



THE FLUFF-FREE GUIDE TO CONTENT STRATEGY

Attract. Differentiate. Influence. Grip. Nurture.
Convince. And Convert Customers with Words.

FREE EBOOK

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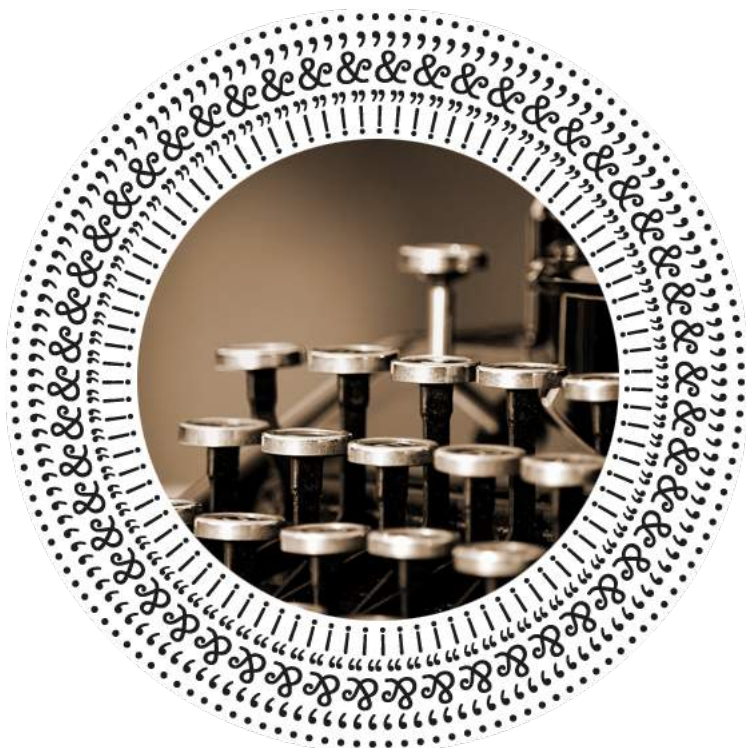
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READ THIS FIRST

AN UNSKIPPABLE INTRO TO SET THE
SCENE AND REVEAL THE SECRETS OF
THIS GUIDE



It was 2014. The once-wieldy ways of search engine optimization (SEO) had been forced into early retirement by Google's algorithm changes, known as Penguin and Panda to those in the know.

Google was no longer fond of keyword-stuffing. Or link-buying. Or redirects. Or those horrendous article-spinning machines. Or shoddy-looking websites which sent their visitors running for the hills within moments of first embrace.

And rightfully so.

You see Google had a new crush. And she went by the name of Sticky Content.

She was the kind of gal that gripped and engaged her audience instantly. And soothed their heaviest headaches. That told them what they wanted to hear, and taught them what they were desperate to learn. That spoonfed them with so much actionable value they couldn't help but share her worldly wisdom with friends, colleagues and followers alike.

She didn't come on too strong, but instead seduced her prospects, subtly, gently, tactfully.

Sticky Content was unique in her field. And a trustworthy source of niche-specific thought-leadership. A loyal friend who would continue to feed her prospects with no-strings-attached value and/or entertainment since their very first encounter.

For that reason, any brand that consistently created Sticky Content would catapult to mind as soon as its readers required the products or services they offered. Or as soon as its readers' friends, family or colleagues required the products or services it offered.

Yes, Google would reward Sticky Content generously for her charming, selfless ways.

How? By pushing those esteemed web pages up the search rankings, and positioning them in front of the right audiences for relevant industry-specific keyword searches.

Why? Because Google's users were happier when they clicked through to find valuable, engaging content, rather than its keyword-stuffed, self-absorbed predecessors. They found the answers they were seeking. The cures to their pains. The stories which resonated. The tips which they could instantly put into action.

They found the kind of value and quality needed to excel in whatever it was they really wanted to excel in.

And because of this,

- a) they spent more time on the pages they visited (recorded in Google analytics as 'page duration').

- b) they clicked around more posts and pages on the websites this content belonged to (thus increasing the 'page depth').

- c) they were much less likely to leave the site after just one page view (lowering the 'bounce rate').

These were some of the key signals that made Google think: "this... THIS is a website that I should serve up like fresh appetizers to my users. They'll enjoy this."

It was a new dawn of digital marketing. And while my business, The Creative Copywriter, was still pulling in organic traffic thanks to some of the old SEO tactics that hadn't been awashed by the changes – it was time for me to up my game. It was time to master the art of content marketing.

I mean, really master it. Mr. Miyagi-style.

So that's what I did.

6 months later and I'd already knocked up blog posts totalling 9000

new visitors in the first week after upload, without an ounce of paid promotion. I'd already gotten recognised in the industry as a powerful force of thought-leadership. I'd already been listed as one of the world's top 120 Twitter marketers - and had caught the attention of world-leading power influencers like Aaron Lee, Neal Schaffer, Lee Odden and Joe Pulizzi.

Fast forward to present day and our agency helps businesses like yours craft killer content strategies.

The kind that include every nuance of a successful inbound marketing funnel, leaving no strategic or logistical stone unturned. That ensure your brand's content stands out in that saturated blogosphere like a unicorn in a field of donkeys. That truly identify and overcome your target buyers' obstacles and objections. That take your prospects on an immaculately-planned buyer's journey from first touchpoint to final conversion. That turn your company's website into a well-oiled, traffic-generating, lead-converting machine. And beef up that all-important bottom line with an ROI that will make your board of directors giddy.

Want your company to reap these rewards?

Then read away.

THE FOLLOWING GUIDE WILL:

Help you build a content strategy that actually works.

Follow the steps laid out, use the example answers for guidance and inspiration, and answer your own questions on a separate sheet as you go along.

This is certainly not a strategy that can be completed in one sitting. Some work, such as the buyer interviews, and gathering all your analytics data, will need to be carried out beforehand. So whatever your role is in the company, I suggest you give this guide a once over first – so you know what needs to be prepared before assembling your

crack squad to flesh it out.

Like all effective strategies, we start with the higher-level questions (the ‘who’ and ‘why’ questions) then gradually work our way towards the nitty gritty details (the ‘hows’, ‘whats’, ‘wheres’ and ‘whens’), loosely following this overarching strategic framework:

INTERNAL

Who are you?

Why do you exist as a company?

Why are you starting this campaign?

How can you achieve your vision?

What are the exact deliverables of this campaign?

Where can you distribute these deliverables?

When should each deliverable be put into action?

WHO?

WHY?

HOW?

WHAT?

WHERE?

WHEN?

EXTERNAL

Who is your audience?

Why should your audience care about you?

Why should they care about your campaign?

How can your audience achieve their goals?

What action should each deliverable evoke?

Where are your audience likely to engage with and react to these deliverables?

When are your audience most likely to engage with and react to these deliverables?

By the end? You'll have:

- a) An understanding of the main content marketing pitfalls and how to dodge them.
- b) An audit of your current digital marketing efforts, including a SWOT analysis.
- c) A collective understanding of how inbound/content marketing can help your company and what your goals are.
- d) Clearly defined buyer personas and journeys, plus the content assets which will be used to push them through each stage of those journeys.
- e) A solid list of differentiators that will make your content zig as your industry zags.
- f) A unique, relevant, memorable tone of voice.
- g) Oodles of carefully-created topic ideas in line with the strategy.
- h) Four or five content buckets that will focus the content you create and curate across all platforms, channels and mediums.
- i) A fixed plan for what content you're going to create, when you're going to create it, what the goal of each piece is, what format and channel of content it should be – all laid out clearly in a content calendar, content matrix and lead-nurturing flowchart.
- j) A list of influencers to target for influencer marketing purposes, and an understanding of how to do so effectively.
- k) A social media action plan in place.
- l) Several content promotion strategies in tune with your budget, available resources and goals.
- m) A list of short-tail and long-tail keywords to focus some of your content pieces on for SEO-value.
- n) A guest posting campaign plan.
- o) A list of KPIs and a process for measuring, tweaking and refining the strategy for optimum results.
- p) A huge grin on your face, knowing that success is around the corner.

WHO SHOULD BE IN ON THE ACTION?

Every decision-maker involved in your digital marketing efforts. This might include your CEO, your CMO, your VP of Strategy, your Head of Content, your social media manager, any other marketing reps, and – if you really want to do your bottom line some favours – an external expert or strategist (like yours truly).

It's crucial to have ALL key stakeholders on the same page moving forward. Everyone must know the gambit, why you're playing it, and how each move is going to help you win the game. Right from the get go.

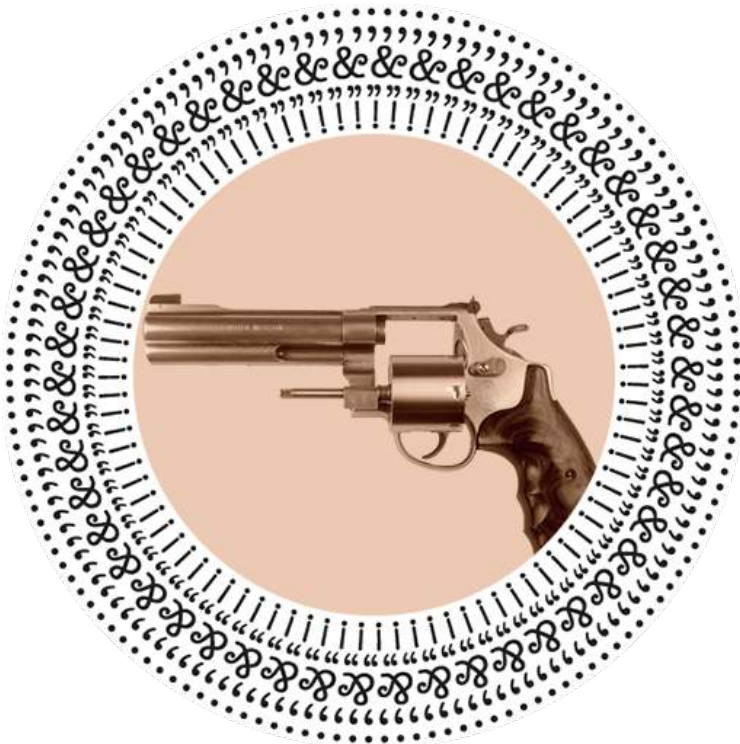
The last thing you need after cooking up a powerful inbound recipe is for other key decision makers to question every ingredient as and when they're dropped in the mix. I've seen content strategies come to a grinding halt because key decision makers from other departments weren't present during the initial workshops.

