Andrew Whalley

A guide to Content Marketing

Preparing for content marketing

ANDREW WHALLEY

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Whalley is currently a Marketing Lecturer at Royal Holloway University of London, where he concentrates on topics in Strategic and Digital Marketing, as well as mentoring less experienced colleagues. He is a teaching veteran of over 25 years with international experience in universities and executive education, as well as being a guest speaker and presenter. Prior to lecturing, Andrew was an officer in the British Army, after which he gained commercial experience as a consultant, director, interim manager and executive director, as well as co-running his own consultancy business. He holds six degrees, three masters and a DBA, alongside numerous professional and executive education qualifications.

OVERVIEW

Introduction

We live in a time of great technology evolution and revolution. Innovation is not only upon us; it affects, even disrupts, us as marketers and as consumers of other businesses. Things are now very different; marketing is no longer what it used to be. The old fashioned 'interruptive' approach to capturing customer attention is declining. Partially due to all the distractions facing consumers, partially as the number of touchpoints between businesses and customers has exploded, but also because what customers want is changing too. As such it's time for businesses to establish a new relationship with them, Customers are more connected than ever before.

Technology is pervasive and something new is always on the horizon. Wearables. Smart watches. The Internet of Things. The only constant is change. We live in a world where phones are no longer "phones" in the way they were originally used. Rather, they're electronic windows into new worlds connecting people, information, and things, and ushering in a new generation of expectations and behaviours along the way. At the same time, media is no longer static, owned, or controlled; it's social, democratized, and real-time.

While we understand customers are more connected than ever before, as marketers we continue to struggle in truly appreciating how and why this increased connectedness changes the customer journey and their expectations and behaviours. The change is pervasive - it's not just Millennials and the even more connected younger generation (Generation Z, as they're called) behind them.

The future customer is here now and it's not just the Millennials; its more it's a group of connected individuals, who are social and separate at the same time, networked together, forming groups, tribes and communities as needed, regardless of age, race, creed or geography.

Indeed, Brian Solis refers to this generation of connected customers as Generation C. It's an even larger, and ever growing, group of likeminded consumers who "act" like Millennials but consist of every generation including X, Boomers, and Seniors. They live a digital lifestyle where all things related to life, work, and consumerism are digital and mobile first. The impact and effect of connectivity transcends any age group. The differences are realized in;

- How they learn, discover, and share.
- How they want to work or go about finding answers and solving problems.
- How they're influenced and, in turn, how they influence.
- What and why they hate, like and love.
- What they value and how they want to be valued.

For generation C technology is now part of life; they live and participate in an active digital lifestyle, in which their connections empower and inform them in an unprecedented way.

As a result, their expectations are also growing; they demand attention, personalization, and efficiency. They want it, their way, and they want it now, they require that your values match their own. This goes beyond mere expectations; it's a mandate for "how things should be given my relationship with your brand."

You need to grab their attention, keep it with meaningful and personal interaction and that's where content comes into its own.

Why a guide?

The idea of a guide is to inform, assist and steer you through the methodology, processes and theory behind contemporary content marketing. As such this guide is aimed at achieving two things;

1. A comprehensive understanding of content marketing and what constitutes a successful content marketing programme
2. Actionable steps and advice to apply a methodology that allows you to develop your own content marketing programme.

The contents herein are based on my own experiences in teaching marketing for over twenty-five years in both higher and executive education programmes, but also on my consulting and interim management experience over the same timescales. I've also borrowed extensively from commercial and academic sources in writing this guide. Yes, there is theory here; but there is a concentration on its practical application in contemporary situations. This guide will make you a better content marketer, both in understanding what it is and in how to implement it.

It's also worth noting that Content Marketing is increasingly complex as the graphic below from Content Amp shows;
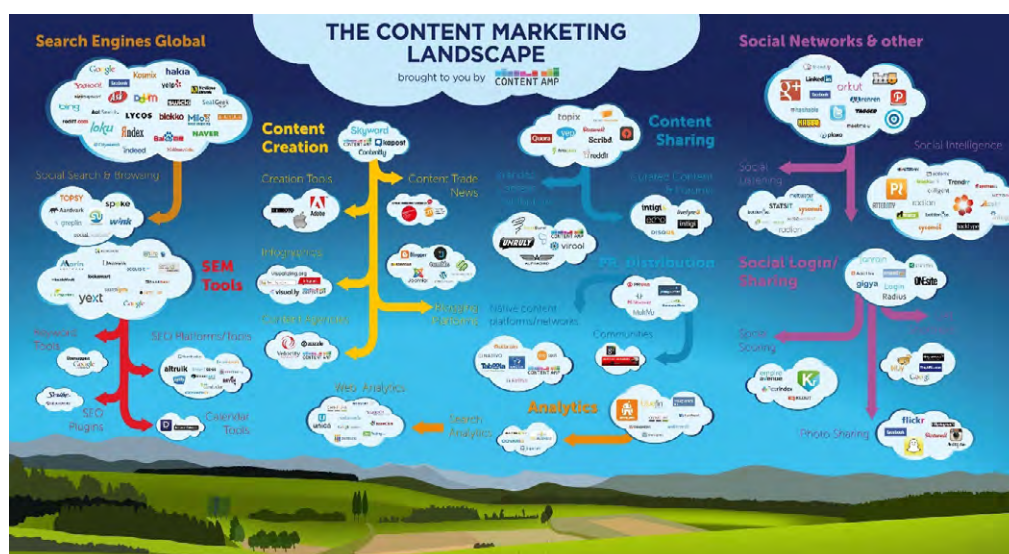
1 INTRODUCING CONTENT MARKETING

1.1 WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

Content marketing is the process of creating valuable and relevant content and transmitting it to your audience. Content is used to inform your audience and that information helps guide them through the purchase funnel.

What tactics and forms of content marketing do you actively use?
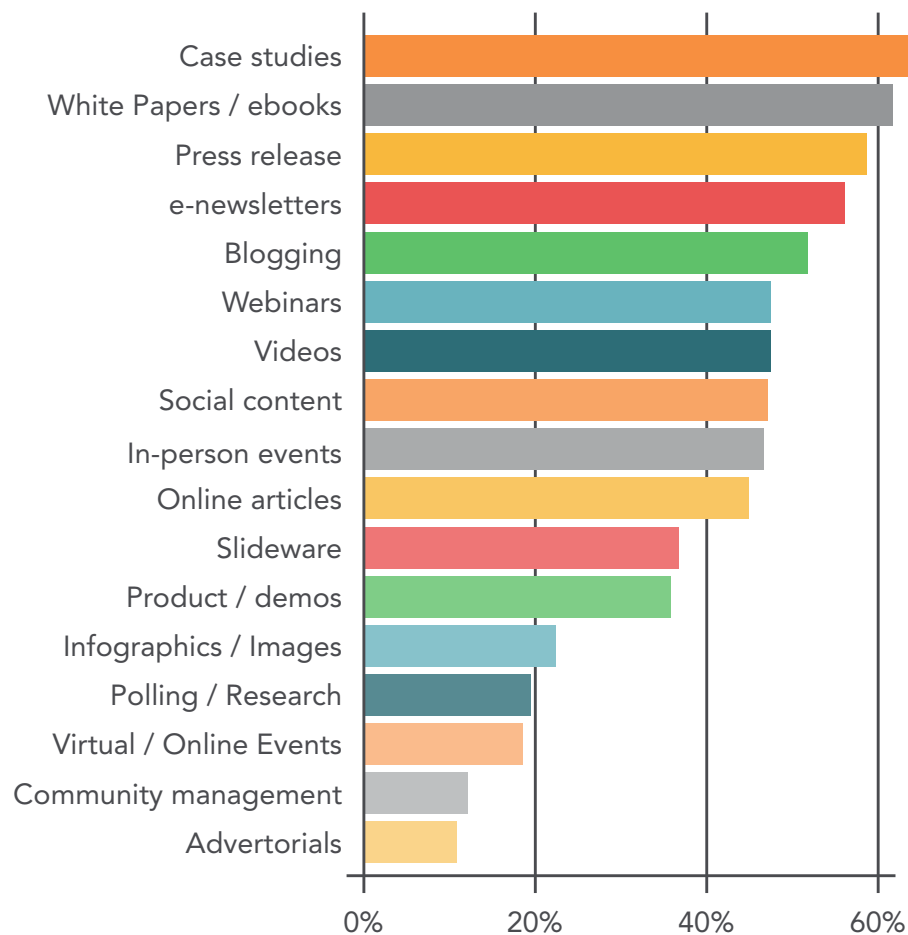
Content is more of a context than a thing, firstly content have a creative angle; so this includes the humble tweet through a simple 500 word post on a company blog, Facebook page, outranet etc , to an all-singing, all-dancing, dynamic updated, stand-alone website. The graphic opposite shows the results form a recent MarketingProfs poll of what conent forms are used by its readers.

The creative content should be centred on an idea, theme or issue rather than a product, a service or a brand directly. In short, it is non-product content the explores an area related to a business which is relevant and useful to its customers and prospective customers.

The 'marketing' element of the content ensures that its focus is firmly on the needs and interests of the consumer, not of the company. Content should look to answer any questions customers (existing or potential) might have or provide them with something stimulating that is relevant and valuable – content that produces value in the eyes of the customer builds engagement which in turn over time builds advocacy, loyalty and brand/product equity. The marketing edge of the content acts subtly as a barely conscious undertone, establishing a brand's authoritative voice through persuasion and not the heavy promotion or sales-pitch.

Regardless of its form, effective creative content provides high-quality information displayed in a creatively innovative way that best encourages customer engagement. More than anything else, successful content will attract the attention of thought-leaders in your niche area – Mavens – who will in turn reach out to their own audience thus increasing the consumer-base who will respect and trust your brand's content.

1.2   WHY IS CONTENT MARKETING IMPORTANT?

Over the past decade, content marketing has rapidly and dramatically evolved. Indeed, it was seen as a 'nice to have' rather than an essential. It was an afterthought – a gap filler for social campaigns. As the proliferation of media channels grew both traditional and to some extent digital advertising channels have lost their effectiveness, contents importance has grown. Indeed A report by Forrester indicates that on average a customer now consumes 11.4 pieces of content before making a purchase – that's a lot of content!

At the same time a drive for marketing efficiency and ROI has further concentrated marketing minds onto content – Demandmetric's 2017 survey showed that content marketing was 62% less costly than traditional marketing but generated triple the leads per unit of currency spent. Content works, and study after study shows a clear link between content business results.

Before 2011, it was relatively simple to exploit search engines such as Google. Links and keywords formed the basis of a page's ranking and there were numerous methods for spoofing numerous links at your website with relatively little effort. In other words, spam worked.

Since 2011, Google has lead a war against spam via regular updates to its algorithms. Panda, the first update in the spam war, targeted practices such as keyword stuffing (ramming a website's pages full of variations on phrases people were searching for) and duplicating content across multiple pages or domains.

After that came Penguin, which looked at the quality of links pointing towards a site. If a significant proportion of links to your site were from spammy websites (sometimes referred to as content or link farms) then you were in trouble and Google forced your ranking down. The combination of these two means that whilst links are still important, spam rarely works and when it does it is inevitably short lived.

Google's latest update, Hummingbird, is more a structural update in that in moves the search engine away from using keywords as the sole method for returning search results. Instead Google wants to understand the *context* of a searcher's intentions, and be able to interpret more conversational search queries, especially important given the continuing rise of voice activated search. As such keywords retain their importance in Search engine ranking.

Google's argument is that all they want to see is what consumers want to see: high quality original content that by its very nature will attract links and social shares, and hence boost a website's rankings in the search results. As mentioned above, this content could be anything from a well-written, informative blog post to a fancy interactive website. Bringing more rigour, creativity, and strategic thinking to content specification, origination, packaging, and delivery is now a strategic imperative for marketers as they seek to drive content consumption and knowledge sharing.

So, the question 'why is content marketing important in today's world?' is a simple one to answer: in order to offer a better service to our existing customers, and to attract new one – same old aim but a new medium.

1.3   THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Many talk about content marketing as if it's a new phenomenon – it isn't. Companies have been practising the art of engaging their customers through various forms of own-brand media for well over a century. I myself used customer case studies to generate content for many companies.

Indeed Michelin brothers created a guide promoting motoring – more cars on the road meant more tyre sales; indirect demand generation. Lego, Dell, BMW and most other major brands have used content marketing and continue to do so, the difference is that contemporary digital platforms make in easy to create and to share, both by companies and by consumers.

Today's content marketing efforts have moved to the digital sphere, where the sheer volume of content platforms, from desktop PCs to tablets, mobiles and gaming consoles, present

their own challenges. Developments in technology has itself opened doors for different types of content – videos, podcasts, etc that those early adopters of content marketing could never have dreamed of.

As with all aspects of contemporary marketing the increasing complexity of consumers, who have higher expectations and increased desire for immediacy and efficiency that were absent even 10 years ago, makes communication with them challenging. This is never more true that in the digital world. Indeed according to the Havas Group's 2017 Meaning Brands survey 84% of the public expect brands to create content – so the future of brand marketing is also a future of content marketing.

1.4   WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING GOOD FOR?

This will be covered in detail further in this text but is worth noting that the key strengths of content marketing are increased brand awareness, word of mouth reputation building, and improved trust. All these are long-term actors in demand generation.

Conversely its main weakness is that it is not a "channel", like PPC or direct TV marketing, where results may be obtaining by simply 'plugging in' to your current method of generating and converting leads.

Content Marketing is about exploiting original opportunities and creativity, it is not formulae and optimising processes.

1.5   ROI IS WHERE IT'S AT

The "soft" benefits of content marketing are obvious: public trust, more engaged prospects, happier clients. But what about the hard benefits. What about ROI?

In today's marketing world Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI) are key considerations in which campaigns to move forward, which good and services to invest in, what brands to develop – indeed to be a contemporary market requires an understanding and appreciation that marketing expenditure is just like any other investment; there has to be a payback.

With content marketing that begins with understanding that you need to address five elements;

- STRATEGY
- TRAFFIC
- ENGAGEMENT
- ACTION
- MONETISATION

This guide works through these five elements by looking at preparing and planning your content programme and then moving on to actually implementing and measuring its success.

But don't just take my word for that content makes sense financially. "Content Marketing ROI" a joint publication by kapost and Eloqua is the first study to address the fundamental questions: How much does content marketing cost and is it a better financial investment than other marketing strategies?

The study shows two very interesting results;

- Content marketing delivers three times more leads per unit of cost than traditional methods
- In the first 5 months of operating content marketing average lead costs dropped 80%

That's three times more leads for a fifth of the cost per lead – makes sense to me.

