THE USE OF CONTENT MARKETING ON THE WEBSITES OF DAIRY COMPANIES

ZASTOSOWANIE CONTENT MARKETINGU NA STRONACH WWW PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW MLECZARSKICH

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ABSTRACT

This article's aim is an attempt to identify the scope and ways of implementing content marketing on the websites of dairy companies. To achieve the stated objective, 15 dairy company websites were analysed using the content analysis method. It was observed that the companies surveyed use content marketing in different ways on their company websites, with the aim of distributing attractive content designed to persuade the customer to act accordingly. Companies are recognising the increasing role of content marketing and the opportunities for its implementation on the company website. However, there is great potential to intensify activities in this area.

Key words: content marketing, online marketing, food industry, dairy cooperatives

ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest próba określenia zakresu i sposobów realizacji content marketingu na stronach internetowych przedsiębiorstw mleczarskich. Dla osiągnięcia wyznaczonego celu dokonano analizy piętnastu stron internetowych przedsiębiorstw branży mleczarskiej, przy wykorzystaniu metody content analysis. Zaobserwowano, że badane przedsiębiorstwa w różny sposób wykorzystują content marketing na swych stronach firmowych, celem dystrybucji atrakcyjnych treści, których zadaniem jest nakłonienie klienta do odpowiedniego działania. Przedsiębiorstwa dostrzegają wzrastającą rolę content marketingu oraz możliwości jego realizacji na firmowej stronie WWW. Istnieje jednak duży potencjał nasilenia działań w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing treści, marketing internetowy, przemysł spożywczy, spółdzielnie mleczarskie

JEL: M, M3, M31

Introduction

The Internet is an information environment that is constantly evolving and subject to change. Since its inception, the World Wide Web has been known for its unique characteristics of information capacity, interactivity, hypertextuality and multimedia. With the development of the Internet, these features take on new importance as they enable innovative communication methods to emerge. These methods are also being implemented by companies that, when competing in the marketplace for customers, need to use communication tools that ensure they attract the attention of buyers and build consumer loyalty to the brand. The increasing ease of publishing information online makes companies want to use this opportunity to compete in the marketplace. Interesting content attracts internet users to places on the internet that allow consumers to get closer

to the company's products and to the brand. A manifestation of the use of content for this purpose is the growing role of content marketing. It involves a company using interesting content to draw consumers' attention to the products on offer and to build brand loyalty. Companies can use various websites in the implementation of content marketing. Particularly popular in this respect are social media, which allow content to be easily published and shared among consumers. Also of great importance in this respect is the company website, which is an important element of marketing communication and whose design concept is constantly evolving. Companies have the opportunity to post interesting content on their own websites, thereby winning over potential product buyers. With the growth of social media, new demands are being placed on company websites. Websites, similar to social media, should meet the challenges of content marketing and, at the same time, support a two-way communication model based on the company's dialogue with the consumer.

Literature Review

A large proportion of online marketing communication takes place on company websites. Their role is constantly growing due to the fact that the number of Internet users is increasing worldwide, as well as the average time per Internet user. At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the Internet is already a common good worldwide. However, this network is constantly developing and evolving. It can be looked at not as a single innovation, but rather as a collection of innovations of an informational nature (Amour, 2012). The technical parameters of internet infrastructure and access devices are improving, making it easier and more convenient to use the Internet (Naughton, 2016). Nowadays, it is not necessary to have an expensive and large personal computer to access the Internet, as all that is necessary is a relatively cheaper smartphone, whose owners can access the Internet from wherever they are. A number of new business models are emerging on the Internet, whose offerings are helping to better meet consumer needs (Amit & Zott, 2001). More and more websites are emerging that are dominated by information published by internet users, such as social media, which allow consumers to publish,

share and react to information. There have been many innovations in social media related to enabling consumers to create information and publish and share it with other users. This phenomenon has been called user-generated content (UGC). UGC is an essential component of Web 2.0, which is an online environment characterised by openness, participation and sharing of content by users (Kim, Jin, Kim, & Shin, 2012). The UGC mechanisms popularised in social media have begun to migrate rapidly to other websites, including corporate websites. As a result, there is an increase in individual UGC, which can assume various forms, e.g. blogs, photos, images, videos, comments, reviews and social bookmarking (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011).

The changes that websites and their content are undergoing are influenced by changing consumer behaviour. The new consumers, largely represented by the millennial generation, are consumers who seek to make purchasing decisions based on objective information. They view advertising messages from companies more critically and are more influenced by other consumers' opinions on products (Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet, 2021).