Comprende?

Good. So round up the squad and let's play ball.

WHERE COMPANIES FAIL

AND WHAT YOU CAN LEARN TO
CREATE A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



“Learn from your mistakes, Konradik, and you’ll go far” my mother wisely told me, as I stood before her, red-handed (literally), with my arm jammed tight inside the cookie jar.

But luckily you can learn a whole lot from other people’s mistakes too. And equally, from their successes – I discovered later in life (all by my clever self).

By casting a spotlight on these mistakes, we can ensure your content strategy is set up for success, pre-empting the many pitfalls that other companies plunge into.

So with my wealth of experience in the content marketing world, working with companies of multiple shapes and sizes (plus analysing the efforts of countless others), here are the top 16 most common blunders I witness daily. And the key takeaways you can learn from them.

It’s crucial to get to grips with these before delving any deeper. You can (and should) then revert back to this checklist later, making sure every ingredient in your inbound marketing recipe is just right.

Hopefully, then, you’ll manage to avoid most, if not all, of those awkward cookie-jar moments in front of mummy (or your CEO).

MISTAKE #1: ALL ABOUT “ME, ME, ME”

This is a classic blunder. And as bizarre as it seems to me, an all-too-common one.

Tons of companies still use their blog as an outlet for sharing company news. Like the arrival of a new CFO. Or an industry event they’ve attended. Or a press release about a shiny new product they’re launching.

Why? Because they suffer from 'inside-out thinking' syndrome. What the heck is 'inside-out thinking' syndrome you ask? Perhaps the worst disease a company can be diagnosed with. Especially when it comes to content marketing.

What I'm referring to is the tendency of CEOs and marketers to think that their products, services, and things their staff get up to, are somehow important or interesting. That they're somehow newsworthy. That somewhere out there in the digital jungle sits a tribe of target prospects, so head over heels with their product that they are eagerly awaiting its company news updates, week in, week out. And that there's nothing better they would rather do than take 10 minutes out of their busy day to read self-indulgent blog posts about how incredibly awesome that company is.

I hope it goes without saying that, unless you are Justin Bieber, this kind of hankering fan base simply doesn't exist.

Trust me.

No one, and I do mean NO ONE, is interested in reading a blog post detailing your team's adventures cleaning up the rabbit's hutch in some obscure urban farm on your away day. No one cares about the CV of your new CMO. No one is sitting by their laptop eagerly awaiting for you to tell them about the number of business cards you collected during a niche industry event you attended last week.

Sorry if I sound too harsh. But this is the truth. And if you put yourself in the shoes of your potential customers, this should become crystal clear in a second.

Instead, you should be asking this powerful question:

"Why should people give a ****?"

Content marketing (and business in general) needs to be approached with an outside-in mindset.

Ask yourself questions like these:

Where are your target audience active online and what are they doing/looking for there?

What are they interested in learning or reading about?

What information are they searching for?

What problems do they need solving?

And how can you create content which feeds that value (and/or entertainment) to them, and which aligns with your brand and offering?

MISTAKE #2: UNSTRATEGIC. UNFOCUSED.

Focus is vital in content marketing. Or any kind of marketing, for that matter. Yet many companies still suffer from a lack of it.

The marketing team of a design agency we worked with, for example, would blog about all kinds of unrelated topics; their favourite shoe brands, the latest episode of Game of Thrones, what they got up to at the weekend etc.

Why? Because they wanted to come across as a friendly, approachable bunch.

But this begs that crucial question once more:

Why should people give a ****?

And how would these topics help to compel, convince and convert their target prospects?

Unless the authors had cleverly revealed design or branding-related

insights within these articles (e.g. “10 Killer Branding Tricks Your Company Can Steal from Game of Thrones”) – which would be a pretty smart move – then they’re pretty much just wasting time. And a blog which covers any/every topic under the sun is extremely unlikely to build a solid readership. At least not a focused readership of target prospects that will convert into paying customers somewhere down the line.

The solution? Carefully decide on four or five overarching themes which are connected to the services/products you offer, and which are thoroughly in tune with your audience’s needs and interests.

We call these content buckets. Because they catch your target audiences like buckets catch water...or something like that.

MISTAKE #3: BLOGGING INSIDE THE BOX

This is pretty much the opposite of mistake No.2. And perhaps, an even more popular fail.

I was once asked to help some branding guys come up with an ongoing content and social campaign for Devon’s Custard. Their initial idea? To create a carton-load of custard-related content. Blog posts about custard. Custard-related memes. Videos with people throwing custard at each other. Custard, custard, and more custard.

Makes strategic sense, right?

Wrong.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, let’s revisit my favourite ‘why’ question.

Do people really care that much about custard? Do they do custard-related Google searches regularly? Would you actively follow and engage with a Twitter feed which revolved solely around this one milk-based (albeit yummy) dessert sauce? And would anyone eagerly subscribe to their blog, desperate for their daily fix of custard-related updates like a toddler yearning for today's episode of Peppa Pig?

I doubt it.

So in this situation – when your offering is very specific and perhaps not the most fascinating of subject matters – don't bore your audience to tears with dull and repetitive content. Broaden your scope. Think outside the box (of custard). Create content buckets which belong to a bigger idea that is closely connected to your product or service, but which will actually attract and engage your audience.

For Devon's Custard, this might be 'school lunches'. Or 'home-cooking'. And thus custard would only be the focus of some articles and updates.

For a London Moving Company, this might be 'moving to and living in London'. And thus they would avoid drowning their audience in constant tedious packing tips.

For a SaaS company offering project management software built specifically for app developers, this might be the broader field of app development and all that comes with it. Rather than harping on about that one very-specific project management issue, they could build a large readership of potential prospects by establishing themselves as a thought-leader in the industry on the whole. And then sell the product to their subscribers later. (And other products, for that matter.)

Red Bull's content strategy is a perfect B2C example of this 'big idea' approach in action.

Imagine if all of Red Bull's content focused merely on its core product; an energy drink. If the theme of every single blog post, social media update and live event was the caffeine content of its products, or how

much fizz each can contained.

Do you think they'd have developed the kind of cult-following and brand recognition that they're famous for?

No sir-ee.

Instead they aligned the brand, and all of its content, with a bigger idea, which is cleverly enticing to a specific audience. The kind of audience that might also enjoy their products. They affiliated themselves with extreme sports and adventure, which is what pops to mind when you think: Red Bull.

Make sense?

Be the Red Bull in your industry. Not that weird custard-obsessed company.

MISTAKE #4: JUST ANOTHER THOUGHT-LEADER

Great. You've created content buckets and have your blog content topics razor-focused.

You're on for a winner, right?

Probably not.

The problem is: there are thousands of other companies and individuals creating content about the same bloomin' topics you are. If not bazillions.

The world of content is **EXTREMELY** saturated and every company is vigorously battling for attention, traffic, customers and those sacred few spots at the top of the SERPs. So why do you expect anyone to

notice your brand's underwhelming content if it's no different to the others?

And that brings us to a very potent ingredient in your content strategy. One that is often overlooked, especially in the B2B world.

Differentiation.

On top of following formulas that work, and reaping the benefits of the many tactics you'll learn in this guide, you absolutely must make your content different. To give it a unique edge. A distinct angle. Something – or many things – which make it stand out like a lemon in an apple field – but yet still remain relevant to your audience, and neatly in line with your core brand identity.

I like to call it: branding your blog.

MISTAKE #5: LETTING VISITORS LEAVE!

What happens after prospects read that valuable article on your blog?

Good question. And one you need to be asking yourselves if you don't want your content marketing efforts to fail miserably like a bacon shop in a Jewish Orthodox town.

For companies doing things wrong; this happens:

Their prospects think "hmmm, what a jolly good read!" and then vanish back into the webosphere, never to be seen again.

For companies doing things right; this happens:

A full page pop-up suddenly appears before them, tempting them

with FREE valuable gated content or offers (like eBooks, webinars, downloadable guides, checklists, or free vouchers). In order to seize this mighty opportunity, the readers must enter their contact details, and thus are pushed one step down the funnel.

That's how you build your email list to epic proportions. That's how you grow an avid group of content-hungry followers who will be the first to share your new ToFu content with other potential prospects. And that's when you start a lead-nurturing campaign that will turn blog traffic into actual, bottom-line boosting sales.

And no. A simple, static opt-in box which says 'subscribe to our blog' is not going to cut the mustard.

Do you ever subscribe through those things? Neither will your target prospects.

Encourage them. Incentivise them. Seduce them.

MISTAKE #6: NO NURTURING. NO CONVERTING.

Why the heck are you creating all this content in the first place?

Oh, that's right.

To increase your company's bottom line. And achieve a wholesome ROI.

(Not just to show your mum all those swell articles you wrote on the internet).

That's why lead-nurturing must be a crucial part of your content strategy. And the lack thereof is a wasteful blunder.

Once those budding prospects have graced you with their contact info, it's time to reap the benefits and nudge them towards conversion.

How? By drip-feeding mid-funnel (MoFu) and bottom-funnel (BoFu) content to them over a strategically-planned period of time, which is dependent on the length of your sales cycle.

Here's your chance to pre-empt and overcome those common buyer barriers and objections. To solidify their need or desire for the products and services you offer. To position YOUR BRAND as the best possible solution to their woes. To arm them with ammo that can be used to persuade other decision-makers and departments involved in this process. And to gently guide them, step by step, on that path towards conversion. However long or short it may be.

