Content Strategy

Sustainable Content Governance Guide

by Liam King

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Guide Overview

No one thinks outdated, irrelevant, reputation damaging content is a good thing. So why is the Internet littered with it? The truth is: sustaining good web content is hard, but it is achievable.

Content Strategy
Sustainable Content Governance Guide

by Liam King

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone responsible for the ongoing quality of a website's content - consider it a springboard into the much bigger world of content governance.

We'll introduce you to the key ideas and techniques for sustaining a great content experience:

› reflect on what sustainable content is and why it matters

› recognise the common causes of unsustainable content

› launch a sustainable site in the first place

› understand the people and skills needed to sustain content

› apply effective techniques and tools to sustain content

› learn how to enforce content standards over time

› and how to evaluate content

› recognise (and deal with) unsustainable content

› sell in content governance services to prospective clients (as an agency)

What is sustainable content and why does it matter?

Sustainable web content is a collection of content (like a website) that can be maintained at a high-standard, meeting user needs and business communication goals, for the entire duration of its life-cycle.

Several factors must align to achieve this:

› people have the necessary skills to maintain the content

› those people need sufficient time to dedicate to the content

› an ongoing focus and commitment from the organisation

› full oversight and awareness of the content

› ownership of specific content

› a manageable amount of content (for available resources)

Website content degrades when any of these factors slip, and that means the content no longer sufficiently meets the user needs and business communication goals.

At its worst unsustainable content can actively damage your reputation and have legal and financial consequences. 🐦

Over the coming chapters we'll explore techniques to stop this from happening.

"The value of content governance is that it creates a predictable, repeatable process that ensures that all content is created and managed to a defined and communicated set of standards."

PAULA LAND
Content Strategy Consultant

Design for Sustainable Content in the First Place

Design for Sustainable Content in the First Place

Here's an idea: let's get better at giving ourselves a fighting chance of sustaining our content over the longer term.

Truth #1 – Your content is degrading from the moment it is published

The temptation as we launch a new website with lots of shiny new content, is to think "job done." If you were publishing a book or an annual report, that's true (until the next edition). But for a website you are simply on Day 1 - stood at the start line.

The visual design and templates will probably start to look tired after a few years, and the codebase and CMS likewise as new technology and trends come along.

But your content could be out of date within days! A product price change, seasonal opening hours, application terms...

Content

Visual Style

Functional / Code

Time   Days ————————————————→ Years

A perennial example: you have a latest news panel on your homepage. Every day that passes without a new article eats away at the claim of "latest" until it loses any meaning and actually makes you look sloppy and unprofessional.

Truth #2 – We don't truly value our content

Unlimited digital publishing has lowered the barriers to publication, so much so, that we have unwittingly devalued content as something we can just "chuck up" on a site and leave it to decay.

Good content is an expensive and resource sucking business asset. 🐦 A single page of content will typically take 10-15 hours of combined effort to research, draft, review, upload, and publish (think of all the back and forth at the review / approval stage).

Truth #3 – Some sites will never be sustainable

Website (re)design projects are a time to dream big, when our egos are tickled by the opportunity to do something special. And that's fun, but in our excitement we forget to truly consider and plan for the longer-term sustainability of the site's content.

So we keep designing and building sites that overreach, run away from us, and bite us back.

If we dedicated as much time to considering ongoing content governance as we do to the new site's colour scheme, we wouldn't sleep walk into unsustainable content.

All that sweat, tears (and money) to launch something that can actually damage your brand and reputation. It's a common own goal.

"Digital governance is something all organisations struggle with. It's the one thing you'll need to change, if you want to create a website that meets your users needs and helps your business to achieve its objectives"

RICH PROWSE
Digital Editor-In-Chief

"Let's start a blog on the new site."

Coming up with ideas for new content channels and content types is both easy and tempting, but take a pause. If the previous site is already hopelessly out of date and there is no commitment to increase resources to maintain it, then you are going to make things even worse.

Truth #4 – Content governance just ain't exciting

True, it's not that exciting. Digital agencies and inhouse teams are happy to be distracted by the fun design work on a new site, but it is all in vain if nobody is thinking hard about the ongoing governance of the site's content.

A good digital agency will pro-actively help the inhouse team to design and implement a content governance plan before the end of the site project.

We're just the web agency - sustainable content's not our responsibility

Well it is actually. A good agency finds that balance between delivering something special that meets or even exceeds the brief and a site that the client can realistically sustain.

"Governance is a system, and like any system, it's easy to design something very large and complex. Gall's Law tells us that this doesn't work; we instead have to design simple systems that can evolve over time. If your content machine is already rolling, identify the biggest pain points and start with some very lightweight editorial practices to alleviate that pain. Test it out, get feedback on how that works, and look to expand that system. I've learned the hard way that a big top-down project to "assign" subject matter expertise and content ownership rarely sticks."

SCOTT KUBIE
Designer and Digital Strategist

It really doesn't matter how clever the CSS animations are if the latest news is six months old because the client has no dedicated writers after the project.

A client might ask for a blog in their brief, but have they considered the content challenge to sustain it month after month?

