

IMPLEMENTING
B2B
CONTENT
MARKETING

**A PROVEN 7 STEP
APPROACH TO SUCCESS**

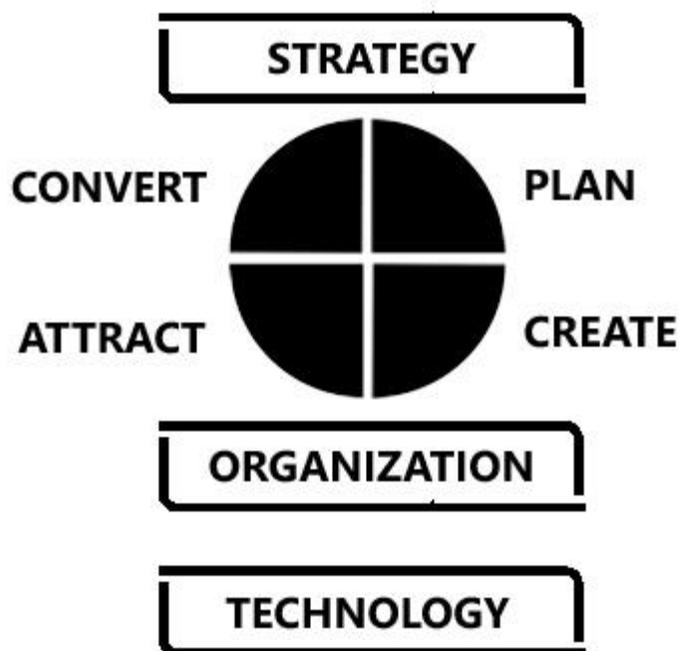


By Virtual Republic

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Introduction

Decision-makers in the business world have become self-sufficient in gathering relevant data, knowledge and information. Information is widely available and easy to access via a broad spectrum of channels. As a result, the purchasing process for businesses is, largely, done online – from user to executive level. This doesn't imply that personal contact has become less important, however, most potential customers go online to search for information. This presents your organization with the opportunity to put yourself forward early in the buyer journey. There's a virtual treasure trove of information available online to potential customers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to be the go-to destination for searching target audiences looking to consume information.

Brands become publishers

To achieve this, B2B organizations need to consider their approach to marketing. Helping suspects, leads and prospects throughout the entire decision-making process plays an important role. Offering relevant and appealing content via the right channels is key. Increasingly, brands are starting to resemble publishers. Publishers, like no one else, know how to understand and penetrate a target group. By bringing the wishes, dreams and needs of a particular target audience into their vision and anticipating interactions through highly relevant, in-depth or entertaining content, they forge a connection and reach that can be capitalized through advertising. In increasing measures, companies are looking to establish this connection and reach themselves and capitalize on it by selling their products and services.

The relationship between content marketing and media companies becomes clear in the definition laid out by the Content Marketing Institute:

"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Although the goal of marketing is, ultimately, to increase profit and turnover, it needn't be the primary objective for each marketing initiative. Content marketing also contributes to secondary objectives, such as raising brand awareness, brand engagement and achieving recognized thought leadership.

7 Step Framework

In this book we identify 7 key steps to implement content marketing.

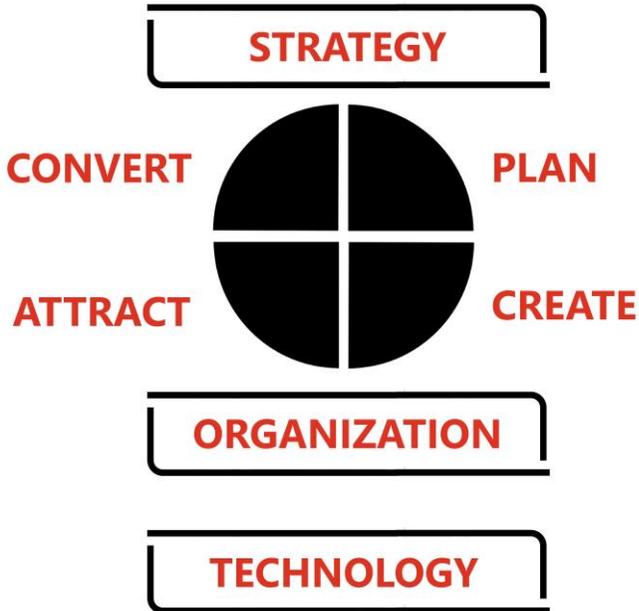


Figure 1: 7 step framework

Step 1: Strategy

The marketing strategy must be an extension of the strategy of the organization. In content marketing, helpfulness comes first in the entire process. That can be a good start before any solutions are considered. Direct communications concerning products or services are not necessarily useful in an early stage. Instead, this discovery stage involves pointing toward developments, trends and business issues that are related to the organization's portfolio. You can help customers form their ideas, thereby coming into direct contact with possible future customers at an early stage. In this marketing process, the development of a good first contact is hugely important. The development of relationships only works based on authenticity. This can be warranted when the communication is aligned with the vision and the core values of the organization.

When an organization makes the decision to strategically implement content marketing, it's important to realize that content marketing is a process, not a campaign. Traditionally, marketing divisions have always thought in terms of campaigns aimed at direct sales. If sales revenue falls behind, a campaign is set up to generate new leads. Content marketing has a long-term nature. It is about anticipating actions at an early stage of the buying process, which eventually leads to more customers and increased turnover. Suspects aren't converted into hot prospects overnight. Throughout the various buying stages, potential affiliates require different types of content. The alignment of content with the different buying stages through lead nurturing demands a process-oriented approach.

Step 2: Plan

When you have a clear business strategy in place, the initial step in the continuous content marketing process involves the development of communications concepts for the various product-market combinations around which the organization focuses. At this stage, starting points must be established as to what type of content is shared, with whom, by what methods and via which media. The most important step here is to formulate answers to the following set of questions:

- *Who is your target audience (or, better yet, who are your buyer personas)?*
- *What are their challenges, fears and dreams relating to your offering (or, better yet, what's their buyer journey)?*
- *What messages are then most effective to share with them?*

- *What formats are the best fit (blogs, social media, papers, video, etc.)?*
- *What channels will be most effective (search, email, social, native ads, etc.)?*

When it comes to business-related buying decisions, there will always be multiple decision-makers involved in the process. These decision-makers and influencers have different roles and priorities in terms of the decision to buy. The need for information of these decision-making unit (DMU) members also changes during the buying process. The initial information requirement will involve forming ideas, whereas in the latter stages it will be aimed at orientation.

Step 3: Create

Once you formulated an answer to the set of questions in the previous step, the necessary content and assets must be produced. For maximum effect, different content formats can be linked. For example, a white paper can be linked to various blogs for websites and infographics for interaction on social media. Fundamentally, content involves the use and the conception of different content formats, their interrelation and the optimization of each channel.

Step 4: Attract

Content is effective and relevant but only when it is consumed, valued and shared by the right audience. The next step in the content marketing process is communications. What will be your media mix? The basic layout for communications is a combination of owned, earned and paid media, which are defined as follows:

- Owned media includes your own channels, such as your website, social media and email newsletters.
- Earned media includes all unpaid, third-party media.
- Paid media is all media that has been bought, such as traditional advertising, advertorials, Google AdWords, sponsored emails, banner networks, sponsored social media messages and in-video advertising.

In content marketing, the attention shifts from paid media to owned and earned media. But to get started and accelerate a campaign, paid media is normally part of the plan.

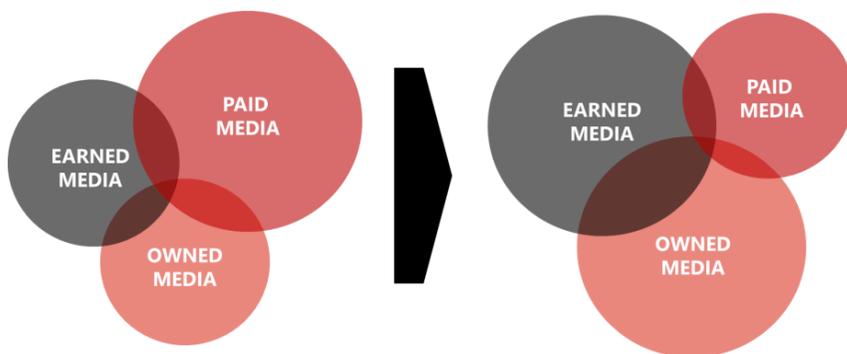


Figure 2: Attention shifting from paid to owned and earned media

Step 5: Convert

In the end, the returns on marketing are in the conversion from an unfamiliar visitor to a loyal customer. In between that there is a broad spectrum of stages or steps – from likes to subscriptions, followers, leads and prospects. To measure the performance of content marketing, key performance indicators (KPIs) are important. By monitoring and interpreting KPIs, decisions can be made to improve performance, such as optimizing titles and user interfaces, aligning better with your target audience, optimizing per device and making better use of visuals.

Step 6: Organization

Content marketing sounds appealing and logical, but it's hard work. Research shows that in content marketing, the production of both sufficient and appealing content is the biggest challenge. Additionally, the best content is in the heads of different employees, and not everyone is keen to start writing blogs, participating in webinars and being active on social media. Hence, facilitating your organization is critically important. And when the decision is made to outsource the creation of content, the message and tone of voice need to be on target.

The production of content and the management of a content marketing process requires new skills and competencies in the organization. The content marketing process shares parallels with the process of publishing companies, but most organizations are not (yet) publishers. The different skills are contained in organizational silos. As such, different people or departments are responsible for SEO, PR, social media, product marketing and the customer magazine. The challenge here is how multidisciplinary teams can work together to create and maintain the most effective and efficient process.

Step 7: Technology

Although content marketing concept is centuries-old, recent technological developments are what is driving the recent popularity of the field. The final building block involves technology and different software tools that are required to organize an efficient, effective content marketing process. Think of content management systems, marketing automation, email marketing software and lead management.

STRATEGY

CONVERT

PLAN

ATTRACT

CREATE

ORGANIZATION

TECHNOLOGY

STEP 1: SETTING YOUR STRATEGY

A commonly used expression sums up the message in this chapter: Do what you say, say what you do. When it comes to communication, the urge can be to present things better than they are. When someone tells tall tales, he will not be taken too seriously. Why would we assume this works in marketing and communications?

For building sustained relationships, communication between companies does not differ from communication between individuals. It's critically important that communication is the extension of the vision and the mission of an organization and aligned with the company strategy. When an organization has a clear vision of the market and society and acts according to their mission, the communication not only becomes more straightforward, the messages will be in line with the collective climate and the activities of the organization. Much like the individual who "does what he says," the organization that "says what he does" is more credible and will be viewed as more authentic.

The need for transparency

The time when organizations could completely shape reality is over. The enormous availability of information and the easy access to search and share it means that business decision-makers have almost all the information at their fingertips. Your audience is a mouse click away from knowing the ins and outs of your product, your organization, your employees, your customer satisfaction and the views of influencers and experts.

Two-thirds of the commercial buying process now takes place online, from the user to the executive level. This doesn't imply that personal contact has become less important, however, most potential customers go online to search for information. This presents an organization with the opportunity to put themselves forward and under the attention of potential customers early in the buyer journey. There's a virtual treasure trove of information available online to potential customers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to be the go-to destination for target audiences who are searching online to consume information.

It's naïve to think that sharing relevant information with audiences will lead to leaked information or company secrets being revealed to the public. It's a common fear but often unfounded. Most information is already available and potential customers consume it, although it's not in connection to your company brand, not linked to you as experts and not linked to you as the best source to provide potential customers with information to ideate thoughts surrounding investment in your products or services.

You should not be afraid of sharing unique knowledge because you think that potential customers won't need you or competitors can learn your best tricks. The information in itself is usually not the service for which customers pay you. It's much more about combining context and knowledge and understanding the problems and the experience of your company and team that create the true value. You can build the brand confidence needed for your company by sharing your knowledge and experience.

Let's clarify this point with an example. Let's say you read extensive instructions on performing open heart surgery. When you're done, a patient won't be knocking at the door to be treated by you (assuming you're not a heart surgeon). Most likely, you're insecure about the process yourself. What's lacking is the knowledge, understanding and experience of a medical team that can put it into practice. Admittedly, this is an extreme example, but it illustrates the difference between theory and practice or, in other words, the difference between information and the implementation or application of it.

The wide availability of information and the emergence of the self-sufficient, fully informed, commercial decision-maker require the supplier to be transparent. In his bestseller book, *Youtility: Why Smart Marketing Is about Help Not Hype*, author Jay Baer argues that information must meet three criteria: self-service, transparency and real-time relevance.

Authenticity and trust

Do you also have relatives, family members, colleagues and friends who have decided to become entrepreneurs at the halfway stage of their career? In recent years, the recognition of the importance to be authentic and follow your heart have gained in popularity. Authenticity is the extent to which someone is loyal to themselves and their personality and spirit despite all external impulses. Authenticity comes across through communication, verbal as well as non-verbal.

Because authenticity plays an important role in building confidence and trust, it is an essential starting point in marketing communications. Confidence in commercial decision-making processes is crucial. And because content created by suppliers is by its very nature not entirely independent, it presents a huge challenge to work on credibility for marketers.

"By being authentic, you resonate better with others. Therein lies your magnetism — the reason that someone opts for your product or service."

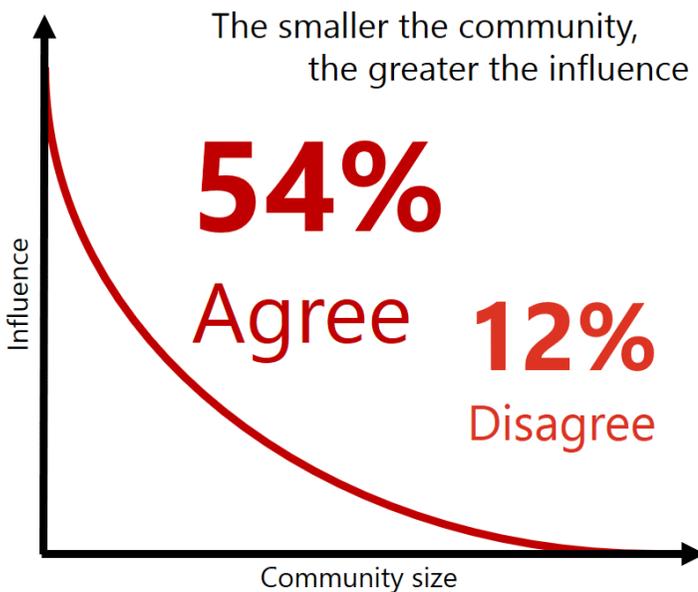


Figure 3: Influence and community size

Those loyal to themselves carry more credibility. Authenticity of organizations is associated with the loyalty they have to their own core values, mission and vision statements. Thus, the communication of the employees, as well as that of the organization itself, is relevant. The identity of the organization must be shared with the employees to achieve one-on-one communication by the organization.