1.6 SEO

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a major aspect of contemporary marketing and it is intimately intertwined with Content Marketing. Indeed some have gone as far as to suggest that effective content marketing eliminates the need for SEO, I wouldn't go that far but the crux is that the two should be a matched pair in any business, they overlap, they cohere and they blend.

SEO is a critical component of any successful content marketing program.

93%	75%	51%
of online experiences begin with a search engine	of search engine users never click past the first page	of website traffic come from organic search
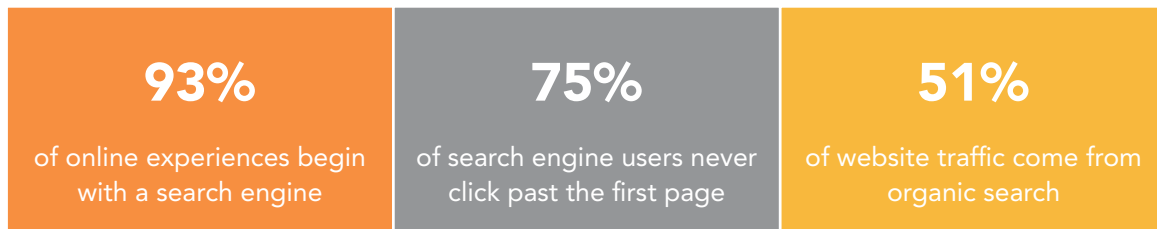
As content marketers, our ultimate goal is to use content to drive measurable business results. To do so, we build relationships with our audiences by providing them with non-promotional content that's helpful, credible, inspirational, and entertaining. Increasingly we are turning to SEO to help us do this.

Rather than enumerate every point of difference between the two, I want to point out this elemental contrast:

- SEO is narrower, and more technical.
- Content marketing is broader and more holistic.

And this is the way in which the two converge:

- The way to apply SEO in a broader way is to channel its specific technical endeavors into content marketing.
- Conversely, the only way to ensure the success of content marketing is to apply SEO techniques in its implementation.

Another way to look at it is like this — SEO makes demands.

&

Content marketing fulfils those demand.

SEO demands content. Content marketing is content.
SEO demands keywords. Content marketing means using keywords.
SEO demands linkbacks. Content marketing introduces linkbacks.
SEO demands onsite technical optimisation. Content marketing needs great UX.
SEO demands consistent output. Content marketing requires consistent output.

How to Align Your Content Strategy to SEO

There are three main ways to align your content strategy to SEO. But, keep in mind that for each tactic, your focus should always be to create best-in-class content that provides utility.

1. Content Coverage
   Content coverage is the foundation of your editorial strategy, the aim is to comprehensively cover topics core to your brand's audience. These are the core topics that you want to own. To do so, assign stories aligned to them at regular intervals. This builds your depth of content around those topics and shows search engines know that you're a source to be counted on. You need to ensure you answer all relevant questions your target audience is asking and prioritise high-volume search terms that will drive traffic and the bottom line.
2. Content Utility
   Think of this as service content. These days, we know that when people have questions, they turn to search. That's why it's important for your content to provide answers and you develop a content angle that aligns with searcher intent.
   Utility answers common consumer questions or addresses pain points, it provides solutions through a variety of useful formats (e.g. lists, guides, how-to). List posts can rank very well in search if they're in-depth and provide detailed, helpful information.
3. Cornerstone Content or "Big Rock" content
   This is generally a long form content that is fundamental to the business and reflects the business message. Ideally, it's research-backed and opinionated, this content helps position the brand as the thought leader in a certain topic which informs the content hierarchy and website navigation.

If you're not an SEO, unless you're also a content marketer. You're not a content marketer, unless you're also an SEO.

Your SEO campaign will fail unless you integrate content marketing. Your content marketing campaign will fail unless you integrate SEO.

Content & Data

Whenever we share, everywhere we go, everything we say, and everyone we follow or connect with we generate volumes of data. Data that can provide information; insights that can be used to improve marketing, consumer experiences, and, ultimately, improve products and services. The deluge of real-time social, local, mobile (SoLoMo) technology is nothing short of overwhelming and is the reason the term "Big Data" was coined. Think about all

the gadgets, apps, social networks, and appliances that continue to emerge, the pace of innovation is only outdone by the volume of data that each innovation produces.

The sheer amount of personal and ambient information from SoLoMo is both inundating and perplexing. But, it is this "Big Data" that helps marketing to evolve and adapt, it is this data we will use in our Personas, in our journey maps – it is this data we will use to help us in developing relevant engaging content and deciding where and when to distribute it.

Content Marketing is a business process not a campaign

To do justice to Content Marketing, and to its utility to your business, a key point needs to be understood – Content Marketing is not a campaign; it's a business process and it needs to managed and viewed as such. Whilst its fine to experiment real results come with planning, investment and commitment to a regular publishing schedule which yields engagement and leads. The planning, production and distribution of content can be taxing and complex, requiring meaningful investment in people and systems as well as their maintenance and continuous improvement.

1.7 USER EXPERIENCE; UX

User experience or UX is closely allied to content marketing, good UX is highly beneficial whereas bad UX can kill it. UX is worthy on an entire book on its own, but content marketers need to be familiar with what it is, in outline. So, what is it?
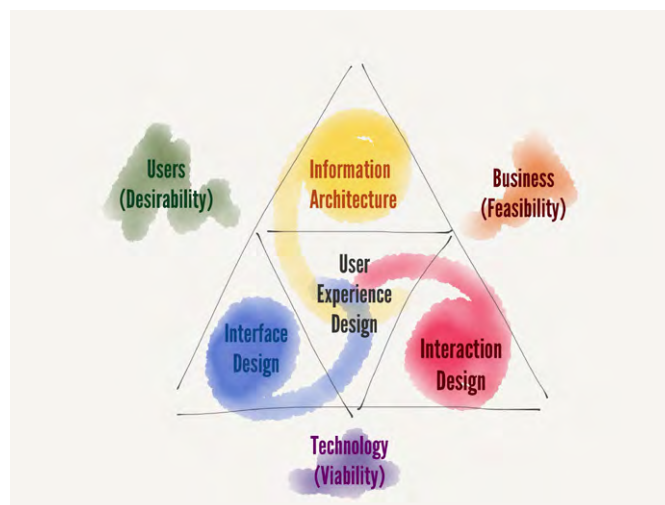
UX is basically everything that users feel or think while interacting with a product, which doesn't necessarily need to be a digital one.

UX is very broad in scope as a concept and as such encompasses every aspect of the product from as small as button design on a web page, caption up button to navigation, information architecture or an e-commerce checkout process.

It is all about examining the experience of potential customers as they use the product. It should be present in almost every stage of product development to create a really smooth and seamless experience for the target audience and as such it is highly relevant to content marketing in terms of the UX of those consuming content.
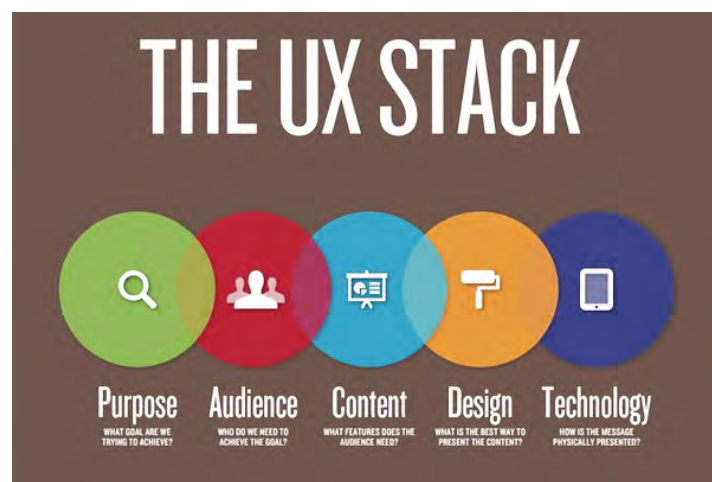
UX gurus Nielsen and Norman stated it best: "In order to achieve high-quality user experience in a company's offerings there must be a seamless merging of the services of multiple disciplines, including engineering, marketing, graphical and industrial design, and interface design."

But above all this, user experience is the voice of the end user. IT should be obvious that the core concept moulds itself closely to the use of Personas (see later in this guide) and to deep customer understanding; the mantra of contemporary marketing.

Up until relatively recently and before UX and related disciplines began to be more widely adopted, websites and other digital products were designed considering the taste and opinion of the client/company and based on the imagination and skills of the web designer. Designers produced what they thought was 'cool' and the more extraordinary solutions that showcased *their* abilities they created the better.

In some respects, this was understandable, the early web was far more of a "seller's market" and users had little choice but to consume whatever was offered. As the web evolved and competition intensified this changed, potential customers became more demanding and exacting in their standards and expectations. Web developers had to change their strategy for a more user-cantered design putting the focus on the user needs and expectations.

Making Content Strategy and UX Work Together

Though UX and content strategy seem to have similar goals there is often too much conflict when it comes to the actual execution. There are often battles between UX and content management teams, especially when it comes to design process. Content marketers and SEO specialists often want to add as much keyword optimized content to webpages as possible – and for sound traffic reasons. But designers often have a issues in fitting 400-500 word content piece into a page without impacting the design.

Note; I've seen cases where even two extra words distort a design to the point that it looks horrendous. Content marketers may have solid reasons for their wording, but it might be worth rewriting for the sake of design, so that the overall desired effect of the message as whole isn't ruined. In my view it is essential for Content Marketing, SEO and UX teams to collaborate to get projects done.

When UX and content strategy work together, the synergistic effect is much greater than simply resolving conflict. The combined expertise, skills and mindsets of usability professionals, creative designers, content curators and strategists will not only solve existing problems but will improve the overall communication between them. Ideally, such brainstorming sessions will help create a clear vision of the product both from UX and content perspective.

How Can Content Strategy Benefit From UX And Vice Versa?
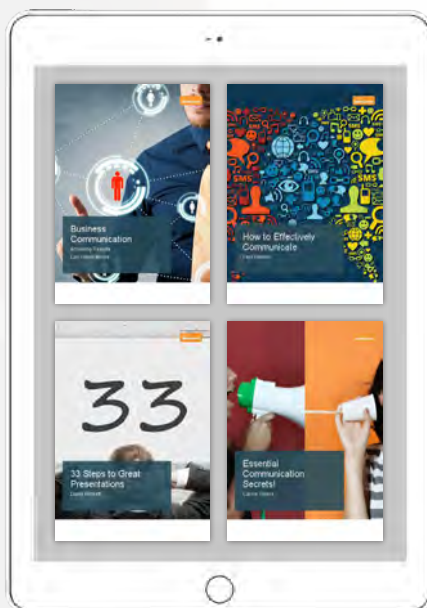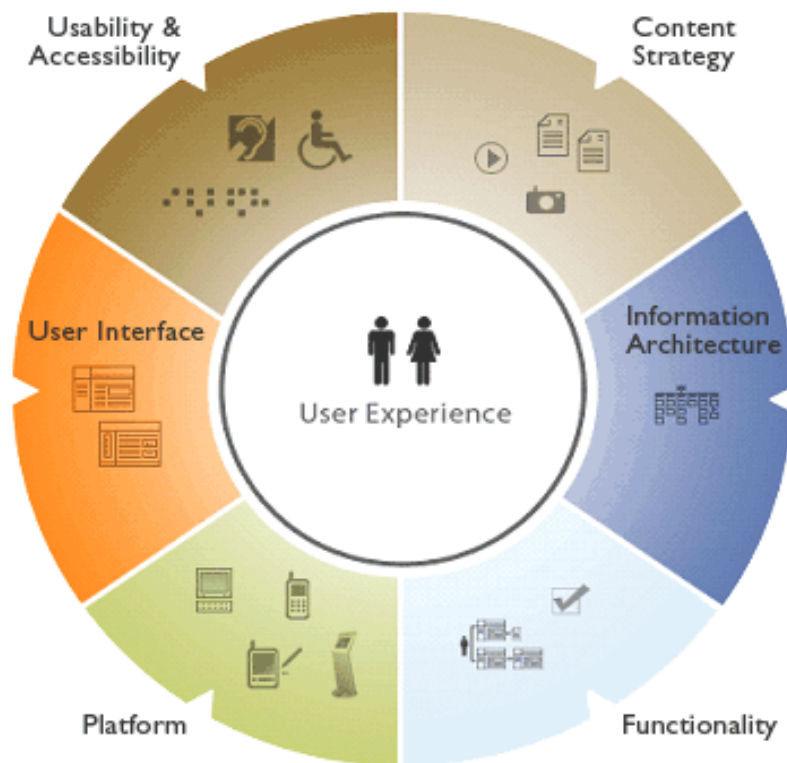
Clarity and Readability

User experience is all about creating sleek and seamless user flow and keeping user interfaces clear, but delightful. The same can and should be applied to the content we deliver. This doesn't necessarily mean shortening content, but making it more readable, easy to understand and scannable. Most users do not read every sentence; they merely scan copy. So make sure to have clear structure with meaningful headers and sub-headers, as well as spice up text with relevant visuals.

Better Information Architecture

Information architecture focuses on organising content so that it is easily accessible by the user. Obviously, content strategy plays a huge role in creating more optimal information architecture, since it defines what type of content (text, multimedia) will be created and how it will be structured to better address user needs. This eliminates a lot of guesswork for an information architect.

Focus on the user

Content strategy can greatly benefit from applying the most important principle of UX: Putting the user at the centre of everything – this is something I advocate strongly in this guide. Consider getting the UX team involved in developing your user personas with the UX team and keeping them in mind when curating content.

Conversion Optimisation

Smooth and enjoyable user experiences are the key components of higher conversion rates. But often better UX means clearer wording, calls to action and value proposition. Here's where content strategy comes in handy. It helps find the optimal voice, tone and messaging to boost conversions.

The seven Principles

UX is generally thought to operate with seven principles, applying one, several or all of them can significantly improve content marketing results, as such bear them in mind throughout this guide:

1. **Attractive:** UX practitioners and marketers understand that content must be attractive, else risk losing the audience before they ever engage with the information. Content marketing takes information and wraps it into attractive packaging, UX teams use design best practices to ensure the experience and thus packaging is attractive.
2. **Stimulating:** Content must be stimulating if it is going to be consumed. Boring information is, well, boring, and thus ineffective. UX best practices identify ways to incorporate value, motivation and incitement to drive engagement. Even the lowly white paper can be made more stimulating with simple additions of charts, graphs, callouts and the like.

