

Influence&Co.

The Ultimate Guide to Content Marketing





Contents

- 3..... What Is Content Marketing?
- 4..... Content Marketing Goals
- 6..... Essential Content Team Members
- 8..... How to Determine Whether You Should Hire an Agency
- 9..... The Value of Strategy
- 10..... The Tech You Need to Accomplish Your Goals
- 12..... Content Menu
- 14..... Everything You Should Know About Knowledge Sharing
and Internal Subject Matter Experts
- 15..... Why You Need a Distribution Strategy
- 16..... Results, Results, Results

What Is Content Marketing?

Content marketing is a modern tactic 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.

Consistent, high-quality content marketing is one of the most effective tools you have to reach your company's goals. Because content marketing is scalable and can be used across various departments in your company, it is considered one of the most versatile marketing tactics. From lead nurturing and brand management to sales enablement, recruitment, and more, content marketing is a game changer.

Before you jump into pumping out dozens of pieces of content as fast as you can, though, take a second look at what makes successful content so effective: It's high-quality and consistent.

Content Marketing Goals

Businesses' content marketing goals will vary greatly; however, there are hurdles that businesses of all types try to overcome on a regular basis. The key to a strong goal is that it be trackable — that way, success can be measured over time.

How to set goals based on common issues:

No one knows what your company does.

If you feel like your company doesn't stand out from the rest, you need to increase your brand awareness. This can help your company stay top of mind with potential customers so that when they have a need, they think of you first. This should be done by educating your audience in an interesting way about what you do rather than pushing your brand at them.

You aren't getting booked for speaking engagements.

Are your customers eager to listen when you have something to say? When readers find themselves consistently reading a brand's content, they start to see that brand in a new light, not only in terms of credibility, but also likability — and they want to see more. By publishing informative content that provides value outside of offering products, companies can develop a large, loyal customer base. The more your audience wants to hear from you, the greater the chances that conference organizers will take notice and ask you to tell your story at their event.

Your company has a ton of knowledge, but you aren't sharing it.

Your company and the people who make it successful probably know a great deal about your industry and have loads of information that people would be interested in. But if you're not sharing your expertise, you're getting overlooked by your ideal audience. It's time to show off what you know and use it to gain business traction.

You don't know what to write about.

Educating potential customers is one of the most efficient ways to put content marketing to work. When you have a strategy, the strategy fuels what you write about because there is a goal in mind. If you feel as though your company is just brimming with information your audience needs to know, start off by writing down the questions your sales team hears from clients. Those questions will spur ideas for your strategy and keywords and show you what it is that people need more information about.

You aren't keeping up with competitors.

If you've noticed that other companies are cranking out content that's getting a lot of attention from consumers in your industry, it's easy to feel like you need to step up your presence online. It's time to do some deep dives into your analytics and the keywords you're trying to rank for. You can then use that information to identify topics and create content that aligns with what you want to be ranking for and that fuels your already successful keywords. Content is pure gold when it comes to improving your SEO without paying for online advertisements.

You're hiring the wrong people.

Use content to showcase your company vision and culture via meaningful content. Don't spin your wheels posting jobs on career sites, hoping the best people are going to magically run across your listings. Instead, create and distribute high-quality content that will make great candidates think they are the perfect fit for your team. Make sure all of your content is an accurate representation of your brand and utilize keywords that your ideal candidates are looking for.

You need to make more sales.

In the long run, all businesses need to make sales in order to stay open. And to make sales, you have to have people who are looking for what you're selling. No matter how many eyes stumble upon your content or your website, if those eyes don't belong to people who are going to reach out and make a purchase, it's not working. Focus not just on finding an audience, but finding the right audience.

You need investors.

Investors who are passionate and driven are always on the lookout for more opportunities. If you're seeking investors, use guest-contributed articles and gated content to tell your story and demonstrate your expertise. And make sure that the content you're putting out to the world prompts audience members to take an action so that you can obtain their contact information. Sending potential investors your newsletter and including them in your email campaigns are two ways you can stay top of mind with them and remind them of your credibility.