Traditionally, marketing communication initiatives are aimed at reaching as many audiences as possible. But when marketing communications objectives are aimed at supporting and influencing decisions, the question is whether this is the right strategy. Reach is interesting for increasing brand awareness, but it doesn't influence commercial decisions in the right way. Confidence is more important than reach. This is especially true for small, specific communities that are hugely influential. For instance, when it comes to maintaining a company blog, a popular blogger needn't be employed. Involving recognized niche experts can be far more interesting to influence decisions.

Start with why

An organization's marketing strategy should always be an extension of the strategy of the organization as a whole. In the company, strategy choices are mainly made regarding the possible directions an organization can take. Strategic decisions involve the long term and form the central starting point for (sub) decisions that need to be made in the short term. The general scope for strategic decisions in the business world is somewhere from 5 to 10 years.

To make choices over the long term, organizations must have a vision of the environment and the market in which they operate. A vision illustrates what the company aims to be. To achieve this, it's important to examine the world as it is now and the opportunities that exist for the organization in the future. To formulate a vision for the company, the following questions should be posed:

- *What are the current conditions of the market?*
- *How is the external environment developing?*
- *How will the market develop?*
- *What position do we want to take?*

Subsequently, the mission defines the *raison d'être* and the identity of the organization. This explains the existence of the organization – who they are and what they believe in.

In his book, *Start with Why*, author Simon Sinek captivantly explains the importance of a mission statement. He says that the most successful organizations adopt a reverse control model regarding the norm. That model is brilliantly straightforward and works as follows. Decision-making, taking action and communicating in successful organizations is based on why they exist (their *raison d'être*) and how they fulfill their position.

This model subsequently determines what the organization's activities will be as indicated in figure 4.

On the other hand, most executive boards, managers and employees argue otherwise. Every company, business unit or department can explain what they do. Some can even say how they do it. But only a few will be able to perfectly explain why. We aren't referring to making profit, products or services. At best, this defines the how. Simon Sinek uses Apple as an example. Apple computers are more expensive than PCs, and there has long been less software available for it but a very large audience wanting to buy it. Why? Sinek argues that the motivation can be traced back to the consumers' identification with Apple and its reason for being (raison d'être). The Apple consumer will gladly pay a little more because the brand is more closely aligned with his own values.

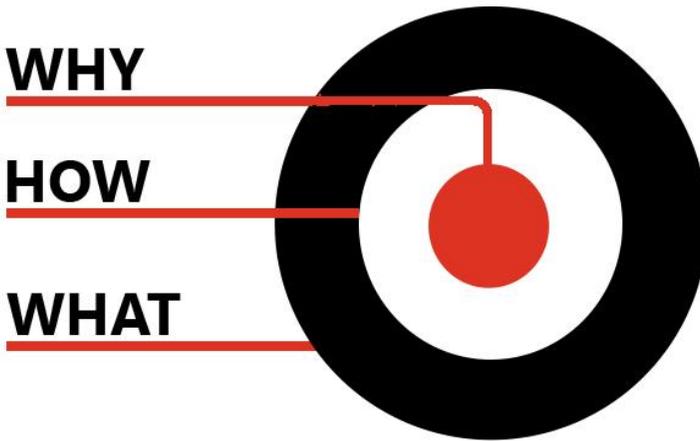


Figure 4: Why, How and What from Simon Sinek

To demonstrate the difference between communicating about what and communicating about why, it's useful to compare the following messages:

- "We make great computers. They are beautifully designed and easy to use. Would you like to discover more?"
- "We think differently. We challenge the status quo in everything that we do. This is reflected in our products, the design and the user-friendliness. We make computers, among other things. Are you interested in discovering more?"

The second message likely appeals more to you than the first. The difference in perspective is the following:

- **WHAT -> HOW**
- **WHY -> HOW -> WHAT**

The why constitutes the starting point in Apple's case; the organization is actually capable of changing the status quo. Take the rise of the user-friendly interface, the effect they've had on the music industry, their innovations in terms of the use of smartphones and the rise of the tablet, to name but a few. What's remarkable is the role that Apple has played in the music industry with iTunes. In doing so, Apple is no longer just a computer company, remaining loyal to its conviction to genuinely challenge the status quo. The recent, and subtle, removal of the word computers in the name coincides with this evolution.

At its helm, Apple's co-founder Steve Jobs was not alone in this. Other examples of successful organizations that, through solid leadership, placed the why at the forefront in everything they do and how they communicate were:

- Sam Walton (Walmart) wanted to provide quality products at an affordable price to country-wide America.
- Herb Kelleher (Southwest Airlines) wanted to make traveling by airplane less boring and more readily available to the common man.
- Bill Gates (Microsoft) already believed at the end of the 1970s that the computer would be a valuable addition to offices and households and proceeded with the production of software.

When leadership falls away, as was the case a few years ago with Apple and Microsoft, it's a huge challenge for the organization to keep operating in terms of the why. The power of communications on the why level can be compared to friendships. Friends don't love you for what you do but for who you are. The same applies to customers and employees. Many companies have lost this perspective. They know what they do but not the reason why. This is why they are unable to communicate at the right level with their customers and employees. The part of our brain that takes care of our emotions knows no language. Putting into words the reason why is so difficult. It's the same as trying to explain the reasons why we love someone. We tend to rationalize these reasons, but we do know it feels good. According to Simon Sinek, the power this has can be traced back to the fact that the limbic system – a group of structures in the brain that concerns itself with emotion, motivation, enjoyment and the emotional memory – in our brain deals with the why level.

Rational or emotional decisions

For a long time, the starting point in B2B marketing was that decisions were made rationally. Anticipating emotion was exclusive territory for the B2C marketers. However, it's becoming increasingly apparent that emotion plays an important role in B2B. Emotion and rationale are two power fields that, together – sometimes in agreement but sometimes in conflict – come to a decision. It's not one or the other, black or white, but more of a gray area.

It's interesting to gain insight into the development of the human brain. The oldest part of the brain is also known as the reptilian brain, which determines our instinct. It's the automatic pilot that keeps you out of harm's way. Subsequently in our evolution, the limbic brain, which is responsible for our emotions, developed itself. It determines what we like and who we love but also our dislikes or the things that make us aggressive. What separates human beings from other creatures is the neocortex. This is the most modern part of the brain and is home to the intellect. This is what enables us to consider rational decisions. As it relates to Simon Sinek's model, there is a logical correlation between the why and the limbic brain.

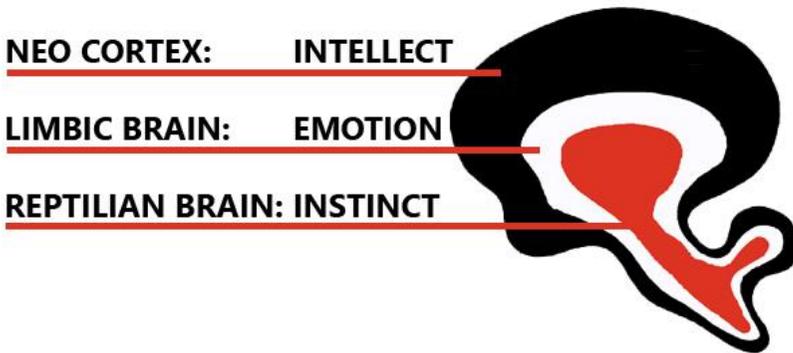


Figure 5: Our brain

Corporate identity

The organization communicates its identity via the corporate identity. Corporate identity is broader and farther reaching than house style elements. It's a combination of:

- behavior: shaped by company culture, based on the norms and values within the organization
- design: the consistent use of certain visual trademarks, such as the company logo, use of color and style elements

- communication: the communications created for different stakeholders, such as investor relations, PR and marketing campaigns

The corporate identity provides valuable guidelines for the content of the content marketing message as well as the tone of voice and visual appearance. Two especially valuable elements of content marketing are the creation of editorial guidelines and an editorial board. These guidelines, commonly used in the publishing business, offer a reference point and direction for the editorial aspect of content marketing initiatives. The editorial guidelines set out the goals, the principles and the starting points for communicating.

Beside the existence of a living corporate story, for content marketers, editorial guidelines can provide grip for initiatives and campaigns. The corporate story is a tale (or a series of stories) that connects the vision and the mission to the positioning of the organization in the market and the society. It's used as a strategic compass and aimed at all stakeholders, including employees, customers and shareholders.

Content marketing strategy

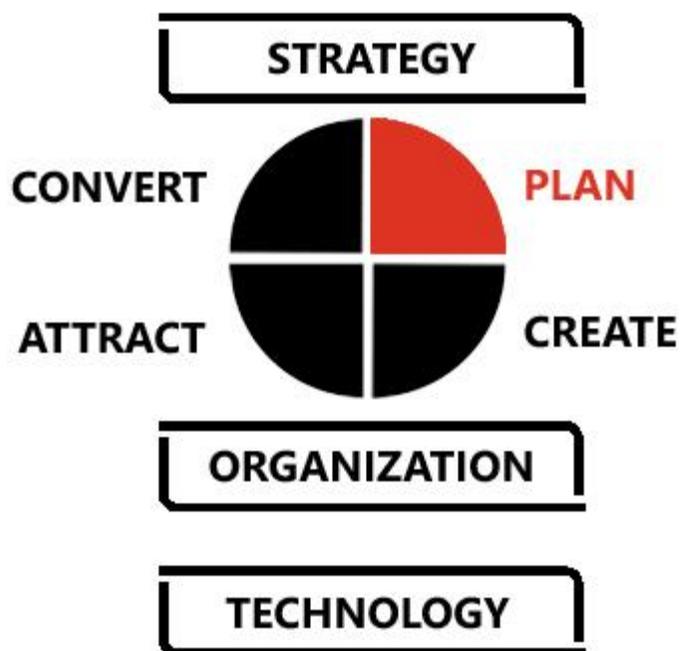
The messages and the stories contained within the content marketing activities of the organization must be consistent with the mission, vision and strategy of the organization. By sharing relevant knowledge, expertise and experience, in an authentic way, confidence and trust is created. Authentic communication is thereby guaranteed, and this is reinforced by communicating from the why level. Not only should the content be in line with the strategy, the marketing strategy must be compatible. Strategic choices in content marketing include:

- The measure to which content marketing is to be implemented relative to other marketing methods, such as sales promotion, brand advertising, cold calling, sponsorship and direct marketing
- The objectives of content marketing in terms of lead generation, conversion, thought leadership, brand experience, brand recognition and loyalty
- The product-market combinations to which the content marketing will be geared
- The people and the tools to strategically design the content marketing activities
- The commitment and acceptance of the content marketing strategy within the management of the organization

This is how the company strategy forms the starting point for the content marketing initiatives. The layering of Simon Sinek's model can be linked to the communications.



Figure 6: Communication based on Why, How and What



STEP 2: PLANNING YOUR PROGRAM

In the chapter “Content marketing Strategy,” we discussed the correlation between the strategy of the organization and the type of messages the organization communicates. It was demonstrated that there is a clear link between both; consistency is important to guarantee authenticity. Often, the mission, vision and corporate identity provide good pointers. But what should the content actually encompass? And who should it be targeted at?

In our definition, content:

- consists of content formats, such as copy, visuals, audio, video, spoken word or a combination thereof
- contains answers to information requirements surrounding the context of your services or products
- satisfies, attracts, informs and/or triggers curiosity
- demonstrates specific in-house knowledge, expertise and/or experience

From product-oriented to buyer-oriented

An essential characteristic of content marketing is that it's always thought of in terms of the customer. Naturally, many organizations are used to communicating in terms of themselves or from the context of the products or services they offer. This is exactly where content marketing differs from traditional marketing. The traditional marketing way of thinking has historically been developed according to the tried and trusted four “Ps” from Philip Kotler, the father of marketing. This is also called the marketing mix. The four Ps stand for product, price, promotion – to once again highlight the benefits of the product – and place, where you can buy the product. However, there's no mention of a P for prospect, the potential customer that it all revolves around.

Examples of traditional forms of marketing in which the four Ps play a key role are:

- ✓ Sales promotion: a promotion to stimulate direct sales
- ✓ Discount: a price reduction to stimulate direct sales
- ✓ Advertising: communications to promote a product or service

Communication based on products or services is straightforward as it's all derived from your own context. Marketers spend their days in an environment where they are discussing the product, its features, the existing success stories and the self-made, unique selling points. If someone is enthusiastic about an idea they will always talk about it. Writing a piece of copy based on the company context will generally lead to a summary of the unique selling points, which will shape the core of the message.

But communication based on the potential business customer is focused on answering questions from decision-makers. It should be clear which questions are posed by which decision-maker and in what stage of the buying process. To give some necessary structure regarding questions arising from the market and answers that can help people in forming their ideas and approach, two commonly used marketing concepts can be applied: the buyer journey and the decision-making unit (consisting of different buyer personas).

The buyer journey

Business investment decisions are generally not made overnight. Decision-makers undergo a process known as the buyer journey. Before making investment decisions, people first discover a challenge, problem or idea. For example, the current situation is no longer sufficient or external developments created the possibility for new opportunities – or threats – which need to be dealt with or anticipated. Subsequently, different scenarios are considered for which improvements can be made and implemented. Finally, the various options are assessed and decisions are made. This journey can be divided into the following stages:



Figure 7: Buyer journey

- ✓ **Discovery:** The starting point is the recognition or acknowledgement of a problem or challenge. Following that is acceptance that a solution must be found.
- ✓ **Consideration:** Next it's necessary to find solutions. Internally, the wishes and requirements are reviewed and externally all the possibilities are lined up. This search generally ends with the preference for one, or a limited number of, suppliers.

- ✓ **Decision:** Finally, you move toward the execution of a choice. The chosen option must be justifiable and give the feel-good factor.
- ✓ **Implementation:** After the actual purchase, the product or service needs to be implemented or put into use. As supplier, it's key to optimize this process.
- ✓ **Usage:** Lastly, the service or product is put into use. Now it's essential to turn users into fans!

The buyer journey is language from the marketing team. However, salespeople think in terms of a sales funnel. The sales funnel is a classification of potential customers by the likelihood that they buy products or service from the organization. There are various classifications of the sales funnel whereby the likelihood of generating a customer relationship increases.

