

# **How to Apply Content Strategy to Each Stage of your Sales Funnel**

*Content marketing may be effective for every industry, but it has one advantage that's unique to eCommerce: guide shoppers through the sales funnel. Clever content can lead, influence, encourage, reassure, promote, inform, and nudge your customers at every stage of the funnel. Read this article to learn how to build the most effective content marketing sales funnel.*

Also known as the buying process or buying cycle, the sales funnel represents the different stages a shopper goes through when making a purchase of any kind. While the actual steps vary with different treatments of the topic, they tend to follow some general ideas. We've found the four-stage AIDA categorization — plus a fifth stage for post-sale — to be the most useful:

1. Attention — The customer goes about their everyday life and becomes aware that your store or eCommerce site exists.
2. Interest — The customer is interested in a product, type of product, shopping in general, or simply finding a solution to a problem, and conducts research.

3. Desire — The customer wants the product and is convinced it will help with their problem.
4. Action — The customer builds the confidence around a purchase decision, including shopping around for the best price or deciding not to buy at all.
5. Post-Sale — The customer reflects on their purchase. If there's an issue, they will interact with customer service; but regardless, there is an opportunity for building strong brand loyalty and social advocacy.

# 1. Attention

The attention stage is characterized by how the customer becomes aware of or more familiar with a brand. Brand identity plays a big part here, especially if this is the first impression with the shopper. This stage can also involve a shopper becoming aware of a problem they never knew they had, or that a solution to a preexisting problem actually exists. It's the broadest of each stage in the sales funnel, and the style of the content should reflect it.

Note that this stage isn't always necessary. For example, a shopper may have the urge to buy new shoes, and go directly to their favorite online retailer after signing on. It is, however, the most important stage for:

## **What the Customer is Doing:**

- Browsing the web normally
- Using social media normally

## **Your Goals:**

- Convert cold traffic into new customers

- Inform shoppers of a sale, a product, or campaign
- Build or change your reputation
- Have customers interact with your social media

## **Types of Content:**

- Social media posts
- Blog, video, and podcast posts on popular topics
- White papers on popular topics
- SEO-laden posts on your own blog
- Guest posts on popular sites relevant to your industry
- Advertisements on popular sites relevant to your industry
- Feature by social media influencers

## **Best Strategies:**

Discuss popular topics that your potential customers are already searching for. Your main goal is attracting attention. The features should be rather broad — you can hone in on more specific topics later. Decipher which sites your target customers go to and what they want to read about, then deliver.

For style, at this stage content should be high quality, memorable, and shareable. Don't be afraid to be funny or off-topic, like the Taco Bell-Old Spice Twitter exchange below.

Post about general and trending topics instead of only talking about your brand. Social media is important here as a means to “introduce” yourself to new clients. The more followers or interactions you have

already, the better your first impression will be. Social proof is a highly effective marketing tool, and your social media accounts reflect that. Short and visually bold content. This type of content isn't necessarily better, but it grabs more attention. Remember, new clients may not know much about you: visual content engages them instantly, and the shorter length requires less of a commitment for users who don't trust you yet.

Focus on SEO. The goal here is to attract people to your site, so coming from a search engine result is just as effective as from social media or a friendly site. Blogs are a great vehicle for SEO, and you don't have to sacrifice quality. When selecting keywords, the popularity of the search is not always as important as the amount of competition. Try to strike a good balance.

If you're posting on external sites, make sure you're sufficiently backlinking.

Avoid sales pitches. This is crucial for this stage. Customers hate being sold to, especially right from the start. The sales funnel is a process, and there's a time and place for a sales pitch later. At the beginning stages, you want to build a relationship.

## 2. Interest

The Interest stage is an important transition: you are no longer a stranger, and the shopper begins to build a relationship with you. Here you want to put your best foot forward, and establish yourself as superior to your competitors.

### **What the Customer Is Doing:**

- Evaluating possible solutions to their problems
- Researching

### **Your Goals:**

- Demonstrate value
- Separate yourself from competitors
- Promote campaigns
- Acquire email address and/or signups

### **Types of Content:**

- How-to guides
- Quizzes
- Lookbooks (fashion)

- Recommendations from social influencers
- Related videos (i.e., tutorials)
- Newsletters and emails

## **Best Strategies:**

Demonstrate value and set yourself apart from competitors. The attention stage was about getting your name out there. Now, you need to give that name some weight. Think of this stage as the shopper getting to know you.