3. **Novelty:** As humans, our attention is captured by 'new' 'different' and 'unusual.' Good marketers and UX practitioners incorporate this fact into the content they produce. Information presented in new ways works very effectively toward capturing and holding attention. As an example, this is why infographics work so well as a content marketing tool. Infographics take existing information and wrap it into a novel and unique format that most of us find hard to resist.

4. **Efficiency:** The core purpose of content marketing is to provide an efficient method for prospects and customers to find and consume information. UX teams live and die by efficiency, it is the core of their mantra. Marketing communications that are highly efficient at communicating will always provide better results than those that don't. Remember that complexity is the enemy of good communications.

5. **Perspicuity:** Clarity or transparency is another critical element of content marketing and UX. How understandable, easy to learn and clear content marketing communications are directly impact their usability, and adoption. UX best practices call for decreasing ambiguity and clarifying the experience whenever and wherever possible. The over use of jargon, abbreviations or company specific terms falls into this bucket. Keeping content marketing clean means keeping content marketing clear and transparent.

6. **Dependable:** The interesting thing about content marketing is it must communicate consistently across many mediums and over time. One-off ads are easy, dependable content marketing pieces must maintain their style, theme and vision across videos, articles, infographics, white papers and much more, and must reflect consistent Brand and tonality of voice throughout. UX best practices focus on creating dependable and consistent user experiences, which helps reinforce a positive user experience and satisfied users.

7. **Satisfying:** A major component of good content marketing and UX is the ability of the content to satisfy the consumer. A great headline that stimulates a response to visit the content won't matter if the content does not satisfy the reader and their expectations. But satisfaction implies something deeper; it implies a connection between the audience and the content. That connection can only come from identifying with and being connected to the audience and what they care about.

Finally, I'd like to use a quote from Joe Natoli of GiveGoodUX.com because in this he really nails it …

"UX isn't just about users; it's really a value loop in three parts:

• The person using the website has to perceive that it's valuable to them.
• That perception has to be validated through use. Proof equals trust, which means they use and/or purchase.
• When both things happen, value comes back to the business/creator: increased market share, customer loyalty, money made or money saved."

As in nature, symbiosis is an important part of creating an effective website designed to foster conversions and long-term relationships through the right balance between UX and content marketing. Without one, the other will fall, creating a true interactive experience that must excel at all levels.

When your UX and your content don't work together in harmony, you miss out on a vital part of operating a successful website.

1.8   BEFORE WE BEGIN MIGHT I ASK, "WHERE ARE YOU NOW?"

What have you got? Where is it? Who's responsible for it? Is it any good? Who looks at it? What and how do you measure it?

It's a little trite but the first step in any strategic planning process is to establish where you are now. There are likely to be existing areas of content for a business and as such you need to determine where you are on the Content Marketing Maturity Curve, a concept developed by NewsCred.
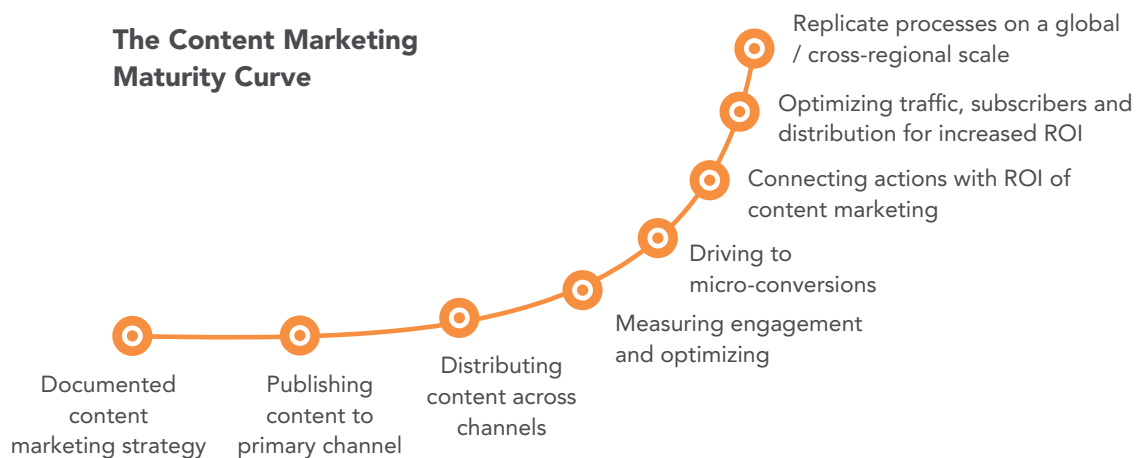
Source: Adapted from The Five Elements of Content Marketing Success, NewsCred, 2017.

Here you need to do a strengths and weaknesses analysis of what you already have – we'll return this severa times in this guide as it's the bedrock you're going to build upon. The details of tactics, metrics, goals will all flow from this.

1.9   DEFINE YOUR GOALS

- What do you want?
- When do you want it by?
- Why do you want it?
- What are your KPIs & metrics?

Simple questions with difficult answers.

Simply extending your current business strategy to content marketing is a good basic first step, but to excel you need to see where your business strategy needs to adapt and expand. Content need to be used to build on your strengths and eliminate or at least ameliorate its weaknesses.

Content planning starts with a customer focussed SW analysis of your content to create goals, we touched on this in the previous section. Without careful identification of goals at the outset there is a real risk of creating content that is technically and aesthetically pleasing whilst simultaneously conflicting with your objectives, doesn't appeal to your target audience, or has all the appeal of a bout of the flu. You need to understand what you need before you can create/obtain it.

Beare in mind the comments above about what content marketing is good for …..

……………increased brand awareness, word of mouth reputation building, and improved trust.

1.10 PLAN YOUR PREPARATION

STEP ONE – Identify your needs
Before planning your content strategy ensure you understand your organisation's business objectives and goals. Ensure you know the direction the business is heading in.

1. Clearly identify content marketing goals and KPIs which are aligned to business objectives, e.g. sales revenue, market share,
2. Develop a clear business case/s
3. Designate which websites are the primary channels for hosting content. This should be done to match your organisation's structure, i.e. by market/product.
4. Build your team – well return to this at different sections of this guide.

STEP TWO – Identify and understand your content's strengths
How does the content the intend to use further your organisation's direction? How does it engage with customers? How are you encouraging content to be shared and used?

1. Get the leadership team to agree to the business case/s

STEP THREE – Create a contingency plan
What are you going to do if content marketing doesn't achieve what you want it to?
More resources? Re-focus on a different media? Be ready rather than having to wing it.

1.11 CREATING A STRATEGY

The act of writing and developing a strategy is of itself a vital part of being successful; it allows you to align the key stakeholders with your goals and thus develop strategy and tactics that are focused, cohesive and coherent – or they should be!

The start of your strategy should be basic and consider;

- definitions,
- audience,
- plan (curation, distribution),
- measurement

1.12 DEFINITIONS; CONTENT MARKETING TERMINOLOGY

Language is a complicated thing, never more so than when you are trying to convey ideas and concepts across cultures, experiences and differing viewpoints. Indeed, that's a major reason that in marketing we develop personas to understand audiences, which we cover later in this guide. But in terms of strategic planning its important that the terminology used in shared in its definition and understanding; especially when it comes to what goals and KPIs are going to used to measure success.

Below are examples of multiple measurement levels you should be considering with some basic types of KPIs attached. Note: list is neither exhaustive nor definitive as some KPIs can be used to measure more than one thing. The idea is to give you a broad appreciation of how to structure a measurement plan.

1. **REACH:** Answers the question "How many people saw my content?"

   Sample KPIs: Total page views, number of web visitors, unique page views, social impressions, newsletter opens, articles viewed, etc.

   What it tells you: How many people had the opportunity to see your content and have had the ability to read it. This is the total reach of your content, how

many people it touched. This is helping you to understand how well your strategy is working – what is driving the most views is an insight into what your audience wants to read. Pageviews indicate whether your SEO strategy is effective or whether paid social campaigns are working.

Should be looked at alongside; number of readers, average attention time and engagement rate.

2. **ENGAGEMENT:** Answers the question "How many people read my content?"

It is the next level of measurement after basic reach metrics. Did the content garner enough interest for someone take an action: clicking through the newsletter or social post and then reading the article or blog post.

Sample KPIs: Time spent reading; average and total, scroll tracking to determine how far they get into the content, attention time on an open browser window, clicks on web links, clicks on social posts, PDF downloads, video views, ad and newsletter click through's, trend on time on site, trend on engagement, stories read per visit.

Also, you can look at a content page as the web site landing page, did that session generate a "Deep-website engagement" such as the visitor going at least three pages deep. Answers the question: "Did this content generate interest in my overall brand?"

What it tells you: You are actually looking at two aspects of engagement behaviour – did someone take an action (click) and what was the intensity of that action (reading and attention). The more action taken, the better the engagement and the better chance of moving the prospect to the next step in their journey with your content, and by proxy, your brand.

3. **SHARING:** Answers the question "Did anyone share our content?"

Determining if the reader thinks highly enough of your content to share it with their social network or with a colleague via email can say a lot about the quality of your content.

Sample KPIs: Sharing on social networks, forwarding a link on page to a colleague's email, forwarding of email newsletters.

What it tells you: A "virtual" endorsement of your content as IT decision-makers are not likely to forward content unless they feel it has utility for them and their

colleagues. Sharing also extends your content's reach to the social network of each person who shares it.

4. **CONVERSION:** Answers the question "Did anyone raise their hand to engage us in a conversation?"

A very key step – as these are positive actions in favour of your business.

Did the reader opt in to any of your mechanisms for capturing a lead, sign up for a newsletter, etc,. By doing this they are proactively entering into a permissioned based relationship with your company. You now have the ability to place them into your lead nurture program and/or sales funnel where you can continue the conversation.

Sample KPIs: Email list sign up, form completion for a content download, webinar sign up, asking for a sales person to contact them, repeat vists to a website, engagement in a community. It can be any form where prospects offer personal information in return for more content or information.

What it tells you: The reader has found your content useful and is possibly interested in exploring a business relationship with your company. Most often, this relationship should begin with additional content via a nurture program email or paid media retargeting. Unless they directly asked for a sales person to contact them, it may not be the ideal first move. Ultimately, actions show that your programme is working – even before revenue is generated – with tangible evidence through micro-conversions.

5. **REVENUE IMPACT:** Answers the question "Did anyone buy anything after reading our content?"

The ultimate measure of content analytics would enable you to know if a new customer came in contact with your company via your content. They also could have been part of your nurture programme; or they were a current customer retained or upsold based on content that you created for current customers.

**Sample KPIs:** This isn't straightforward as you must be careful to code all your inbound contact tactics, content or otherwise, with unique codes. This is the only way you will know where the web visit or conversion came from originally. You then also have to carry those attributions into whatever CRM or sales system you operate, so you can credit the content or marketing tactic with the sale.

Typical KPIs used are; Leads reached, Leads generated, deals influenced, revenue influenced. Leads reached is the total number of existing leads touched by content, Leads generated is the total number of new leads resulting from prospects interaction content (needs the coding to measure this), deals influenced is the total number of deals touched by content at some stage in the buying process, revenue influenced is the sales generated by deals touched by content at some stage in the buying process.

What it tells you: This is the true financial ROI of your content strategy and plan. Ultimately, how successful is it? What impact is it having on the bottom line?

By creating a measurement regime that mirrors the sales funnel with appropriate KPIs you can build an understanding of how your content is performing and if its generating a ROI. It facilitates more informed decisions on where to and in what to invest.

Remember a strategy is only complete if it has metrics, goals, cross-team participation, and executive buy-in that supports these.
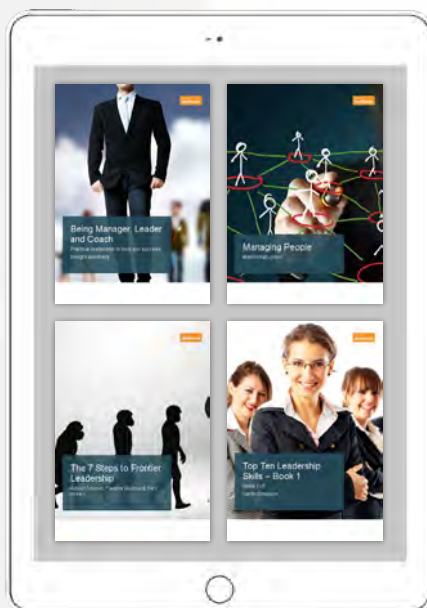
PART ONE

2 PREPARATION FOR CONTENT MARKETING

2.1 AUDIENCE; DEVELOP BUYING PERSONAS

*If you don't know the audience for your content, everything
you do will be fundamentally flawed*

The concept behind content marketing is that you're not grovelling for approval, you're offering genuine value and getting something tangible from the increased exposure. There is a real danger of over compromising in an attempt to appeal to more people. This is a basic mistake, you need to understanding the decision making unit (DMU) and a common way to do this in marketing is to develop Buying Personas.

> In the broadest sense, a *persona* is simply a description of someone who's interested in your company, products, and services. A persona provides a detailed description of a fictional person who would buy your product or use your service. A persona describes their behaviours, job role, responsibilities, priorities, and personality traits; it puts human attributes to an abstract marketing description.

Content that aims to meet the needs of your whole target audience is likely to be only loosely relevant to each group and not specific enough to fully engage with everyone, it will lack impact be ineffective and inefficient – in other words a waste of time.

No matter whom you sell to or what industry you're in, a persona will give you a much better sense of what content is appropriate. For example, if you're se selling primarily to Directors at companies with 2,000+ people, you want much different content than if you are selling to a department manager at a local 15-person business.

In the digital age there is always some way of getting through to your audience on your terms, so developing audience specific content – whilst more resources consuming – is always advisable. A campaign with many irrelevant views is not as strong as a more focused campaign, so make sure you know that the people interested in your content form a valuable, long-term audience. By developing personas, you'll be able to get more value for the content you're creating, and you'll be able to test different types of content for the various personas you develop in your market. By creating an actual description and character for your marketing materials, you'll be far more capable of creating content that's compelling and meaningful to your target audience.

72% of buyers in the awareness stage use Google

Persona development is a little like targeting in the STP process; to reach as much of the audience as possible it's a good idea to map out a minimum of four distinct buying personas - average age, along with their needs and a backstory. You need to work out how each persona group contributes to and affects the industry, and then your business. Who are the influencers? Who are the thought leaders? Who are the main spenders? Remember to relate to buyer behaviour models and DMU in particular if its B2B marketing.

