
CREATING CONTENT STRATEGIES FOR WEBSITES FOR 2017

Content Strategy Defined

Content strategy is the culture, mindset, and approach used in delivering the kind of content that fits the audience's needs. It gives a clear direction on what steps would have to be taken to create, launch, distribute, and maintain different kinds of content, treating it like a business asset that would bring in a quantifiable return of investment, whether directly or indirectly.

What makes content strategy important enough to require this kind of attention?

It serves as an introduction to the brand and product.

The experience of every consumer does not just begin the moment they interact with the product or brand itself. It actually begins with the first piece of content that they come across, whether it openly links to the product or not. The content gives them a general idea of what the industry is about and what its importance is, preparing them for the time that they finally have the chance to interact with the product and making it easier for them to give a commitment of loyalty.

It delivers content to the people who need it the most.

Having a business is not just about selling. It's about selling the product to the right people. What's the difference? Selling a product to the wrong person does not only result in a high percentage of negative feedback, it also wastes time that could have been spent selling to someone with a 99% chance of a sale. Selling the right product to the right person also increases the chances of establishing brand loyalty, knowing that the person needed the product in the first place. This is what an effective content strategy does. It delivers the products and services to the people who need it the most considering the way that the content is packaged and the channels used to deliver them.

It keeps the audience informed.

Information is a powerful tool that any business can give to its audience. Having them make a decision half-blind will immediately cut their trust in half. However, giving them all the information they need to make a wise decision ensures that the trust has already been established as they pledge their loyalty to the brand, product, or service.

It can dictate how long a product lives.



If there's one mistake that a lot of business owners have, it's banking too much on the quality of their product or service and neglecting to consider how it reaches the market and how the consumers will react to it. This is something that content does. There are so many great products out there that do not even reach their target market, mostly because of lack of good content to allow consumers to find out more about them. This makes good products die early.

It equips the team for future campaigns.

Any form of content strategy, especially when documented properly, is a most efficient tool that can be used to plan for future campaigns. It allows any marketing team to find the approach that works well with the kind of product they have and see how significant the numbers are. This helps them create more accurate forecasts and establish processes more efficiently, basing everything on real experience and actual numbers.

Characteristics of Effective Content

Considering how immense the impact of effective content is for any business, it has become a necessity to keep all bases covered and ensure that every strategy enforced will result in minimal to no losses in terms of time, money, and other resources. With this said, it is important to check for these aspects with every piece of content that is released:

Good content reflects the organization's goals and values.

Good content is not just there to attract customers or to gain followers. It is there to give people a glimpse of what the brand is all about, showing them what goals the organization has in place and what values are applied to reach them.

Good content reflects the user's needs and thoughts.

In the same way that the content reflects business goals and values, it should also connect with the audience by giving them a reflection of their own thoughts and needs. By analyzing web metrics and doing extensive user and market research, the organization will be able to express the needs of their target market and make them feel that they are understood and are being offered solutions that match their needs.



Good content is communicated effectively.

Each kind of audience also uses a different kind of language that would not only appeal to them the most, but would also allow them to understand the message more clearly. This proves to be an important part of content creation, knowing that it shows the target market how their language is spoken and how their needs are understood completely.

Good content is useful and direct to the point.

Good content should have a clear purpose, and this purpose should be delivered without any pit stops or reroutes. Every second wasted delivering needless content is a second that the team could have used to immediately convey the message, gain the kind of commitment the team has been looking for, and convert these commitments into numbers.

Good content is timely and factual.

Just as market trends have a tendency to change overnight, so do the needs of any audience. There is a need to ensure that the content adapts to every significant change and caters to the current needs of the target market. At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure that every piece of information given is based on facts, and every promise given can be delivered.

Good content is accessible.

Unless the business is hoping to give the brand a sense of exclusivity, the content should be accessible not only by the target audience, but those beyond them as well. This is something that most content marketers miss out on, focusing too much on how they can reach the people they want to reach without thinking about the others. Making content accessible can turn critics into believers, and non-believers into loyal supporters.

