The Skyword Perspective:

Content Marketing Excellence: How to Jumpstart, Evaluate, and Accelerate Your Program

SKYWORD

INTRODUCTION

Though about 80 percent of marketers today rate their content marketing as at least moderately successful, only around five percent of them call their efforts extreme successes. How do these five percenters achieve such astounding results? They're audience-driven, data empowered, committed to quality, and disciplined with their execution.

Drawing from our experience in developing and advising more than 1,000 brand marketing strategies, we're sharing the key components of successful content marketing and how you can build a strategy around them.

Contents:

The Skyword Perspective:
Why Step Up Your Content Game?

1. Trust wins

Brand trust is a deal-breaker or deciding factor in buying decisions for roughly 81 percent of consumers. To foster trust with users, you'll need to prioritize value-driven messaging over product-centric campaigns. Additionally, your content experiences need to be highly relevant and well researched to drive lasting audience connections.

3. Build confidence

Around 76 percent of CMOs use data analytics to drive key decisions, with competitive insights and marketing analytics topping their list of strategic priorities. You must be able to prove ROI and back up your content strategy with data, especially as new tools continue to raise the bar on data intelligence. Those who are unable to master analytics risk falling behind.

2. Relevance is required

In the United States alone, companies stand to lose $1 trillion in revenue if they fail to maintain customer relevance. To remain relevant, you must create content that's tapped into your customers' needs and interests, while applying data to the constant improvement of those content experiences.

4. Boost impact

B2B buyers spend roughly 27 percent of their time independently researching solutions online, and nearly 90 percent of U.S. consumers research products online before making a purchase. Content plays a leading role in helping customers understand your brand and its offerings. To capture and maintain your audience's attention, you'll need to consistently distribute quality, informative content at scale.

Common Content Marketing Pitfalls

Why is it that some content programs struggle while others thrive? At a gut level, we know it has something to do with uncertainty in decision-making and a lack of internal engagement. However, program pitfalls commonly fall into four major buckets: strategy, quality, operations, and data. Does your team struggle in any of these areas? If so, it may be putting your program at risk; however, you can turn things around using the best practices in this guide.

Content Marketing Pitfalls

STRATEGY

- Business outcomes not clearly identified.
- Content strategy and vision not clearly documented.
- Lack of executive buy-in.
- Uncertainty about audience needs.
- Unclear about competitive positioning.

QUALITY

- Low-value, unoriginal content.
- No consistent tone or quality.
- Topics not aligned with business objectives.
- Lack of optimization.
- Lack of subject matter expertise and authority.

OPERATIONS

- No clear leadership.
- Undisciplined or overly complex workflows.
- Siloed marketing teams.
- Time, monetary, and resource constraints.
- Failure to publish and distribute.

DATA

- No access to data.
- Inadequate data infrastructure/tools.
- Uncertain how to monitor progress or measure ROI.
- Uncertain how to extract actionable insights from data.
- Lack of executive-level data storytelling.

A Customized Guide to Success

To avoid specific pitfalls, we recommend focusing on the following sections of this framework:

If you struggle with Strategy, explore:

If you struggle with Operations, explore:

If you struggle with Quality, explore:

If you struggle with Data, explore:

How to Diagnose Your Program

Avoiding pitfalls starts with having a solid foundation. And the foundations of a high-functioning content marketing program can be boiled down to five key competency areas: planning, operations, distribution, results measurement, and optimization. We've outlined each of these and their main components below to help you assess the health of your program at a deeper level.

OPTIMIZATION

Ability to apply data insights to improve results

PLANNING

Ability to create and maintain a unified, audience-centric strategy

5 Competencies for Effective Content Marketing

RESULTS MEASUREMENT

Ability to accurately measure results with data

OPERATIONS

Ability to create quality content at scale

DISTRIBUTION

Ability to publish and exploit content effectively across channels

Note the competency areas that you struggle with now. As you review each of their components, ask yourself:

✓ Do we have this or do this today?

✓ If not, how will we fill this gap?

✓ Does this area need improvement?

This will give you a solid list of your program's strengths and weaknesses, which can guide decision-making as you manage your budget and resources. This exercise can also pinpoint areas in which you may benefit from an external partnership.

Content Marketing Components

PLANNING	OPERATIONS	DISTRIBUTION	RESULTS MEASUREMENT	OPTIMIZATION
Documented personas and audience journey map	Documented roles, governance, and workflows	Documented channel strategy	Documented benchmarks and quantitative goals	Regular performance measurement
Competitive landscape analysis (search, social, editorial)	Scalable creative talent	Content hub (Search)	Access to data & analytics dashboards	Regular analysis of competitive threats and opportunities
Documented editorial identity and content pillars	Centralized production management	Amplification (Social, PR, Employee Advocacy)	Configuration of goal tracking & funnel attribution	Regular analysis of audience trends
Content mix that supports every stage of the buyer journey	Documented content creation guidelines	Lead nurture (Email)	Omnichannel reporting	Insights applied to strategy, ideation, and distribution
Unified marketing calendar	Editorial QA and SEO enforcement	Paid optimization	Regular performance measurement	Insights sharing across departments
Documented KPIs	Consistent publishing	Sales enablement	Regular ROI calculation	Regular content audits