Before building anything, a good agency will assess the client's current and ongoing ability to sustain content, and challenge them if necessary. Some simple questions will reveal plenty: Who will write the blog? How many hours can they dedicate to it? How regular are their current newsletters (as a comparable channel)?

Truth #5 – Love for content dangerously fluctuates

It's time for an unscientific bell curve...
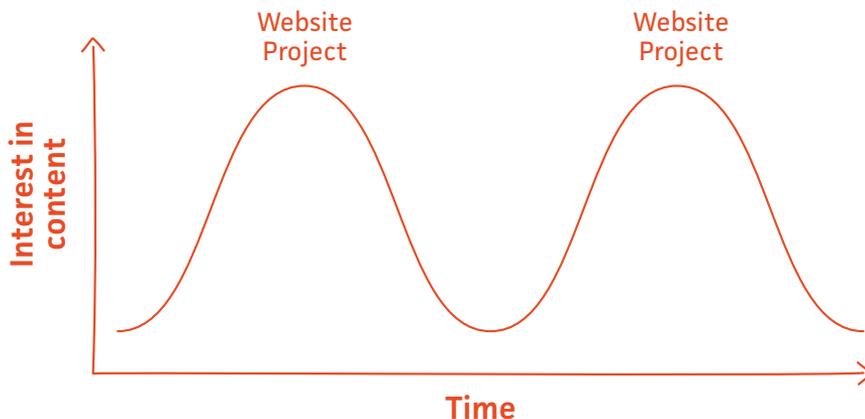
During a website (re)design project interest in web content spikes with lots of competing agendas around the organisation. These projects are a big deal for an organisation and centre stage (for a few months) with everyone wanting a piece of the action.

Then the site goes live, the web agency is paid their final invoice, contracted writers move on, distracted subject expert owners hurry back to their inboxes, and the project team shrinks back to the core few left to run the site.

This is when love (and attention) for the content wanes, until the next site redesign in a few years.

Why the fallout of love with content?

As a website owner be prepared for these things to happen at the end of your web project (and be ready to mitigate them):

›   no more budget for hired writers to dedicate significant time to the content

›   seconded project staff with content responsibilities return to the day job, especially the subject matter experts (SMEs)

›   been too busy getting the damn site live to put much thought into the content post-launch

›   the web agency that has driven the strategic thinking behind the site steps away

›   staff are wary of accepting ownership (and the required time commitment) for the content

›   the project adrenaline has worn off and there are other new "shiny" projects to work on

›   the content people are worn out from the intense project and ready for a break from the content

"It's impossible to overstate the importance of an empowered senior editor or editing team. Real power is the ability to say "no", even to the CEO. No, that's not up to our standards. No, this content isn't working anymore and has to go. No, we're not creating a new landing page just to solve this short-term problem. Many editors are empowered to say "yes, this will do", but fewer are empowered to say no when it really counts."

SCOTT KUBIE
Designer and Digital Strategist

Governing Live Content

Once a site is launched the challenge is to continuously maintain and improve its content for the rest of its life-cycle. Several components are necessary to achieve this:

Evaluation plan

Style guide

Content standards policy

Job Descriptions

Governance

Content production workflow

New content policy

Content review policy & schedule

Content inventory
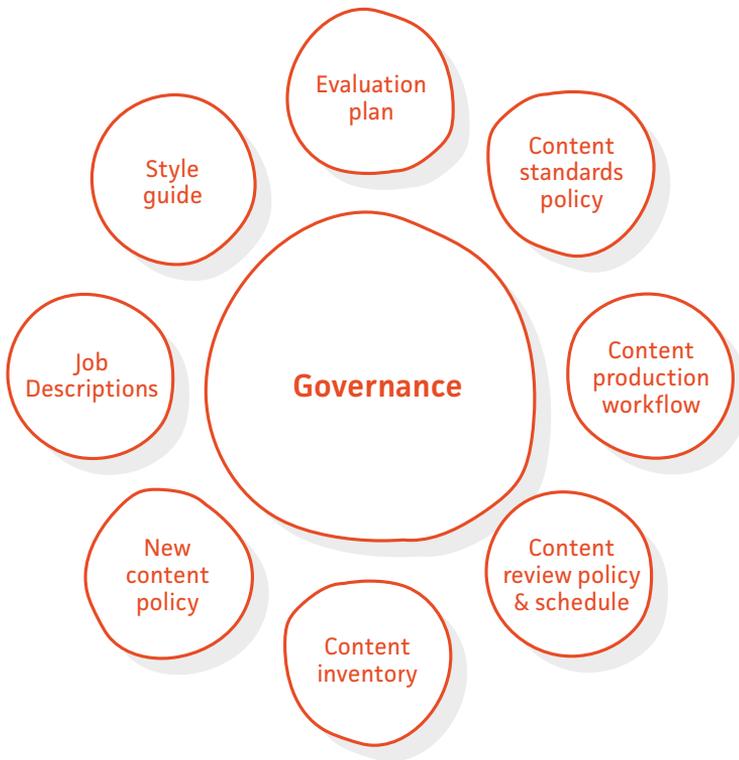
The content governance hats

Before we get into the tools and techniques of content governance, it's time to talk about the humans with the skills, resource, and commitment needed to maintain high-quality content over its lifespan.

