

Getting Started in Content Marketing

7 Practical Tips to Keep You Focused



Overview

So you want to gain a foothold in content marketing? You've read all the statistics, 76% of nonprofit marketers and 88% of B2B marketers are doing content marketing. That's a lot of content marketing! This guide is designed to give you a brief introduction to content marketing and provide some practical tips.

Is content marketing new?

According to [Joe Pulizzi](#), author and founder of the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is not new but it is enjoying a renaissance thanks to the internet. The first documented content marketing dates back to 1895 when John Deere first published his magazine called *The Furrow*. Deere's goal for the magazine was to educate farmers about new technologies and how to be more successful business owners. In other words, it was not about promoting agriculture products.



Fast forward 12 decades and we now see content marketing proliferating across the internet.

Simply defined, content marketing is a strategy which involves delivering the right content, to the right audience, through the right channels with the objective of driving profitable customer action; that last part is key.

But content marketing is more than just publishing content. It's really a one, two punch. First there is the content itself, which usually has an editorial feel to it. And then there is the marketing of content assets in order to attract your audience and encourage some action (ex. learn more, download, buy, share).

Key Principles of Content Marketing

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It is	<input type="checkbox"/> It is not
Acting like a publisher	Acting like an advertiser
Relevant, useful, high quality content	Fluffy content
Persona-driven content	One-size-fits-all content
Designed with a call-to-action	Hard selling throughout
Distributed and marketed	Just published

Why is content marketing so popular today?

The rise in content marketing activities can be attributed to three things:

- Increased consumer skepticism of advertising and overt marketing
- Google rewarding providers of high quality content with better search engine results
- Organizations reporting that content marketing costs up to 62% less than traditional marketing (source: Demand Metric).

Keys to getting started

Here are 7 practical tips to keep you focused when starting content marketing:

1. Start simply, with ONE audience
2. Write an editorial mission statement
3. Develop an editorial calendar
4. Brand your content
5. Catalog and track content assets
6. Treat content marketing as a team sport
7. Start small

#1. Start simply, with ONE audience initially

The first time I started a content marketing team, I borrowed our mantra from the software development world which was, “we can do anything but we cannot do everything.” This mindset empowered us to say “no” to certain ideas and set expectations appropriately.

Starting with one audience will keep you focused in terms of developing both a thoughtful editorial mission and highly relevant content. Expect your audience personas to be refined over time as you gain additional insight about who is actually consuming your content.



It's important to recognize that you have many audiences you could pursue with content marketing. But you need to focus by starting with ONE audience persona, perhaps this will be your most important audience, perhaps not. The key is to pick one. Then build content around this persona and truly master your content marketing efforts with this first persona before diversifying into other personas. According to the Content Marketing Institute, most content marketers

have 3-4 audience personas they address with content marketing.


What goes into an audience persona?

Your first persona can be as simple or complex as you want to make it. I recommend you start very simply to include:

- Name
- Photo
- Basic demographic data
- Psychographic insights, like values and/or 'state of mind'
- Sample content topics that persona is interested in
- Preferred media and/or technology habits

Your persona should be based on data you have collected about your audience, not stuff you simply make up. You will likely create this persona based on a combination of people but it will ultimately be a fictitious person. Having an audience person visible in your workspace will also remind you of who you are trying to reach and engage with your content marketing.

Sample Persona

	<p>Madison, The New Marketer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Madison, The New Marketer• Demographics: Age 25 Gen Y• Position: Social Media Coordinator at a mid-sized company• State of Mind: Marketing is fun but overwhelming— there is so much to do and learn.• Content topics of interest:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Time management tips❖ Emerging social media platforms❖ Real-world social media examples• Media preferences:<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Facebook❖ Webinars❖ Infographics
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#2. Write an editorial mission statement

Every publisher understands the importance of an editorial mission because it identifies who your content is for and how they will benefit from it. When content marketers get clear on their editorial mission, it keeps their content efforts on target.

If we look at the software development world, we can use their user story format to write our editorial mission statement, here is the format:

As a _____ (your one audience), I want to _____ (accomplish what?), so that I can _____ (enjoy what benefit?).

Here is an editorial mission statement for one of Brand Mentoring's audience personas:

*As an **association marketer**, I want to discover **how to attract and retain members through content marketing**, so that I can **keep our association vibrant and relevant**.*

Expect your editorial mission to go through an evolution as you gather additional insight about which content pieces resonate and why.

#3. Develop an editorial calendar



If you like to plan, you will enjoy editorial calendar planning. The purpose of an editorial calendar is to establish a series of relevant topics and commit to a regular publishing cadence.

Your first step is to audit the content you already have in order to see patterns in platforms and any themes in topics. Print out these assets (or representations of them) and hang them all on the wall so it's very visible to those in the planning session. Notice how your content

has evolved, maybe you prefer to write and therefore have a lot of blog posts but not very much in terms of infographics, video or podcasts. And maybe you notice that most of your content is shorter and designed to attract new followers but there is not any longer-form content to address topics more deeply. Take note of the patterns.

Next, observe what your audience/followers/members are doing with your content. Are there certain assets that have a high volume of visits and/or comments or shares? Within social media, are there certain questions or ideas that keep resurfacing? You can find many clues regarding which topics to create content around when you observe your audience's content behaviors.



Last, ask your audience/followers/members what topics they want to learn more about or have explained more deeply. You can do this through official surveys, using tools like [SurveyMonkey](#), or start a discussion about this via social media or online chat forums where your members are congregating. The point is never to assume, ask your members what they're concerned or confused about. Asking for input will make your content a lot of more valuable.