And all of this with: carefully-considered, triggered content. Plus of course, other marketing plays that will help you score the touchdown (e.g. sales calls and face-to-face meetings when possible).

Smart, ain't it?

MISTAKE #7: AN OBSESSION WITH SELLING

Let's say your ideal target buyer – the key decision-maker – is the CFO or head of the treasury department in an enterprise with a billion dollar turnover. And let's say you're trying to slog them some new treasury management software.

Many marketers would opt for the 'obvious' route;

"10 Things to Consider Before Choosing a Treasury Management Tool".
"Why Your Treasury Department Needs a Treasury Management

Solution NOW?”

“CFOS Like You Can Reap These Benefits Today”

And so on.

But if your content exclusively aims to catch (and convert) that particular prospect, right at the tipping point before purchase, are you likely to gain any kind of long-term readership? Or achieve any virality of your posts? Or have people share and link to your articles? Or, for that matter, do well in the search rankings without these Google-alerting social signals and organic backlinks?

And if your target decision-maker happens to be an extremely busy bee, who rarely finds the time to skim a LinkedIn update – let alone subscribe to a blog – then what are the chances of them becoming an avid fan of your content?

In some cases; not a lot.

But fret not my friend. Their trusted peers and team members may be the exact kind of people to share your industry-focused content, subscribe to your blog, and refer you to those busy decision makers when the time is right. Especially if you help them do so.

Here's where you need to be smart about your gambit. Consider the 'sharers' and 'referrers' as well as your target buyers, who may be harder to get to.

MISTAKE #8: ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT BUYERS

“Meet Sarah Temple. She's a CMO living in Richmond in a large Victorian house, just a stone's throw away from the river. She's married, with two kids – Amy and Joel, who both attend the same

Primary School. After a busy day at work, there's nothing she likes more than relaxing by the fireplace with a mug of Earl Grey and a novel... yada yada yada"

Ever come across these kinds of buyer personas?

I've received much of this waffle from many a marketer. Sometimes three pages per persona!

Are they useful? Nope.

Are they merely an unhelpfully-specific list of assumptions made about a random day in the life of a made-up person? Yep.

These lavish descriptions may hold some merit as "after purchase" user personas. I.e. personas designed to focus the development of products on the users, which can help guide decisions on product features, navigation, interactions, and visual design etc.

But "before purchase" buyer personas should be designed to focus the marketing messaging and content strategy in a way that best persuades buyers - those evaluating whether to purchase your solution or not - that the product/service is the perfect solution for them.

Buyer personas should include a buyer profile - which is a hypothetical buyer archetype, including demographics and psychographics - much like a user persona. But much more importantly, they should include buying insights, such as the motivations, expectations, goals and doubts etc of those evaluating your product/service during the time of evaluation (and just prior to it).

To put it simply: You shouldn't blab on about a random day in the life of Sarah Temple, your target buyer. You should blab on about THE SPECIFIC day (or week/month/year) in which Sarah Temple is considering a solution like yours - and what goes on inside her head from start to finish.

Still not sure? Consider this analogy:

You want to help a real estate agent set up some viewings for a friend of yours who's looking to buy. You could:

Tell the estate agent that your friend is tall, white, married with no kids, works as an architect in the city, plays tennis on a Wednesday, likes to drink cappuccino, reads the Guardian and supports the Labour party. Or...

Tell the estate agent that your friend is looking for a 2 bedroom well-lit apartment with a garden, that must be within 10 minutes walk from a station on the Central line, won't pay more than £500 K and his wife (who he has to get agreement from first) is concerned about house safety.

Which of these is a more valuable tool to the salesperson?

Uh huh. You got it.

The first is a buyer profile, with demographics and psychographics. The second is a set of buying insights, like the ones you'll be working on in your strategy. A proper buyer persona should include a little of a) and a lot of b).

MISTAKE #9: TOO MUCH SEO

"Make sure the content is packed full of SEO" those marketing guys tell me, benightedly, but with vigour.

But what do they actually mean? And what would that actually entail?

To most, this remains a mystery.

So let's break it down.

SEO means Search Engine Optimization. Which essentially means: optimizing your website content for people searching for stuff. Which essentially means: giving those 'searchers' the info they seek and an all-round good experience when they land on your site. Which essentially means: providing them with content of value, which is useful and engaging enough to make them stick around or take action of some kind or another.

Does it entail forcing awkward keyword phrases into every blog post title and paragraph?

No.

Because forcing awkward phrases into every blog post title and paragraph (known in the biz as keyword stuffing) doesn't really go hand in hand with the idea of posting authentic, valuable, engaging content, does it? Unless you're exceptionally lucky, that is.

Allow me to illustrate.

A so-called SEO expert once white-labeled our content creation services to help an IT services company based in Los Angeles. Naturally he decided to focus his client's blog post topics on location-based keywords. So every blog post got a title like this:

"How to Find an IT Company in Los Angeles"

"The Secret to Hiring IT Companies in Los Angeles"

"3 Things to Consider before Choosing an IT Service in Los Angeles"

Every. Single. Post.

What's the problem?

You know the god-darn problem!

A monotonous blog like this just won't gain any kind of readership. It won't ginger up its readers and have them pining for more content. It

won't get shares and organic backlinks. It will, to be honest, probably bore people off within the first few sentences, if they do even decide to click on it at all.

And all of these factors will, in actuality, send the opposite message to Google that Mr SEO Expert was hoping for.

Not such an SEO-Guru after all, aye?

Does this mean that you shouldn't use keyword phrases in your titles and articles?

No. But it does mean you have to be careful, and smart. And, as always, you have to get that balance right.

MISTAKE #10: NOT ENOUGH SEO

Well, let's be clear. You CAN create an effective inbound marketing strategy without tossing SEO into the mix.

But doing proper keyword research – and weaving keyword phrases into article titles, content and meta-descriptions – you can certainly add fuel to your content marketing engine.

Some pieces of content, like those involving influencer collaboration, may achieve virality at the time. But those pieces focused on carefully-chosen long-tail keyword phrases – if they do end up reaching a top spot in the SERPs – can pull in river-loads of monthly visitors for years and years to come.

So...

Create some viral hits, AND some long term pullers – and you're on for a winner.

Just keep mistake #9 firmly in mind.

MISTAKE #11: UPLOAD, AND HOPE FOR THE BEST

"Publish tons of content and your bottom line will sing and dance!" they say.

"Content is king" they say.

Well, not unless people actually read it, watch it or listen to it.

I.e. not unless you have a successful way of pushing that content in front of people's faces... The right people's faces.

The moral of the story? Don't just cross your fingers and hope for the best. Only create content for your company if you have an effective (and cost-effective) means to promote it.

This might include sharing across your social channels (once you have followers to share it with), Google PPC, paid social ads, content syndication platforms like Taboolah and Outbrain, peer sharing platforms like Triberr, [influencer marketing tactics](#) like 'the Drip Technique, promoting to your subscriber list, and cold-emailing out to potential prospects. Or all of the above.

What will be your way of pushing prospects into the top of that funnel?

MISTAKE #12: IGNORING INFLUENCERS

This isn't a mistake per se. It's more of a missed opportunity.

Influencer marketing has been in force since the days of chariot-racing in Ancient Rome. Legendary racers, like Gaius Appuleius Diocles, were given a toga-load of cash by local businesses, in order to represent and endorse them.

Why?

Because they were the heroes of the people. They had status. They had influence.

And who are the modern day equivalents of these Roman warriors?

The celebrities of the online world. I.e. individuals with mass followings, fan bases and/or readerships; "who have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position or relationship." (Businessdictionary.com)

In the world of health and beauty, this might be big beauty vloggers like [Zoella](#). In the marketing industry, it could be industry thought-leaders like [Mark Shaeffer](#). In the cybersecurity sphere? [Kimberly Whitler](#) might be your lady. Sell cupcakes? Food bloggers like [Izzy Hosack](#) may hit the mark... and so on.

In a nutshell, influencer marketing involves;

Carefully building a list of potential influencers in your niche. Building relationships with them through social media and/or collaborative content, in order to get your content in front of the eyes of their mass audiences. OR incentivising them to promote your content/products/services through that good old-fashioned motivator; moolah!

Reaping the benefits of the traffic and brand exposure these popular people can bring you.

[Here's a much more detailed explanation](#), with actionable tips, written by yours truly.

And [another take on it](#) from the marvellous Kissmetrics blog.

If influencer marketing is injected into the bloodstream of your company's content strategy, then your chances of success will be way better.

MISTAKE #13: ONLY BLOG ON YOUR BLOG

It's a catch 22 scenario.

You've created high-calibre content but don't have any traffic or readers yet. You need people to share the content in order to attract an audience, but without any readers in the first place, there's nobody but Aunt Betty (and your staff members, if they're willing) to share it!

The solution? Get your content on other industry publications which do have a readership already. And preferably, a massive one.

We call this 'guest posting'. If it's a regular fix on a specific publication, you might call it 'byline content'. And if we're getting saucy with semantics here, this kind of activity could fall under the bracket of 'digital PR'.

For me, though, it's just one of many ToFu pieces in the intricate inbound marketing jigsaw. But a very important and powerful one at that.

So where should you try to get your content placed?

On a) industry influencer's blogs and b) well-known high-authority

publications. If you're not already a recognised and respected author in your field, then you'll likely have a better success rate by first targeting the a)'s and then targeting the b)'s. Many top publications will only accept authors that already have a presence on Google, or some industry-recognition.

What should you write about?

Topics which are laser-focused on the audience of the publication you're writing for. Topics which offer selfless value to the readers, just as the content on your website will. Opinion pieces which make some noise and position you as a top thought-leader in the field. And as a general rule; articles that grip and engage, and get your voice and brand name 'out there'.

Will this help push prospects into your funnel?

Of course.

