KEY ELEMENTS FOR BUILDING A CONTENT STRATEGY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations often use the terms "content strategy" and "content marketing" interchangeably, when in fact there's a distinct difference. A content strategy is a plan for how a company will use content to fulfill a need, or solve a problem for its customer, while simultaneously helping it achieve a business goal. Two executional arms, content development and content marketing then implement that content strategy. Content development is tasked with creating, sourcing and curating content, while content marketing is responsible for delivering that content to the right audience, on the right channel, at the right time.

By focusing more on the executional arms of development and marketing instead of a holistic strategy, organizations can end up producing large volumes of content without a clear purpose or sense of direction. In addition, the different departments that deploy content can end up producing material with differing (and often competing) objectives. With limited resources and digital real estate for engaging customers, it's crucial that the entire organization work off a single, coherent content strategy that explicitly states who the brand's customer is, what is the major need or problem they have, and how the brand will fulfill that need using content.

Through our research, we found that companies with successful content strategies had clarity around what they wanted the content to do for their customers and strong criteria for what they would and wouldn't publish. Our methodology for narrowing this focus is for companies to choose one of five major content strategy archetypes:

- Content as Presence
- Content as a Window
- Content as Currency
- Content as Community
- Content as Support

This report helps companies decide which archetype is best suited to help them deliver on a customer need while meeting a business goal as well. It then walks through the sequence of steps that builds upon this archetype to create a formalized strategy that minimizes content waste, aligns multiple teams around a common vision and helps them deliver on a unified customer experience.

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WHAT IS A CONTENT STRATEGY?

It's never been easier for brands to create engaging content and deliver it to a large audience using a variety of formats and channels. There's an (over)abundance of sophisticated tools in the market that can help companies achieve this scale of content delivery, along with a remarkable level of granularity when it comes to targeting customers with specific behaviors or demographics.

And yet most of it is going out into the void. According to a report by Sirius Decisions, 60—70% of content produced by B2B companies goes unused,[1] and Forrester found that 87% of B2B marketers say they struggle to produce content that truly engages their buyers.[2] Those stats show that a lot of companies are producing content without a plan or a purpose, focusing instead on producing vast quantities of multi-format, multi-channel content, in the hope that some of it will stick. This sort of approach rapidly depletes resources, creates waste and inefficiency, and a workforce that is overwhelmed with "feeding the content beast."

> "You basically want to know what content you should produce, and where and when you should use it," says Mina Seetharaman, Global Director, Content Strategy and Content Solutions at The Economist Group. "Doesn't matter if it's a marketing program, or a website, that premise still holds true. You have to see what your goals are, and how you can dovetail them with your audience needs."

A coherent content strategy goes a long way in solving these problems by narrowing the scope of the content produced, giving it purpose and vision, and aligning all the content stakeholders in the organization around a common set of principles for what that content should achieve.

Put simply, a content strategy is how a company executes on a vision for serving both its customers and its business goals using content. There are three important questions embedded in that statement; "Who is your customer?" "What is their need?" and "How will you deliver on their need?" To create a vision for its content, the organization must have definitive answers for each of those questions.

