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Where Should I Put My Content Hub?

Warning: Do not read this article unless you have a content marketing strategy.

Content marketing in B2B is nearly ubiquitous; 89 percent of marketers deploy some form of it and 41 percent characterize their efforts as effective, according to a 2017 survey conducted by Content Marketing Institute. With pretty much everyone bought in and businesses producing more thought leadership content than ever, marketers often have to grapple with a new question: What the heck do we do with all of this new content?

The answer is often a content hub: an online destination that provides a repository for your smartest content, i.e., a consolidated opportunity to communicate a point of view on important industry trends or offer educational materials on best practices. According to HubSpot, almost half of buyers view three to five pieces of content before engaging with sales. A hub helps you avoid scattering your best marketing content all over the place, which could make this ongoing engagement more difficult.

WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING BETWEEN THE COMPANY WEBSITE AND A STAND-ALONE WEBSITE FOR YOUR CONTENT HUB?

Finding a home for a content hub on your enterprise website can be a challenge. But taking the hub offline comes with its own set of considerations. Here are six things to think about, including how each might influence the direction you choose.

Content Hub Definition (unofficial):
A digital platform that acts as a centralized home for content. Content hubs make it easy for your visitors to discover a collection of helpful, educational and authoritative content in a variety of media, including: blogs; white papers; case studies; articles; social posts; videos; curated posts; and user-generated materials.

1. SEO

A stand-alone website with a separate domain (which includes sub-domains, since they are treated as separate entities for search) will not take advantage of the SEO strength the corporate domain has earned. Additionally, the content hub domain will not positively affect the corporate domain. If organic search strength is your primary consideration, you might find this lack of search contribution to be too great an obstacle to taking your hub outside the corporate site. But if the content marketing program addresses topics for a completely different audience or an entirely different or parallel keyword set that the corporate website does not, a stand-alone hub might offer an opportunity to focus on this new audience and create organic search strength the mothership cannot. Consider Adobe's cmo.com, which allows Adobe to influence a very specific role (the CMO) in ways their main website cannot. Note also that Google has begun shifting its attention to "topic clusters," which may give more SEO benefit to well-organized, stand-alone content hubs going forward.

> ***Winner***
> *Corporate website (unless you're pursuing a different audience or search strategy)*

2. OBJECTIVITY

Being trusted as an industry or topic authority requires objectivity — looking at a problem or trend through an unbiased lens. So, if your top consideration is the appearance of objectivity, hanging your thought leadership content out there on the corporate website probably isn't the best place to start. You'll find great examples in B2C and B2B where stand-alone content hubs have become destinations. Take a look at L'Oréal's makeup.com, which uses stories, insights, trends and tips to drive visitor engagement. The brand wins by association. For something closer to home in B2B, check out txchnologist.com. This site provides a future view of how humanity will tackle challenges through industry, technology and ingenuity. The hub is sponsored by General Electric but stands on its own, allowing content contributors from inside and outside GE to write about the industrial future. Positioning, anyone?

> ***Winner***
> Stand-alone

3. WEBSITE BUREAUCRACY

Let's be candid: enterprise websites can get unwieldy. The bigger and more complex they get, the harder it can be to make significant changes. Processes, guidelines, rules, long enhancement queues and two-year rebuild cycles often stand in the way of creating innovative, timely and customized approaches to support content marketing efforts. Sometimes the only way around and over these hurdles is getting outside the bounds of the corporate site. (Sorry, friends at corporate.) We know how important the main website is, but sometimes structure, rules and long timelines are the enemies of effective communication. Think this isn't an issue everywhere? Look at GE, Intel and even Google for examples of companies with numerous stand-alone websites to address a variety of strategic priorities.

> ***Winner***
> Stand-alone

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4. USER EXPERIENCE

As content marketing programs become successful and contributions from inside and outside the company become more prolific, you're going to end up with a good problem: lots of great, timeless content that needs to be accessible. Here are three valid options to solve this dilemma. 1) Try to wedge it into an existing corporate website architecture and user experience — an option that can leave a company's very best content buried beneath layers of established navigation and veiled behind menu names that don't make sense. 2) Compromise by establishing a Resources section. Doing so allows your corporate website to become more than just an online brochure, but it could be a disservice to your thought leadership program. A link between "Literature" and "Technical Documents" doesn't scream, "We've got great, objective industry content that can help you!" But it can be done. See HubSpot, which has often been cited as the flagship for a high-end user experience for a Resources section. 3) Build a stand-alone content hub with the flexibility to deliver the required user experiences for your target audiences.

> ***Winner***
> Slight nod to stand-alone

5. SUBSCRIPTIONS

If user subscriptions are the key metric for content marketing (reference The Content Formula), then consider whether or not a stand-alone content hub with its own subscriber signup is more enticing than that of a corporate website. While your SEO might take a hit from deploying a stand-alone option, it may provide you better access to leads. If you're consistently delivering quality content your audience likes, (see Schneider Electric's hub for another great B2B example), you can go it alone, outside the corporate website and build a subscriber list that thirsts for what you're serving.

> ***Winner***
> Stand-alone

6. MARKET POSITION

Sometimes, a brand has earned it. That is, they own the authority position on a certain topic, whether due to consistent industry stewardship, a strong content marketing commitment or other industry credibility factors. They've got the content and the reputation to go solo — outside the company website. They can exploit their industry-leading position in a separate hub because they'll have an easier time directing audiences there and enticing new followers. Does that mean weaker or starter brands in the thought leadership space should stay within the mothership? Not necessarily (see all the reasons above). But weaker brands without a solid thought leadership foundation will need to exercise some patience in building an audience outside the corporate website. The stand-alone hub will afford you the flexibility to create the ideal user experience, but making it a "must-visit" destination will take time and commitment.

> ***Winner***
> Depends on position and patience

CONCLUSION

We apologize for not providing a definitive "yes" or "no" answer as to how you should handle your content hub location. But if you prioritize the factors mentioned herein, you should be able to make a decision without too much trouble. If you can't, then here's a content hub on decision making that might help.

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