

 Microsoft + Influence&CO.

The Ultimate Guide to Content Marketing





Contents

Page 3: What Is Content Marketing, and Why Do You Need It?

Page 5: Use Content Marketing With Intention

Page 9: Essential Content Team Members

Page 12: Your Strategy and What It's Made Of

Page 13: The Content Itself

Page 16: Choose Your Thought Leaders

Page 17: What Fuels Your Content?

Page 19: The Content Creation Process

Page 20: Get Your Content Out to the World

Page 22: Track the Results

Chapter 1

What Is Content Marketing, and Why Do You Need It?

Content marketing is a new wave of marketing that goes beyond classic methods of outreach like billboards and TV advertisements. It's a comprehensive strategy that actually engages prospects instead of peddling products. It's a tool that educates, entertains, and raises questions. It's kind of like the best form of advertising in that readers actually enjoy it — if it's done right.

Creating content is necessary for all forms of your marketing — social media, email, and your website — to get people thinking and talking about your brand. It should serve as a catalyst for other marketing efforts because it builds a community around your brand message and creates loyal customers. Instead of using other people's content, imagine the power and growth that your company could experience from creating your own. A great amount of research proves just how powerful content marketing is, but to get the results you're after, you need to approach this method with intention. [Content Marketing Institute has found](#) that companies with a documented content marketing strategy are:

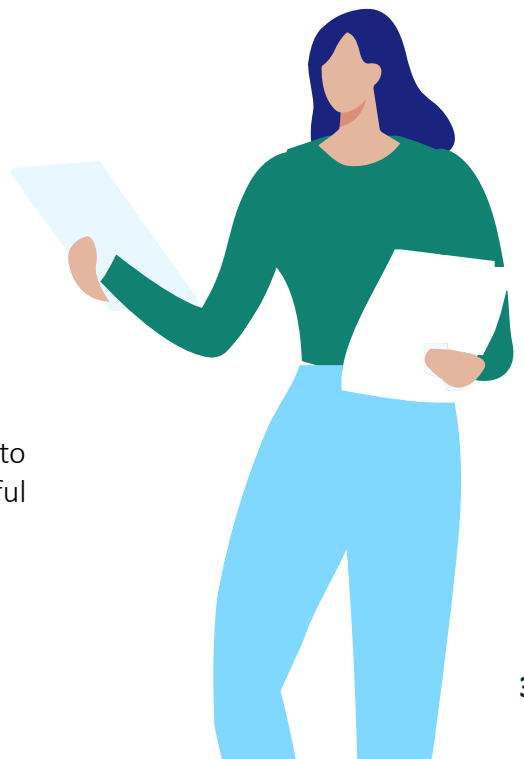
- Far more likely to consider themselves effective at content marketing
- Far less challenged with every aspect of content marketing
- Generally likelier to consider themselves more effective with every tactic and social media channel
- Able to justify a higher percentage of the marketing budget to be spent on content marketing

In this guide, we will walk you through how to use content marketing effectively based on your specific goals. Through these steps, you'll learn how to transform your marketing strategy into a content marketing machine and skyrocket your ROI.

Why Is Content Marketing Right for Me?

As a Microsoft partner, we know that you want to learn about the latest and greatest tools and tactics to help your business grow. Content marketing is a strategy that nurtures relationships between the business and the consumer, building trust along the way. Consistent, high-quality content is one of the most cutting-edge and effective tools you can use to reach your company's goals, and it's what customers are coming to expect.

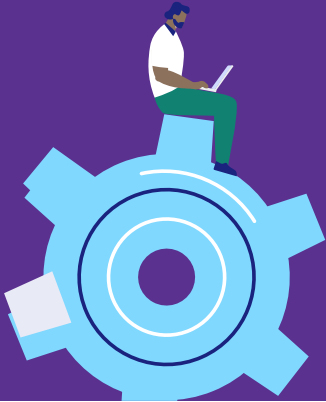
By incorporating content marketing into current digital marketing strategies, Microsoft partners can propel themselves forward according to their unique company goals and be at the forefront of the most successful digital marketing trends.



Get Your *FREE* Content Marketing Assessment

Are you on the right track to content marketing success?

Click the button below to get your free online assessment of your current marketing efforts, brought to you by Influence & Co.



Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Get Started:

- Are you happy with your current marketing efforts?
- What specific marketing tactics have you tried in the past?
What worked and what didn't?
- Has the engagement from your audience changed over time?
- How many people do you have in your marketing department?
- What expectations do you have of your marketing efforts?
- How do you track your current efforts?

How to Approach This Guide

Whether you are just starting out or you are a content marketing pro, this whitepaper will help you take your efforts to the next level. Depending on how much your company has already invested in creating a content marketing program, here are our suggestions for which chapters might be most relevant to you:

- **Chapters 1-3:** You are interested in learning more about what content marketing is or are looking to begin your strategy
- **Chapters 4-7:** You currently have a content marketing strategy but are looking to further build your brand and amplify your presence
- **Chapters 8-10:** You have a dedicated team and want to take your content strategy to the next level

Chapter 2

Use Content Marketing With Intention

With No Goal, You'll Miss Every Time

Content is a tool that, when used correctly, can be an absolute superstar for your marketing and sales teams. However, if it's not paired up with well-defined goals, content is just background noise that satisfies no one.

The underlying goal of content marketing is to create brand awareness and build trust with your audience. Don't mistake that term for something less powerful than what it is. Sure, it's obvious that you want potential consumers and current clients to be aware of your company and what it stands for. However, there are three things that stem from brand awareness and turn it into a very effective business goal: thought leadership, lead generation, and SEO.



Thought leadership:

Every company has people who are full of knowledge. Putting a face behind your company and showcasing that you are a true expert will lead to more trust, and it's becoming more and more important to customers that they do business with companies and people they trust.



