B2B RESEARCH CONTENT:

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO DOING IT YOURSELF

How to use research to create compelling content that will attract and engage your audience

Equinet
THE INBOUND
AGENCY

INTRODUCTION

Content comes in various formats; how to's, guides, quick tips, roundups, infographics, eBooks, whitepapers. But, research is consistently hailed as the most effective form of content, as proven in studies by CMI, Clutch and Ascend2, to name a few.

We're not talking about some online searching to build a case for a new blog post. We're talking original, primary research - with your name on it. It's speaking to real people and capturing insights that will interest, inspire and attract your target audience.

Of course, it does involve more work than creating a blog post or eBook, where in comparison, the work required before you hit the publish button is minimal. But in a world where people are inundated with information, your content needs to be able to stand above the noise, and research content can do this. It can be a real opportunity to set your company apart.

You may choose to recruit the services of a market research company, or a marketing agency to do the research for you. But doing it yourself is not as hard as you might think, and in this eBook, we show you how.

Specifically, this eBook provides you with a detailed guide of how to conduct your own research and turn it into compelling and engaging content.

We will cover:

- The case for research content
- An overview of research methodologies
- 7 steps to doing your own research
- Turning research into engaging content

THE CASE FOR RESEARCH CONTENT

When done well, original research can garner more shares and links than any other form of content. And it's hardly surprising. Research that provides answers to unanswered questions on a topic interesting and relevant to your audience, will undoubtedly captivate them.

Research provides the ultimate story. It's tangible, persuasive and inspiring. It gives an insight into what's happening at a specific point in time, and it can be revisited over and again. Furthermore, you can continue to grip your audience with your story by repeating and sharing new research year on year.

For a B2B content marketer, sharing new, original research demonstrates thought leadership, and positions you as experts in your field, helping you build trust and credibility with your prospective buyers. It can also help you better understand your audience; their behaviours, frustrations, challenges, and ambitions. Moreover, the task of carrying out research involves connecting with your audience, so you can increase your outreach and grow your network at the same time.

In the inbound and content marketing industry, the likes of the **Content Marketing Institute** and **Hubspot** have established themselves as go to sources for industry research. They have been publishing annual reports every year for the best part of a decade, and articles discussing industry trends often cite data from their reports. But it's not only big corporations with colossal resources who are doing it. **Orbit Media Studios's** research on blogging trends for example, has in just a few short years, become a much-anticipated source for information about the state of blogging and content marketing.

Any business in any industry can use research to demonstrate their expertise. And it doesn't have to be large scale. Just one nugget of insight that strikes a chord with your target audience can propel you to the forefront and position you at the centre of the conversation.

Now we've made the case for creating original research content, hopefully you're compelled to read on. In the next two sections we establish the main types of research, and then provide a step-by-step guide to doing it yourself.

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AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Primary research can be broadly split into two methodologies: quantitative research, and qualitative research.

Quantitative research is used to measure, or 'quantify', behaviours, attitudes, opinions and other defined variables, to produce numerical statistics that can be transferred into useable statistics. Surveys are the most common way of collecting quantitative data. Whether conducted online, by phone, or in person, surveys ask the same questions in a structured format to a large number of people.

Quantitative research is used to uncover trends in thoughts, behaviours, and opinions, and the reasons behind them. In other words, it explores not just what people think, but why they think it. It does not involve numbers or numerical data. Data is typically collected by talking to people in one-to-one interviews (face-to-face or over the phone), focus groups, or discussion groups hosted online.

So which is best when using research for content?

Your research content needs to attract and engage your customers and prospects. As a result, quantitative research is often the best methodology to use. It can measure patterns and trends and generate statistics on previously unknown phenomena. And statistics are clear, tangible, and memorable - and will create an impact with your audience.

Quantitative research, specifically online surveys, allows you to reach out to a large number of people. And the more people you can base your research findings on, the more powerful it becomes. Online surveys are also relatively easy to administer in comparison to qualitative research.

While not typically used to create research content, there is a great deal of potential for qualitative research to be leveraged in other areas of B2B marketing. For instance it can be used to help shape buyer personas, to test new products, concepts and propositions, and evaluate brand perceptions, or promotional materials.

With this in mind, we have focused the following section of this eBook on how to conduct research using a quantitative online survey methodology.

7 STEPS TO DOING YOUR OWN RESEARCH

The following seven steps will provide you with a clear framework for conducting your own research.

1 Define your focus

Your first step is to determine the focus of your research. You may already have an idea or two up your sleeve. Perhaps you have burning questions about your industry that you want to answer.