Content may differ widely from site to site, but common roles need to be filled and performed.

Senior Editor

A good senior editor really is the key to successful content governance. 🐦

Responsibilities

› central to the development and execution of the content strategy

› has ultimate responsibility for the quality of the content experience

› champion and enforcer of the content style guide and brand

› coaches and supports the writers and producers

› coordinates content production and evaluation

› has final say on what content is published and archived

Skills

› significant digital communication experience

› intimate with the communication goals of the site and user needs

› domain knowledge (ideal)

But we don't have a Senior Editor

Not every site has a dedicated role of Senior Editor or comparable title such as Editor-in-Chief. The important thing is that someone or some people in your organisation can adopt this function. That might be the most experienced writer, website manager, or the marketing guy.

"Lots of organisations go through the process of restructuring their digital teams every few years. The cause of low quality, poorly performing digital content isn't related to the structure of the digital team. It's a lack of clarity over who does what, what standards to follow and what happens when they aren't met."

RICH PROWSE
Digital Editor-In-Chief

Writers and producers

It's not just about writers. Your content producers could include videographers, illustrators, animators, and photographers depending on your content.

Responsibilities

› create new content and update existing content

› collaborate with subject matter experts (SMEs)

Skills

› writing for the web experience

› ability to apply the style guide

› populate and edit the CMS templates

Producers may be in house staff or contracted third parties. More specialised skills such as videographer and illustrator will typically be contracted, which requires additional budget.

The rise of the Content Designer
The difference between a Web Writer and a Content Designer can be blurred, but the recent trend is for the producers of content to also actively design (and write) the content to meet the needs of users as clearly, simply and quickly as possible.

The implication is that simply crafting text on a subject to fill pre-defined templates will not sufficiently meet user needs.

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Responsibilities

› ongoing ownership of specific content

› collaborate with the writers and producers

› review new and existing content for accuracy

Skills

› the organisation's authoritative voice on the subject

› has access to the latest info on that subject

› values communicating their subject

Don't forget Marketing, or Legal!
Team's like marketing, legal, HR, finance may all want a say in the governance of your content too. Such team's have a habit of silo-thinking so you need to ensure they understand the bigger goals for the content.

Legal may want to prominently caveat every bit of content because that makes them feel like they are doing their job properly, but if that soon becomes a problem if it gets in the way and infringes on the user experience.

Don't neglect good training
All of these people need to be trained to perform their content roles. They need to be confident with the tools and documents you issue them and know who to talk to if they need support.

Have your governance hats in place before launch
These hats are usually heavily involved in a website project, scrambling to produce all the new content for launch.
The key is to ensure they don't all wander off as soon as it launches and that means setting expectations for their post-launch responsibilities.

Tip: Refuse to publish any content during the project if the SME doesn't agree to own it after launch.

Content Ownership Models

There are generally two main models for managing the ownership of web content in an organisation.

Centralised model

A central, core web team actively maintains the site's content. The team are dedicated, web professionals with the skills to produce, edit and publish content, in collaboration with the organisation's SMEs.

Pros

› web experts with dedicated focus on the content

› have control over what content is published and removed

› wider view of the digital strategy and the site's communication goals

› produce better quality content that applies the style guide

Cons

› expensive to fund permanent web roles

› central web teams are often busy with other projects and regular content governance can slip

› the SMEs are still required to collaborate on content

Devolved / federated model

The ownership and maintenance of the content is distributed around the organisation (usually to the SMEs). Responsibility for their content is added to their regular day job and they are (hopefully) trained how to maintain their content, including writing for the web best practice, applying the style guide, and using the CMS.

Example: the responsibility for an organisation's Intranet pages about annual leave would be devolved to someone in the Human Resources department.

The central web people set the overarching strategy and support the devolved editors.

Pros

› don't need to employ extra staff to maintain the content

› appropriate for a small web team (or single person) with too much content to maintain

› empowers the SMEs to have genuine ownership and responsibility to maintain and improve their content

› reduces bottlenecks for central team resources

Cons

› SMEs are not typically employed for their web communication skills and often struggle to write concise, goal-orientated, user-centric content*

› higher risk of poorly written, sub-standard content, that is inconsistent in style and tone

› SMEs are juggling their existing day job and maintaining their content is often a secondary priority

› SMEs are less likely to appreciate the wider strategy and goals of the site (as they have an understandable silo mentality)

* Colleen Jones calls this "SME Syndrome" when they include every last detail about their subject.

Many organisations settle on a hybrid model that brings the benefits of both models, especially when some types of content don't need central control and can be devolved:

› press releases by the Press Office

› job adverts by HR

› events by Marketing

Content Inventory

If you are going to effectively govern a site's content you need to maintain an accurate content inventory 🐦 so you can continuously answer:

› what content do we actually have?

› who owns it?

› what state is it in?

› what needs our attention next?

This isn't the place to get into the nitty gritty of producing your site inventory and GatherContent's Content Strategy: A Project Guide has a dedicated chapter on conducting a site content audit.
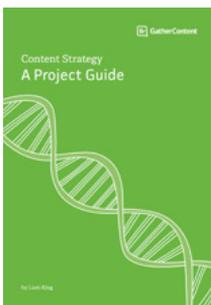
Content Strategy: A Project Guide

How to take your project content-first, from sales to delivery.