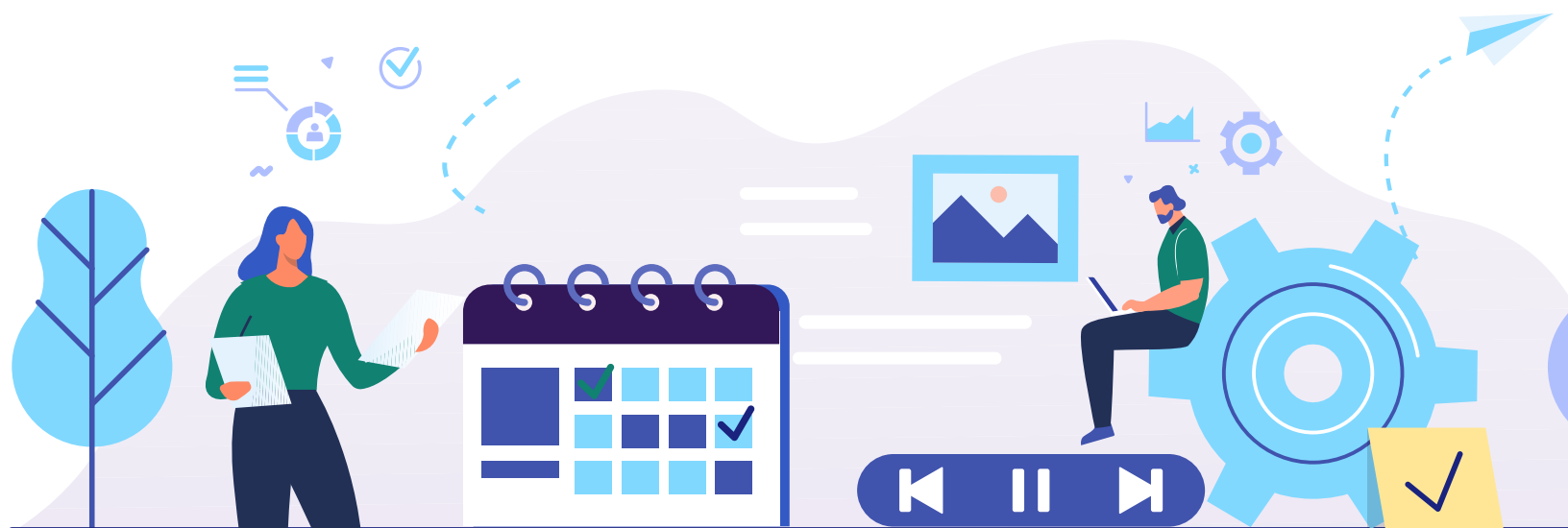
Lead generation:

To make more sales, your company has to find the right people to sell to. Lead generation is the process of converting people who have heard about your company into people who want to buy from your company.



SEO:

The first thing that most of us do when we have a question about something is to reach out to the internet. Search engine optimization (SEO) works to get your answer on top of the list. In order for the search engines to find your company, your content has to be crafted with their needs in mind.



Other Content Marketing Benefits

In addition to overarching thought leadership, lead generation, and SEO goals, here are examples of other ways that companies put their content marketing efforts to work:



Investor relations:

Getting published helps build the credibility you need to close the deal. And if you've recently closed on a round of funding, now is the time to put the pedal to the metal and grow! Double down on growth by positioning your website as a top industry resource. It should be chock-full of informative blog posts, educational whitepapers, and newsworthy events in your industry. Your content lives online and works all hours of the day to grow your company. In a way, it's your most loyal employee, working 24/7.



Sales enablement:

When you arm the members of your sales team with content that educates prospects, answers questions, and breaks down barriers, you enable them to supplement their sales conversations, improve efficiency, and spend more time selling.



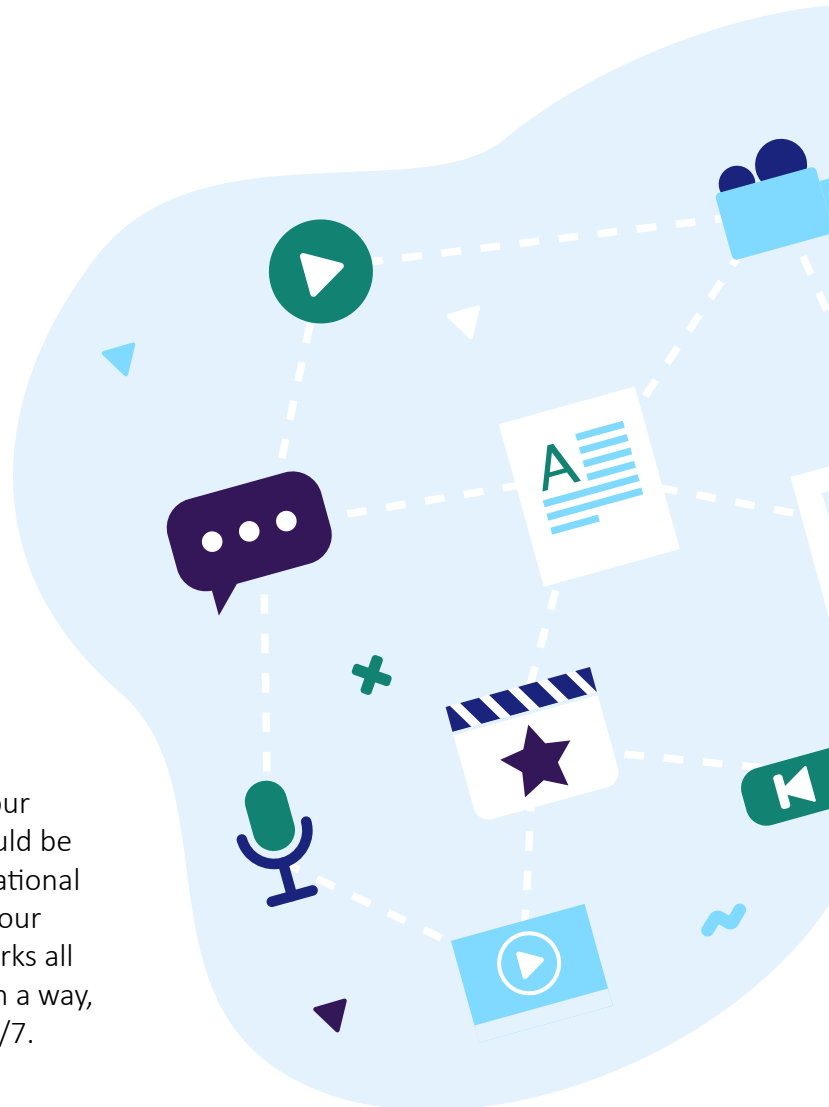
Training:

Did you know that you can use content to educate employees in much the same way that you use content to educate prospects? If you find there's a topic that your employees don't have a good grasp on, try creating content that will resonate with them to ensure they really get it.