Once that strategy is established, it serves as the definitive criteria for all content that is produced by the organization. Any content that doesn't serve the goal outlined in the content strategy can often be eliminated or de-prioritized, leading to an increased focus, and clarity in measuring success.
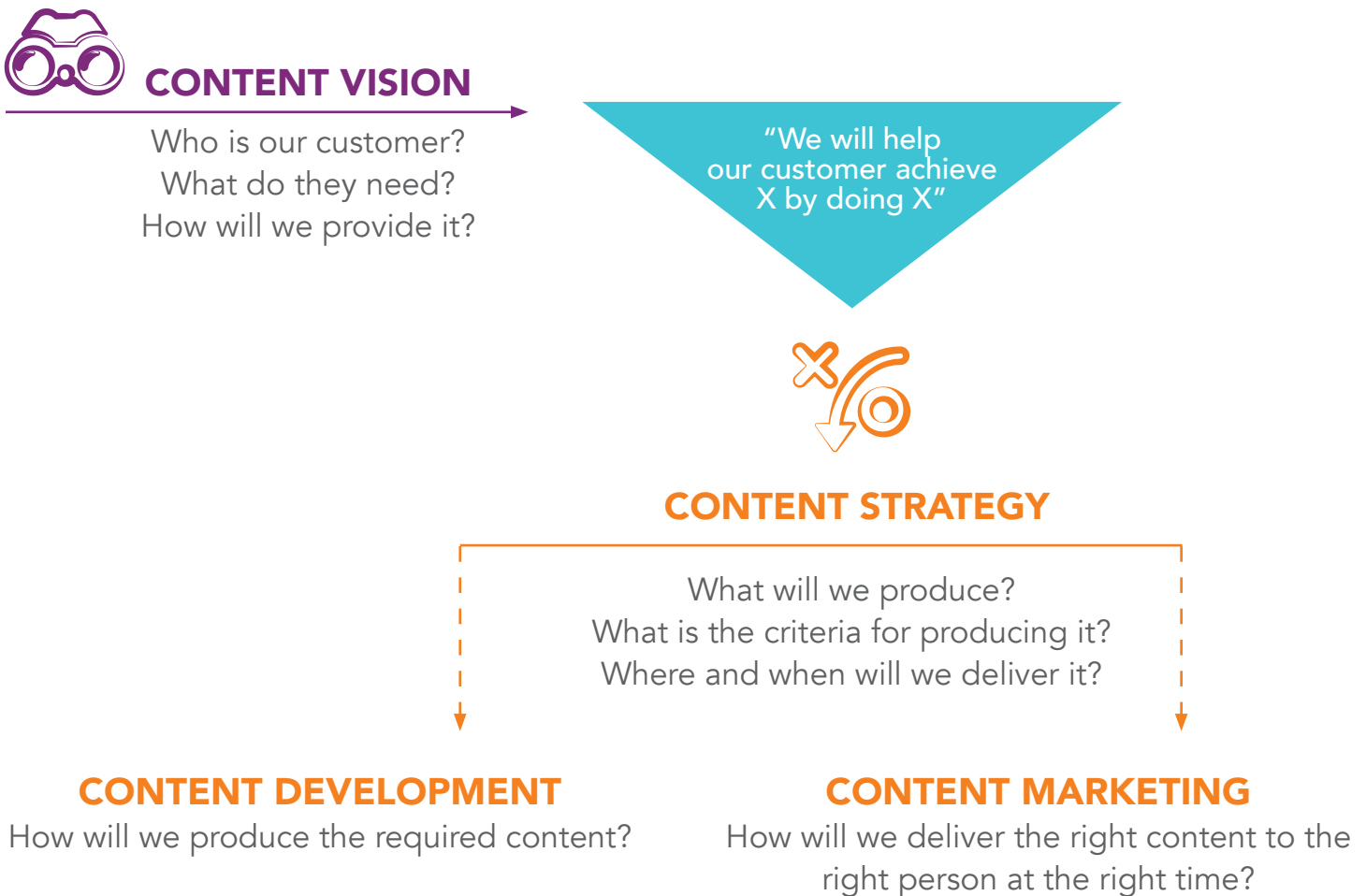
CONTENT STRATEGY VS. CONTENT MARKETING

If the content strategy is the plan, it is executed by the coordinated efforts of two arms, content development and content marketing. Companies often use the terms content marketing and content strategy interchangeably, but there is a distinct difference. Content strategy is the vision for what the company wants to achieve using content. It determines what content will and won't be produced. Content development then works out how to create, curate or source that content, while content marketing figures out how to deliver that content to the right audience, on the right platform, at the right time.

Figure 1 shows the relationship of content marketing and content development to content strategy, and the key questions that distinguish each unit from the other. By going through these questions from top to bottom, an organization can identify which parts of its content practice have a problem, and what people, processes or tools it needs to implement in order to solve them.

FIGURE 1 ELEMENTS OF A CONTENT STRATEGY

CONTENT VISION

Who is our customer?
What do they need?
How will we provide it?

"We will help our customer achieve X by doing X"

CONTENT STRATEGY

What will we produce?
What is the criteria for producing it?
Where and when will we deliver it?

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT
How will we produce the required content?

CONTENT MARKETING
How will we deliver the right content to the right person at the right time?

It can be easy to confuse a content marketing plan with a content strategy, especially since the marketing department often shoulders the bulk of the responsibility for distributing content. But it shouldn't be the only department that has a stake in how customers engage with content, especially when content is created by multiple units such as PR, investor relations, sales, the product team and the service team. "It's not about creating only marketing content, it's about having a strategy for everything you do which cannot be manifested in the world in a form other than content," says Hilary Marsh, content strategist and CEO of Content Company. "Content is what you're doing, you're not deciding to create content, you are creating content simply by existing."