How to Define Success

To build a successful strategy, you must first define what success means to your organization. From the get-go, your content marketing efforts need to be aimed at a set of clear business outcomes. The benefits of documented outcomes are threefold: you define the focus of your content, CTA, and distribution strategy; your team is held accountable for a set of strategic directives; and you have the means to prove your impact on the business.
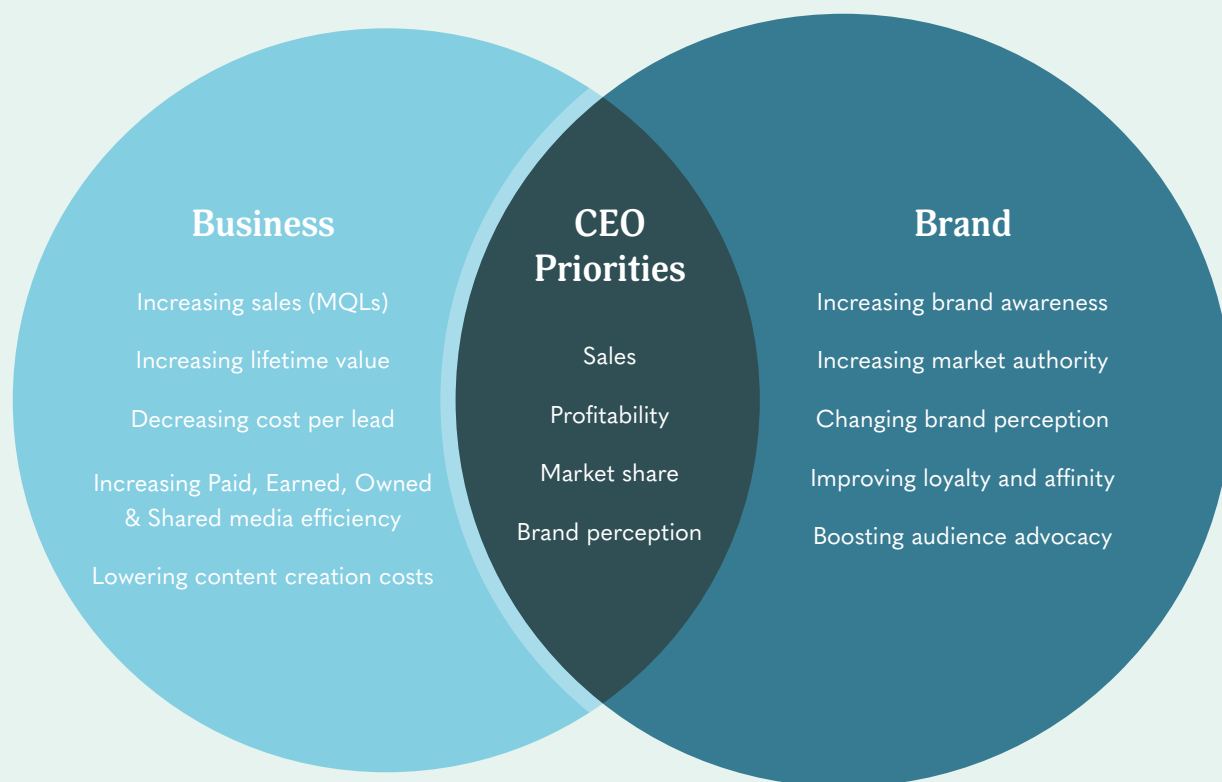
Think Business and Brand

CEO priorities such as improving sales, profitability, market share, and brand health should be the starting point for setting your outcomes. If your efforts aren't impacting these priorities, they're not aligned with the business at a strategic level. A simple way to correct this is by looking at your outcomes through the lenses of business and brand:

Business outcomes directly influence sales, profitability, and market share.

Brand outcomes primarily influence brand perception, with an indirect impact on sales, profitability, and market share.

View Outcomes Through 2 Lenses: Business and Brand

Business

Increasing sales (MQLs)

Increasing lifetime value

Decreasing cost per lead

Increasing Paid, Earned, Owned & Shared media efficiency

Lowering content creation costs

CEO Priorities

Sales

Profitability

Market share

Brand perception

Brand

Increasing brand awareness

Increasing market authority

Changing brand perception

Improving loyalty and affinity

Boosting audience advocacy

Choose the Right KPIs

Once you've defined your strategic outcomes, you need to link them to KPIs that make sense. Your KPIs should be a balanced mix of leading and lagging indicators:

Leading indicators are metrics used to measure immediate progress; they indicate the likelihood of achieving your desired outcome. For example, if your goal is to increase sales, a leading KPI should be the number of people (traffic) driven to your site or sales leads (prospects) generated from your content.

Lagging indicators measure actual results related to your business outcome, and they are often used to quantify ROI. The number of deals closed by leads coming from your content program is one example of a lagging KPI. Be realistic about what you can measure when setting these KPIs. For instance, tracking sales leads and customer touchpoints requires that you set up proper attribution internally.
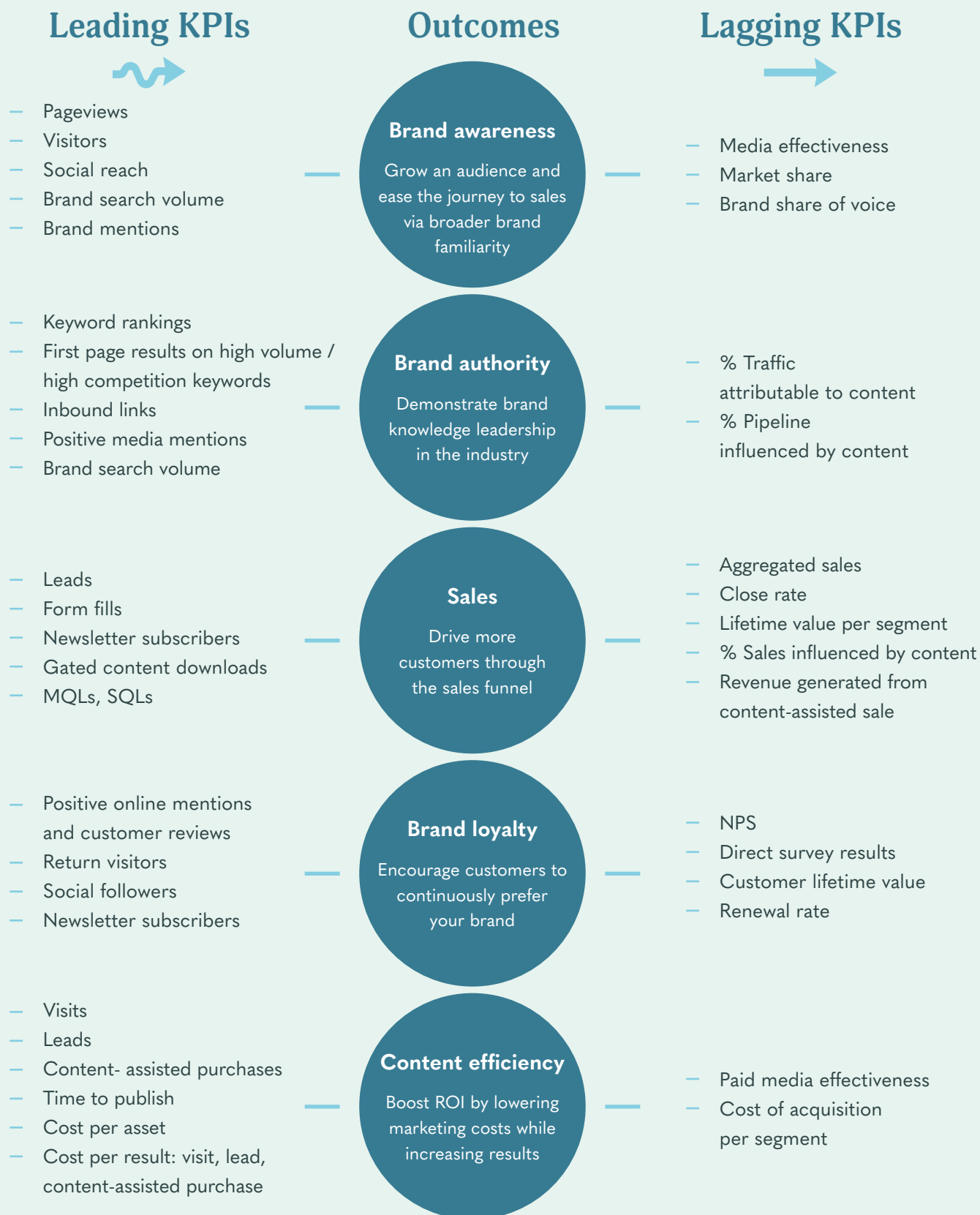
As you set KPIs, keep in mind that different metrics will align with different stakeholders. Your content marketing team will mostly be focused on impacting leading indicators from week to week, while your C-suite will want to see whether your content has delivered top- or bottom-line results—measured by lagging indicators—on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Business Outcome

