment trends, where you are resonating with prospective students, and how to capitalize on untapped opportunities.

Competitive Positioning

Visualize the competitive landscape from your customers’ point of view so you can set your brand and organization apart and focus resources to achieve the greatest impact.

Optimal Pricing Analysis

Examine and evaluate what price customers are willing to pay for a product or service, including what price is too high to even consider and what price is so low customers would question the quality.

Products & Services Development

Learn what features and benefits your customers value most, capture unique points of difference, and discover emerging unmet needs in the market.

Employee Engagement

Understand how committed your employees are to the values and ideals of your organization, what motivates them, and where their priorities reside regarding their own well-being.

Want to learn how customer choice can inform content development?

See how Vennli can help you create the most effective content and messaging to deliver to the right people at the right time. Sign up for a free consultation today and see how you can improve your content marketing strategy.

[Improve Your Content Strategy](#)

Contact Information

105 E. Jefferson, Suite 500
South Bend, Indiana 46601

Phone: (574) 344.2022
Fax: (574) 968.8240

Email: support@vennli.com