For example:

- ✓ **Market:** all parties of the intended audience
- ✓ **Suspects:** parties that in theory best match the profile
- ✓ **Leads:** parties that have displayed interest
- ✓ **Prospects:** parties that are actually looking for a solution
- ✓ **Hot prospects:** parties that consider your solution
- ✓ **Customers:** parties that have signed a contract

The term funnel is used because the number of parties keeps getting filtered down. The further you move down the classifications, the more parties drop off the list, which is called leakage. A funnel shape forms from the list of potential customers in different stages. The big difference compared to the buyer journey is that the sales funnel is based upon the sales organization. To close the gap between marketing and sales, the two can be linked to each other as such: The buyer in his journey is also a potential customer somewhere along the sales funnel.

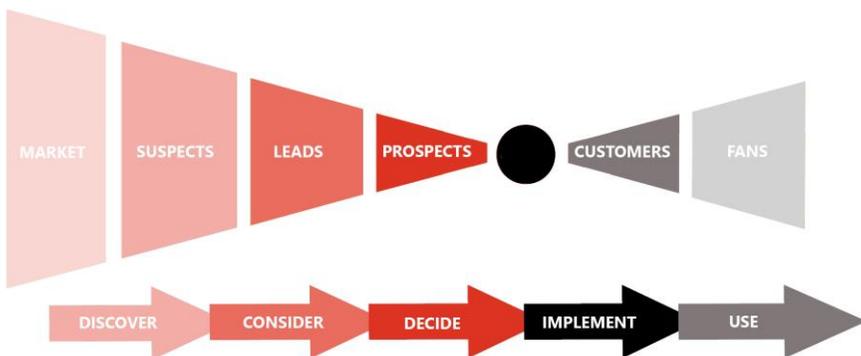


Figure 8: Buyer journey versus sales funnel

To set up a content marketing concept, we take a closer look at the buyer journey. As it relates to the sales funnel, it has been established that the number of people that find themselves in a particular phase of the buyer journey gradually reduces. More people are at the stage of discovery than consideration. This is largely because discovery takes more time than consideration and, in turn, discovery is a longer process than the actual selection. Linked to the sales funnel, buyers that are in the discovery stage are leads, buyers who are still considering are prospects and those who are at the point of making their choice are hot prospects.

The phase in which the buyer finds himself within the journey influences the type of messages that the buyer is open to. Someone who is busy discovering ideas is not necessarily open to the hard sell or any other message pushing them to buy. Messages that stimulate the discovery phase could be more relevant. Think of content related to trends, developments and possibilities.

The phases that comprise the buyer journey can be used as suitable messages as displayed in the diagram below:

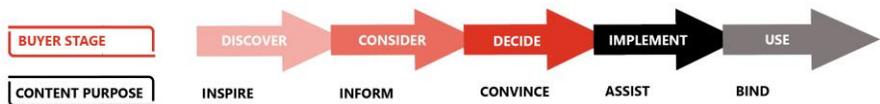


Figure 9: Buyer journey and content purpose

Inspiring content

Content to raise inspiration is meant to activate the discovery process in a customer at an early stage of the buying process.

Examples of such content include:

- ✓ Background articles: articles, reports and papers that discuss developments, visions and trends that can result in ideas
- ✓ News and blogs: relevant stories and blogs that relate to the industry or position of the buyer
- ✓ Keynotes: inspirational keynote speakers who offer a fresh vision on possibilities and provide new perspective to analyze the current situation

Informative content

Informative content is aimed at supporting companies or individuals in the consideration phase.

Examples of informative content include:

- ✓ Informative articles: articles in which content is discussed and possible solutions are presented

- ✓ Methodology or plan of action: a description of a method or plan of action organizations can apply in a specific situation
- ✓ Reference cases: descriptions of solutions and certain results in different situations in practice
- ✓ Checklists or pitfalls: a summary of matters that should be considered in a particular situation
- ✓ Webinars: a virtual seminar surrounding a specific topic related to the portfolio

Convincing content

Convincing content is used for the actual promotion of your own solution. It is wise to distinguish stimulating content from other content. This way, the reader perceives awareness content and informative content independent from each other. Independence is important to retain the reader's attention.

Convincing content shares many similarities with traditional push methods, such as brochures and advertisements. It's important, however, to continuously publish within the same sphere, which means avoiding loud copy or flickering ads that disturb the careful approach made to a customer, causing them to click away. Stimulating content is carefully focused with the help of concrete solutions to the target audience.

Examples of stimulating content are:

- ✓ Sales: the most important stimulating messenger in the B2B market is the account manager
- ✓ Service descriptions: description of your service(s) related to the surrounding content on the website
- ✓ Company profile: a short description of your company with objectively measurable attributes
- ✓ Presentations and fact sheets: all other commercial documents in which your company details awareness and informative content

Assisting content

The purchase or investment is followed by installation, implementation or use. This first introductory phase with the product or the service is the moment to form the basis of customer satisfaction. Through assisting content, the organization can, at this stage, provide maximum service to the newly acquired customer with:

- ✓ How-to guides: practical guides with tips and tricks regarding the use of the solution
- ✓ Implementation methods: a description of self-developed or implementation methods adopted by the organization
- ✓ User trainings: an online or offline training program to lower usage thresholds for customers

Binding content

Content can play an important role in increasing customer satisfaction, brand engagement and customer loyalty.

Some examples are these content formats:

- ✓ Events: physical gatherings, such as product launches, themed sessions, conferences or master classes
- ✓ Customer magazines: a magazine published by the organization as a means of communicating with the customer
- ✓ Email newsletter: a regular e-newsletter with relevant blogs, product updates and customer feedback/stories
- ✓ Expert training: in-depth knowledge sessions for experienced users
- ✓ User groups and communities: facilitating communication between users via online and offline platforms

In the customer relationship phase, it's also relevant to monitor signals that point to a new phase of discovery. By anticipating new information requirements/needs, loyalty cycles can be stimulated. The more the awareness content is aligned with binding content formats, the more the circle can be reinforced. Existing customers also need news on latest developments, trends and possibilities. This can involve customer magazines and email newsletters, among other things.

The decision-making unit

A smart marketing strategy doesn't merely look at the buying process but also considers the various members within the decision-making unit (DMU). The DMU includes the group of people within an organization that influences the decision-making process surrounding the purchase of products or services. Kotler, inventor of the term DMU, defines six different DMU roles:

- ✓ **Initiator:** The initial owner that went in search of the solution to his or her problem.
- ✓ **User:** The actual users of the products or services; they influence the specifications.
- ✓ **Influencer:** These people influence the buying process by setting preconditions. They are in every layer of an organization.
- ✓ **Buyer:** The person that actually conducts negotiations for contract terms with the supplier.
- ✓ **Decision-maker:** The person that eventually decides on the supplier.
- ✓ **Gatekeeper:** This person takes care of the information distribution with the DMU and can significantly influence the decision-making process.

The DMU members can fulfill any number of roles. Here, we specify the various roles based on a practical example. When a mid-sized wholesale company needs a new CRM system, this can be initiated by the commercial director. It could originate from the ambition to increase customer centricity as an organization. As a member of the executive board, he is responsible for the decision. He appoints the marketing manager to lead the project to select and implement a new CRM system. The marketing manager, as a project manager, has a gatekeeping function but is also a user and an influencer; he has his own purchase motives. The marketing manager includes the IT manager in his team. The IT department manages the purchase of such applications throughout the organization.

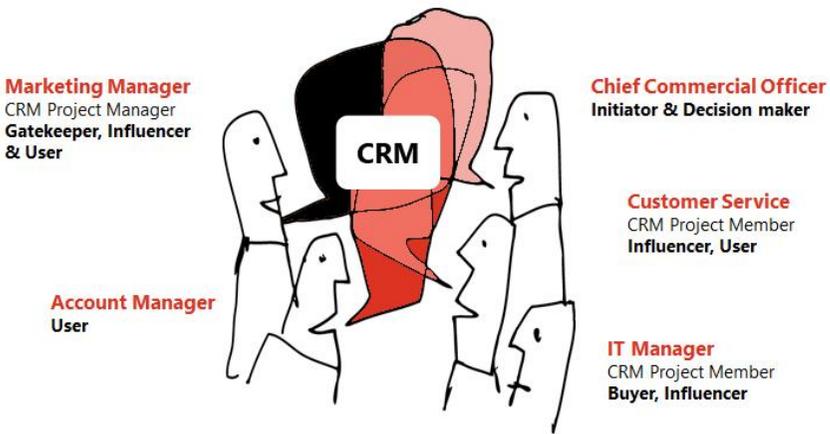


Figure 10: Decision making unit

The customer service manager is also involved as he receives all the queries and complaints, which is a good link to improving customer focus. Finally, the sales division is also represented through updates with the demands and requirements of the account managers.

This situation highlights that during the course of the sale of a CRM system different DMU members will be open to different messages. What makes it all the more complex is all members undergo their own buyer journey in the buying process. They go through the stages of discovery and consideration individually and come to their own preferences. One member of the DMU will spend more time on one phase than the next. For example, for the initiator, the discovery will involve a particular stance while the buyer will pay more attention to the contract terms and considerations prior to making the eventual choice.

Messaging framework

If we combine the buyer journey and the decision-making unit, we can establish a framework. This framework provides an overview of the stumbling blocks and the motives involved in the buying process of more complex products and services. By analyzing and examining this framework on each item, we can establish the relevant communication messages. The figure below provides a basic illustration of a standard overview in such a framework. This framework can be set up for each product-market combination.

BUYER STAGE	DISCOVER	CONSIDER	DECIDE	IMPLEMENT	USE
C-LEVEL	Trends & Developments	Strategic Options	USPs References	Progress & Risks	Strategic Possibilities
MANAGEMENT	Management Issues	Solutions	Improvements	Adoption	Optimization
OPERATIONAL	Operational Issues	Improvements	Operational Advantages	Usage	Expert Features

Figure 11: Standard messaging framework

This simplified framework consists of a C-level director, a manager and a user. In terms of discovery, at the executive level (director), his or her perspective is the starting point for shaping the relevant messaging. At this level, strategic aspects could be relevant. The executive board could question whether or not the organization is ready to anticipate certain trends or developments in the market. However, if we look at the same phase (discovery) in terms of the user, one aspect that could influence them to consider change is operational issues in the day-to-day functioning of the business.

A messaging framework can be set up for the product-market combination relevant to the organization. When the organization sells CRM systems to wholesale organizations, business associates and retailers, a messaging framework can be established for each market segment for the sale of CRM software.

It quickly becomes clear that communication based on the unique selling points – in terms of the product or the service – mainly appeals to the decision phase in the buying process. It offers no, or very little, reference points that appeal to the buyer journey at an earlier stage in the buying process of the different DMU members. The questions that were mentioned as an example in terms of information requirements of the customer can now be adopted in the messaging framework.

BUYER STAGE	IDEA	ORIENTATION	CHOICE
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR	Customer-centricity strategy	KPIs to monitor customer centricity	Knowledge of our industry
IT MANAGER	IT architecture roadmap	Implementation competences	Uptime & service desk
MARKETING MANAGER	Connect with marketing automation	Managing sales leads	360-degree customer view
SALES	Hassle using Outlook & CRM	Identifying best sales opportunities	Easy to work with
CUSTOMER SERVICE	Using 3 systems at the help desk	Integration with ERP system	User interface

Figure 12: Messaging framework example for CRM

A messaging framework provides a complete overview of buyer motives and stumbling blocks of the various DMU members and provides valuable input for defining relevant content and formats. A complete framework also offers an overflow of possibilities; prioritizing the different messaging is extremely important. This can be approached as follows:

- ✓ **Prioritizing personas.** For each phase, determine which DMU members have the most influence on the buying process. In the example above, for the discovery phase, this could be the director and customer service; for the consideration phase, it could be the marketing manager and the IT manager; and for the actual selection phase, it could be the Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) and the IT manager.
- ✓ **Prioritizing the messaging.** Subsequently, look at the most important motives and stumbling blocks. When a consensus is reached regarding these aspects, the outlines of the content marketing concept start revealing themselves.

BUYER STAGE	IDEA	ORIENTATION	CHOICE
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR	Customer-centricity strategy	KPIs to monitor customer centricity	Knowledge of our Industry
IT MANAGER	IT architecture roadmap	Implementation competences	Uptime & service desk
MARKETING MANAGER	Connect with marketing automation	Managing MQLs & SQLs	360-degree customer view
SALES	Hassle using Outlook & CRM	Identifying best sales opportunities	Easy to work with
CUSTOMER SERVICE	Using 3 systems at the help desk	Integration with ERP system	User interface

Figure 13: Prioritizing messages

Buyer persona

The term buyer persona came into play in the marketing world in the last few years. The buyer persona basically goes more in-depth into the different DMU members. It's a description of the person that gives the DMU member a face. The buyer persona contains a description of the various media followed by the DMU member, the work they do and the responsibilities that the work brings with it. Also taken into consideration are their interests and how they search for information, news and trends. The buyer persona is often written in the form of a story and the profile is given a face to give the audience an identity.

The C-level buyer

A special position in the decision-making unit is the so-called C-level buyer: the decision-maker that is involved from the top with the buying process. A lot of value and influence is assigned to the C-level buyer in most marketing strategy plans. The question is whether or not, in practice, this is actually still the cases. Because C-level management can only dedicate a limited amount of time to buying decisions, a large portion of the buying process will be delegated.

The Farland Group recently did research into the buying behavior of C-level buyers, which offered interesting insights. Their buying behavior is strongly influenced by their focus on results, expected value generation, their lack of time and confidence in peers and existing associates. The insights from Farland are an extension of the following characteristics: Delegation and recommendation – C-level management delegates a large portion of the consideration in new solutions and providers to the buying team. It doesn't concern itself with the details but can make recommendations in this phase.

- ✓ Confidence in proven value – The focus on generating value for the company and associates makes C-level buyers loyal to existing and proven strategic allies.
- ✓ Valuable use of time – To be as efficient as possible in the allocation of time, C-level buyers are skeptical when it comes to new matters that don't yet have a proven value or track record. For this reason, their involvement in the process will be limited to key moments.
- ✓ Supplier management is not a priority – C-level buyers want to spend the minimum amount of time on supplier management. They are wary of suppliers who need to be intensively managed.

