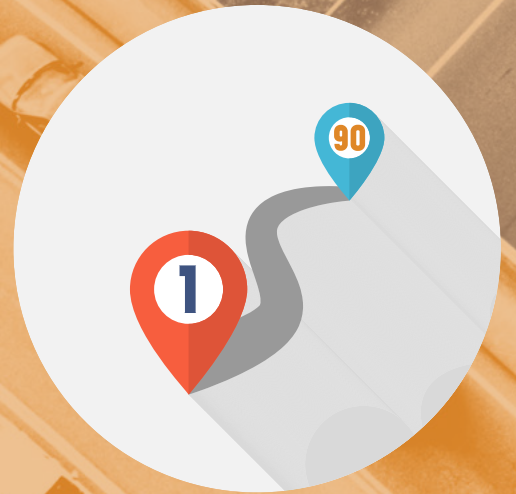


A 90-Day Content Marketing Course-Correction Plan



Have you actively been doing content marketing for some time but still aren't seeing substantial results? This workbook will help you drive positive changes over the next 90 days. Before we explain how you can get started, let's quickly explore why. Then we'll dive into a template you can use to plan out your roadmap for the first quarter of your content marketing course correction.

How content marketing can help any organization

The Internet has matured at an incredible pace since its inception 20 years ago. Web users now have the expectation that they can find answers to virtually any questions they have, on any product, service, or company.

Your content can become a valuable bridge between your target audience's needs and your business goals.

Over 90% of consumers use a search channel prior to making a purchase, along every stage of their purchasing decision, according to Catalyst-Forrester. This is where your business — and more specifically your content — enters the picture. If and when you follow content marketing best practices, your organization's website content can become a valuable bridge between your target audience's needs and your business goals.

Whether you want to perform better in Google or ultimately drive more leads and revenue from your online efforts, content marketing can help you. According to Hubspot's study, [State of Inbound](#), every company, regardless of spend, is likely to see 3x higher ROI when using inbound marketing as opposed to outbound marketing.



90%

of consumers use a search channel prior to making a purchase.

Source: Catalyst-Forrester



3x

Companies are 3x more likely to see higher ROI from inbound campaigns vs. outbound sales.

Source: Hubspot



How businesses implement their content marketing programs

Note: For purposes of this guide, we are assuming you intend to play an active role in your content marketing program. You may end up working with freelancers or an agency on some of your strategic initiatives, yet you are in the driver's seat to steer the direction and execution of your program. Active participation is vital to content marketing. After all, you know your business better than anyone.

Many organizations start their content marketing journey something like this:



1. An executive or website/marketing leader within the company identifies a pain point: decreasing revenue, fewer leads, or declining website performance.



2. The leader begins reading industry blogs or subscribing to e-mail newsletters.



3. They begin contacting potential consultants and attending webinars.



4. They may even attend a conference or self-educate.



5. They become convinced that content marketing can solve some of their pain points, and perhaps transform their business.



6. The leader(s) assign the fledgling content marketing program to one or two internal resources.

How businesses get off track with content marketing

Our content marketing heroes are often following a “do it yourself” approach. They begin interviewing stakeholders, creating content ideas, and adding some new content to their website. After a few months of enthusiasm and some progress, many organizations abandon or doubt their content marketing program.

Sound familiar? There are three major reasons why this happens:

1. Lack of buy-in

There isn't enough buy-in from the top-down. Content marketing has been relegated to a small handful of people, and most employees don't understand the motivations or possibilities.

2. Lack of resources/budget

It's a mistake to think that your marketing or web team can create and maintain a content marketing program alone. For content marketing to transform an organization's results, nearly everyone on staff must play at least a small role. You may also need to hire new talent with digital skills and writing abilities, or partner with a content marketing consultant or agency.

3. Lack of follow-through

This is probably the biggest reason for failure. Companies give up on content marketing if they don't see results in the first 6 months. Content marketing is a long-term strategy that requires discipline and commitment.

How to make a course correction in 90 days

So you've reached a turning point and are ready to pivot your strategy to drive real progress after seeing less than stellar results. Here's how your business can get in the fast lane toward content success. You'll want to accomplish one major task per week for 12 weeks. We recommend keeping this checklist on your desk or desktop for the next 3 months.



Educate Leadership and Teams

This week, you want to gain internal support for your content marketing program.