Good content is consistent.

For every kind of content that is released, it is expected to have passed a consistency test. Does it align with the thoughts and ideals that were imparted with previous pieces of content? Does it share the same values that the organization has, as expressed through other posts? Is a specific schedule followed in



releasing new content? Deviating from what the audience has expected from the brand will confuse them and could cause them to rethink their loyalty.

Good content is documented.

Studies show that of the 72% of marketers who have a content strategy in place, only 30% have solid documented strategies while 42% are completely undocumented. Of the most effective B2B marketers, 53% keep regular documentation. As for the least effective marketers, 40% of them do not even have any existing content strategies.

Every piece of content and each aspect involved in creating, launching, and maintaining it should be documented accordingly. What are the targets? Once released, did the content manage to bring the organization closer to those targets? What processes were followed? A complete description of each step of the way would allow the team to improve on the approaches to be used for the next content release.

Content Lifecycle

The need to produce one piece of good content after another also comes with the need to follow the basic content lifecycle. This ensures that the creation of the content follows an organized path. Although a few steps could be added as needed, these are the five basic stages:

- **Audit and Analysis.** This includes competitive and objective analysis, as well as an evaluation of the current environment, including trends, partner content, and other similar factors.
- **Strategy.** Determine a proper process and workflow to be followed, and pinpoint references and sources. Decide on a voice to be used and how the brand will be defined.
- **Plan.** Think about the people needed and what their roles and tasks will be. Decide about how the content will be managed and how everything will be communicated. Create a proper migration plan.
- **Create.** Produce the content needed and optimize it for the different mediums that will be used for distribution. Do quality checks and correct and improve accordingly.
- **Maintain.** Audit periodically and measure the targets missed, met, and exceeded. Improve content accordingly.

The Content Strategy Quad

When any form of strategy is created, the checklist should include key components that would make it effective once applied. This holds true for content strategy as well.

Melissa Rach, a communications and content specialist, has created what she calls the content strategy quad. With 20 years of experience to back her up and as an acknowledged leader in content strategy methods, she explains how an entire string of processes and methodologies come together as a whole as each component plays a vital role in making the content work its magic.



What does the content strategy quad mean?

Right at the center is the organization's **core strategy**. This is the central idea that the team wants to apply in reaching organizational goals through effective content. This strategy can only be effective if these four components that cater both to the people and the content itself are considered.

Content-Focused Components

- **Substance** – This focuses on what the goals are. Who is the intended audience? What kind of content is needed? What voice and tone will be used?
- **Structure** – This focuses on how the content is created, how the messages are mapped, how they are bridged together, and other structural aspects. What should be prioritized? How will the thoughts be organized? What kind of access will the audience be given?

People-Oriented Components

- **Workflow** – This focuses on how the team will be managing and maintaining the content. What are each person's roles and tasks? What tools do they need to launch each piece of content successfully and maintain its quality?
- **Governance** – This focuses on the policies, guidelines, and standards followed in the content's lifecycle. How are key decisions made? How are changes communicated? How is the strategy sustained and evolved?

Building Your Content Strategy for 2017

What content strategy should be utilized for 2017?

Content strategies continue to evolve year after year. Of course, while some strategies consistently remain on the list, there are new ones that only emerged as consumers, businesses and marketers adjust to the times. Based on how things are going, an effective 2017 content strategy should be built according to these factors:

Content Technology

In the past years, one common problem that content marketers encountered would be the lack of technology used in the process. It was hard to compute for direct ROI. It was challenging to distribute information across different channels in an efficient and time-effective manner. A lot of the work was manually done – but not anymore.



It is seen in 2016 how a lot of these past dilemmas have been solved by technology, a trend that will progress even more in 2017. Especially now that content marketing has become the core of a lot of businesses, the demand for tools that make the job more efficient at a cost-effective manner has gone even higher.