Recruitment:

Recruiting employees is a big undertaking, and you'll need some help to ensure the candidates you attract are fully educated, engaged, and prepared to work for your company. Content will give potential hires more to talk about in interviews and a better sense of your company culture. If you know how to use it, content can be just the recruitment help you're looking for.



If you align your content with the goals you've set, it can breathe new life into your marketing strategy and make a huge difference in the relationship you have with your customers.

Set Your Goals

Which of the following sounds most like you?

1

- A. I want my content to position me as a leader in my industry.
- B. I want to create more leads for my company.
- C. I want my website to come up through organic search.

2

- A. I want to build credibility within my industry.
- B. I want to convert leads to new clients.
- C. I want my audience to be able to find me more easily online.

3

- A. I want to book more speaking engagements.
- B. I want to increase site traffic.
- C. I want to rank higher in search engines.

4

- A. I want to increase my social following and engagement.
- B. I want to increase my on-site engagement.
- C. I want to know which keywords my audience uses to find information about my industry.

5

- A. I want to be published in high-quality publications.
- B. I want to increase my revenue.
- C. I want my website to be referenced by other important websites.

6

- A. I want to increase my press opportunities.
- B. I need more sales enablement tools.
- C. I want my website to be the answer to people's questions.

How to Track Metrics Based on Goals

Mostly A's

Thought Leadership

Content syndication: One of the clearest signs that you're creating valuable, high-quality content is when other publications pick up your published content and syndicate it on their sites. If other publications are republishing your content, then that means you're probably doing something right.

Social shares and engagement: When people read something that really resonates with them, they comment on it and share it on their platforms. If your content is sparking conversations online, then you know you're heading in the right direction.

Award opportunities: Awards aren't given to just anyone — you have to earn them. Receiving awards from leaders in your industry proves you've demonstrated your expertise in your space.

On-site analytics and engagement:

Time on site, finish rate, and bounce rate are important analytics that will help you track engagement with content on your website. Use conversion rate metrics to see which pieces of on-site content encouraged specific actions.

Speaking engagements: When was the last time you went to an event that was headlined by an obscure, unknown speaker? Being asked to speak at events is a good indicator that you're sharing valuable insights with the right audiences.

Press opportunities: Press opportunities can include anything from requests to contribute as a source or quote for an article to appearing on a podcast or co-hosting a webinar. Receiving requests like these means people value your insights and want to share them with their audiences.

Mostly B's

Lead Generation

Clickbacks to your site: This metric tracks the number of people who click through to your site from a piece of off-site content. When your referral traffic is high, it's a good signal that your audience finds your content valuable and wants to engage further.

Lead conversions: This is crucial. Your conversion rate shows you how effective your content is at turning visitors into actual leads — and future customers. If you're generating a lot of leads but few of them are becoming clients, then your content may not be compelling enough.

Award opportunities: Awards aren't given to just anyone — you have to earn them. Receiving awards from leaders in your industry proves you've demonstrated your expertise in your space.

On-site analytics and engagement:

Time on site, finish rate, and bounce rate are important analytics that will help you track engagement with content on your website. Use conversion rate metrics to see which pieces of on-site content encouraged specific actions.

Mostly C's

SEO

Search visibility: If your SEO is in good shape, then it shouldn't be hard to search and find your content online. Using tools like Moz and SEMrush will help you track your search visibility. The higher you rank in search engines for your keywords, the better chance you have at improving your organic click-through rate and generating organic traffic.

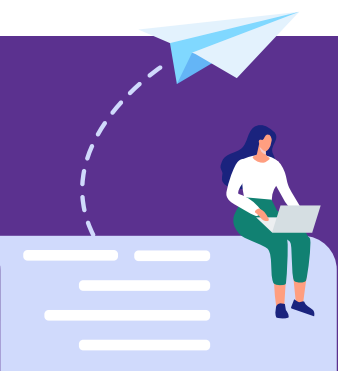
Keyword rankings: You want your website to rank higher on a search engine results page (SERP) for a particular keyword because the higher you rank, the more likely it is for your audience to find you when they search based on keywords. Track your rankings over time to see how well your efforts are working to elevate your position.

Award opportunities: Awards aren't given to just anyone — you have to earn them. Receiving awards from leaders in your industry proves you've demonstrated your expertise in your space.



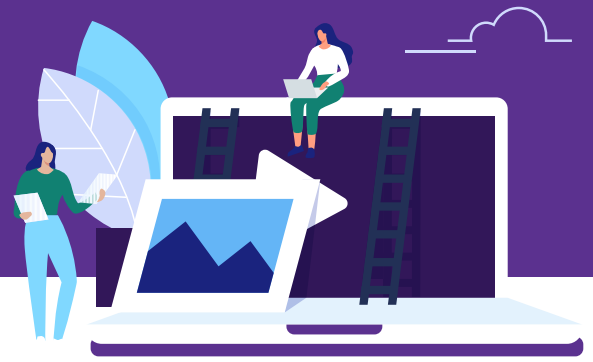
Click the button below to get your free online content marketing assessment and learn more about aligning your content strategy with your specific goals.

This assessment is brought to you by Influence & Co.



Chapter 3

Essential Content Team Members

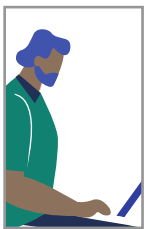


Choosing the Right People

Creating content is definitely not a one-man show. It requires people who know what they're doing and are committed to the content goals of your company. If you want measurable results, a content team is an essential tool.

Keep in mind that as you build your team, you might discover that one person has multiple skill sets that can be applied to more than one specific role. There is no magic number for how big your content team has to be; you just need to find what works for your company's ability and resources. You might also find it beneficial to know that you don't have to have people to fill all of these roles physically inside your office: Outsourcing is an extremely effective way to accomplish your content goals.

