



The Content Creation Guide

Build strategic and effective content for big results.

INTRODUCTION

Why have a content strategy?

With inbound marketing on the rise, the popularity of content marketing has exploded into a widespread phenomenon. But how important is it to map out an official content strategy?

According to a study by Brighttalk, only 30% of B2B marketers have a documented content strategy in place. Today's B2B marketers are under constant pressure to create a steady stream of worthwhile and relevant content. When you are busy, sitting down to map out a content marketing strategy may seem like a waste of valuable time, but taking this extra step can benefit you in several ways:

Save time and money. Understanding how the content you create relates to your overall business goals can help you rule out projects that aren't going to be beneficial, helping to save both marketing resources and budget.

Generate new business. Per dollar spent, content marketing generates approximately 3x as many leads as traditional marketing (Demand Metric). Gating content behind a form has proven to be an invaluable lead generation tactic for many businesses.

Improve the customer experience. As the B2B buyer's journey evolves, buyers will only work with companies that can provide personalized selling experiences. This applies to marketing just as much as sales — and having a content strategy to address each buyer's pain points can help meet these growing expectations.

Enable sales. Your marketing content isn't only helpful to your customers. It can also be exactly what your sales reps need to persuade a hesitant prospect or close a hard-won deal.

Educate prospects. Not every lead is going to be ready to convert into a closed deal. Content is critical to the lead nurturing process, and can help educate leads to a sales-ready state.

The wrong content (or the right content at the wrong time) is a waste of your efforts. The worksheets in the following guide will help you to focus and organize your content marketing initiatives, paving the way for more effective content.

CHAPTER ONE

Identifying Goals

Before creating your content, let's start at the most obvious point: your goals. Identifying overall business goals and key messages can lead to more focused and effective content that highlights your company's strengths and meets your target customer's needs.

Before you begin mapping out a content marketing plan, it's a good idea to lay out the basic components of your business, product, and target audience. Having this information laid out on a worksheet, like the one on **page 3**, will help you identify key messages and strengths around which to build content.

Determine overall goals. One of the first steps in the content creation process is to decide what your goal is for your content: are you trying to further establish your brand as a thought leader, or is content purely a lead generation play? This decision will determine the type of content to create and the steps needed to track and measure its success.

59% of B2B marketers cite lead generation as their top content marketing goal.

-B2B Content Marketing Spotlight Report, Brighttalk

Define your customer. It's important to gain an understanding of your buyer personas. What are some key characteristics of your target audiences? What company size is the best fit for your product? Who are your key decision makers in the sales cycle and what is the best way to reach them? Answering these questions will help you to determine some of the greatest challenges you will face in reaching your target audiences, and how these challenges can be overcome. Read more about this step in chapter four.

Identify your strengths. What sets your company and your product apart from competitors? Knowing your strengths can help you identify key messages around which to base content, and defining your company culture can help you to develop a consistent voice across your content.

Once you've identified the goals that are most important to you, start thinking about the types of content you can create to meet those goals. The next chapter can help.

WORKSHEET ONE

Goal Identification Worksheet



Identify your goals by answering the questions below to make sure that your content goals are always aligned with your overall business goals.

QUESTION 1 What is your overall goal/mission statement?

QUESTION 2 Describe your target customer(s) and their basic needs.

QUESTION 3 How does your product meet these needs?

QUESTION 4 Briefly describe your company culture and some of your greatest strengths.

QUESTION 5 What sets your product apart from competitors in your field?

CHAPTER TWO

Seven Recommended Types of Content

Before you dive into content creation, it's important to have an understanding of all of the options at your fingertips. The types of content you can create may seem limitless, but it's likely that some content will be better suited to your content strategy than others.

Take a look at the seven common types of content below and start thinking about whether or not any of them might be a good fit for the goals that you outlined in the previous chapter.

[Content creation](#) ranks as the single most effective SEO tactic by 53%.

-MarketingSherpa

1. A Company Blog

[Starting a company blog](#) is a great way to position your business as a thought leader (while also giving your content a nice SEO boost). Your blog can become a wonderful resource to those looking for more information about your industry, which can help build a community around your brand, bring in new prospects, and cultivate a following of brand evangelists. Blogs

can require as little or as much time commitment as you like — just make sure you decide on a posting cadence so that your audience knows what to expect.

2. White Papers and E-books

Creating long-form pieces like white papers along with a company blog allows you to offer higher value content that can be gated behind a form. This gives you the opportunity to deliver a valuable resource to your audience while also collecting lead data to support your demand generation efforts. Having a library of white papers positions your company as a resource to buyers during the buying process (and to current clients who are looking for more information on a topic).

