Content Strategy Trends
By Karyn Snyder

As we approach the final Quarter of 2015, I thought it would be interesting to review predictions that had been made as hot trends for Content Strategy in 2015 to see how accurate they were. My first installment is from SmallBizTrends, entitled "7 Hot Trends Defining Your Content Strategy." I like reviewing information about Small Business as I find these companies are often more nimble and willing to act upon the innovative recommendations. They push the envelope to remain competitive and find creative ways to stretch their budgets. Implementing a strategic approach to content is something even a small business can easily invest in. So here are some of my thoughts on these topics.

Buyer Personas

I was excited to see this mentioned. In the past, I worked as a Consultant for a software company that specialized in providing personalized website experiences through their solutions. We spent much time with clients defining Personas and developing customized experiences for each. Many clients I have worked with since have been focused simply on achieving particular business goals without regard to tailoring their solutions to particular types of users. They often seek a transactional approach rather than a user-centered experience. It has been a tough-sell in some cases, but I am hoping it will become "trendy" again to convince clients to recognize that they should properly target content to their varied users. A recent project for TeachforAmerica.org allowed me an opportunity to propose a Content Strategy that really spoke to the Candidates, Teachers, Alumni, Donors and other interested parties in a meaningful way.

The Rise of Adaptive Content

While most of the clients I have worked with in recent years don't employ robust personalization engines, some have seen the value in developing targeted content for segmented users and trying to entice them with the correct CTAs. Others have had a single-minded focus on a particular type of user they want to or think they attract, rather than the diverse audience that actually visits their sites with varied purposes in mind. It's a wonderful thing when you can develop content for different personas and demonstrate the value of that investment with analytics indicating better user engagement. Users want a personalized experience that speaks to their motivations.

Expansive Content Platforms

I still see a gap here with many clients and organizations, in general. I think it is easier to bridge that gap within smaller organizations where an individual or small group of employees can align all of the media outputs. However, in larger ones it seems that there are too many departments working in a vacuum. Print, web, social media, PR, sales and marketing materials don't always have the same focus. Oftentimes, it's a disjointed communications effort that is difficult to

overcome if it has become the cultural norm in an organization. A cohesive messaging strategy across all media should be the goal.

Mobile Content

Most organizations understand that much of their traffic is now coming from mobile devices. Most are optimizing the user interface to adapt to that. I am not sure their Content Strategy always follows suit. Information presented on a mobile device should be concise. It really should be edited in a way that breaks up the points into small, digestible sections or bulleted points. The proper IA can enable the content to be published to different platforms in a meaningful way. Ample Visual Content This is one area I struggle with. While I admire a beautiful User Interface (which can only enhance the content that lies within), I find that some sites overdo their visual content. There is nothing more annoying than a video pre-roll when you just want a simple piece of information. Some sites are jarring to view in an effort to be edgy. Less is more. However, I do think that this is a trend that is not going away as people increasingly turn to the web for entertainment with streaming media rather than traditional TV.

Website Content Optimization

I think both small and large organizations alike understand the value of Website Content Optimization and have embraced Best Practices when it comes to SEO, I am not as sure that they know what a clear CTA is. They often invest in drawing users to their site with improved keywords, only to find out that the user is not quite sure what to do when they arrive. Spending money to drive traffic to a site is of little value if the users are confused by the content and UX.

Going Inbound

Inbound Marketing is an extremely valuable tool, especially to small businesses. Promoting a company through blogs, podcasts, white papers, eNewsletters and eBooks is an extremely affordable option. It also serves to build a relationship with a customer base by offering information to a potential client and showcasing what the company can offer in terms of products and services. When done properly, the organization's culture and personality shine through their content and convert visitors to clients. So, in conclusion, I do believe that we have seen most of these trends at work in our industry. We still need to be cognizant of our clients' particular needs and not propose a strategy just because it is trendy. However, it is important to stay abreast of these developments and employ the most useful ones to our work. I look forward to blogging again about Content Strategy.