

 : EBOOK

HOW SMALL TEAMS

CAN BUILD & EXECUTE A KILLER CONTENT
MARKETING STRATEGY



by Jay Swansson and the ClearVoice team

Introduction

You know that content marketing can bring real value to your company. You see other brands publishing killer content, building their social media followings and successfully leading prospective customers down their sales pipeline.

But you're on a small team. You worry that these big wins won't happen for you. Maybe you don't have a team of writers to help you post content every day, or perhaps you don't have the budget to create vibrant, custom infographics. Maybe you can recognize great writing when you see it but struggle with writing yourself.

Even if you're the only one leading the content marketing charge, you can have a substantial impact. You can learn about your audience, publish helpful content and bring insights back to your team. You can raise brand awareness, increase engagement and bring in new leads and sales.

It starts with understanding how a great content strategy comes together. That's why we've published this ebook — we've had repeated success in building content strategies and know that you can, too. With the help of this guide, you'll be able to create a great content marketing strategy even if you have minimal resources.



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CHAPTER 1

Creating a Content Marketing Strategy

Although 88 percent of B2B companies are engaging in content marketing, only 30 percent of marketers say they're effective at it, according to the B2B Content Marketing 2016 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends [report](#) by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs.

It seems we understand that content can lead to better brand awareness and more leads, but that many of us struggle to get our content to make a substantial impact.

This may be because these companies don't have well-thought-out strategies with tangible goals. If you want to be successful with content, you must start by building an effective content strategy.

The components of an effective content marketing strategy

According to the same report from CMI and MarketingProfs, a staggering 48 percent of organizations have a strategy but don't have it documented. Don't do that. Create a strategy doc that you can refer back to and will help you stay on track. Here are some things to think about when you're putting together a strategy:

Define clear goals

Every company is different, and your content marketing goals should reflect that. Some brands care about increasing leads, while others are more intent on building brand awareness. But all brands go into content marketing because they believe it will help them achieve their business goals. When you're putting together your strategy, highlight which goals are most important, and make sure your strategy reflects them.

Understand your audience

Many brands falter because they don't have a good understanding of their audience. They rush to publish advice they think their audience wants, without ever asking them what their biggest problems are. To combat with this, many content marketers [create in-depth personas](#) to steer their efforts.

These personas can help writers create content that resonates. Here are three tactics to help you learn about your audience:

- » **Pick up the phone and have a conversation.** Ask about how they use your product, their habits and what their biggest issues are. These conversations can often result in compelling case studies.
- » **Send out a survey.** In addition to asking specifically about your product, ask general questions about who they are, what they like to do and what struggles they're having.
- » **Ask for info when they sign up.** When customers sign up for your services, ask them such questions as job title, responsibilities and pain points. What you ask further depends on what's relevant to your business.

Focus on great content

There's a lot of crappy, boring stuff out there. If you want to be effective, you have to make sure you're publishing stuff that people actually want to read. Start by making a list of the publications you like to read. Why do you like them? What can you adopt for your own strategy? To create great content, you need to solve the problems of your customers. These problems can go well beyond your product.

Understand SEO

Search is one of the biggest drivers of traffic for content marketing. The field is constantly in flux, but content marketers need to have a basic understanding of how to optimize a piece of content for SEO. You could also partner with an SEO specialist (more on that later).

Focus on distribution from the beginning

It would be nice if you published content and it was so good that you were suddenly on the map — but this type of virality rarely happens. You need to include distribution into your content marketing strategy from the beginning. Distribution includes paid and organic efforts in social media, email marketing, SEO and PR (more on this later, too).

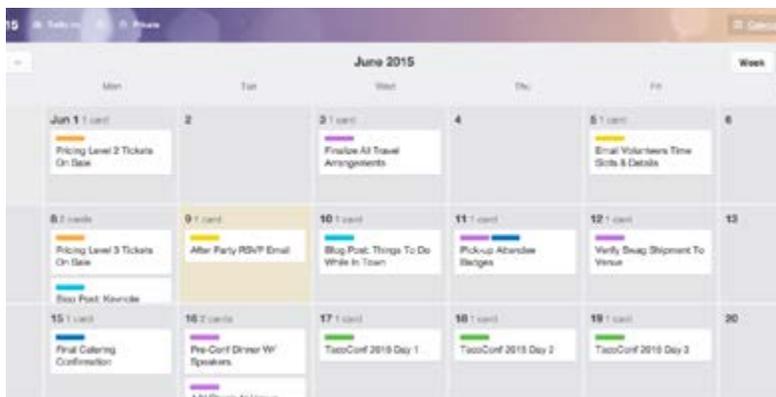
The nuts and bolts that support your strategy

