



# DEFINITIVE



to Planning a New Content Initiative















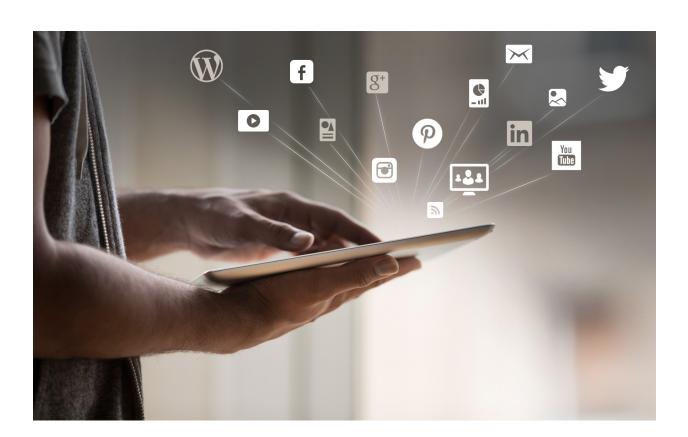


#### Introduction

For the last decade, DivvyHQ's founders have been helping the world's leading marketers to plan and produce effective content for their respective companies. In that time, we've experienced first-hand how much time, effort and thought is required to get a new content initiative planned, launched and firing on all cylinders.

In today's noisy digital world, it's more important than ever that marketers have a well-defined strategy for each content initiative. At Divvy, we work closely with many of our customers to help them think through their strategy and the realities of what it will take for them to execute successfully and sustainably.

Before you and your team get too deep into the weeds of execution, please spend some time with this ebook to ensure your new initiative is set up for success.

















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### What is the primary purpose or mission of this content initiative?















### What is the primary purpose or mission of this content initiative?



Seems obvious, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it's not all that uncommon for marketers to have a hard time articulating the purpose of their various initiatives. There are way too many shotguns at this party. And vague answers like "building brand awareness" or "to generate more leads" aren't good enough. You need to dig deeper. You need to create a purpose that delivers a specific value for the targeted recipient of this content.

If you were to ask any content marketing expert "Where do we start?", most answers will come down to the same idea: you need to figure out the "why" before you start tackling the "what".

Meghan Casey, lead content strategist at Brain Traffic, suggests finding your organization's core strategy (or mission) statement by breaking it down into four smaller questions:

- 1. Content product: What content should we produce, procure, curate, and share?
- 2. Audience: Who, specifically, is that content for? (More on this below)
- 3. User needs: Why do those audiences need or expect that content from us?
- 4. Business Goals: What outcomes does providing this content help us achieve?

Answering these questions is the first step. Crafting your mission statement (the very purpose behind your content initiative) will help to steer your focus as you make content-related decisions. Let's take a look at an example:

L'Oreal's Makeup.com is an owned brand destination for women with a high level of interest in all things beauty. Behold their mission statement, per their website:

"We are driven by a commitment to create a platform where by all women can reach their ideal level of beauty. Whether she changes her look depending on her mood or is all about keeping it natural, she's sure to find the beauty tips, tricks and products that work just for her. Our goal is to create a personalized, educational, and, most of all, fun experience for all women who are looking to get their daily dose of beauty. We do so by caring deeply about the content we produce, obsessing over new products and by possessing insider access to industry experts and a behind-the-scenes look at some of our favorite beauty brands. We know that trends are important but we're realistic."















Let's winnow it down, using Casey's framework for crafting a core strategy statement:

"We are driven by a commitment to create a platform where by all women (audience) can reach their ideal level of beauty. Whether she changes her look depending on her mood (user need) or is all about keeping it natural (user need), she's sure to find the beauty tips, tricks and products that work just for her. Our goal is to create a personalized, educational, and, most of all, fun experience (content product) for all women who are looking to get their daily dose of beauty (user need). We do so by caring deeply about the content we produce, obsessing over new products and by possessing insider access to industry experts and a behind-the-scenes look at some of our favorite beauty brands (business goal). We know that trends are important but we're realistic."

In this case, the business goal is implicit: Makeup.com doesn't only promote L'Oreal products, but a quick look at their list posts reveals that L'Oreal products are suggested as drugstore options in every single post (in addition to higher-end luxury brands), helping build trust in the brand. This initiative adheres to content marketing ideology by stating the needs and desires of its customers rather than explicitly expressing "We want to sell L'Oreal makeup".

According to Meghan Casey's statement outline, if any piece of content that Makeup.com puts out doesn't adhere to the four components of a successful core strategy statement, it doesn't fit in and has no place being a part of the initiative.

Think of your mission, or core strategy statement, as you make content-related decisions: does this piece of content adhere to our centralized purpose? Or are we just seeding a piece of fluff to appease our sales team? Thoughtfully craft your mission statement and broadcast it in a location easily located by your audience. Keep your content creators on track by continuing to reinforce it in meetings, on walls, or via internal company communication.



## Who is the target for this content initiative?















#### Who is the target for this content initiative?



As a seasoned marketer, you know that identifying and understanding the ideal audiences for your products or services is vitally important. Heck, you learned that in your Marketing 101 class in college. But the days of creating an ad that will appeal to the masses are over.



"If your content marketing is for everybody, it's for nobody."