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>
> – Hilary Marsh, Content Company

In other words, most of the parts of the organization that deal externally with customers are producing some form of content. But if they aren't aligned on a unified vision and strategy, they'll end up producing content with different, and often competing objectives. The solution isn't necessarily to have a central group that produces content for everybody, but to have a central vision that's accessible to all content stakeholders. That's why it's important to think of a content strategy as a guide that allows every content producing part of the organization to create its own content, but produce it according to the same criteria and goals.

CHALLENGES OF FORMULATING A CONTENT STRATEGY

While most organizations are usually able to create some form of a content plan or strategy, our research and work with organizations has found that there are four major challenges with these plans that keep them from being coherent and effective:

- **Focus on tactics instead of strategy**
  Today's marketers are under immense pressure to continuously produce large amounts of quality content and deliver it to multiple channels. The sheer amount of digital channels that a company can be present on makes it easy to focus on the executional aspects of developing and delivering content, and only measuring KPIs around those efforts. It's much harder to tie these efforts to a greater business impact, especially if there isn't a clearly defined vision for what the content should be achieving. This leads to an overemphasis on day-to-day KPIs such as page views, likes and shares, instead of big picture assessments of whether the content being created is actually serving a customer need and/or a business objective.

- **Multiple teams, competing objectives**
  Multiple teams within the same organization can have different ideas about what the content should achieve and what it should look like. For example, at a retail company, the e-commerce team might want the content to be more product centric, while the brand team might think the content should be more reflective of the brand and the lifestyle it wants to promote. This creates situations where multiple teams have different objectives for using content, but have to use the same real estate, such as the company website and social media channels. The mistake most companies make is to have a content strategy that is either too narrow, or too broad to serve all the stakeholders. If a strategy is too narrow (e.g. "Increase lead generation by posting lots of daily content") it only ends up serving the success metrics of one part of the organization. If it's too broad (e.g. "Create quality content for every channel") it lacks focus, ownership and measurability.

- **Lack of executive leadership**
  The objectives of a content strategy need to benefit an entire organization, not just certain units. Hence it requires leadership to set the agenda and force the alignment across multiple teams. This is especially difficult when there isn't a clear answer for "who owns content." In its absence, the content development and marketing teams are beholden to the often-differing demands of the other stakeholders in the organization (e.g. PR, Web, Product teams), instead of a vision implemented by a central authority. The lack of a vision for content also makes it harder for the C-suite to buy in to the initiatives of the content teams since it becomes difficult to see the business impact of their efforts.

- **Disparate audience data**
  Customer data lives in many different digital and analog stores, including CRM, web analytics, third party data, survey data and more. With the marketing, sales, service and product departments all using separate tools to gather and store customer insights there isn't a single, coherent view of the customer that the company can use for executing a content strategy. This unified view of the customer is what provides the starting point for a holistic content strategy, as it answers the two biggest variables in the vision statement, "who is the customer," and "what is their need?"

ESSENTIAL STEPS FOR CREATING A CONTENT STRATEGY

To create a comprehensive plan that provides a blueprint for multiple stakeholders, we've identified a series of essential steps to take. Within each step are a series of questions to answer before moving on to the next one.

START WITH THE CUSTOMER AND THE JOURNEY

The first and most crucial step in creating a strategy is to know your customer. The primary questions to answer before moving to the next step are "Who is your customer?" and "What are their biggest pain points?" But in addition to those questions, you'll need to gain an understanding of their content consumption behaviors and preferences in terms of format, device, timing. Where do they go to get the information that will solve their problems? Who is influencing them? What content formats do they prefer? The first set of questions will help determine the "Who" and the "What" of the content vision. The secondary set will help to map the different stages of the content journey taken by the customer, from awareness to consideration.

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In this case, demographic information isn't as important as behavioral information, so when you are confronted with a mountain of data from multiple sources, it helps to prioritize exactly what you need to know about the customer in order to create and deliver content that serves them. "I don't need 17 different personas with hyper-granularity on what coffee they drink and what music they listen to," says Rich Schwerin, Digital Content Strategist at VMware, "Instead, I just need to know the things that keep the audience awake at night."