You want to start hosting webinars or booking speaking engagements.

Getting the chance to speak to your audience face-to-face is a huge win for business leaders. It's an opportunity to really show off your personality, humanize your brand, and share valuable information while you have your audience's full attention. Increasing the number of people who are interested in hearing what you have to say is crucial, and you have to start somewhere. Creating content that proves you have the knowledge and insight to engage a large group of people is fundamental to taking your visibility to the next level.

You need:
Thought Leadership

You need:
SEO

You need:
Lead Generation

Thought Leadership

There are experts and strong leaders in every company. Getting those people's thoughts and ideas about your industry out to the world showcases the knowledge that exists behind the product or service. This earns customers' trust and humanizes your brand. There are two main ways content marketing enables this: guest-contributed articles and press mentions. Both of these deliverables enable your company's leaders to gain more exposure and share knowledge with members of the target audience.

SEO

It's the dream to be No. 1 on the list when people hit the internet looking for something within your industry. In order to make that happen, your content has to be created with their questions in mind. An SEO strategy needs to include keyword research, blogging, link building, and content distribution tactics. When SEO is your main goal, it's important for your content team to develop a strategy to optimize your content.

Lead Generation

Lead generation is the process of converting people who have heard about your company into people who want to buy from your company. This is accomplished through gated content, or pieces of content that readers are only able to access when they fill out a form. Once a reader provides certain information, such as name and email address, he or she gets access to that content, and the marketer on the other end has generated a new lead.

Essential Content Team Members

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

Keep in mind that as you form the team, you might discover that one person has certain skill sets that can be applied to more than one specific role. There is no magic number of members your content team should have; you need to take your company's abilities and resources into account.

You might also find it helpful to know that not every member of your team has to be physically in your office — outsourcing is an extremely effective way to accomplish your content goals. Keep reading for tips on outsourcing.

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



Subject matter expert.

A subject matter expert is an industry leader 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. Subject matter experts are people who fully immerse themselves in everything about their industries; they understand the inner workings of their own businesses and know their audiences and competitors to a T. A subject matter expert can be anyone in the company who has industry expertise and knowledge to share.



Content strategist.

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



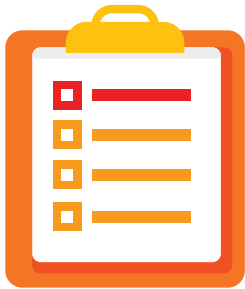
Writer.

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 on 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 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 writer have another person edit his or her content, as it's very difficult to spot errors in your own writing. Two sets of eyes are always 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.



Project manager.

Having someone really drive your content strategy helps ensure it's consistent and that everything is being accomplished that needs to be in a timely manner. A strategy is only as good as your ability to execute it. Having a project manager to keep the ball rolling on your strategy is crucial to success.



Graphic designer.

Content is only effective when it gets the attention it needs. Having someone on your team to create graphics for your blog posts, design whitepapers, and keep all of your collateral consistent with your brand is truly worth it. We're generally taught not to 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 in front of your target audience members and teaching them about your company.

The Power of Outsourcing

If building a content team in-house isn't going to work for your company, have no fear. There are several options to choose from when it comes to creating great content. Outsourcing is an excellent way to get the results you want without piling more responsibilities on current employees. Outsourcing is not a one-size-fits-all solution, however, and how you utilize it depends on what is best for your business model.

You can outsource 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 still have a full-time employee fully involved. 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.

How to Determine Whether You Should Hire an Agency

External content marketing companies can help you generate topic ideas, secure placements in online publications, earn PR opportunities, maximize your published content, and ensure your work is clean, professionally written and edited, and optimized for SEO — not to mention develop and refine your content strategy in the first place.

Questions to ask yourself:

- ☐ Are you happy with your current marketing efforts?
- ☐ Do you have the resources (time and people) to execute a content marketing strategy?
- ☐ What specific marketing tactics have you tried in the past?
- ☐ What worked and what didn't?
- ☐ 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?
- ☐ What is your marketing budget?

