Content Inventories – Setting the base for a content audit

Course

Topics

Teachers

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Teaser

One cannot talk about *Content Audits* without mentioning Content Inventories. Without a properly established inventory a content audit is not possible, and the quality of the audit depends on the quality of the inventory. Paula Land explained in her lecture many dos and don'ts of content inventories, and she raised awareness for the close connections between the qualitative and the quantitative elements of a content audit.

Relevance

Content audits are one of the foundation laying parts of a content strategist's work. They are always related to a qualitive goal: Can the existing content achieve what it should achieve? But before you can analyze and assess your content you must find out what content you have — an uncomfortable and unpopular task in many cases. A content inventory gives a structured overview of the content published or created by an organization. To set up a content inventory is one of the first skills a beginning content strategist must acquire.

Description

To create an effective content strategy, it is essential to be aware of the current state of content. A content audit is an enquiry to find out how your content is doing at the moment and where the opportunities for future improvement lie. In dealing with content the visitors and the organizations publishing the content pursue objectives. A content audit is an indispendable step to align content with those goals on an empirical base.

No content audit without a content inventory

A content Audit is a qualitative assessment of the content and its functionality. To

audit content means basically to measure the quality of content with regard to desired actions. In this article we guide you through the "**content inventory"** as the most important part or the preparation of a content audit. We will also treat some other clarifications which are needed before the content audit can be carried out.

Before we get started, let's clear up some main terms:

What is meant by content?

A piece of content is the information that is directed towards a customer or user. Content can appear and be published in many forms, such as headline, text body, video, images and through different channels. In our class we were digging deeper into digital content, presented on a website.

What is an inventory?

You might be familiar with the term *inventory* as you know that every supermarket needs to conduct it and that this is done either at a quarterly period or at the end of the year. At a specific time, supermarkets need to check on which products (WHAT) are located within their storage (WHERE) and further on to to which extent (HOW MANY) and what kind of quality.

What is a content inventory?

So if you think of your website as a supermarket, then for a Content Inventory you would need to look at every page and every piece of content that is found on your website, in order to later on qualify how good it is, determine gaps, detect room for improvement et cetera.

A content inventory is done as a preparation for a content audit, when:

- Content improvement is needed
- A content migration has to be prepared
- Content must be made fit for entering a new market
- Maintenance and optimisation is needed
- You review your content as a part of your business

Phase 1: Definition of the audit

Before starting a content audit some questions should be asked to define the purpose and the scope of the project. The answers to these questions are essential not only for the inventory but for the audit as a whole:

1. Why is a content audit happening?
2. What are the objectives of the organisation?
3. How to measure the success of the audit?

To be able to understand business goals the followings steps can be carried out:

1. Stakeholder Analysis: identify everyone who contributes to content including cross functional teams.
2. Assignment of measurable metrics to goals.
3. Prioritisation of musts and shoulds.
4. Listing long term and short term goals.
5. Definition of the addressees: Who does the organisation serve?
6. Definition of the most important user tasks and goals?
7. Definition of criteria for the successful information retrieval and fulfilment of user needs by the website

In order to understand the goals of the users you can proceed e.g. by

1. User Research
2. User Analytics
3. User Feedback
4. Developmemt of üersonas
5. Visualisation of customer journeys

Additionally an auditor should be aware of the:

- Resources and Budget
- Long term content strategy and planning
- Clear understanding of what an auditor will work with

Answering those questions are considered as the "define" section, afterwards "assess" section starts which consist of content inventory and audit.

Phase 2: The establishment of the inventory

To be able to do a comprehensive and full audit, a content inventory should be done which is usually a quantitive analyses of all pages of the website. (It can also comprise other content, e.g. social media content, PDFs and other media types and even printed material.)

A content inventory contains structured data, usually in the form of spreadsheet. How many and which data the inventory contains depends on the project definition. All website content inventories should comprise: URL, file type, media including videos and images, meta data, Word Count and H1 tag text. If a tool/ software is used to create the inventory, it is suggested to start from the home page and to follow the navigational structure. It is essential to label every item of the inventory by an ID in addition to the URL to not get confused in the future when URLs change and to be able to sort the content easily.

Content Inventory SpreadSheet

There are 2 ways to create an inventory:

- **Manual inventorisation:** It provides detailed insights about the content, as the auditor collects piece by piece information about each content item. This way to proceed makes it easy to identify patterns. However as the webpage grows, manual ways to create an inventory become tedious and time-consuming. In many cases a manual inventory is restricted to relevant or representative parts of the content. Which and how many content items are inventorized manually depends on the goals that were set for the audit.

- **Automated inventorisation:** For an automated inventorisation all pages on a webpage are collected by a tool. Usually every item of a website is fetched via its URL. This approach is fast, comprehensive and detailed. However, the generated inventory only gathers data, unlikely manual work, it doesn't create insights and it is not hands-on. In addition, automation will display a lot of information in an unstructured way. The most important tool for automated inventorisation are [ContentWRX Audit](#), [Screaming Frog SEO Spider](#) and [URL Profiler - Powerful Content and Back Link Auditor Software](#).

Phase 3: Preparation of the qualitative audit

When the content inventory is ready, an auditor basically has the list of what s/he needs to audit in his hands. Voilà: the audit can start as you completed your inventory. Depending on the type of audit additional columns will be added to the inventory. Usually these columns have to be filled manually even if the inventory has been generated by software. By using the inventory as the base for the assessment of the content it is possible to achieve a much higher degree of reliability and independence from bias then by analysing only content items selected by chance or subjective preferences of the auditor.

Just a brief information for you to consider different types of content audits; qualitative (editorial) , competitive (best practices), brand, content performance, structural (functional), global, audience and social audit. This article will mainly focus on Qualitative Audit, Competitive Audit as well as Quantitative Analyses (Content Inventory).

- A **Qualitative Audit** analyses the effectiveness of content and how it performs for desired actions.
- The **Competitive Audit** is an audit type focused on best practices in the market by comparing audience, type and quantity of content, language

format including tone and voice, community features, frequency of publication, overall impression and any other differentiating features across organisations.

- A **Brand Audit** mainly evaluates terminology, tone and voice, imagery and messaging. The main purpose is to evaluate how content delivers the brand messages and represents the organisation.
- A **Content Performance Audit** uses analytics data, site metrics, search data and customer feedback to see how content is performing towards quantitative business objectives.
- An **audience audit** elaborates how content meets with the users needs by focusing on user types, needs, tasks, flows, customer journey map, and gap analyses.
- The **structural (functional)** audit focuses on user interface and user experience. It identifies content elements, interactions, navigational models, templates and content types.
- The **global audit** analyse site for localisation efforts including language support, breadth of translation, cultural relevance, navigational model, imagery, design consistency, regional and local content and localised meta content.

Recommended reading

Paula Land's book on content audits is still the most comprehensive introduction to the subject. It also provides comprehensive information about content inventories. You find a detailed review of the book here in this knowledge base: [Content Audits and Inventories – A Handbook by Paula Land](#).

Paula Land's short article in The Language of Content Strategy contains links to interesting texts from the early phase of content strategy, one of the first typical tools of which were content inventories.