



YOUR
CONTENT
MARKETING

←••••• **STRATEGY** •••••→

TEMPLATE
AND
CHECKLIST

If we had to pick one key theme that has emerged from this year's B2B research, it would be this: If you want to be more effective at content marketing, document your strategy.

- Joe Pulizzi and Ann Handley, [Content Marketing Institute: 2015 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends Report](#).

Audience-driven content is a central focus for both B2C and B2B [inbound marketers](#). This type of content is aimed at providing valuable, useful information to potential and current customers in order to drive qualified leads, build brand authority and trust, and solidify customer loyalty.

Prospects are more informed before the point of purchase than in any other point in history -- Forrester reports that potential buyers are now **70% to 90%** [of the way through the sales process](#) when they finally connect to a salesperson. What's more: potential customers reward businesses who provide them with honest and helpful content.

So that's great, we know businesses need to publish quality content. But how do we actually go about creating effective content that resonates with potential customers and turns curious site visitors into leads, and ultimately into customers?

The answer: **it all starts with a documented content strategy.**

90%

80% >

70%

60% >

40% >

20% >

What is a content strategy?

A documented content strategy doesn't have to be a 50-page document or a 75-slide PowerPoint presentation. You can make your content strategy as robust or simple as your time and budget allows. All you need to create is an informed, realistic, and actionable plan that outlines how content will help you achieve your larger business goals. This document will help align your people, processes, and priorities around common goals and accelerate any efforts you make.

Your content strategy should be:

- **Informed:** Well-researched, educated on industry, audience, competitors, and business challenges/opportunities
- **Realistic:** Practical, content recommendations and insights are relative to your business
- **Actionable:** Step-by-step plan that can easily roll into execution and be scaled up/down by budget
- **Data-driven:** Your content plan is centered on evidence and is measurable

Why create a content strategy?

An effective content strategy gives you a dedicated action plan with a prioritized roadmap to help you maximize the return on your content investment. A 2015 study by the Content Marketing Institute found that successful inbound marketers shared a common practice: [52% of those surveyed](#) whose content was (self-reported) most effective said they had a documented content strategy and they followed it.

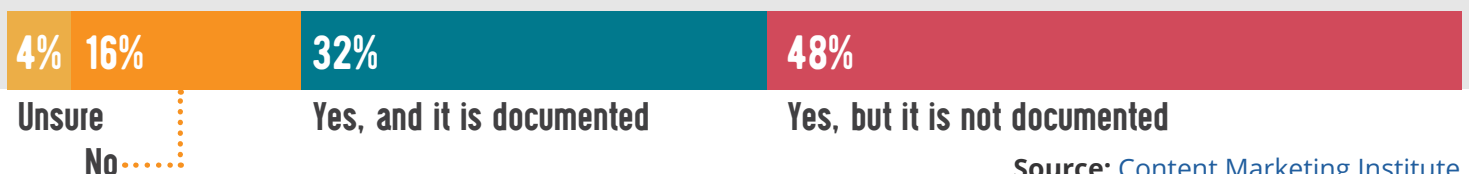
Start with a content strategy template

Content strategies do not have to be made from scratch. For most businesses, if you can answer these questions for the following 8 checkpoints in at least one full sentence then congratulations, you will have documented your first content strategy!

- ✓ **Business Goals:** Why are you creating content?
- ✓ **Content Goals:** What do you want the content to do?
- ✓ **Audience:** Who will your content speak to?
- ✓ **Competitor Research:** What are your competitors doing online and where can you find a competitive advantage?
- ✓ **Format:** What are the content formats you can realistically create?
- ✓ **Distribution:** Where will the content live and how will it be shared? How often will you publish content?
- ✓ **Implementation:** What is your budget for content? Who will produce, publish, and promote your content?
- ✓ **Measurement:** How will you measure success? Set 1 realistic milestone for your content for the first 90 days. Repeat after each defined measurement cycle.

Let's go over these 8 core checkpoints in greater detail. At the end of this template you will be able to draft your own content strategy and move on to producing great content!

Percentage of B2B Marketers Who Have a Content Marketing Strategy



Source: [Content Marketing Institute](#)

Checkpoint #1: Why are **you** creating content?

Business Goals: Why are you doing content marketing?