You're going to be smart when it comes to channeling and monitoring that traffic. We're not doing old school 'hit and hope' PR here. We're doing new school 'track and trace' digital PR.

Make sure you link back to your own content (if allowed by the publication) from within your pieces and bio. Especially to 'gated downloads' (like eBooks or eCourses) that will squeeze the contact details out of your readers.

Doing the above will:

- Position you, or whoever your company has chosen to be the 'author', as an industry thought-leader.
- Raise brand awareness massively over a short period of time, especially if you run a campaign that targets a high volume (e.g. 30-40) publications over one or two months. The accumulative effect will certainly perk up some ears.
- Drive relevant traffic to content on your own site, which can really

help it get off the ground (or propel you further towards stardom, if it's already 'off the ground').

- Push people down your funnel, which, thanks to this content strategy guide, will be carefully constructed to nurture and convert leads (you're welcome).
- REALLY improve your site's SEO, by providing you with those all-important backlinks from high-authority industry-relevant sites. In fact, there's no better way to tell Google; you guys are a big deal!

And while I'm in a generous mood, here are a few extra freebies:

#1: If you're unknown in your industry and feel like there's a slim chance of influencers accepting your guest submission request; try building relationships with them first on social (following the steps I've mentioned [here](#)). Then, write some super long comments under their recent posts, almost blog post-length, that delve into the subject in expert detail, positioning you as a fellow thought-leader, showing off your writing skills, and flattering them at the same time. Flattery gets you....somewhere.

#2: Once you break into those lesser-known blogs in round one of this attack plan; link out to the higher-authority publications from that first batch of articles. This will increase the chances of them accepting your submissions in round two. (Even big publications love a bit of flattery and support).

#3: Chuck in some influencer quotes and insights ('The Drip Technique') to make the articles even more valuable. And of course, you should then reach out to those gurus to let them know you've included them – just as you would with the content on your own site.

MISTAKE #14: NOT MIRRORING THE MASTERS

I'm sorry to break it to you, but you're not the bees knees when it comes to content marketing. Or blogging techniques. You don't know everything there is to know. You haven't tried and tested every possible headline variation, sentence style, article structure or blog post format.

But there are a shuckload of marketers out there who have. And because of that, there are a heckload of winning formulas you can borrow.

The mistake here is: going rogue with your company's content, thinking you know best, and not applying tried and trusted recipes for content creation which have proven to increase engagement and conversions time and time again.

Don't get me wrong. It's important to be creative, test your own methods and bring your unique approach to the table. But learn from the masters first. Borrow formulas which work.

For example, [here are 30+ headline formulas for tweets, posts and email subject lines by Kevan Lee](#) from the Buffer App squad.

And [52 types of blog posts which are proven to work](#).

There are plenty more where these came from.

MISTAKE #15: KEEPING YOUR EARS AND EYES SHUT

Yes. I've just imparted a whole bunch of knowledge on you like some kind of content marketing God.

But, I'm not.

And as much as you should follow the guidance, instructions, formulas, and strategies of other experienced marketers and companies like me, there's one group of people you should listen to even more closely...

Your audience.

Don't just blindly copy tactics, assuming that they'll yield the same results for your company, in your industry, with your audience – as they have for someone else.

Every situation is different.

That's why you **MUST** track every stage of your sales funnel, keeping a close eye on what's working and what isn't. Split-test the heck out of everything (e.g. article and landing page headlines, email subject lines, publishing times and days etc). And always try to gain real feedback and insights from your prospects, readers and buyers.

Assumptions can lead you down the wrong path like a witch disguised as a pleasant old lady.

MISTAKE #16: RUNNING WITH A FRACTURED SPINE

Perhaps this should be mistake #1. Because if this is an ailment you need to remedy, then call the brand doctor immediately.

I'm talking about the spine of your business. Your core site. The branding. The design and UX. The copy and messaging on every page.

Is it unique? Is it persuasive? Is it clear, concise and instantly compelling? Does it speak to your target audience? Does it highlight your company's USPs, and pre-empt your prospects' common objections? Does it instil trust, build rapport and ooze brand values

from every orifice? Is it packed full of uniquely-branded personality? Does it resonate? Does it CONVERT?

No? Then get this fixed first and foremost.

Why invest time and money in a long-term content marketing strategy, if the site you're sending people to won't do your business justice?

You might just need a copywriter to revamp your site messaging and tone of voice. Or a UX design agency to tweak the user flow. Or perhaps you have to strip things back to basics and work on a brand strategy.

Either way, cement those foundational stones in place, before trying to build your empire on top.

NOW USE THIS AS A CHECKLIST:

Here's a bitesized recap of what we've just gone through. You should refer back to these 17 lessons when it comes to actually putting your content calendar together, and further in the future when it comes to review time.

The secret here is: balance.

Adhere to all these laws, and you should end up with one finely-balanced content strategy.

Lesson #1: Your content must be selfless; always focused on giving value (and/or entertainment) to the reader. BoFu content can, and should, be a bit more salesy and self-promoting. But you need to get prospects down that end of the funnel with all the subtle enticing stuff first!
Lesson #2: You must create content with a specific target audience in mind.
Lesson #3: You must be strategic about your topics, by using overarching 'content buckets' that all the content topics fall into.
Lesson #4: You must analyze other blogs in the industry and give your blog (and vlog and podcast etc) a unique edge. You must differentiate and 'brand' your blog and content.
Lesson #5: You must include an opt-in box, along with an incentive to encourage readers to subscribe (e.g. a downloadable content asset), plus a chain of triggered emails to keep the conversation going.
Lesson #6: You must create content for different stages of the sales cycle, so that you don't just engage people with your content, but carefully and strategically nudge them towards conversion.
Lesson #7: You must also create engaging, industry-relevant content for 'sharers' and 'referrers'. These people will bring more traffic to the site, and thus more prospects. You must aim towards growing a readership of loyal subscribers, not JUST trying to convert with every post.

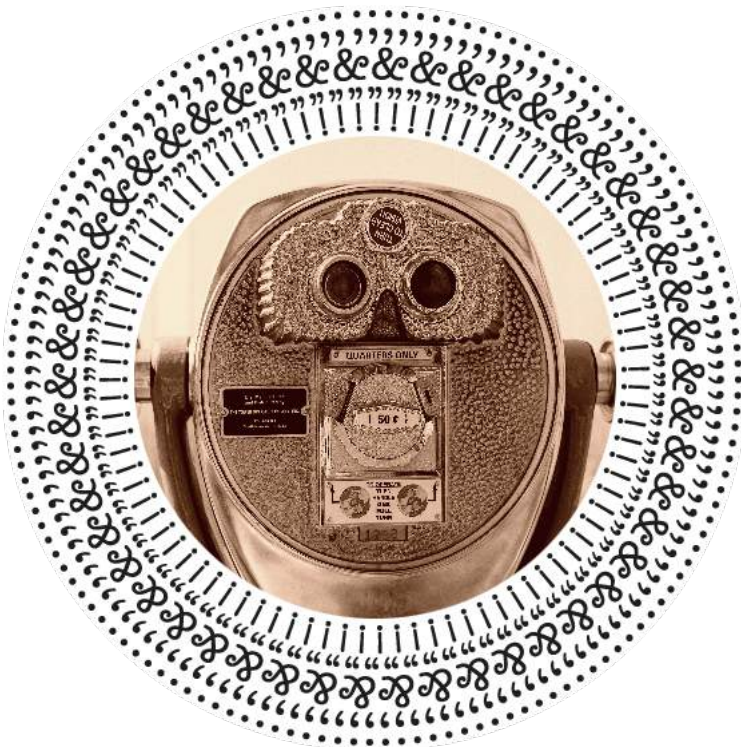
Lesson #8: You must conduct buyer interviews to gain buying insights, in order to create lead nurturing content which truly helps and convinces your buyers.
Lesson #9: Your content must have the right balance of providing value, having unique insights, involving influencer marketing and other strategies. SOME posts should be very keyword-focused, when possible, without overdoing it.
Lesson #10: You should do thorough keyword research first to find relevant keyword phrases (connected to each content bucket) which have a high monthly search volume, but low competition. Then create blog posts which focus on one specific keyword phrase, whenever possible (keeping in mind Lesson #9).
Lesson #11: You must have a number of blog promotion tactics set up, including paid promotion, Triberr, enticing social media updates, promoting to email lists, content syndication (e.g. Taboola and Outbrain) and so on.
Lesson #12: You must identify the key influencers in your industry, perhaps divide them into four lists (one per content bucket), build relationships with them, and involve them in your content as much as possible, in order to harness their influence and traffic.
Lesson #13: You must create a guest posting strategy; ideally with the aim of getting guest posts across a number of valued, high-traffic, relevant industry blogs within a short space of time (e.g. one month) and/or continued byline content. Try the double-staged approach.

Lesson #14: You must constantly analyse your own past posts and re-use tactics that have worked well. You must also use tried and trusted formulas that have proven to work well for other expert marketers and brands.

Lesson #15: You must make sure you always pay close attention to audience responses, both on the blog, in social media and within the sales process. Then create content that answers their burning questions and concerns. And always, always, monitor analytics, and refine your strategy based on results.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

HIGHER-LEVEL STRATEGIC DECISIONS
AND A SWOT ANALYSIS TO SEE WHERE
YOU STAND



“Two weekly articles for our blog, one monthly eBook and a daily Facebook update” is the sound of an all-too-common request that graces our contact form with its presence on a regular basis.

And the reasoning behind it? Errr... because content is king. Because we know we should be doing it. Because everyone else is doing it. Because it will help us communicate to people out there on the world wide web... somehow.

But why? And to whom? And how?

Without first digging deep into the whys, whos and hows, you can only pull these whats, wheres and whens (e.g “blog posts, twice weekly, on our blog”) out of a hat. And when content deliverables emerge from the depths of a hat, the end result is almost always: unstrategic, mediocre, a big old waste of time.