Use your content to promote yourself a little so that your potential customers understand your value. [Content strategist Zach Miller gives a three-point strategy for value propositions:](#)

1. Define the customer's pain points (and empathize)
2. Provide resources to alleviate these pain points
3. Guide the customers to subsequent steps with clear calls-to-action.

Content here needs to convince your potential customers to shop with you instead of your competitors. However, resist the urge to mention your competitors directly, as it comes across as petty.

Establish yourself as an authority on your niche. This is one of the most effective strategies for content marketing. Giving your users all the information they need on your specific niche gives them a reason to continually check back to your pages for new information.

Research the types of topics customers are searching for with SEO tools, then have an expert create the content. The customers of Lowe's buy supplies from their store or site when they have a construction project, so Lowe's targets this group of DIY'ers directly with video tutorials on building common home additions, like a fire pit.

Source: [Lowe's](#)

Offer incentives for emails and signups. Newsletters and emails can be great tools for generating interest and getting the word out there about promotions and campaigns. But you may need to sweeten the deal in order to get visitors to give you their email address.

It's standard to offer exclusive deals or coupons within newsletters, but a more immediate gift works better. Offer shoppers a free gift or discount just for signing up.

For social media, offer a discount, coupon, or free gift for "liking" or signing up, like an exclusive deal for social media friends and followers.

Longer content, more details. Don't forget this stage is about providing information, so naturally you'll want to give shoppers longer and more descriptive content. This means longer articles, longer videos, and more technical coverage for both. Short content is better for piquing an initial interest, but now that you have their attention, you want to fan that interest by giving them more in-depth content.

Just remember to keep the tone casual. You want to remain friendly and engaging; you don't want to sound like a boring lecturer.

# 3. Desire

According to a [Intel report studying American consumerism](#), 69% of the participants seek out opinions before making a purchase. If you could provide the content that they're seeking out, you have an immediate lead and are just one or two clicks away from a sale. The Desire phase brings the shopper to the front door of the sale, heightening their craving for the product and giving them the information they need to buy with confidence.

## What the Customer Is Doing:

- Deciding whether to commit to buy
- Evaluating different buying channels
- Compiling a shopping list

## Your Goals:

- Aid buying decisions
- Strengthen buying desire
- Present your brand as the best option

## Types of Content:

- Buying guides
- Product reviews
- Testimonials
- Product descriptions
- Product photos
- Product videos

## **Best Strategies:**

Show off reasons to buy. Reiterate why shoppers should choose you over your competitors, whether lower prices, better quality products, etc. Your content at this stage should reflect the unique selling points of both your product range and your brand itself.

Showcase features, delivery deals, price breaks, sales, discounts, etc. with complete visibility. If you're running a special campaign, mention it.