3. “Snackable” Video Content

[Video is on the rise](#), and with video-hosting sites like Wistia and Vidyard, it's becoming easier than ever to collect lead data and integrate it directly into your CRM. Not only is video good for lead generation, it's also a great way to connect with buyers and current clients on a more personal level (think product

demonstrations, training videos, and more). Videos are also one of the easiest types of content to digest — just sit back, relax, and enjoy the show!

Posts with videos attract 3x more inbound links than plain text posts.

-SEOMoz

4. Visual Content

Visual content has grown in popularity, and will only continue to grow as the marketplace becomes more crowded with content. Buyers are looking for content that is easy to absorb and doesn't require a large time commitment — and visual content like infographics fits the bill perfectly.

5. Case Studies

[Case studies](#) show potential buyers exactly how others are using your product or service, and since they're conducted with client approval, they carry much more weight than the generic marketing copy that covers your website. This makes case studies an extremely valuable piece of collateral for your sales team. Tap into your brand evangelists to see who might be willing to participate in a case study or video testimonial that you can feature on your website.

6. Educational Webinars

If your goal is to position your company as a thought leader, [educational webinars](#) are a great way to demonstrate your knowledge of industry trends and best practices. You can also use your webinar program as a lead generation tactic by collecting data from registrants through forms. Just like blogging, webinars can be as much of a time commitment as you want them to be — just make sure that your expectations on scheduling and execution are clear from the start.

7. Podcasts

The New York Times has dubbed this “The Great Podcast Renaissance.” As buyers get busier and busier, [podcasts](#) give them the opportunity to learn while they're doing something else, making podcasts a great tool for education while multitasking. They also add more variety to your content marketing mix, so you can incorporate an audio element along with visual and written elements.

Choose the types of content that best match your goals and resources. Then, use the information in the next chapter to decide who should get each piece of content you create, and when.



“ Customer testimonials and case studies are considered the most effective content marketing tactics, identified by 89% and 88%, respectively, of B2B marketers. ”

- B2B Content Marketing Trends Report

CHAPTER THREE

Buyer Personas

The greatest challenge in content marketing is making sure that the right person receives the right content at the right time. By having a concrete understanding of your ideal buyer, you can cater your content to their needs and preferences and distribute it among the appropriate channels, meaning that your marketing messages are always relevant.

77% of business buyers want different content at each stage of the product research process. -Pardot, *State of Demand Generation*

To make this task a little less intimidating, use the template on **page 10** to identify concerns and questions for each of your buyer personas at each stage of the sales cycle. Depending on how many buyer personas you will be working with (initiator, influencer, decision-maker, buyer, user, etc.) you may need to print off several copies. Consider concerns at each of the following stages:

TOP OF FUNNEL

At the beginning of the sales cycle, your potential buyers may not even be aware that they have a problem or need. It is extremely important to understand the individual needs of each of your personas at this stage, and be able to help them identify them.

At this stage, you should be focused on generating awareness with educational, non product-specific content. Any of the following content is appropriate for buyers at this stage:

- Educational white papers
- Tip sheets and checklists
- Videos
- Infographics
- Blog posts

MIDDLE OF FUNNEL

At this stage, your buyers will be looking for more product-oriented content — content that points out both the advantages of having your product, as well as the disadvantages of not having it. Once a prospect has a general understanding of their needs

and how your product can meet them, it's time to identify the aspects of your product that set you apart from competitors, and apply them to each persona's specific needs.

For example, a “user” persona may be particularly concerned with your product's ease of use at this stage. Use any of the following content for buyers at this stage:

- Recorded webinars
- Case studies
- ROI calculators
- Industry reports
- Data sheets with product information
- Product- or ROI-focused white papers

BOTTOM OF FUNNEL

In the later stages of the sales cycle, your personas may still be deciding between vendors, and will have specific needs that must be met before the sale is closed. For example, an “influencer” at this stage may be looking for content to help them sell their CEO on your product. Keep in mind that some personas, such as the “decision-maker,” may not enter the sales cycle until later stages.

Try using the following content for these bottom-of-funnel buyers:

- Implementation and support information
- Buyer's guides
- White papers/one-sheeters geared toward decision-makers

Take a walk in your prospects' shoes — learn how to best reach your prospects at each stage of the buyer's journey in our interactive infographic, *Understanding the Buyer's Journey*.



WORKSHEET TWO



Buyer Personas

Use this worksheet to identify concerns and questions that you need to address for each of your buyer personas at each stage of the sales cycle. Depending on how many buyer personas you will be working with (initiator, influencer, decision maker, etc.), you may need to print off several copies.

| | STAGE | QUESTIONS/CONCERNS |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------|
| PERSONA 1 <div></div> | EARLY | <div></div> |
| | MIDDLE | <div></div> |
| | LATE | <div></div> |
| PERSONA 2 <div></div> | EARLY | <div></div> |
| | MIDDLE | <div></div> |
| | LATE | <div></div> |

CHAPTER FOUR

Basic Planning

Planning a new content marketing initiative may seem like a straightforward enough task, but taking the time to map out a concrete plan can help keep your efforts focused and on track, add structure and organization to your projects, and prevent you from wasting time on initiatives that aren't worthwhile. When approaching a new content marketing initiative, use the worksheet on **page 13** for guidance. Keep the following points in mind during this stage.

