



# Is this thing on?

WORDS  
BY  
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HOW TO  
HUMANIZE  
YOUR  
CONTENT  
IN THE AGE OF  
CONVERSATION

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A conversation is an immersive, two-way communication that involves a healthy exchange of information. But what does this have to do with marketing? We're all aware that a business is largely driven by its customers and that it flourishes only when the brand can deliver what it's expected to. Consumers are bombarded with a wide range of options they can choose from. And because the average person already sees 5,000 messages every day from well-established brands, it's essential that your shout-out is relevant, engaging, and memorable. This is where conversation marketing comes into the picture, or what I call

**“The Age of Conversation.”**



## The Age of Conversation

With intense competition for business, it's critical that you stand apart from your rivals beyond customer service and price, which are expected. So, where's your edge? It starts with your brand personality—an emerging component of brand identity. But brand personality isn't defined by clever logos, bright colors, and cool slogans. Rather, it's defined by your brand's tone of voice and character—how you relate to your target audience through a new set of microphones. It's about making a connection with individuals with single “handshake moments” across the digital divide, or to entire groups through well-planned content channels. It's how your brand connects with the world and cultures within it.

By transitioning from bullhorn marketing to conversation marketing, you'll secure an irreplaceable position in the hearts of your consumers. Create a connection with your audience and showcase your values instead of just displaying your list of products and services. Don't sell them a product. Invite them into your story and make them a part of it. Instead of luring them into buying a camera, teach them how to take a great picture and create an affinity for photography.

## What Is Conversation Marketing?

Before we tackle conversation marketing, let's revisit the basis of traditional marketing. As you use various media to display your ads and provide information about your products and services via newspapers and television, you're largely indulging in one-way communication that mostly involves spreading your word to people who may not be interested in your offering. There's no immediate way for you to obtain a response, negative or positive, from your potential customer. And because you remain fairly unaware of what your customer actually wants from you, you cannot adjust to their likes, dislikes, desires, or needs. In other words, traditional marketing approaches do not incorporate any conversation between you and your target audience.

With conversation marketing, you develop your brand's social personality, discover where your customers are hanging out, and then you simply talk to them through the appropriate content channels with a new set of rules—defined by them, not you. For example, if you want to sell to stock market investors, you need to speak investor. This involves using subject matter experts to speak their language and identify their pain points. Show your audience you care through authenticity, not with forced and awkward corporate-speak or trite ideas that have been discussed a thousand times. Then, work with them on a solution, and



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make them part of that solution—with, say, a blog that encourages feedback and inquiry about what’s on their minds. In other words, invite them into an “open source” process that encourages learning and feedback during the sales journey, developing increased brand loyalty, advocacy, and greater lifetime value.

Through conversation, you create a two-way dialogue that not only engages someone enough to take another step in their purchase journey, but also encourages brand loyalty, resulting in greater lifetime customer value.

You probably know that by using newer marketing channels such as social media, blogs, and video, there’s a better chance for you to get to know your audience and offer them what they’re looking for. Then, when you post an ad on

a social media platform like Facebook or Twitter, you can measure audience behavior and response, whether it’s views, likes, shares, click-throughs, or link-tracking. Not only are you tracking consumer reactions in real time, but you can also make corresponding tweaks to, say, a banner ad or landing page within minutes of posting a campaign. Because you get a response for a message that you deliver to your customer, a conversation happens, and the conversation marketing journey begins.

But there’s much more to the concept of conversation marketing than just obtaining a response to your ads. It’s about creating an immersive relationship with your consumers and maintaining that relationship through ongoing, relevant conversations and interactions. There’s active participation on both sides. It’s

about earning their trust at an organic level, which not only motivates them to do something, but then stick with you for the long haul, too. It’s about talking *and* listening, to secure lasting relationships with your customers.

### **How Is Conversation Marketing Related to Content Marketing?**

Conversation marketing is the evolution of content marketing. Brand personality, tone of voice, and choosing where to “meet up” with your audience are all considered at the earliest stages of developing a content strategy. The term “conversation marketing” broadens the definition with a more holistic approach, rather than merely an abstract concept of using words through channels to drive behavior.

Marketers have a lot of channels to work with, and content is becoming commoditized very quickly. As such, it’s easy to dismiss the importance of a meaningful content marketing strategy—one that promotes brand advocacy and utility. Evolving “content” into “conversation” is a better way to frame what marketers should be working toward. It takes content from a thoughtless “must-have” to a thoughtful engagement strategy that sits at the same table as your larger marketing objective.

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The core of an immersive conversation is great content. But how do you make sure that content reaches your target audience? There are many channels—blogs, social media, video, web, newsletters, podcasts, infographics, magazines, white papers, webinars—through which you can showcase your content and make it available for customers. But your job doesn't end at putting the word (i.e., content) out there.

For conversations to be effective, your content must evolve from a box to check to a human discussion.

### Prudential's Retirement Conversation

A good example of what conversation marketing can do for a brand name was when Prudential created a series of videos for their “Bring Your Challenges” campaign. Prudential asked customers how much money they thought they would need in retirement. It's tough to figure out exactly how much money you'll need to retire, let alone trying to make that amount last for potentially 30 or 40 years—far more than the 10 to 20 years statistics and actuarial tables will tell you. Luckily, as Prudential put it, there was another way to think about planning for retirement. Simply ask the question, “What if you live to be 90?” and approach things differently in order to get ready for a long retirement. Their theme: “Together we can create retirement income that lasts.”