Joe Pulizzi

All too often, today's marketers are taking that same approach with their content by creating "one-size-fits-all" content assets in the hopes that they will resonate with all audiences they target. In reality, today's savvy consumers recognize immediately that a piece of content isn't relevant to their specific situation and bounce (literally in some cases).

This relevance issue takes on even bigger significance when you consider the amount of time and resources that go into launching and feeding one-size-fits-all content properties like corporate website, blogs or all-customer email newsletters. Countless content marketing research reports (like this one, slide 9) reinforce that audience relevance is the largest contributor to the effectiveness of content. So if your existing properties or channels are struggling to move the needle, perhaps you need a different approach.

In a 2014 article by Joe Pulizzi, CEO of the Content Marketing Institute, Joe told the story of a large technology company (a fortune 100 company) that had 18 different audiences they were targeting with a single blog. "Needless to say, the blog wasn't working very well for them."



















You know the answer. But most organizations aren't changing their ways. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," some may say. Chances are most organizations don't even have the proper measurement systems in place to identify what "broke" means. Let us shed some light. Relevant content gets opened. It converts prospects. It gets shared and fuels word-of-mouth. It makes the cash register ring. For your new content initiative, don't waste countless hours and resources targeting everyone.

#### **Our Recommendation: Focus, Daniel-san!**

While it might take some hard work and convincing to narrow the focus and strategy of your content initiative down to a single audience or persona, the effectiveness of your content initiative will most likely outweigh its limited reach.

















To help you narrow your focus, here are some exercises we would recommend:

- 1. Identify the ideal buyer/audience persona that will have the biggest impact on your business goal(s). Perhaps this initiative should be targeted to a primary decision maker, or the end user of your product/service. Or maybe you're actually trying to inform a specific type of influencer who regularly recommends your product or service. The key is to pick one (only one if possible).
- 2. Dig in Deep with that Persona Go through a <u>persona development exercise</u> with your team. This exercise forces you to drill down deep into the needs, wants and desires of that persona. Engage your sales and/or support teams to get a pulse on what they're hearing from prospects and customers. Survey and/or execute one-on-one discussions with current customers to validate your focus and strategy. Content ideas and direction flows from this.
- **3.** Build Your Content Strategy Around that Persona Make that persona the core focus of 100% of the content you produce for this new initiative. What specific value will this persona derive from your content? Why will they want to subscribe or keep clicking to read your content?



#### **Hitting Close to Home**

All too often, new Divvy customers struggle to fill in our "target audience" field with a defined list of target buyer profiles or personas. And we get that personas are often hard to nail down (although platforms like <u>Akoonu</u> and <u>Cintell</u> are making it easier), but not defining a specific, single target audience for an initiative is just setting yourself up for failure.



How long are we planning to keep this initiative going?















### How long are we planning to keep this initiative going?



Successful content marketing requires a long-term commitment. < You should totally Tweet this!

When it comes to planning for content initiatives, many companies are still stuck in an advertising campaign mentality, which can be detrimental to any results-driven content initiative. Seeing a lack of immediate results often sends marketers into an unwarranted emoji tail spin, and the content initiative is abandoned before it has a chance to gain any traction.

It takes time to build trust and nurture consumers, which makes content marketing (a long-term play) such an effective strategy in today's digital world. As you're thinking about your mission and strategy, have you defined the lifespan of your initiative? Will this be just a short term experiment, or a never-ending channel? Certainly the type of content or medium often dictates this answer, but if you're starting something like a new email initiative, social channel or website property, it's pretty important that you think this through.

Also remember that content marketing often requires its own timeline. Layering your <u>content marketing calendar</u> over your advertising and messaging calendar is usually a great place to start so you can see where you need to nurture clients before a big product launch or announcement and continue to grow their loyalty post-launch.













A content marketing timeline should not be driven by an advertising campaign or product promotion. As a content marketer you should define your strategy and the length of the initiative by considering the needs of your core audience. While digging into that persona, asking the following questions can help define the length and effort you should put behind a content initiative:



- How much content is currently available to my audience?
  Is there an over-abundance of industry related content available or are we the first in the space?
- How are they consuming this content and what do they want to do with it?

  Does my persona actively engage with content that is out there by sharing it and reposting it or is there an opportunity to get them something they can be more engaged with?
- Based on your set goals for the audience, how long will it take you to see measurable results?
   How long do you need to give your audience to interact with your content before

How long do you need to give your audience to interact with your content before you adjust your approach based on the goals you have set forth?

Let's say you are a boutique fitness studio who wants to sell online fitness videos through your website channel. The overall marketing goal is clearly to drive online video sales. In the past, a traditional promotional "campaign" may have just included a short-term blast of spammy emails and digital ads pointing people back to an ecommerce store. But you're taking a different approach by implementing an integrated content marketing strategy.

Your content mission is to help busy moms stay motivated through daily fitness tips, video snippets and recipes that will build trust in your brand over time and grow your list of busy moms (subscribers) who are more likely buy fitness videos in the future.













You understand that building awareness, trust and your list of subscribers is going to take time. You're making a long-term commitment to executing a never-ending strategy that includes:



- 1. Using your website's blog to post weekly fitness video snippets and informative content on the benefits of different types of yoga and other related exercises
- 2. Sharing blog content daily on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- 3. Use your Pinterest channel to curate and share healthy recipes.