ENGAGE THE STAKEHOLDERS AND AUDIT THE CONTENT

To create a content strategy that every part of the organization can serve, it is important to engage every stakeholder who has something to gain from the production of content. This could include everyone from the head of the e-commerce team, the web development team, the social media team to the product team. Interview these stakeholders to find out what they think the content should do for them and the customer, and look for areas where different teams align and diverge. It's as important to know what content can do for your stakeholders as it is to know what it can do for your customers. Some questions to answer could include; what do they need content to do for them? What is their best performing content? What is the process by which they get content created? What channels are most effective for them? How do they measure their team's success? Being knowledgeable about the hopes and fears of every department that depends on content is key to setting a strategy they can all get on board with. This is also the time to present the results of your research on who the customer is and what their needs are. Getting the entire organization to agree on the needs of these empathy-based personas can often be a contentious task, but it's absolutely crucial to get everyone on board before moving to the next step.

It is also a worthwhile exercise to conduct a content audit to see what most of the organization's efforts and focus are going into. A content audit is a thorough inventory check of where and how all an organization's content is being developed, distributed and stored. This exercise helps to identify inefficiencies in the production and delivery process, similarities in how different teams are producing content, strengths and weaknesses of external content partners (e.g. agencies, freelancers) and possible points of integration for technology platforms. This information will come in handy when its time to start charting the executional parts of the strategy.

CHOOSE THE BEST CONTENT ARCHETYPE

Through our research, we identified five broad archetypes for a company's content strategy They are:

- Content as Presence
- Content as a Window
- Content as Currency
- Content as Community
- Content as Support

A content archetype is the simplest possible description of how a brand serves both its customers and its business through the use of content. The value of these archetypes is that they help to narrow the different strategies a brand could take for its content down to one central strategy. A brand could easily decide that each one of these archetypes is worth doing since they all provide value to the customer. But this framework acts as a mechanism that forces the organization to prioritize which customer need it is in the best position to solve. Based on that need, it must pick the archetype that will best solve the problem.

Figure 2 illustrates the process for choosing a content archetype. The first step is to start with the customer at the center. Once you have an idea of who the customer is, and what they are looking for, choose a content archetype that will best deliver on the needs of the customer. Keep in mind that in the process of doing research on the customer, you could conceivably identify every single need and pain point they have. Your brand's content strategy can and should only solve one of them in order for it to be truly effective. The mistake most brands make is trying to fulfill multiple customer needs. Not only does that dilute the effectiveness of the approach, most of the time brands try to go after problems they simply aren't equipped to solve.

A content archetype works best when it is used for only one type of audience. Hence it's conceivable that companies who have a number of different customer personas, can use multiple content archetypes. For example, it is entirely possible for a brand to want its content to act both as a way to establish presence, (for customers-who-don't-know-us segment) and a way to serve a community (for the loyal, engaged customer segment.) That said, it is our recommendation that in order to have an effective, measurable content strategy for a specific audience at a specific point in time, an organization must embrace one archetype as its primary strategy and maybe choose another as a secondary. Trying to function as any more than two archetypes at a time can lead to a lack of focus, and content strategy that is much harder to implement across the organization.

The following section goes into greater detail about the characteristics of each content strategy archetype.

FIGURE 2 THE FIVE CONTENT STRATEGY ARCHETYPES

CONTENT AS PRESENCE

Content types: Social media, advertising, contests, sponsorships

Brand examples: Red Bull, Taco Bell

Success: "Are more people aware of the brand and how it wants to be perceived?"

CONTENT AS SUPPORT

Content types: How-to/demo videos, FAQs, user manuals, spec sheets

Brand examples: General Motors, Comcast

Success: "Are customers happy with the level of content support they receive?"

"I need entertainment and knowledge of this brand"

"I need fast, quick accurate info that helps me solve my product issues"

"I need to trust this company and it's practices"

CONTENT AS A WINDOW

Content types: Videos, interviews, customer stories

Brand examples: Piedmont Healthcare, McDonald's

Success: "Do more people trust this company and its services?"

"I need peer support and knowledge to pursue my passion/hobby"

"I need high value information to help make better decisions"

CONTENT AS COMMUNITY

Content types: Tips and tricks, websites, niche publications, online forums

Brand examples: REI, PlayStation

Success: "Are people in our community more likely to purchase than customer who are not?"

CONTENT AS CURRENCY

Content types: Research reports, webinars, whitepapers

Brand examples: Charles Schwab, Dun & Bradstreet

Success: "Do more customers consider us because of our subject expertise?"