Financial institutions like Prudential are difficult businesses to advertise in the traditional sense. Financial planning is complex and scary for most people. That's why conversation marketing works for Prudential. In their ads, they asked questions to get “everyday people” thinking and to understand the subject in a conversational way. They used simple, conversational messaging complemented with powerful visuals and easy arguments. Easy arguments are the conclusions people reach using inferences without a careful review of available information. These ads clearly and simply got the messages across, showing before and after visuals. They helped people understand Prudential's service, and did so with the help of the very audience to which they were marketing.

A good conversation or story does not interpret or explain the action in the story for the audience. Instead, it allows each member of the audience to interpret the story as he or she understands the action. Experiences that trigger our emotions are saved and consolidated in lasting memory because our brains get the signal that the experiences are important to remember. In the Prudential ads, the conversations triggered emotions—including humor, realness, fun, surprise, and even a little fear—and those emotions are the essence of conversation marketing.

## Rubber, Meet Road

Here are a few critical strategies for effective conversation marketing.

- Showcase your vulnerability to your customers and win their appreciation for your honesty. Speak human with them, and they'll return the favor tenfold.
- It's not how loud you can shout with megaphones, slogans, or noise. No matter how big you are, there are people meeting you the first time. The noise gets tuned out. Rather, be mindful of what you say and how you say it.
- Customers no longer grade you on a positive curve just because you're bigger than your competitor. Audiences today expect humility and respond less to "corporate-speak."
- Customize and tailor your content to your audience, not your brand. Speak to them like you're one of them.
- Be approachable to customers so that it's easier for them to reach out to you when they need your help.
- Provide focused solutions for the specific problems of your customers—according to their needs, not yours.

**For conversations to be effective, your content must evolve from a box to check to a human discussion.**

Avoid generalizing when you engage directly with your customers. Conversation marketing helps people know your edge through your unique story. What makes your product and service truly different is the degree to which you can humanize it. It marks the official transition from purely thinking in terms of B2B or B2C to thinking through an H2H (human to human) lens.

Now, apart from making a note of what you're offering them, customers today also keep an eye on what you're not offering them! Audiences notice other aspects of your messaging, such as:

- Is your tone bullying or inviting? Are you trying to grab their attention or earn their confidence?
- Is your content designed to tell a story?
- Are you selling a product or educating people with relevant information?
- Are you engaging an audience to buy your product or creating an affinity for your brand?

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So, how exactly does the approach of conversation marketing add value to your business?

**Promotes more human engagement.** Companies that are only interested in delivering one-way information to a target set of customers without attempting to get to know them will lose in the Age of Conversation. Just like with personal relationships, if your message is all about you and how great you are, people will start to avoid you. Conversation marketing takes you from robotic and boring to likeable and human, making it easier for you to connect with your consumers on a deeper level. It fosters their affinity to your brand, and consequently, makes your products more appealing.

**Adds a personal touch.** Making your customer feel valued is a critical aspect of effective marketing. Through conversation marketing, you get to know the likes and dislikes of your customers and offer them personalized solutions to suit their specific needs. When you engage with your customers on a one-to-one level, and customize your message and story to their varied needs and requirements, you make them feel special and appreciated.

**Maximizes conversions.** Conversation marketing lets you develop a lasting connection with your potential customers and ensures that they respond positively to your product or service. When customers trust a brand, they will automatically gravitate toward that company without giving it a second thought.

### Tips for High-Fidelity Conversation Marketing

Now that you know the advantages of incorporating conversation marketing in your business, how do you think you should use it? Here are a few ways you can integrate effective conversation marketing into your brand.

**Keep your target audience at the center of your marketing.** Effective conversation marketing creates an agenda that has the power to generate a healthy, relatable conversation with your target audience.

**Create content channels for your specific kind of business.** You want to effectively spread the word about your offerings and reach potential customers who might not be aware of your brand. Whether it's a blog, newsletter, or microsite, such communications not only help to build a sound reputation for your business, but also make it easier for you to create a base for integrating all your social media presences.

**Monitor engagement in your content channels.** Watch consumer behavior and engagement on your web posts and ads to analyze their responses in relation to the information you deliver. There's a plethora of analytical tools to scrutinize



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consumer purchase patterns and determine where they come from, what drives them, what turns them off, and basically what it takes to pique their interest and instigate a transaction. It's important to note that conversation marketing is NOT about two clicks to purchase, but rather a call to action (CTA) to something else. Your ROI is the result of that customer journey; it's rarely a direct line to purchase.

**Avoid a "one-size-fits-all" content strategy.** Nothing is more irritating to potential customers than insincerity or laziness. No one likes to be greeted with a message that not only sounds mechanical, but also feels like it was delivered to hundreds of thousands of people. Get to know your audiences and the personas of your primary customers. After all, if no two people are the same, how can their needs and requirements be? Well-researched and personalized brand messaging is crucial to connecting with your customers.

Conversation marketing is an engaged process of getting to know an audience and motivating them to do something beyond the 30-second commercial. This is what we do at T3 Custom. Earning customer affinity is our quest, and we provide world-class content and tools that cut through and clarify a great branding message.

Today, in the Age of Conversation, you have a global audience. But a marketing message is only seen by one person at a time. Shout at them, and you might have a sale. Talk to them like a human, and you have a customer for life.