Over the next year (yes, it could take that long), you start earning trust and engagement among a very qualified audience who view you as a subject matter expert in the fitness world. When those videos drop on your website and you promote them through your social channels and via email marketing, the cost of those conversions is much less because you have been organically engaging your customer along the way—planting the seeds of trust and now offering a solution—which is your full line of fitness videos.

Consistent and continuous content publishing leads to organic engagement that drives increased leads and sales in the long run.

#### **Set Expectations**

Remind your executive or management team about the long-term play of content marketing and be sure to optimize throughout the initiative to ensure you hit your goals and provide value to your customer.



Have we chosen a content topic or area of focus that we can sustain? In other words, might we run out of content ideas?













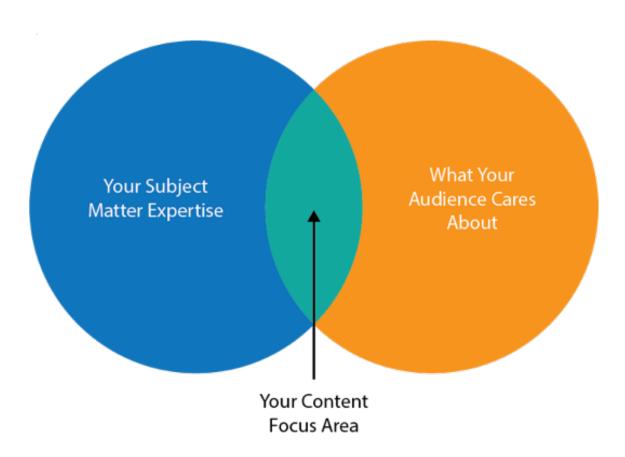


## Have we chosen a content topic or area of focus that we can sustain? In other words, might we run out of content ideas?



Choosing a topical area for your new content initiative is, in many ways, a balancing act. For starters, there's the "narrow vs. broad" debate. A narrow focus may result in you becoming the authority on a very niche topic (a good position to be in). But it also may be more challenging to sustain your long-term content initiative with fresh, high-quality content. A broad focus makes it easier to come up with fresh content, but subscriber growth and traction may be slower due to a lack of topical relevance for your target audience.

The other important aspect of this balancing act revolves around identifying the sweet spot in between the topics where you are an expert, and the topics that your audience actually cares about.

















As mentioned previously, consumers are dealing with a never-ending firehose of content noise. In this environment, a narrow focus has a better chance of breaking through that noise. Regularly publishing high-quality content on a niche topic for a niche audience will always win over the long term.



#### Narrow Wins, But...

This is certainly an area where a lot of content initiatives die. Writer's block kicks in. Your subject matter experts get tapped out. You've grown tired of writing about the same ol' topic and hounding people for new ideas. On the surface, you may think of these as resources or process issues. In actuality, these are symptoms of a larger problem.

#### You aren't digging in deep enough with your target audience on a regular basis.

Let us explain. When you've combined such exercises as persona development, internal sales/support discussions, and regular conversations with customers, your content focus should be crystal clear, and those ongoing conversations should always provide new fodder for ideas.

#### Still Can't Come Up with Fresh Ideas? Don't Worry...

It's common for those of us with a journalism background to get hung up on the idea that our content channels and properties should always be filled with fresh, original ideas. We should never be too redundant and cover a topic more than once or twice. That's the best way build a loyal readership, right?

In reality, the majority of traffic to digital properties like websites and blogs comes from new visitors. We've covered this topic before and a quick check of our analytics found that 80% of the traffic to our blog content comes from new visitors. So in theory, you could repackage the same piece of content 10 times and only 20% of your audience would recognize it.















#### **Never Run Out of Ideas: Exercises & Best Practices**

#### Start With a Good Base

When starting a new content initiative, we always recommend that marketers brainstorm an initial batch of content ideas that will get you through the first several months (3-6 months perhaps). If this exercise proves to be challenging, perhaps you should rethink your topic/focus. If this exercise gets the creative juices flowing and it's obvious to your team that this first batch is just the tip of the iceberg, then you've probably picked a winner.

#### Q & A is Always Effective

Prospects and customers always have questions. Why not get your sales and support teams in a room for a few hours and jot down every question that your audience ever asks? You may find that you end up with a list of 50 questions. Sounds like the perfect starting point for a year's worth of weekly articles...eh?

#### **Let Your Customers Do the Talking**

Every customer has a story. Would those stories fit within the content mission for your new initiative? Create a process that facilitates regular customer conversations. Hear their story first hand. <u>Learn about their skepticisms and their resulting experience</u>. With their permission, you should have an endless supply of quality content.

#### Stay on top of trends

Crowdsource this one: what's the new app everyone's talking about, and how can it relate to your audience? Check in on the trending hashtags on your social channels. It sounds obvious, but tunnel vision (not to mention groupthink) can lead to disengagement of what's truly happening in the world. Staying on top of the trends needs to be a key part of your content marketing initiative, and will help ensure your content remains stimulating.

#### Repackage/Repurpose Top Performing Content

Not every piece of content you produce has to be created from scratch. Repurposing existing content that has performed well is often a great way to not only save time, but you'll have another opportunity to get more value out of an existing asset. Browse your analytics platforms and look for the pages or posts that have generated the most traffic and conversions. On your social channels, look for posts that have received the most shares and likes. From there, you can brainstorm possible new angles or format variations. Perhaps the original was written for a different audience. Maybe you can just rewrite the piece with your selected target audience in mind.