To create a compelling, concise, educational pitch on why content marketing is an approach you want to continue to pursue, start by leveraging resources such as HowToConvinceYourBoss.com or Hubspot. Use data to tell your team a story of how and why your existing content marketing efforts can help your organization reach its goals, such as:

- Companies that blog 15x per month get **5x more traffic** than those that don't (Hubspot)
- Content marketing **costs 62% less** than traditional marketing & **generates 3x more leads** (Hubspot)

Be prepared to confront objections. After all, you need resources, budget, and time for this to succeed and often need to convince someone to give it to you! Showing your colleagues what competitors are doing and why it's working can be particularly eye-opening. Inform your teammates that you want to unlock their expertise about their industry and share it on your company's website. Lastly, share with your internal team your general content marketing strategy, plan, and timeline, and ask for buy-in and ongoing support.

Week 1 To Do Items

- Research stats, quotes, and case studies to bolster the case for content.
- Highlight goals you want to accomplish and broad stroke strategies that will help you reach them.
- Prepare to confront any objections you may be faced with.
- Create a short presentation to deliver to your leadership and team.

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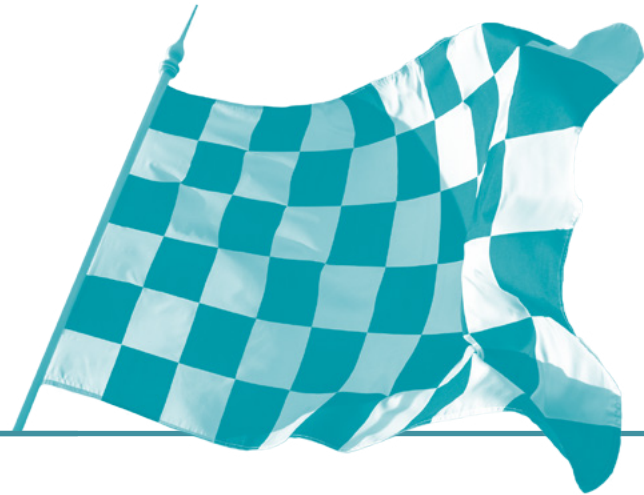
Establish Content Marketing Goals

Armed with feedback from leadership and teammates, it's time to document your new goals.

- 1** For your business goals, what are the hard numbers you want to achieve with sales, leads, or revenue?
- 2** For your audience goals, what do your prospects want to achieve or learn? Why do they choose you? How do they want to get better?
- 3** Now that you know your business goals (hard targets) and audience goals (soft targets), the intersection of these should comprise your content goals. Focus on two or three overarching goals for your content marketing program, such as:
 - For our business to increase _____, we will produce content that _____, so our customers can achieve _____.
 - We will produce content that _____, so our customers will _____ when they find/read our content. This will help our website drive _____.

Week 2 To Do Items

- Schedule smaller, follow-up meetings to discuss priorities with stakeholders.
- Make it a priority to talk to customers or at least your customer-facing teams to start understanding their needs.
- Gather analytics and year-end reports so that your targets are realistic.



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Assign Roles and Responsibilities

Based on the planning meetings you have had up to this point, it's time to assemble your "content team." This should absolutely have representation from across the company, and may include contracted writers or partners. This will help you not only reaffirm company-wide buy-in, but it will also set the foundation for your content's frequency and diversity.

Let your teammates know what will be expected of them, and specifically how each will contribute now and moving forward with actions like:

- Submit content ideas
- Write down questions they receive from customers or prospects
- Write outlines for potential blog posts or other content formats
- Develop checklists of your internal processes

For this part, remember to take advantage of your colleagues' strengths and subject matter expertise!



Assigning responsibilities will help you not only reaffirm company-wide buy-in, but also set the foundation for your content's frequency and diversity.

Week 3 To Do Items

- Create a list of "content champions" from each key department; identify a backup for each team.
- Set a meeting schedule with your content champions for monthly or bi-monthly check-ins.
- Set expectations around a governance process; who will approve content, when will drafts be due, and what kind of style guide will you use?