If you haven't, look at what's currently being talked about in your industry. How can you contribute to the conversation? What are the challenges people are facing? Are there any trends emerging? Remember that content marketing is all about helping your prospects and customers, and this is what your research needs to do.

Andy Crestodina at Orbit Media states "In every industry there are common statements. But they aren't backed up with data. We call these gaps 'missing stats' and they are ripe for research. If you can find this gap in your industry and produce the research that fills it, you'll have something truly share-worthy, link-worthy and even press worthy."

Your goal is to find the gap that will bring something new to the conversation and in doing so, encourage your target audience to connect with you.

2 Set clear objectives

Once you've identified a topic, it's a good idea to set clear objectives to help maintain your focus.

First, set a primary objective summarising the main aim of your research - what you want to learn. For example, your primary objective might be "To identify current trends in outsourcing manufacturing", or "To explore the buyer's journey when choosing a new service provider".

In addition, set several specific research objectives. These should indicate the topics or issues the research will investigate to achieve the primary objective. They will help you to generate questions to ask your respondents, and keep you on track with your overall goal. For instance, in the case of exploring the buyer's journey, specific objectives may be 'To identify the needs, behaviours and decisions made at each stage of the journey', 'To identify key moments of truth' and 'To identify what factors are important from a provider'.

Throughout the research project lifecycle, always keep your objectives in mind to keep your focus.

3   Define your sample

When it comes to who answers your survey, ask yourself: who will be the most relevant people to speak to? Who will have the most knowledge about what you want to understand? For example, if the focus of your research is exploring IT purchasing trends, you'll want to target IT Managers.

When it comes to how many people you should speak to, naturally, if you're putting your research out to the world, then the bigger number, the better. Research based on a larger sample size is more credible and reliable, and will hold up better to scrutiny. If your research identifies an interesting new trend, but is only based on the behaviour of 20 people, it won't have the desired impact.

Be aware that for data to be statistically reliable, a minimum sample size of 100 people is required. And if you want to be able to break down your respondents to compare data of two different groups, you'll need at least double this amount.

4   Write your survey questions

When starting the survey writing process, think about what questions you need to ask in order to answer your objectives. It may be tempting to unload all your burning questions and call it a day. But a better approach is to think about your questions from the viewpoint of what you want to learn. This way you will ensure information you collect will be meaningful.

Surveys are not just about yes and no questions. There are lots of question types you can use which will impact on the answers you get and the analysis you can do.

Multiple choice questions: Multiple choice questions have a fixed list of answers for respondents to choose from. You can add as many answers as you want. Respondents either select only one answer from the list (single response) or as many answers as they like (multi response).

Single response example: *In which country do you live? Select one from the following: England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Northern Ireland*

Multi response example: *Which type of meats do you like? Select all that apply: Beef, Pork, Chicken, Fish, Duck, Other, None*

Rating scales: With rating scale questions the respondent selects a single rating along an equally spaced scale of possible choices. These questions give you a more precise measure of people's thoughts than a yes/no or multiple choice question. Typically a scale of 1-5 or 1-7 is used.

Example: *On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the quality of the product? 1 - very high quality, 2 - high quality, 3 - neither high nor low quality, 4 - low quality, 5 - very low quality*

Open-ended questions: Open-ended questions require respondents to type their answer into a comment box. No pre-set answer options are given, allowing for spontaneous responses to be captured. You may use an open-ended question to follow up on an earlier question. For instance if you asked the rating scale example question above, you might follow up with 'Please tell us why you said the product had a very high quality'.

When it comes to survey length, it's important to find the right balance between asking enough questions to capture everything you need, but not making it so long that your respondents lose attention. The 'sweet spot' is generally considered to be around 10 minutes.

Once you have written your survey questions, you need to create the survey online.

Survey writing tips

DO

- **Keep it simple** - ask clear, straightforward questions

- **Avoid jargon** - speak in the language of those completing the survey

- **Use a mix of questions** - e.g. multiple choice, rating scale, and ideally a couple of open-ends where a deeper or spontaneous response may be useful

- **Be specific** - e.g. if you are asking how regularly they do something, explain what you mean by 'regularly' - multiple times a day, a few times a week?

- **Order your questions so they make sense to the respondent** - generally a funnel approach is advised, with broad and general questions first then more specific questions asked later

DON'T

- **Ask more than one thing in one question -** e.g. 'Which method of communication do you prefer and use most often?' may be hard to answer - the one they use most often may not also be the one they prefer

- **Ask leading questions** - avoid asserting your own opinion into the question, and keep the tone balanced so respondents don't feel directed to a particular response

- **Force an answer** - think carefully about your answers, e.g. if asking a simple yes/no question, do you need a 'don't know' option?