And yes... *even my hat.*

That’s why it’s vital to kick things off with some higher-level strategic questions and a digital audit. Or ‘The Bigger Picture’ as we like to call it. These will lay the foundations for all the other decisions you make, and cement your tactics into a solid results-oriented framework.

So go get your team of decision-makers together, and let’s begin.

1. Why are you building a proper content strategy? And why now?

Quick Examples:

- Because our growth plans for the next year require a new source of lead generation.
- We’ve been dabbling in content marketing for years but without any real direction. The ROI hasn’t been great, and we know it can drastically improve.
- We’ve just received investment and want a long-term strategy to dominate our niche online.

2.What are your expectations for this content strategy session?

Quick Examples:

- To be able to understand the entire inbound marketing funnel, and put together a strategy that will help us make a splash in our industry.
- To come away with a strategic content calendar in place, and know what the next steps are (short term and long-term).

3.What do you want to accomplish and how will inbound/content marketing help?

Quick Examples:

- 30,000 new users over the next 12 months.
- To double our website traffic and conversions by next March; inbound marketing will pull that traffic in.
- To raise brand awareness, position us as a key player and thought-leader in the fintech industry; content marketing will get 'our voice' out there, in the online world.

4.What should be the purpose of your content at different stages of the funnel/sales cycle?

Quick Examples:

- Top funnel (ToFu) content should attract prospects with selfless value. But also, subtly sell our consultancy service, by positioning us as experts and challenging other thought-leaders.
- Mid-funnel (MoFu) content should preempt common objections that we see all the time.
- Bottom-funnel (BoFu) content should persuade subscribers to start a free trial.

5.What are you currently doing successfully? And what do you feel needs improvement?

Do a digital marketing SWOT Analysis, and consider...

- **The copywriting, design and user low on your core website pages.**

Because what's the point in sending a load of traffic to a site that doesn't tell the right message, grip and convert your target prospects?.

- **The best and worst performing blog posts.**

You can base this on traffic volume, share counts, comments and conversions.

- **Your site & blog analytics.**

Look out for your monthly traffic volume, traffic sources, bounce rate, page depth, average page duration, interactions per visit, exit pages, conversion rate for first time visits and conversion rate for return visits.

- **The entire inbound marketing funnel.**

Including top-of-the-funnel (ToFu) tactics, middle-of-the-funnel (MoFu) tactics, and bottom-of-the-funnel (BoFu) tactics.

- **The 17 common mistakes we unravelled earlier.**

Current strengths:

Quick Examples:

- We have a strong brand and lots of positive feedback about our site.
- We already have 9,000 Twitter followers who engage with our social media content.

Current weaknesses:

Quick Examples:

- Our website isn't converting.
- We have some traffic to our content, but we're not retaining and nurturing those leads.

Opportunities:

Quick Examples:

- Our CEO is known in the industry, and has been asked to speak at

some events coming up – and contribute as an expert to some top publications.

- We have relationships with influencers in our industry already, who we could easily reach out to for collaboration purposes and tap into their audiences.

Risks/threats:

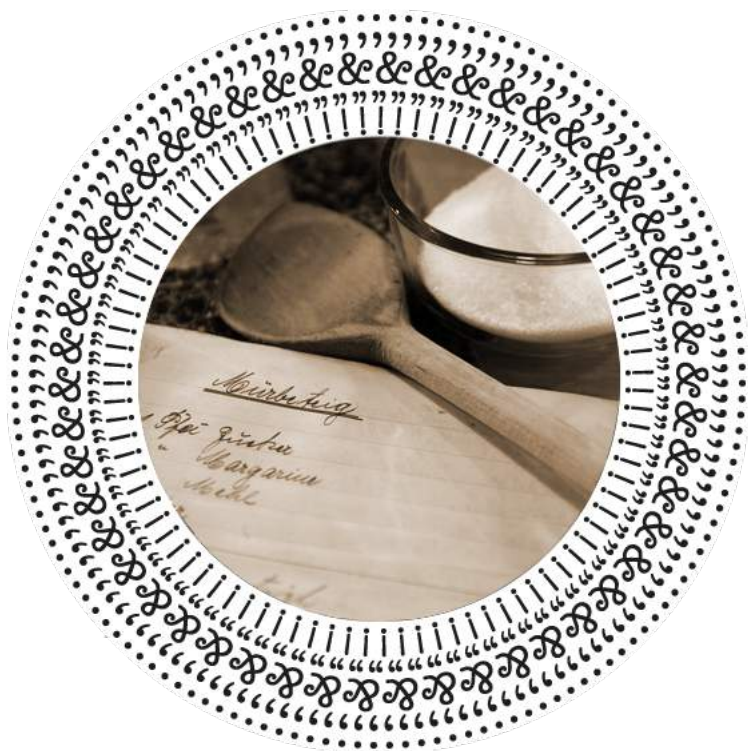
Quick Examples:

- Twitter may soon adopt a 'pay to play' approach like Facebook, which will make our social strategy more costly.
- We may not get the second round of investment we're seeking, which might throw a spanner in the works.

Extra Tip: To help you analyse external threats thoroughly, you can also consider the [PESTLE framework](#) to make sure you're not missing anything out.

EXPLORING EACH INGREDIENT

DELVING INTO THE DETAILS, AND
CREATING COPIOUS CONTENT TOPICS
EN ROUTE



a. BUYER PERSONAS

As I angrily ranted about previously, most marketers mix up 'user personas' with 'buyer personas'. They create hypothetical archetypes of their buyers, with unnecessarily detailed descriptions of their personality and daily routines, which offer little to no value when it comes to brand messaging and crafting content that actually convinces and converts prospects. They create 'buyer profiles', without including the much-needed 'buying insights'.

If done properly, buyer interviews will reveal invaluable 'buying insights', such as:

1. The main reason or reasons that trigger this buyer persona to search for a solution like yours ('Priority Initiative Insights').
2. The results and outcomes that they hope to achieve with a solution like yours ('Success Factor Insights').
3. The attitudes or concerns that prevent this buyer persona from investing in a) a solution like yours and b) your solution specifically ('Perceived Barrier Insights').
4. The top three to five factors this buyer uses to compare alternative solutions before making their decision ('Decision Criteria Insights').
5. The sequence of events leading up to the purchasing decision (whether positive or negative), including the role of this buyer persona in the decision-making process and who else impacted the decision ('Buyer's Journey Insights').

Adele Revella, Queen of Buyer Personas, calls these 'The 5 Rings of Buyer Insight'.

How do you gain this invaluable information?

By conducting 'buyer interviews' with a) actual customers of yours, b) prospects who considered coming onboard but didn't convert in the

end and c) prospects who considered a solution like yours, but not yours specifically (these will be harder to find, and not essential).

How should you go about conducting your interviews with these customers and near-customers?

Very casually. By prompting them first with one simple line, "Start from the beginning..."

Essentially, you want them to retell the whole story in their own words. The answers to the above questions should reveal themselves organically (but if not, it'll be your job to guide them in that direction).

One thing you definitely should NOT do is: put words in their mouths. Here's your chance to squash those poisonous assumptions about what goes on in your clients' psyche, and unravel the truths!

To really nail this process, make sure you grab a copy of Adele Revella's wisdom-packed book, [Buyer Personas: How to Gain Insight into your Customer's Expectations, Align your Marketing Strategies, and Win More Business.](#)

And if conducting interviews is an unfeasible option, try shooting out surveys.

Then tackle these questions:

1. What can you learn from your buying insights?

Quick Examples:

- The main reason we don't win business is because our brand is less-established than our competitors and customers don't trust our products as much.
- Buyer persona #1's decision is heavily influenced by the CFO, and they are usually only interested in next year's bottom-line, and hesitant to invest in a service as costly as ours is to implement.

2.What buying insights are currently being addressed by your content?

Quick Examples:

- The common hesitation to invest in an agency because of cost; we have a series of blog posts that focus on 'Value VS Cost', and why agencies will give you more bang for your buck. It's done quite well.
- Most of the success factor insights are addressed on the website, and in our gated webinars.

Optional Activity:

- In pairs, write down different scenarios in which users might visit the site. Stick them on the wall. If there are any duplicates, stick them on the same spot.
- Then as a group discuss: is your current website copy and content currently doing a good job of compelling, convincing and converting that buyer type? Which type of buyer is most likely to be persuaded by your website and content funnel/sales funnel? Why?
- Answer in pairs: what's missing from those other journeys that aren't being addressed? What could be improved to make the journeys flow better? Compare your answers with the rest of the gang.

3.What buying insights (from any persona) are not currently being addressed by your content?

Hint: A lot of this will come down to the messaging on the core pages of the site itself and will be uber useful when creating/revising the copy across it. Remember mistake No.16? Here's your chance to pre-empt it.

Quick Examples:

- The fact that we also need to win over the IT team, as they are

concerned about implementation time and cost.

- A lot of customers (buyer person type #2) are afraid to enter their credit card details for this kind of eCommerce site.

4. Ideation Time: create a list of potential content topics which could be used to address the expectations of customers, based on your new-found insights.

Quick Examples:

- “How to Prove the Value of Content Marketing to Your CFO” (BoFu)
- “Had Enough of Hangovers? Here’s How to Make Them Disappear Forever” (ToFu)
- “Why You Shouldn’t Settle for Cheap, When it Comes to Your First Piano” (BoFu)
- “Don’t Run Before You Can Walk: Why Companies That Skip on Strategy Fail” (MoFu)

b. DIFFERENTIATION

These days everyone’s a ‘thought-leader’. To truly make a splash within your industry, and build a solid readership of content-hungry prospects, you need a unique edge. A unique angle. A way of doing things or saying things which is just different. When your industry zigs, you need to zag.

Got it?

Whatever this chosen path of differentiation is, it must – like all business decisions you make – be aligned with your core brand essence, values, culture and positioning.

Feel like your brand value cabinet is a little bit empty?

Perhaps your team should work through [this brand strategy eBook](#) first.