DOWNLOAD

"The ROT model is a great tool for tagging your thoughts about individual content during a rolling inventory. In my practice, I use WROT — Weak, Redundant, Outdated, Trivial. "Weak" allows you to identify content that isn't well-written or up to your current standards, while reserving "Outdated" for content that is literally out-of-date and no longer correct. This has been helpful for me when sharing the results of an audit with others, as updating or removing old content and rewriting bad content can be different sorts of projects."

SCOTT KUBIE
Designer and Digital Strategist

Identify risky content

Once you have populated your content inventory, label the pieces of content that will need more attention than the rest. Look out for content that is:

› in the future tense / upcoming (or referring to something upcoming)

› seasonal content, e.g. Christmas or Summer holidays

› likely to be replaced / surpassed in time, e.g. "Our latest Annual Report"

› named people (people have a habit of moving on)

› prices and new products / services

Log this in your inventory as a dedicated column or tag so you can easily filter for high risk content.

Tip: Try to flag risky content when it is being produced. It will be easier than checking through everything afterwards. A quick note in the sitemap plan is all it takes.

Reviewing existing content

A Content Review Policy sets out your ongoing approach to maintaining high-quality content.

Content review checklist
Each reviewer should be guided by some sort of checklist (in the Policy) to ensure all content is reviewed properly:

☐ does the content sufficiently help meet a validated, priority user need?

☐ does it help meet a business communication goal?

- is it redundant, out-of-date or trivial content (so called "ROT" content)?
- is it at risk of "rotting"?
- is it actually correct, on message, still saying the most important things?
- are there any errors - typos, broken links, poor grammar?
- does it follow the style guide - house rules, voice and tone?
- is it duplicated elsewhere (word for word or the same topic)?

Content review outcomes

The reviewer should record one of these three decisions for each piece of content they look at:

1. Keep - all good and no updates required
2. Keep and revise - some updates are required to maintain the quality of the content
3. Remove or archive* - no longer meeting user needs and business goals

* You may need to archive content so it is no longer on the site but still available. There may be a legal requirement to do this.

Apply strict review dates to content

You need a way of ensuring and checking content is being reviewed on a regular basis. Waiting for someone else to alert you to poor content is not a great tactic.

You may want to handle this in your CMS by configuring a 'Next review due' field for each piece of content. The reviewer can reset that date once they have checked the content is ok. Have a word with the CMS techs about this.

Try to flag risky content
when it is being
produced. It will be
easier than checking
through everything

🐦 **CLICK TO TWEET**

If you do this in your CMS or in a content inventory spreadsheet or tool, you can usually filter for content that is outside its review period and ready for attention. Alert emails can also be triggered and sent to the named reviewer to prompt them.

Some organisations set different review lengths for different types of content. A product page may need to be reviewed quarterly, while a history of the company page on an annual basis. This is largely determined by the likelihood of content falling out of date.

Remember that anyone assigned as a reviewer, such as a subject expert, needs to be on board. Ideally reviewing content should be a formal part of their job description so it actually happens.

Content Production Workflow

Website content needs a documented workflow process that everyone can follow. There are lots of things to consider and define:

- what stages does a new piece of content go through?
- who is responsible for each stage?
- how is the content reviewed and signed off?

The process should be owned and enforced by the person (or people) assigned with the Senior Editor duties and communicated to all content owners so they know the rules.

Our Content Strategy: Content Production Planning guide is a great resource for designing and documenting an editorial process.

Editorial calendars (for new content)

There is nothing new about editorial calendars - they have been helping organisations focus and articulate their content roadmaps long before the Internet came along. And they work.

Benefits of an editorial calendar

› a single view (for everyone) of what's coming up

› accountability - "we said we would publish Article X by last week"

Obviously a calendar isn't much use if there is no one with time to work on the content.

Make your calendar a success

› consider who is going to use it and their needs, e.g. the Senior Editor will run through it in the weekly editorial meeting

› have a clear owner responsible for its upkeep - typically the Senior Editor

- › keep it simple - no points for an overly complicated sheet that confuses everyone

- › ensure easy access - use a format and location that works for the team

- › be realistic and savagely prioritise content ideas before they are committed to the calendar

Read the GatherContent blog post Establishing an Editorial Calendar with Your Team to get cracking with your own calendar.

Calendar options galore

Fortunately there are plenty of templates and tools ready for you to use: generic spreadsheets and calendar software, work management tools, and purpose built editorial calendar tools. The Writtent blog summarises 15 options:

Our tip: if you aren't already using GatherContent which has an inbuilt editorial calendar, then start simple with a Google Sheet. It is free, easy to use, flexible, collaborative, and accessible in a browser

Content Style Guides

Style guides help us to produce (and maintain) consistent, high-quality web content. Never an easy task. Content style guides typically include:

Style guide sections	
Voice and tone	Guides writers to craft content that is consistent with how the organisation wants to sound. Usually includes examples of the voice personality attributes, e.g. authoritative, passionate, empathetic, irreverent.
House style rules	A reference of accepted spelling, grammar, formats, and punctuation for all content, e.g. number formats, handling acronyms, sentence case or title case for subheadings. This builds over time as more rules are defined.
Do say / Don't say terms	Do say 'use'... Don't say 'utilise'. Do say 'Balmain University'... Don't say 'BU'. This builds over time as preferred terms are agreed on.
Writing for the web guidance	A reminder of the proven techniques for effective web copy, e.g, hierarchical subheadings, inverted pyramid (say the most important thing first), one idea per sentence, write in an active voice.