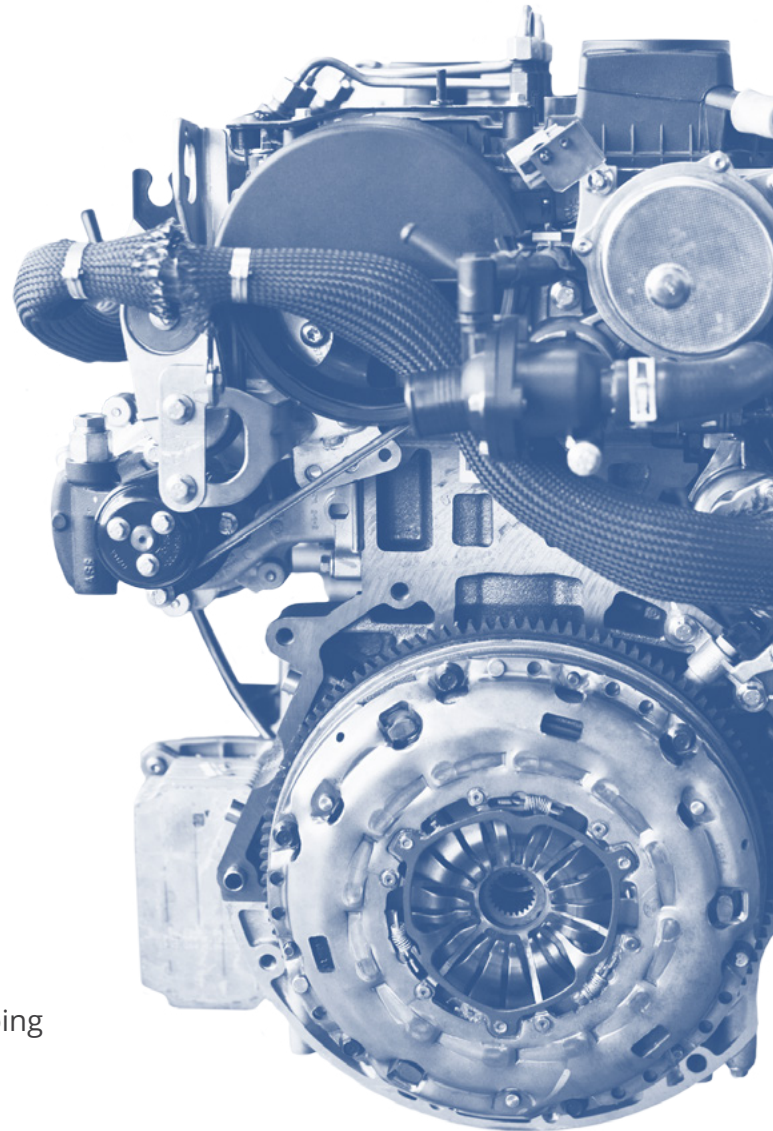
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Audit Your Content

Determine what kinds of content you currently offer on your website and social channels and their effectiveness.

- What are the common themes?
- What are the common formats?
- How often are you producing new content?
- Who is producing the current content?
- Is the content helpful, educational, or salesy?
- Which kinds of content are successful? Not successful? (Use Google Analytics to track page visits, bounce rate, and more)
- Are you following best SEO practices on key pages and blog posts?
- What are your competitors doing with their content?



Week 4 To Do Items

- Identify gaps or opportunities for you to create new content that could give you a competitive advantage.
- Identify pages that could use refreshing (look for outdated content or poor UX).
- Discover which pages and sections are doing the “heavy lifting” for you.

Record notes here:



Week

5

Document a Bare-Bones Strategy

Remember, we're trying to turn around your content marketing program in 90 days. Let's document a content strategy, but keep it to 1-2 pages. That's right. A brief, living document will be much more likely to be useful, agile, followed, and consulted. Answer these questions in your document, and share them with your teams:

Goals: Revisit your work from Week 2. Is everything still clear and accurate?

Target Audience: Revisit your work from Week 2. Select 2-5 target groups. Briefly describe them and the content they are looking for.

Content Producers: Revisit your work from Week 3. Remind them again of your expectations.

Competitors: Revisit your work from Week 4. What gaps exist for you to succeed?

Content Types: What formats will you create? Stick to what is feasible and within budget.

Content Distribution: Pick 3-6 channels where you will publish your content. The first one is your website. You might also pick Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, e-mail, and other industry blogs.

Week 5 To Do Items

- ✓ Download and complete our [free content marketing strategy template and checklist](#).
- ✓ Create your 1-2 page content marketing strategy.
- ✓ Circulate your documented strategy to team members and collect feedback.
- ✓ Finalize and keep moving! Remember, this strategy 1-pager will be a living, breathing document that you can and should refine in the months ahead.



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Create Topic Ideas to Fuel Your Content Strategy

Now that you are clearer on who you're targeting with your content as well as your business goals, it's time to start creating a slew of ideas. Here's how you can start:

- 1** Determine the top barriers and obstacles your customers face, by talking to them and/or your internal teams. These can be seeds for great content ideas.
- 2** Perform light keyword research via Google AdWords Keyword Planner, ubersuggest.org, Wordtracker, or another low-cost tool.
- 3** Use the power of Google Suggest to come up with ideas. Some of these should be based on keyword opportunities you've identified.
- 4** Look for content gap opportunities (or lack thereof) on the search engine results pages.