CONTENT AS PRESENCE

What it is: In this archetype, the main barrier to the customer engaging with the brand is either over-familiarity, or a lack of familiarity. If your brand is a household name, like Coke, or Kleenex, or if it basically sells the same product, with little or no variation/innovation, then content is the way you stay relevant. Conversely, if you are a brand that is new, or cannot afford the bigger advertising budgets of your older, more established competitors, then producing content to establish a presence is also a suitable strategy for you.

Content types: Most traditional content marketing efforts fall under this category, usually because it has the most straightforward ways to measure success, which are brand awareness and brand equity. The content produced to support this archetype is typically geared towards the top of the funnel, with a focus on engagement on a large scale and widespread distribution. The content itself can cover a range of characteristics, including useful, entertaining, highly visual, easily digestible but most importantly attention-grabbing.

Case study: Red Bull is a good example of a brand that produces a ton of highly engaging content with the primary purpose of reminding customers that Red Bull exists as a brand, and it is synonymous with high energy events and activities. All of Red Bull's advertising, custom content, sponsorships and events are aligned with the singular strategy of establishing the brand's presence and what it stands for. Although there could conceivably be a link between increased awareness and increased sales, for this archetype, the focus should be on measuring the former, before proving the link to the latter.

CONTENT AS A WINDOW

What it is: For companies that sell services that could be considered risky, (both physically or financially) content can serve as a window into how the company works, creating transparency and trust between the brand and the customer. This strategy overcomes the customer pain point of not having enough information (or trust) to engage with the brand's services or products. Healthcare, wellness and food companies fit this archetype, but also companies that want to rebuild trust with customers after being questioned on the quality of their products, or their commitment to safety.

Content types: In this archetype, content is more focused inwards, telling customer stories, or articles about how the company works, and what its values are. Behind-the-scenes videos, images, interviews and case studies are all effective forms of providing transparency.

Case study: An example of this is McDonald's response to the widespread controversy over how it produced its Chicken McNuggets. After being accused of making the nuggets using "pink slime" or chicken beaks, McDonald's responded with a video that showed viewers exactly how the Chicken McNuggets are made, with 100% real chicken.[3] This act of transparency helped McDonald's dispel harmful rumors about the quality of its menu items, and go some way in regaining the trust of its customers.

Another example of a brand embodying the Content as a Window archetype is Atlanta-based Piedmont Healthcare. The healthcare system produces content that not only helps customers live a healthier lifestyle, (through its Living Better blog)[4] it also showcases the work and experience of its doctors and staff. "Instead of doing what advertising tends to do - which is tell people what's great about you, I felt that it was important that we should show people what's great about us," says Matt Gove, Chief Consumer Officer at Piedmont Healthcare. "We had to figure out, 'How do we use our stories to create and build loyalty, or activate preference in a customer.'"

One such story was a video titled "A heartwarming Christmas kidney swap story."[5] It shows how 21-year-old Briana Mathis donated her kidney to a woman, whose brother in turn then donated a kidney to Mathis' mother. Piedmont surgeons performed both operations, and the video ended up winning a regional Emmy, in the Health/Science - Program Feature category.

CONTENT AS CURRENCY

What it is: This archetype is embodied by companies who create high-quality content that serves to educate customers, give them exclusive information and provide them with expertise that is related to the field of their products/services. In exchange, the customer gives the brand their time, attention, and ultimately their consideration. This strategy overcomes the customer pain point of not having enough knowledge or the right kind of expertise to excel in the field that is being served by the company's products or services.

Content types: This is probably the most widely recognized and implemented content strategy. After all, the whole idea of modern content marketing seems to be about creating content that can get the customer's attention for free, without paying advertising rates to deliver it. But not every company can create content as a currency. The key word here is "currency" which translates to something of high-value. For content to be truly valuable, it needs to offer the customer knowledge and information they can't get anywhere else. For that to happen, a company needs to spend a considerable amount of resources on research, subject matter expertise and an editorial staff to create assets that serve a highly specific need for a highly specific audience. "To create something truly valuable, it should be high quality and scarce," says Steve Rubel, Chief Content Strategist at Edelman. "Very few marketers think about scarcity and abundance and how to really use content in that way."