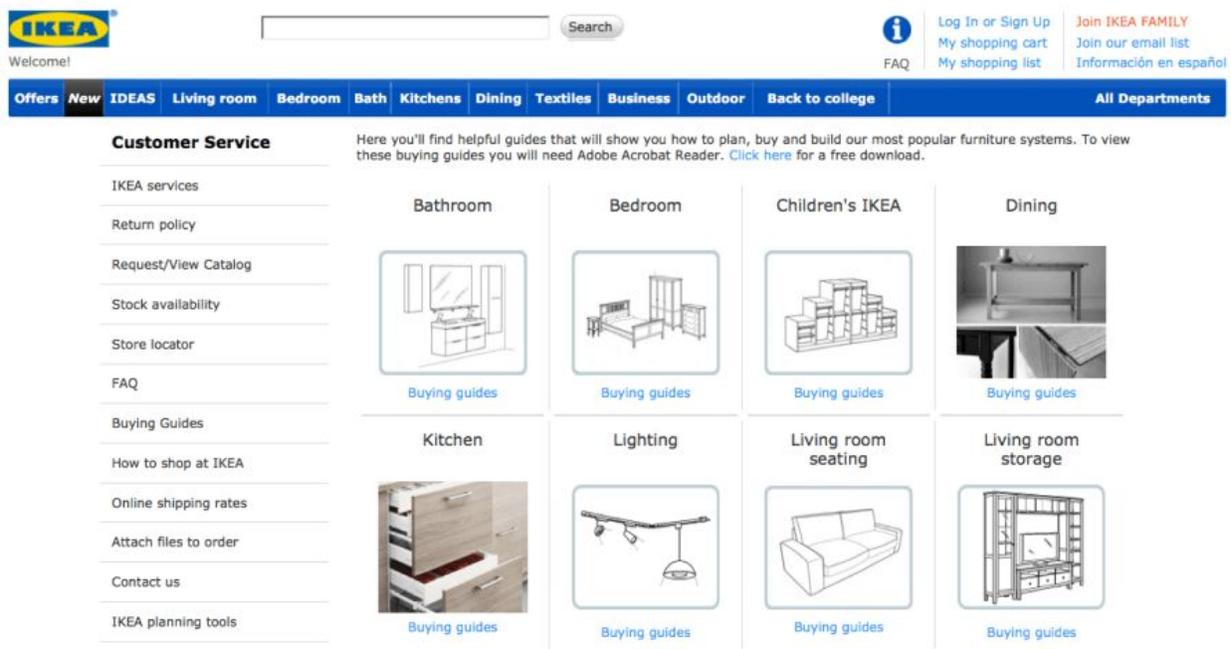
Provide the research shoppers are looking for. This stage is all about research. You can win the shoppers' gratitude by giving them the research they're looking for without hassle. This involves specific advice, technical how-tos, and preliminary pricing alerts.

Typically, shoppers are looking for information on:

- How strongly price corresponds to quality
- What features are more important than others
- How to use the product
- Environmental or ethical concerns (i.e., Fair Trade)

Make sure you develop and study buyer personas to understand what information they're looking for and what format they'd prefer it in.

IKEA goes above and beyond, with individual buying guides on every category of furniture they sell.



Source: [IKEA](#)

Address shopping concerns. Even if you have a spotless record, other sites definitely do not, so you can't blame your customers for being weary. Address their concerns upfront and reassure them that nothing

fishy will happen. While these are normally site design decisions, it doesn't hurt to mention them in your content as well.

Some common consumer fears about eCommerce are listed as:

- credit card information being stolen
- inaccurate product depictions
- no sales assistance
- problematic product return policies
- unable to track order

It's also a good practice to display your security icons so that users know the site is secure. But to go further in easing your customer's anxieties, be forthright about your return policies and delivery options. Don't make them search for this information.

Persuasive copywriting. The tone you take with your content should ramp up near the end. When it comes to making sales pitches, you can use special persuasive writing techniques to get shoppers excited about purchasing. While this is a topic for an individual article, [Jeremy Smith's five classic persuasion techniques](#) can help get you started.

And don't neglect the importance of microcopy. How you phrase your buttons and CTAs can make or break a sale, especially if the wording is vague or confusing.

## 4. Action

### What the Customer Is Doing:

- Developing confidence around what to purchase
- Shopping around for the best price
- Calculating how much they're willing to spend

### Your Goals:

- Promote your store's advantages
- Facilitate purchasing
- Drive traffic to a specific product page

### Types of Content:

- Pricing guides
- Product reviews
- Helpful widgets (i.e., price calculator, sizing chart)

## **Best Strategies:**

Product videos. As we highlighted in the previous article in this series, product videos can have an immense effect on eCommerce.

- 73% more shoppers will buy after watching a video.
- Videos appear in 14% of search results.
- Almost 46% of shoppers will buy a product in-store if a product video is unavailable.
- 71% of shoppers believe videos explain products better.
- 57% of buyers are less surprised by products with videos.
- 58% of shoppers view companies with product videos as more trustworthy.

If you're targeting millennials, product videos can provide a significant boost in engagement.

Embed CTAs and buying options in content. The less steps shoppers have to take, the better. If you embed buying options directly into late-funnel content such as a price comparison guide, your shoppers can buy when they're desire is the highest.