Have we chosen a publishing frequency that we can sustain with high-quality, relevant content?















## Have we chosen a publishing frequency that we can sustain with high-quality, relevant content?



The content quality vs. quantity debate has been going on for over a decade now and if you're really interested in seeing which side is winning these days, just Google it and we bid you "good luck."

We certainly have our own opinions on this topic, but there are some harsh realities that you should consider when thinking about the publishing frequency of your new initiative.

#### Reality #1 - Content Shock

The term "content shock" arose early in 2015 thanks to a <u>controversial blog post</u> by Mark Schaefer, one of the marketing industry's top thought leaders. To summarize, Mark argued that content supply far exceeds demand.

"The volume of content is exploding at a ridiculous rate...However, our ability to consume that content (demand) is finite." – Mark Schaefer

In some respects, we agree. The internet and social networks have become a neverending firehose of noise and it's getting a lot harder for organizations to break through that noise. And as we all know, there are only so many hours in the day. Only a portion of those hours will be available for your audience to consume content. Even groundbreaking content assets may never make it to their intended audience.

So put yourselves in your audience's shoes: How much time do you realistically spend per day or per week on engaging with a brand's content? What publishing frequency would be too much and perhaps even prompt you to unsubscribe?















#### Reality #2 – We Scan for Relevance & Value

Think about your email inbox. If you're like most, part of your morning routine is scanning your emails and purging anything that is irrelevant or has no obvious value. If you're an email marketer, the last thing you want is for your email promotion or newsletter to be purged immediately. This same story applies to social networks and blog feed readers. If your headlines don't scream of relevance and value, you're just wasting time and resources.



Ask yourself, at what publishing frequency can we ensure that we're always delivering a high level of relevance and value? And are we spending enough time creating enticing headlines that will compel clicks?

#### Reality #3 – Lack of Skilled, Dedicated, Passionate Content Producers

These people deliver the good stuff, but are extremely hard to find. You may have folks on your team that have one or two of the aforementioned attributes, but seldom all three. For example, you may have skilled, passionate producers, but they have many other responsibilities. They're can't just focus on your single initiative. And you certainly have to be careful with lack of passion. Passion (or lack thereof) is easy to spot in content. Producers who really don't care about the subject matter are unlikely to create anything that stands out.

Take a hard look at your team. Do you have enough quality producers that will be able to consistently pump out great content at a high volume? Or should you start at a lower frequency that you know your team can handle?

#### Reality #4 - Lack of Time & Money

Based on the people you have available to execute your new initiative, how much time can they commit? And if your internal resources aren't sufficient, how much budget will be required to get some outsourced help?

In some companies, there's not really a shortage on subject matter expertise or passion. The holes fall within the creative skills and bandwidth (time) departments. Fortunately, those are areas where creative agencies and freelancers really become valuable. Sure, there's a cost involved, but the production quality of your final content assets may be the difference in the success or failure of your initiative.















#### Reality #5 – Infrequent Publishing = Slow Growth

Most content marketing research studies that have addressed the publishing frequency question report that an increase in frequency shows a positive correlation to increases in website traffic and leads. But there's also a point of diminishing returns. In other words, there's a point at which the traffic and lead growth curve stalls out and then starts to decline due to audience churn (I can't keep up, so I'm going to unsubscribe now).



Robert Rose, one of DivvyHQ's advisors and the Head of Strategy for the Content Marketing Institute, said it best...

#### "Our goal is to create the least amount of content with the maximum amount of impact."

The overall goal or purpose of your content initiative certainly plays a role in determining the publishing frequency. If the goal revolves around attracting an audience for future nurturing or sales activities, then you should consider a frequency that keeps your brand top-of-mind, perhaps on a weekly basis. The channel and format of your content is also a consideration. Daily blog content might be too much for your audience to consume, but a daily tweet or LinkedIn post is enough to make daily deposits in your audience's "trust bank".

#### Reality #6 - Inconsistent Publishing = No Growth

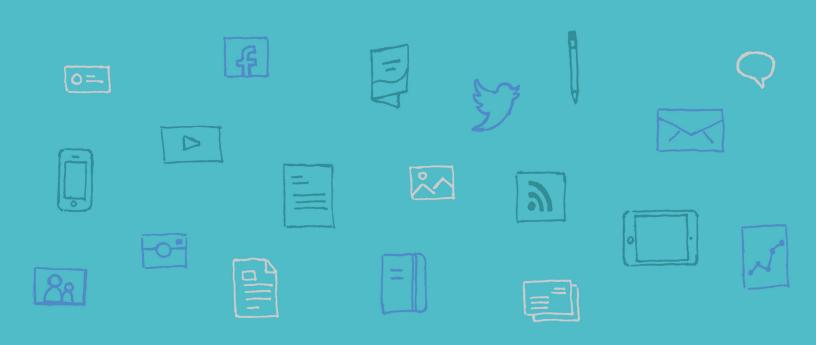
If content is king, then consistency is queen. No one understands this better than the traditional media industry. TV shows, radio programs and magazines gain audience because you can count on their publishing schedule. Would you ever watch a TV series that just puts out a new show whenever they get around to it? No. So why would you expect your audience to be any different with your new content?