Content marketing costs 62% less than traditional marketing. -Demand Metric

How will this initiative meet your business goals?

It's important to ask yourself this question with any project. When defining your reasoning for taking on a project, you may find that you are adopting a project strictly because other businesses have adopted it, when in fact it doesn't really apply to your business plan. Taking a moment on this extra step can ensure that you are only funneling company resources into projects that contribute to your overall business goals outlined in Chapter One.

Does this content initiative revolve around one particular piece of content, or several pieces?

Depending on your goals, you may be creating one giant piece of content, several smaller pieces of content, or both. For example, if you're releasing a white paper on a topic, you can also create supporting content like an infographic, a series of blog posts, or a webinar to help tie your campaign together. Releasing related pieces of content pertaining to a particular theme can give your content a more unified, intentional feel.

How long will this campaign run? What is the shelf life of the content you're creating? Some content is evergreen and can continue to bring in leads and contribute to your thought leadership goals for months on end. Other content may be more seasonal, and may need to be refreshed down the road. Consider how long a piece of content will remain useful to your business before sinking time and resources into its development.

Who is responsible? Think through the entire process of completing the initiative when delegating tasks. What do you need to do before you begin? Who will be responsible

for each portion of the project? Will the project require regular updates or maintenance after it is completed? Will one person handle the creation and distribution of the content, or will tasks be divvied up across a team? Make sure everyone knows who is responsible for what before you get started.

Where will this content go? Is this something that will be gated behind a form on your website? Will it be distributed across your social channels? Do you plan to use it for paid search advertising? Make sure you know where your content is going so that you can develop a proper promotional plan with all of the appropriate creative (for example, the paid search creative if you'll be running ads).

Use the worksheet on **page 16** to keep each of your content initiatives organized from the start.



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If you'd like to see a collection of example email templates that cover everything from newsletters to event follow-ups, download our full Email Design Lookbook, which features 10 stellar email templates provided by Pardot clients.

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WORKSHEET THREE



Basic Planning Worksheet

When approaching a new content marketing initiative, use the questionnaire below to start mapping out your plan.

One sentence description of your objective.

Who is in charge?

How will this objective meet your business goals?

Potential Costs:

Anticipated Total Cost:

Goal for Completion Date:

Delegation of Tasks:

Creation

Launch

Maintenance

CHAPTER FIVE

Content Mapping and Distribution

Once you have identified your different buyer personas — as well as the concerns that your personas may have at each stage — it's time to map out the content that will best address these concerns. Use the mapping template on **page 16** to determine which content will be sent to each persona and when. This method of outlining your content strategy can also help you to identify areas where more content is needed.

95% of B2B marketers use some form of content segmentation.

-Content Marketing Institute

Refer back to your former template to make sure your content is directly addressing concerns at each stage (top, middle, and bottom).

DISTRIBUTING YOUR CONTENT

Even if you've identified each of your buyer personas, their specific needs, and the best content to address these needs, that content will go to waste without

proper methods of distribution.

Know your audience. Reconsider all that you know about your different buyer personas. What is their preferred outlet of communication? Are they active on social media? Do they frequent specific websites? These are the channels that you will want to target when distributing your content.

Consider the format. Can your content be organized into a fun infographic and sent out over social media? Keep in mind that a single piece of content can be distributed through more than one channel. Cross-promote your content: if you post an infographic to your blog, be sure to announce the posting on Twitter, send out an e-blast with blog updates, and promote it on any other relevant channels.

Take advantage of your networks. When the time comes to distribute your content, tap into your networks. Can they reach an audience that you can't on your own? Provide them with some suggested promotional messages that they can use for their audience in order to minimize the amount of heavy lifting that goes into distributing your content.

CREATING AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR

When it comes to content marketing efforts, timing is everything, and using an editorial calendar is one of the most effective ways to stay organized. Editorial calendars can vary depending on the type of content. The generic template on **page 17** is a great way to keep up with content of all types.

A few things to consider when filling out your editorial calendar:

Establish themes. Once you have amassed a certain amount of content and have a good grasp on the formats that resonate with your audience, consider planning your content around particular themes or campaigns each month or quarter. This will allow you to tie all of your content to an over arching campaign to better track your success.

Schedule postings. Mapping out the outlets that you would like to use to promote your content is a great way to stay organized and save time, particularly if you're using a marketing automation system. If you know which channels you want to use — and when you would like to use them — you can schedule your promotions to launch when they'll be most effective. Not only does this encourage transparency among your team, it makes it easier to support your content campaigns from every angle.