Commercial websites come in various forms. The main types of company-owned websites include (Maciorowski, 2013) the following:

- The corporate website-it contains information about the company and its product offerings. The recipients of the message are not only consumers but also other groups of people and institutions interested in the company's operation, such as investors, distributors, the local community and even the company's own employees.
- Product website-it is designed to showcase a specific product or brand. Its purpose is to build the brand by engaging with consumers.
- Sales website (also known as an online shop)-this is the website through which a company sells products.

The majority of medium-sized companies in the food industry mainly operate websites in which they present information about themselves and their product offerings, and thus the object of study in this article is the first type mentioned, i.e. company websites.

The quality of content plays a dominant role in the design concepts of corporate websites (Beaird & George, 2014). It influences visitor retention

and makes them more likely to return to the website. The importance of high-quality content published by companies online is also evidenced by the increasing importance of content marketing as a growing marketing strategy. According to the Content Marketing Institute (2022), content marketing can be defined as a strategic marketing approach focussed on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a defined audience. The implementation of content marketing is largely taking place on the Internet, so that companies have ceased to be just providers of products, but also play the roles of producers, discoverers and distributors of information (Jutkowitz, 2014). With content marketing, companies become content publishers and can decide for themselves what information messages to publish and communicate to potential buyers. The emphasis in published content, however, should be more on promoting the idea of the product category rather than on advertising the products the company is selling. In the content they create, companies should provide their audiences with what they are curious about and what they want, while maintaining the quality of the message (Bakalarska-Stankiewicz, 2020). The constant work of developing streams of new information is a major challenge for many companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, as it requires time and the ability to create interesting content. However, the companies have a great deal of expertise in the product categories they manufacture, the technologies used, product opportunities, market trends and fashions. This wealth of knowledge can be shared with buyers thereby enhancing their perception of the company. Hosting interesting content on the company's website results in attracting consumers to company's brand and products.

The implementation of content marketing can make use of e.g. e-books, articles, demonstration videos, reports, detailed descriptions of the products offered, case studies, company blogs, social media posts, newsletters, infographics, presentations, information videos, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and webinars (Pikuła-Małachowska, 2017). In creating content, it is important to focus on the potential needs and problems that the target audience may encounter. It is also important to regularly refresh the content published on the company's website so that consumers begin to perceive the website as a valuable source of information (Świeczak, 2012). It is also important to make it easy for content readers to

make purchases offered by the company. In content marketing, a very important role is played by the website, which, in addition to interesting content, should be clearly designed to make it easy for internet users to find information. For this purpose, personalisation (Wong & Yazdanifard, 2015) and content segmentation on the website (Muscat, 2013) are used. Content marketing on the company website is one of the main types of content marketing and its use allows consumers to engage with the products and the brand, and at the same time improves the search engine positioning results of the website (Baker, 2022). In turn, social media are particularly useful for content distribution, where content serves as the basis for eWOM (electronic word of mouth) (Vinerean, 2017). It is also important to bear in mind that an important form of content delivery is through images in the form of photos, graphics, videos and infographics. They carry a lot of information that can be difficult to convey through text (Song, Han, Lee, & Kim, 2018).

The food market, similar to other product markets, is subject to various influences and conditions of a social, technological and economic nature. Consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by such characteristics of food products as the health and environmental impact of food products, animal welfare, organic production methods, local origin of products, and traditional production methods of products (Dąbrowska, 2018). Consumers are also increasingly looking for unusual and exotic food products from the culinary arts and traditions of other countries.

There are many scientific studies in the literature on content analysis of marketing communication on company websites. Initially, content analysis was used as a means to research support for, a company's marketing communication elements on a website (Perry & Bodkin, 2000). Over time, more specialised studies aimed at narrower audiences have emerged, e.g. in marketing communications used in food industry company websites and aimed at children (Cheyne, Dorfman, Bukofzer, & Harris, 2013). The growth of social media has led researchers to increasingly use this method to study messages posted on social media, including in the area of content marketing (Plessis, 2017). However, there is a lack of research in the academic literature on evaluating the implementation of content marketing on company websites. It should also be noted that the conclusions of such type of studies could only be industry-specific, as different industries need to have different solutions for website design and content posting.

Research Methodology

The main objective of the article is to determine the scope and implementation of content marketing as they apply to the websites of dairy cooperatives. The intermediate objective is to evaluate the content on the surveyed websites from the perspective of the application of content marketing and the potential for its development.