To develop personas just think about a potential customer's story …….

…….What's their age? What's their plan? What's their goal?
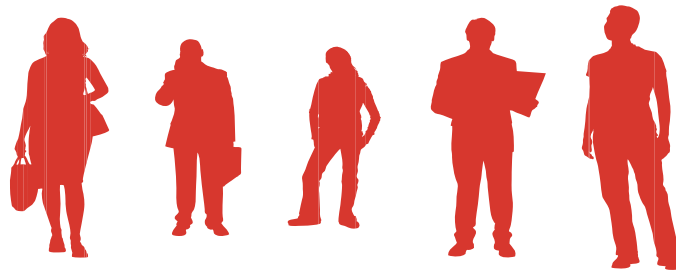
STEP ONE – know your customer base
The first step in developing a convincing persona is to use you existing internal information – identify the key demographics

STEP TWO – know their friends
Identify the non-buying influencers. Who's talking about your business?

STEP THREE - know their voice
Where are people talking about you, your products, your competitors, when are they doing this, Why? What is being said?

Let's give some basic examples;

- Peter Aged 52, wants a portfolio of buy to let property, wants to acquire properties in popular commuter areas
- Sarah Aged 21, student nurse who wants to house share, wants a place in an existing house share near to work

- Alan & Jane 27 & 25, city professionals, want to more affluent area to live in, exploring options to buy rather than rent
- James Aged 78, retired widower, looking to downsize, wants a smaller more rural property but with links to the city

Note; these are examples – you need to develop ones that are contextual to your business. Sets of personas should be product, market and brand specific. The more effort you put into getting these accurate, the more useful they will be and the better chances your content has of being successful.

B2B

It's also worth taking a specific look at B2B persona development. Consider asking the following questions;

> Demographics - These questions help you understand the commonly understood characteristics of your buyer. These cut-and-dry questions should help you understand high-level information about your buyer.

> **60-70% of B2B content created is never used** because the topic isn't relevant to the buyer audience – Content Marketing Institute

> 1. What is the person's age?
> 2. What is the person's level of education?
> 3. Does this person require a specific skill set, degree, certification, or other continuing education?
> 4. What is their title and where do they stand on the organisational chart?
>   a) Do they report to someone or are they responsible for a team?
>   b) How are they measured?
>   c) Are they capable of making purchase decisions or do they require additional input?

> Behaviour – these questions go beyond standard demographics to help you better understand the persona. These questions should help reveal your persona's likes, dislikes, problems, and responsibilities.

LinkedIn generates more leads for B2B companies than Facebook, Twitter, or blogs individually. Yet only 47 percent of B2B marketers say they use LinkedIn versus 90 percent on Facebook. *Inside View*

1. What are this person's most important daily responsibilities?
2. What is their routine when they get to the office?
3. What daily obstacles make this person's work life more difficult?
4. What would make life easier?
5. What does the person read on a daily basis?
6. Where do they get the information that helps them do their jobs that much better?

Company interaction –these questions help to understand why the company interacts with yours and thus goes to content type and format

1. How do they interact with your company?
2. Why do they come to your company in the first place?
3. How does your product/service solve their problem?
4. What sort of content will engage with them?

In some companies you might already have much of this information as part of a key account management programme or, and forgive the term, a "smother" programme as it's known in sales circles.

Note that if you are a small local professional or tradesperson looking to pick up several new customers each week, then the effort to produce plumbing, heating, hairdressing, building, legal or similar content that ranks highly in Google is most likely not going to be worth your time. You would be better served by PPC, SEO and local SEO. You may also be able to use a more targeted approach to content marketing using social media advertising.

Companies, both global and emerging, realise the need to use content to drive brand relevance and authority. Content investments by B2B technology companies now account for as much as 25 percent of marketing budgets (CMO Council). This percentage will continue to grow, fuelled by multiplying formats, delivery channels, platforms, audiences, device types, and consumption rates worldwide.

If you have a scalable business model and are not geographically bound, then nothing is going to be more scalable than a combined content marketing and SEO strategy. You will be able to drive more awareness and engagement — without rapidly scaling costs — as you reach a more diverse and geographically broad audience

Psychology and Persuasion

Psychological principles tent to reside in the realm of academic research and literature, which are often inaccessible for marketers. But, one of the major reasons for undertaking Persona analysis is to understand the buying psychology of your potential customers and to this be able to persuade them to become customers, advocates etc. As such it's important that a content marketer or designer of content to understand psychological principles, whether you're working to make an existing website more intuitive or building a digital experience aligned with how users make decisions.

> Victor S. Yocco, author of "Design for the Mind: Seven Psychological Principles of Persuasive Design," put it well: *"Utilizing dark patterns or tricking a user into doing something they wouldn't otherwise do is not persuasion. It's being an asshole."*

Psychology can help us answer questions like:

- *Why do users behave the way they do?*
- *Which elements of design will facilitate the behaviours I want users to engage in?*

The idea is that once we can answer these type question we can build on our persuasion. Here I need to add a cautionary note; Persuasion has a bad reputation and to a degree that's understandable, but it isn't an inherently negative thing. Persuasion is just finding a way to influence and it's something we ALL do on a daily basis; job interviews, pay rises, getting people to volunteer, getting the kids to do their homework or tidy their rooms – they are all acts of persuasion.

Which is my point this isn't about tricking or arm twisting, what I present below is a collection of principles, examples, and best practices that will make your content and design more persuasive, triggering behaviours **users were already considering**. In other words, how to increase conversions by understanding psychology, engaging readers in specific behaviours, and creating calls to action **at the right time**.

Applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model to design

As I noted above, persuasion is part of every aspect of our lives. Businesses want us to buy their products. Politicians want our votes, people want us to like them. The same concepts hold true for websites, apps, content destinations, and other digital properties. Good design persuades users to engage with your product or content in the way you intend, leading to your desired outcome.

It also is worth noting that, persuasion involves more than words. Aesthetics and user experience makes a website or application more persuasive, indeed within advertising theory this aspect via Polysemy is deliberately used to enhance appeal to a target audience; indeed, in all cases they can reinforce your audience's attitudes. Equally a digital experience can also dissuade users, e.g. too many pop-ups, long loading time, pages of disclaimers, constant buffering to get to your core message, will result in a high probability they will leave your site before you get your point across. Distractions, whether physical, visual, or intangible, can temporarily halt the whole persuasion process – again this mirrors into the "noise" concept in marketing communications theory.

Various academics have used a variety of models to attempt to explain how persuasion works. The model I prefer is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), it is one of the most frequently cited models of persuasion, explains how shaping attitudes also shapes behaviour – which is the critical area for content marketers. As such incorporating the principles of the ELM into your message and design will maximize your influence on user attitudes and, therefore, behaviours.

Central and peripheral routes

The model starts by stating that when someone is presented with information, some level of "elaboration" occurs. To elaborate on something simply means to have to take the time to really think about it. For example, when buying a car you will spend a lot of time thinking about and researching which car bets fits you; it's likely you'll use Google, talk to friends, look on car sales websites and even visit car dealers.

This is what the ELM is about;

- How likely are we to elaborate, and on what level?
- The level of elaboration determines which processing route the message takes: central or peripheral.

  Central route processing means your audience cares more about the message. They'll pay more attention and scrutinize the quality and strength of the argument. Any attitudes formed or reinforced this way are thought to be more resistant to counter-arguments.

  Peripheral route processing happens on a more superficial level. Your audience pays less attention to the message itself, but are more influenced by secondary factors, such as source credibility, visual appeal, presentation, and enticements like food, sex, and humour. Attitudes formed or reinforced this way are thought to be less enduring, subject to change through counter-arguments, and in need of continual reinforcement.

It should be obvious how an understanding of which of these mechanisms is in force for your Personas can be used to guide your content's content! But let's reinforce this by examining the difference between central and peripheral route processing and how messaging and design can address each, through an example.

Imagine two potential customers, both in need of a new small car.

- Ann is a car expert who often reads car magazines.
- Andy barely knows about cars; he's interested in finding a quality car, with good design (he loves design products) at a good price.

While both users will have some level of central route processing (i.e. pricing), it is more likely that Ann, with her interest in cars and mechanics, will be attentive to the messages. Ann searches for car details, specs, and comparison information. Her process will likely follow the central route.

Andy, instead, looks at several different sites before deciding on a new Mini Cooper model. He's not interested in technical details, rather he likes the way the website presents the car. He loves the design, and he's attracted by large images and customizable colour combinations. Andy goes the peripheral route.

Motivation and ability

This also leads us onto considering what promotes central route processing and high elaboration? In other words, how can we move visitors to the central route as opposed to the peripheral? Research shows two main factors influencing a shift to the central route: motivation and ability.

- **Motivation** is often influenced by relevance. A user who feels directly impacted by a topic is more likely to process a message through the central route.
- **Ability** is a straightforward concept. For central route processing to occur, your message must align with your audience's thinking capabilities. If people lack the mental ability to process your message, they will not be able to critically evaluate it, and are guaranteed to process it through the peripheral route.

In other words: If you want people to pay attention to your content, make it relevant and easy to understand.

The **Fogg Behaviour Model** can help you connect motivation and ability. Dr. BJ Fogg founded the Persuasive Technology Lab at Stanford University which has produced some

astounding insights towards behaviour design, where psychology, design, and technology meet – a systematic way to influence a desired behaviour.

Fogg's model explains that three elements must come together at the same time for a behaviour to occur:

- motivation,
- ability, and
- trigger.

If one of those elements is missing, then the action won't happen.

Fogg Behavior Model
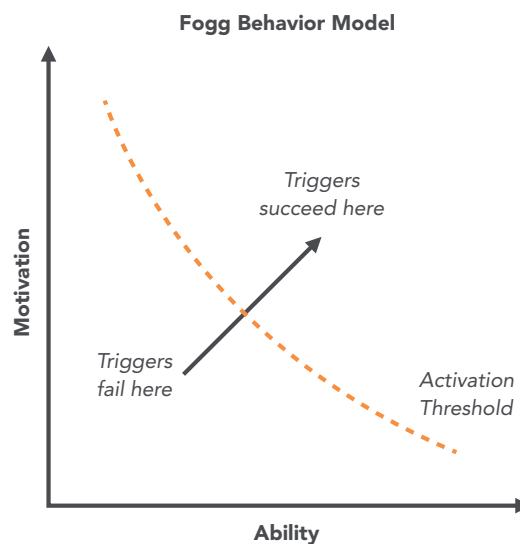
Ability and motivation have a trade-off relationship when it comes to performing behaviours. That's what the curved line on the Behaviour Model represents. You can see the point when we should ask users to engage in a behaviour because they'll be most likely to say "Yes!"

We must design our content to increase motivation and ability to the point where a trigger will be successful. If a design presents the trigger before motivation and ability reach sufficiently high levels, the behaviour won't occur.

Here's how you can account for each in your content and design.

- **Motivation -** The most effective way to increase motivation is through strong messages that show why your product and content are relevant to your audience. Several factors, like status, early access, power, and rewards, can also boost motivation.

- **Ability -** Convey your message in a way that your audience understands. There are two paths to increasing ability. The hard way is to train people to understand your message. The easier (and best) path is **simplicity**. Make it easy for your audience to understand what you offer and how to receive it.

This leads to an important rule: If you must choose what to optimize for, always choose ability over motivation. Become a master of simplification, not motivation.

- **Trigger** - Without a trigger, a target behaviour will not happen. A trigger can be external, like an alarm sounding or internal to a behaviour. The concept of a trigger has different names, but content marketers generally refer to it as a call to action (CTA), borrowing from marketing communications theory. As Fogg says, the way to encourage wanted behaviour is "*place hot triggers in the path of motivated users*".

The closer the timing of an external trigger with an internal trigger, the sooner an association forms. In general, an internal trigger is created when a user has a consistently great experience with content or an application. After continuously getting rewarded by the application, an association is made between the application and the need that prompted the opening of it, there are Pavlovian overtones in this.

But, since internal triggers take the form of internal drives and thoughts, it's pretty much impossible to measure or rely on them.

This leads to another important rule: external triggers are a designer's best friend.

Examples of external triggers are:

- Emails
- Push notifications (e.g. email subscriptions pop-ups)
- Text messages

These triggers are most effective when actionable, personalised, and timely. When a user is presented with a CTA when they're able and somewhat motivated to perform a behaviour, it's likely that they will.

Cialdini's Principle of Persuasion

We now seen how elaboration occurs and how it is facilitated by motivation, ability/simplicity, and triggers. Dr. Robert B. Cialdini, a renowned thinker on persuasion adds one more

element. We live in an age of information overload, as such we sometimes don't have the time to process all of the information and make informed decisions. This situation makes us look for signals that help us decide quickly if we want to do something. Cialdini calls these signals "shortcuts." Enabling these shortcuts through design and content will facilitate users to adopt the central processing route:

- **Status Quo**: People generally prefer status quo, even if they say (or their actions suggest) they're open to new ideas or ways of doing things. If your company's products or services require customers to venture out of their comfort zone, explore risk-free mechanisms that allow customers to experience them. For example, free samples

- **Reciprocity**: People generally feel indebted to those who do something for them without asking for anything in return. Simply put, the more you give to your potential customers, the more they'll be willing to give back to you. Free gifts, extended payment terms, extra discounts – whatever adds meaningful value in the eyes of the customer. Note this yet again mirrors to the core marketing concept of "Positioning" and is also the concept behind the "big rock content marketing model". You can google that to get a full explanation of the concept or go to https://insights.newscred.com/content-marketing-thanksgiving-turkey/

- **Social Proof and Acceptance**: We value opinions and ideas from people like us, and we feel greater compulsion to act when we see others like us taking action. Social proof comes in a lot of forms: customer case studies, testimonials, reviews, and social engagement, to name a few.

- **Scarcity and Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO)**: When we fear that something is scarce, we feel compelled to act – buying, stockpiling, or experiencing that thing before it's gone. This is an incredibly powerful psychological principle that marketers have used for years to drive action. By using limited time offers or showing consumers what their friends are purchasing, you can create a sense of urgency to buy. This is widely used in gamification scenarios.

Paying attention to the all above will reap dividends.

2.2 AUDIENCE; AUDITING YOUR WEBSITE

The next step is to take a good dispassionate look at what you already have starting with your website. Looking at your existing potential sources for, and mediums for promulgating content with a critical eye should establish your current base and thus what else is required to achieve the goals you outlined earlier. Whilst this might be time consuming, especially with multi-page ecommerce sites its vital and its ok to concentrate on key pages – home page, main categories – and sample some of the rest.