The two biggest factors when it comes to hiring an agency or not are time and money:

Time

Outsourcing content marketing is like hiring an architect. The professional has the knowledge and the tools; he or she just needs to get up to speed on your mission, preferences, goals, and timeline. That requires a period of onboarding, discovery calls, strategy, and knowledge sharing. Since this is time you would be spending on actually creating content yourself, getting the results from a content marketing expert at the cost of a little more time upfront is justifiable.

Money

When you've already got content marketing underway, it can be difficult to figure out how much you need to spend on outsourced efforts. PR and content marketing partners provide comprehensive services, which is different from your budget for one-off freelance writers here and there. And if your end goal is ROI, you're going to need to spend money to make money if you don't have the in-house resources to initiate a content strategy.

The Value of Strategy

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 will magically happen, but it does give your team specific things to work toward together — and that's powerful. The 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% vs. 14%).

What You Need to Do Before Documenting Your Strategy

- 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 provides the fuel for all strategies, including your content strategy. Your content should align with your brand, who you are, and what you do. Document a statement that communicates all that, and your team members will understand exactly what messaging they need to put out there.

What a Strategy Entails

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.

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.

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.

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.

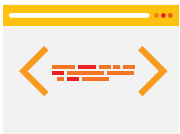
Distribution plan. The act of sharing published content is easy, but as it's becoming increasingly hard for publishers to achieve organic reach through traditional branded posts, they often end up paying for it — in more ways than one. When so much is invested, reaching the right audience is key, and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

The Tech You Need to Accomplish Your Goals

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



Project management software. The most important thing your strategy requires 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 type of platform for project management already, so you know how effective it is for businesses. Add your content strategy into your tasks to ensure that it all gets done and that your strategy is put into action.



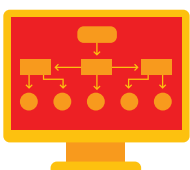
Marketing automation software. This is a tool that can save your team so much time and energy. Once your content is successfully created, it would be absolutely heartbreaking to forget to distribute it according to schedule. Marketing automation software allows you to preschedule your content distribution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



Graphic design software. If you hire a graphic designer to make your content look pretty, you're going to 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 or not your content is successful, you're going to 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, 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.

Our Process for Working With Our Clients

Our content process all takes place in ICo Core, our custom content marketing software platform. It allows our team members to communicate directly with the client, assign tasks to each other, view our progress toward goals, and more. Core visualizes and centralizes our workflow and allows each of us to focus our time, energy, and creativity on the parts of the content process we do best.

The most important thing to note is that before we get started on creating any content, we meet with our clients to discuss strategy, goals, and details on what we will be creating in the future. Once the client is successfully onboarded and the strategy is set, we're ready to get to work behind the scenes.

We write pieces of content for our clients in-house or tap into our network of freelance writers and content creators to help develop them.

After the content has been created, it moves into the first round of edits, during which our editors review the content with a comprehensive lens. We edit for format, flow, structure, tone, voice, and SEO.

Once a piece of content has been created and edited, it's passed back to the subject matter expert for review and approval. If it needs more work, another round of edits is performed. If it's approved, it moves on to our managing editors, who pass through each line with a fine-tooth comb to polish the content and get it publication-ready.

But don't think the content process is finished once an article is written, edited, and approved. It then has to be distributed and analyzed, and you'll notice that our workflow includes those steps, too.

Content Menu

Blog posts.

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 posts should focus on providing actionable and educational insights that truly benefit your readers.



Guest-contributed articles.

One simple method that can have big results is guest-contributed articles.

The point of this approach is for your subject matter experts to contribute original, high-quality articles 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 these articles 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 added to that ongoing push, they can provide valuable bursts 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. A drip campaign is exactly what it sounds like: a slow and steady stream of automated emails that are sent to members of your email marketing list. This 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.