Read the GatherContent blog post How to Make Style Guides That People Will Use to produce your own.

"Human nature makes governance tricky. Even the nicest, smartest, most well-intentioned people are going to seek the path of least resistance when it comes to writing, particularly if what they've been asked to write isn't, in their view, part of their day job. It's comforting to imagine a newly-enlisted writer turning to your style guides and checklists as step one, but more likely than not they're going to copy-and-paste some bits from your existing site or blog and start to reshape them into what they need. Well-curated collections of actual content that adhere to your guidelines give your writers what they want — something to get them started — while still encouraging best practices."

SCOTT KUBIE

Designer and Digital Strategist

Style guide adoption is the hard part

Like any other well meaning document, style guides have a nasty habit of dropping out of consciousness which is a bad thing for the ongoing consistency and quality of your content.

› assign clear ownership (typically the Senior Editor) and communicate who is in charge

› continuously iterate the guide over time as missing elements and inconsistencies bubble up - this will happen a lot in the beginning

› make it as accessible as possible and easy to print off and pin up - wikis and Intranet page/s are always good and ideally embedded in the CMS

› keep it simple - no points for scaring people off from using it because it covers every last detail

› issue it with all briefs to content producers (especially third-parties)

› enforce the style guide with consequences, e.g. temporary removal of content that does not conform

› get senior buy in for the guide and its enforcement to harness the authority to punish offenders

› run training for the guide's users - sell the benefits and explain when to use it and the consequences of not using it

› style can be pretty subjective so include worked up examples of content in the guide

Don't reinvent the style guide wheel

'Website' or 'web site'? 'local council' or 'local authority'? '1 million' or '1,000,000'?

Big publishers have already wrestled with (and ruled on) many of the inconsistencies that will try to creep into your content.

So pick an existing, well-respected style guide (sometimes called a "global" style guide) and add a handy link to it from your guide.

You can then just concentrate on detailing the stuff that is specific to your organisation, like product names.

Good guides (for British English): GDS Style Guide A-Z, and the Guardian and Observer Style Guide. And the Economist Style Guide is good option for American English.

"Governance is about creating a set of guidelines that everyone can follow. If your organisation isn't comfortable with the idea, find out why. Sometimes people don't understand what governance is and how it can help them in their day-to-day role"

RICH PROWSE
Digital Editor-In-Chief

Take the Power Back

Web teams often feel unempowered, ignored, pushed around by other parts of an organisation, relegated to little more than glorified publishers. The content consequently suffers.

But think about how strong a web team's position is:

› possess the expertise on web communication and content in the organisation

› have the the wider view of the site's goals, user needs and content

› have responsibility for the overall (high) quality content experience

› have the CMS administrator privileges to take decisive action on the content

Prioritise content hard and learn to say "no"

Don't make the problem worse by allowing more inappropriate, poor quality content to be dumped onto the site.

Tool: New content requirements checklist / policy
You need a checklist that all new content must conform to:

▫ What identified user need does this content help meet? What's the evidence?

▫ What business communication goal does this help meet? How?

▫ Have we checked existing content doesn't already do this, or could with some moderation?

▫ Who will own this content for its life-cycle?

To ensure the checklist succeeds:

› communicate the importance and benefits of it to people well before they start working on new content and come up against it

› make it easily accessible for reference (on the Intranet or linked from the CMS for example)

› get public, senior endorsement (ready to back you up when you get resistance)

› consistently enforce it - if you make an exception its legitimacy and effect is weakened

› pull down any newly published content that does not comply with the requirements

Pull down poor content

What about poor content that already exists on the site? Content that has been allowed to drift out of date? Or is no longer meeting user needs?

Tool: content standards policy
Have a policy that empowers you to remove any piece of content that is not meeting appropriate standards: 🐦

▫ outdated or irrelevant

▫ not reviewed within the agreed review period

▫ does not have a named and engaged owner taking active responsibility for it

▫ not achieving sufficient levels of engagement

▫ failing against other specific Key Performance Indicators

To ensure the policy succeeds:

› ensure all content owners have agreed to the policy

› get senior buy-in (ready for when the emails start to fly)

› define the process for taking down pages to be consistent and fair

› give fair warning of your threat to take down pages

› offer support and guidance to struggling owners (carrot and stick)

› don't bluff and be prepared to make an example to show you will act

Of course: you need to create the right environment for content owners to encourage positive behaviour. If you fail to train them how to perform their content responsibilities, including the use of tools, don't be surprised if they don't engage with their content.

Prune content

Too many sites are allowed to clog up with content over time. Navigation systems and search struggle, duplication creeps in, and users are left confused. Less it truly more when it comes to content.