Here is a list of the most common core roles for an effective content marketing team:



Subject matter experts:

A thought leader is an industry expert who shares his or her expertise with a broader audience for the purpose of educating, improving, and adding value to the industry as a whole. Thought leaders are people who fully immerse themselves in everything about their industries; they not only understand the inner workings of their businesses, but they also know their audiences and competitors to a T. This can be anyone in the company who has industry expertise and knowledge to share.

topic ideas and determining how they fit into your overall strategy. After the content is written, the content strategist works closely with your company's subject matter expert(s) to guarantee that all information is correct and then distributes the finished product.



Writer:

The good news about this role is that it doesn't always have to be the same person. You can have various team members write content about what they're passionate about in their role, ask subject matter experts to write about their positions, or even outsource writing to freelancers. As long as the content gets written, this role is covered.



Content strategist:

The content strategist is like the quarterback of your content marketing team. He or she builds the strategy on the basis of research and goals for the future. This person is all about pitching



Content editor:

Editors are responsible for making sure that every piece of content is free of grammatical errors, that the tone of the piece sounds right for the company, and that the content is aligned with your goals. For instance, if your goal is to increase your website's rankings on search, your editor can double-check that the correct keywords appear in your article. It is highly recommended that every team have another person edit their content, as it's very difficult to spot errors in your own writing. Two sets of eyes are way better than one! Remember, we all make mistakes, even editors. If an editor writes a piece of content, it's crucial that someone else be responsible for proofing his or her work.



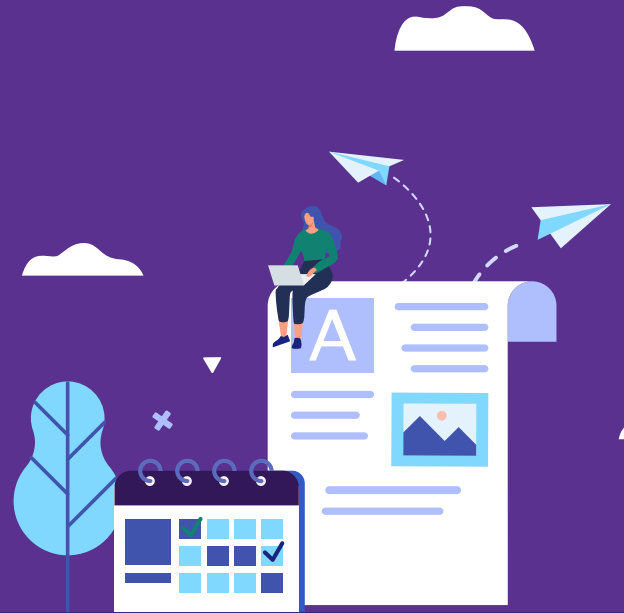
Graphic designer:

Content is effective only when it gets the attention it needs. Having someone on your team to create graphics for your blog posts, to design whitepapers, and to keep all of your collateral consistent with your brand is truly worth it. We're generally taught to not judge a book by its cover, but quite frankly, people would rather pay attention to things that are visually appealing. Your content is no different!



Social media/ community manager:

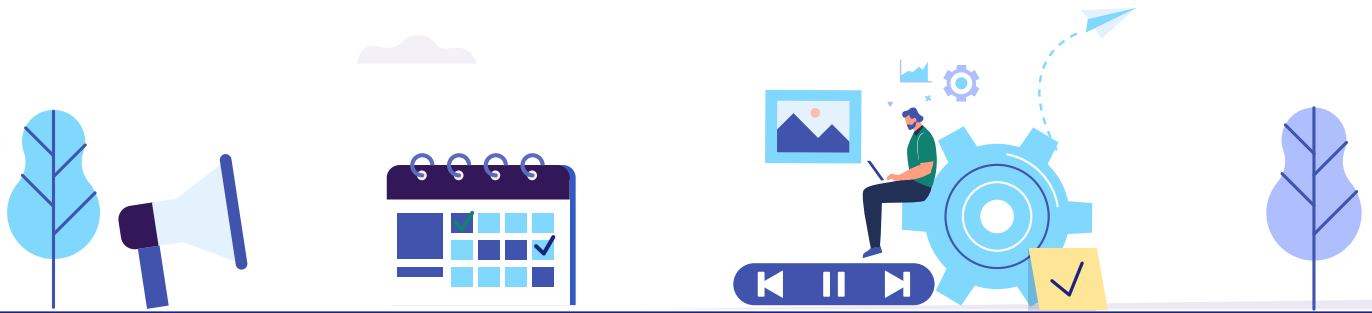
What good is content if no one sees it? If you're not fully utilizing social media for your company, now is the time to jump on the bandwagon. Having someone strictly dedicated to putting your content out there for the world to see is one of the best things a company can do for itself. Sharing content on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is essential to getting your name out in front of your target audience members and teaching them about your company's passion.



The Power of Outsourcing

If building a content team in-house isn't an option for your company, have no fear. There are several options to choose from when it comes to content creation. Outsourcing is an excellent way to get the results you want without taking too much time from your current employees, who already have a ton on their plates. It's also a great way to test the waters and see whether a strategy is really right for you before you invest in hiring someone full time for a role. Outsourcing is not a one-size-fits-all solution, however, and how you utilize it depends on what is best for your company.

You can outsource your content marketing to an external partner, or you can even meet in the middle and hire someone to manage your company's relationship with an agency partner and to collaborate on projects. If you still like the idea of creating some content in-house using full-time employees, you should definitely embrace that. Outsourcing and using freelancers can be as collaborative or as hands-off as you like.



The Tools Your Team Needs

Regardless of how you choose to conquer your content marketing strategy, your content team members need the right tools and resources to get the job done.



Project management software:

The most important thing your strategy needs is organization. Using project management software can help keep your process on schedule and make sure that all of your team members are on the same page. You probably use some form of platform for project management already, so you know how effective it is for businesses. Add your content strategy into your tasks so that you ensure it all gets done and that your strategy is put into action.



Marketing automation software:

This is a tool that can save your team so much time and energy. Once your content is successfully created, it would be absolutely heartbreaking to forget to distribute it according to schedule. Marketing automation software allows you to pre-schedule your content distribution at a certain day and time. This can be a lifesaver when you realize that the days you chose for a blog post to go out or for an email campaign to start are really busy and you wouldn't have been able to get them out had you not prepared beforehand.