It will certainly help you answer some of these key questions:

1. What are the 4 or 5 core values of your company?

Quick Examples:

- People. Persistence. Clarity. Innovation. Excellence.
- Humbleness and Willpower. Leadership by Example. Daring to Be Different. Togetherness and Enthusiasm (IKEA).

2. What sets you apart from your competitors?

Quick Examples:

- Our pizza gets delivered to your door in 30 mins or less, or it's free. No one else matches this offer.
- We provide a marketing service to companies without a marketing department.
- Our customer-service is second-to-none in the industry. We have reps on call 24/7, and make courtesy calls weekly.

3. What is your brand statement? What's the 'why' behind the 'how' and 'what?'

Hint: [This TED talk](#) by Sion Sinek will give you some food for thought.

Quick Examples:

- "At IKEA our vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people. Our business idea supports this vision by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them." (IKEA).
- "Our purpose is 'the happiness of all our members, through their worthwhile, satisfying employment in a successful business', with success measured on our ability to sustain and enhance our position both as an outstanding retailer and as a thriving example of employee ownership. With this in mind, our strategy is based on three interdependent objectives Partners, customers and profit." (John Lewis)

5. What are your competitor and other industry blogs/vlogs/podcasts/content like?

HINT: Do your research!

Quick Examples:

- Generally long-form blog posts, 1500 words+.
- Mostly full of jargon, with little to no storytelling, and corporate-looking old-fashioned design.

6. How can you differentiate your content from the others and give it a unique, compelling edge?

Important Note: I like to call this part of a content strategy “branding your content”. And while differentiation is one of the seven keys of branding, it’s also essential to remember the other six; **relevance, consistency, duration, meaningfulness, authenticity and experientialism**. In other words, when choosing ways to make your blog and content unique, make sure it is still authentic to your brand and company culture, relevant and meaningful to your target audience, consistently unique in a way that will stand the test of time, and evokes an emotional response from your audience (i.e. not just a blanket of bland information).

Quick Examples:

- Create bite-sized blog posts which are a quarter of the length of other industry blogs, but valuable for busy businessmen on the move.
- Fill it with actionable take-aways, rather than high level theory.
- Use graphics or images to illustrate every tip.
- Make every single article an interview with an influencer, with the same consistent format.

c. TONE OF VOICE

Maybe you have a thorough brand bible which your team religiously

adheres to. Or just a mission statement and some values jotted down somewhere.

Either way, it's crucial to define your brand personality, and all the traits that come with it.

Humans respond to and trust other humans. Your customers are human, so make your brand human, too.

Once you've identified your key brand personality traits (during a brand strategy session), it's vital to give that personality a 'voice'. And of course, this must be the same voice which speaks to your audience consistently across all online and offline copy and content, at every touchpoint. Including your blog.

Consistency, after all, is key in branding, remember?

Work through these questions to create your voice, if you haven't defined one in this way before:

1. Using 5 adjectives, describe the style and tone of voice you want.

Quick Examples:

- Hip, playful, cheeky, friendly, blunt.
- Sophisticated, educational, inspirational, soothing, wise.

2. Create an axis like this and situate your tone of voice on it:

Formal-----	X-----	chatty
Serious-----	X-----	humorous
Detached-----	X-----	warm
Professional-----	X-----	casual
Tasteful-----	X-----	unrefined
Wordy-----	X-----	concise

3. Create a table like the one below, listing phrases your brand should/shouldn't be using:

OK	NOT OK
Cost effective	Cheap
Many/numerous	A lot
Assist	Help out
Simple	Easy

4. Think of different celebrities/ characters/ public figures. Who would you like your brand to sound like?

Quick Examples:

- Warren Buffett
- Professor Xavier (Xmen)
- Beyonce

5. If your brand were a person, describe them:

Quick Example:

- **Age:** 35
- **Sex:** Male
- **Profession:** Social Worker,
- **Personality traits:** Empathetic, warm-hearted, optimistic, friendly, gentle.

6. How does your company's core website (and offline) copy compare to the guidelines you have just created? Would it be consistent? If not, what areas need work?

Put an action plan together. Make it all consistent, or else.

d. CONTENT BUCKETS

Defining content buckets is an excellent way to focus, organise and manage all of your content for all content channels (including social

media) moving forward. They should be created with the different buyer personas (and those who influence the buyers) in mind, as well as 'sharers' and 'referrers'.

ALL content created, shared and curated will then fit into these four or five overarching categories, and you should aim to (roughly) divvy up the content topics equally between the four buckets.

Anything that doesn't fit into a bucket? Not worth talking about. Too broad.

If your content heavily falls into that one bucket? You're not dividing between them well. Too narrow.

1. Create a list of potential content bucket ideas.

Quick Examples:

- Travel tips
- Sales Methodology
- Dessert-making

2. Now narrow these down to 4 overarching content buckets (all of the topics mentioned above should fit into one of the four chosen buckets).

Quick Examples:

- 1) Copywriting, 2) Brand Strategy, 3) Social Media Marketing, 4) Content Marketing (these are our content buckets).
- Technical Advice, Industry News, Real-Life Stories, Actionable Tips.

3. Create a list of potential ToFu blog topic ideas for each of the buckets. Start by dropping any ToFu buyer persona-focused topics from before into the correct bucket.

HINT: To gather ideas, use [Buzzsumo](#) to find industry and bucket-related topics which have had the most engagement, plus [answerthepublic.com](#) to see what people commonly search for in Google. [Quora](#) can also give you some food for thought.

Quick Examples:

Content Bucket 1: Copywriting	Content Bucket 2: Brand Strategy	Content Bucket 3: Social Media Marketing	Content Bucket 4: Content Marketing
"10 Ways to Improve Your Website Copy to Convert More!"	"Does Your Company Obey These 7 Key Branding Rules?"	"How to Create and Execute a Winning Social Media Strategy"	"The 15 Biggest Content Strategy Blunders"

e. CONTENT CHANNELS

Here's a revelation for you: different people do things differently.

Mind-blowing, I know.

Different people interact with and respond to different kinds of content, through different devices, at different times of the day.

Some like to grab their daily dose of insights or entertainment from a YouTube clip. Others listen to their favourite industry podcasts on the morning commute. And others like to sink their teeth into a good old-fashioned blog post.

The same goes, of course, for your target prospects (who are people too, as it happens). Which means: the most effective content marketing strategy will hit **multiple channels**.

A powerful and cost-effective way to make the most out of your content is by repurposing it. E.g. by turning a blog post you've written into a more extensive eBook, then a vlog episode, then a podcast, then an infographic, and then a bunch of bite-sized tweets.

Repurposing can really help you deliver that ROI your CEO is hungry for.

1. What different content channels do your buyer personas interact with and how can you use them to engage, attract and nurture leads?

Quick Examples:

- LinkedIn Pulse articles – buyer persona #1 reads these daily while on the lookout for actionable tips to help them with their daily routine. We can create short ToFu posts tackling the biggest problems they endure at work.
- Webinars – buyer persona #2 joins these for deeper insights. We can create a monthly webinar, interviewing an expert in our field, and use this as gated content to capture email addresses and push prospects into our funnel.

2. Can you kick off with ALL these channels within our current budget/time/resources? If not, which would be most effective to start with?

Quick Examples:

- Blog posts, bi-monthly.
- 1 downloadable eBook.
- A monthly webinar.
- Infographics repurposed from the blog posts, with visuals added.

3. How can you use the power of repurposing to get the most bang for your buck?

- Quick Examples:
- We can transcribe our video interviews with influencers, and turn these into written blog posts and social media content.
- We can repost our website blog posts on LinkedIn and Medium, after Google has indexed them.

f. INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing is perhaps the most powerful way to fast-track your content marketing efforts to success.

Put simply: it involves building relationships with and helping out other influential thought-leaders and bloggers within your industry, so that they will then reciprocate by sharing your content - thus sending mahoosive amounts of traffic your way and exposing your content and brand to MUCH larger audiences than you could do otherwise.

Or, paying them to do the same kind of thing.

In the world of content marketing, there is certainly power in numbers. And if you get influencers on your side (each with tens and hundreds of thousands of followers), there is a shedload of potential.

1. What *types* of influencers can you identify and target?

Quick Examples:

- Contributors to the top tech blogs.
- Medical thought-leaders, who have an online presence.
- Speakers at the SocialMediaExaminer Conference.
- Fashion bloggers.

2. Create a long list of potential influencers to target, with all their valuable details, on a spreadsheet.

Include their names, email addresses (if possible), area of expertise/thought-leadership, blog URLs, social media profiles, KLOUT scores, any other notes about who they are and what they do, and your current relationship status with them.

HINT: You can identify influencers using tools such as Klout, Kred, Traackr, Followerwonk, Little Bird, Buzzsumo, Forbes' lists and good old

Google searches! Most of the blog posts at the top of Google, on any subjects, will have been written by influencers in that field. That's why they're at the top of the SERPs. Follow these tips, and you'll get there too...

3. Create a power influencer grid to identify which influencers would be best to focus your efforts on, and then choose your top 15-50 influencers for each content bucket.

HINT: Beyonce might be the ideal influencer to share your brand content and collaborate with. But is there much chance of this happening? Not unless you're Jay Z. And that's why it's important to carefully consider the likeliness of you/your team building a relationship with this person. And if the only way to involve them is through payment, how much would it cost, and would it be a cost-effective move?

Public	Private	Civic
Governments and governmental departments	Thought leaders and well known experts in different fields	Think tanks and academics
Politicians and high-ranking civil servants	Companies (and their high ranking personnel)	NGOs and charities
International organisations and their top personnel	Business groups	Faith groups
	Media organisations	Student and youth groups
	Individuals: celebrities, well known bloggers, youtubers etc.	

4. Brainstorm some ways to collaborate with/involve influencers on your content.

Quick Examples:

- A round-up post with 30 top sales experts answering our customers' most common problem.
- An interview for the company podcast.