So take every opportunity to remove content that is no longer meeting user needs and business goals, and let your content breathe.

Focus on short lived content types like job ads, events, seasonal promos that quickly fade from relevance. Remove or archive them ASAP.

Chapter Three

Evaluating Content Performance
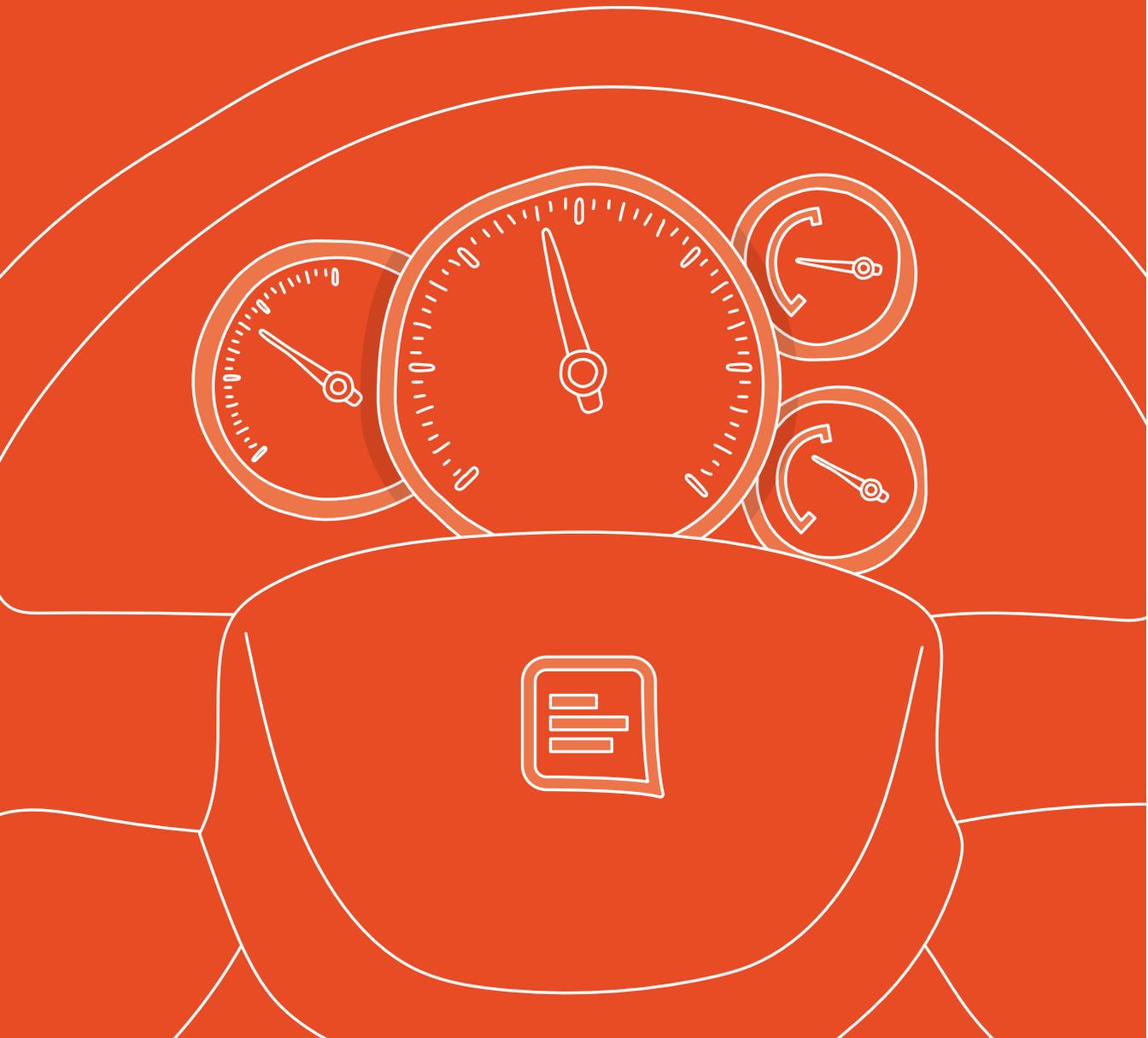
Why Bother to Evaluate Content

Realistically, content evaluation isn't a top priority for website owners. Finding the time to produce new content is hard enough. But we are missing a pretty big trick when we don't.

Here are just a few reasons to evaluate content:

› ensure content is continuing to meet user needs

› ensure it is still meeting business goals

› identify and deal with outdated and erroneous content (before it damages the user experience and your reputation)

› identify unsustainable content (and deal with it)

› increase ROI on existing content

› learn what is and isn't working and stop repeating mistakes with new content

› identify content ready to remove and / or archive

Good Evaluation looks a bit like this

Regardless of the site, type of content, audience, and scale - there are common principles for good content evaluation:

› design a plan so it actually happens (ideally before launch)

› know what success looks like in advance with benchmarks to compare with

› regularly evaluate

› focus on actionable insights

- › assign ownership / responsibility for performing any evaluation

- › communicate evaluation insights

- › have the people and time to act on insights

- › be selective - better to focus on a few aspects to evaluate than trying to look at everything

- › gather insight from a range of inputs such as usability testing, audits, and web analytics

Design and Implement a Content Evaluation Plan

Starting off with a simple plan with some basic details is all you need.