#### **Reality Check**

If you don't feel like your team will be able to sustain a consistent publishing frequency with high quality, valuable content, don't start it. But if you're confident in your abilities and resources, pick a publishing frequency that you can sustain with good stuff. Start slow. You can always increase your frequency as your processes get better, you start seeing success, and you can dedicate more resources to it.



6 Do we have the people and processes in place to sustain this initiative?















### Do we have the people and processes in place to sustain this initiative?



We see this everywhere, and guilty of it ourselves...You start strong, but over time other responsibilities start to take priority, your passion fades, writer's block creeps in and frequency sputters. The best way to combat this is to have documented processes, dedicated resources (people, in clearly delineated roles), good tools built for this process, and accountability in place to turn your team into a well-oiled content machine (a.k.a. a publisher).

#### **Documented Processes & Workflow**

As you start narrowing in on the topics and format of content for your new initiative, you should get your team together to identify and document several things:

- 1. How often do we need to meet for editorial planning (specific to this initiative)
- 2. The agenda and expectations for those planning meetings
- 3. The various steps that will be required to get a single piece of content done from start to finish
- 4. The amount of time that should be allotted for each step. When added up, you should have a good idea of how much lead time you need to complete each piece of content (your start-by date/time).

#### **Dedicated Roles**

Who is responsible for each step in your process? Most content-related mishaps stem from one of these: fuzzy role clarity, no prioritization, and a lack of accountability. Does any of this sound familiar?

- Am I responsible for this section of the site, or is he?
- Does she even have the skillset to handle the design work on this piece?
- Wait, who is proofreading this?
- Sorry, I had other things on my plate.













Not only can issues like these lead to heated office politics and wasted time, but they also can result in shoddily-produced content and could send mixed messages to your audience.

As the world catches up to content marketing and companies start creating full-time positions for dedicated content creators, content-centric job titles will become the norm (be on the lookout for more organizations to have chief content officers, for example).

Within your existing org chart, document any role-related issues, and keep them in mind when assigning future content. The following is a standard set of roles for content tasks that can be shared among multiple people or departments (keep in mind these aren't necessarily job titles, rather functions):

- Editor: Your editor strategizes and oversees content projects, assigns content creation work (to outside or freelance resources if necessary), and bears the ultimate responsibility for the integrity of your content.
- Contributor: This can be anyone, be it a writer, photographer, graphic designer, or proofreader who is contributing to your content.
- Reviewer: Reviewers are often stakeholders or subject matter experts who review
  and perhaps approve content before it's published. These individuals can reside
  within or outside the organization, and may be looking at the content from a unique
  perspective (i.e. a legal one or only to proofread).

Certainly your content production process may require more narrowed roles (specific SMEs, proofreaders, and so forth), but this base set of roles is essential for outputting the great content that with align with your strategy.

#### **Content Maintenance**

An often overlooked part of any content process is governance. Ask yourself: Will the content you're producing need to be maintained at some point in the future? For some organizations, failing to audit existing content is a big problem. Old, inaccurate content could get you in legal trouble, communicate an off-brand message to your audience or potentially promote discontinued products or services.















Having a documented methodology in place for maintenance, both planned and unplanned, is less daunting than it sounds, granted you stay on top of it. First, determine your maintenance goal. Robyn Tippins, at Mariposa Agency, defines the goals of her agency's routine content audit for their clients in a simple manner:



"We're...looking for flow inconsistencies, ensuring all content is up to date and making sure that we continue to align to the brand's voice and current priorities."

Keeping the goal clear and simple, as the above, will point you in the direction of what, exactly, your maintenance schedule needs to involve. Do the needs of your organization require frequent reviewer training, perhaps due to high turnover? Do you have an extensive content inventory that needs multiple sets of eyes to comb over it at a high frequency? Only after you formulate a specific maintenance schedule can you begin to be on the constant lookout for ROT: Redundant, Out-of-Date, or Trivial content.

#### **Accountability**

Holding your team accountable for their content is certainly easier said than done. After all, most of your content creators will have other responsibilities in their day-to-day schedules besides churning out content. The key here is to have a content policy in place presented to all new hires.

Perhaps in your organization, every team member, regardless of role or department, is expected to contribute one piece of blog content each month. Emphasizing that this policy is just as important as those other HR policies (casual Fridays, anyone?) will create good habits in your employees right off the bat. In addition, keeping your employees' eyes on the end goal is also crucial, so as to not have them lose sight of the forest for the trees. It's much easier to be enthusiastic about your tiny piece of the puzzle when you see the larger payoff.

As mentioned before, content governance isn't the sexiest element to your content strategy, but it is among the most vital. Ensuring you have these aspects in place will reap benefits beyond what you imagined.



## 7 How will we know if/when this initiative has been a success?















### How will we know if/when this initiative has been a success?



At this point, you've put forth a bazillion pounds of effort for just one initiative. You're exhausted and ready for a cocktail, no doubt. But let's not forget why you're burning the candle at both ends: results.

It's important to regularly remind your team (perhaps at the start of each planning meeting) of the mission or purpose of this initiative, why we're busting our humps, to ensure harmony among them. Developing a regular cadence or touchpoint to align tasks to the overarching content mission focuses the team, subconsciously embedding the goal into the mind(s) of the content creator(s).