Creative Formats

Content has evolved through the years – from written content, all the way to visual ones in the form of images and video. In 2017, the trend is seen to evolve even more. Because audiences are craving for something different, a lot of creativity is required to keep them happy. This explains the abundance of GIFs and other similar online content. By 2017, it is not going to be about how much information is packed into a single piece of content – it's more about how creatively the information is presented.

Documented Content Marketing Strategy

This is not just about having a content marketing strategy in place – it's about efficiently documenting it as well. The importance of having a documented content marketing strategy has been emphasized for years. Sadly, a lot of people still have not taken on this habit.

Brands and businesses that focus on delivering real value through content will continue to soar in 2017. This is not just about content that openly promotes the brand's own products and services. Rather, it's about content that aims to answer the target market's questions and makes them informed consumers

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has been quite popular in the past couple of years, but in the past few months, its efficiency catapulted it into being one of the most relevant approaches today. It's not a complicated concept. It only focuses on letting someone else send the message to the target audience. The critical point here is choosing who that someone is. It has to be someone who is already influential in a certain niche, someone the people already trust.

Consumers are becoming more informed by the minute, which is a major factor on why influencer marketing is more relevant now more than ever. As consumers find more ways to educate themselves about products and services they want to acquire, it is important to use people they see as credible sources of information as brand ambassadors.

So how does this figure into a brand's content strategies? By connecting with influencers and building relationships with them, they can play a role in the content creation process, as well as in the distribution



system. Ask them to create a guest post on the brand's official blog. Better yet, they can mention the brand, as well as its products and services on their own content whenever relevant.

Messaging

The abundance of messaging apps has made it quite evident that this is a niche that marketers can take advantage of. The highlight on messaging apps like Kik, FB Messenger, WhatsApp and other similar platforms will continue in 2017 as more consumers start to appreciate the immediate connection that this technology brings. This immediate connection is one source of power that marketers everywhere can take advantage of.

Through this means of direct contact with consumers, there is a more efficient way of delivering content straight to any market's fingertips. Although it may seem intrusive from an angle, it's all about packaging the content the right way to make it as effective as possible.

Native Advertising

Native advertising is one of the most misunderstood approaches in digital marketing today. However, it is also proving to be most effective.

The most basic definition would be this – it is paid content that remains aligned with a brand's editorial standards. This is nowhere near paid ads that are often dismissed as intrusive. They do not openly ask audiences to buy a product or switch to a service. Because they appear like any regular content, two goals are hit in one precise action: the possibility of a click-through, and the edge of appearing on top of the usual search results.

Excellent examples of native advertising would be sponsored content, recommended content, and social ads. Of course, to maintain its effectiveness, there is still a need to ensure that the piece of content remains high quality.

Purpose-Driven Marketing

One reason why a lot of brands fail at content marketing is their lack of a specific purpose. Content marketing should not just be about hitting this mark or going over that target. It's about creating a deeper purpose for everything that is done, a clear vision of where all this is leading to.

Each time a strategy is generated, the question has to be asked – "What is your why?" And each time a piece of content is created, it has to be aligned with your purpose as well.



By answering this question each and every time, each approach used in creating content will be conscious of whether what is being delivered has real value or not. It's not just going to be about targets and numbers that will be favorable to the business. It's also about what the target market gets out of it, something that has a more long-term effect.

Conclusion

2017 promises a mix of trends that have been around for a long time and emerging approaches that make the future of content marketing exciting. A lot of the focus is on efficiency and sustainability for the marketer. There is also an immediate need to keep up with the audience's yearning for credible information and knowledge.

It is evident that marketers should focus on helping their audiences become informed consumers. 2016 may have been revolutionary for content marketing, but with the emerging trends for 2017, it looks like the market is about to explode with amazing discoveries that bind consumers and marketers in a tighter circle.

Just remember that it's also about learning from the content strategies that were used in 2016, maintaining and improving the ones that worked, discarding the ones that didn't, and moving on to the new challenges that 2017 holds for marketers everywhere.