Be clear about the communication goals of your site to design a few meaningful and relevant KPIs 🐦 to evaluate if your content is helping to achieve them.

A communication goal could be: 'Build awareness of our services with prospective customers', or 'Build our credibility in subject area X'.

The table includes some popular and insightful KPIs to consider using when measuring the success of your content:

KPI	Why measure this?	Eval method	Freq	Responsible	Actions
All pages have an engaged owner [A governance metric]	Content without a responsible owner is at risk of becoming outdated	Update and review content inventory for gaps	Quarterly	Senior editor	Assign ownership or remove the content.
All pages have been reviewed within their review date [A governance metric]	Pages that haven't been reviewed are at risk of being out of date or irrelevant	CMS report to filter all pages past their review date	Monthly	Senior editor	Instruct owners to review their content ASAP or it will be removed
Each blog post has over X new visitors per month [A consumption metric that could be adjusted for any area of a site]	Consumption metrics like this are quite basic and don't tell the whole story, but they do give an idea of what users are interested in. Unpopular content needs attention	Google Analytics report	Monthly	Senior editor	Re-promote older blogs OR remove or update old blogs that have lost relevance
All support pages are rated helpful or very helpful by users [An engagement metric that could be adjusted for a star scoring or a thumbs up /down method]	Metrics from direct user feedback are powerful indicators of success (or not)	CMS report for user ratings on all support section pages	Monthly / Quarterly	Senior editor / page owners	Review struggling pages and update or remove
X% of new visitors to our dedicated landing pages are subscribing to the email newsletter [A conversion metric that could be adjusted to measure any desired user action - download a PDF guide, submit an enquiry, sign up...]	Understand what content is or isn't driving desired actions for your users.	Google Analytics reports with configured conversion goals	Monthly / Quarterly	Senior editor / page owners	Review poorly performing content and update or remove.

Evaluation plan checklist

When you are designing your evaluation plan ask yourselves:

- Are the KPIs SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound)?

- Have we benchmarked the KPIs so we can measure improvement?

- Will the insights be actionable?

- Is the method configured? It may require some technical skill to set up first time.

- Is the person responsible aware, skilled, and resourced to perform their role?

- Who is going to see the evaluation? What format is appropriate?

- Do we have enough time to evaluate properly and consider what it means?

"If you're making a case for budget next year for a new website, consider this. Content is a commitment. You wouldn't buy a car unless you had plans to maintain it. Same thing goes for content. Consider additional costs to produce fresh content, and to maintain it. How many people are needed on a daily basis? A website is never as simple as a single line item in a project plan or a marketing budget so make sure you can maintain a commitment to content so that new website isn't a wasteful investment.

MARGOT BLOOMSTEIN
Principal of Appropriate, Inc.

Selling Content Governance to Clients

Hopefully we've made a strong case for content governance in this guide. Now it's time to sell content governance services to prospective clients.

What can you sell in?

› a Content Governance Plan and associated docs:

- content inventory / audit
- editorial calendar
- content standards policy
- evaluation plan
- content requirements checklist / policy
- content production (editorial workflow) process design

› configure Google Analytics and other evaluation methods

› coaching on effective content governance

› a retainer to perform the evaluation of content (post-launch)

The benefits for clients

› improve the ROI for their expensive content

› don't let outdated and inaccurate content threaten the overall user experience and damage reputation

› delay the cost and disruption of starting over again with a new site (because the content got too bad)

An interview with

Melissa Breker

Why does having sustainable content matter?

If it doesn't matter how much money, time and content resources you waste, then don't worry about sustainable content.

From an efficiency standpoint, sustainable content looks at the entire content lifecycle. It means getting the job done right the first time. No "dump and done". It allows you to develop content tasks, estimate time, set up workflows, and oversee content requirements up front. It's also cheaper, easier, and faster to maintain content once you know how it's going to be managed and maintained.

From a customer experience perspective, sustainable content builds trust by identifying what content needs to be updated and when. The result is a more consistent brand experience across all content.

Most importantly, sustainable content ensures you continually develop and evolve your content vision. It means improving how you communicate and plan for your content long-term.

When should governance first be discussed during a project?
The earlier you discuss governance, the better. It should be discussed as part of the initial conversation, even before the project plan is finalized.

Governance can mean different things to different people. At the beginning of the project, you can use the five pillars of content governance to help define your project requirements.

Understand the impact governance can have across the content team and what you can influence. If you're part of content team, make sure you address key questions around content leadership that are appropriate for your role. Then discuss, evaluate, and evangelize as part of a holistic content strategy to drive strategic change.

Who should be responsible for governance?
Everybody needs to be responsible for governance, but ultimately, one person should be accountable for getting it done.

For larger organizations, a team of key stakeholders can provide content leadership and ensure different roles and responsibilities are considered. This team should schedule regular meetings to make sure content governance has monitoring and oversight.

For smaller organizations, one person can be accountable, but it is up to them to advocate across the company.