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Case study: Investment firm Charles Schwab is a good example of the Content as Currency archetype. The company had always produced high value content for its existing clients, which consisted of analyst reports with tips and best practices on how to invest. "For us, the challenge was how to take this thought leadership and expertise and get it to people who aren't currently our clients, leveraging it as a currency for engaging those customers," says Helen Loh, SVP Owned Media, Digital and Content Marketing at Charles Schwab. "Instead of advertising which is more of 'let me tell you how great we are' we could also provide real value for free by saying 'hey I know you're thinking of investing, here are some tips and insights that might be helpful to you, which we hope will give you a sense of the expertise we have.'"

After adopting the content as currency strategy, Loh and her team went about trying to determine what were the channels where prospective customers would go to find content,

and then they identified what kind of assets would work best in getting prospects' attention within that channel. As a result, it led to a transformation of Schwab's content. From initially only producing text based reports, Schwab now produces a variety of assets, including videos, infographics, and Slideshares.

When it comes to measuring success, Loh considers content as a way to facilitate customer learning, a journey that operates in parallel to the typical customer journey of acquisition. Because of that, content is not judged by the metrics of conversion. However, Loh says the eventual goal is to be able to prove a strong correlation between the two. "What I would like the team to continue to push for is to demonstrate we can get people to move from learning to shopping," says Loh. "We need to show that once we're successful in lowering our media cost per engagement through this strategy, we know how to cross customers over to considering Schwab."

CONTENT AS COMMUNITY

What it is: This archetype represents companies who create content that serves a community of customers who follow a shared interest, passion or lifestyle. The content platform encourages customers to post content of their own, interact with each other and spend more time on the brand's properties. The value to customers here isn't just the content, it is the social interaction that the content supports. The customer's pain point here is that they want to have access to community knowledge about experiences, best practices, tips and tricks about how to excel at the hobby, or lifestyle they are passionate about.

It might sound very similar to the Content as Currency archetype, however there's a subtle but important difference between the two. In Content as Currency, the brand is creating high value content that serves the individual need. In Content as a Community, the brand is serving the needs of the community, which in turn creates content to serve the needs of the customer. In a way, the latter archetype is an extension of the former, but instead of only producing content itself, the brand is also providing a space for the community to produce content, and engage with each other.

Content types: Brands can host these communities in a number of ways, by creating community specific websites, forums or social media accounts. In addition to posting original content to facilitate discussions and provide value to the customers, the brand can also leverage user-generated content to keep the community engaged. The value it gets from these efforts is that customers come to see it as a real member of the community, and not an outsider trying to shill products. In addition, the longer a customer spends time on a brand's properties, the more likely they are to eventually engage with the brand as a buyer.

Case study: Outdoor gear retailer REI makes products that serve a community of people who are passionate about experiencing the outdoors. Hence it makes sense that it would create content that serves the same purpose. "People come to us because they want information on where to go, what to do and what gear to use," says Paolo Mottola, Content Marketing Manager at REI. But it didn't start off with that kind of focus. "Initially we only created hardworking, product-oriented content, but we weren't necessarily inspiring people or educating them upstream," says Mottola. "We needed a more strategic approach to create and curate content across the customer journey and a decision criteria to help us stay focused, and not create a lot of waste."

By following the strategy of creating content to serve a community, Mottola's team was able to develop solid criteria for all the content it produced or promoted, helping to minimize waste and streamline the editorial decision making. This strategy helped to position REI as simply another content contributor in a closely-knit community of outdoor enthusiasts. In addition to being a content creator, REI also acted as a curator and sponsor of good content, increasing its credibility within the community. "We're not just thinking about associating ourselves with the content people put out in the world, we're asking people to create content with us in a collaborative way," Mottola says.

CONTENT AS SUPPORT

What it is: For high-end products where the path to purchase is longer than usual, content that serves as support is a good way for a brand to stay engaged with the customer long after the transaction is complete. This is where a brand can win, providing consistent, accurate information about their products and how to maintain them across a variety of easily accessible channels. This helps customers feel more confident in their purchases, and more satisfied with the level of service they get from the brand.

Content types: Examples of content that support this archetype include product specs, self-help-diagnostic articles, how-to-videos, FAQs and product manuals.