Leading indicators measure immediate progress; they indicate the likelihood of achieving your desired outcome.

Lagging indicators measure actual results, and are often used to quantify ROI.

Here are some common business outcomes and corresponding KPIs that
you can use to measure and broadcast the success of your efforts:

Leading KPIs

Outcomes

Lagging KPIs

Brand awareness

Grow an audience and
ease the journey to sales
via broader brand
familiarity

- Pageviews
- Visitors
- Social reach
- Brand search volume
- Brand mentions

- Media effectiveness
- Market share
- Brand share of voice

Brand authority

Demonstrate brand
knowledge leadership
in the industry

- Keyword rankings
- First page results on high volume /
  high competition keywords
- Inbound links
- Positive media mentions
- Brand search volume

- % Traffic
  attributable to content
- % Pipeline
  influenced by content

Sales

Drive more
customers through
the sales funnel

- Leads
- Form fills
- Newsletter subscribers
- Gated content downloads
- MQLs, SQLs

- Aggregated sales
- Close rate
- Lifetime value per segment
- % Sales influenced by content
- Revenue generated from
  content-assisted sale

Brand loyalty

Encourage customers to
continuously prefer
your brand

- Positive online mentions
  and customer reviews
- Return visitors
- Social followers
- Newsletter subscribers

- NPS
- Direct survey results
- Customer lifetime value
- Renewal rate

Content efficiency

Boost ROI by lowering
marketing costs while
increasing results

- Visits
- Leads
- Content- assisted purchases
- Time to publish
- Cost per asset
- Cost per result: visit, lead,
  content-assisted purchase

- Paid media effectiveness
- Cost of acquisition
  per segment

Tips for Setting KPIs

As you begin to set your specific metrics, you'll also want to keep in mind that:

1 Metrics are interdependent:
Your goals should span the stages of the marketing funnel. But recognize that top-of-funnel growth, such as increasing traffic, subscribers, and followers, is a key determinant of bottom-funnel results, such as leads, conversions and sales. It's especially critical to broadcast this internally if you're launching a new program.

2 Benchmarks should be achievable:
Give your team and stakeholders achievable benchmarks to gauge progress against. Looking at industry-wide or peer benchmarks is a good starting point for quantitative goal setting.

3 Results are relative:
Avoid comparing apples to oranges when you're evaluating your content's performance. In other words, if you're a footwear startup, you shouldn't base your benchmarks on Nike's results. Take into account the relative size of your addressable market as well as your current traffic, content volume, and level of brand recognition when setting quantitative goals.

4 Metrics can be normalized:
You can still compare your performance to a broader set of brands by using a common scale of measurement. For example, Skyword uses a ratio of average interactions per post per 1,000 followers as one way to compare social engagement across brands with vastly different social followings.

5 Progress must be regularly measured:
Organize your metrics into weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports. When evaluating strategic decisions, you must allow enough time (usually a couple of months) for strategy adjustments to be reflected in the data.

6 Plans will need to evolve:
Continue to raise benchmarks as you hit your marketing milestones. Once you have a predictable inbound strategy in place, focus your efforts further down-funnel to continue expanding your program's impact and success.

How to Assess Existing Content

If you already have brand content but are shifting or formalizing a strategy for the first time, you'll need to assess how well your existing content and processes support your marketing ecosystem. Answering these questions can help you determine what's working and what needs to change to align your team and their efforts with your new goals.

Strategy

Who/what determines what content you create when?
— *If this needs to change, how will you re-set expectations internally?*

How is your content driving readers to take action or move through the buying cycle?
— *Do you need to build/adjust your CTA strategy?*

How much/how regularly are you publishing?
— *Should you be publishing more or less frequently to hit your goals?*

How is your audience finding your content?
— *Is your content published in the places where your audience is looking for and sharing information?*

Content Types

What content types are you using today?
— *Are they the content types your audience prefers to engage with?*

Which stages of the buyer's journey is each content type supporting?
— *Are the right content types matched with the right stages?*
— *Are any stages unsupported?*

Content Questionnaire ?