Stay agile. One important thing to note: don't feel limited by your editorial calendar. Just because you have a post scheduled to go out on a certain day a week, that doesn't mean you can't move content around to make sure everything gets released at the optimum time. For example, if there's some important industry news that you feel your team should cover, make sure your editorial calendar is flexible enough to account for the adjustment.



WORKSHEET FOUR

Content Mapping Worksheet



SALES CYCLE STAGES

Defining the stages of your sales cycle will help you tailor your campaigns to a buyer's journey.

AUDIENCE ROLES

Who are the major influencers in a purchasing decision? Define and understand each one.

MAPPING YOUR CONTENT

Each stage should have content that fits your audiences' needs best.

STAGE

There may be more or fewer than six.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

AUDIENCE

There may be more or fewer than six.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

MAP YOUR CONTENT

Each stage should have content that fits your audiences' needs best.

WEEK ONE

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WEEK TWO

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WEEK THREE

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WEEK FOUR

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

WORKSHEET FIVE

Editorial Campaign Template



WEEK OF:

THEME:

| DAY OF THE WEEK | CONTENT TITLE | AUTHOR | PLANS FOR PROMOTION |
|-----------------|---------------|--------|---------------------|
| MONDAY | | | |
| TUESDAY | | | |
| WEDNESDAY | | | |
| THURSDAY | | | |
| FRIDAY | | | |
| SATURDAY/SUNDAY | | | |

CHAPTER SIX

14 Content Marketing KPIs

One of the more difficult aspects of content marketing is measurement. How do you take something qualitative, like a white paper or a blog post, and turn it into something quantitative? Without a reporting strategy in place, it's difficult to see which pieces of content are contributing the most to your lead generation (or thought leadership) efforts.

Fortunately, marketers can choose from a variety of metrics to measure their content success, ranging from more easily-tracked metrics like page visits to data that could be collected by a CRM or marketing automation tool.

Take a look at the list below to get a better idea of some of the ways you can start measuring your content.

1. Unique Page Visits. One simple measure of your content success is the traffic it's receiving. Take a look at your unique page visits to see how many people are visiting your page on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

2. Downloads. Downloads can give you even more insight into the popularity of your content, since they

indicate an elevated level of interest (i.e. your reader probably had to fill out a form to download instead of skimming through a blog post).

3. Time on Page. A page visit means one thing. But someone actually staying on your page long enough to read an entire article or fill out a form means something else entirely. This says that your content was high enough quality to merit additional attention.

4. Inbound Links. Are people linking to your site? This means that your content is improving your credibility. When other sites start viewing you as an authority, it can increase your site traffic and help you achieve a higher spot in search rankings.

5. Shares. While many consider “shares” to be somewhat of a vanity metric, they're worth keeping track of so that you can see which channels your content is resonating on.

6. Comments and Interactions. Comments on your content are great indications that you're sparking conversation and making an impact on your readers.

7. Cost Per Click (CPC). In all likelihood, your boss is going to want to see some metrics that correlate with dollar signs. If you're promoting your content via pay per click ads or sponsored social postings, track your cost per click to see your return on investment for those campaigns.

8. Cost Per Lead (CPL). Similarly, cost per lead is another valuable metric you can start tracking to measure your content marketing ROI.

9. Lead Generation. For many companies, content marketing is primarily a lead generation tactic, used to acquire leads through forms and content downloads. Keep track of how many leads originate from a piece of marketing content, so that your content gets credit for that revenue if the deal closes.

10. Annual Contract Value (ACV). If you're keeping track of leads that originate from a content marketing campaign, you can also track the ACV (for example: the monthly cost of your service x 12) of the deals that have closed due to your content.

11. Influence. Has your content served as a touchpoint for leads at any point during the sales process? If so, you can judge the number of leads, opportunities, or closed deals that have been "influenced" by your content.

12. Conversion Rates. When it comes to content marketing, you'll want to make sure you're optimizing your conversion rates at every possible opportunity.

If not, you risk losing valuable leads who would have converted, but decided not to for one reason or another.

13. Followers and/or Subscribers. The number of followers and subscribers you have is a great indication of brand awareness. If increasing your brand awareness is one of the goals on your list, make sure you're keeping track of these numbers.

14. Growth. As a general best practice, you'll want to make sure to measure your growth in the following areas: subscribers (for a blog, perhaps), downloads, page views — anything that you can put a number on and measure the percent change over time.



The B2B Social Media Guide to Best Practices

Social media may have started as a personal communication tool, but today it's an integral part of most businesses' marketing and content strategies — and B2B organizations are no exception. Whether your business is just getting started with social media or is well-established in the social sphere, this e-book can help you see more value from your efforts.

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