Week 6 To Do Items

- Create a basic content matrix for each of your target audiences. Does each audience segment have content piece(s) dedicated to their "awareness," "consideration," and "decision" stages? For example, let's say you're missing content in the "consideration" stage for your target audience B. Now you have a blueprint of where you need content ideas.
- Create an "idea board" — whether physical or digital — and encourage your teammates to always submit any content ideas they may have to this board.
- Turn your ideas into actual headlines not only rank well, but garner clickthroughs.

**Don't ask What can we write about?
Ask: What questions do we get asked every day? Use those as seeds for content ideas.**

Record notes here:



Week

7

Create a Content Calendar Based on Priorities, and Low Hanging Fruit.

Your content calendar will be a valuable roadmap that you'll refer to on virtually a daily basis. Start to prioritize what content makes it on your calendar, by using these few prompts:

- What headlines did you come up with?
- Which target audience is missing the most content dedicated to their needs?
- Where are the greatest opportunities for your business to rank well, because your competitors have yet to create content on that topic (or it's mediocre)?

Most importantly, look again at your business goals. ***Focus on scheduling the content that is most likely to help move you towards reaching those goals.*** Remember, seeing positive content marketing ROI takes many months, so get started today!

Week 7 To Do Items

- ✓ Pick a tool to manage your content calendar. We recommend cloud collaboration tools such as Google Drive, Quip, or Trello. All three are free, easy to use, and easily sharable with your teammates.
- ✓ Identify who has bandwidth this month to start creating content, and write it in the calendar.
- ✓ Assign the piece(s) to writers and/or designers, with clear deadlines.
- ✓ Add some sophistication to your shared calendar spreadsheet, so you can track the following for every content piece: milestones, approvals, publication date, how it ties back to a business goal, distribution channels, and results.

Record notes here:



Week

8

Fine-tune On Page SEO and UX of Your Top Pages

Keep your momentum going — don't take a break this week! Back in Week 4, you should have identified underperforming pages on your website. These are low hanging fruit, ripe for improvement. Now is your chance to implement some changes for your course correction.

Cross-check your list of underperforming pages with your analytics tool. You should be able to come up with a dozen or so pages that have:

- High bounce rates and/or are killing conversion rates
- Great content but aren't helping you achieve business goals
- Mediocre content on a very important topic for your business

Refresh the pages by following the to-do items below.

Implement improvements on your top performing pages these are low hanging fruit that will help drive quick results.

Week 8 To Do Items

- ✓ Follow our [SEO best practice videos](#), and ensure these pages have unique, compelling, and logical titles, meta descriptions, and H1s.
- ✓ Practice content chunking: It's time to cut out those walls of text. Introduce new images or graphics, short paragraphs, multiple subheads, internal links, and bulleted lists.
- ✓ Add "Call-to-Action" (CTA) buttons on these key pages. Tell the user what you want them to do next: Subscribe to your blog or e-newsletter? Download a guide? Watch a video? Contact you?

Record notes here:



Week

9

Review and Edit First Piece(s) of Content

Your teammate or freelance writer has come back and revealed their masterpiece — a piece of content created under this new process! This is a critical moment in your journey. Be too harsh with your feedback, and you may lose the contributor forever. Be too kind, and you may encounter the same headaches and edits for months to come.

Be appreciative of the content, use it as a coaching opportunity, and review it with the creator(s), discussing all the things you've been honing over the past two months:

- Does the content piece align with your strategy, your business goals, and your audience's goals?
- Does the piece follow SEO best practices? Does it have a compelling headline that your target audience would feasibly search for? Does it have supporting H2s and subheads?
- Would your audience gain value from it?
- Is the piece free of grammatical errors and walls of text? Would you read this piece yourself?
- Does the piece have images, graphics, or photos?
- Can you envision sharing this piece on social or otherwise promoting it?

Week 9 To Do Items

- Create an editing checklist that you can easily follow.
- Share your style guide (even in its infant form) with potential content contributors.
- Add the piece to your content calendar and follow your governance process.

Be appreciative of the content, use it as a coaching opportunity, and review it with the creator(s) so they know how to improve.

Record notes here:



Publish and Promote First Piece(s) of Content

Congratulations, you're ready to go to press! Publish the piece on your website without delay. Remember – done is better than perfect in most cases, but of course don't sacrifice quality either.