Quality

What types of decision-makers is your content written for?
— *Is this reflective of the people you want to reach?*

How does the quality of your content stack up to that of the media, peers, and competitors in your industry?
— *Is your content original and distinctive?*
— *Do you need to improve your content's quality?*

How audience-centric is your content?
— *How much of it is focused on your products?*
— *How often are you talking about yourself?*
— *Is your content clearly addressing your audience's needs and answering their questions?*
— *Is your content written through the lens of your customer?*

Optimization

How well are you optimizing your content for digital/search?
— *Should you be more focused on SEO strategy?*
— *Are you publishing in digital-friendly formats?*

How many keywords are you ranking on, and which ones are they?
— *Are they the keywords you want to be ranking on?*

How to Foolproof Your Operations

Set aside your org chart for a minute. There are endless team models you can use to achieve content marketing excellence. For instance, yours may include outside vendors or involve a virtual team. The key to a foolproofed operation is having all your critical functions covered and working in sync.

Two of the most common causes of stunted results are overly complex review processes and a lack of communication between siloed departments. Following these best practices can help you avoid or eliminate these issues and streamline your team's efficiency.

Accounting for Critical Responsibilities

Successful programs designate a content marketing leader who is responsible for maintaining unification around a central strategy, holding the team accountable, and driving executive buy-in. From there, you'll want to map supporting roles to the responsibilities outlined below.

We've highlighted responsibilities that are optional, depending on your type of business and the outcomes you want to achieve.

Content Marketing Responsibilities

CENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP

Maintain strategy unification, hold team accountable, and drive executive buy-in

PLAN	IDEATE	CREATE & MANAGE	REVIEW & APPROVE	DISTRIBUTE	MEASURE
Business outcomes and KPI setting	Manage regular content planning meetings	Creative talent sourcing, onboarding & payment	Content guidelines maintenance	Setup and maintenance of platforms	Data infrastructure setup & maintenance
Analysis of audience data	Gather inputs from audience, market, and keyword research	Creative brief/assignment development	Review/feedback management	Web publishing	Attribution setup & maintenance
Analysis of market and competitor data	Gather inputs from internal SMEs	Content creation	Revision based on feedback	Amplification via social, email, PR & employee advocacy software	Performance measurement & reporting
SEO and keyword research	Gather inputs from sales, community, or others	Overall project management	Editorial & SEO QA	Paid optimization	Collection of audience, market, and competitor data
Strategy creation & maintenance	Idea consolidation & documentation	Publishing calendar maintenance	Final content approval	Curation for sales	Audit management

There's also a host of technology platforms available to support the responsibilities we've outlined.

Where Technology Can Help

PLAN	IDEATE	CREATE & MANAGE	REVIEW & APPROVE	DISTRIBUTE	MEASURE
– Centralized documentation and planning	– Centralized idea collection & review	– Freelance management & payment	– Centralized feedback collection	– Automated publishing	– Data collection
– Keyword selection		– Workflow enforcement	– Editorial QA	– Paid optimization	– Automated reporting
		– Centralized content creation & management	– SEO enforcement	– Automated amplification	– ROI calculation
		– Asset storage		– Integrated channel management	– Data storytelling
				– Asset curation	

Programs often use third-party technologies to support:

– Content creation and management

– Freelance networking

– Task management and team collaboration

– Digital asset management

– Analytics reporting

– SEO research

– Social listening

– Social media management

As you consider technology partners, evaluate which of these areas are of top concern and seek to satisfy as many as you can with as few platforms as possible. Jumping between multiple platforms will quickly eat up the time you'd planned to save using automated tools in the first place.

Choose tools that are easy for your team to adopt to ensure they're worth your investment. If it's unlikely that your team has the time to prioritize these tasks and learn the platforms, consider signing up for additional support services through your technology vendors.

Working in Sync

The importance of establishing mindful workflows within your organization at large and between your team can't be overemphasized. This is especially true for review processes, which can be particularly tricky if they need to involve multiple stakeholders. To foster better workflow harmony, consider these best practices.

Review Workflows

"Don't ship your org chart." Famed Microsoft developer Steven Sinofsky's mantra cautions brands that the quality of their products will mirror their organizational structure. Simply put: If your processes are disorganized or otherwise flawed, your content's quality will likely suffer because of it. Your best bet is to let order and simplicity drive your workflow design.

Be selective about who you engage in content review. Inviting too many opinions into the fold can dilute your content's creative quality as it passes from hand to hand or, worse, grind production to a halt. Skyword data shows that on average each additional layer of review adds 10 business days to content production. So keep in mind that the more review stages you have, the more lead time you'll need to add to your content's schedule.
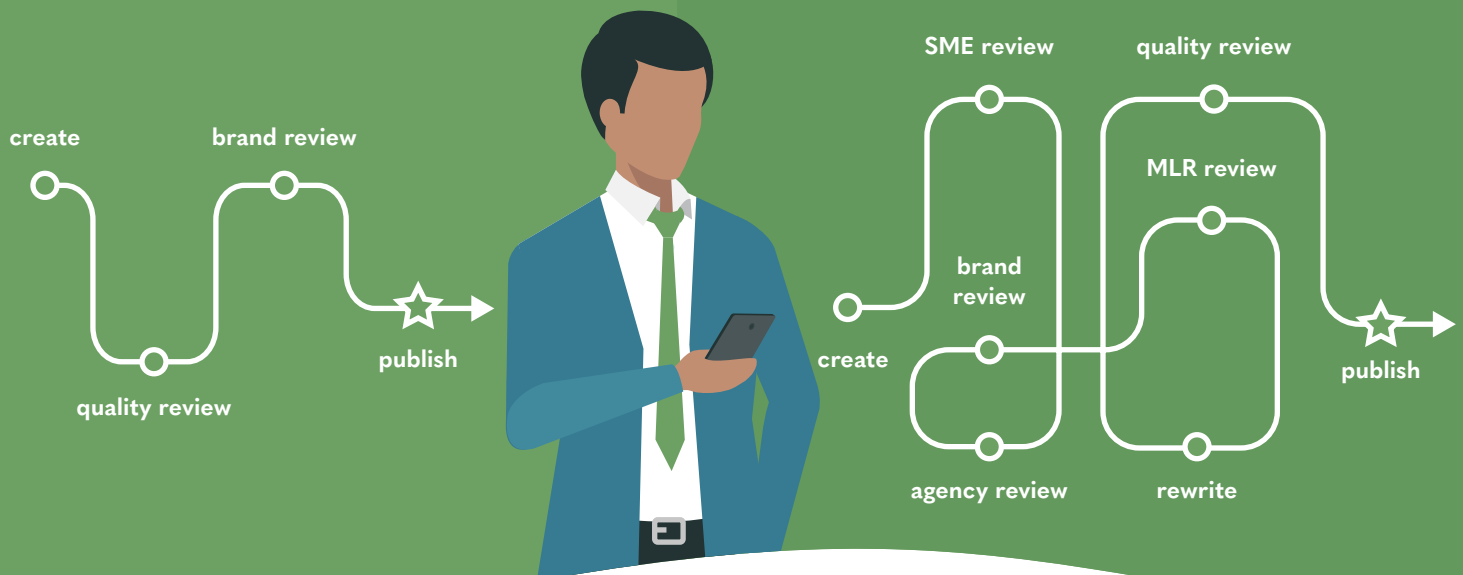
Think about setting up shorter review processes for frequently published content, such as blog posts, and separate workflows for more intensive assets, such as whitepapers. This will give you some agility as you work to publish timely assets or meet tight campaign schedules.

