



Premium Content and the PDF: Is it Time to Say Goodbye?

by Sarah Chula

Within the B2B world, PDFs are the most popular way to deliver and share premium content, such as e-books or guides, online. As inbound marketing started to become popular years ago, it was no surprise that the PDF became the first way to digitally distribute premium content across the web. There are many benefits of the PDF that have made it a good medium to use – PDFs preserve formatting and they can easily be distributed via email just to name a few – and although this vehicle has become a pillar of our content marketing efforts, things are beginning to change.

As mobile internet usage begins to surpass desktop usage, it's important that we begin to take a mobile-first approach and with that, continue to tweak the way we deliver premium content in order to provide the best customer/client experience possible. There are some disadvantages of the PDF that may make using a web-based format the better alternative. While there is still a place for PDFs in your overall content program, it is time to reconsider how big of a role they play

1. PDFs are not Mobile Friendly

PDF documents are not meant to be viewed on mobile devices. Because PDFs are not mobile-friendly, it's extremely hard to read and maneuver through (*pinch, zoom, repeat*) a PDF document on a cell phone or tablet, in turn providing a horrible user experience.

Webpage advantage: A better mobile experience. Text is larger and users can easily scroll through content

PDF viewed on mobile



Responsive webpage on mobile



Courtesy: PennState

2. Decreased Measurability

Since PDFs don't exist on the web, there's no way to track how many people viewed the document, how long they spent viewing the content or what links they clicked on. Given the growing importance of data analytics in marketing, it's essential to understand how your audience is receiving and interacting with your content.

Webpage advantage: The ability to gather additional intelligence to help gauge your content's performance. Page views, time spent, links clicked and referral source information can all be leveraged in future content decisions.

3. PDFs are Difficult to Keep Updated

Once someone receives a PDF, that document is permanent. If you do need to make a change, you can always edit the document and re-upload the most current version, but there's a good chance that anyone who already downloaded the document will never see it.

Webpage advantage: Can easily be edited and the changes are instant. All future views of the page will have the most updated version of that content.

4. Engagement

Because the information is static and one-way, PDFs leave little room for you to interact and engage with your audience.

Webpage advantage: Allows for additional calls-to-action, online forms and other avenues that will engage your audience and guide them further down the sales funnel.

The demise of the PDF is not something we see happening tomorrow, but we do need to take into consideration that the way people want to interact with our content is changing. People want content that is two-way, interactive and dynamic. Strictly using PDFs as part of our premium content strategy limits our creativity, the level at which we're able to interact with our audience and valuable analytics into how our content is performing.

As marketers, we should be challenging ourselves to find alternatives to this format such as interactive webpages, microsites and online presentations. At the end of the day, our audience is most important and they should be the ones driving our content marketing decisions – so don't be afraid to test something new.

Questions about your content strategy? Call Sarah Chula at 440-449.6900 or **email Sarah**.