You'll need a few things in place to help you execute your strategy. Take the time at the beginning of a campaign to nail down the following:

Make a budget

No one has money to burn. Figure out what you can and can't afford and adjust your strategy accordingly. If you only have \$1,000 per month to spend on content, what can you get with that? You may be able to get a freelancer to write three blog posts, which

is enough to get a strategy moving forward.



Trello Editorial Calendar - Source: blog.trello.com

Create an editorial calendar

Content marketing doesn't work if you're not at least somewhat consistent. You don't have to publish every Tuesday, but you do want to create and post enough so

your audience keeps coming back. Come up with an editorial calendar that details when you'll publish what and who the responsible parties are. Many marketers use Excel or Google Sheets, but project management tools such as [Trello](https://trello.com/) and [DivvyHQ](https://divvyhq.com/) are good options as well. Many content marketing platforms have editorial calendars built in, too.

Come up with a branded style guide

One of the most effective ways to solidify your strategy is to create a [style guide for your brand](#). This is a must if you work with freelancers. A branded style guide is a document that includes details about your brand's content. It should include samples of your tone and voice, details on your personas and information on topical preferences. When you hire a freelancer, simply give them your style guide rather than spend a ton of time onboarding them.

CHAPTER 2

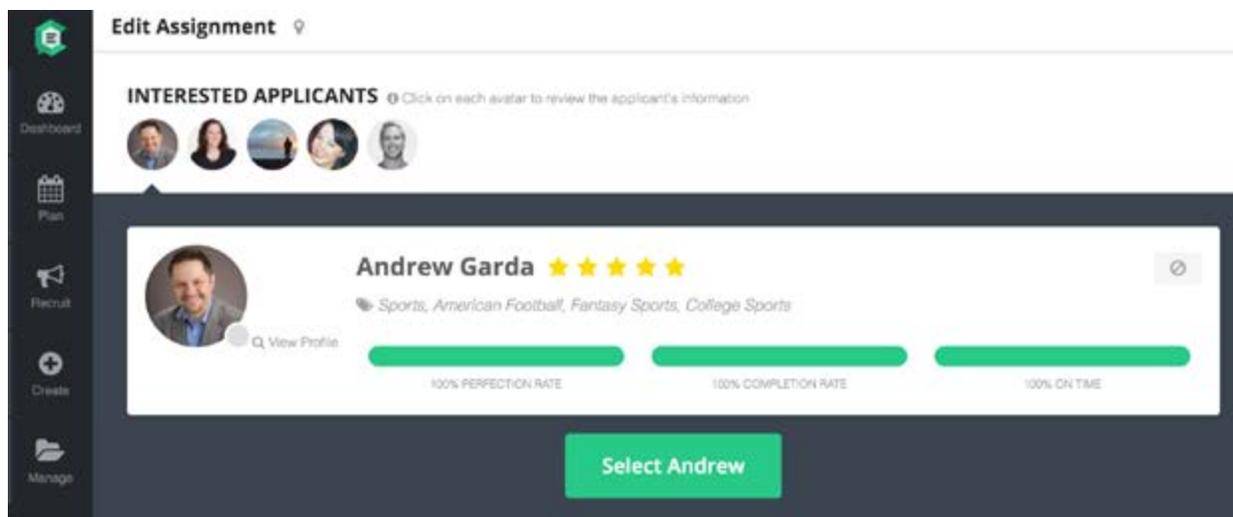
Executing the Strategy

Once you've come up with a general strategy, you have to figure out how to execute. Which parts can you do yourself? Where are the holes in the plan? Can you hire freelancers to help you out?

Many marketers are wizards at analytics and know how to drive growth for a business, but when it comes to creative content ideas, they get stuck. They have some idea of what their audience struggles with, but it's hard to come up with clever topics and angles. That's where freelance writers and content strategists (freelance or in-house) come into play. Remember that freelancers tend to be a lot less expensive than hiring someone in-house.