In particular examine your themes – what's worked and what hasn't, you to your competitors and most importantly look at examples that have received critical acclaim; a quick google search will give you lots of examplars. Ensure you start to think about all the types of content, blogs, videos, tweets, infographics, stories, pictures, buying guides, etc. How can you use these? And importantly how can you use these to provide linked themes to enhance your SEO and to achieve synergistic benefits.

At this point its also worth noting that you should think about analytics – how are you going to measure traffic and its origins. You'll need to do this as you roll-out new content so you can track what works and what doesn't. There are lots of commercially available aps and pieces of software ranging from the free to the costly with varying degrees of functionality. You need to invest some time in getting something that will help you tailor your activity within your budget. This is important – Loyalty can be measured in this way and loyalty has a hugely disproportionate affect on the bottom line; that is after all why most businesses undertake content marketing!

Doing the audit

Review your Personas and goals – have you already been targeting them? And what results did you get? Take a moment to ensure your audience is actually who you think it is. Are you goals realistic? Have you used the SMART mnemonic to plan? Do these areas add up? IF not might you benefit more from further focus or shifting attention within your market? Once you're happy its time to dig into your data.

Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value	Page Type	Content Type	Quality	Notes
10610	32%	31.58%	£1.88	Home	Awareness	1	Confusing Layout, Home staging access?
709	79%	69.59%	£0.26	Information	Trigger	3	Very High Bounce rate
593	65%	58.78%	£0.00	Information	Trigger	3	
313	64%	29.35%	£11.34	Product page	Trigger	2	
302	75%	56.02%	£2.59	Contact Details	Purchase	2	
256	51%	27.15%	£5.16	Information	Trigger	2	Could be more user friendly
206	53%	30.57%	£18.93	Product page	Purchase	3	
147	57%	30.93%	£1.28	Information	Trigger	2	
121	45%	34.52%	£5.05	Reviews	Preference	3	High Page Value and close to average Bounce rate
95	60%	31.60%	£1.43	Information	Loyalty	3	High BR, small PV , large amount of page views
70	50%	20.91%	£3.60	Information	Awareness	2	
64	86%	41.80%	£4.51	Information	Trigger	2	
57	44%	34.84%	£1.89	Blog related	Awareness	2	large promtional header
50	48%	51.72%	£0.00	Blog related	Awareness	2	
40	55%	38.72%	£4.43	Information	Trigger	3	
18	39%	54.91%	£6.40	Guide	Awareness	3	Low BR and High PV
18	61%	23.65%	£0.84	Information	Awareness	2	
35	34%	26.54%	£4.74	Information	Preference	3	Low Bounce rate, high Page value
34	88%	89.74%	£0.00	Blog related	Awareness	2	

Fig 1; An audit example using Excel
Source: adapted from consultancy data by author.

STEP ONE – USE YOUR HEAD

Review the content for quality, spelling grammar, ease of language, construction of sentences. Is it easy to follow? Importantly is it geared to the audience expected in these terms? Fix anything and look to improve its usability. A critical 'friend' is of great usefulness in this regard.

STEP TWO – FIND THE HIGH QUALITY TRAFFIC

Its not just about achieving high volume of traffic – its about getting them to do something on use to you once they are there. Look for times on site, stickiness of pages, social shares, etc All of these mean quality traffic that is delivering benefits.

STEP THREE – DEVELOP A SCORING SYSTEM

Each piece of content has a purpose in the buying process; awareness, trigger, preference, loyalty. Score content based on its ability to achieve these – note some content may well serve multiple purposes in this regard. You need to balance these across your content, so keeping track of this helps to plan future content to fill gaps.

2.3   AUDIENCE; CONTENT MISSION STATEMENT

The Makeup Of a Good Content Mission Statement

This statement will be printed or otherwise produced to reflect its value and importance. It will be passed out to everyone who writes content and anyone at the core of all your Content Marketing initiatives so you need to spend time getting this right.

Let's see what goes into a good Mission Statement:

- **What Audience are you targeting?** - You should know who you are targeting if your Persona exercises have been successful. But at the beginning most organizations cannot easily answer this. Think about the big characteristics of who you are reaching with the content. These don't always line up directly with your current customer base, but there should be a business reason you are reaching this audience. If reaching the child of an aging parent is a target for your Senior Living facility, then they should be part of your target Personas and mentioned in the Content Mission Statement. Remember, this statement should be an outline for your content, so it should provide value to someone listed in your statement.
- **What are you delivering?** - Not blogs, infographics, and podcasts, but what is within these items.; think about words like insights, advice, expertise, experiences,

opinions, suggestions, lessons, or guidance. This is what you will be delivering within content items. Try not to be overly vague use keywords that drive specific value, indeed think about your UX and SEO at this point too. Lessons and opinions have two very different meanings but are represented in the word information. Leave out words like information, data, and articles as they can be far to open to personal judgment – bias will kill in both directions.

- **How will your audience find value in what you are delivering?** - Robert Rose has spoken about viewing your content as an asset and not just value. The more aware you make your audiences of the quality of your content and continue to meet the expectations of their initial gut calls, the faster you build truly passionate audience members who will be more willing to use your products and services. If your Content Mission Statement does not convey the level of value you expect your content to have, then you need to keep working on it.

- **How will you differentiate yourself?** - At first, this may be hard to convey in your Mission Statement. As you see a rise in the amount of content being produced, it will be important that you know how ours will stand out. If your differentiation is the small niche you have defined for your audience, then use that. However, if your Mission Statement is everything to everyone, focus in here to add some distinctions.

STEP ONE – WRITE THREE GOOD STATEMENTS
Remember, you are trying to create a new asset class in your organiSation with your content. You want to be able to fill the pockets of your audience with valuable tokens that make them want to come back for more and, in turn, do business with you.

STEP TWO – SHARE THEM
Sahre what you produce with colleagues get their ideas too.

STEP THREE – REVIEW
You may find it easier to solidify your Content Mission Statement by reviewing your existing content. The content will be in one of three states: in line with your statement, needs a tweak to get in on the same page, or in need of a new home. Getting your content in line with your Mission will help kick off your Content Marketing initiatives faster than creating new content. You will also find those hidden gems that you forgot about, or in some cases, didn't know you had.

2.4   AUDIENCE; ARCHITECTURE IS IMPORTANT

It is important to develop an understanding of what you want to say about yourself and to establish a hierarchy; least to most important. This should form a touchstone for your

content marketing, indeed for your marketing communications as a whole. This helps to prevent ANY form of communications being disruptive or counter-productive in terms of your brand. It should minimise accidental noise, polysemy or semiotic issues. Indeed many large companies have a "Brand Bible" to control this element of communications and developing one for your own business is not a bad idea in itself.

Margot Bloomstein's book "Content Strategy at Work" explains that message architecture is about this type of hierarchy; a hierarchy of communications goals. In other words, a prioritised list of what you want to say to your customers. The most advanced of hierarchies also has ties to campaigns and a content calendar (communications calendar) is created so that the progression of what is being said, where, by what method, when, and to whom, is tracked. In this way the content is linked to the audience and to the DMU.

Having a strong awareness of message priority; which audience, at what time is vital when planning and creating content. It is an essential discipline in maintaining brand image and personality.

Your voice and your values should determine the direction of your content;

- Are you trying to establish an ethical position?
- Are you low cost or luxury?
- Are you sustainable and green?
- Are you a good corporate citizen?

All of these considerations and many others too, potentially go to establish your architecture, we don't talk about Brand personality casually; it's a core discipline of contemporary marketing and content is a great way to establish it – say what you want to mean to customers!
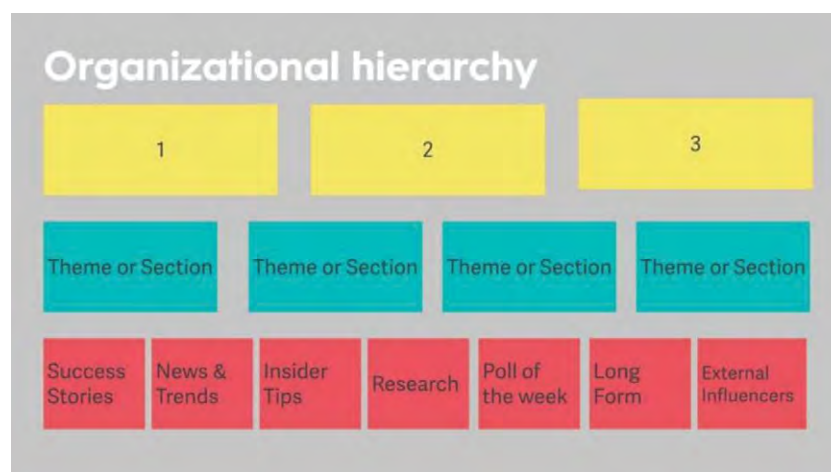
In this vein, it's important to consider the topics your brand wants to engage in, where you have the right to an opinion that adds value to the discourse. You need a good degree of congruence between your brand and the topic, otherwise your opinion just isn't meaningful. Once you've defined topics you think your brand can and should provide a perspective on, then you can start to create an organisational hierarchy of topics that can be grouped together.

From this, content pillars and sub pillars can be created so that this hierarchy may serve as the navigation for your content hub or your method of internal tagging that allows you to easily find and index content.

Now that you have topics ranked on importance and grouped based on their relevancy and relation to each other it's time to think about what the content you create will look like.

You need to consider the formats you are going to publish. Curating 5 pieces of licensed content, producing ten videos, and writing five original articles, for example, will take considerable resources. In your strategy document (see next sections), you need to communicate the value of each format, as well as relative goals for how and when you will utilise each. Your content strategy should show the way each format will fit into a cascading strategy that tackles a "big rock" challenge, i.e. a topic that's very important to your audience and core to your brand.

See the chart below for taking ad hoc content creation and formats into a structure that will allow you to scale content and provide a ripple effect of value:

Move from *ad-hoc* content creation...
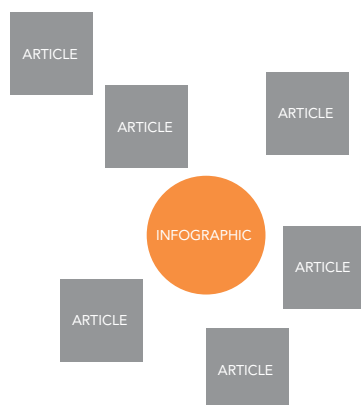
...To *cascading* content strategies.
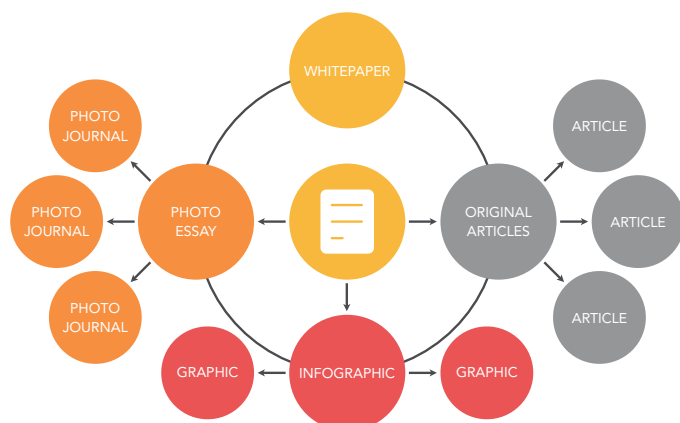
STEP ONE – WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?

Write down your company values, display them where you can refer to them as you create content. Posters or index cards can be useful aids in this. Get some input from customers on this both in terms of what they think your values are and their relative importance. Establish a hierarchy you are satisfied with.

STEP TWO – WHAT DO YOU WANT TO STAND FOR?

What you want needs to align closely with what your customers want so again get some customer input and again rank them

STEP THREE – IDENTIFY YOUR THEMES

You should now have enough values to identify any themes and also to rank them in relative importance to your company and your customers. Any stand out themes, ones that are repeated or very strongly favoured should be treated as 'super-values'.

It's also worth thinking about the longevity of content at this point. Not all content is equal you need to think about the three Hs;

- **Hero:** Big activation pieces that are core to campaigns.
- **Hub:** Always-on pieces that ensure that you're always in the conversations you want to be in, as a brand.
- **Hygiene:** Critical SEO pieces that drive conversions.

2.5   AUDIENCE & PLAN; MASCOTS

Visual identity is a core part of most company's branding these days. Colours, graphics etc are usually well worked out but there is an increasing trend to utilise another element of visual identity – The Mascot.

There are lots of Mascots being used by Brands throughout the globe from what is widely recognised as the progenitor of Mascots – Mickey Mouse (now over 90 years young!) through to more contemporary incarnations such as Alexanader Orlov, Talking M&Ms, Mr Sheen, Mr Stay Puft, etc.

The Widget Wizard

But you don't have to be as big as Disney to make a brand mascot work for you nor do you have to be a retail business. In the early 90s I helped develop the use of a mascot – "The Widget Wizard" for a plastic parts company operating in the industrial business to business market. This included the development of a screen saver where the wizard danced across the PC screen and then 'revealed' one of our parts – this was early content marketing and a move that our competitors soon followed!

And these days, with content marketing, social media, and video, companies can get more leverage out of a character than ever before, engaging audiences, building brand loyalty, driving retention, and helping to clarify complex ideas – which is particularly useful for B2B companies.

Most of the top brands now employ a cast of people, animals, and fantastical beings to help build audience awareness, distinguish themselves in their industries, and tell their brand stories in a myriad of ways across marketing channels. Many also exploit tie-ins to movies, TV shows etc to do this – a classic example of event-based tie-ins for content marketing.

You also need to know your audience and its cultural sensitivities. The BuzzSumo mascot (seen above) has received a few complaints about the character (all four from Americans), but they point out that the idea for him came from co-founder Henley Wing, who is Asian-American.

Wing explains, "He came up with the sumo wrestler concept, and though we've had a few comments with regard to cultural sensitivity and appropriation, they've never come from our Asian audience. If we were just white English people, then that might be different." At the end of the day, a sumo wrestler is a respected athlete, and the illustrations don't degrade the character. Nevertheless, you must consider these issues when developing a mascot for your brand.

Social media is a natural habitat for mascots that allows brands to tell stories and connect on deep and intimate levels. In addition, it's a great way to drive traffic to your content hubs. The use of Twitter and Facebook are well developed by most brands but there are lots of other visual media – Instagram, Pintrest, YouTube, Tumblr, Snapchat, etc that are growing in value too. Indeed, some sources credit Pintrest with being the fourth largest driver of traffic worldwide, a lot of this is now actually crowdsourced and co-created.