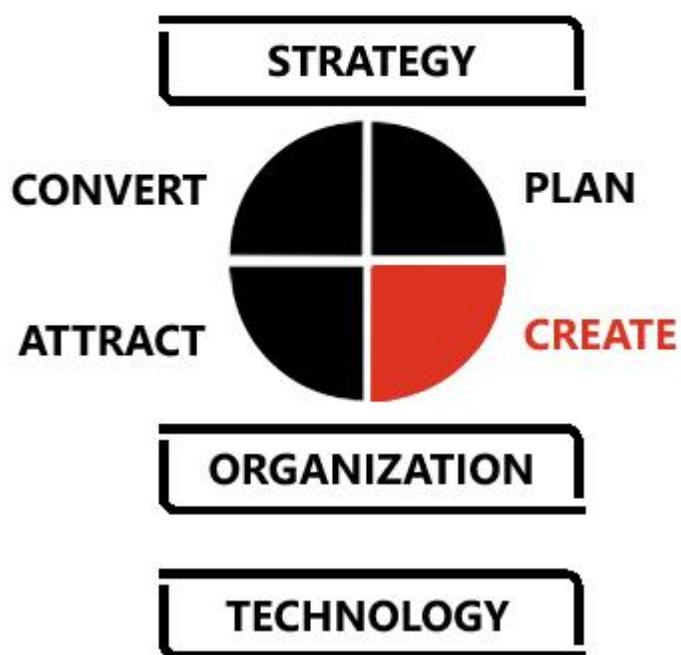
Plan

When it's clear what messaging the organization will aim at which DMU members, or buyer personas, an important step has been taken. Based on this context, a tactical content marketing plan can be established.

Planning is the initial step of a continuous four-step process, followed by content production (Create), use of media (Attract) and ensuring conversion mechanisms (Convert). The plan will contain a description of how the market will be approached, fed by the knowledge from the buyer journey and DMU.

The tactical content marketing plan divides the choices made into target groups or personas and the messages into content formats and media. This is not a one-time exercise but a process that – based on the dynamics of the market and the response of, and interaction with, the target audiences – is continuously adjusted, expanded and developed. Forming the concept is the basis, the starting point of the tactical content marketing plan. To further solidify the process and to provide the conversion from concept to market and organization shape and content, the entire content marketing plan is as follows:

- ✓ objectives
- ✓ starting points and preconditions
- ✓ content formats
- ✓ production and editorial planning
- ✓ social media plan
- ✓ conversion mechanisms
- ✓ organizational implementation
- ✓ technical implementation



STEP 3: CREATING GREAT CONTENT

When the content marketing plan is in place, the actual creation phase can start. Research has shown that content creation is seen as one of the biggest challenges for content marketing. It's not just authors who suffer from writer's block; complete organizations face this challenge. Creating content in itself is challenging due to the rapid growth of content marketing initiatives, so distinctive content is becoming more and more important. When content becomes a repetition of previously published knowledge or facts, the added value is limited. Providing high-quality content with unique characteristics increases its appeal. Here we delve into various content types, the relationship between these content types and the creation of the content.

Content types

Content can be arranged in different ways using:

- ✓ format, such as copy, images and/or a physical experience
- ✓ medium, such as digital, physical or print
- ✓ frequency, such as a one-time production, reuse or curation
- ✓ editorial formulas, like a blog site, video channel or magazine
- ✓ suitability for media type: owned, earned or paid

Arranging according to format

The most commonly used way to organize content types is according to format. Below is an overview of different content formats that can be used to convey messages.

Format	Examples
Copy	Blogs, columns, white papers, reports, background articles, point-of-view papers, interviews, cases, methodology paper, plans of action, checklists, templates, news, books and e-books
Visuals	Illustrations, photos, infographics, charts, flowcharts, presentations
Moving media	Videos, animations, webcast, demos and talk shows

Events	Conferences, roundtables, seminars, master classes, company parties, information sessions and product launches
Virtual events	Video webinars, slideshow webinars, online talk shows, virtual conferences and live streams
Audio	Podcasts, music and radio shows
Interactive formats	Games, comparisons, scans, communities and social media

Which content formats can be most effective is, of course, an interesting question. The Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs carried out relevant research on this topic in 2016. Approximately 1,500 B2B marketers that took part in the survey were questioned regarding the effectiveness and use of different content marketing tactics. The tactics that were perceived as most effective by respondents are shown here:



Figure 14: 2016 Research by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs

The effectiveness of a format depends very much on the message and the audience but also on the quality of the content and reach of the audience. It's impossible to single out one format or offer advice on the best application thereof. It is possible, however, to logically link content formats to the buyer journey. To stimulate the discovery process trend analyses, vision and infographics can be suitable. The discovery phase, however, lends itself to formats that can transmit more in-depth messaging with vehicles like white papers, checklists and demos.

Combining formats

Furthermore, the chosen content formats must be suited to the DMU member to whom they are targeted. When considering setting up gatherings or a roundtable meeting, C-level decision-makers will feel more drawn toward this if they can exchange their thinking with their peers while users feel the need for demonstrations to gain a valuable impression of the use of the product/service.

BUYER STAGE	IDEA	ORIENTATION	CHOICE
SENIORITY	EXTERNAL PLATFORMS		OWNED PLATFORMS
C-LEVEL	Executive Events	Roundtables	Reference Visits
MANAGEMENT	Conferences & Seminars	Expert Meetings & Workshops	Sales Meetings
OPERATIONAL	Conferences & Exhibitions	Custom Demos & Webinars	Sales Meetings

Figure 16: Event format matrix

The use of online communication can be established in the same way. Online communication can reinforce the offline initiatives and vice versa. Also, when establishing the framework for the use of online messaging, the DMU members and the phases of the buying process should serve as the starting point. As such, downloadable research reports and visionary documentation can be vital for executive board members and white papers about organizational issues can be important for line managers.

Here, individual content items are not standalone entities but rather combine to reinforce one another. In the example above, research can be combined with roundtable sessions. But that same research can give rise to, among other things, blogs for websites and infographics to be used on social media. The same basic content is then used in a different context aimed at different DMU members.

BUYER STAGE	IDEA	ORIENTATION	CHOICE
SENIORITY	EXTERNAL PLATFORMS		OWNED PLATFORMS
C-LEVEL	Blogs, Reports, Research, PR	Executive Briefs	Reference Stories
MANAGEMENT	Blogs, White Papers, Video, PR	White Papers, Social Media, Webinars	Factsheets, USPs, Presentations
OPERATIONAL	User Communities, Social Media	Checklists, Demos	User Experiences, Product Demos

Figure 15: Content format matrix

Reuse, curation and cohesion

In a carefully considered content marketing plan, efforts in the area of content production are optimized by cleverly determining possibilities for reuse and cohesion with different productions to reinforce the message. Content can be reused in various ways. A large-scale content production can be divided up in a series of smaller productions or in a different context. Consider splitting up a white paper into blogs, an action plan and a checklist. Or divide a long video interview up into short, specific Q&A segments. A change in format of the same production can also be applied. Organize a webinar based on market research or make a SlideShare e-book from a white paper.

Content curation can also be effectively deployed to enrich your own content and raise the level of cohesion. Content curation includes reusing external content. There is so much content online that it can be a useful exercise to make use of this through content curation. The most well-known and accessible form of curation is retweeting relevant content for the audience to keep the Twitter account current and relevant. But curation comes in many shapes and sizes. The internet offers a broad spectrum of tools for content curation, such as Scoop.it, Trap.it, Attivio, GinzaMetrics and SmartShoot.

Editorial formulas

A special category in the various content marketing tactics is the format that involves an editorial formula, such as magazines, portals and large conferences. This involves issuing messages from a cohesive combination of different content types tuned in to a specific target group. A magazine can contain a combination of background articles, interviews, columns, infographics and illustrations. A content marketing portal can be used for blogs, white papers, expert profiles, e-books and webinars.

Production with an editorial formula as its base often involves long-term objectives and is aimed at establishing fixed value for the target group. The starting point is completely aligned with the continuity of content marketing, which should be strategically deployed and viewed as a process rather than a one-off campaign.

This is also the area in which marketing shares the most common ground with the world of publishing. Where many publishers with declining ad revenue and changing demands reconsider their business models, brands now consider the publishing framework they can implement to give their messaging shape and connect their target audiences. Various experts claim that companies now need to think like publishers. It is a possibility that, in the future, publishers will be owned by big brands. They have the budget, and it's in their interest.

Editorial calendar

The actual creation of content appears to be one of the most important marketing challenges for organizations. This has repeatedly been demonstrated in international research. A common argument is lack of time, but if content marketing within an organization is established as a strategic means of achieving economic growth, this is merely an excuse. Creating content is a new task and should be accounted for, even if it is at the expense of other activities. Hence, it is a question of good management and setting priorities.

To manage the production of content, it's sensible to work according to an editorial calendar containing a schedule for the planning of content that is to be developed. Items that should be included in this calendar are:

- ✓ **Deadline:** date when the content must be finished
- ✓ **Working title:** brief title description of the item
- ✓ **Owner:** person responsible for the production of the content
- ✓ **Message:** the customer question/problem/issue that should be answered in the content
- ✓ **Audience:** the DMU members or buyer personas to which the content is aimed
- ✓ **Format:** the content format (article, white paper, blog, video, webinar, etc.)
- ✓ **Conversion:** the desired call to action on the content – for example, a download, response, like or subscription

From content to communication channel

Content is produced to be consumed. The bridge to consumption is the communication channel. Content and channel must match.

Complementarity and separation between content and channel used to be evident – a commercial was made for TV, an ad for a magazine or newspaper, a banner for a website and direct mail. The message was largely spread through the acquisition of media.

The rise of content marketing has blurred the lines in one-on-one interaction and the division between content and channel. Content can be created for multiple channels and the channel can form part of the content itself. For example, is an in-depth blog optimized for search engines a content type or a channel? Is an e-book optimized for SlideShare a content type or channel? By placing the emphasis on content that is relevant for the target group via editorial formulas, the importance of in-house media channels increases. Content and channel co-exist and morph. The next pillar, Communication, delves into this topic more.

Content in copy form

Despite the fact that visual content is gaining ground, written content remains one of the most important content formats. Written content comes in many different shapes, from brief quotes to extensive books. Every format has its own set of characteristics, pros and cons. This chapter deals with the creation of copy content in its various forms.

Blog

The most well-known copy format in content marketing is the blog, which was quickly adopted by consumers in the rise of the internet and later adopted by the business world. The word “blog” is derived from the term weblog and is comparable to an online logbook. A blog gives people and/or organizations the opportunity to create an online podium for sharing knowledge or progress. Blogs are increasingly used commercially, in a creative way, to spar about industry ins and outs and for organizations to demonstrate products and services to customers. A blog can be included on a company website or be presented as part of a separate channel like on WordPress, Blogger or Joomla. These are tools used for creating blogs in a preferred design and format. A blog enhances brand awareness and SEO performance in Google and other search machines.

When the objective for the blog is to touch base with an audience at an expected frequency, then it is vital to blog consistently. If the audience has to wait too long for a blog update, the engagement declines. A good blog consists of short paragraphs. By referring to previous blog posts by the organization, ideas can be reinforced and highlighted. A blog usually contains between 300 and 450 words and makes use of images and powerful headers for each paragraph. A blog should offer a specific viewpoint and entice readers through a catchy title.

White paper

Another way of sharing knowledge is to write white papers. The term “white paper” originally came from politics: It includes objective documents to back up decision-making. The term was later adopted by the IT sector. Essentially, a white paper is a substantive document of knowledge. A white paper written by a company, of course, is never completely objective, but the primary goal is always to share knowledge such as a particular vision, development or process.

A white paper should not be written as a commercial document. It should primarily be written to provide answers to particular questions from potential customers.

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share knowledge• Be objective• Aim at specific target group• Focus on a specific problem/topic• Ensure writing is lively, visual and <i>to the point</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pitch products and services• Be subjective• Have a lack of focus• Praise the organization• Write in a dry, boring or excessive way

A white paper – usually between eight and 12 pages long – gives an opportunity to discuss a topic at length and in detail. Publishing white papers positions your organization as a thought leader. Naturally, it's of great importance that the author captures the right tone of voice and content.

When writing a white paper, it's important to make a target group analysis. Consider which challenges your target group faces. Research topics, potential solutions and developments that are aligned with these challenges. In-depth knowledge of your audience and their challenges ensures that you can create useful content such as checklists or a list of pitfalls. To improve readability, make use of images and charts and use short paragraphs with descriptive headers. It is also important to make a clear introduction, conclusion and summary for readers who wish to scan the white paper. Make sure these parts are written to entice people.

The white paper is a commonly used content format for generating leads. In exchange for downloading it, readers must provide information such as their email address. By obtaining this contact information, you can connect with readers who are interested in a particular topic about which you have published content. It's also possible to put the white paper on SlideShare, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media channels. By sharing knowledge via qualitative white papers, you position your organization as a thought leader in the industry.

Report

Industry knowledge can also be shared in the form of a report. What distinguishes a white paper from a report is the research aspect of the document. The word "report" is derived from the verb "to report." A report is an account of a development, trend or a situation based on research and/or analysis. This could be market research, a survey or desk research.

A report should also have a neutral tone. Reports are written in the third person and use active verbs. Avoid long sentences and, as much as possible, the use of adjectives. Be brief and make use of compelling headers for paragraphs. Select suitable charts, tables and images for your report to engage readers visually.

A report can also be shared in different ways such as the website, a newsletter and social media channels. A report that contains particular newsworthy findings can also be a good way to generate media attention.

Book

Writing a book as part of a content marketing tactic is a huge challenge. It exceeds all previous copy formats in terms of effort, breadth and depth. A book written by your own organization, though, positions you as having in-depth knowledge and experience. Furthermore, a book can highlight a topic from all angles through which potential prospects with a variety of questions can gain knowledge.

A good idea must be formed first to write a book. There also needs to be a sufficient amount of knowledge and expertise available to carry out the idea. Subsequently, discipline and a regimented, dedicated writing process are necessary to ensure completion.

E-book

An e-book is essentially a digital version of a book although generally much shorter. On the other hand, e-books often include collections and bundles of previously published articles, blogs or white papers. Easy access to technology means that existing copies can be given a new content form. The e-book then allows for extra exposure and the possibility to discuss different topics within your chosen field.

Digital media presents the possibility to back up copy with video, audio or interactive graphics. These e-books can be made accessible and easily shared via SlideShare.

Action plans, checklists and do's and don'ts

Brief, practical documents often effectively generate leads in campaigns. Potential buyers are interested in action plans, checklists and overviews of do's and don'ts. Besides the added value they provide for many target groups, this type of content is often easy to create and can be reused in white papers, e-books, blogs and quotes.

A practical document commonly used in the IT sector is the RFP or RFI template. In making selections for software packages, there will often need to be a so-called request for proposal (RFP) or request for information (RFI). Through the document, the buying party will invite a selection of providers to submit information or provide pricing. An established RFP should be as complete as possible for a buying party; no functionality can be left out. When the software provider gives an RFP template, the buyer is provided with practical input. Of course, additional information can be provided in the RFP.