Using the content analysis method, the content elements of the surveyed websites were identified and subjected to coding and counting. This method can be defined as a systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of content characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). The stages of this study include: observation of websites, selection of variables for the study (representing the different content categories), coding of the occurrences of content elements on the analysed pages, and quantitative analysis of the coded data.

The selection of dairy cooperatives for the study was made at random from the list of dairy cooperatives affiliated to the National Union of Dairy Cooperatives in Warsaw (KZSM). The cooperatives selected for the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Surveyed dairy cooperatives and their website addresses

Names of dairy cooperatives and addresses of their websites
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Kole (https://www.osmkolo.pl)
Jogo Łódzka Spółdzielnia Mleczarska (https://jogo.com.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Krasnymstawie (https://www.krasnystaw.eu)
Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Rospuda w Filipowie (http://smrospuda.pl)
Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Bieluch w Chełmie (https://smbieluch.pl/pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Garwolin (http://osmgarwolin.pl)
Spółdzielcza Mleczarnia Spomlek (https://www.spomlek.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Nowy Sącz (https://www.osmnowysacz.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Oleśnie (https://osm-olesno.pl)
Maluta Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska (https://maluta.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Siedlcach (https://www.osm.siedlce.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Czarnków (https://www.osmczarnkow.pl)
Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Sierpcu (https://osm-sierpc.pl)
MLEKOVITA (https://mlekovita.com.pl/pl/)
Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Ryki (https://www.smryki.pl)

Source: Own research.

Selections were made at random from a list of 60 dairy cooperatives posted on the KZSM website (at https://mleczarstwopolskie.pl/o-kzsm/czlonkowie-kzsm). The sample size of 15 cooperatives was determined with an assumed 99% confidence level and a 30% margin of error. The website analysis was conducted in September 2022. The way the sample was selected makes this research representative only of the dairy cooperatives affiliated to KZSM, and thus it is not representative of the larger group of food industry companies.

Findings

During the study, the main content features were identified and their occurrence on the cooperatives' websites was analysed. Table 2 presents these features together with the frequency of their occurrence on the websites. The values in brackets next to the content indicate the frequency of occurrence

Table 2. Frequencies of content categories on company websites

Content characteristics	
Feature	**Frequency of incidence (in percentage)**
Company information	100
Product presentation	100
Contact us	100
RODO/privacy policy	100
Certificates and awards	100
News	80
Recipes	67
EU funding information	60
Supplier information	53
Competition	53
CSR information	47
Jobs/careers	33
HoReCa	33
Tenders	33

Source: Own research.

among the surveyed websites in percentage terms. Due to the odd number of the sample, the percentages given in the table could not assume the value of 50%; and accordingly, e.g. for seven cooperative websites the percentage value was 47% and for eight it was 53%. For a clearer presentation of the results, the percentages were rounded to whole numbers.

As can be seen from the data in Table 2, the most frequently occurring content elements on company websites were 'Company information', 'Product presentation', 'Contact us', 'RODO/Privacy policy' and 'Certificates and awards', which were present on all surveyed websites (frequency of occurrence 100%). Under these names, however, there is some variation in the content elements. In the category 'Company information', some companies additionally included tabs such as 'Company mission' or 'Company history', for example, while others described the company in brief. The content element 'Presentation of products' refers to product catalogues, which also varied between the analysed sites. The majority of companies used extensive product descriptions (60%) within the analysed sites, while short product descriptions consisting of one to a few sentences were less common (40%). All of the surveyed companies provided nutritional values in the descriptions of the food products presented on the website. Promotional messages of a rational nature predominated in the product descriptions; promotional messages of an emotional nature in the product descriptions occurred sporadically and alongside the rational ones. The cooperatives cared about the quality and aesthetics of the product photos in the catalogue. In most cases, product photos could be enlarged. The second category 'Contact us' also varied in terms of content, as some of the companies enriched it with contact details of the company's various departments and branches, as well as the addresses of the company's stationary outlets. Some of the surveyed companies in this category included a map integrated with Google Maps, as well as a contact form where Internet users could enter queries to the company. The 'RODO/privacy policy' element was usually located in the bottom footer of the surveyed websites, adjacent to the 'Contact us' element. In the case of the 'Certifications and awards' category, it mainly appeared on the surveyed websites as a separate tab of the main menu; however, in some cases, it appeared in the 'Company information' section. Three of the surveyed

companies included information about certificates and awards in the 'News' category.