A final thought – the advent of Virtual Reality headsets is likely to expand the potential use of mascots

2.6   AUDIENCE; COMPETITORS ARE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Competitor analysis is difficult, time consuming but essential. Wether you're reverse engineering a physical product, looking at customer service benchmarks or looking at a website, you're looking at many metrics and in some cases you'll be guessing. But that isn't an excuse not to do it.

Fortunately when it comes to content marketing you've usually got a wealth or publicly, readily available information at your disposal. Self-promotion means your competitors are lauding their successes and triumphs, they are looking for plaudits and that makes competitor analysis in this domain easier. Equally don't assume it's the biggest than will be the best. In many cases size comes at the cost of agility and it may well be the small fry of the market that are the best when it comes to content. Get the opinions of a few key neural industry experts as to whom leads in this regard in your market and to be really good find out who is the best at it "full stop" and benchmark yourself against them too.

It's the way you do it, not what is done

Competitor analysis in this domain is not about what they've done – that is a niche that's already taken and following is not usually the most productive thing to do. Instead its how

they've done it that matters. Look at their sources, where did they get data? Which experts are they quoting? Which studies? Which customers? What images are they using? What backgrounds? Think about how its been put together what are the overt and covert messages?

Even where it looks unique or a one-off there are lesson to be learnt. Often you can identify a key component to its success and remember, virality often starts with a few key individuals – find out who they are and aim your content squarely at them and others like them.

STEP ONE – FIND COMPETITORS WITH CONTENT
Search for competitors with content directly – you should know who they are already, and by your industry e.g. search using 'education infographic'. Note this second method is often overlooked but it usually the one that yields the nosy interesting results!

STEP TWO – ANALYSE THEIR SUCCESS
Use a free link exploring piece of software, e.g. OpenSiteExplorer, to analyse the links coming into a website. What social share buttons are present – this will give an estimate of social media success. Google the content – how easy is it to find?

STEP THREE – BREAK THE CONTENT DOWN
What platforms they are using to promote it. Analyse their tone, do the platforms fit? Is the research robust? Are they synergistic? What are the themes?

2.7   AUDIENCE; FURTHER RESEARCH

The next step is to use research to ensure your personas are reflective of a sufficiently large enough audience to be viable and that you are going to resonate with them. There are a number of areas to look at.

What's in the news? What are people talking about? What businesses are featuring? All these and much more are sources that can be used to 'newsjack'.

There is nothing illegal or immoral in 'newsjacking' – it is the promotion of a 'story' from your perspective just as, or hopefully just before in breaks in the mainstream. To do this you must research deeply into the communities where interesting stories have previously originated from and those communities most relevant to your business. Indeed these should be core parts of your stakeholder map. Have stories come from Digg? Reddit? Twitter? Pinterest? Facebook? Local newspapers? Bloggers? All these potential sources need to be understood and analysed.

Note; by getting ahead of the curve you are much more likely to generate successful content than trying to mimic.

STEP ONE – INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL FORMS

You need to establish what is relevant to you. An informative article will always be, but an amusing graphic, cartoon etc may be depending on the timing.

STEP TWO – DEVELOP TOPICS

Develop a list of topics that excite those in your relevant communities – have ideas ready to go

STEP THREE – DEVELOP BACKGROUND READING TIMETABLE

Once you know the topics and forms that are relevant continue to research and refine. Gwt to know both intimately.

2.8   AUDIENCE; KEYWORD RESEARCH

You need to know how you are being found and that means keyword research. The most in-depth keyword research involves uncovering every aspect of the way your audience thinks, acts and talks about businesses like yours. It is one of the most powerful and far-reaching methods of market research anyone can carry out, it is vastly misunderstood as it is part art and part craft. Yet the tools to perform it are available completely free.

Rank and keyword tools are reliable and readily available and are numerous. One tool that is worth singling out is ubersuggest.com, which is a keyword/keyphrase list generator capable of producing long lists and whilst a thesaurus can be substituted bear in mind the Google automatically translates synonyms, so using those will not bet better results!

Notably you can use is Google itself. It gives you an idea of the kind of content which Google's algorithms favour and its autocomplete suggestions shows you what people are searching for. Their smaller scale feature Google Analytics delivers definitive information on how people are already finding your site, and its services are as wide ranging as are its pricing options; free onwards!
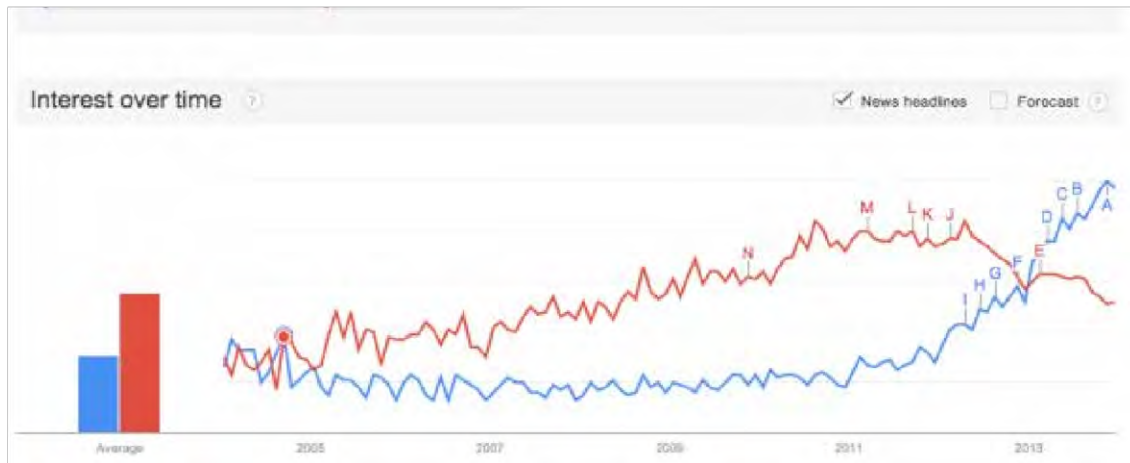
STEP ONE – CREATE A FOUNDATION
Check inbound behaviours across all metrics, e.g. time on page, stickiness, etc. Continue to develop keyphrases using your knowledge and Ubersuggest etc.

STEP TWO – ADD INFORMATION
Use Google trends to analyse over time – What are the trends? Cross refer to campaigns e.g. PPC Look for patterns in keyphrases.

STEP THREE – REVIEW AND REFINE
Evaluate what you've done – what are the lessons? Apply them and repeat. By doing this you overtime will get a suite of keyphrases that will result in sustainable organic traffic.

2.9   AUDIENCE; INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

When most talk about content marketing, they share tips and advice on strategy, audience building, distribution, and ROI – just as I have in this guide. But rarely is this done in the context of internal communications; despite most of us realising that engaging with those within an organisation is as important as those without.

Irrespective of the size of organisation we work for internal communication is a critical function. For companies running global content marketing programmes, it's critical to establish internal communication channels between teams, as noted later within the Editorial Board section of this guide. This will ensure that everyone knows the latest information about content processes, frameworks, methodologies, and best practices.

A common solution is to use content marketing tactics internally. Email newsletters, content hubs, and apps are all great ways to solve internal communications challenges and keep employees and partners aligned.

I had personal experience of putting together an internal newsletter whilst working for a large multinational print, pre=press and multimedia business. The content team I headed-up created, in cooperation with internal communications and HR, an internal weekly content marketing newsletter that was sent to all staff either by print or e-mail if a preference was made. We also produced a quarterly magazine that developed stories around contracts we were working on, e.g. an image library for British Airways. I used a similar approach in a large Civil Engineering contractor which so impressed some shareholders that they commented on it at the AGM.

I've advocated this approach in many companies and often been asked;

- Why send a newsletter to employees?
- Why not just use existing internal sites or collaboration tools?

To my view there are some very good reasons:

- **Internal newsletters reduce email overload**. Instead of sending multiple, one-off notices, an email newsletter is a more efficient way of distributing information.
- **Internal newsletters are trusted sources**. Especially when coming from an established leader, internal newsletters are seen as impactful and relevant.
- **Newsletters break down silos**. Email newsletters can encourage conversations among employees belonging to different countries, divisions, or departments.
- **Internal newsletters help build champions**. A continuous flow of information to the right employees will facilitate change and accelerate adoption of new programs.
- **Newsletters supplement other forms of communications**: Although we had our own section on the company intranet and regular video conference calls with main stakeholders, the newsletter was the most successful and impactful tool.

All newsletters should have some recurring sections as evidence suggests that when readers are familiar with regular newsletter features, they tend to remember them better. Note in organisations where you are likely to have new subscribers every week, it's important to continuously communicate the existence of core ideas, whilst keeping a fresh feel to the newsletter. Having a regularly updated internal link, with outgoing links from our website also help with your SEO.

In some cases, an e-mail newsletter can be more beneficial – usually when you're extending to partners that you collaborate with. Larger companies have even gone down the route of developing content hubs specifically for employees and B2B relationships, e.g. GE. Note these are still an internal audience and are also a potential source of content in their own right. Indeed, partners that feature in your content are most likely to reciprocate and be appreciative of the positive coverage gained, which I likely to strengthen and deepen the relationship.

Just because these tactics are used for employees or local partners, they shouldn't be considered minor programmes or taken for granted. They play an important role in building internal champions and, often, furthering your content marketing goals – so they should be thoughtfully planned and crafted.

2.10 PLAN; GENERATE KILLER CONTENT IDEAS

For most marketers, coming up with ideas begins relatively easily but as you progress through content marketing they often begin to become harder to produce. This is in spite of the fact that most of us are pretty creative and we develop some very compelling content.

Problems start to arise naturally after you have been generating ideas for a while and they creep up again when you focus on one segment of the funnel, or path on a customer journey and gaps in your content. There's always the chance that you just don't know where to begin because of the context.

I've been writing marketing and educational materials now for over 35 years. I've written books, PR, content materials – you name it I've written it and for a wide variety and size of businesses to boot. I've often got 'stuck' in what to write, where to start but importantly I've never let that stop me and in the majority of cases I've turned to three basic tools to help me; Brainstorming, Mind mapping and Brian writing.

These tools are really useful but to be at their best, I would aim at having a group of 4 to 20 available for 30-minutes or more to really get the ideas flowing. These participants should be subject matter experts, fellow content writers, or my favourite, audience members.

- Brainstorming
  When done properly this is a powerful tool. To do it properly when you begin a brainstorming session, someone is assigned as the moderator and they present a problem or question. In content development this could involve a persona goal, content type, or any another area you want to focus on. Then the group is asked to individually write down ideas for a short amount of time. When the time is up, the

moderator goes around the room and collects the ideas verbally. After the ideas are presented, the group interacts and fleshes them out.

• Mind Mapping

When coming up with ideas, it is good to have structure. If you find you have gaps in your content, this tool will help you see where those gaps are, or it can be used to prevent these gaps from happening. Mind mapping builds from a core focus and branches off into multiple levels. These branches have branches and those branches can have branches, but the core purpose is always at the centre.

In content idea generation, I'd advocate using a persona at the core, with a list of goals at the second tier, and content types at the third. Then I would list my content ideas at the fourth tier based on the conversation you want to have with the persona about the goal, using the content type.

After finding a meeting room with the biggest whiteboard possible (A chart or whatever drawing surface is biggest), draw one circle in the middle and put a persona in it. Then review the goals of the persona that you want to target and draw connected circles around the core. Next, put the content types around the goals that you reach this audience persona with. At this point, you can go around the third level and at each stop ask the team for a few ideas. You could also use another section of the board to do a brainstorming session if the ideas are not coming along as easily as you hoped. Either approach can work, but the main goal is the creation of several fourth tier items for each third tier content type.

• Brain Writing
This is the approach I favour for writing novel 'brand new' content, especially if involving groups of your audience members. The approach is inherently collaborative which I have found to deliver ideas that are rich in value and are fleshed more completely by the end of the session.

Brain writing sessions need paper, lots and lots of paper. Begin by giving one sheet to every member of the group and present the problem or goal you are trying to generate ideas for. Then each member should write down 6 ideas in 5 minutes. When the time is up, have each person pair up and present their ideas to one other member for 5 minutes. Based on the conversation have each pair stay together and generate another 6 ideas for 5 minutes. Then each pair will group with another pair and present their ideas. Repeat this process until you have two groups remaining then present the last set of ideas to the whole room.

At the end of the session collect all the idea sheets and make sure you write down the group size or member's names on each page for future reference. You will be amazed by the level of creativity that flows out of these groups.

Indeed, I've won PR and marketing awards from fully developed content I've written based on the initial output from Brain writing sessions.

2.11 PLAN; CREATE AN EVENT CALENDAR

One of the core parts to content marketing is to create content that supports and exploits the opportunities that events create. These can be industry specific, company specific, culturally specific or general events, e.g. holidays. There is no shortage to be chosen from – however obscure some are! But be careful to chose those that resonate with your company and your current and potential customers. As a related aside competitions are becoming increasingly popular ways to generate content around events as are podcasts and videos. Think creatively!

Ensure that you've done some stakeholder mapping so you know which audiences to address when, how frequently – indeed this should be part of your goal setting process. This will help you select what events to build into your communications plan and what content you need to generate to support them. Don't omit to look at local events that may well help with your overall reputation in the community indeed if you're large enough you might consider staging some events for this. My own University – Royal Holloway University of London regularly stages community engagement events https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/aboutus/newsandevents/events/home.aspx. 2018 provided many opportunities for public engagement around the 100 year anniversary of women's suffrage in the UK, with Royal Holloway Alumni being intimately involved in the origins and development of the movement.

STEP ONE – IDENTIFY EVENTS
Use your stakeholder mapping to decide which events you are going to use. Ensure you understand what content is required for each and what the production timescales

are involved. You might want to use some project management software to help plan the production deadlines and key stages, especially if multiple approvals are required for content. Nothing's more embarrassing than publicly missing a key date!

STEP TWO – TRY AND ENSURE AN EVEN SPACING

The idea is to create a steady flow of content rather than a raging torrent, with ten months of nothing after it. If you want newscoverage/virality then being seen as an ongoing reliable source is a vital dimension of your content strategy. One hit wonders do not build engagement and brand equity, reliability and trust does. If you are linking content to your website regular updates will also help in your organic SEO, of itself an excellent reason to have a calendar.

STEP THREE – WRITE UP THE CALENDAR

Calendars need to be explicit – what is being done, by when, by whom, with what cost and why you've chosen this event. Publish the calendar – display it your office and ensure sales, marketing and customer service staff ALL know about it. If its an industry event you want your sales/telesales staff talking about it and encouraging customers to attend.