Of course, depending on your industry, MLR or compliance review may be mandatory. In these cases, it's critical to define what the review team is tasked with looking for in content and what's likely to get flagged. Getting this information into the hands of content creators and editors early on can help cut down on rounds of revisions.

Content guidelines are another crucial element in this process. To maintain consistency and mitigate the need for corrections, your guidelines should include details about:

- Your brand's mission, vision, and industry outlook.

- Your unique voice and tone.

- Sourcing requirements.

- Your stance on hot-button topics and topics to avoid altogether.

- Approved terminology.

- Image preferences.

If you're publishing articles that are ghostwritten for your executives, having separate tone and style guidelines is essential to help ghostwriters nail these personalities. These notes should be informed by interviews with these executives.

Collaboration

When collaboration isn't second nature, balls get dropped and your content is likely to go undistributed or underutilized. If your content marketing operations straddle different teams or departments—such as demand generation, site management, and social—establishing regular check-ins and clear handoffs is crucial to have smooth operations.

Productive collaboration comes from:

Strategy unification: Everyone who touches content is aware of its purpose and familiar with the documented content strategy.

Centralized project management: Someone is the designated gatekeeper of the production schedule and is ready to flag the group when teams fall out of sync.

Accountability: Everyone is held accountable for fulfilling their function in the content creation cycle and has a stake in the performance results.

Steps for Creating a Frictionless Workflow

1 Assign Stages:
Include content ideation, creation, and distribution in your workflow plan with timelines for each phase.

2 Assign Roles and Tasks:
Document the tasks that need to be accomplished in each phase and assign roles to be responsible for those tasks.

3 Organize:
Create an editorial calendar to provide visibility into content as it progresses through the workflow.

4 Train:
Coach every teammate on the content strategy, content guidelines, and their role in the process.

5 Enforce:
Give reviewers specific instructions about what to look for in the content. Centralize responsibility for review and approval.

6 Communicate:
Set regular progress meetings and keep content distributors informed of changes.

7 Evolve:
Plan for the need to retrain resources and evolve your workflow over time.

How to Land in the Top Five Percent of Content Marketing Programs

So which behaviors lead to the best-performing content marketing programs? According to our experience, the programs that soar above their competition all have the same few factors in common: they're audience-driven, data empowered, committed to quality, and disciplined in their execution. We're taking a deep dive into these four characteristics and sharing what it takes to excel in each one.

The 4 Habits of Highly Effective Content Marketing Programs

Audience-Driven

Data-Empowered

Committed to Quality

Disciplined

Audience-Driven

Being audience-driven means understanding your customer and letting that knowledge dictate what content you create and when you create it. Users today are inundated with content, so the experiences you offer must meet their needs and standards of value in order to earn their trust.

Success criteria:

Data-Driven Personas

Understanding your customers starts with mining audience and voice of the customer data. You can then use this data to build out unique content personas. Limit yourself to one to three personas—ideally, key participants in the purchasing process—so that you can adequately serve them with tailored content. B2C programs should mine demographic and psychographic info, while B2B programs will want to seek out specifics about industry roles and business pressures.

Audience Journey Map

Your content plan should be driven by your audience's decision-making process. Audience journey mapping is an exercise in empathy that allows you to do just that; it charts the pain points, questions, and emotions your audience faces at key moments in the path to purchase, revealing clear opportunities to serve and foster deeper connections with them.

Building an Audience Journey Map

[insert persona]	Awareness	Consideration	Evaluation	Decision	Advocacy
Actions	What are your persona's priorities at this stage? What actions drive them to the next stage?				
Questions	What specific questions does your persona need answered at this stage?				
Pain Points	What pain points is your persona experiencing at this stage?				
Content Impact	What do you want your persona to think/feel at this stage?				
Channels	Where is your persona looking for information at this stage?				
Content Types	Which types of content is your persona likely to prefer consuming at this stage?				
CTAs	How will your content guide your persona to the next stage in their journey with your brand?				

CTA Strategy

Every piece of content you create should serve a distinct purpose in the audience journey. That means it delivers the right value at the right time, presents appropriate next steps, and leads to relevant business opportunities.

Keyword Pillars

Properly matching your content to your audience's search intent is the best way to get your efforts right out in front of them. To give your content focus, define keyword pillars—the core topics that you want to own in search—and the clusters of longer-tail keywords that ladder up to them, taking into account user intent and sentiment. These keyword pillars should form the backbone of your ideation and optimization strategy.

Create Content That Ladders Up to Priority Keywords

Content Marketing

Organizing your **Content Marketing Funnel** to Maximize Conversions

Content Marketing ROI: Ensure You Have the Tools in Place to Measure it

How to Build a **Content Marketing Strategy**

How to use **Marketing Data** to Identify What Content Your Audience Wants

Personalized Experiences

As you expand your program, aim to make customized content a centerpoint of all your audience touch points. Properly tagging and tracking how specific content performs among different audiences at different stages in the journey will help you hone and, eventually, dynamically personalize the experiences you deliver to each user.