Case study: At General Motors, one element of its enterprise content strategy was borne out of third-party consumer reports highlighting customer pain points discovering and understanding information about their vehicles. To combat this, GM implemented a Content 360 approach, which was to first make sure all informational content about its products was easily discoverable and consistent across multiple channels and platforms. "Our overall strategy focuses on making our content as easy to access and as consistent and accurate as possible," says Michael McCormack, Customer and Dealer Experience Lead at GM. By striving for consistency, GM can help ensure that if a customer discovers a piece of content about a specific product in the early stage of their engagement, they will be able to bring that same content with them into another channel or another stage.

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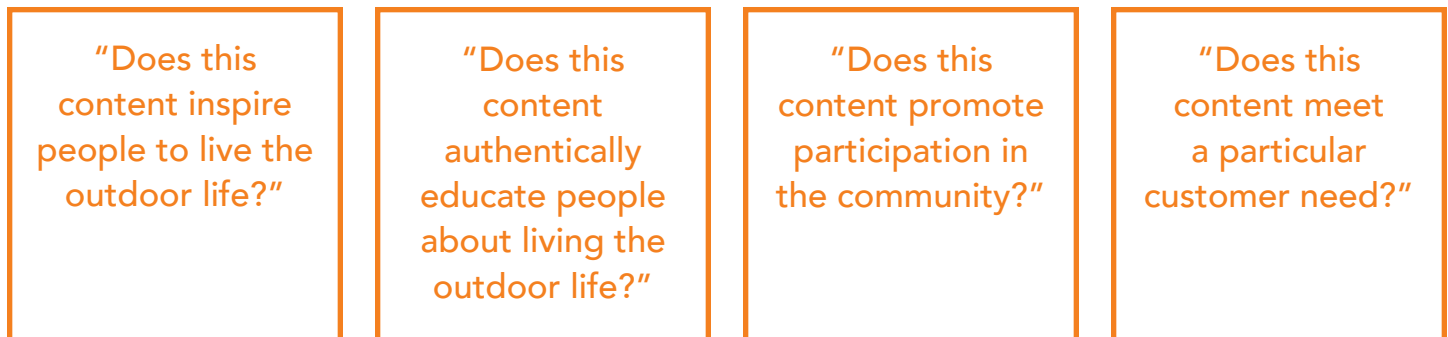>
> – Mike McCormack, GM

Another component was to anticipate the questions consumers might have about specs, service issues or other product details and create content against it. To do this, GM tasked different centers of expertise to create content for each stage of the customer journey. While GM started seeing positive results on the customer side, one of the biggest positives was internal. "Creating guiding principles and getting people to come together on a common goal was a big win," says McCormack. "It's as crucial to customer experience success as customer data."

That was selecting content archetypes. The next step in the process is establishing the criteria for content development itself, and bringing the organization on board with a common set of content guidelines.

SET PILLARS OF CONTENT CRITERIA

Aligning with a content archetype only establishes the high-level goal that a brand is trying to achieve. To make the plan truly actionable, a company needs to set up "pillars" of content strategy, a set of criteria that will determine whether any single piece of content is produced or not. These pillars must support the overlying content strategy. At REI for example, since the content strategy is to serve the community of REI customers, the pillars that support it are:

"Does this content inspire people to live the outdoor life?"	"Does this content authentically educate people about living the outdoor life?"	"Does this content promote participation in the community?"	"Does this content meet a particular customer need?"

If the content does not meet any of the criteria outlined in the pillars, then it can be deprioritized. By setting easily understood criteria, the company is able to ensure that all content that is produced is serving a purpose and it minimizes the production of waste. The key is to socialize these criteria across the organization so that all content producing units are operating off the same blueprint. Not only will content producing units be able to follow these rules on their own, they will be able to hold them up to any other team that is asking them to create content that doesn't fit with the goals of the strategy.

Nespresso's Head of Content, Social and Media Laure de Bary describes the process. "We created a set of strategic materials such as customer journey, content strategy built around the brand equity, brand tone of voice. When we got all the material we shared it with all departments that are producing content, including PR, the CRM team, the B2B team, and the commerce team," de Bary says. "After sharing the framework with them, we asked them to align against these pillars when building this content, with the central content team providing them with support."

MAP CONTENT NEEDS ALONG THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Based on the research and data you have on the customer, create the journey they would typically take from awareness to consideration of your brand, and identify the role content can play at each stage of this journey. Put yourself in your customer's shoes and chart exactly what you would do if you were looking for more information, or a solution to your problem. Are they first going to Google, or industry blogs? What are the keywords they are typing? Where is the brand currently adding value through content? What are the gaps? It often becomes apparent that at different points, distinct value can be created and content will take different forms. For example, during early inspiration and awareness phases, thought leadership content might build your brand's credibility. During on-boarding or first weeks of ownership, guides, manuals and access to peer advice will be most meaningful.