4. What tactics can you use to engage and build relationships with influencers in social media?

HINT: [This post](#) will give you a plateful of food for thought.

g. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media marketing and content marketing go hand in hand. They're 'besties', in fact.

Social media is one of the most effective vehicles for getting your content in front of the right eyes (or ears) and pulling in that much-needed traffic. Once these visitors devour your content and realize how darn valuable it is, they will likely share the wisdom with their own fans and followers, driving more traffic (and prospects) your way.

It's a beautiful cycle.

The more this happens, the more potential clients will flow into your funnel. And then Google's ears will perk up – thanks to the social signals and backlinks created by those satisfied readers and watchers – deeming your content a worthy fit for its users.

To delve a little deeper into social media marketing strategy, [here's another free eBook](#) for your perusal (we're really spoiling you today, aren't we?).

Once you've worked through it, come back and give the below

questions a whirl. Or get straight to them if you're feeling confident.

1.What social media channels are your buyer personas most active in and what do they use them for?

Quick Examples:

- Twitter. For daily, up-to-date news about all their favourite celebs.
- LinkedIn: to get advice from peers in industry-related groups, and to promote their own services.

2.What are the growth, engagement and conversion strategies for each platform?

HINT: The eBook I just linked to will help you get to grips with this.

3.What kind of 'sharable' image, video and written content can you create?

Quick Examples:

- Infographics with interesting statistics about the property market.
- Branded memes with short quotes about art and fashion.
- Short 'How To' videos.

4.What are the best online sources of content (other than your influencers) for curation?

Quick Examples:

- Forbes.
- The SocialMediaExaminer blog.
- BBC News

5.What are your competitors doing on social media? What do you like and dislike about them?

Quick Examples:

- Competitor #1 is heavily self-promoting, and ignoring the [Golden Ratio](#).

- Competitor #2 is posting and curating a lot of great videos, all very on-brand, with nice teaser questions alongside them to arouse interest.

6. What ideas can you steal from your competitors (or other companies/influencers) and make your own?

Quick Examples:

- Competitor #1's bite-sized actionable tips are getting the most retweets and shares on Facebook. We could do something similar, but focus on our own area of niche-expertise, and brand them differently of course.

7. Do your current social media profiles stand out? Are they unique, memorable, attention-grabbing and in line with your core branding? If not, what can you do to make it so?

HINT: think about your tiny avatars too. These are what will show up in influencer's feeds, among the thousands of other noisy socialites. What can you do visually, that will make your profiles stand out and

be remembered (if you're not already a well-known brand)? For me, the trilby hat, vintage photo and circular frame made all the difference.



Quick Examples:

- Use our CEO as the face of the company, but have his picture illustrated rather than a bog-standard corporate photo.
- Wear a funky hat!
- Use our unique brand pattern as the background image on Facebook.

8. How can you harness the power of employee advocacy to accelerate your social media efforts?

HINT: Have a read of [this post \(about Employee Advocacy\)](#) if you're not sure what I'm banging on about. And here are [10 Stats That Prove the Importance of Employee Advocacy](#).

Quick Example:

- Use an employee advocacy tool, like [GaggleAmp](#), which uses gamification to encourage our staff to share our new blog posts and comment in relevant industry groups. Reward the top monthly 'Gagglers' with champagne or tickets to a show (or money)!

h. SEO

Remember: the most magical SEO trick you can do these days is simply this:

Create engaging, gripping, relevant content so good that your audience can't help but share it with their network and link to it from their own content.

But, if you want your blog posts to stand a chance of acquiring that long-lasting flow of organic traffic via the SERPs, you'll be best off doing some proper keyword research beforehand. And exploring both short and long-tail derivative keyword phrases, which you can then focus some of your posts on (by including them in the titles, content, image alt text and meta descriptions etc).

Feeling rusty in the old SEO department? The [Yoast](#) blog reveals the secrets of this dark art.

Should SEO keywords be the heart and soul of your blog posts? Definitely not.

Try to use your keyword phrases wherever possible, but use them

naturally, without compromising the quality of the content. These should be keyword phrases with a high monthly search volume, but not too much competition. And they should be keywords heavily connected to your chosen content buckets and topics... Not your favourite game of Thrones scenes.

1. What keyword phrases do you currently have on the list?

Quick Examples:

- Golf Equipment, Fairway Woods, Wilson Prostaff Chipper
- Digital design agency, designer for hire, infographic design.

2. Based on your user personas and chosen content buckets are there any other keyword directions worth exploring?

Quick Examples:

- Best golfing destinations, golf trips, advice for golfers.
- B2B branding, choosing brand names, digital agency pricing.

3. What are the new top 15-20 long-tail keyword phrases that you should focus on, in addition to your original list (with a decent monthly search volume and low competition)?

HINT: Here's where you'll need to do some proper digging, using a keyword research tool. Or commission an agency like us to do it for you. Personally we're big fans of the sleek, user-friendly app.kwfinder.com, which was a big step up from the slow and tiresome Market Samurai times of the past. But here's a more rounded list of the best [SEO tools for keyword research](#), plus [61 experts revealing their favourite tools](#) (which is a couple of years old, but useful nonetheless).

4. What potential blog titles can we create with these keywords and which buckets do they fit into?

Quick Examples:

- "Influencer Marketing Tactics: a Secret Formula to Content Marketing Success" (Bucket: influencer marketing)

- “How to Make Sense of Your Big Data Projects” (Bucket: Big Data)
- “10 Top London Restaurants You Simply Have to Dine In” (Bucket: Nightlife Tips)

i. GUEST POSTING / BYLINE CONTENT

The most powerful guest posting campaign should be done across many blogs and publications over a short space of time. Just as a prospect is more likely to be influenced and converted by a consumer brand ad campaign that hits them from many different angles and touchpoints (TV, radio, billboards, posters, online etc), a potential blog subscriber is more likely to take notice if your pops up across ALL of their favourite industry-leading blogs within one or two months (for example).

It's a powerful, powerful technique.

1. Create a list of potential blogs and higher-authority publications to contribute to.

HINT: [This article](#) and [this one](#) both list blogs which openly accept guest posts; a good place to start. To get placed on the more prestigious publications, they'll be looking out for how much authority and Google presence you/your chosen author has already. It's a stepping stone to the big leagues. You can then reach out to the bigger publication's editors via LinkedIn, and show them the pieces you've published already. It helps to have someone on the inside too.

2. Map out your plan for approaching these publications.

Quick Example:

- Create a spreadsheet with both blogs and high-authority publications listed. Add any information about submission requirements available online (what are the steps you need to take to submit a guest post to each publication, if this is public

knowledge?)

- For those blogs with clear submission guidelines; follow the guidelines!
- For those without, approach with an email – with 3 potential topics (and summaries) that you believe would be great for their audience. Stress the benefit for the influencer/editor of the blog.

3. When should you carry out your first guest posting campaign? How big should it be?

HINT: think about time and resources available for this, and consider all the other work you need to put in for the rest of your content strategy. Be realistic.

Quick Example:

- Creation in July, Placement in August. Aim for 30 guest posts. This must come after our gated content has been created and uploaded, so that we can drive traffic to it from our guest posts.

j. LISTENING TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Remember the tragic 'inside-out strategy syndrome' that so many misguided marketers and business owners suffer from?

Sorry to bring up this sour affair again. But it's for your own good.

The best way to avoid falling into the trap is by actually listening to your audience. Not just through those initial buyer interviews with prospects and near-prospects, but through continuous conversations with your subscribers, social media followers and customers.

What articles of yours resonate with them most? What burning questions do they have? What are their deepest and darkest industry fears and obstacles, which you can help to overcome? What types of

content do they prefer to consume?

Make sure you work this into your strategy.

1. Where, how and how often can you reach out to your audience for feedback and suggestions?

Quick Examples:

- Twice a week on Twitter.
- Once a month we can send a questionnaire out to our subscriber list.

k. LIST-BUILDING AND LEAD-NURTURING

OK, here comes the juicy part.

The all-important lead-nurturing piece of the puzzle; BoFu content which is carefully devised to engage, nurture, persuade and convert your prospects. This is the content your bottom line loves most.

And don't forget; building up your email list won't just mean more sales at the end of the funnel. Your subscribers have subscribed for a reason. Because they're interested in what you've got to say. They find value in your worldly wisdom. They're thirsty for more content, and happy for you to tell them about your new pieces via email.

Which means? These are the eager beavers who will pounce on your new ToFu content first and share it with their like-minded colleagues, friends and followers. Not only will a slice of them convert into customers at some point down the line, but many will become your chief content promoters and ambassadors, filling your funnel full of new leads regularly and at an exponential rate (if you play your cards right).

So...

1. List potential ideas for gated content or other incentives to encourage prospects to subscribe.

Quick Examples:

- An in-depth eBook for each of our four content buckets, e.g. 'The Ultimate Guide to Website Design for Startups' and so on.
- A monthly gated webinar, interviewing a top expert in the field.
- A 20%-off discount voucher for any purchases through our e-Commerce store.

2. Write down some lead-nurturing ideas; what triggered emails and content can you send subscribers who have just opted in? And what triggered emails and content can be used to subtly sell your services/products, pre-empt objections and nudge prospects closer towards conversion?

Quick Examples:

- A seven-day e-course which reveals a new powerful formula every day. This will keep the prospects engaged, get them used to opening emails from us, and further position us as experts in our field. In the footer of each email we can place a call-to-action encouraging them to give our software a free test run for one month.
- We can gradually drip feed them emails with links to BoFu content which pre-empts common objections. Those who have clicked through can be moved onto another triggered email list which will receive case studies and further calls-to-action.

EXTRA TIP: The more detailed, tailored and carefully thought-out you make this part, the higher your conversion rates will be. The ideal scenario is to have numerous gated content assets. Within each piece of ToFu content you would link to the most topic-relevant asset. Whoever downloads that asset, would be pushed into a particular funnel tailored to their interests, with carefully chosen content chosen

because of the ToFu content they were initially interested in.