Graphic design:

If you hire a graphic designer to make your content look pretty, you'll need to provide the tools to support him or her. Most graphic designers tend to lean toward the same products, but it might be worthwhile to ask designers what platform they prefer to work on before purchasing one so you know that what you buy is exactly what they need.



Analytics:

In order to track whether your content is successful, you'll need an analytics tool. Analytics allow you to see how each piece of content is performing and to look at specific metrics. This is crucial for monitoring the work you're doing and adjusting for future success.



Social media scheduling:

Not only can you automate when bigger pieces of content get published, but you can also automate posting to social media platforms. These different platforms make it easy to schedule social posts for the future so that consistency is guaranteed. A lot of platforms, such as Hootsuite and Later, offer free options for users.

Chapter 4

Your Strategy and What It's Made Of



The Value of a Plan

If you want to hit your content goals, it's crucial that you have a documented content strategy. Sure, having a documented strategy doesn't guarantee that results magically happen, but it does give your team specific things to work toward together — and that's powerful. Content Marketing Institute reported in its [2019 Benchmarks Report](#) that the most successful content marketers are far more likely than their less successful peers to have a documented content marketing strategy (65 percent vs. 14 percent).

A solid strategy can:

- Properly align your team members around the same goal
- Hold everyone accountable
- Set up your team to scale

Steps for Creating Your Strategy
Document your overall mission and your “why”: Not only does a mission statement unite your employees and strengthen advocacy, but it also fuels your company's content strategy. Your content should align with your brand, who you are, and what you do. Document a statement that communicates exactly that, and your team will have a much easier time creating content that reinforces it.

1. Define your goals and KPIs: Without the well-defined goals and strategy that come from a decent understanding of content marketing, your content is just noise — noise that neither you nor your customers will be satisfied with.

2. Create data-driven audience personas: Personas — which outline buyer motivations, assumptions, expectations, and goals — can be invaluable for helping organizations figure out what content to deliver, as well as when, where, and how to deliver it.

3. Plan a diverse content mix: Content marketing can — and should — be used throughout the buying process, all the way to a signed contract. As your buyer moves down the funnel and closer to the product, so should your content — starting with a wide, catch-all approach and becoming more focused as you move toward closing.

4. Develop an editorial workflow and process for content creation: The right workflow simplifies your content process. It outlines the journey of every piece of content you create, and it identifies who is in charge of each of those steps. And because that process is established, your team doesn't have to spend unnecessary time and energy playing catch-up.

5. Put together a distribution plan: The act of sharing published content is easy, but as it's becoming increasingly difficult for publishers to achieve organic reach through traditional branded posts, they often end up paying for it — in more ways than one. When so much is invested, reaching the right audience is key, and achieving the desired level of engagement makes for an appropriate measurement. Decide exactly when and where you will share your content so that you can measure its effectiveness.

Chapter 5

The Content Itself



Content Mediums to Create



Blog Content

Behind the scenes, your blog is like a treasure chest of keywords and credibility — if you're doing it right, that is. Blogging is critical to the digital marketing scene because it provides a platform for you to show off how much you know about your field, increases your chances of being found online (SEO), gives you something to share out that leads people back to your website, and gets your name out in front of prospective customers more frequently and in a positive way. Keep in mind that a great blog goes beyond simply sharing company updates; your articles should focus on providing actionable and educational insights that truly benefit your readers.



Guest-Contributed Content

Guest-contributed content is a simple method that can have big results. The point of it is for your subject matter experts to contribute original, high-quality content to publications that speak to your company's target audience. The two purposes for doing this are: (1) to introduce your brand and knowledge to people in your industry who don't know your name yet, and (2) to create more trust among those who do know your name. Customers like hearing from the people behind the companies they do business with.

Publishing articles that are bylined by your company's subject matter experts in online publications your audience reads adds third-party validation to your message and gives your company the opportunity to earn high-quality links back to your website from diverse external sources. Consider publishing this content on a monthly or quarterly basis in a variety of publications your audience members read.



Press Mentions

Your content marketing strategy is a consistent and steady push, and when press mentions (articles written by other influential people that mention your company) are sprinkled throughout that ongoing push, they can provide valuable spurts of momentum and quick wins. Your efforts won't necessarily collapse without press mentions, but these mentions can give your content strategy the boost it needs to help you see even greater ROI.

Press mentions are a powerful way for your brand to earn third-party credibility and build trust with your audience. Mentions can signal your authority to search engines via both context and links, making press mentions a valuable tool for improving SEO. Consider building relationships with media outlets and influential people in your industry who may be interested in featuring your company or quoting your company's subject matter experts in future articles.



Email Marketing

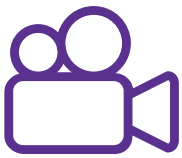
There are two types of emails that your company should be sending: drip campaigns and email newsletters. Drip campaigns are exactly what they sound like: a slow and steady stream of automated emails that are sent to members of your email marketing list. These can be as basic as providing a simple tip that relates to the current stage in the buyer's journey or as complex as mentioning specific things the audience member has already done on your website, urging him or her to take a future action like completing a purchase.

Email newsletters are great for putting content right into readers' hands and keeping your company top of mind. It's the ultimate show-but-don't-tell route for delivering updates on your company and the industry while linking to blog posts, articles, and resources that your readers will appreciate. A great way tactic is to corral all the content you created in one month into the newsletter, in case anyone on your list missed it.



Gated Content

Gated content means that in order for readers to access the content, they have to fill out a form with their name and email address. There can be many forms of gated content, but the most common is a whitepaper like the one you're reading right now. Whitepapers are informational pieces of content that are longer than a blog post and give valuable information that readers wouldn't be able to find anywhere else. They're great for both you and your readers because they get to expand their knowledge, while your sales team can determine whether they are qualified prospects on the basis of the information given, such as title, company size, and current needs. The key is to make sure the content within the whitepaper is, in fact, valuable.



Video

There are many kinds of videos you can create, including explainer videos, how-tos, testimonials, product demos, and more. And you can use that video content in countless ways: on your website, in blog content, on social media, and in your email marketing, to name just a few. This is a great way to connect with visual/auditory learners, as not everyone enjoys reading but could still get a lot out of your message.