This strategy also works well with special deals. For example, if users click directly to a checkout page from a certain piece of content, a special deal is automatically applied.

Provide all the necessary buying information. Some content is mandatory, and without it shoppers will abandon their cart even if they still wanted to make a purchase. Sizing charts and delivery options should all be within reach at all times. North Face's sizing chart includes exact measurements, circumventing some of the doubt inherent in buying clothes online without trying them on.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE // SIZING CHARTS**

**MEN'S JACKETS**

|     | <b>CHEST</b>          | <b>HIP</b>            | <b>SLEEVE LENGTH</b> |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| S   | 36-38 in / 91-96 cm   | 35-37 in / 88-93 cm   | 33.5 in / 85 cm      |
| M   | 39-41 in / 91-104 cm  | 38-40 in / 96-101 cm  | 34.0 in / 86 cm      |
| L   | 42-44 in / 106-111 cm | 41-43 in / 104-109 cm | 34.8 in / 88 cm      |
| XL  | 45-48 in / 114-121 cm | 44-46 in / 111-116 cm | 35.5 in / 90 cm      |
| 2XL | 49-52 in / 124-132 cm | 47-49 in / 119-124 cm | 36.3 in / 92 cm      |
| 3XL | 53-56 in / 134-142 cm | 50-52 in / 127-132 cm | 37.0 in / 94 cm      |

**CUSTOMER SERVICE // SIZING CHARTS**

- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- RETURN POLICY
- CONTACT US
- WARRANTY/PRODUCT GUARANTEE
- PRODUCT CARE
- SIZING CHARTS
- MOBILE APPS
- PRIVACY POLICY & LEGAL NOTICES
- TERMS OF USE
- CALIFORNIA TRANSPARENCY IN SUPPLY CHAIN ACT OF 2010

**CHAT**

Source: [The North Face](https://www.northface.com)

# 5. Post-Sale

## What the Customer Is Doing:

- Reflecting on their purchase
- Seeking customer service to resolve an issue

## Your Goals:

- Improve customer service
- Improve loyalty/repeat business
- Increase word-of-mouth advertising (social media referrals)
- Convert fans in social media
- Positive product reviews

## Types of Content:

- Surveys
- Email correspondence
- Invitations to review
- Rewards/gifts

## Best Strategies:

Customers appreciate transactional emails. Sending an email after a sale shows your brand's human side — you don't just care about the money, you care about customer satisfaction.

Transactional emails not only establish a more personal connection with the customer, they confirm the details of the sale, including delivery, and place that information in the customer's inbox for quick reference.

They also provide an opportunity for a specialized call-to-action, such as an invitation to rate or review the product, which we discuss below. Delta includes a survey right in their transactional email, making it as easy as possible by clicking within the email — you don't have to visit another site.

Invite customers to rate or review the purchase. This isn't the first time we've mentioned how important customer reviews are, but after the purchase it's time to think seriously about them. Customers aren't prone to leaving reviews, especially if it will take a few days or weeks for delivery, so you may need to be proactive.

One of the best ways is to just ask. A well-timed email can arrive after the product has arrived, right when the customer's excitement is highest. Embed the CTA right in the email, because you want to make the reviewing process as easy as possible.

# Building the Perfect Content Marketing Sales Funnel

Content marketing isn't just about advertising and brand awareness — in the hands of a master, it can shepherd customers through the sales funnel with surgical precision. Keep these key points in mind when revisiting your own content strategy:

1. **Attention:** General and popular posts meant to be seen. Be fun and engaging, and don't give a sales pitch.
2. **Interest:** Informative and practical posts meant to generate interest. Establish yourself as an authority to become the go-to source for any questions about your niche.
3. **Desire:** Useful posts meant to both help the customer in the buying process and demonstrate your value. Now is the time to start in with some (light) sales pitching, but above all, present content that the customer will find useful.
4. **Action:** Persuasive posts meant to facilitate sales. Alleviate last-minute fears and hit home why the shopper needs this product (videos do wonders for this).
5. **Post-sale:** Reassuring posts meant to boost customer satisfaction and therefore brand loyalty and social advocacy.

Use this opportunity to encourage user reviews, which are invaluable in future business.