Find freelance writers

Freelancers can help your business, but you've got to find them in the first place. The [ClearVoice Marketplace](#) fills this need; once you create an assignment, the software matches you with freelancers who most closely fit your parameters. Peruse their profiles, check out their published work, choose your favorite and get started. You can collaborate with freelancers, pay them, publish to your blog and measure results, all from within the platform.



Freelancer selection - ClearVoice Platform

In addition, if you already work with a freelancer, chances are they know other writers who would want to work with you. Many freelancers build their business on referrals, so asking your connections for a recommendation is a good tactic. You can also find freelance writers in the following places:

Freelance job boards

Freelance job boards enable you to publicize your needs to a large audience. On these sites, you can post your freelance job for a small fee. Some of the best are:

- » [ProBlogger's Job Board](#). ProBlogger regularly posts jobs specifically for blogging, and freelance writers check this site often.
- » [Inbound.org](#). Inbound.org is a community for marketers and has a job board filled with opportunities for freelancers, full-time content marketers and other roles.
- » [WeWorkRemotely.com](#). This site is run by 37Signals, and the jobs are high-quality. It's not as well-known as other job boards, so it won't reach as many freelancers.
- » [LinkedIn](#). LinkedIn is a go-to destination for anyone looking for new opportunities, and freelancers often search the site for new clients.

Another company's blog

Which blogs do you read every day? What voices inspire you? Some blogs are staffed exclusively with in-house writers, but most blog managers rely on freelancers. Why not contact the writers who are penning your favorite articles?

Determine if a freelancer is right for you

There are thousands of freelancers out there; how do you know which one is right for you? Analyze prospective freelancers against these four factors:

- » **Subject matter expertise.** Many freelancers specialize in particular verticals such as ecommerce, technology or lifestyle. If possible, hire a freelancer who has some experience in your industry.
- » **Skill set.** Some freelancers specialize in content creation, while others specialize in PR, SEO or digital marketing strategy. Hire freelancers who have the skill set that complements your needs.
- » **Price.** [Freelancers vary widely](#) in price. Remember two things: You get what you pay for, and it's up to you to make sure you're getting adequate value for the services your freelancers provide. Keep in mind that hiring freelancers — even expensive ones — is almost always cheaper than hiring an in-house employee.
- » **Portfolio.** Always review samples of their published work to determine if their style and expertise is a good match for you.

Manage in-house content creators and freelance writers

Once you've figured out who is going to help with your strategy, it's time to get stuff done. With the right tools and a solid, streamlined process, you'll be able to manage freelancers with ease. Here's how to perfect your management process:

Keep onboarding simple

If your onboarding process is lengthy and laborious, you're going to waste a lot of time and annoy your writers. Come up with one onboarding document to send to every new

freelancer that details what they can expect. Your style guide should be part of this document. This will help your content creators get writing quickly, and it should reduce the amount of edits and revisions on your end.

Decide on a word processing solution or content marketing platform

Some teams are still using Google Docs or Microsoft Word, and these are fine for the short term; just know that these solutions aren't suited for growth at scale, and once you start to ramp things up, managing your content in them will become unwieldy at best. Platforms like [ClearVoice](#) incorporate a CMS with project management and collaboration tools, enabling you to review, edit and pay your writers all within one channel.

Use a project management tool

Important information such as due dates and relevant research and links can get lost in an email inbox. Project management tools tend to make things go smoother than email. We've already mentioned Trello as a good one — [Asana](#) and [Basecamp](#) are two more.

Be a good client

The best freelance writers have a lot of clients, and they can pick and choose whom they want to work with. Be one that freelancers like with these tips:

- » **Be respectful of their time.** Freelancers have to make good use of their time to make a living; don't bog them down with unnecessary details.
- » **Be realistic about deliverables.** Sometimes editors send pieces back and forth over and over again and are always unhappy with what their freelancers give them. It may be an issue with the freelancer — but it's more likely that the editor is unrealistic about a freelancer's ability to mimic the editor's preferred writing style.
- » **If there's an issue, talk it out.** Things won't always go to plan, and when a freelancer delivers something that isn't right, talk it out. Pick up the phone and have a conversation about what's not working, and be sure to give the freelancer a chance to make it right.
- » **Develop a real relationship.** Freelancers can help with your content marketing

strategy, but they're not writing machines. They're people. The best content managers will develop lasting relationships with their freelancers, in which both parties consider the needs of the other.