#### A Holistic View of Success

Outside of the tasks and chaos of your production process, carve out some time to take a holistic view of the specific initiative goal and content created against it. Does each piece of content shadow the recited goal? Ask yourself, "what does success look like for the initiative?" Just as you've defined the strategy for the content initiative, clearly define its success.

There is a formula that is commonly used to define and measure goals: (From X) (To Y) (By Z). Here is a great example: Increase our 1000 monthly leads to 2500 monthly leads by focusing our impressions to demographic A. To turn this around into percentages, increase our leads 150 percent by narrowing our impressions to demographic A.















#### **Success is Measured**

Goals and metrics are interrelated. In fact, the next chapter will dive deeper into metrics. A goal is only as good as its ability to be measured. In a presentation given at the Content Marketing World Conference 2015, Doug Kessler (Twitter: @dougkessler) and Michael Brenner (Twitter: @BrennerMichael) outlined examples of quality goals commonly found in content strategy initiatives:

"A goal is only as good as its ability to be measured."

- To generate 2,000 sales-ready leads in 12 months
- To create \$10m in pipeline in 2016
- To double our engaged web traffic
- To increase traffic to our Services pages, from 5% to 20% of all traffic
- To position us as experts in our field
- To increase unaided awareness from 13% to 30%

These examples are of good quality because one can easily create metrics to measure against. Let's take the first example of generating 2,000 sales-ready leads in 12 months. It is quite easy to simply say that as a group "we need to create more leads." Go the extra mile and qualify how many and what type of leads you need to create. Because you've already qualified the goal, you're that much closer to creating measurement or metrics against it, decreasing the element of chance or shotgun success.

#### Your Content's Flight Plan

Think of metrics as a Boeing 737 heading towards Cancun. The cockpit is filled with gauges giving both the on-board computer and pilot an accurate reading of where the plane is in relation to its programmed flight plan. Planes are constantly off-course due to a multitude of reasons. The pilot or computer must constantly make adjustments to the plane's heading, pitch and speed based on gauges or metrics to stay on the programmed flight plan down to Cancun so you can head to the beach and get away from the winter blues! The metrics you define for your new content initiative are no different than those cockpit gauges:

- Set Your Flight Plan = Initiative Goal
- Set Your Cockpit Gauges = Create Metrics Against Goals
- Reading Your Cockpit Gauges = How Are You Performing Against Your Goal?
- Make Flight Reading Adjustments = Adjust Tasks to Stay on the Path to Meeting Your Goal.















Following our previous sales example, let's now create metrics that help us make conscious, data driven decisions to get the most out of our goal to end up with 2,000 leads within 12 months. To start, we should establish a target for how many leads we need walking in the door on a repeating time constraint. We'd suggest a weekly cadence for tracking and evaluating progress for a couple of reasons. One, if you only have 12 months to generate 2,000 leads, it means you really only have 12 opportunities to make operational adjustments, which makes it harder to make up for lost leads and time. Weekly tracking gives you 52 opportunities and you can make adjustments much quicker if results are lacking.



Think if the pilot only checked the plane's gauges every 15 minutes. At 550 mph, 15 minutes could mean the difference between heading completely the wrong direction (north) when the flight plan calls for due south down to arrive safely in Cancun.

Two, a daily checkpoint could be borderline micromanaging. Sometimes we as managers have a tendency to have knee-jerk reactions to lackluster results within a very short cadence. Developing the appropriate amount of time in between check points is crucial to deciding what actions need to take place to keep pace with your goal.

How else, besides time, can we further qualify or measure the incoming leads? Here are a few to get the ball rolling:

- By channel (social, email, automation)
- By campaign (holiday push, re-engage, new year/new you)
- By demographic/target audience (21-30 female marketing professionals etc.

#### **Tools to Track**

Which tools will you use to track these metrics internally? Do you use a basic spreadsheet or are you more of the dashboard/stoplight type? Have you ever thought about heat or tree maps? Do you need to be visual and play to the Crayon crowd?

There are a myriad of options available to you for housing your internal metrics, though the right option is dependent upon the platforms you currently use today. Are there visualization and reporting tools baked into your CRM, automation or CMS tool? Perhaps there is room in the budget for a basic dashboard? Even if there is no money in the coffers (because you spent it all on drinks in Cancun) there are plenty of templates and freeware dashboard alternatives readily available.















#### Reflection

After all is said and done, take time to reflect (with a glass of bubbly in hand, of course) and document the lessons learned from the initiative. What worked? What didn't work? What are the numbers and metrics that back up those theories? Does there exist an opportunity to repeat the content or initiative? Where did the efforts fall short qualitatively? How about quantitatively? Did you have appropriate resources, be it people, time or budget? Creating a repository of results and lessons learned will give you a wealth of documented knowledge to draw upon when strategizing future initiatives.





B Do we have the right tracking and reporting mechanisms in place to know when we get there?















## Do we have the right tracking and reporting mechanisms in place to know when we get there?



In the previous chapter, we set goals and metrics. Now it is time to make sure you're getting the data you need to make your metrics work.