An email newsletter is 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 to do this is by corralling all the content you created in one month into the newsletter, in case anyone on your list missed it.

Gated content.

To call content "gated" means that in order for readers to access it, 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 your readers and your company because they get to expand their knowledge, while your sales team can determine whether they are qualified prospects based on 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 posts, 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.



Everything You Should Know About Knowledge Sharing and Internal Subject Matter Experts

Yes, your content creators can research and write a perfectly useful, informative article, blog post, or whitepaper on their own for you to slap your name on. But in the end, what readers want are stories from real people they can relate to. We all prefer to be spoken to directly by a real human being when we're perusing our email newsletters and the articles that pop up in our social feeds. Generic case studies or newsy reports that could have been written by anyone — perhaps any of a dozen or more researchers, a conglomerate of corporate subject matter experts, a college intern with a great knack for Googling, or even a bot — are not going to have the desired effect. The human elements needed to draw audience members in and capture their attention simply can't be manufactured.

A Knowledge Sharing How-To

Gathering all the information needed for a piece of content will involve interviewing the relevant subject matter expert and storing his or her information in a knowledge bank to use on this piece and future ones. At this point, you should focus on getting key nuggets of information from your subject matter expert that will help set your content apart. You can gather this information via in-person interviews, phone interviews, or written Q&As. Any method can work; it just depends on your team members' preferences and communication styles.

How to Choose Your Subject Matter Expert

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 subject matter experts are your CMO, CTO, salespeople, and/or head of recruitment. Here are the three things that 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 subject matter experts 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 subject matter experts 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.

Why You Need a Distribution Strategy

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's not just about making it easy to fill your social media posting schedule. Content distribution allows you to reach the members of your audience through a variety of channels and platforms and build meaningful connections with them. The success of your content marketing efforts depends on it!

Go Beyond Your Normal Distribution Tactics

Of course you'll want to share out your published content on your various social media accounts, but have you considered expanding your tactics? Distributing your content in strategic ways makes it easier for the right audience members to get their hands on it at the right time.

Use content to nurture and qualify leads.

When your sales team members are talking with prospects, how are they further educating them to turn them into qualified leads? Instead of constantly reaching out and scheduling calls, sales reps can send helpful and relevant content that lets prospects learn more about your company and the ways you can help them overcome common pain points. It's a noninvasive way to nurture leads, and it doesn't cost a dime — the content's already there.

Add content to your newsletter or email campaign.

Not every company has an internal newsletter, but if you don't have some sort of email campaign set up for the members of your audience to join after they've visited your site, it's time to get with the program. Once you've created that, just add your content! It's unlikely your leads will know you're publishing content in niche publications unless you give them ample opportunity to discover it.

Distribute content internally.

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 exact 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.

Results, Results, Results

Content marketing is a long-term strategy. Every piece of content you create isn't going to 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 will help ensure you're setting yourself up for continued success.

The Content Marketing Institute recently reported that only 21% 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.

Understanding Your Results: Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics

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 that 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. Some key metrics to track if you're taking a quantitative approach to measuring content marketing ROI include:

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

Remember, though, that content offers more value to your organization than leads and sales, as important as those are. In fact, for any content marketing program, leads generated are just one aspect of a more holistic vision of success. Here are some less measurable but still significant ways content can impact your organization:

- Establishing thought leadership
- Building trust with your audience
- Enabling research and education

Keep in mind that content marketing is a long-term play. You need to give it a fair shake before you decide 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.

Content Marketing Is Not a Sprint

Content marketing is definitely not a quick-fix solution or sprint — it's a marathon that requires preparation and dedication. Success depends on paying attention to what is and is not working and making appropriate changes. Setting goals, documenting a strategy, creating great content, and tracking metrics are the must-dos of successful content marketing. The motivation is that if you put in the hard work, the outcome is truly worth it.

If you're inspired to take action with your content marketing strategy but still want more information, [set up a free consultation with us](#). We'd love to chat about your company's specific needs or answer any remaining questions you have so we can get you on the path to achieving your content goals.

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