Then create and enact your plan to promote this content. Don't feel that you have to do all your promotion on the same day you publish. Your e-mail update might go to your list next week, and you can theoretically promote the piece for months on social. There's no rule to say you can't.

Above all remember that the "If you build it, they will come" mantra does not apply to content marketing. Promoting and distributing your content to where your audience will find it is just as important as creating it.



Week 10 To Do Items

- ✓ Ensure you have an [SEO plugin](#) that will help you check for the most salient SEO factors before publishing on your site.
- ✓ Keep [user experience](#) in mind as you publish this piece: Your content can only be as good as the on-site experience you provide your audience.
- ✓ Practice content chunking as you or your developer lays out the page/post.
- ✓ Establish a consistent styling for your CTA buttons.
- ✓ Create a series of pre-approved copy snippets that you and your staff can use to promote the piece(s) on social media.
- ✓ Add the piece and any final details into your content calendar.

Record notes here:



Celebrate Wins

Make it a habit to share a progress report with the company every few weeks to motivate contributors and continually build buy-in. In the coming months, you can:

Be appreciative of the content, use it as a coaching opportunity, and review it with the creator(s), discussing all the things you've been honing over the past two months:

- Does the content piece align with your strategy, your business goals, and your audience's goals?
- Does the piece follow SEO best practices? Does it have a compelling headline that your target audience would feasibly search for? Does it have supporting H2s and subheads?
- Would your audience gain value from it?
- Is the piece free of grammatical errors and walls of text? Would you read this piece yourself?
- Does the piece have images, graphics, or photos?
- Can you envision sharing this piece on social or otherwise promoting it?



Week 11 To Do Items

- ✓ Create a brief all-staff e-mail that highlights any content you've published thus far. Thank and praise the contributors publicly.
- ✓ Share why these specific content pieces were created.
- ✓ Share metrics related to the content pieces: traffic, number of downloads, social shares.
- ✓ Share lessons learned, any resources or cheatsheets you've developed so far, an updated content calendar, and next steps.

Record notes here:



Week

12

Review Results and Refine Strategy

Congratulations — you’ve made it through 11 weeks of content marketing milestones to course correct your program and get it moving! Now is the time review, revise, rinse,

Week 12 To Do Items

- ✓ Review analytics: Are you seeing positive trends? At this juncture, you want to see the needle moving in the right direction — not necessarily immediate ROI.
- ✓ Ensure your content calendar is up-to-date, for both published pieces and future pieces of content.
- ✓ Hold an “editorial board” meeting with key stakeholders to discuss progress.
- ✓ Tweak your 1-2 page strategy document to reflect changes in your industry, your business, your specific goals, or your areas of focus.
- ✓ Decide what will be different in your second “batch:” Maybe you will adjust the publication timetable, or create multiple promotional e-mails, introduce paid promotion, or implement a [hub-and-spoke](#) approach to content creation.



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Week

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Is DIY Digital Marketing Just Not Working for You?

Companies large and small understand that embracing digital marketing can transform their business. But many feel helpless when they can't sustain their program and results are less than stellar.

Consider working with one of our online marketing consultants – we fondly call them “Coaches” – who will train and educate your team so you can achieve long-term success on your own. Our digital marketing mentorship program touches on content, SEO, paid advertising, web design, and more, including:

- Weekly coaching sessions
- On-demand online training
- In-person workshops

Interested in hearing more?

**Learn About our
Content Coaching Program.**



About Vertical Measures



Vertical Measures is a full-service Internet marketing agency based in Phoenix, helping clients drive profitable growth through content marketing strategy and development, PPC management, and technical search engine optimization.

VERTICALMEASURES.COM



“Our Content Coaching engagement with Vertical Measures has been positive experience from

day one. From the level of attention we receive to the thoughtful recommendations our Coach provides, VM has truly become an extension of our internal marketing team. Our partnership has produced immediate results: Bounce rates on a number of key web pages have decreased, and new form submissions for our e-book continue to rise. Our entire team now has a strong appreciation for maintaining our ‘content marketing mindset.’”

Evan Klein
President, Satrix Solutions



“Vertical Measures has worked closely with us to design and implement our content

marketing vision and provided critical subject matter guidance and expertise. Our Coach actively manages our activities to keep us on schedule and help us monitor our effectiveness. VM has become an essential business partner in Business Enterprise Mapping’s marketing strategy.”

Joe Bockerstette
Partner, Business Enterprise Mapping