Data-Empowered

Data isn't just a tool for measuring value, it's also a way to remain relevant as a brand and support the decisions you're making as a marketing leader. Top-performing programs use data insights to inform three areas at all times: awareness of competitive positioning and opportunities, operational decision-making, and audience intimacy.

Use the Data Triad Model to Unlock Your Marketing Potential

THE DATA TRIAD

Wisdom
Awareness of market positioning and competitive opportunities

Intimacy
Understanding of audience pain points and opportunities for two-way dialogue

Operations
Confidence in trade-off decision-making and efficient content creation

Q: How does my marketing stack up to competitors and peers?

Q: Which important discussions are my target audience engaging with?

Q: Which content is landing with customers and which is not?

Success criteria:

Tech Infrastructure

Making sure the proper tags, goals, and attribution are set up in your analytics tools is a prerequisite for measuring success. This requires ongoing attention as you expand your content footprint, so you'll want to assign someone to regular data hygiene. This helps to guarantee that your content performance is accurately tracked over the long term.

Opportunity Analysis

Regularly assess your competitive landscape to identify market opportunities that align to your business objectives. Is there a topic spiking among industry influencers that your competitors have ignored? How can you apply peers' successes to your own strategy? Proactively gathering insights from listening, social, and search data can help you stay ahead of the pack.

Audience Research

Analyze interactions and intent signals to identify ways to better reach, connect with, and convert your ideal customer. Using search and social listening data is crucial, especially in the ideation phase, to deliver content that meets your customers where they are. This process helps you pinpoint which topics and content types are resonating with your target audience.

Regular Tracking and Sharing

You've set KPIs that align to business outcomes, now you need to measure them regularly and adjust your efforts to maximize ROI. Establish regular check-ins to hold your team accountable for reporting, interpreting, and responding to what your performance data is telling you. Key insights slides or an executive dashboard are great ways to keep executive leadership tapped into your program's ROI.
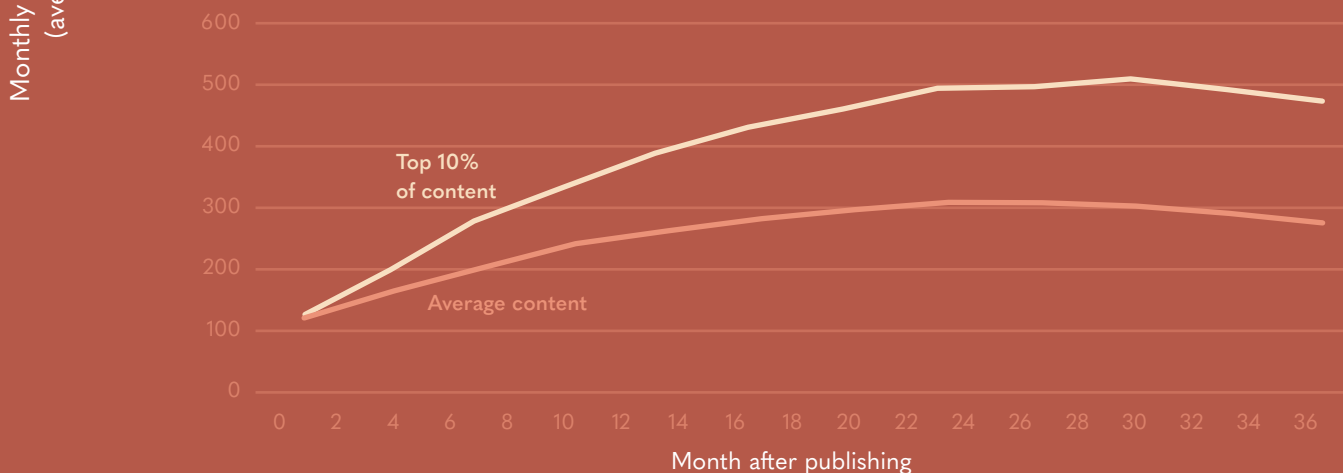
Optimization

Apply data insights to continually improve your content. Skyword data shows that the top 10 percent of content for any program typically delivers 70 to 80 percent of pageviews in a given month. Do a monthly or quarterly qualitative assessment of these all-star assets to identify repeatable patterns. Then, use those insights to inform the creation of future assets.

70-80% of organic pageviews come from your top 10% of content

B2B

Top 10% of content

Average content

Monthly organic search views (average per asset)

Month after publishing

B2C

Top 10% of content

Average content

Month after publishing
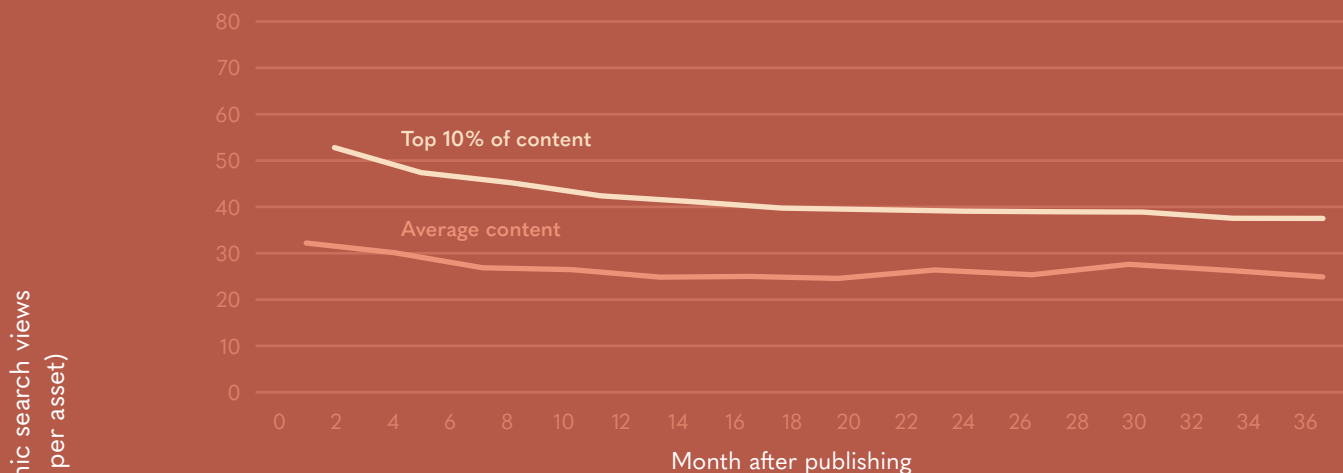
Committed to Quality

Strategically, creative assets should live up to the purpose ascribed to them; creatively, they should reflect the character of your brand and inspire audience trust. That means content needs to be highly relevant to your audience and distinctive of your brand in order to deliver significant value and reap maximum ROI.