- » **Pay promptly.** Freelancers love clients who pay promptly. Doing so shows you respect the fact that they work for a living — and it's likely they'll bump you up higher on their list of priorities, too.

Integrate content into your brand's larger marketing strategy

Content does not stand on its own. Your strategy will work best when it works with your brand's larger marketing strategy. Make sure you're checking in with other members of your team to figure out how you can work together. Many marketers use [HubSpot](#) to integrate their content with their email marketing and lead generation efforts. We address how to get your team invested in content in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

Publication and Promotion

With a smart and proactive promotion strategy, you can get your content in front of an audience who is excited to hear what you have to say. After all, you'd hate to spend all that time creating content only to find that no one is seeing or interacting with it, right?

Bake in promotion tactics from the start

These tactics help ensure your content gets seen and shared from the beginning:

Collaborate with an influencer

[Working with influencers](#) isn't just about promoting your products — doing so exposes your content and brand to a new and relevant audience, and it adds ethos to your efforts, too. For a more in-depth look at the effectiveness of influencer marketing, check out [this Forbes article](#). Keep in mind, however, that influencer-created-and-shared content costs more than ghostwritten content. Budget accordingly.

Use freelancers with PR experience

Consider working with freelancers who can lend their PR experience to your content marketing efforts. This can help you get connected with the right editors and distribution channels without having to take on another full-time employee. Not sure where to look? Ask your existing connections if they can help you find the freelancer you need.

Work with your PR team

If you have an in-house PR person or team, ask them to help you brainstorm ideas for content distribution. Think about both local and regional opportunities that can build up your authority in your niche and look for ways you can leverage PR within your market segment.

Work with a media company

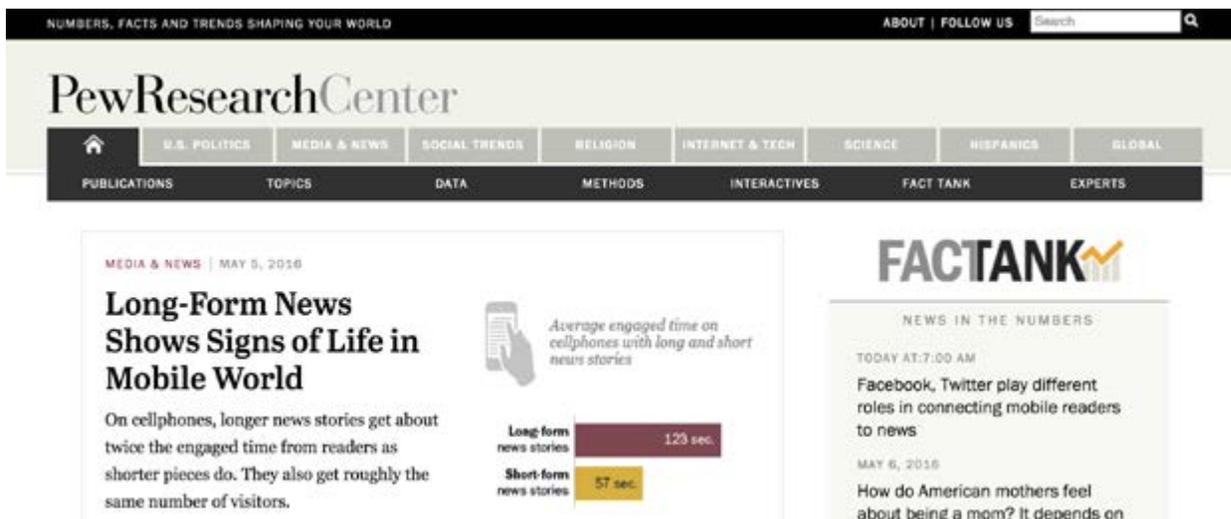
Outsourcing some of your promotion efforts to a media company can help free up internal resources. Especially for traditional mediums like radio, television and billboards, a media company can help coordinate and monitor your external marketing and PR so you can focus on your day-to-day work.