From the information in Table 2, it can be seen that the frequently occurring content categories on the surveyed company websites were: 'News' and 'Recipes'. The 'News' category is a type of company blog, where companies publish up-to-date information on company events. Such blogs prevailed on the analysed sites. Another type of company blog is one dedicated to the sharing expert knowledge about the food products quality, which are gaining increasing acceptance and popularity due to the specificity of food products, especially those that are considered novelty foods, and the fashion for healthy eating. Such blogs were less common on the surveyed sites, at 20% of the sites. A common content element on the surveyed sites was recipes, which companies were willing to share with Internet users. Most of these recipes were based on products offered by the surveyed dairy cooperatives. A frequent content element was information on EU (European Union) funding for cooperatives' investments. By indicating the information on their website that it is through EU funding that they are receiving an important source of their sustenance, cooperatives primarily aim to target business partners and the local community for potential business opportunities.

Some of the cooperatives surveyed also included a section for suppliers on their website, which contained information and documents needed by farmers in their cooperation with the cooperatives. In some cases, access to these documents was password protected.

More than half of the cooperatives surveyed also posted information on their website about one or more competitions being held for consumers. This information was placed in different categories on the websites. Often they could be found, e.g. in 'News', or some companies used a separate tab in the main menu called 'Competition', intended to announce that they run competitions.

Almost half of the companies included information on CSR (corporate social responsibility) on their websites. This category on the sites appeared under the names of either 'CSR' or 'Sustainability'. During coding, cooperatives' activities aimed at developing sport in the local community were also included in CSR activities. This information is simultaneously directed at consumers and the wider corporate environment, such as the local community and business partners.

On some of the websites, it was also possible to find a section aimed at potential employees, discussing employment opportunities in the cooperative and the prospects they provided. As shown in Table 2, a similar incidence can be found in the case of the HoReCa category (a popular term for the hotel, restaurants and catering sector), which is a separate tab on the main menu. In this category, cooperatives presented their offerings aimed at the hotel, restaurant and catering sectors. Products in this offer were characterised by larger sizes, and larger packaging was used than for consumer products (e.g. yoghurt in packages of several litres). Some of the surveyed websites also provided information about tenders announced by the cooperatives.

Table 3 presents the feature categories of content that support the promotional message, integrate the site with social media and direct the site's promotional message to foreign markets.

Table 3. Website features supporting published content (in percentage of occurrence on pages)

Feature category	Frequency of occurrence (%)
The use of infographics	53
Integration with social media	Facebook (73) YouTube (47) Instagram (33)
English-language version of website	60

Source: Own research.

The use of infographics enhances the aesthetic value of the website, makes it clearer and makes it easier to browse through its content. Infographics were used on more than half of the analysed sites. Their role was primarily to present the company's strengths and the advantages of its products.

Integration with social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram was also common on the websites of the cooperatives surveyed. Referencing the cooperative's Facebook profile was the most popular type of social-media link on the pages. Almost half of the pages referred to their

YouTube channel. Some of the cooperatives surveyed also posted advertising videos from YouTube. The advertising videos posted carried an emotional message, which contributes to brand building. Occasionally, there were references to Instagram on the pages, where cooperatives posted attractive photos of products and of company life; in the former case, the pictures posted carried a substantial coherence or semblance with the overall type of product advertising used by the enterprise.

More than half of the websites surveyed had an English-language version. This is a good feature of company websites, as it increases the company's international visibility and thus, at low cost, increases the reach of the company website's promotional message to foreign markets.

During the analysis of the websites of the studied cooperatives, it was possible to observe some features that were not subject to coding. It was observed that, for the most part, the pages were mainly directed towards consumers. In some cases, the design of the website showed that the main recipients of the content were the next levels of the distribution channel, such as wholesalers or retail shops.

In their promotional messages, the surveyed cooperatives on their websites often emphasised compliance with nature, ecology and traditional production methods. They often pointed to the advantage of their geographical location in a region with a clean environment and advantageous natural values.

The majority of the cooperatives surveyed cared about the clarity and aesthetics of the website. They tried to include graphics representing the products on the homepage. Often there was a graphic element in the shape of a large billboard under the main menu, which influenced the aesthetics of the website. This took a variety of forms. On most pages it was a static image, whereas on some it took the form of a scrolling image bar. In one case, it was in the form of a video that showcased the cooperative.

