Getting Started with Content Marketing
Building an Effective Approach
Executive Summary

For the marketer who has long been responsible for the website, the shift to a content marketing mindset is a subtle one. Joe Pulizzi at Content Marketing Institute provides an excellent definition:

“Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

To the veteran marketing writer, this may seem like what we’ve always done. After all, who thinks they’re not producing valuable content? But the distinction with content marketing is the measurement of relevance. Rather than amplifying the message a business wants to send out, content marketing focuses on the message prospective customers are trying to hear in locations where they are going to listen. And consistency means creating a framework that aligns content with an organization’s goals. To be successful at content marketing, you need a documented plan for developing a variety of high value assets.

This paper outlines the fundamental steps that comprise content marketing.
The Role of Content Marketing

The job of content marketing is to create content to help drive organizational goals. In a B2C organization, those goals are primarily focused around sales. Other goals for B2C include brand awareness or thought leadership that leads to long-term consumer awareness and loyalty. Often the focus of B2B content is to drive people to the middle of the funnel, with the sales conversion happening via a dedicated sales organization. And in sectors such as higher education or non-profits "conversion" takes the form of goals such as increased enrollment or donations. In all cases, content is a foundational element in driving these goals.

Content takes many forms. It can be written content both long and short form. Increasingly, it takes the form of video or other visual content such as infographics. Content is both digital and physical. It's as much your business cards and tradeshow graphics as it is landing page copy and blog posts.

To go from being an organization that simply creates content to one that has a content marketing mindset, you need to understand the fundamental steps that organizations go through in the content creation and optimization process.

Creating an effective Content Marketing program requires looking at the total process of delivering content. Some parts of the overall process might be deprioritized or deferred, but, some can’t, and none can be ignored.
Plan

Planning is both strategic and tactical. From a strategic standpoint, you need to consider the personas you are targeting, what messages, keywords or strategic themes you want to stress, what content is needed at various stages of the conversion funnel, and where you want to engage your audience. On Marketingprofs.com, Peter Baron breaks down strategic planning into seven easy steps to help you create a strategic framework.

From a tactical perspective, you need to map out how all of this strategic content will be delivered, and by whom. The very first step is designating a content strategist to lead the process. If you don’t already have someone dedicated to content marketing it might not be obvious who to invite to lead the effort.

Whether you select someone with a journalist background, product marketing chops or a media background, the most important thing is you select someone who knows how to manage timelines. They must be able to bring out the hidden writer in everyone across the organization and constantly be on the look out for topics your audience craves.

Transforming all of your content into well honed, strategic assets is not something that can be done overnight, and some content may still need to be produced even if it can’t get the full “content marketing” treatment. But documenting your priorities and assigning leadership will take you a big step in the right direction.

When building your plan be sure to consider:

- Who are the stakeholders that need to review the plan? Be sure you have representatives from across the content lifecycle involved.
- Who are the resources available for content production? Look both inside and outside of your organization.
- How frequently will you update your strategic plan? Make sure it’s at least two times per year.
- How will you communicate your plan to the organization?
- How are you going to track progress?

Content design is often implied in the process of planning. For example, if the plan is to create a Slideshare presentation on Topic X, then the design is clearly a Powerpoint presentation. However, design can often be nuanced and broken
out separately from the planning process. If your organization needs web-based content on a new product offering, does it make sense to create that as a landing page or a microsite?

Will you use the corporate branding styles or will there be a unique style sheet associated with the new offering? You may also identify in the planning process that more top of the funnel content is needed to demonstrate thought leadership and use the design phase to brainstorm on what format that content may take.

The most successful content marketers experiment with many different content formats. How many are you using?

- Blog posts
- Webcasts (live or recorded)
- Audio podcasts
- Video case stories
- Video training
- Video overviews
- Comics
- Slide decks
- Memes
- Q & As
- Whitepapers/Knowledge Briefs
- Research Reports
- How to Guides
- eBooks
- Infographics
- Product/Service Reviews
- 3rd party research reports
- Case studies (PDF)
- Press releases
- Calculators
- Self-Assessments
- Quizzes
- By-lined articles
- Mobile Applications
- Social posts

Design also clearly interacts with the writing and creation phase because the design and the content must be thought of together. Where design can get bogged down is when it is deep in the weeds of web design or print layout.