To rev up the engines even more, your lead-nurturing tactics should have an element of split-testing built into them, so that you can constantly test, refine and improve.

Make sense?

The main aim of your content marketing funnel is to lead your prospects through these five psychological phases in their buyer's journey:

- 1. Unaware
- 2. Aware
- 3. Interested
- 4. Research
- 5. Purchase

Once you've had a good discussion and whiteboard scribble about all of this, you can start to put it together in a more structured, organised format. For example;

UNAWARE	AWARE	INTERESTED	RESEARCH	PURCHASE
Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal
Contact method	Contact method	Contact method	Contact method	Contact method
Content format	Content format	Content format	Content format	Content format
Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging
Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal	Conversion goal
Contact method	Contact method	Contact method	Contact method	Contact method
Content format	Content format	Content format	Content format	Content format
Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging	Content topic/messaging
(And so on)				

4. Create a lead-nurturing flowchart to visualise your entire inbound funnel.

HINT: If you don't have an in-house design team to help you out, there are plenty of simple tools like [Creately](#) that should make this a piece of cake for you.

I. FORMULAS THAT WORK

You should consider yourself lucky. Because there are many types and formats of blog posts out there (for the taking) which have proven to yield top drawer results when it comes to attracting, engaging and converting leads.

And it is of course crucial to learn from tried-and-trusted formulas that work, rather than throwing ideas at the wall like spaghetti to see what sticks.

I'm not saying you shouldn't get creative. Content marketing is half science, half art. Use formulas that have been proven to work like a dream, and then give them a creative twist. This should, of course, include formulas that have worked for your brand on your target audience - which is why you should keep a close eye on your analytics to see what ToFu, MoFu and BoFu is hitting the spot.

Here's a bunch of [different post types](#) which perform well. And another list for you to sink your teeth into.

1. What content types and formats from these lists, plus other proven formulas, can you weave into your strategy?

Quick Examples:

We could create a series of controversial posts challenging some of the top influencers in our field.

We could review the top web design tools on the market this year.

m. CONTENT PROMOTION

Top-funnel content won't get you very far if you don't have any traffic flowing to it. Sure, it would be nice to land your web URLs smack bang on the first page of Google and have those hot prospects find you organically. But as you know, this is very unlikely to happen unless that first wave of traffic comes via some kind of successful promotional activity.

We've covered a few already:

- 1) Sharing across social channels.
- 2) Collaborating with influencers in order to get in front of their vast audiences.
- 3) Guest posting on publications which already have a large readership.

But there are plenty of other ways to give your content that boost it needs, for example:

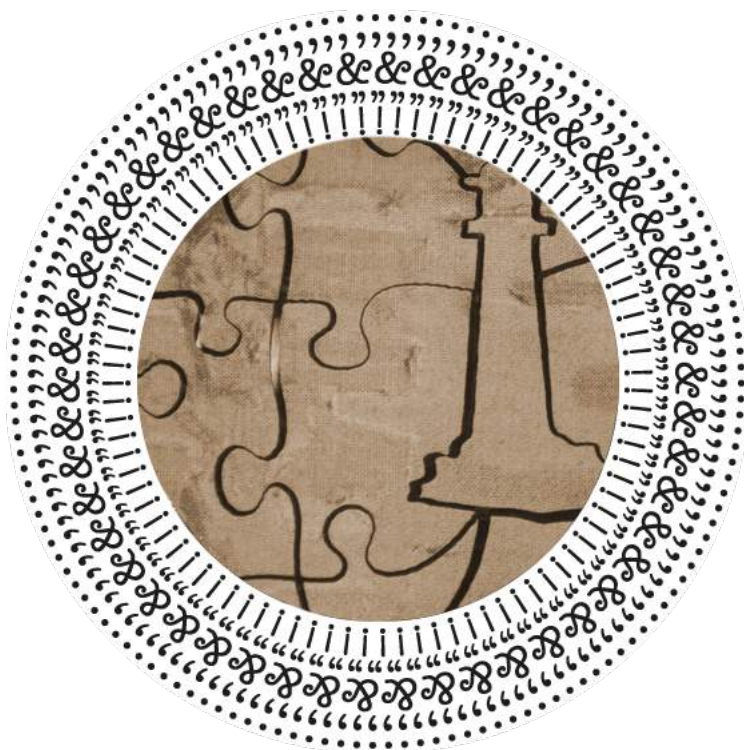
- 4) Google PPC.
- 5) Paid ads in social media; especially Facebook.
- 6) Influencer peer-sharing platforms like [Triberr](#).
- 7) LinkedIn groups, Facebook groups, Google+ communities and other industry-specific forums online.
- 8) Content amplification services like Taboolah, nRelate and Outbrain.

And you can get heaps more ideas from this thoroughly thorough article by Kim Roach: [101 Ways to promote Your New Blog Post](#).

- 1. What content promotion strategies could work for you – and how much time or money would you need to invest?**
- 2. Select the strategies that are a feasible solution for now, and then make sure you keep track of all your stats!**

PIECING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE

ORGANISING YOUR DECISIONS, AND
MAPPING OUT YOUR CONTENT CALENDAR



Here’s where you sort out that big jumble of amazing ideas you’ve just created.

(Bravo on those by the way; some excellent strategizing you’ve done there.)

But before whipping up this content calendar, now’s the time to collect your collective thoughts and recap all the main conclusions you’ve come to throughout this gruelling process.

First up, skim through all the previous sections, starting with the bigger picture stuff. Make a quick note of the main points from each, in a table that looks something like the one below.

By refreshing your memory on everything covered so far, you’re much more likely to achieve that almighty balance when you piece it all together, and not miss out on any essential components.

INGREDIENT	KEY TAKEAWAYS
Bigger Picture	
Buyer Personas	
Differentiation	
Tone of voice	
Content buckets	
Content channels	
Influencer marketing	
Social media	
SEO	

Guest posting	
Listening to the audience	
List-building & lead nurturing	
Formulas that work	
Content Promotion	

Second of all, it's time to revisit that checklist of lessons we went through to start with. Do any of the decisions you've made thus far run the risk of ignoring them?

Keep both of these tables close as you create your content calendar for the next three to six months. Here's your chance to set everything perfectly.

A simple Google spreadsheet will suffice for your editorial content calendar; or you could use more of a fancy collaborative tool designed for the job, like [Coschedule](#), which allows you to assign tasks related to specific pieces of content (like editing, proofreading, publishing etc) and even publish automatically through the platform.

But of course, it'll cost you.

IRONING OUT THE PROCESS

WHO DOES WHAT, WHEN AND HOW?



It's important to leave the last strategy session with all the next steps, actions and roles fixed firmly in place.

And make sure you do this while it's still fresh in mind – not several weeks later.

1. Who's involved and what are their roles?

Quick Examples:

- Konrad Sanders (The Creative Copywriter) – content strategist.
- Lindsey Kennedy (The Creative Copywriter) – main blog writer
- John Smith (In-house) – content manager
- Lucile Shepperd (in-house) – project manager

Initial Set-Up Tasks (Month 1)	Person/Company	Deadline
Quick Examples: - Revising core website copy - Writing 4 eBooks: 1 for each bucket - eBook design - Landing page creation for four eBooks, plus triggered pop ups	The Creative Copywriter (Pablo)	10/07
	The Creative Copywriter (Lindsey)	25/07
	In-house designer (Sarah)	30/07
	In-house developer (Jason)	30/07
Ongoing Tasks (Month 2-6)		

- Writing blog post 1 - Proofing blog post 1 - Blog post approval	TCC (Lindsey) TCC (Ella) In-house, (John)	5th 6th 7th
Condensed Guest Posting Campaign (Months 3-5)		
Quick Examples: - Research into publications - Writing 10 articles	The Creative Copywriter (Ella) Richard (in-house)	10/09 10/10

2. What communication and project management tools and processes will you use for each stage of collaboration?

Quick Examples:

- [Fleep.io](#) – for internal communication between team members
- [Freedcamp](#) – for the content calendar, uploading content and setting tasks for all external agencies (inc. design and copywriting)

3. Take all of the info out of the table created above and put it into your project management tool, appointing tasks to the relevant collaborators.

4. Are there any immediate to-dos needed to get the ball rolling with everything?

MEASURE, TWEAK, REFINE

HOW AND WHEN WILL YOU MEASURE
SUCCESS, AND REVISIT/REFINE YOUR
STRATEGY?



Assumptions can be a marketer's worst enemy, remember?

And that's why you need to constantly keep track of all your metrics, measure results and plan time to review and refine your strategy, like a meticulous scientist.

What should you be looking out for?

User indicators, secondary indicators and **primary indicators**, like the diagram below illustrates. Not all of the indicators exemplified here will apply to you, so create your own pyramid.



1. What metrics will you measure on a monthly basis? (See above diagram for ideas)

- a) User Indicators?
- b) Secondary Indicators?
- c) Primary Indicators?

HINT: [This article](#) by the legendary Joe Pulizzi will help you understand the pyramid approach and decide what indicators your company needs to measure.

2. Which stakeholders need to see which figures/reports? What are their expectations? What other requirements do they have?

HINT: [Here's another piece by Joe](#) about reporting content marketing ROI to the C-Level. Have a gander.

3. When should you review these results and arrange re-strategizing sessions? How often and with who? Get some dates locked down!

MOVING FORWARD

Congratulations!

You've learnt the ins and outs of advanced content strategy.

Feel more savvy now?

Feel more empowered?

Feel ready to take over the world with your brand's unique, strategically-focused content?

Then why not enrich your knowledge even more with one of our other free in-depth eBooks?

- [The Bull-Free Guide to Brand Strategy](#)
- [25 Customer-Converting Copywriting Secrets](#)
- [The Waffle-Free Guide to Social Media Marketing](#)

Or if you feel it's time to bring in the content marketing pros, to make sure you're truly set up for bottom-line-boosting success, then...

GET IN TOUCH