In all cases, authority is key. You need to choose a team or person who cares about content. They must be passionate about creating great experiences online, identifying the workflow and processes, and finding people to get it done.

How can we sell governance to clients or stakeholders?

Understanding your client or stakeholder's needs is the first step in selling content governance. Determine the specific pain point they are looking to resolve with the project.

It could be:

- Inefficient content: "We don't know what's working but we keep creating more content."editorial calendar

- Inconsistent content: "We haven't defined standards based on content types."evaluation plan

- Content re-use: "We'd like to re-use content but don't understand the people, workflows, and process required to do that."

- Strategic content: "We need to schedule content strategically vs. react to content requests."

Once you understand the problem, you can make a business case to show how the content team can solve it.

Remember, small changes can create a big impact.

For example, if you refine how content is reviewed by setting up content policies, then you save time not only on the content creation side, but also on the reviewing side. The result is a happier team, which means better content and a better experience for your users.

It comes down to saving time, money, and resources, then having the right people to create, publish, manage, and maintain content with a long-term view.

Thanks for Reading

We hope you have found this brief exploration of content governance valuable.

Launching a new website really is just the beginning and it takes some good planning and lots of ongoing, hard work to sustain high-quality content over the months and years.

We've only been able to scratch the surface of this broad topic and included some recommended reading for you to dig deeper.

Do let us know how you get on!

Recommended Reading Books

› **Content Strategy for the Web**
  Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach

› **The Elements of Content Strategy**
  Erin Kissane

› **Content Audits and Inventories: A Handbook**
  Paula Ladenburg Land

› **Clout, the Art and Science of Influential Web Content**
  Colleen Jones

› **Content Strategy at Work**
  Margot Bloomstein

About the author

Liam King

Liam is Founder of Lagom Strategy, a UK consultancy specialising in UX and sustainable content strategy.

With over a decade of content production and strategy experience in the UK and Australia, Liam has built up a wealth of practical knowledge on how to put content back at the heart of web projects.

Liam was previously Senior UX Architect / Content Strategist with Sydney agency, Digital Eskimo, where he introduced and led the agency's successful content strategy services. Before heading to Australia in 2009, Liam was a Web Producer at the UK Parliament and the Senior Web Editor at the UK Foreign Office.

Liam also has a Masters degree in Web Journalism.

SCOTT KUBIE
Designer and Digital Strategist

Scott Kubie is a designer and digital strategist from Des Moines, Iowa, USA. He uses writing, modeling, and editorial strategy to design digital products and services, and coaches teams on how to do the same. When not on the road for a conference or client workshop, Scott can be found popping tags at the thrift shop for Mugbum andHartford & Union. He'd love to meet your pug and will have a sparkling water please, thank you.

PAULA LAND
Content Strategy Consultant

Paula Land divides her time between being a content strategy consultant and a technology entrepreneur. As founder and Principal Consultant at Strategic Content, she develops content strategies and implementation plans for private clients ranging from nonprofits to large technology companies as well as partnering with other agencies on large-scale projects. As co-founder of Content Insight, she is the impetus behind the development of CAT, theContent Analysis Tool, which creates automated content inventories. Paula is also the author of Content Audits and Inventories: A Handbook (2014, XML Press).

RICH PROWSE
Digital Editor-In-Chief

Rich is Digital Editor-In-Chief at the University of Bath where he leads a 7 strong team responsible for bath.ac.uk. For the past 10 years he has led on digital content efforts at top-ranking English universities.

He regularly talks at higher education conferences on content strategy, agile content development, and user experience design. Rich most recently featured as an industry expert in .net magazine's Exchange column. He is also Co-founder of Bath's first content meetup.

MARGOT BLOOMSTEIN
Principal of Appropriate, Inc.

Margot Bloomstein is the principal of Appropriate, Inc., a brand and content strategy consultancy, and the author of Content Strategy at Work: Real-World Stories to Strengthen Every Interactive Engagement. She helps companies create brand-appropriate user experiences to engage their audiences with consistency and clarity.

Over the past 15 years, she's helped companies as a creative director, content strategist, and user experience design consultant. She helped shape corporate social responsibility efforts at Timberland, alumni relations at Tufts University, and cultural tourism strategy for the state of Nevada.

Her clients also include Lovehoney, Lindt and Sprüngli, Delhaize, Harvard, and Sallie Mae. A SXSW featured speaker, Margot speaks internationally on topics in user experience design and content strategy. Recent engagements include Confab Central, HOW Interactive Design Conference, UX Lisbon, CS Forum Frankfurt, Confab, and Web 2.0. She tweets prolifically at @mbloomstein.

MELISSA BREKER
Co-founder and Content Strategist

Melissa is founding partner at Content Strategy Incorporated, a Vancouver agency that helps large companies to meet their business and customer-experience goals by changing how they think about content.

Recent clients include Wells Fargo, Samsung, and lululemon.

Melissa has a background in marketing communications where she created systems to support targeted, goal-oriented content. She has taught content strategy at the University of British Columbia and has designed an online course for the Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs. She's passionate about connecting people and making a difference through content strategy. She mentors and supports new content strategists through in-house training at Content Strategy Inc and through teaching at Langara College.

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