Success criteria:

Editorial Identity

Your content needs a distinctive tone, voice, and point of view to stand out. These editorial qualities should encapsulate your brand's personality and how you want your audience to think, feel, and act when they engage with your content. Document these qualities as part of your content guidelines and include how you want them calibrated for different phases of the audience journey.

Content Authority

Recruit content creators who are subject matter experts or influencers in the topics you want to own. Author expertise lends credibility to your content and signals your authority both to search engines and your audience. Research shows that Google's algorithm considers authority a hallmark of high-quality ratings, especially when it comes to content that's trying to influence a searcher's actions or shopping behaviors. Both written and visual assets should be original and professionally polished to assert brand authority.

Diverse Content Types

Creating content across mediums allows you to provide richer experiences to your audience, account for different learning preferences, and reach more people. We call this the surround-sound approach to content marketing. When determining which types of rich media to create, ask yourself three questions:

— What search intent will bring my audience to this content?

— How does my audience want to learn or consume content at this stage?

— What device or platform will my audience use to access my content?

Editorial Oversight:

Every program needs a gatekeeper of quality, someone who guarantees your standards are enforced day to day, so that your team can stay focused on the future. This person or team will ensure that every piece of content you create passes muster, is consistent with your brand's personality, and delivers on its intended purpose. They maintain ownership of your content guidelines and have the last look at content before it goes live.

The Content Quality Checklist

Before publishing, use this checklist to gauge the quality of your content.

✓ **Successful:** Content serves a strategic purpose.

- — Does it deliver on its intended purpose?
- — Does it effectively encourage the action you hope readers will take?
- — Is it aligned with your content strategy and the brand's voice?

✓ **Original:** Content is distinctive.

- — Does it offer the reader a unique, fresh or unexpected perspective? If not, is it superior in some way to similar assets already available?
- — Does it surprise or delight the reader?

✓ **Empathetic:** Content reflects the needs and concerns of its intended audience.

- — Is it highly relevant to the target audience?
- — Does it reflect an understanding of their needs, mindset, desires, fears, and experience?
- — Will the reader care about it?

✓ **Valuable:** Content delivers a tangible benefit to readers.

- — Does it enrich the reader's life by moving them to think, feel, or act differently to their own benefit?
- — Does it help them make a decision or give them a competitive edge?

✓ **Optimized:** Content is built to be discovered, to engage, and to drive results.

- — Has this piece of content been given every opportunity to perform?
- — Have on-page optimization tactics been deployed thoughtfully?
- — If the content is timely, will it be published at an optimal time?

✓ **Artful:** Content is clear, logical, and easy for the reader to understand.

- — Is every sentence clear and easy to read?
- — Is the argument logical and persuasive?
- — Do the visuals support the text in a cohesive, meaningful way?

✓ **Respectful:** Content meets the reader where they are and addresses them in their own language.

- — Does it use the appropriate lingo?
- — Are the depth and rigor appropriately challenging?
- — Is it inclusive, or does it make assumptions that some readers may find alienating?

✓ **Authoritative:** Content is accurate and reflects sound subject matter expertise.

- — Is it factually sound, accurate, error-free, and appropriately supported by credible sources?
- — Are the topic and perspective aligned with brand expertise?
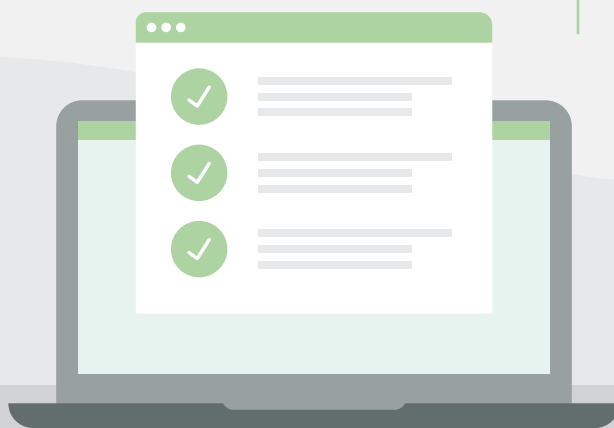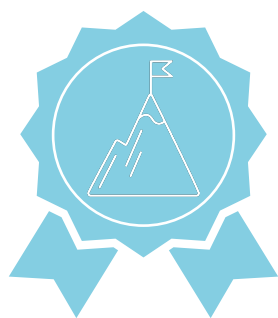
Disciplined

Well-oiled operations take the chaos out of the creative process. High-achieving programs are intentional in how they stage resources, foster collaboration, and hold people accountable for their contributions to assure regular publishing and compounding results.

Success criteria:

Workflow rules and governance

Every team member should be trained on their role and the tasks they must complete at their stage of content production. Document timelines for each stage as well as how you'll hold each person accountable for their function. Also, schedule regular reminders to share your processes and guidelines as everyone can benefit from a refresher now and then.

Scalable talent

Your content creation process needs to be streamlined, repeatable, and scalable. Tapping into freelance content creators, producers, and editors is a great way to enable your team to meet significant on-demand needs. This allows you to easily scale production up or down without having to hire, lay off, or sap in-house resources at every turn.