#### **Get Your Data**

What external data do you need to populate the metrics? More simply asked, how are you getting the information you need to read your gauges? (See Boeing 737 analogy.) In our previous sales example, leads are fairly black and white to track. They either come in or they don't. But what if your goal needs are more multi-tenanted and not just based on a single variable? What if your goal requires more metadata to make actionable decisions? Does the metric or goal need a sophisticated tracking mechanism to capture multiple variables within a specific campaign? Or perhaps it just needs a simple Google Analytics tracking code?

#### **Keep it Simple**

Content and digital marketing gives the inner nerd data for days. Don't get too bogged down in the amount of data you can pull. Rather, be very specific in your data requests so that the incoming data matches the goals and metrics you set for the specific initiative. A common phrase used in the data analysis world is, "garbage in, garbage out." Use this phrase when pulling data for your metrics. Too much data or data that is just "crap" doesn't do your goals and metrics any favors. You will begin to take action based on data points that mean nothing to your goal. When in doubt, just stick with the "less is more" approach. Start small and ramp up as you feel more comfortable. It will save you from some serious headaches in the future.









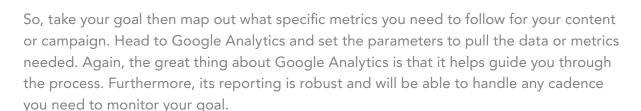






#### **Web-Based Content**

If your new content initiative will live on a website, Google Analytics is your best friend. Take it for a spin. There are great videos and tutorials within the Google Analytics platform that help even the novice user administer and use the platform at a pro level. Almost everything you will need digital data wise is right there within the site for you to tailor to your specific goal.



#### **Email & Social**

Just like Google Analytics, email marketing and social media platforms typically provide full suites of performance monitoring tools and reports. Each individual platform differs and you will need to explore them accordingly. For social, many marketers use Hootsuite, an all-in-one publishing and data aggregator of the most popular social sites. This tool is a lifesaver as it literally places all the metrics you need for a post or campaign in one centralized location, allowing free time for a happy hour! Treat yourself!

#### **More Advanced Tracking Methods**

Monitoring the success of some content initiatives may require specialized tracking mechanisms or more metric granularity, so let's introduce you to some sophisticated, yet fairly easy-to-use, tools that are common and available to all.















- Google URL Builder for link tracking: Google has a simple yet robust <u>URL</u> generator for the tagging of custom campaign variables and parameters needed for deeper performance reporting. Navigate to the URL Builder Form in Google Analytics Help site and complete the fields required to generate a custom URL to be placed in your content, advertising links, social posts, emails and more. The unique URL is linked back to the main URL of your Google Analytics account and is readily available for reporting and goal tracking.
- Email Subscription Tracking: For many marketers, their primary content mission is to grow their subscriber list by providing great, free content. Embedding email subscription forms is pretty easy via your email marketing platform of choice. And most do a nice job of tracking and reporting on subscriber growth and click rates. But should you be taking this further? Where are your new subscribers coming from? Which content pieces are resulting in the most subscriptions?

As a hub for performance and goal metrics, Google Analytics can (with just a few clicks of configuration) easily track your entire subscriber funnel without the need for you to access your email platform's dashboard. Some technical connections (and a little research) may be required to ensure your email platform can sync data to Google Analytics. A simple Google search (ex: "Mailchimp and Google Analytics") should point you to a search result that goes into full technical detail.

• Tracking via Marketing Automation/CRM: Visitor and usage statistics provided by marketing automation platforms are powerful to say the least. The combination of identifying actual people (by name, IP address), tracking and scoring their engagement across content channels, and their general website activity from Google Analytics provides you with a much more rich view of how your content is moving (or not moving) the needle. Most marketing automation platforms provide the standard set of tracking mechanisms (lead capture forms, click tracking, lead scoring, email campaign reporting), but some have more sophisticated tools for content localization and personalization.

The moral of the story is that each effort and goal is different, requiring different sets of metrics, tools and tracking. Take the time to set up your tracking mechanisms and procure the necessary data specific to one goal at a time. Soon, you will have a wealth of well-manicured data sets to make actionable decisions, ensuring your content's success!



Do we have a solid distribution or promotion strategy that will ensure we get enough eyeballs on this to reach our goals?















## Do we have a solid distribution or promotion strategy that will ensure we get enough eyeballs on this to reach our goals?



As we discussed in section two of this ebook, your new content initiative should have a clear target audience. But how do we reach those people? And how many of those people do we need to reach in order to achieve success?

Herein lies one of the largest benefits of content marketing that often gets overlooked. Companies that have been leveraging content to build an audience over time often have a significant leg up on those who are starting from scratch.

#### Paid vs. Owned vs. Earned Audiences

If your new content initiative will be targeted at an owned audience (a group of people with whom you already have a relationship, ex: a customer list or subscriber list), then you are in a much better position to achieve your objectives with minimal distribution costs. But if you're starting something from scratch and trying to reach new eyeballs, you have your work cut out for you in today's noisy environment.

"If you build it, they will come" is obviously a ridiculous assumption. Certainly there are cases where companies have built up enough authority on a topic that Google will highly rank anything they publish (a.k.a. earned placement). Then there's also the example of Apple who has built up such a fanbase that anything they launch is going to go viral immediately. But for the rest of us, having a strategy and a dedicated budget for paid content distribution or promotion is all but required.