2.12 PLAN; EDITORIAL BOARD

In some cases what you might need is an Editorial board for your content efforts. The editorial board usually:

- Generates content ideas
- Ensures that content is being created to address all personas
- Gets content approved quickly and smoothly
- Stops random acts of content and ensures that every piece created aligns with the strategy
- Analyses and optimizes content performance: Amplifies content that is working and stops content that isn't working

The board manages what is often referred to as the "content ecosystem": all the internal writers, guest bloggers, agencies, and freelancers that support editorial efforts. In other words, it defines the full process around the content marketing strategy, handles all content-related requests and issues, manages the distribution and amplification strategy of content and establishes the Metrics and framework to be used in its measurement.

In large organisations, the editorial board ensures alignment and coordination between divisions and content sources, as well as overseeing internal communications; it is responsible for

clarity, cohesion and congruity across all. Board members include key internal stakeholders from across departments who play a role in executing a company's content marketing strategy. Getting these stakeholders all together on a regular basis should break down the silos, open up communication, and create beautiful consistency throughout your content strategy. Note; editorial boards aren't just for planning: they're good for idea generation and the creative process, enabling participants to bounce ideas around. Editorial board brainstorming sessions are the best way to put a governance process in place and to make sure that "the right" content is being created. Refer back to the points on Brainstorming above.

Establishing an editorial board takes time, often their needs to be a justification of the long-term payoff, so you need to have your ROI thoughts sorted. You also need to think about the roles its members will play, in general, the following macro-areas of expertise are required;

- Content and Persona Owners: As the titles imply, these members are responsible for content and personas. Content and persona owners can be strategic marketing reps, product managers, or technology leads; these are people who will have been reading around key topics, talking to customers, and attending events, so they have lots of relevant current knowledge to draw upon.

- Channel/Content Distribution owners: They are experts on media and content distribution via different channels: email newsletters, social media, SEO, SEM, paid media.

- Geographies: It's beneficial to invite one or more countries to editorial board meetings. The advantage is twofold: getting early input about upcoming content from local markets, plus learning about new content created at the local level that might be "elevated" to the global level.

- Community managers, the role may well be taken within geographies or channel owners but if not, someone needs to be the brand's representative/s on social channels. This is an adjunct to the editorial team feeding back to them on issues, topics, influencers, observers thus feeding back and into to the content generation.

- Chief Content Officer, in many ways the key player in the content operation and must have a mix of marketing and journalistic skills. There main role is to co-ordinate production and to oversee day to day metrics. In small and mid-sized businesses the role is often subsumed into that of the Managing Editor.

- A Managing Editor (or, often, the Content Marketing Director/Leader) should be appointed to coordinate the editorial board, oversee the strategy implementation, and then drive content through the system. The Managing Editor owns the content calendar, plus measuring and optimizing content performance, and reporting results to the editorial board and other stakeholders. The Managing Editor should also decide on which content is curated, commissioned, or created; they have a key role in content ideation ensuring product centric self-promotion doesn't pass for acceptable content. This person should be a veteran of traditional media or otherwise have a proven track record of editorial contribution.
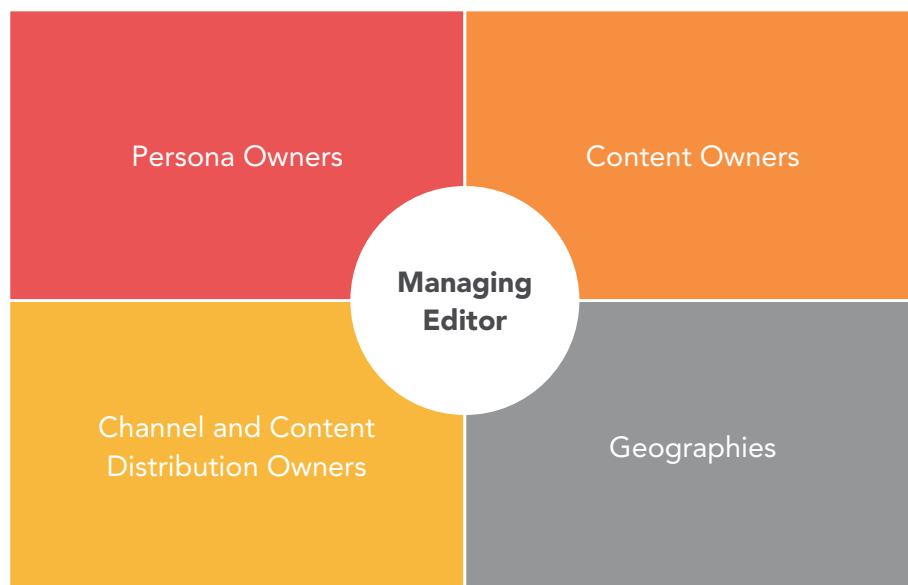
A content marketing editorial board

Whether the editors are employees or part of an outside agency, their job is to understand how a brand's voice and the specific objectives of a brand publishing programme should play out in content formats. Your editorial ideas are only as strong as the resources allocated to executing them. It's imperative to walk through roles and responsibilities, as well the process your team needs to follow to ensure everything is thought through before you publish content. Here are some roles and responsibilities to consider and document in your content strategy:

Roles and Responsibilities

Ideation	Creation	Approval	Publishing	Organic Social
• Quarterly planning • Biweekly calls with CW	• Writes content • Managing editing	Strategizes, oversees content projects to ensure brand consistency and alignment with business objectives.	• Uses CMC to publish content directly to the blog	• Published through social tool • Can be published directly through the CMC
• Brand • NewsCred	• NewsCred	• Brand Team	• Brand	• Social team on brand side

Paid Social	SEO / Paid Specialist	Internal Activation	Email Distribution	Measurement
Any content creator- blogger, photographer, designer — who contributes to your project.	• Manages the paid distribution of content online • Manages SEO	• Responsible for sharing/educating internal employees of content. • Create partnerships with other business units and channel partners	Create Insights e- newsletter distribution and lead nurturing program. A/B testing	Determine efficacy of channels and content to optimize towards KPIs
OPEN	OPEN	• OPEN	• NewsCred	• NewsCred • Brand

The editorial board is usually involved in two different types of meetings: **editorial board meetings** and **work in progress, or weekly stand up meetings**. In some cases, especially in less complex organisations, the two meetings coincide to save time and organisational efforts. The Managing Editor will typically lead both meetings.

- **Editorial board meetings** are strategic. During these meetings, attendees will set the editorial agenda, tone, and direction. They'll evaluate market changes and content and hub performance. These meetings also include content brief reviews, budget allocations, content calendar updates, and success sharing.
- **Work in progress meetings** are very operational with the goal of managing the editorial publishing calendar, overseeing the production of major content assets, optimizing content activities, and coordinating distribution activity for the content.

The **editorial calendar** is the editorial board's tool for keeping all parties aligned. As discussed above, a good editorial calendar maps content production to audience personas and phases of the buyer journey. An editorial calendar allows everyone involved in the editorial board to see what content ideas are being worked on, when they're likely to be completed, and if any issues have arisen. The more diverse and complex the organisation the greater the need for a functioning, accurate editorial calendar.

At a minimum, the editorial calendar should show:

- Content ideas and how they align to pillars, themes, and personas
- Macro-moments: The events or company launches impacting the audience that are going to happen in the current year. Some of these macro-moments are predictable (e.g. product and campaign launches, events, regulations), others are not.
- What actions are being taken on the ideas
- Who is writing the content
- In what format the content is being written
- Due dates for completion

**A List of Possible Stakeholders
in an Approvals Process:**

Requestors
- Subject Matter Experts
- Vertical Owners
- Demand Generation
- Public Relations
- Sales
- Customer Marketing
- Product Marketing
- Brand

Editorial Team
- Director of Content
- Content Manager
- Copyeditor

Approvers
- Executive Sponsor of Content Marketing
- CMO
- Legal

Design
- Creative Team Members

In larger organisations I'd advise that there should be two calendars in place: the (content) **production** and the **distribution/publishing** calendars. Here is where software Content Marketing Platforms (CMPs) can make the difference and increase the board's effectiveness, as it combines project management with the content process.

Organisational structure as a whole should be developed to suit an organisation and its markets, but in larger organisations local editorial boards may well be required to manage local content, e.g. local context specific holidays.

You also need to be mindful of any sign off processes that exist – see graphic.

2.13 AUDIENCE & PLAN; IDENTIFYING INFLUENCERS

One of the best uses of content is to get those with influence in your markets on your side. All contemporary research shows that more than ever customers trust the recommendations of third parties when it comes to choosing products and services – the advent of digital technologies has mage this a very simple process for customers and potential customers to research. In some industries there are now dedicated aps for this, e,g, TrustPilot, Trip Advisor, Trivago, Hotels.com, all involve aspects of third party reviews and there are many others.

The idea is that influencers are an accelerator of audience, whilst great content will attract an increasing audience over time, great content that is lauded by influencers will achieve this much faster. Indeed, results can be achieved with speeds barely dreamt of before the advent of digital technologies. Note as well that whilst there are lots of ways to promote your content there is only one way you as a business can turn content into action – research your influencers, contact them and pitch.

Top influencers are often bloggers, but that's not always the case. Work out where your buying personas would hang out online first, and then find out who is influential there. There may be a huge community around a discussion forum, for example.

Influencers exist anywhere a conversation exists. The best are; authoritative, smart, witty and have a connected following – a ready potential audience to consume your content. You usually get one chance with them, so you need to plan be well prepared, anticipate questions and get your facts and approach straight. Remember this is akin to a job interview – blow-it and the door is closed and might even result in negative coverage if done particularly badly. You also need to bear in mind the standard of content influencers have produced – look at what they've shared before, you need to equal or exceed this. If the bar is too high consider targeting social media influencers instead, usually easier and cheaper, if a little slower to deliver results.

In academic circles you will often see influencers called Mavens – this comes from Yiddish, meaning a wise and knowledgeable person. Within Marketing its usage is popularised by Robert Kozinets in his studies of online communities and netnography.

The ultimate incarnation of influencers is to have your own customer online community that is supportive of your business but is not owned by or run by it. You may well provide the domain and the 'cyberspace' for it but a customer community is most effective when it is free from company interference in its running day-to-day.

STEP ONE – USE FOLLOWERWONK
Followerwonk, https://moz.com/followerwonk/, isn't free but it is an essential piece of software that allows you to identify key influencers in your market. Note that metrics can be 'spoofed/gamed' so a degree of common sense and market knowledge also has to applied to the results here. Nevertheless, Followerwonk allows you to identify those with real influence – the Mavens in your market.

STEP TWO – FINF PROMINENT BLOGGERS

Blogs are anchors for communities, any successful blog has a has a reach into the community around it. Offer them something of interest/useful to the community or to them personally and they may way agree to help promote your content. Contests are an excellent way to do this.

STEP THREE – LOOK AT THE COMPETITION & LOOK AT THE BEST

Don't limit your benchmarking to the direct competition. Find out who are the best are see what they are doing. Equally there is no reason why you cannot partner with a non-competitor business and do reciprocal agreements to utilise each other's social influence. Suppliers, key customers are great targets for this sort of arrangement.

If you're looking for inspiration try these - the 2018 Content Marketing Institute winners by category:

Auto

- Land Rover
- Mazda
- Zipcar

Beauty

- Glossier
- Sephora

Finance

- Barclaycard
- Bloomberg
- Ellevest
- Fidelity
- First Republic
- Goldman Sachs
- Santander

Fitness Lifestyle

- Adidas
- Bumble
- ClassPass
- Equinox
- Grindr
- Headspace

- Nike
- Peloton

Food

- Ben & Jerry's
- Clif Bar
- Plated
- Taco Bell

Health + Pharma

- AbbVie
- Cleveland Clinic

Insurance

- Farmers Insurance
- Generali Spain
- Progressive Commercial
- USAA

Retail

- Bed Bath & Beyond

- IKEA
- Lowe's
- Patagonia
- Stitch Fix
- Zappos

Technology

- Dell Technologies
- First Round
- Fujitsu
- GE
- Intercom
- SAP Hybris
- Sage
- Slack
- Twitter

Travel

- Away
- JetBlue
- KLM
- Marriott
- Visit Seattle

2.14 AUDIENCE & PLAN; LICENSED CONTENT

Licensed Content is another approach that can be useful. Licensed content also known to as "syndicated content" or "third-party content," is content that is created by someone else, that you then 'hire' the use of whilst the originator maintains legal ownership of it. It's the same as hiring a car.

The owner (licensor) issues a license to the client (licensee) allowing them to republish a copy of the full article on their own property in its original form. Licenses usually state where the content is allowed to appear (on a licensee's content hub, for example), the length of time it can appear, and what promotion or distribution is allowed. Additional licenses contain the following parameters of use:

- The licensee must give attribution to the original publisher.
- The licensee maintains the author's byline.
- The licensee is not allowed to edit or add copy to the article. Any additional insights or commentary must be presented before or after the body of the article.
- The licensed article must carry the canonical URL of the original article, if provided.

Using licensed content has many benefits, but confusion abounds about whether licensed content will help – or hurt – your content marketing. So let's critical look at this area;

Licensed content should contribute to improved SEO by helping it publish more content that search engines can index. In this way brands can increase their depth of content around specific themes or keywords, helping them build authority in those areas. Additionally it can be used for social shares, backlinks, and internal links. All these factors boost SEO so provided the legal niceties are observed licensed content wont hurt you.

That said, don't expect licensed content to rank well in Google searches. Licensed content, as powerful as it may be, has already been published elsewhere. Canonical URLs protect the original publisher's SEO and ensure that they always rank first in search results.

Licensed content usually saves time and money on content production. Basically, any time when you need to build a depth of content around a certain topic, it can be a short cut. Where content has already been ideated, researched, written, edited, and copyedited it's publishing-ready. So it's a time saver.

It can also be a money saver, licensed content costs less than commissioning original pieces. As such it's a cost-effective way to test new content topics or formats with audiences to learn what resonates. Licensed content can help you launch new topics quickly or easily pivot on strategy or seasonal shifts.

Additionally, licensed content helps brands respond to timely news. If you want to newsjack – see later section – but don't have the resources internally licensed content can be a godsend.

The main caveat to the use of licensed content – marketers often expend great efforts to find the perfect article that is on-brand and has the right tone and voice, evokes the right

response from the reader, and does not contain competitive mentions. Since marketers cannot edit the content of licensed materials its curation within the brand context is an important consideration.