How Do You Know What Types of Content to Create?

Deciding on what types of content you should create depends entirely on the marketing funnel. You want to nurture leads throughout their whole experience.

Buyers move through a decision-making process that starts with “How do I solve this problem?” and moves to “Do I have a need for this product?” before ending with “Why should I buy from this company versus another?” Content addresses (or should address) each of these questions, helping your business and sales team to be seen as thought leaders and trusted resources.

Examples: Blog content, videos, infographics, social media promotions, guest-contributed content

- **Top of the funnel:** This should be your most fun and most shareable content. It should be light and easy to digest and should inspire readers to pass it on. Readers who are looking for the basics of what you do and need more education are looking for top-of-the-funnel content to see whether it can help answer their questions.

Examples: Blog content, whitepapers, webinars, email newsletters, press mentions

- **Middle of the funnel:** At this stage of the buyer’s journey, the customer has come to a point where he or she understands the problem and is now identifying solutions. The content here should usher leads further into your funnel and should provide more researched, in-depth pieces that help build more trust. The more tactical the better in the middle of the funnel, as readers are no longer skeptical and are ready to be convinced.

Examples: Sales collateral, case studies, product demos

- **Bottom of the funnel:** This is the stage where customers are ready to make a decision. The bottom of the funnel is an opportunity to talk more about your company and its offerings rather than your industry and to provide them with information that will help them decide whether your company might be the right solution for them. It used to be that sales owned the bottom of the funnel. But content marketing introduces a different approach, encouraging marketing and sales to work together to create insightful content that closes deals.

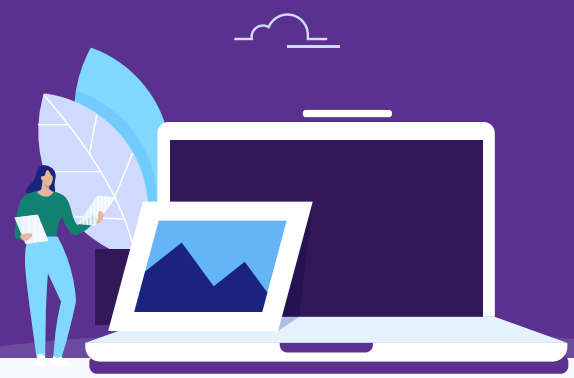


How Much Content Should My Company Be Publishing?

Find out just how much content you need based on your goals by taking this free online Content Marketing Assessment, brought to you by Influnee & Co.

Chapter 6

Choose Your Thought Leaders



Turning Your Company's Subject Matter Experts Into Thought Leaders

Thought leadership is all about humanizing the brand, giving a face to the company, and adding some good old-fashioned personality to the mix. The thought leader is the name on the byline for an article. Thought leadership works by choosing one person from the company and crafting content around his or her personality, industry insights, and experiences to attract and build relationships with the company's audience. A few well-known examples of prominent thought leaders are Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Oprah Winfrey. Keep in mind that you don't have to be the next Oprah to be a successful thought leader; you just have to know your stuff.

Although it may seem like your CEO or president is the automatic choice to be your company's subject matter expert, successful thought leadership is actually more about the individual qualities of the person than his or her title or status. Some examples of people in your company who could be great thought leaders are your CMO, CTO, salespeople, or head of recruitment. Here are the three things you should look for when choosing a thought leader:

- The person has a wealth of industry knowledge and unique insight.
- He or she is a good storyteller.
- He or she understands the value of content.

While this may seem obvious, your thought leaders really need to know their stuff, not just be the most charismatic people in the room. The content they will be putting their names on has to feature high-quality information that won't put readers to sleep. You also want these individuals to believe that putting the information out there will do some good for the overall company; they need to be on board with the process and goals.

Notice that being a "good writer" isn't one of the requirements. Creating a process that gathers the story and knowledge from thought leaders without relying on them to write the content themselves is a helpful way to ensure that the content gets written in a timely manner and is of the highest quality.

How Companies Benefit From Thought Leaders

Subject matter experts, or thought leaders, are essential to your content marketing strategy. Your company's credibility and expertise are crucial elements to communicate in order to solidify your brand and grow as a business in the long term. Building more credibility happens through authentic engagement with your audience — the human element of business. People love it! Content is far more powerful when there is a face and name associated with it. In the end, buyers choose companies that they trust and believe in over standard vendors and service providers to whom they have zero connection.

Start the conversation, share your insights, and reach out to make connections. Take the time to provide real value, and you'll reap the payoff from helping to shape your industry.

Chapter 7

What Fuels Your Content?

Where to Find Inspiration for Your Content

Not sure what to talk about when it comes down to actually creating the content? Your ideas do not all have to come from one person: The best content strategies actually involve input from the entire company. Here are some places to start drawing inspiration from:



Crowdsource From Your Team

When it comes time to talk with team members, carefully explain that while you're heading up the content strategy, you're not an expert at everything. Their expertise is exactly what your content needs to differentiate your company and stand out to potential customers.



Use Your Thought Leaders as Inspiration

The people you chose as thought leaders are in that position for a reason: They know things! Use this to your advantage and pick their brains about what they think are important subjects to cover. If it's something they're passionate about, they probably have some great insights you can use. Set up some time to interview them about topics that excite them.

If you're drawing a blank, use the following example questions to get started:

What's the biggest challenge you've faced over the past three months?

What's something going on in your personal life that really made you stop and think?

Talk to me about a hard conversation you've had recently. How did you approach it?

What is something exciting in our industry that you can't stop thinking about?





Keep Your Mind Open to Ideas

Being open to moments of inspiration can actually help you generate ideas for content. Work to become more aware about hot topics going around your industry and things your co-workers are talking about a lot. There might be more ideas floating around in conversations than you realize. Also, don't ignore what's going on in the world around you: Some of the best topics revolve around newsworthy events or pop culture and circle back to your industry.



Brainstorm With Marketing and Sales

Imagine this: Your marketing and sales teams are in one room, working together toward the same goal. It may seem shocking or maybe even impossible, but it's pretty much guaranteed to be a content gold mine. Your sales reps know what questions your prospective customers are asking, what objections they have about your services, and where they need more education, and your marketing team needs to use those questions to provide the best answers. This helps you get more mileage out of your content because it ensures you are writing content that truly connects with your audience members. It also allows you to empower the members of your sales team with content they can use in the sales process.