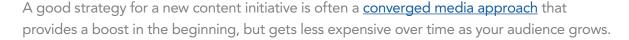






#### **Setting Expectations**

If your content initiative is targeting a new audience, clear expectations should be identified based on your business goals. If it's expected for your new content initiative to move the needle quickly with this new audience, you'll need to budget much more for paid placement or promotion/advertising. If you don't have much in the budget for paid distribution, then you should set proper expectations for the slower growth that comes with building an owned audience and or earning prime placement in third-party channels.



#### **Converged Media Strategy Example**

Let's say your company has developed a new product that will be targeted at a different audience than you've engaged with before. You've done your homework, surveyed the market and now you have a solid go-to-market strategy that includes a microsite/blog specifically tailored for this new audience. Your executive team understands that brand awareness takes time, but they'd like to make some noise to drum up a base of early adopters.

Here's a few converged media tactics that would get the ball rolling:

- 1. Influencers within your new product category are identified and paid to create engaging, high-quality content and they share it on their owned channels.
- 2. This paid content is then amplified via both organic sharing and paid promotion (boosting) across social networks, driving readers back to the company's new microsite/blog through links.
- 3. Buyer-focused blog content is published weekly to build a subscriber list.
- 4. Gated content downloads and introductory webinars are promoted on the microsite to build a list of leads for ongoing nurturing.
- 5. Google Ads are deployed to gain impressions and clicks for targeted search keywords.

While costly upfront, these types of tactics deployed with high-quality content should quickly fill the top of your funnel. From there, your analytics should provide insights into when/if your paid tactics can be turned down or shut off completely. For those companies who have great products and services, the earned media engine often takes over and can provide a steady stream of user-generated content (happy customers will spread the word).



Which planning, production and workflow tools are you going to need to execute your new initiative?















## Which planning, production and workflow tools are you going to need to execute your new initiative?



Every day, more and more companies are realizing that their current system of endless spreadsheets, status meetings, and emails is way more painful than it should be. And HEY LOOK! There's a bunch of cool-looking content marketing platforms out there that will rescue us!!! Herein lies the problem.

#### What type of platform DO you need?

The short answer is..."It depends". There are several variables to consider when a company is looking at software to manage their content initiatives. Variables may include things like:

#### Size and structure of a content team

Solo-to-small-ish teams may be able to get by with less-sophisticated tools like Excel or Google Drive (calendar/spreadsheet/docs) to manage their process. But as teams grow, these solutions get cumbersome and inefficiencies start to thwart output.

Large organizations that often have multiple departments/teams contributing to content marketing should look at more robust content marketing platforms (DivvyHQ, Kapost, others) that offer shared, scalable content calendar architecture, content-centric workflow tools and CMS-backed platforms that become the centralized repository for all content created across an organization. These platforms can significantly increase efficiency and output, as well as improve collaboration and content quality.

#### **Volume of Content**

Along the same lines as above, lower volumes of content typically equate to smaller levels of "process pain", so organizations that don't create a lot of content can get by with less-sophisticated solutions (Excel, task management systems). As the volume increases, pain levels increase and getting content planned, produced and published efficiently becomes a real challenge. High-volume content teams need well-defined workflow processes and a software tool needs to be customizable and mold to those processes.















#### **Types of Content and Distribution Channels**

When evaluating software platforms, it's important to consider the different types of content that your organization needs to produce and through which channels that content will be published/distributed. For example, B2C organizations may focus heavily on social and visual content, and thus a solution like Percolate may be ideal. B2B organizations may produce more long-form content (blog posts, ebooks, webinars), and thus solutions like DivvyHQ or Kapost may be a better fit.



And let's not forget about all the other types of content that are produced inside of your organization. Employees are arguably your most important audience and internal communications teams need good tools too! Feeding intranets and internal social networks take just as much planning and process efficiency as external channels. Just imagine: external comms and internal comms sharing assets and collaborating efficiently!

#### **Beware of Generals and Swiss Army Knives**

A few words of caution as you're narrowing down your platform options: Beware of "generals", as in general/generic project management systems that aren't tailored for managing the unique aspects of content strategy and content marketing. They simply don't have content-centric workflows and native fields that are vital for managing this very unique process.

Also be careful with "swiss army knives", the platforms that claim they can do EVERYTHING, but do nothing well. The best tools are those that specialize and go deep into a small part of the process. Think of a chef trying to cook a meal with a swiss army knife. Sure, he could probably get the job done, but to make something special, he needs his set of specialized knives, spatulas, pans, etc.

#### **Key In On Your Real Pain**

So, think about what you really need. Which parts of your process are the most painful? Where are you really struggling? Before you start spending valuable dollars and time on platforms that may not be the most efficient or effective, take time to consider the above variables and discuss with your key stakeholders. When you remove the hassles of coordinating your content marketing in impractical ways, you'll be able to focus on what you're here to do...create and publish great content.

#### Now go find your ideal solution.















#### Wrapping Up!

You made it. Hopefully we didn't scare you. Content marketing is not an easy process, especially in today's noisy environment. Those companies who make the investment in great strategy, processes, tools and talented content producers will be positioned well to capture audience, thought leadership, market share and revenue.

This probably isn't your first rodeo, but following this guide for each new content initiative should ensure that they are as successful (if not more) as you need them to be.