5 Create your survey

There are plenty of online platforms that allow you to create and publish online surveys. SurveyMonkey and SurveyGizmo are just two examples. All you need to do is sign up - for free - and follow the instructions to create your survey, where you can add your questions.

It's crucial your survey is easy and convenient for respondents to complete. You therefore want to choose a platform that allows them to complete the survey on any device. Most are fully optimised for mobile and tablet, and across operating systems, but it's worth checking before you commit. Some tools, like SurveyMonkey, even allow respondents to complete the survey through a mobile app.

Should you wish to do so, most platforms will allow you to customise the survey with your company logo and branding. This will make the survey look credible to your customers, and help create awareness of your company amongst your prospects.

Once you have created your survey, it's always worthwhile testing it. Ask other people in your business to complete it as though they are a respondent. Ask them how long it took, and whether any questions were confusing. Any issues can then be ironed out before you launch the survey.

The next step is to share your survey with your intended respondents.

6 Get your target market to complete your survey

The most obvious source to recruit from will be your database of customers and prospects. As courtesy, it's a good idea to give them a heads up by emailing to say you'll be asking them to take part in research. This will give them a chance to opt out if they wish to. You can then follow up by sending them a further email with the survey link. You could also add the link to the bottom of your newsletters as a further reminder.

In addition, you may want to share your survey more widely to reach out to people whose details you don't yet have, by adding it as a call to action on your site, or sharing it on social media.

You may however consider using a panel. A panel is comprised of people who have expressed willingness to take part in research surveys or qualitative feedback sessions. SSI have one of the largest dedicated B2B panels, with access to over 1.5 million B2B decision makers globally, across a wide range of industries. You give the panel provider a criteria of people you want to target, such as 'IT decision makers in the professional services industry'. They then send your survey out on your behalf to people who fit this criteria.

It's worth being aware that many panel providers also offer full service packages, where they script and host the survey for you. This way you don't have to use a survey platform to create it yourself. This can be costly, but is a good option if you want to relieve some of the impact on internal resources.

7 Analyse the data and compile a research report

Once you are happy with the number of people that have completed your survey, you can start analysing the responses and identifying statistics.

Platforms like SurveyMonkey and SurveyGizmo make it really easy for you to see survey responses. They allow you to generate reports displaying the research statistics at a click of a button. Should you wish to do further analysis, you can also download Excel files with all the data.

You should culminate your findings into a research report. This should tell the story of your research and centre around the key statistics of interest to your audience. Make sure you look back to your research objectives and address these in your report. Keep it clear and concise. And use charts and images as well as text to help bring the research to life.

Now you have collected your data and pulled it together into a research report, you can use it to generate multiple pieces of content. In the next section we provide ideas on how to do this.

> *Your goal is to find the gap that will bring something new to the conversation and in doing so, encourage your target audience to connect with you.*

TURNING YOUR RESEARCH INTO ENGAGING CONTENT

The greatest thing about having your own piece of research is that you can package it up in lots of different ways. You can repurpose your research into multiple pieces of content - however you like, for as long as you like.

Below are just some ideas of how you can package your research into content.

Blogs: Your research will give you lots of material for blog posts. Take an element of the research, a key finding, and discuss what it means for your industry. Provide a link to the landing page to download the full report as a CTA at the bottom of the blog post.

Social media posts: Share a key finding from the research on social media, ideally alongside an image of a bar or pie chart to make it more impactful. Link the post back to the landing page of the full research report, or to a blog article discussing the finding in more depth.

Infographics: Make your research instantly more impactful and digestible by creating an infographic and sharing it on your social platforms.