Use Content Idea Submission Forms

Send out polls, interview your co-workers, use software to collaborate on documents. Make it as easy as possible for team members to tell you about their ideas right as they come up. Use tools like Google Forms to gather answers in an organized way.



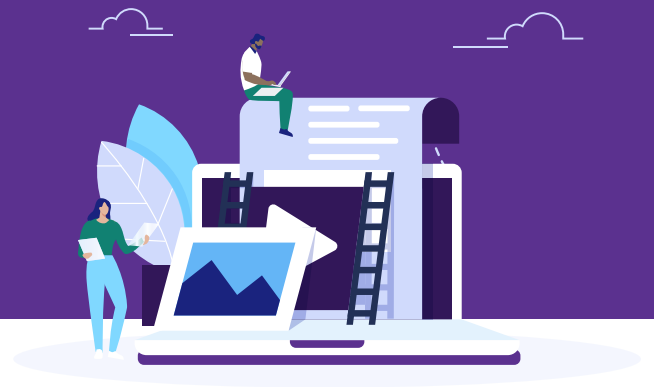
Shadow a Sales Call

What better way to find out what your leads want to learn more about than listening directly to them? Join in on sales calls to pay attention to how the conversations go and think about what kind of content you could create to educate them better.

It can be a struggle to come up with fresh topics. Next time you're sitting at your computer with writer's block, remember: You don't need to have all of the answers because — lucky for you — your team members likely do.

Chapter 8

The Content Creation Process



Create an Editorial Workflow

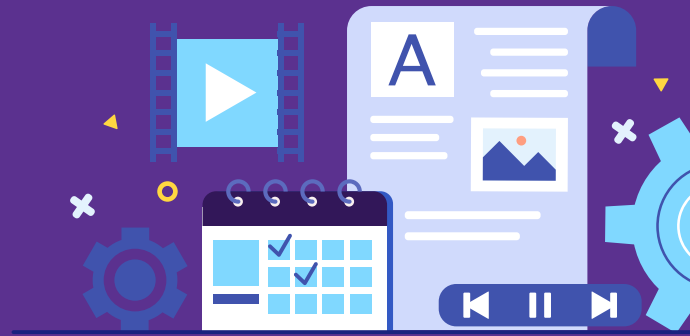
As with your content marketing strategy, documenting your editorial workflow is very helpful, but in this case, the purpose is to ensure your team is working efficiently. Your workflow is just the process your team agrees to use to nurture a content project from its conception to its final form and get it in front of your audience. It's basically a glorified process document.

The right workflow simplifies your content process. It outlines the journey of every piece of content you create, and it identifies who is in charge of each of those steps. An established process will prevent your team from wasting time and energy figuring out who's doing what every time you create a new piece of content.



Chapter 9

Get Your Content Out to the World

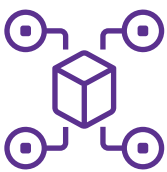


You worked hard to create content that will help you achieve your goals — but how much good will it actually do for you if your audience never sees it?

Content distribution is a crucial step in the marketing process. It's not just another task to cross off your to-do list, and it doesn't just make it easy to fill your social media posting schedule. It allows you to reach the members of your audience through a variety of channels and platforms and to build meaningful connections with them. The success of your content marketing efforts depends on it!

When and Where to Distribute Your Content

There's power in sending the right content to the right people at the right stage of their online journeys, and you can harness that power with strategic distribution.



Organic Social Media Distribution

Use your content to fuel your company's social media feeds, from Twitter to LinkedIn to Facebook and more. Use the right content distribution tools to expand your reach and impact, and be sure to tailor your messages to your audience on each platform.

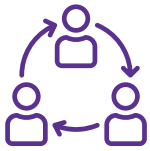
Don't stop at your company accounts, either. Members of your team have networks of their own, so encourage them to share content, too — and make it as easy as possible for them to do that by giving them all the tools they need. Platforms like Buffer and Hootsuite allow for your company and co-workers to plan ahead and distribute consistently.



Paid Amplification

A variety of options exists for paid amplification: everything from promoted tweets to sponsored content via Google Ads or sponsored posts on social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter. Different audiences will respond best to different platforms, so choose wisely and always test.

Highly targeted amplification is a great way to home in on a very targeted audience who might not already be aware of your company and to put your content directly in front of them. The key thing to remember is that paid amplification attracts consumers for only a brief period of time, and it costs money. (It is "paid," after all.) So unless you have a huge budget, it's not sustainable to rely on this as your only method of getting eyes on your content. By focusing on building up your own SEO, lead generation, and social media channels with an engaged audience, you will help ensure that your audience members are reading your content without having to rely on advertising dollars. Remember, though, that your content needs to be compelling and thoughtful enough to entice them to come back for more.



Internal Distribution

Encourage your team members to read and use your company content. It keeps them informed and up-to-date on industry trends, and they'll see the same information your audience views online, which is beneficial to almost all departments within the organization. Content is also a good tool to use when training employees, as it gives them valuable information about your company and products.



Email Newsletters

Your weekly or monthly email newsletter should basically just contain a roundup of all of your new published content. If you don't have enough content to fill an entire newsletter, you can also include a few relevant posts published outside of your site. Your subscribers will thank you for finding and delivering helpful content, and you can use this strategy as a tool to form new relationships with partners who might help share your content.