Unified production calendar

Visibility into the status of assets as they move through production is critical to keeping your team in sync. Use a centralized marketing calendar to ensure that deadlines are enforced and content creation remains coordinated across marketing departments. Use the same calendar to track everything from blog content to campaigns and social posts to marketing events so that it's a go-to resource for the entire team.
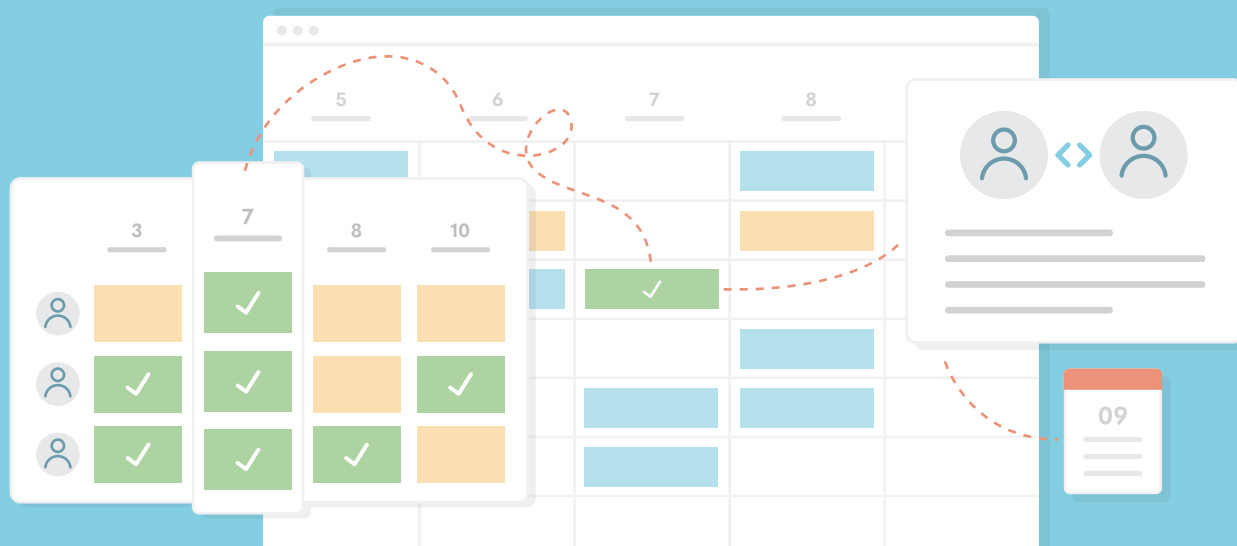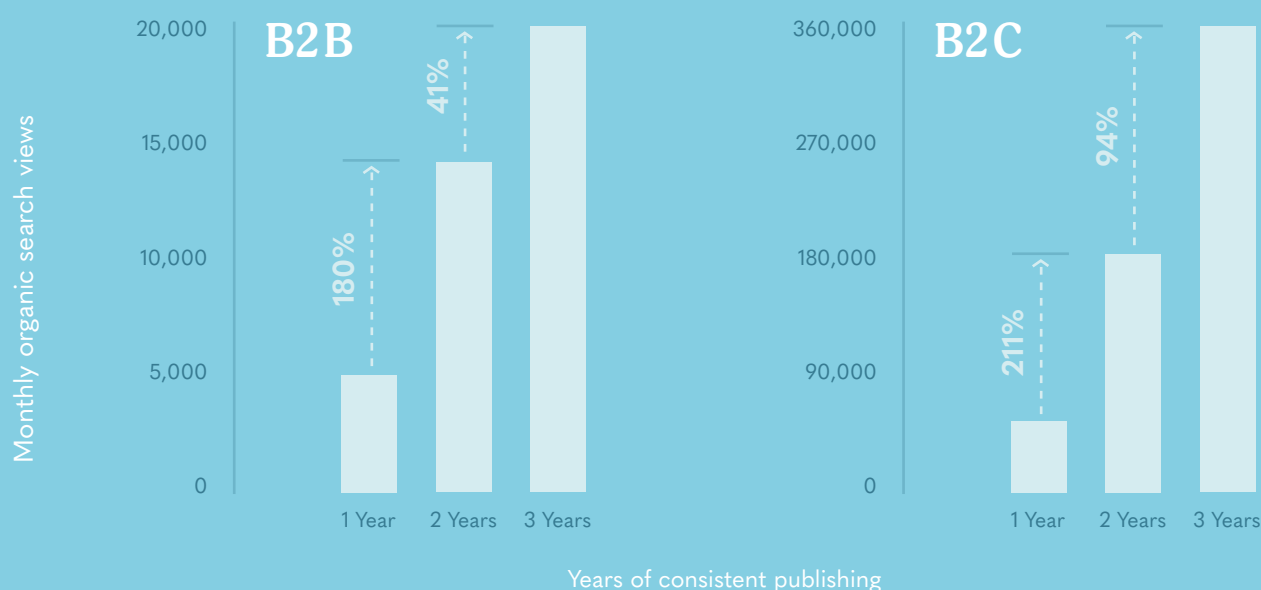
Consistent publishing

Consistent publishing delivers a better return on your investment by steadily compounding your search views over time. Skyword data shows that programs that consistently published over two years saw an approximately threefold increase in organic views from year one to year two. With that in mind, you'll want to work to prevent common gating factors—e.g., content review, approval, and handoff for distribution—from getting in the way of your ability to publish regularly.

Consistent Publishing Compounds Site Traffic Over Time

B2B

Monthly organic search views

20,000	
15,000	
10,000	
5,000	
0	

180%   41%

1 Year   2 Years   3 Years

B2C

360,000	
270,000	
180,000	
90,000	
0	

211%   94%

1 Year   2 Years   3 Years

Years of consistent publishing

Cross-channel distribution

Content that goes unseen can't drive results. Make sure that hitting publish triggers amplification across your paid, earned, owned, and shared channels, keeping in mind that repeated amplification will generate the best results. Make sure that your teams in charge of amplification—social, email, paid, sales, and/or PR—have skin in the game as you track the results from each channel.

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Achieving excellence in content marketing depends less on your budget and more on you having a clear purpose, smart strategy, and an ability to take decisive actions. It requires understanding the needs of your audience and serving their interests in order to serve your own. It means organizing, collaborating, and taking every opportunity to optimize your content over time.

It won't happen overnight and you may not please everyone in the process, but you can start to diagnose your program and lay the foundation for one that excels by applying these insights. Using these tools will help get everyone on the same page about your mission and your goals, which will allow you to craft content that satisfies your audience, accurately represents your brand, and delivers maximum ROI.

For more information, email learnmore@skyword.com
or visit www.skyword.com

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