Wikis

Does your organization contain a lot of professionals with relevant knowledge on the same subject with whom you'd like to create content? Then another possibility is to work on content in a shared wiki. A wiki is a web app in which various people can work on a knowledge document. The most well-known of these is Wikipedia. The advantage of a wiki is that the copy is written by multiple professionals, which means the copy includes more knowledge than if it were written by an individual. The disadvantage is that the copy will consist of different styles of writing and will need editing.

Online writing

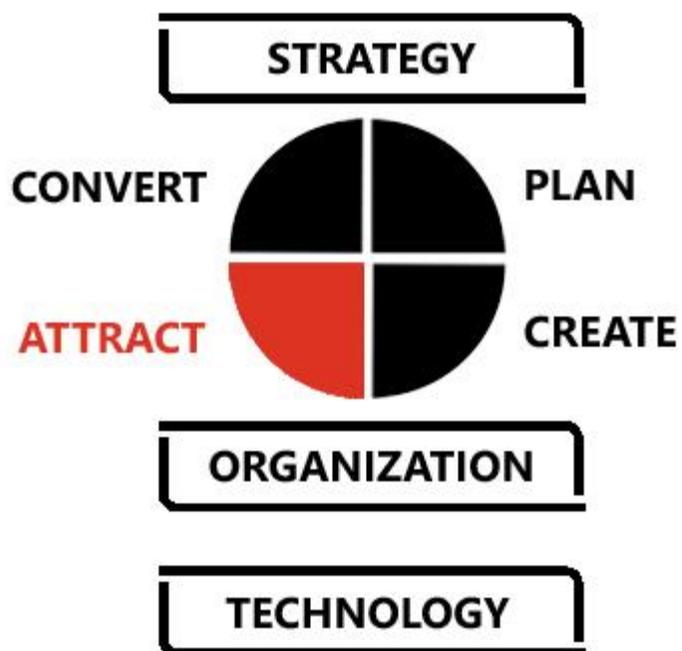
Numerous aspects need to be taken into consideration when it comes to writing online. Writing starts with a catchy, descriptive title. The title is the first thing a reader encounters and should prevent him or her from clicking away. Online readers can be quickly distracted by ads or banners surrounding the copy. They are constantly distracted by buttons, ads and other links. For this reason, it's important to keep engaging the reader by writing copy that is as short and compelling as possible. Here are some considerations:

- ✓ Make a target group analysis for the audience you wish to engage.
- ✓ Set up a brainstorming session to discuss a fun topic.
- ✓ Consider the content type to publish your story. Think of white papers, blogs or articles. You can also choose to make use of a white paper that you divide into smaller sections and publish as blogs.

- ✓ Start the copy with an enticing introduction that briefly describes the contents of the piece. Try to trigger readers with the introduction so that they are interested in the rest of the story.
- ✓ Always make use of visual aspects in your content, such as images, charts and graphs. Colors and images trigger people to read further and give rise to curiosity.
- ✓ Construct your copy using short paragraphs with a catchy header in which one subject is highlighted. Don't make the paragraphs too long; use no more than 70 to 100 words per paragraph.
- ✓ Write engaging, active content that triggers a call to action. The knowledge you offer is not there just to be shared but also to trigger prospects to behave differently.
- ✓ Link to other content types, social media channels and online platforms in your online copy, making your content cross-media and fully optimized.
- ✓ Write using one tense; do not mix the past tense and future tenses. To trigger readers, it's important to write compelling copy but avoid using slang.

Cohesion between content

This chapter dealt with various types of content using copy that is often used in content marketing plans. The production should also include the process of examining cohesion between various content types as well as the content in itself. When you write a white paper, for instance, you can also use it for the production of various blogs. A research report can be combined with a webinar on the topic. By reusing messaging and the selected content formats, you can develop a broader content portfolio through which you can achieve greater interaction and exposure.



STEP 4: ATTRACTING YOUR AUDIENCE

High-quality content that is aligned with the buyer journey of a potential customer is worthless if it is invisible to the buyer. To bring content effectively to the target audience, you need to think hard about the communications. Reaching the right target audience is far more important than the total exposure achieved. Those who are in the discovery and consideration phases, in particular, need to be reached so they can be turned into leads.

Distribution of content

The media possibilities to distribute content these days largely fall into the categories of owned, earned and paid such as those shown in the graphic below.

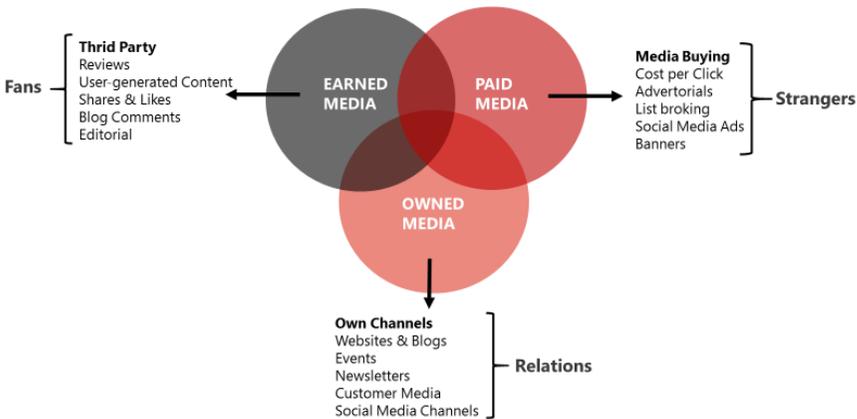


Figure 17: Earned, paid and owned media

Owned media

Owned media includes the channels that you run and control yourself. Your own channels include your website, newsletter and your social media accounts. As owner of a social media account, only you decide what content is shared and the possibilities for responding to the messages. Your media channels carry a strong correlation with the content itself. The big advantage of these channels is that you have complete control over the content and functionality.

Owned media is largely aimed at familiar target groups and contacts – such as existing customers, associates, subscribers and prospects – parties that are (somewhat) familiar with the organization.

Examples of owned media include:

- ✓ **Social media** – Companies can open an account on social media under their own name, so-called logo accounts. The most commonly used social media platforms for B2B marketing include Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, followed by Google+, SlideShare and YouTube.
- ✓ **Newsletter** – A low-threshold and effective way to engage a target audience at set times is a newsletter. Since the average internet user is bombarded with countless newsletters, it's essential to offer distinctive and relevant content.
- ✓ **Portals and blogs** – An in-house blog or content marketing portal is a good platform to regularly publish new content for the target audience. Increasing the amount of content increases the chance for search engines to list your content and visitors to find it.
- ✓ **Customer magazines** – Traditional print magazines for customers and associates is a good way to physically be present among the audience, right on the desk of the decision-maker.
- ✓ **Online TV channel** – An expensive but unique way to engage a target group is via a TV channel. The Danish Jyskebank is the ultimate example of this, but a basic and more accessible variation could be to set up a YouTube channel (such as that of Life Technologies).
- ✓ **Company events** – A company event is an outstanding way to not only share knowledge but also network with existing and new customers.

Earned media

Earned media include the channels used by others to share content and messages about your organization. Your credibility can be increased because others are posting the message. When powerful media spread the message, the exposure of earned media can be huge. A message or other such content that goes viral can attract a lot of attention.

When a message is forwarded by a number of people with their own reach via social media, the exposure increases exponentially. Imagine a message sent to an account with 1,000 followers is shared by three followers of that account, each with 1,000 followers of their own, then the reach is 4,000 followers instead of your own 1,000. Worth the effort!

The big disadvantage of earned media is that the organization has relatively little, to no, control. Whether the message goes viral in the form of an illustration, video or animation is determined externally. Although the humor or newsworthiness is significant, the chance of a viral effect remains limited.

Earned media generates exposure that doesn't involve out-of-pocket costs. That doesn't mean that earned media is always free. To gain actual attention and response, you need to make an effort. Earned media can be accelerated by the production of content that is worth sharing. And high-quality content is often – but not always – more expensive to produce. The ultimate objective is that fans reinforce, recommend and share your message.

Earned media includes user-generated content, among other things. User-generated content includes all media in which the user can add content themselves, such as comments on blogs, additions to wikis and replies to items in discussion groups.

Examples of earned media include:

- ✓ **Reviews and ratings** – These include responses or ratings on a product, service or content (such as a webinar or white paper).
- ✓ **Online communities** – These include groups of people that communicate with each other, share information or collaborate via an online platform. By starting a community and functioning as a moderator or community leader, a company can maintain contact with an audience in a powerful way via the core of the knowledge. Communities are largely aimed at existing customers such as those found in user communities.
- ✓ **Reactions on social media** – A low-threshold method of achieving earned media attention is by enticing people to respond, like or retweet via social media by putting up relevant, interesting, remarkable or enjoyable posts.
- ✓ **Free publicity** – This is a traditional earned media exposure such as what you get when you contribute to existing editorial content, such as a trade magazine or established blogs.

Paid media

More than 100 years ago, the legendary Harry McCann opened his advertising agency. His credo "Truth Well Told" can still be applied on advertising today. All external channels that are bought to distribute your own message in a positive light to target audiences fall into the category of paid media. Paid media can vary from banners to ads for search engines to advertorials and product placements. With paid media, the organization buys exposure for their messaging and its distribution.

Paid media forms a straightforward method to get messages across to people with whom there is no relation yet. An important objective in reaching new people is to convert them into familiar people, for example, to turn them into a newsletter subscriber, participant in an event or, better yet, a new fan!

The ways in which organizations can communicate changes from sales stimulation to supporting the target group. Companies are acting more as publishers, and the role of media companies is also changing. Publishers are confronted with reducing earnings from traditional advertisements and offer more services that are tuned into content marketing. Companies want to be more closely associated with established media companies and offer content-related assistance and contributions. This can be done through more robust advertorials, sponsored content or TV and radio show sponsorships. This means that media companies are confronted by the changing boundaries between editorial freedom and editorial demands and wishes from the sponsors.

Examples of paid media include:

- ✓ **Sponsored edition** – You can include your company in an existing publication, such as sponsoring an advertisement in a newspaper or magazine.
- ✓ **Participation in a commercial TV or radio production** – By playing a content-related role in a TV or radio show and sponsoring it, you can achieve significant reach, brand engagement and recognition.
- ✓ **Advertorials** – The most low-threshold method to communicate quickly via existing media is to advertise via an advertorial, a copy-based advertisement in a newsletter that appears as an editorial article.
- ✓ **Search engine advertising (SEA)** – This is advertising based on search words to position sponsored content favorably in search engine results.
- ✓ **Retargeting campaigns** – When visitors display an interest in, for instance, a webinar on your own website, they can be updated on other sites and notified of the same webinar, for example, via Google AdWords.
- ✓ **Sponsored updates** – Messages on your social channels can be actively promoted to specific audiences.

Owned, earned and paid media

When drafting a communication strategy, you should determine the combination of media options you plan to use. The dividing lines between earned, paid and owned media are not 100% definitive. An overlap exists in numerous areas, such as:

- ✓ Owned media is promoted via paid media.
- ✓ Owned media is optimized for earned media.
- ✓ Earned media is responded to via owned media.
- ✓ Positive earned media can be promoted via paid media.
- ✓ Social media advertising can be engaged via earned media.

A recurring factor when considering the use of media channels is the tension field between reach and control. Reach means the number of people reached via the channel. Of course, it primarily concerns itself with people who are potential DMU members for the products and solutions that are being sold. Control involves the measure of influence that the organization can have in the presentation of the message or content.

Looking at the different media options, the advantage of owned media is optimal control. The message, the design, the tone of voice and the format are completely in the hands of the organization. The flipside to this is that the reach is limited mainly to existing relations. To generate new business, it's vital to involve paid and earned media.

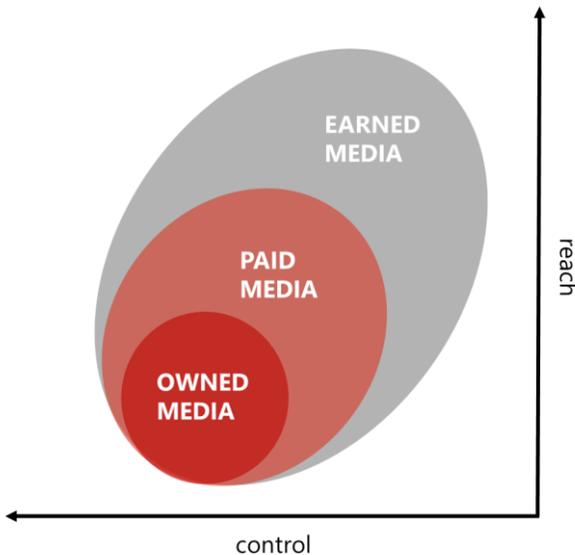


Figure 18: Control and reach per channel type

Traditionally, paid media was always seen as the most obvious media channel. The rise of social media and content marketing has given owned media and earned media a bigger share in the mix. Owned media is growing because of the increasing value placed by organizations on the production of valuable and relevant content. Earned media is gaining attention due to its potentially huge reach using the relatively low threshold involved in social media, blogs and communities. In practice, though, it's still very difficult to run effective, large-scale campaigns without involving paid media in some sort of capacity.

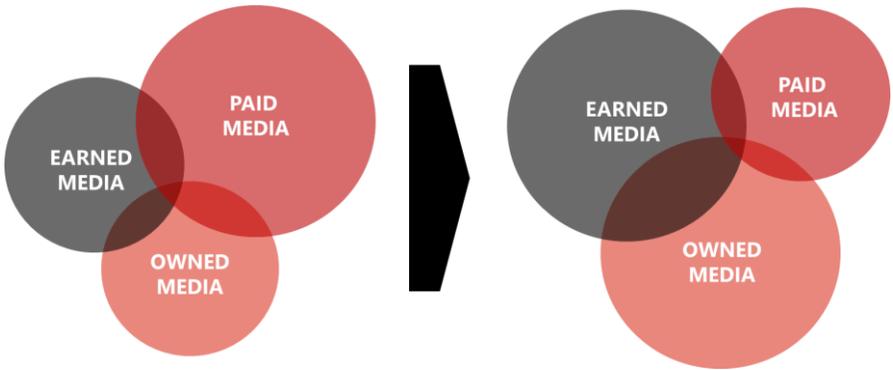


Figure 19: Attention shifting from paid to owned and earned media

Media planning

Beside looking at media as either owned, earned and paid, it can also be looked at from a push and pull approach. With push communication, the sender determines the content and the timing of the message. If you receive a weekly e-newsletter, then you know beforehand what the editorial team will have in store for you and when it's going to land in your inbox. In pull communication, the initiative is with the receiver of the communications. For example, you can search for a certain topic on Google and arrive at a relevant publication that way.