Several of the cooperatives surveyed simultaneously ran separate product websites dedicated to the product brands on offer. These were exclusively consumer-oriented websites and were characterised by an attractive and engaging design. This demonstrates strong support for the brands offered. An example is the Spomlek cooperative, which runs separate product websites for the Serenada and Skarby Serowara brands. Separate Facebook social profiles are also maintained for these brands.

One of the cooperatives surveyed had a 'For the media' tab in the main menu. Through this section, various traditional and electronic publishers were able to download graphic files of this cooperative. Some other cooperatives also included the possibility to download graphic files, but they but they named this section by a different name way, e.g. as 'Graphic downloads'.

Some of the websites surveyed also featured online product shops through which the cooperatives reached consumers directly with their products.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The surveyed dairy cooperatives approached the implementation of content marketing on the company website in different ways. This is evidenced by the different frequencies of content categories posted on the pages. The basic ones were: 'About the company', 'Product presentation', 'Contact us' and 'Certificates and awards'. Of these four categories, product presentation is particularly important for the implementation of content marketing, as it is the place on the Internet where companies have the opportunity to communicate interesting information about the products they offer. In the detailed descriptions, they can include a lot of information on the product technology, as well as hints on the possible use of the products. On most of the sites surveyed, these aspects were described in detail, with particular emphasis on the advantages of the products offered. Cooperatives could further improve this element by indicating possible uses of the product, e.g. by combining the product description with links to recipes that are compatible with the particular food product marketed. The cooperatives surveyed placed great emphasis on the quality of the photos in the product catalogue, which is also an important feature for the implementation of effective content marketing.

'News' and 'Recipes' were also frequent content categories. In the 'News' category, relevant information from the life of the company was posted on the surveyed websites. This category plays an important role as a company blog. In many cases, cooperatives post company-related events in 'News', which might involve a difficult task for medium-sized companies when it

comes to providing an adequate stream of interesting and frequent posts. This category has great potential for the development of content marketing on the company website and should rather be treated by the cooperatives as a company blog with more thematically diverse posts. The posts should emerge from company employees and be thematically directed towards interesting content related to the consumption and qualities of dairy products in the broadest sense. This was the case in a small number of the analysed sites. It is likely that the posts could have been enriched with the name of the post's author and the possibility for visitors to post comments. This would be an element that would engage internet users and build brand loyalty.

The 'Recipes' category is also an important element from the perspective of content marketing implementation. This is a place on the website where the company shares culinary ideas with consumers, related to the possibility of using the products it offers. In many cases, however, this category could be expanded to include other recipes related to dairy products not necessarily offered by the company, so that it becomes a valued place for internet users for obtaining culinary inspiration. It could also include a mechanism for consumer comments and ratings. This could ensure that more people visit the company website and thus have a better relationship with the brand.

The analysis of the content of the surveyed websites showed that cooperatives operate company websites with not only consumers in mind, but also other groups of people and organisations interested in the operation of the company. This is a good approach and typical of company websites. However, in line with the trends of personalisation and segmentation of content on websites, cooperatives should consider separating content for different audiences, so that, e.g. consumers do not have to come across information that is aimed at distributors or suppliers. The use of segmentation in the main menu with a division into, e.g. consumers and business, could circumvent this problem. This solution could be particularly beneficial for companies that do not run separate product pages at the same time.

The cooperatives surveyed mostly have their profile pages on social media, especially Facebook. It is there that they usually implement two-way communication based on dialogue with buyers. On social media, companies have a number of easy-to-use mechanisms for publishing and sharing content. From their company websites, companies direct Internet

users to their profiles on social media through links in the form of an icon symbolising a social-media portal. Some of the cooperatives also post content from social media on the company website, as evidenced, e.g. by YouTube advertising videos. However, cooperatives should consider implementing UGC mechanisms to a greater extent, also on the company website (e.g. the possibility to comment on company blog posts).

In content marketing, information conveyed in visual form (image, photos, graphics, video, inforgraphics) is of great importance. The cooperatives surveyed usually take care of this side of content delivery. Some, however, should make more use of infographics, which contribute to the clarity of the website and make it easier for Internet users to find information.

In summary, it can be concluded that the companies surveyed recognise the increasing role of content marketing and the opportunities introduced by its implementation on the company website. However, there is great potential for food industry companies to increase their activities in this area, particularly in creating more content of interest for consumers and developing UGC techniques on the company website. This means that companies must continually improve their websites and use innovative solutions to communicate content attractively. This is part of the battle for customers.

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