Leverage social media

Any content marketing strategy that leaves out social media amplification is incomplete. Here's what you need to know about social media content promotion:

Determine which networks to target

Find where your target market spends time on social media before committing any resources. For example, if you're targeting women ages 25-40, data from [Pew Research](#) indicates your time would best be spent on networks like Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram, thanks to the high volume of users that fit your demographic. If you're working with limited resources, starting with the most relevant networks helps



Pew Research Center - pewresearch.org

ensure your time and money is being well spent — and rather than trying to maintain an active presence on all social networks, you're focusing on the ones most likely to produce results.

Organic content vs. paid advertising

Organic and paid content work in different ways, and used in tandem, they can be a powerful form of promotion. Because many social platforms today work via [algorithms](#) that determine who sees what content and when, organic (unpaid) content has a lower likelihood of being seen. Organic social content doesn't typically sell — it's just great content that resonates with your target audience. Ads, on the other hand, make a hard

sell for your product or service and are more likely to be seen by more people within the demographic you've selected. Need more on this topic? Check out [this Clickz post](#).

Perform A/B testing on ads

When you're just getting started, it can be tough to know where your ads will be effective. Start with a small budget and [A/B test different versions of your ads](#), so you can begin to understand what makes a successful ad on different platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Over time, you'll find out what types of images work best, what copy angle the audience prefers and which targeting options produce a high volume of conversions.

Pitch the media

If you want to land opportunities with the media, be sure you're following these best practices to increase the likelihood for success:

Best practices

- » **Connect online.** Start by building relationships online with editors and writers. Follow the people you want to collaborate with and interact with them on a regular basis.
- » **Customize every pitch.** Mass sends almost never get traction. Know the qualifiers of a good pitch for different media outlets (a simple Google search will often produce the outlet's guidelines) and work to create a well-developed, thoughtful pitch with a unique angle.
- » **Keep it short.** Your pitch should be concise; don't ramble on.
- » **Follow up.** If you haven't heard back from a pitch in seven business days, send a followup email that lets them know you're still interested in hearing back.

Where to look for opportunities

If you're not sure where your audience turns for information, ask. Conduct a survey, turn to social media or use a focus group to find out which blogs, magazines, etc., your target market trusts as a source of industry news and tips. These customer-identified resources

are the first places you should look for collaborative opportunities.

Guest posting and syndication

Reach out to the places you've identified as important and look for guest posting opportunities that will get your brand in front of those readers. In some instances, you may even find opportunities for [syndication](#), which gives you a regular, recurring spot to showcase your brand's expertise.

Optimize your content for search

SEO is the process of optimizing content so it rises to the top of organic search rankings. Here's what you need to know to ensure your content performs well in search:

Have a general understanding of SEO

There's a long list of [SEO best practices](#), but a few of the essentials are:

- » Conducting [keyword research](#) to identify which phrases are searched at a high volume
- » Naturally working in relevant [keyword phrases](#) to content
- » Including both internal and external links to content

Use SEO plugins

Depending on your CMS, you can use an SEO plugin like [Yoast](#) or [others](#) that simplify some of the SEO work you'll do on the back end of content. These help you optimize your meta description, tags, images and more.

Outsource your SEO

If SEO isn't something you're comfortable handling on your own, you can always work with an external SEO expert. This person should be working closely with your internal teams and able to answer a few [key questions](#), so be sure to vet your options before hiring anyone.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Reporting

Once your content is live and your audience starts engaging with it, you can begin to study a few key metrics. These will help you discover what's working with your content strategy, and they can help mold your tactics moving forward, too.

These metrics also indicate a direct ROI for the time and money you invest in the content side of your marketing strategy. When you bring these results to your team members, key stakeholders and managers, you're helping communicate the value of this marketing tactic across many different organization verticals.

Which metrics should I study?

Once you've established various content marketing channels, you'll have many different metrics to study within those specific arenas. It's a good idea to study them individually as well as together for both micro and macro perspectives of the work you're doing.

Within each of these channels, there are three main categories of content metrics you should look at: engagement, demographics and sales. Each of these categories has different uses and benefits and will be interesting to different parts of your team.