	Pull: unsolicited presented content (requested)	Push: unsolicited presented content (with permission)
Owned	SEO (search engine optimization)	Newsletter
Paid	SEA (search engine advertising)	Advertorials

In content marketing, pull and push mechanisms have their pros and cons. A big advantage of the pull mechanism is that visitors are searching for a specific topic. When they find it, the conversion from site visit to lead is high as the correlation between the visitor's interest and content offered is significant. The big drawback of the pull mechanism is that the number of people who search at random moments for a certain topic is relatively low. The advantage of push media is that within a short amount of time you can achieve a large reach with a quick response. The disadvantage of push media is that since the communication is initiated by the sender, the receiver will not always be open to this communication.

When planning media, it is sensible to take into account the differences in response expectation. This is particularly relevant for the follow-up. When you provide white paper downloads in a newsletter but during the week that the newsletter is sent there is insufficient time for follow-up, then you're missing the boat. Leads fall behind quickly and quickly become irrelevant.

However, when you offer one or more white papers on multiple portals that are designed for search engine marketing, people will continuously request them. The follow-up process should be the continuous filtering of leads.

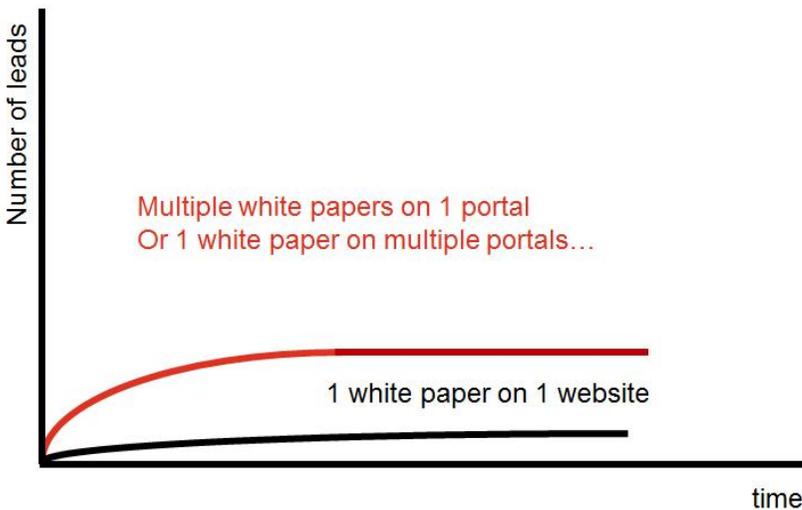
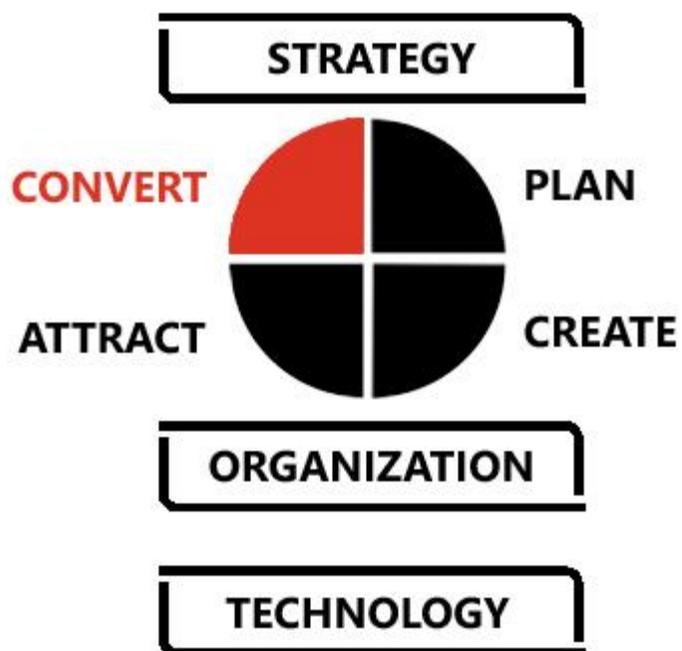


Figure 20: Building search traffic

When setting up the media, you should combine push and pull mechanisms. Many content marketing initiatives start by posting content via their own media, such as their blog or in the knowledge section of their website – the push – which gets picked up by search engines – the pull.



STEP 5: CONVERTING TO SALES

In the end, the return on content marketing is rooted in the conversion from unknown visitor to customer relationship. There are many stages in between, such as subscribers, followers, leads and prospects. To properly measure the performance of the content marketing process, it's important to define KPIs. By steering your actions according to KPIs, you can improve the performance of click and conversion ratios.

Improvements can be made in the titles, user interface, alignment with the target audience, response to the device and the use of visuals.

Types of conversion

The success of an online marketing initiative can be measured in many ways: from visitors to page views, from social media engagement to number of qualified leads. The end objective is always to support the company's strategy. Ideally, the way in which content marketing contributes to the company's strategic goals should be measured. Revenue and profit goals are the most obvious parameters for measuring a company's success. However, strategic objectives can also include the following:

- brand engagement
- brand recognition
- thought leadership
- loyalty

Different types of conversion can be examined depending on the objectives. The most frequent types are:

- **Clicks, views and visits** – The number of page views and (unique) visitors are the most obvious ways of monitoring in online marketing. Furthermore, opens and click-through ratios are also important when it comes to email marketing.
- **Likes, fans and followers** – The effectiveness of a campaign on social media is often viewed in terms of the acquisition of likes and followers. This exposure only carries limited value in social media as it says little about the interaction. So, more and more attention is paid to engagement ratios.

- **Engagement ratios** – Engagement ratios give an indication of the involvement of fans and followers. Simple examples of engagement ratios for Facebook and Twitter are displayed in the figure below. By periodically calculating the engagement ratios (say, on a weekly basis), it becomes apparent whether engagement is rising or falling.

$$\begin{array}{l}
 \text{ER} = \frac{\text{Likes + Comments + Shares (during a period)}}{\text{Active Fans (at that moment)}} \times 100\% \\
 \text{ER} = \frac{\text{Mentions + Retweets (during a period)}}{\text{Active Followers (at that moment)}} \times 100\%
 \end{array}$$

Figure 21: Social media engagement ratios

- **Subscribers** – The first and most straightforward step in developing the relationship from unknown profile to known profile is a subscription to a newsletter, social media account, an app or an RSS feed.
- **Response and leads** – Often, the conversion in an online campaign is measured by response. Response should not be confused with leads. Response is the reaction to a campaign like when a visitor downloads or requests something or registers to take part in a webinar. Leads are the profiles that fulfill certain criteria, indicating their relevance as potential customers. These criteria are company-specific and can be based on:
 - ✓ industry
 - ✓ role
 - ✓ organization size
 - ✓ location
 - ✓ site behavior
 - ✓ interest
 - ✓ investment plans
- **Order** – The customer relationship is sealed at the moment an order is placed. It's an important conversion moment but not the final stop.
- **Promoter** – When a customer recommends the service or products of the organization, a significant measure of loyalty has been achieved. For this reason, organizations are increasingly using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a KPI.

- **Churn** – Beside positive conversion, you also have negative conversion. Customers who cancel their subscription to the service go from customer to market. This negative conversion is also referred to as churn (the percentage of customers that stop engaging with you). Churn is relevant in content marketing as it focuses on existing customers to increase customer loyalty and satisfaction.

The leaking funnel

To manage the conversion process from market to customer, a tool known as the sales funnel is often used. This is the funnel of potential customers that have been identified within the sales process. The following classifications are used:

- **Market:** the entire market in which the organization operates
- **Suspects:** the potential customers within the target market who fulfill numerous specific criteria
- **Leads:** potential customers that have indicated that they could be interested in the products and services of the organization
- **Prospects:** potential customers that have shown a serious interest in the products and services of the organization
- **Customers:** customers with whom there is an established customer-provider relationship

With each step in the conversion process, the likelihood that a potential customer becomes an actual customer increases. More and more customers, though, drop out of the sales process, which is called leakage. Specifically, this leakage could be because the customer:

- has no need for the service or product
- doesn't seek contact with the organization
- opts for a different provider or solution

When there is a good overview of the percentages of this leakage, sales management can better adjust the sales process through KPIs. For example, when it's known that 50% of prospects opt for something else or 50% of qualified leads do not seek any serious form of contact, a better estimate can be made concerning the number of quality leads required to generate a sale. The organization can take steps to improve these conversion ratios, and content marketing can play a role in this. Depending on the specific situation, sub qualifications can be added to the sales funnel management.

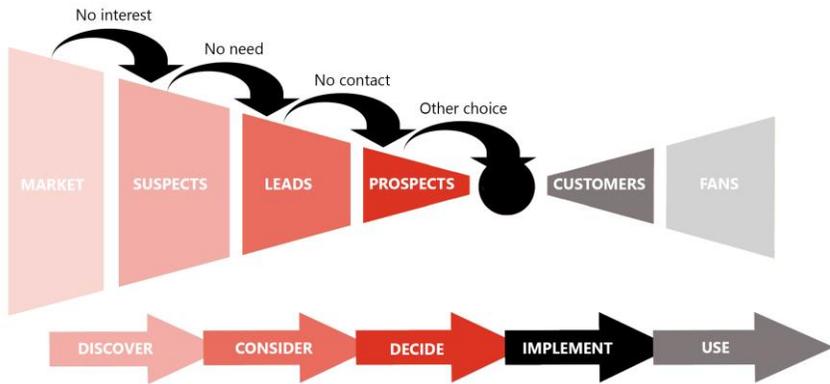


Figure 22: Leaking sales funnel

The sales funnel is mirrored as soon as the sale takes place. Conversion takes place with existing customers: positive conversion with repeat business (another sale) or additional services and negative conversion when the customer breaks the customer-provider relationship. Satisfied customers can be converted to fans. The ultimate scenario is that they promote the organization and recommend products and services actively.

- **Repeat:** the number of customer that repeat buy
- **Churn:** the number of customers that cut ties
- **Fans:** the number of customers that reach a particular level of high customer satisfaction

Lead management

There's often a long way to get from incoming responses from content marketing initiatives to a customer. Since content marketing uses the buyer journey of the customer, the first contact (or conversion) can happen at an early stage of the buying process. When a suspect downloads a trend report, it can be a signal that in the coming year there will be a demand for certain products or services. At this early stage of the buying process, it can still take a long time before there is any need for a quote or contact with an account manager. The follow-up on content marketing leads needs to take into consideration the lead status.

T = 0 "Moment A"

T = 1 "One month later..."

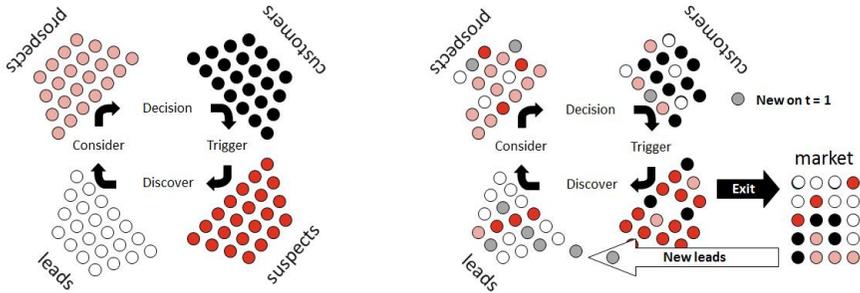


Figure 23: Lead dynamics

In this early stage of discovery, the potential customer can still be busy trying to figure out their actual need in the situation. Content that helps them along in this process is relevant. A solid content marketing program can help the potential customer via a newsletter, white paper or webinar. Helping potential clients, without requiring them to currently buy, is also known as lead nurturing.

The theory above is hard to manage in the real world. The trend report that you planned to help business decision-makers in the discovery stage could be requested by a technical decision-maker in the consideration phase. Or organizations that are regarded as prospects can suddenly delay the procedure or even call the whole thing off. The reverse can also happen in which unfamiliar parties suddenly convert to hot prospects: They had sought out information parties elsewhere but want to see what alternatives there are and display an actual need for a service or a product. In short, what appears to be a well-structured view into your sales pipeline one minute can be completely outdated the next. Lead management is a dynamic process in which actual insight into the lead status of potential customers is essential.

Lead scoring and account scoring

There are certain lead scoring techniques to gain valuable insight into the lead status. Lead scoring is a method that rates potential customers against a sliding scale in which the value of the lead for the organization increases. Depending on this lead score, subsequent steps can be determined within the commercial process. If the score is low, then a program of lead nurturing can be implemented and the lead can be invited to an event or a webinar. If the score is high, then the sales team can be called upon.

The best techniques for lead scoring make use of explicit, as well as implicit, information. Explicit scores are based on information about the lead, such as the size of the organization, the industry or role. Implicit scores are based on the behavior of the lead, such as the websites they visit, the emails they open and the white paper they download. A new lead score is based on activities of the leads on social media, which is known as the social score.

Many investments involve more than one decision-maker within one organization: the decision-making unit. It is relevant to make known the activities of individual leads from the same organization surrounding the same topics. When a marketing manager, for example, downloads a white paper about the integration of email marketing and CRM, and the IT manager in the same organization downloads an article about CRM as a service, this can indicate that a CRM project is taking place with the company. Account scoring brings all these signals at an organization together in the account score.

The gap between marketing and sales

In the funnel management process, somewhere between generating a lead and a successful sales meeting, the lead passes from the marketing team to the sales division. To determine the timing, a division can be made between marketing qualified leads and sales-qualified leads.

- **Marketing-qualified leads (MQLs)** – These are leads with a low account score because they are in an early phase of the buying process. This pool of leads lends itself to lead-nurturing initiatives. It is the marketer’s primary responsibility to develop these leads further. When the lead or account score reaches a certain point, they are taken over by sales.
- **Sales-qualified leads (SQLs)** – When there is an actual need, the function is relevant and the lead fulfills the necessary criteria, it is a case of a sales-qualified lead. This is the moment the lead is passed to the sales department.

The coordination between marketing and sales is crucial for good conversion. It should be clear to everybody when a lead is passed on from marketing to sales. Besides that, the follow-up by the sales division needs to be in place and tightly managed. Leads can cool off quickly and evaporate.

KPIs and ROI in content marketing

In summary, the choice in KPIs where the content marketing initiatives can be measured depends on the content marketing objectives. Additionally, the KPIs differ with each phase in the buyer journey. The table below gives an overview of the most common occurrences.