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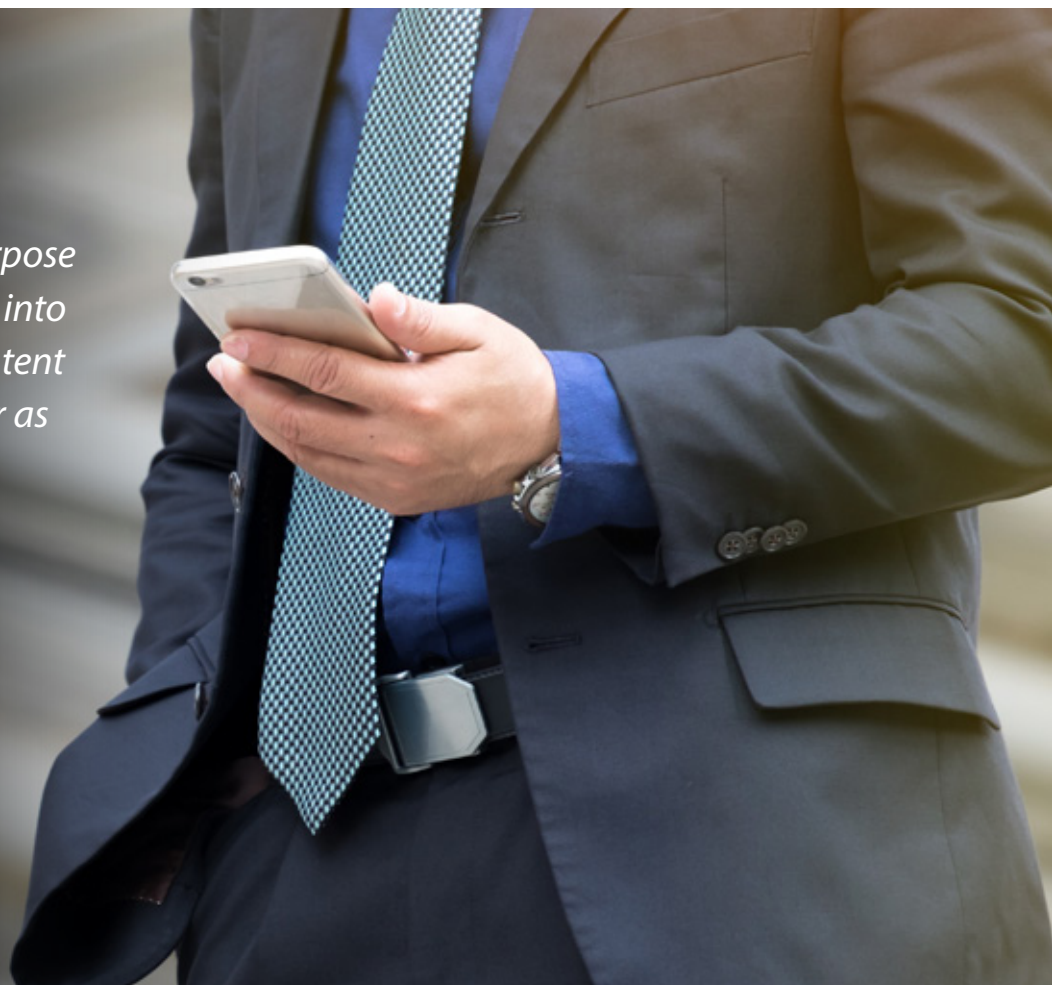
Whitepapers: Whitepapers or eBooks: Use a key point from your research to anchor a whitepaper or eBook offering tips and strategies on a topic in your area of expertise.

Videos and vlogs: Provide videos and vlogs for those who would prefer to see a visual summary rather than read a report. You could create a long version that tells the full research story, and a shorter version with key highlights and a CTA to download the full report.

Webinars: Use the research to identify a problem or opportunity and have experts within your company provide advice on the topic.

Press and blogger coverage: Original, independent research on important industry topics may have potential to feature in marketing and business media. Getting the media to engage with your research will allow it to reach a wider audience.

Once you have developed the content, how it's promoted and distributed can make or break it's impact. So it's important to plan an effective promotion strategy.

CONCLUSION

You now have a step-by-step guide for conducting research for your business, and turning it into content that will attract visitors and generate leads.

Doing your own research gives you an opportunity to make noise in your industry and position yourselves as thought-leaders, and as a point of authority and knowledge.

Now you need to think about what research your business could do that will interest, inspire, and help your target audience. And once you've done your research and repurposed it into multiple pieces of content, you'll need to think about how you share it to ensure you get maximum results from your efforts.

Equinet Media are a specialist inbound marketing agency operating in the manufacturing, professional services and technology sectors. We lead with strategy before tactics and deliver everything we do through an agile process. If we can help you with any aspects of your inbound activity, or if you want to discuss anything in this eBook, set up a consultation **here.**

NEXT STEPS:
EXPLORE THE INBOUND METHODOLOGY

Inbound marketing is fuelled by educational content that attracts, informative content that converts, and remarkable content that nurtures. In this eBook, you will discover the philosophy and methodology of inbound, and the sales and marketing tools HubSpot offers to help you attract visitors, win customers and monitor your success.

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