



Content as a Marketing Tool: A Strategic Approach

We have heard it all about content and context. Here is a company who has done it their way.
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At first glance, SmarterKids.com may appear to be in the business of selling toys. However, as David Blohm, president and chief executive officer, points out, the goal is "to be a leading e-learning and educational e-commerce company."

SmarterKids.com incorporated in 1994 and launched its website in 1998. Initially, it sold proprietary educational software. Since 1998, SmarterKids.com has repositioned itself as an online retailer focused on educational toys, books, games, and software. Products are provided by branded third-party vendors and evaluated by an in-house educational staff.

Unlike traditional "bricks and mortar" toy retailers and on-line catalog companies, SmarterKids.com adds value to the shopping experience by offering informative content to its visitors. Targeting a market of parents of infants to 15-year-olds, SmarterKids.com helps them make intelligent purchasing decisions based on an assessment of the individual child's needs. Educational and editorial content is used to inform readers, provide added value, and differentiate themselves from their competitors: [E-Toys Target](#), [Learning Express](#), and [Zainy Brainy](#), as well as [Amazon.com](#), [KMart](#) and [WalMart](#).

Their approach to marketing is very classical, almost a Harvard Business School case study, but the execution of the implementation, site ease-of-use, and a distribution model that leverages the strengths of web-based technology successfully reflect innovative thinking.

SmarterKids.com plans to expand its market to include schools and teachers, offering compelling targeted content unavailable offline.

Beyond the Bins

SmarterKids.com is using one of the most powerful tools available in marketing a product or service online: customization.

Joe Panepinto, vice president of Editorial and Educational Content, emphasizes the growing realizations that content is crucial, and is all about building relationships.

Their mission to "help parents help their children learn" guides the company strategy. By profiling children by age, learning style, educational approach, and interests, as well as the skill and subject, parents can create a unique profile for a child. SmarterKids can then recommend personalized products.

New, aggressive services include Early Development Checklist Reports, which can measure language, motor, socio-emotional, cognitive, and adaptive abilities of the profiled kids. The site provides tools to help prepare children for standardized tests, and parents are able to evaluate the impact of different learning styles such as auditory, visual, and interpersonal; from special needs to special talents.

By paying heed to the notion that personalization increases loyalty, SmarterKids.com is making a market and building its business one customer at the time.

www.internetcontent.net
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