Buyer Journey	DISCOVER	CONSIDER	DECIDE	IMPLEMENT	USE
Objective	Exposure	Lead generation	Sales	Customer satisfaction	Loyalty
KPIs	# Page views # Visitors # Likes/Followers % Engagement # Back links	# Response ↑ Subscribers % Open ratios % Click ratios # MQ leads	# SQ leads # Prospects # Sales meetings # Deals \$ Turnover	Customer research	Net promoter score % Churn

Figure 24: Marketing KPIs

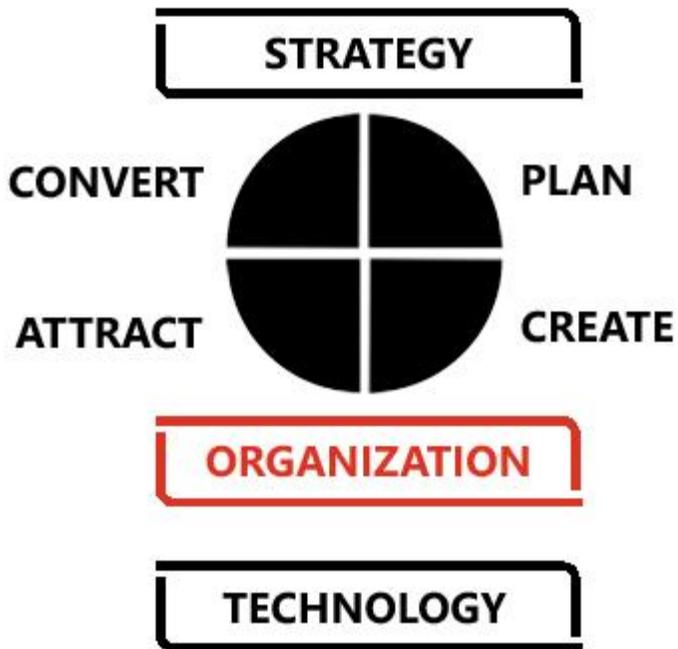
In an ideal situation, the ROI of the content marketing initiatives is guided over the mid to long run in financial terms. A basic formula can be the costs of content marketing as a percentage of the achieved revenue, as shown here:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \text{Annual content marketing costs X} \\
 & \text{-----} \\
 & \text{Achieved revenue from content marketing generated in the year X} \\
 & \quad + \\
 & \text{Expected turnover from MQLs and SQLs from content marketing} \\
 & \quad \text{generated in the year X} \\
 & \quad + \\
 & \text{Repeat business and upsells from content marketing in the year X}
 \end{aligned}$$

Measuring ROI objections in the (too) short term within the content marketing process is not always sensible as the following aspects need to be taken into consideration:

- Content marketing activities are aimed at the entire buyer journey. When marketing leads are generated at an early stage in the buyer journey, resulting in relatively little sales-qualified leads, the turnover cannot yet be measured. The period for measuring turnover should be aligned with the buyer journey.
- When setting up content marketing, there will be a limited amount of content in the start-up phase. In subsequent periods, previously created content can be capitalized upon, which has a positive effect on the ROI.

Finally, it should be taken into account that turnover cannot always be assigned to one channel. A content marketing lead could have converted to a customer by recommendation from another customer or a customer that enters upon recommendation could have regularly read a particular blog without this fact being included in the methods for measuring. The method and the timing of measurement are somewhat arbitrary if no foolproof systems and definitions are used for measurement purposes.



STEP 6: ORGANIZING CONTENT MARKETING

Research shows that in content marketing that the production of sufficient, appealing content is the biggest challenge. Additionally, the best content is in the heads of different employees, and not everyone is keen to start writing blogs, participating in webinars and taking part on social media. Facilitating the organization is of great importance. And when the decision is made to outsource the creation of content, the message and tone of voice need to be on target.

The production of content and the management of a content marketing process requires new skills and competencies from the organization. The content marketing process shares parallels with a publishing company, but most organizations are not (yet) publishers. The different skills are contained in silos. As such, different people or departments are responsible for SEO, PR, social media, product marketing and the customer magazine. This chapter delves into the roles and functions required for content marketing, forming multidisciplinary teams and the question of outsourcing.

Roles and positions

The roles that need to be filled in an extensive content marketing organization can be linked to the seven steps of B2B content marketing discussed in this e-book. This paragraph describes the various roles that are inspired based on the setup recommended by the Content Marketing Institute. It is a vision of the marketing department of 2025.

Each role need not be a position. In practice, various roles will be carried out by one person or undertaken by existing people in other positions. In small organizations, all the roles can be taken on by one content marketer. He or she will never be short on work!

Chief content officer (CCO)

The position of chief content officer has gained ground as a result of strategic choices made by more and more organizations in terms of content marketing. The position is also known as content strategist or VP of content. This is the person who is ultimately responsible for content marketing within the organization.

The responsibilities and roles for the CCO include:

- Drafting a modern content marketing strategy
- Translating the mission and strategy into corporate stories or “the big story”
- Making strategic choices in the concept development, content formats and media channels
- Defining and steering KPIs
- Developing, recruiting, employing and directing the content marketing team
- Ensuring a good technical infrastructure for content marketing



Figure 25: Content marketing roles and positions

The chief content officer doesn't create content himself/herself but an affinity with content creation is a must for the role. Thinking in terms of content or its creation is in this person's DNA. The CCO is comparable to a publisher. He is the gatekeeper of the corporate story, the ambassador of all the content. The CCO guarantees that locally created content from different silos of the organization is consistent with editorial guidelines and aligned with the audience. Not only does he or she have a pulse on the market but they provide support in the content strategy within the organization.

Managing editor

The managing editor is essentially the editor-in-chief. This person is responsible for the production of the content according to the ideas, editorial guidelines and strategy developed with the CCO. The managing editor is the project manager that, on behalf of the CCO, steers and manages the editorial calendar. He or she directs the content creation team, which can consist of editors, designers and producers. The setup of the team depends on the content formats and the size of the organization. Roles and responsibilities of the managing editor include:

- content production
- content planning
- search engine optimization

- content design and layout
- content presentation

Where the CCO focuses on the strategy, the managing editor deals with the execution. In smaller organizations, the position of managing editor and CCO are generally carried out by the same person.

Content creation team

The managing editors are generally content creators themselves but, depending on the amount of content, the type of content and the format, they will need to involve other people in the process. This can be their own editorial team but valuable contributions generally come from the so-called subject matter experts within the company. These could be consultants, product managers, innovation managers, C-level managers or analysts. These content creators needn't be born writers; it's up to the managing editor to translate these stories into content. They have their feet firmly rooted in the organization and can share knowledge, expertise and experience in the most relevant and transparent way via working with ghostwriters, conducting interviews or editing existing pieces.

Content doesn't merely consist of copy. Depending on the medium and format, content needs to be made as appealing as possible through the design and visuals. For the various formats, this can involve different roles with different purposes, such as:

- Events: conference producer, conference logistics, chairman, program board
- Visual: photographer, designer, illustrator
- Moving media: producer, director, sound technician, camera man, editor, animation designer
- Virtual event: moderator, director, studio technician

Content curator

The content curator searches online for news, trends and developments that are relevant to the target audience. The curator is generally not a standalone position but a role adopted in the content creation or social media team. Relevant input is brought to their attention via social media channels or from the content creation team. Curation can be used effectively to enrich your own content, remain current and increase cohesion between existing content items.

Chief listening officer (CLO) or social media coordinator

The social media coordinator is the roaming gatekeeper between the (social) media channels and the organization. This person follows and participates in the conversation on social media on behalf of the organization and involves the relevant departments for specific questions and discussion points.

For the content marketing team, this person is an important source for new information regarding what engages the target group so the marketing team can respond accordingly and continue to produce relevant content.

Audience manager

The audience manager is responsible for monitoring and honing in on the target groups, the decision-making units and the buyer personas. The core of content marketing is anticipating demand, questions, needs and dreams of the target audience. So, it's important to continue to guarantee this and anticipate new triggers in time. The audience manager is closely involved with segmenting and increasing the database.

First responder

The investment in high-quality content is big, but small adjustments in the title, management summary or visuals can significantly affect responsiveness. The appeal to share messages via social media can be strongly influenced by adding just the right twist. The first responder puts the content under the microscope before it's published and optimizes it for maximum effect. A lot of content can be reused in different channels and each channel has its own set of characteristics. The first responder works closely with the channel marketer to optimize content for each channel.

Channel marketer

Content reaches a target group via different channels – the owned, earned and paid media. This can include your own online channels, social media, apps, magazine or events. Each channel has its own set of characteristics, content specifications and promotion possibilities. Channels can also differ in the timing of use or popularity among the buyer personas. The channel marketer is responsible for channel optimization.

Media buyer/planner

For stimulating messaging and reach of specific or new target groups, paid media remains an important part of the communication mix. The media buyer/planner is responsible for the purchase and optimization of paid media.

Content syndicator

Where the curator is responsible for gathering external content, the syndicator ensures that self-developed content is shared on third-party channels as much as possible. The content syndicator is responsible for generating maximum exposure via earned media by ensuring that what he is sharing is straightforward and appealing. This person can be responsible for a subset of the content or all its assets.

External connector

Beside maintaining media contacts, the traditional PR officer increasingly focuses on maintaining contact with influencers. This person takes care of a network of relevant contacts with media, thought leaders, subject matter experts and recognized trendsetters.

Lead manager

The gap between marketing and sales is reduced by organizing a process to transfer marketing-ready leads to the sales team at the right moment. The lead manager is responsible for the qualification and nurturing of the marketing leads and the comprehensive transfer to the sales division.

Analytics expert

The analytics expert takes care of substantive reporting of KPIs and interprets the results. This expert keeps a watchful eye on achieving the set objectives and analyses discrepancies.

Supplier relationship manager

Not only will the content production be done by the organization itself but, as content marketing activities grow, outsourcing to third parties will increase. Freelancers can be called upon to write content on specific topics to carry out specialist work, such as the creation of animations. Agencies will also come into play to set up and execute content marketing campaigns or to advise. The supplier relationship manager is responsible for recruiting this network of specialists and forming the organizational processes that require collaboration.

Training and coaching lead

The adoption of content marketing requires the development of new competencies within the whole organization. In-depth expertise of content marketing can be expected from the content marketing team, but the requirements extend further. From subject matter experts to product managers and C-level employees, substantial contribution is expected for content to tell the story and distribute the messages of the organization. And employees can be expected to engage their network via social media and share content in a personal way. But this has to be according to the guidelines of the organization. The training and coaching lead takes care of the development of competencies of the organization.

HR liaison

The employees are the core for every service-providing company and the embodiment of the story and the messaging. And as every employee presents a channel in itself, it is important in content marketing that the thinking is propagated by the HR organization. The HR liaison takes care of HR policy and the requirement for employees to communicate and behave consistently and transparently within the organization.

Chief technologist

Technology plays an increasingly important role in the content marketing process, from online marketing tooling – such as content management systems, email marketing tools or marketing automation software – to various internal systems. The chief technologist is responsible for the technical infrastructure and its development. Internally, the team of the chief technologist can include a webmaster and a software developer who work on customized solutions. Externally, this person also steers the external service providers.

Multidisciplinary teams

The organization of a content marketing team described above is an ideal scenario with larger organizations used as the norm. In practice, many roles will be undertaken by just one position or accommodated by other positions. It is important to distinguish each role individually to consider all the responsibilities that are spread throughout the team.

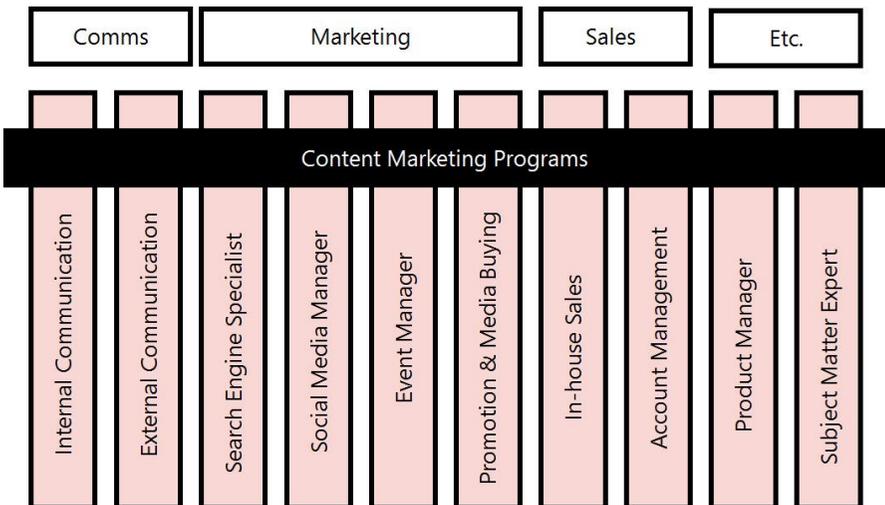


Figure 26: Multidisciplinary teams

When beginning content marketing initiatives, the current organization will largely serve as a starting point. In the traditional layout of an organization, a lot of the responsibilities in terms of content marketing are sealed in silos. The communications department is responsible for the customer magazine, somebody in the marketing department is focused on SEO and in-house sales maintains contact with existing leads that don't yet display any actual needs. High-quality articles in the customer magazine may not find their way into the search engine-optimized content portals linked to a relevant landing page for conversion, which can be important for previously generated leads.

To eliminate this mismatch between the current organization structure and the customer-oriented communication of content marketing, multidisciplinary teams can form the basis for setting up a content marketing program. Various people from different departments work together on the same program within a multidisciplinary team. This requires a lot of competencies on behalf of the team leader as this direction cannot always fall back on a hierarchical position. This management without hierarchy requires specific skills, such as persuasiveness, influence and turning negative situations into positive ones.

Insourcing or outsourcing?

Not all content marketing activities need to take place in-house. Where there is a lack of experience, capacity, knowledge or competencies, external parties such as writers, video producers, social media trainers and strategy consultants can be called in.

As the best content is born inside the heads of your employees, they must play a central role in the content production. Not every employee is a top writer, talk show host or illustrator. The organization must facilitate this process and free up enough space in the budget for content editors and producers to guarantee quality.

With the rise of social media, companies are increasingly outsourcing their social media. Active maintenance of social media can be time-consuming and, by outsourcing it, valuable time can be saved. The situation then is that external parties are communicating on behalf of the organization. This also happens when customer support or lead generation are outsourced, but with social media, the stakes are high in terms of the effects it can have on the company's reputation. The whole world is potentially watching.