It's entirely possible that the final step in the journey isn't always "purchase." It could just as easily be a simple "consideration." This makes a difference when the time comes to prove the success of a content plan. The team needs to set goals for moving customers along the journey they are best suited to deliver on. For example at business software maker Autodesk, the content team runs independent blogs that are geared towards solving problems and providing support to specific audience segments, such as small businesses. "If you think about the bottom of the funnel as demand generation, and the top of the funnel as audience generation, we're acting almost pre-funnel," says Dusty DiMercurio, Head of Content Marketing at Autodesk. "There's a reason why our strategic content doesn't all live on Autodesk.com; we're trying to influence people well before they arrive on our company website."

TEAMS CREATE CONTENT INITIATIVES

Once you have concrete versions of the content archetype, content criteria and content journey, present the plan to the rest of the stakeholders in the organization. With all the information presented to them, each individual team or channel manager can come up with "content initiatives" at each stage of the content journey, which can then be compared to identify overlaps and duplication. This cross-functional exercise helps to establish how each team can add value at each stage, defining their role in the execution of the plan. Every initiative must be aligned against the criteria defined earlier, and have a clear purpose in moving customers from one stage to the next. The difficulty in this exercise lies in figuring out which of these initiatives needs to be prioritized over the long term and short term. It's a good place to deploy another forcing mechanism by plotting all the initiatives on a time (long term, short term) vs. difficulty chart and then asking all the stakeholders to only identify top two initiatives as high priority. This gives a good idea of which initiatives an organization needs to prioritize, and the people, processes and technology resources that will be needed for each one.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Unlike content marketing, or content production, the success of a content strategy cannot be measured month-to-month. To truly measure the effects of a strategy, it must be evaluated year-over-year. Another key difference is that a strategy is often measured in qualitative terms, rather than the KPIs of the content marketing practice. The measure of success then lies within the archetype the organization has chosen. For example, if the goal is to have content establish a presence, then the company must measure how much of a presence it has been able to create. If the goal is for content to be support, it must ask customers how satisfied they are with the support material they have access to. In a lot of ways, measuring a strategy involves the old-fashioned practice of customer satisfaction scores. But when every archetype places the customers' needs in the center, it makes sense to go to them to see how successful a company has been in delivering it to them. All other KPIs on the executional side must ladder up to support the overarching measure of "did this content archetype deliver what it was supposed to?"

It's worth having regular check-ins with the team to make sure the plan is working for them, and to ensure they continue to remain aligned with it. At LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, a content counsel gets together every month, with representatives of every team that creates content. "We don't make it just another meeting, but a place where we can celebrate successes from each division, and then focus on getting everybody on the same page," says Jason Miller, Group Manager, Content at LinkedIn Marketing Solutions. " We discuss what's working, what's not working, what's your best content in the past month, and what's coming up."

CREATE A CONTENT VISION

For the final step, a company should be able to distill the vision it has for its content into a pithy, memorable sentence. This helps every part of the organization remember the vision, and hence the overarching mission for what the company needs its content to do. It also acts as a simple, but effective reply for when someone asks the content team what it does., and the value it adds to the organization.

The content vision sentence has three essential components:

- **Who** are we creating content for
- **What** do we hope this content will achieve
- **How** will we deliver on this content

A good format to follow is "I will help [the customer] achieve [solution to their problem] by doing [content archetype]"

For example, at Charles Schwab, the vision is defined as "We will help current and prospective customers make investment decisions by providing thought leadership and expertise, leveraging that content as currency for engaging with them."

By boiling down the mission and method for using content into one sentence, the organization creates a north star to guide all its actions, and a unified goal for all its different units to align themselves against.

ENDNOTES

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METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a series of in-depth interviews and briefings conducted in the period between January and March 2016.

ECOSYSTEM INPUT

This report includes input from market influencers, vendors, and brands who were interviewed by or briefed Altimeter for the purposes of this research. Input into this document does not represent a complete endorsement of the report by the individuals or the companies listed below. Many thanks to all the individuals listed below, (and the ones who chose to remain anonymous), for their invaluable input and insights that informed our research for this report.

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