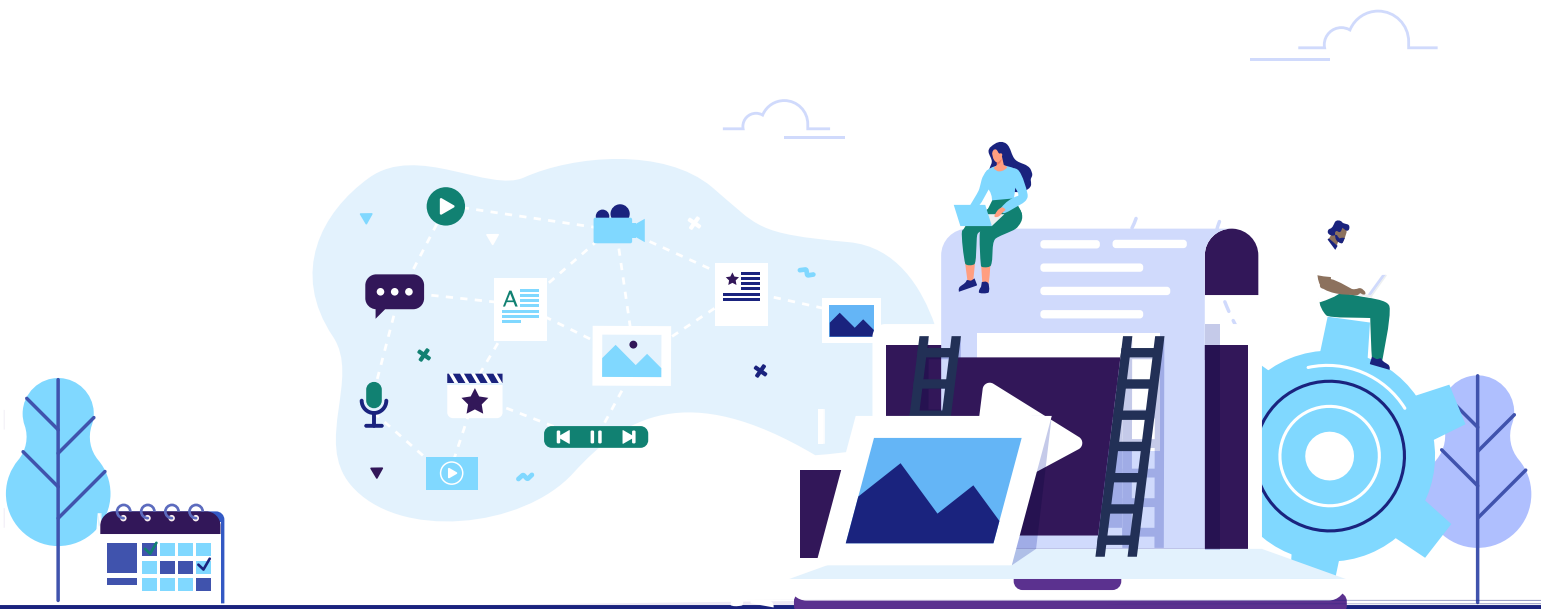
Client, Partner, and Influencer Distribution

Your current clients can be your greatest ambassadors. Encourage your most trustworthy clients to share articles and social posts on their own social media accounts and in their own newsletters. Form relationships with industry influencers, help promote and share their content when it makes sense for your audience, and ask them to return the favor.



Sales Enablement

When you arm the members of your sales team with content that educates prospects, answers questions, and breaks down barriers, you enable them to supplement their sales conversations, improve efficiency, and spend more time selling.



Chapter 10

Track the Results



Setting monthly goals for results and production and tracking key metrics can keep you and your team on track and help you measure ROI. What's most important is to define your goals upfront, communicate them to your team, and stick to them.

Content Marketing ROI

Content marketing is a long-term strategy. Not every piece of content you create will generate hundreds of leads, go viral on social media, or close your team's biggest sale. But beginning each piece of content with a clear idea of how it aligns with your strategy and what goals it can contribute to accomplishing will help ensure you're setting yourself up for continued success.

The Content Marketing Institute recently reported that only 21 percent of marketers believe they're successful at tracking the ROI of their content. Content marketing can impact your brand in many ways, and by putting each piece of content to work across your company, you will start to see true ROI from these efforts.

What Metrics to Track

Overall, your content marketing goals should be used as a basis to plan your content strategy and judge your performance. There is no magic benchmark or ROI number you can expect. It varies for every strategy and every team. The best things you can do are document, measure, and reset your goals and strategy to continuously push yourself and your team to content marketing success.

ROI: Balance Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics

There are two ways you should look at results. They're a lot like the two sides of your brain: One is very logical and data-driven, and the other is all about creativity and intuition. Different goals are achieved by using content in different ways, and understanding your effectiveness requires you to measure different metrics, both quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative metrics are all about focusing on data-driven impacts of content. They theoretically allow you to reverse-engineer break-even points, anticipated ROI, and timetables for success. Establishing measurable and attainable goals is crucial for all marketing and business efforts, so keeping track of specific goals and when you hit them is a must-do.

Quantitative metrics to measure:

- Website traffic
- Subscribers
- Number of leads
- Number of sales calls

Applying the qualitative mentality means remembering that content provides value to your organization beyond generating leads and sales. In fact, for any content marketing program, leads generated through content are just one part of a larger, more holistic picture of success.

Qualitative metrics to measure:

- Building trust
- Research and education
- Sales enablement and lead nurture

Keep in mind that content marketing is a long-term play. You need to give it a fair chance before you decide that you aren't seeing results. Let your content have the chance to connect with your audience — there's no instant route to building trust and relationships.

Optimizing Future Content for Success Based on Your Results

Once you compile both quantitative and qualitative metrics and see how they stack up next to your goals, you can start adjusting your strategy to keep improving.

By setting and documenting clear goals, identifying key metrics, and establishing a process that works for your team, you've basically set yourself up for success. But to see the best return on your efforts, you should always look back at your goals and your performance to find ways to improve, push yourself, and exceed your expectations.

We like to go back and look at our benchmarks on a quarterly basis. This gives us a chance to work through a really good or really bad month and see whether we set our expectations accurately. So if you're constantly having really good months and always blow your goals out of the water, raise them to make sure you're pushing yourself. And if you seem to have only bad months and are pretty far from hitting your goals, look instead at setting goals that are more realistic but still motivate your team.

How to Move Forward

Ultimately, the investment decision comes down to whether your company has the ability and financial resources to build a content marketing team in-house or whether it makes more sense to partner with an outside agency. You can continue to educate yourself more on the benefits of working with an agency at [Smart Partner Marketing](#).

Influence&Co.

Your Expert in Content Marketing

This guide is brought to you by Influence & Co., an award-winning content marketing agency that strives to make content marketing simple by providing our clients a full-service solution to help them strategize, create, publish, and distribute content that accomplishes their goals.