Engagement

Engagement metrics help you determine which pieces of content are interesting to your audience and will help you create more successful content moving forward. Keep an eye on these engagement metrics:

- » **Unique pageviews** - how many different people viewed a piece of content
- » **Time on page** - how long, on average, a user spent on the page reading the content
- » **Social shares** - how many users shared your content on various social media platforms
- » **Comments** - valuable feedback from readers

- » **Bounce rate** - percentage of people who left your site after viewing only one page

Demographics

To create more relevant content, you need to have a clear picture of who your audience is, right? Better understanding your demographic will help you constantly refine your voice so you can write directly for the target reader — and in a way that truly resonates with them.

- » **Referral traffic** - shows where your traffic is coming from
- » **Geographic location** - where your readers are accessing content from
- » **Gender/Age** - who your readers are
- » **Mobile users** - indicates how many are accessing content on a mobile device
- » **New/Return visitors** - shows if people are coming back to read more or are mostly first-time visitors

Sales

These are the metrics your management team wants to hear about. Data within this realm translates into numbers and percentages that directly correlate to your company's bottom line. In most cases, you'll need to use a CRM that tracks a user's website journey to accurately generate these numbers.

- » **Lead generation** - how many leads were generated from a piece of content
- » **Sales conversions** - how many people made a purchase after viewing a piece(s) of content
- » **ROI** - the average ROI for a piece of content (more on this [here](#))

Which results matter?

Different teams are going to be interested in different metrics, so think about how the

data you've collected relates to each department's specific goals.

For example: The marketing team will want to know all about the demographic data you've gathered so they can better understand the online consumer, but not everyone at your company will want that level of detail. Keeping your data grouped into these categories will make it easy for you to quickly and easily share the right data with the right people.

Present the results so your manager can understand them

In the same vein, when communicating results with a manager, think about what numbers he/she will be interested in. Since managers often work with numbers and statistical data to gauge success, metrics from the sales category will translate well. Use simple language, and drop the industry jargon. Translate your progress with content into how it will impact the success of the business overall.

For example: Say that your metrics show 75 percent of your blog visitors are viewing content on a mobile device. When speaking with a manager, talk about how your team is using this data to ensure the content is mobile-friendly and includes calls to action that are easy to carry out on mobile. This, in turn, means better overall user experience — and that's good news for any brand.

Repeat your successes

Once you've started to determine which tactics are successful for your content strategy, look for ways to repeat those successes. Spot the patterns in voice, subject matter, layout and length that show which types of content are successful for your brand, and create more content that fits these parameters.

Learn from failures

Not every idea is going to work, and sometimes — even though you thought you had a brilliant content strategy — it fails. It's OK! Learn from the failed tactics; let them inform your process. These moments of trial are also a way for you to add transparency to your efforts. Rather than burying your mishaps, share with your team how you're using both successes and failures to create an even stronger content strategy.

Where to go for help

If you feel like you need a little extra guidance, consider a few of these fantastic resources:

Blogs

- » [Hubspot](#): Marketing blog with 2M+ readers and endless how-to's
- » [Content Marketing Institute](#): New blogs published every day on how to create killer content
- » [ClearVoice](#): Actionable insights on content marketing and hiring freelancers
- » [Moz](#): Free tips, tricks and advice for overall better search and content marketing
- » [Quick sprout](#): Long-form how-to's with strategies for content marketers



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Individuals

[Ann Handley](#), chief content officer for MarketingProfs: Handley has written two books on creating successful content, and she has a huge archive of content on the MarketingProfs blog that can help you improve your own strategy.

[Jay Baer](#) of Convince and Convert: A respected author and speaker, Baer is known for helping people rethink their approaches to marketing and customer service. His blog and podcast are jam-packed with helpful insight.

[Joe Pulizzi](#), founder of the Content Marketing Institute: A pioneer of the content marketing field, Pulizzi has written four books on the subject and hosts two regular podcasts,

“This Old Marketing” and “Content Inc.” His books, blog posts and podcasts are a great resource for anyone looking for content marketing help.

Conferences/Events

[Inbound](#): Hubspot’s annual content marketing conference is a place to network, learn what’s new in the content marketing world and get insights into specific tactics in various breakout sessions.

[Content Marketing World](#): 80-plus sessions from leading brand marketers on a vast array of content marketing topics.