When you are ready to get your ideas onto an editorial calendar, see the sample template below.

Simple Editorial Calendar Template

Editorial Calendar								
Audience Persona	Content Type	Lead (who)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun...

#4. Brand your content assets

Once you have created content, it's important to brand it so that audiences recognize the source of that content. A few branding elements you can include:

- Your logo
- Link to your website
- Brand colors and typefaces
- Brand design elements
- Boilerplate (about us), as space permits



#5. Tracking your content assets

Tracking content assets is critical. Think of this of this as a directory or catalog of all your content assets. In the beginning, steer clear of an elaborate system. A simple Excel worksheet will do; you can graduate to a fancier system later.

When you track your content, you gain:

1. **Visibility**— Content tracking creates visibility of your team’s content work to both the team itself and other stakeholders, such as leadership. From the smaller assets, such as landing pages or blog posts, to bigger assets, such as e-newsletters, videos and special reports, be sure to include them all in your worksheet.
2. **Findability**— Content tracking helps you quickly find content because links to each asset are centralized in one place. As your content activities grow, so will the need for quickly tracking down specific content assets.
3. **Important Reminders**— Content tracking reminds us of some important operational tasks, like updating or removing certain content. It can also remind us to look at our web analytics to see how certain assets are performing, which can be very useful when you are putting together reports for management or your Board of Directors.



You might be thinking to yourself, “we don’t need a directory of content, it’s all saved in our website content management system.” But the problem with that logic is two-fold:

- Only certain people have access to your content management system, so that diminishes the visibility of that content and
- Some content will end up “living” in places other than on your website, like in a marketing automation system or file sharing area, which makes tracking more complex.

Treat content tracking as an important asset management step and make your content tracking tool available to everyone, after all, it will be a living document. You can store this document alongside your editorial calendar in a separate worksheet.

Simple Content Asset Tracking Template

Our Content Assets								
Asset #	Doc Name	Format Type	Intended Audience	Marketing Goal	Distribution Platform	Date Created, Updated or Removed	URL	Status
<i>Can be a publication number of use sequential numbering</i>	<i>Title of the piece</i>	<i>Examples: Landing page, article, success story, special report, video, infographic</i>	<i>Refer to one of your audience personas</i>	<i>Examples: Build awareness, lead generation, engagement, purchase, renewal, tell others/ evangelism</i>	<i>Examples: Our website www..., blog, e-newsletter, LinkedIn, FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube</i>	<i>Day, Month, Year</i>	<i>Where online this asset can be found</i>	<i>Examples: Current, Needs Updating, Expired</i>
1.								
2.								
3.								

#6. Treat Content Marketing as a team sport

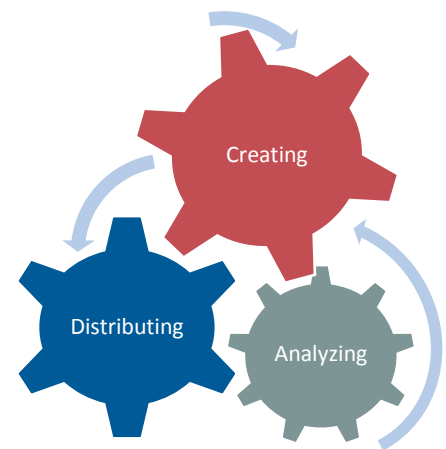
No one person can successfully implement content marketing, it takes a team. And the roles on a content team align with the three stages of content marketing.

Creating

Some people on the team will be responsible for actually creating content, such as the content architect, subject matter expert, managing editor, writer, designer and producer.

Content architects are like the CEO of a content team because they provide the vision and direction for the team.

Subject matter experts are responsible for being the authority on a topic and making sure the facts and spirit of a content piece are correct. A managing editor can serve as both an editor and a project manager who coordinates the writer(s), designer(s) and producer(s). Within content marketing, producers usually focus on video and podcast production.



Distributing and Marketing

Your content team also needs people who can publish and market content assets, think of them as distributors. If your e-newsletter has healthy open rates, get the person who builds that e-newsletter to be part of your team. If your organization has a healthy social media presence, get your social media pro involved on the team. And, of course, you will need someone who knows how to post and edit content within your website's content management platform, make this person part of the content team.



Analyzing Performance

Finally, the last role involves measuring how each content asset is performing. This role should be filled by someone who knows where to find the appropriate data and how to analyze and synthesize that data. This role should produce actionable insight, not just a lot of spreadsheets, charts and graphs. Your content analyst will look at a variety of metrics including:

- email metrics, such as open and click-through rates,
- web analytics, such as unique visitors and time spent with an asset and
- social media engagement metrics, such as commenting and sharing.

As your team evolves, you may find yourself re-organizing and expanding, this is to be expected. Also, team members typically like to play more than one role, let them as this creates “bench strength” and creates professional development opportunities. For more insight about structuring teams, check out Ann Handley's [content marketing organizational chart](#).

#7. Start small



Start small, you can always scale later. Your first content marketing campaign should be around something manageable, such as a blog post or infographic, where you can learn the necessary workflow and contain your mistakes. When you start small, it's easier to learn from what you are doing and adjust from there. For more marketing inspiration, [visit my blog](#).

About Pecanne Eby, MBA



In 2001, I started working with associations while living inside the Washington, DC beltway. I learned that associations play a vital role in providing advocacy, community and education for their members. And that a world without associations would be a very chaotic world. Today my mission is to help associations solve complex marketing problems while rediscovering the joy of marketing. Learn more at www.brandmentoring.com.