Another disadvantage of social media outsourcing is that the organization partly loses contact with the market. The valuable role of the social media coordinator – providing feedback on current issues and connecting people on social media to the organization – is now being run externally. Before outsourcing social media, set clear guidelines and train the service provider, who will become the voice of the organization.



STEP 7: USING MARKETING TECHNOLOGY

One of the reasons that content marketing has come to fruition in the past decade is the rise – and broad implementation – of different technologies. The combination of the internet, mobile technology, cloud computing and social media has made the world more transparent, which has led to the increasing need for authenticity and customer focus in the marketplace. The same technology has also made it far easier for companies to communicate with their market, which is comparable to publishers.

But don't mistake that the successful implementation of B2B content marketing is due to the rise of internet technology. A good example that demonstrates that the power of content marketing is not reliant on technology is a highly successful case study dating back to the Dutch Golden Age. The parallels between successes in the 17th and 21st century speak volumes in terms of the effectiveness of content marketing.

Case study from the Dutch Golden Age

In the Dutch Golden Age, just about 70 years after our discovery of New York, the power of content marketing was demonstrated by a Dutch inventor. In 1672, Jan van der Heijden and his brother, Nicolaes, improved the fire hose. Until then, rows of people with buckets of water were required for putting out fires. A hose was available, but pumping water wasn't yet possible. When you tried to pump water, the force of the suction would cause the flexible hose to collapse on itself. The clever Jan and his brother came up with a suction pump with a suction hose reinforced with iron rings. Via a second linen hose, the water is subsequently transported to the hose and driven out of the nozzle via a pressure pump. Now the water would be continuous and the nozzle could be better aimed at the flames to deal with the fire hazard. In 1677, the brothers acquired a patent for their design.

But Jan van der Heijden wasn't only a mechanical engineer; he was also a painter and clever business man. To introduce his invention to the masses, he used various content marketing techniques, which brought him huge success. He combined the following formats in the content marketing approach:

- **White paper** – A couple of years after their finding, in 1677, the brothers published a white paper about their invention. In the publication entitled “Message with regard to newly invented and patented fire hoses,” they compared their system with previous systems and demonstrated the functionality based on practical use.
- **Book** – In 1690, he wrote the standard reference work, “Description of the newly invented and patented firehose,” with his son. In this first book about the fire brigade in the world, he included detailed descriptions of fire hazards and developments in the organization and techniques of firefighting in Amsterdam. In the 21st century, Jan undoubtedly would have published an e-book version as well!
- **Visuals** – Jan van der Heijden was also an artist and presented his publications with rich print designs and even poems, which enhanced the readability significantly. Using only copy was seen by him as insufficient to engage his audience. His prints were reused well into the 18th century for material covering firefighting.
- **Social sharing** – Van der Heijden dedicated his book to one of his most important prospects, Nicolaes Witsen, who was mayor of Amsterdam 13 times between 1682 and 1706. The city was impressed and all 60 districts ordered new hoses. The price of a fire hose was 385 guilders; a fire hose on wheels would cost 435 guilders. Jackpot!
- **Demos** – “The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” Jan must have thought. He organized demonstrations at the Royal Palace on Dam Square and at the Westertoren.
- **Consultative selling** – Consultants know better than anyone that advising prospects can lead to the sale of new services and products. Based on his advice, Van der Heijden was asked to set up the volunteer fire brigade in Amsterdam. Each district had a chief, members and volunteers on hand to put out fires in an emergency. At the helm of this city-wide organization stood the fire department general: Jan van der Heijden himself. Conflict of interest?



Figure 27: Visual storytelling by Jan van der Heijden

Results

The commercial success of Jan van der Heijden was unprecedented. Not only did the city of Amsterdam place a mega order, other municipalities got in on the act. Then the first stock listed and largest multinational in the world, the VOC (the Dutch East India Company), installed the fire hose on all its ships. In 1697, Jan van der Heijden even got a visit from Peter the Great. The Russian tsar wanted to lure him to Russia to organize the fire departments there.

Those who think the fire hose was a one-off for Jan van der Heijden's content marketing strategy are mistaken. He also developed the first street lighting and presented a lighting plan to the city of Amsterdam that would provide well over 2,500 oil-based lights. He was also the inventor, and the supplier, of these lanterns. This plan was also implemented. The crowning glory to his work was that he was named Director and Superintendent of City Lighting, for which he received an annual fee of 2,000 guilders. As a reference, a nice canal house in the city center would cost about 6,000 guilders back then.

Using Marketing Technology

Although content marketing is centuries-old, the current technological developments are, in particular, the driving force behind the recent popularity of the field. The technology and different software tools can be classified according to the four-step continuous process of content marketing:

- Plan
- Create
- Attract
- Convert

For each step, here is a brief description with examples.

Plan

To gain insight into your buyer personas and relevant (trending) topics, various tools are available. Examples of these include:

- Insight in trends and (search) behavior: finding popular search terms via Google Trends or more extensive tools such as SEMrush or MOZ
- Social listening: scouting for subjects, trends and opinions on social media with relevant target audiences
- Data as a service: the real-time acquisition or enrichment of buyer data via Aeroleads, Synthio and V12 Data
- Predictive analytics: scouting customer behavior and making forecasts

Create

Many tools are available for developing and managing content, including:

- Content management: A content management system (CMS) is indispensable to content marketers. A CMS makes it easier for marketers to publish content and data on the internet without much technical knowledge. Common examples of widely used content management systems are WordPress, Joomla and Drupal.
- Interactive content: Content has become increasingly interactive – think of calculators, quizzes, polls and interactive infographics. A useful tool for this is ion interactive.
- Video marketing: To create, host and distribute video content, a growing set of tools are available, including YouTube, Vimeo, Wistia and Vidyard.
- Webinars and virtual events: Popular tools for organizing and hosting webinars and virtual events include ON24, GoToWebinar and BrightTALK.

Attract

Some straightforward tools for distributing content and actively bringing it to the attention are:

- Display and content advertising: Many advertising networks are available to advertise with banners (DoubleClick), remarket to visitors (AdRoll) or advertise with content (Native Ads).
- Social advertising: Social networks like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook offer the opportunity to target specific audiences with your content updates.
- SEA and SEO: Search is one of the major traffic drivers for content marketers. To optimize for search, many tools are available like MOZ. For advertising, Google AdWords is the major player, followed by Bing and Yahoo.
- Email marketing: One of the most effective ways to share content is still via email. Popular email marketing providers include MailChimp, Constant Contact and AWeber.
- Social media marketing: To manage updates on your social media channels, use social media marketing tools like Hootsuite.

Convert

To ensure that conversion is optimal and the response to a campaign is followed up, tools should be used, such as:

- Lead management and marketing automation: To manage and distribute leads from different channels and campaigns, a lead management solution is a must. Increasingly, lead management solutions are growing into marketing automation solutions, offering a wide variety of marketing functionality.
- Analytics: For insights in conversions, paths and click behavior, analytics are a must. Google Analytics is a good and free starting point.
- Optimization and personalization: Optimization and personalization are effective ways to increase conversion and ensure more relevance to users. Tools include Optimizely, FunnelEnvy and Demandbase.
- CRM: To manage existing and new relationship for sales, CRM systems are used. The most commonly used systems include Salesforce, Dynamics CRM and SugarCRM.
- Optimization of customer and brand loyalty: There are various tools used for communities, service management, feedback and ratings.

How to start: The basics

Marketers have a plethora of tools and solutions at their disposal. But what forms the necessary basic technology required for each content marketing program? The generic basis for content marketing is an open website facilitated by a CMS. For the mobile version, a responsive site or an app with specific mobile capabilities can be created. The most straightforward way for interaction and engagement is via social media, followed by email marketing. To achieve conversion and profile enrichment, a form of responsiveness is important, such as via white paper downloads, participation in webinars and providing e-books.

In our vision, there are some key technology building blocks that every B2B marketer should organize:

- Content Management
- Social Media
- Email Marketing
- Lead Management
- Marketing Automation
- CRM
- Webinar Tooling

Content management

The basic technology for publishing content in an online environment is the content management system. The core functionality of a CMS is to create, edit, manage, store and publish content in the form of copy, visuals, video and documents. Important functionalities of a CMS that are at the core of content marketing initiatives include:

- The flexible setup and adjustment of a website based on your own design or templates
- A division between design and content so people are not dependent on the current design and remain receptive to the combination of content
- Ease of creation, editing and publication of content items such as blogs, articles and white papers
- Facilitation of SEO for published content
- Availability of modules for measured design of social media integration, community functionality, carrying out polls and setting up sliders
- Open architecture for optimal integration of other systems, such as content sources, lead management, social media tools, analytics and third-party applications
- Practical libraries for storing, managing, combining and qualifying different content types
- Possibilities for creating accounts for content or to create a closed environment

There are various content management systems available on the market. For content marketing objectives, WordPress, Joomla, Drupal and Umbraco are highly suited. These systems are often used by publishers.

Social media management

Many tools are available for managing social media channels. Core functionalities of such tools include:

- Analytics: tracking the number of clicks, engagement ratios, followers and likes per post, account or tweet, among other things
- Monitoring: tracking discussions on the basis of hashtags and keywords for relevant topics to anticipate the next step(s)
- Management: managing accounts by planning tweets and posts

Frequently used tools include Hootsuite, TweetDeck, Mention and Buffer.

Email marketing

Email marketing is a straightforward and powerful way to maintain contact with existing associates and interested parties. Interests and needs are anticipated via content. For a professional setup, the use of email marketing tools is important.

Important functionalities for an email marketing tool include:

- A professional environment for directing email campaigns for large groups of people or targeting a highly specific audience
- Planning and personalization of email campaigns
- Managing email lists and opt-in settings, profile information and segmentation possibilities
- Reporting and tracking functionality with analytics, including open ratios and click-through ratios
- Setting up emails in a user-friendly editor with templates and more advanced options such as RSS to Mail
- Measured method of sending an email based on triggers/autoresponders and, in more advanced cases, complete workflows
- Ability to set up response pages, surveys and/or forms
- Integration of social media through sharing capabilities, a newsletter published on social media via an app and automated responses via email on social media activity

Again, in the case of email marketing, the options are endless for establishing a professional setup. Frequently used systems include MailChimp, Emma, ExactTarget, Vertical Response, iContact and Constant Contact.

Lead management

The basic infrastructure for content marketing is in place within many organizations in the form of content management systems and the use of social media and email marketing. This is the low-hanging fruit that is to be plucked first.

The layer above the basic infrastructure, a good CRM system for the sales team, is often taken well care of. The big challenge generally presents itself in the interconnection of those two. It is the well-known gap between marketing and sales. Many organizations are missing an opportunity here. When a large number of leads found in the discovery stage are fed through to the sales division, it can often go wrong.

A large portion of these unqualified leads is not ready for a sales pitch, which leads to frustration among salespeople. The discussion can arise that marketing isn't providing solid leads or the sales division isn't following up with leads properly. The truth is often somewhere in the middle. The leads are relevant to the organization, but they aren't yet sales-qualified.

That's why this gap represents an area of focus for content marketing. A qualified content marketing process anticipates and facilitates the development of initial interest from an early stage of the buyer journey to a sales-qualified lead. To do this properly, sufficient insight into leads at any given moment is required. Based on the characteristics and behavior of the lead, messaging can be used at regular intervals via the right channels to develop the lead, such as using a combination of a newsletter cycle, social media participation, participation in events, customized content and personal contact.

Important functions of the lead management system at the base of content marketing initiatives include:

- Management of a central lead profile and the enrichment and duplication of it
- Customized setup of mechanisms for lead scoring and account scoring to determine the level of the lead
- Straightforward segmenting of leads in target groups based on different characteristics
- Ability to assign leads to sales when the status has reached sales-qualified status and consolidating the lead by linking with the CRM system
- Ability to set up workflows and triggers linked to content components of the content marketing program on the one hand and the buyer journey of the profile on the other

Lead management can be set up as a separate system, but in many cases it overlaps with existing systems. Tools for email marketing with extensive triggers and workflows can serve as an alternative for lead management. CRM systems also provide good lead management functionality in certain cases.

Marketing automation

Marketing automation has developed significantly in the last few years in parallel with the rise of content marketing itself. All underlying layers are brought together in one integrated platform in a system for marketing automation. The advantage of this integration is its ease of use and the integration of functions. This sometimes comes at the expense of functionality and flexibility, and a best-of-breed solution might be better suited.

A system for marketing automation offers a combination of functionalities of the previously mentioned systems for content management, social media tooling, email marketing and lead management. Besides this, an important focus in marketing automation is on campaign management, which determines the timing for releasing certain messages during the buyer journey in combination with extensive and integrated analytics for the system as a whole.

Webinar tooling

A content format that has special requirements for its creation, distribution and interaction is the webinar, a live broadcast of a presentation organized by the organization that can be followed online. Participants see and hear the speaker(s) live via audio and video. Interaction is possible via chat or Twitter. Webinars are well-suited as a low-threshold method for generating and developing leads.

For organizing a webinar, a separate platform is required in which the following functions are facilitated:

- Transmitting the webinar via visual (video and presentation) and audio
- Hosting the webinar as an organizer
- Low-threshold participation in the webinar via any device, anywhere
- Facilitation of interaction via polls, chat and social media
- Insight into participation profiles to enrich lead information

Virtual events can be created based on platforms or by using full-service providers. A platform only supplies the technology, and in many cases it provides no more than webcam-quality visuals. These platforms include WebEx (Cisco), Lync (Microsoft), GoToWebinar (Citrix) and KnowledgeVision, among others. An alternative is to use a full-service webinar platform with studio facilities and expertise.

Customer relationship management

The rise of CRM systems preceded the rise of content marketing. The thought behind the CRM system is that a central customer database is needed in which all information regarding customers is stored. As such, everyone who has contact with the customer has direct insight into all aspects of the relationship between the customer and the organization. This isn't only a condition that enables customer focus but also a source for insight into the customer database. An analysis can be made in terms of valuable versus unprofitable customers.

CRM borders lead management, email marketing and marketing automation. Depending on the specific situation, business rules should be defined when the profile is added in the customer system. This can take place when the lead becomes sales-qualified.

Social media has added a new dimension to interaction with customers. Beside the traditional channels like mail, telephone and personal contact, (potential) customers seek out interaction via social media. As the goal of the CRM system is basically to provide a complete customer profile and enabling the organization to be customer-focused, the integration of social media within CRM is increasingly commonplace. The desired social media functionality required for the CRM is in part dependent on the setup of other applications. Social media plays various roles on different levels within the different tools, like the CMS, the social media tools and marketing automation, but also in customer support.