A steady stream of high-quality, relevant content is critical for engaging audiences. Think about how you consume content. If you visited a blog and saw that its content was out-of-date, chances are, you wouldn't return. Same if you signed up for a company's email newsletter, or followed it on social, and it shared nothing but promotions. You'd unsubscribe pretty quickly.

Licensed content helps brands provide contemporary, contextual materials for their audience. Brands can use licensed articles to engage audiences on social and email. NewsCred conducted a month-long experiment with its Insights newsletter and found that licensed content garnered nearly the same engagement as original content – which shows the value in using licensed content to engage audiences while giving content marketers much-needed bandwidth to work on original pieces.

Licensed content also made up 9 percent of all traffic on the NewsCred Insights in 2017 – without any paid promotion behind it. The traffic is attributed purely to organic social and email engagement.

One major criticism of licensed content is that it is not as valuable as original content; well this really depends. While there are many benefits to using licensed content, there are also drawbacks that may lead to the perception that original is more valuable. While licensed content can help with some aspects of SEO, as discussed above, only your original content will be able to achieve top Google rankings that may drive more organic traffic to your content hub.

Licensed content will not tell your company's unique story or highlight the expertise of your executives, the way you can. To do that, you need to create your own. However, carefully selected licensed content often makes perfect companion pieces to your original content by providing trends, analysis, or a journalist's unbiased opinion on why something is important. You can effectively use both forms of content to complement each other. In this regard it is worth noting that licensed content from reputable publishers carries a lot of weight in the form of brand equity.

But be warned – licensed content on its own is not going to deliver results. The two forms of content work synergistically, own content will work alone but licensed will not.

STEP ONE – IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SOURCES

There are lots of potential sources for licensed content. You need to establish which will suit your needs. What 'fits' with your brand?

STEP TWO – PLAN THEIR USE

Ensure licensed content is going to fit into your overall plan, don't use them tactically but strategically.

STEP THREE – REFINE

Continue to audit the use of licensed content – its costing your business money so make sure you're getting what you thought you were paying for. Audience tastes do change over time so keep a weather eye on this. Whilst there is something to be said for consistency of provision, you need to ensure the quality and appropriateness is being maintained – it is after all being associated with YOUR brand in the eyes of your audience and halo effects apply in a negative manner as well as a positive.

2.15 AUDIENCE & PLAN; TRAFFIC

Building traffic is perhaps the most critical aspect of any content marketing programme – quality content is only as good as the audience that gets to see it. In sales terms traffic is the flow into your funnel, the less that goes in the less that comes out. But it's not just volume, its quality too that's required. Indeed, one of the most challenging aspects of modern marketing is providing quality leads at scale, content marketing can help with this but only when the content is consistently interesting and relevant to the target audience.

Above we've talked about identifying influencers, establishing personas, licensed content, etc – the aim is to establish a space in which themes, memes etc are relevant to both your business and to its potential audiences. In traditional marketing theory you are establishing a 'Positioning' in the minds of your target audience, or in some cases what we cay a 'Niche'. Using KPIs will help you to continually refine which content draws the best performing traffic and become more efficient and effective in your content.

STEP ONE – BUILD A CENTRAL HUB

High-volume audiences need a central location where content 'lives'. This allows new visitors to be directed there quickly in a trackable way and that can be optimised for this purpose. I'm not going to delve into website design but not all pages on a site are or should be created equal, you need a specific page or pages for content that is intended to have longevity. Its fine to have dynamic content on a landing page – great for SEO – but this clogs up if you overuse it for content. This is where KPIs such as 'stickiness',, 'slippiness', pageviews, new visits, repeat visits should be used.

STEP TWO – SCALE CONTENT

Use your production calendar wisely, scaling content requires a dedicated and committed effort, especially if the quality is to be maintained. You may well need software tools at this point; CMPs, and often licensed content begins to come into its own to maintain a cadence and rhythm to your content publishing.

STEP THREE – MEET YOUR AUDIENCE WHERE THEY ARE NOT WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO BE
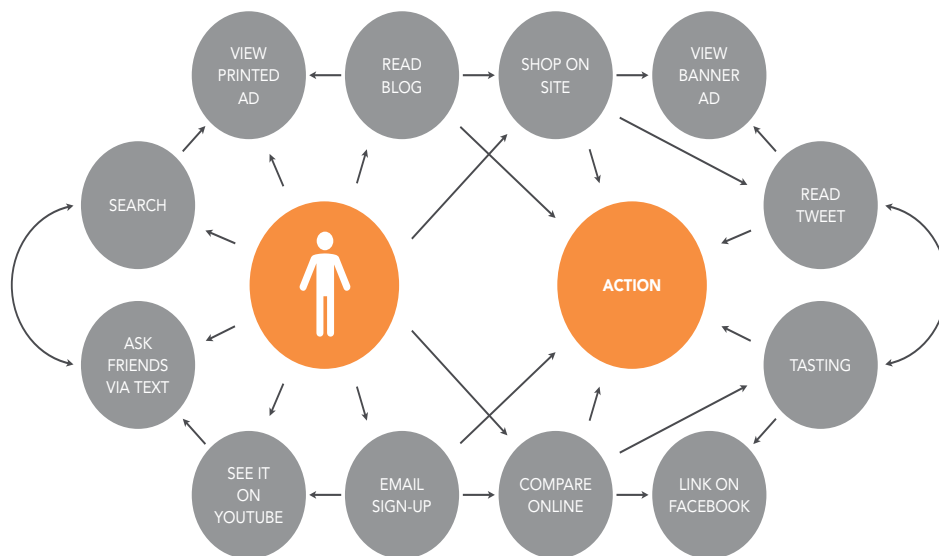
We are starting in many aspects of marketing to talk about the customer experience; their journey and experience with an organisation has never been more fragmented with multiple potential touchpoints. To be effective you need to target where you audience is and begin you interaction with them there, if you sit back and expect them to find you – well it will be a long wait!

This means thinking about a content ecosystem with multiple touchpoints, including nurturing and retargeting. This is always great business sense, because the more you build your repeat audience organically the less reliance you will have on paid promotional activities to drive traffic such as PPC. This means using a mechanism to capture basic visitor information such a emails, preferences, interest. Etc. Note the later two are important to continually refine persona's and hone the themes of your content.

Healthy traffic requires quality content, scaled production of it and optimised distribution of it. This creates the content ecosystem where engaging content meets customers where they are, this builds audience, engagement, loyalty and reliance – all compound returns in terms of revenue, brand equity, referral and long-term reduces 'requirement' costs of customers.

2.16 AUDIENCE & PLAN; ENGAGEMENT

It's not that hard to use your monetary might to get traffic to your content. There exists a number of mechanisms to do so. But, just because you get traffic doesn't mean to say it's doing anything to achieve your business goals. So, whilst some metrics are worthwhile to measure traffic – see above – when we get them to our content we want them to stay and browse.

You can pay for traffic, but you must EARN attention

In contemporary marketing we call this engagement; customers are interested and one of the major ways of improving engagement is to create empathy; empathy is created when you match psychographic, demographic and behavioural data in a resonating narrative. The narrative is the heart – but your data is the connective tissue.

We covered the metrics involved earlier in this guide, but it's worth quickly re-stating them;

- Return visitors
- Reading multiple stories/pages
- Time on site, increased time on site
- Engagement rate/increased engagement rate
- Shares on social
- Likes on social (not as good as shares but still a measure)
- Link forwarding
- Sign-ups
- Forwarding emails

As content marketers it's not a broadcast audience we are trying to reach – it's a focussed method to engage the right people with content that resonates with them and thus increases the probability we can convert them to customers

STEP ONE – IDENTIFY ENGAGEMENT AND PAGEVIEWS
Ensure you are collecting metrics in terms of pageviews and engagement for all content

STEP TWO – TAKE ACTION
Content with high pageviews and high engagement are gold. They need to be developed; can you write a whitepaper, an e-book, an infographic, video, blog post or even a whole blog, a series of articles than expand, invite a guest to write about it – get your influencers ad Mavens working for you.

Content with low pageviews and high engagement need to be promoted – the engagement means your audience finds them interesting; but they aren't finding them enough! Look at your SEO, consider a bout of PPC or again use the influencers and Mavens, think about expanding the social media; repurpose as an infographic etc.

Content with high pageviews and low engagement is actually embarrassing you with your audience – ditch it; fast! The high pageviews means its getting the traffic but the content isn't hitting the mark, re-write it, replace it but immediately change where the inbound link is arriving to stop the rot!

Content with low pageviews and low engagement needs to be looked at carefully – there was a reason you created or paid for this, but it clearly hasn't worked so find out why.

STEP THREE – REVIEW REGULARLY

Don't sit back – the digital world is quite literally at the speed of light. You need to be on top of what is happening in terms of the pageviews and engagement and optimising. This should be a crucial part of any editorial boards review.

2.17 AUDIENCE & PLAN; ACTIONS

As a young marketer I once had a managing director who had a little saying…."Turnover is vanity, but profit is sanity". Its stayed with me ever since and has been at the back of my mind throughout my commercial career. Its relevant because pageviews, uniques etc are often called 'vanity' metrics – they are 'nice' to have and even nicer to be large but of themselves they are actually pretty meaningless – they don't directly relate to the bottom line or indeed anywhere close to it! That is not to say they are useless – the above section outlines an important and strategic use for pageviews – but what we want is our content marketing to move the audience ever closer to becoming a customer. In marketing we call this a conversion.

A "conversion" is any action taken by a user that gets them a step closer to bcoming a customer – when they convert it's a statement of trust in your brand and that they are wiling to engage on an ongoing basis. It's important because this now means you now have their permission to connect with them regularly, to move them further along towards buying or to keep them engaged between purchases. Remember the statistic I quoted earlier – it takes 11.4 pieces of content to convert to being a customer – so you need to keep the interactions going and ensure you've "converting" at every opportunity.

Onsite CTAs, like pop-ups, are the first tool in driving conversations but newsletters, ebooks, whitepapers, infographics, competitions, pagevisits to products/pricing, joining a community site, posting a review, reading a review, etc are all conversions. But in some respects the term is a little too broad and to that end a more detailed classification has been developed;

- Macro-conversions
- Micro-conversions

Micro-conversions are small steps along the path towards a primary conversion goal, e.g. a sale, a lead or a donation. Primary goals are termed Macro-conversions these can be revenue based, lead of acquisition based or enquiry based. Examples are;

- Revenue – paid subscription, order
- Lead – member sign up, completed form
- Enquiry – Contact form completion, phone call

Note these are not exhaustive!

Macro-conversions are obviously more important than micro-conversions, but they are an indication of engagement and thus need to be encouraged, planned for and understood as part of a cpntent marketing programme. Jennifer Cadello of NN Group further splits micro-conversions into;

1. Process milestones – conversions that represent LINEAR movement towards a macro-conversion. Monitoring these helps to where your UX needs to be developed.
2. Secondary actions – desirable actions that indicators of a future macro-conversion.

The commonest way to track both is via Google Analytics by adding them as events using Tag Manager. They should be compared to keywords and traffic source to develop insights into your content effectiveness. Whilst th is might be time consuming for larger websites, it is time well worth spent and indeed is most effective when considered as part of your content planning and funnel planning. Where you are expecting micro-conversions to lead t macro-conversions they need to be part of your analytics programme.

Another point to ponder is that there is anecdotal evidence to support the assertion that micro-conversions are important in customer retention and this to customer LTV. See https://unbounce.com/conversion-rate-optimization/micro-conversions-the-key-to-maximum-lifetime-customer-value/

STEP ONE – OPTIMISE

Driving desired actions on your site wil lead to a higher return on your content marketing programme. Ensure your site is optimised for both micro and macro-conversions, nurture and build your relationships at all stages along the path to being a customer.

STEP TWO – MEASURE

Measure your conversions, do a trend analysis to see which direction you are heading in.

STEP THREE – REVIEW

Use your results to review your content programme, how can you apply any lessons in other areas?

2.18 PLAN & MEASUREMENT; MONETISATION

I've talked about a few 'measurements' earlier in this guide; KPIs and metrics and so there isn't a need to further address those. But one area does bear examination and that's monetisation – it doesn't happen by accident (unless you are exceptionally fortunate) and so it requires planning and understanding to facilitate it.

The goal of content marketing is not to be at content – its to be good at business. This might seem obvious, even intuitive but there is a often a chasm between thinking about business outcomes and effectively achieving them. Indeed, given all we have talked about its understandable to get a little side-tracked. The area we haven't looked is that of "monetisation", turning traffic into sales. I've come to this last in the preparation part of this guide for a very good reason; if your content isn't good you will struggle to monetise it - a key point is Quality first, sales second.

Common monetisation mechanisms are:

1. Membership site
   The key to a membership site is to get the concept behind being a member correct, the value of membership has to outweigh the costs of membership. Members need to feel they are gaining aspects of the following; elite status, high-value information, VIP treatment, networking opportunities, insider access, private forum access or members only area/privileges. These sites operate on one of three models;

   a. Paywall – access is granted to an area for a payment,
   b. Transactional – access is granted on a pay by pay basis akin to Pay-per-view TV,

    c. Metered – free access is granted up to a certain point at which a payment is required for further access. A good strategy to get low volume users interested to try before they buy

The models are not mutually exclusive, and it is quite possible to mix and match. You can also consider;

2. Selling content
   If you know what your audience values, you can sell it directly as content or in most cases you can link from content to what you are trying to sell as a business.

3. Affiliates
   You can sell others' products and earn commission. This route has to be chosen with extreme care due to the associated halo effect.

4. Sponsorship
   Your content may well be a valuable draw that other businesses are happy to sponsor. Where the linkages are logical then this would help with SEO too. Again though the halo effects need to be considered.

5. Mailing
   Every time you update or change or publish new content let your contact list know.

6. Monetise the community
   Set up referral schemes, suggestion schemes, co-creation of products etc.

   STEP ONE – DECIDE WHAT TO USE & FIGURE OUT THE TIES
   A critical first step to determine links from content to its monetary value and to decide what monetarisation mechanism to use.

   STEP TWO – MEASURE
   What metrics are you going to use to show success, try to toe these to business goals.

   STEP THREE – REVIEW
   Analyse the trends, use the information to continually improve.

Here's an outline template for looking at KPIs through the content funnel, a fuller version is available I the second book of this series.

Overview: The high-level overview of what the content marketing program is and how it impacts the business.

Measurement Framework -Blank Template

FUNNEL	KPI	DETAIL	TECH	REPORTING
TRAFFIC				
ENGAGEMENT				
SECONDARY ACTION				
PRIMARY ACTION				
MONETIZATION				