When this occurs it is critical to remember the strategic intent of the content, be it a call to action or increased engagement, and use that as the lens to make decisions.
Create

For Content Marketing, Writing and Creating is where the rubber hits the road. Whether it's writing content, recording video, creating infographics or coding an engaging application, at some point someone has to sit down and do the work.

Before creating content, make sure the author has answers to these four critical questions.

1. For whom am I creating this content? The more detail you can provide about the reader the more likely the content will compel them to read more.

2. What do I expect the audience to experience when consuming this content? Am I trying to entertain? Teach? Persuade?

3. After consuming the content what would I want the reader to do? Go beyond sharing/commenting and think about how your content will impact the reader's day-to-day life or job.

4. In what context will this content appear? Is it part of an email campaign? Will it be posted in LinkedIn? Is it part of a webinar?

Answering these questions in advance will ensure your content hits the mark and maximizes engagement.

Curating content created by others is another effective part of a well-rounded Content Marketing strategy. A useful service you can provide to your audience is to gather information that you think will be valuable to them and present it in a way that is easy for them to consume. The process of curation can also be part of your content creation process.
Validate

Before content is published, it typically goes through some form of review or validation process before it is ready for publish. This might be as simple as a copy edit and approval. However, in many organizations, changes to the digital content must follow the stages of a Software Development Lifecycle where the site is tested in a staging environment and approved by passing quality assurance validation.

Validation might also include checking the content against things like an SEO audit that checks pages for keyword density or checking 508 compliance. However elaborate the process, this job is about making sure the content is ready to go before it is out the door.

What does your validation process look like? Does all content go through the same process? Don't forget an important part of the validation process is to enroll subject matter expert reviews.

What are your editors looking for?

» Brand voice
» Grammar mistakes
» Positioning consistency
» Is it compelling?
» What is the call to action it inspires?
» What keywords are used?
» Are the visuals aiding the story?
» What other content is being linked/referenced?
» Is formatting aligned correctly?
» Are any links broken?
» Copyright and other legal notifications documented
Distribute

Distributing your content includes where and how you publish your content, and what tools and platforms you use to promote it to a broader audience.

For most organizations, the website is the central hub of publishing content. But that isn’t the only publishing destination. With sites like Slideshare or LinkedIn’s Publishing Platform, content can be published to sites not “owned” by the organization. Publishing can also take the form of sponsored articles or other forms of sponsored media.

Once published, promotion is the process of letting the world know the content is available. Social media promotion has become the most common methods for quickly broadcasting that new content is available.

Traditional methods such as press releases, email distribution and content syndication are also productive channels that should be explored.

Smartly distributed and promoted content will provide a digital breadcrumb trail leading new visitors back to your website, where you can convert them to leads, and to customers later on.
Analyze

After all the hard work of planning, creating, validating, and distributing your content, don’t forget to measure how your content is performing. Whether you are trying to drive awareness, improve engagement or influence revenue, content analytics are essential to improving over time.

There are multiple measures of effectiveness. On the web, using tools such as Google Analytics allows you to measure engagement in the form of time on page, bounce rate, pages per visit, or goal completion. Increasingly, content marketing tools are providing their own analytics. For example, video marketing platform Wistia shows video engagement by tracking what percent of a given video is watched. Social media sharing tool Buffer can show how frequently a blog post was retweeted or favorited. And for print or PDF assets, you may choose to gather feedback through surveys or guide groups.

The larger challenge is to bring these different ways of measuring effectiveness into a coherent view that allows you to determine what’s working, what isn’t and what needs to be done next.

Measurements that matter:

**Awareness**
- How much of your audience viewed this piece of content?
- Which channels drove the most traffic?
- Are key influencers promoting it?

**Engagement**
- Is your audience sharing your content?
- Has it generated dialog through comments?
- Have readers reviewed the quality of the content?
- Are they following links to other related materials?

**Business Value**
- How many leads were generated by this piece of content?
- Did it influence current opportunities?
- Has your sales team leveraged it to reach out to an unresponsive prospect?
- Did it help nurture a buyer in their journey?
About Percussion

Percussion CMS helps marketers create, publish, and share website content that drives online traffic, engages visitors, and looks great on any device. Percussion powers websites in business, higher education, government, and financial services, helping them measure content impact, improve SEO, and grow business.

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