The logo for Inbound, featuring the word "INBOUND" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is stylized with a circular graphic element inside it.The logo for MozCon, featuring the word "MozCon" in a stylized, purple, cursive font.

[MozCon](#): A three-day conference presented by Moz on everything from content marketing to community building with various expert speakers.

[Confab Central](#): This annual content strategy conference from Brain Traffic covers how to create, deliver and manage meaningful content.

With the results and reporting tactics outlined here, you’re well-prepared to start making content marketing work for your brand. In the next chapter, we’ll look at how to get buy-in from different departments and showcase content’s value company-wide.

CHAPTER 5

Working Within the Organization

What if you work for an organization that doesn't get content marketing?

How do you [convince your boss](#) and any other departments within your organization that content is a worthy cause? How can you get your team invested in publishing the best possible content? Let's take a look.

Why content marketing has value

The world is now online. You know that, your boss knows that and your customers know that. In this online landscape, you need to be competitive. Many of the traditional tactics for revenue generation (think cold calling for sales) no longer do the trick.

Buyers are more educated than ever, and you can use online content to keep them informed. Your content marketing will help prospective customers find out about you, inform them about what you offer and ultimately lead them down the sales funnel so they become customers.

The best part? Content marketing is scalable. With an effective strategy and the right tools, you can reach a large audience without having to individually reach out to every prospective customer.

How to convince stakeholders that content has value

It can be tempting to try to work around the leadership at your organization. If they don't see the value in content, surely you can prove it to them. Once you publish a blog post that leads to 50 percent more leads, they'll certainly see the light, right?

But this strategy rarely works, and that's because content marketing takes upfront investment. You need leadership to give you a healthy budget for hiring freelance writers, editors and designers. You're better off presenting the facts: The average marketing department spends 28 percent of its overall marketing budget (not including staff) on content marketing, according to the same report from CMI and MarketingProfs, and 51 percent of organizations will increase their content marketing spending in the next 12 months. If you don't invest, you will be at a grave disadvantage.

But you also need to understand where your boss is coming from.

Ask yourself:

- » Which metrics is their performance being measured against?
- » What existing problems or obstacles are they facing?
- » What limitations are they dealing with (time, budget, expertise)?
- » What goals have they laid out for the future?

Answering these questions will help you figure out how to help your boss. Be someone who comes up with solutions, not an employee asking for money. If you pitch a giant project, like a \$10,000 interactive resource, you might intimidate leadership. It's best to start small with a single resource, prove content's value, and then work up from there.

Partner with in-house marketers

Content marketing can (and should) be seen as an engine for marketing at your company. The content you create can be used by the PR, social media, email marketing and sales teams for their own initiatives.

It's best to partner with other in-house marketers early on to understand their goals and figure out how you can help them reach those goals. For example, your social media specialist might want content that's interactive, as he or she has seen that perform particularly well on social media. Don't be afraid to ask the other marketers at your company exactly how content can help their efforts.

Get other departments invested in content

If your marketing team is on board with your content initiatives, that's great. You'll be well on your way to executing on your strategy and finding success. However, the most successful content marketing comes out of organizations that are all in. Every department is invested in content.

In the ideal world, you'll have:

- » Team members (especially leadership) writing blog posts

- » Team members sharing content on their social media sites
- » The sales team using content as a sales resource
- » Customer support team using content as a customer resource

When it comes to convincing team members to write blog posts, be prepared to do most of the work for them. Writing is intimidating for many people, so offer to interview them and ghostwrite the piece. Alternatively, you can have them write an outline, while you or a freelancer will write out and edit. If you can make your team members sound good, they'll want to contribute.

How to get content noticed in the organization as a whole

If you want your company to be invested in content marketing, you have to share results. When you bring information to non-marketers, provide a high-level overview. Many might not even understand what content marketing is, never mind how it impacts the organization. You can share a bit about your overall strategy, share a few pieces that performed particularly well and a few pieces that didn't, and give some insight on where you'd like to go next.

Conclusion

Small teams can be effective with content marketing, as long as they build a smart, thoughtful strategy. By convincing leadership to put resources into content, one person can come up with a plan, hire freelancers and get stuff done — and ultimately be on the road to improved brand awareness, more leads and more sales.