Examples: *Increase qualified lead generation, become a thought leader, expand to new markets or audiences*

Your business goals drive your overall content strategy. All content should directly support or complement your larger business goals. Most companies create content to drive additional leads to increase revenue.

Other common goals include establishing a business as a thought leader or primary authoritative voice within an industry, or expanding your brand to reach to a new market or audience. Always make sure you have a clear business purpose for why you are specifically using content in your marketing efforts.



Your business goals drive your overall content strategy. All content should directly support your larger business goals.

Why are you creating content?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #2: What are **your** goals for **your** content?

Content Goals: **What do you want the content do?**

Business Goals
(e.g. Drive Leads)

Content Goals
(e.g. Educate; Engage)

Strategy Initiatives
(e.g. Create a Resource Center)

Examples: *Educate readers, create a community dialogue, or showcase brand values and expertise*

Content goals take your business goals and narrow them down into the specific context of what the content needs to do in order for you to achieve your business goals. If your goal is to become an authoritative thought leader, your content typically needs to be comprehensive, insightful, and educational. (Specific formats, like how to decide between blog articles or

white papers, are discussed later in the strategy process). In this checkpoint, you want to focus on defining the elements each piece of content should contain to effectively support your business needs.

If time and budget are on your side, you can take this checkpoint one step further by identifying concise and specific strategic initiatives that outline how you are going to achieve your content goals.

What do you want the content to do?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #3: Who is the intended audience of **your** content?

Audience: Who will your content speak to?

Example: *Company ABC is a plastic surgery practice. Their target audience is between 30 and 50 years old; is very comfortable with the internet and technology; wants to find the right medical practitioner for an elective procedure; needs empathetic customer service and is concerned about results, pain and cost.*

The most successful content marketing campaigns align production and distribution to the needs, goals, and concerns of a specific audience.

Creating content for a generic audience is a no-win situation. You'll invest valuable resources to produce content that attempts to speak to everyone and usually ends up bland, with your readers hitting the snooze button.

Instead, always speak directly to your core target market. [Developing buyer personas](#) can be a comprehensive process, but for now we'll

simplify your persona profile to include only the basic information you'll need to get going with content production:

- Your target audience's general demographics: age, gender, and digital comfort level
- The problem your audience is trying to solve
- Your audience's expectations from your industry, product, or service
- Your audience's primary hesitation to convert



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Who will your content speak to?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #4: How are **your** competitors using content to achieve their goals?

Competitor Research: What are your competitors doing online and where can you find an advantage?

Example: *My top competitors currently produce authoritative articles on their blog 3-4x a week. Video tutorials are popular among readers, earning several thousand views but lack a written transcript and relevant calls-to-action.*

Here you'll want to identify how your competitors use content to achieve similar goals, even if they are aspirational. A review of the sites and content offers can help you determine where you fit within the industry. Take note of how crowded the space is (for content) and how far behind or ahead you are — this can help you allocate additional budget if you discover you're significantly behind your competition. Also take note of any formats that seem to stand out such as video, free guides, or custom visuals and how your competitors distribute their content.



3-4X A WEEK

The number of times my top competitors currently produce authoritative articles on their blog.

What are your competitors doing online and where can you find an advantage?

Write or type notes here.

Checkpoint #5: What types of content can **you** realistically create?

Format: What are the content formats you are able to produce?

Example: *With my budget and in-house resources I can create 10 blog articles a month, allowing me to post twice per week to my blog.*

This checkpoint is critical because it directly informs implementation. You want to make sure you can actually create content with your available resources and do so on a consistent basis. Video content can be highly engaging but is often expensive and time-intensive to create. Infographics typically require several hours of design time and need additional promotional spend.

Prioritize quality and frequency — even if that means creating fantastic web copy and blog articles — over aspirational formats until you have a solid library of content in place. Once you have a good content foundation, feel free to explore more creative and unique content types.



You want to make sure you can actually create content with your available resources and do so on a consistent basis.

What are the content formats you can actually create?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #6: Where will **your** content live and how will it be shared?

Distribution: Where will you publish, promote, and distribute your content?

Example: *Free guides will live under our Resources section on our website, we will promote our blog and free guides through LinkedIn and Facebook, and we will write a monthly column for Huffington Post Small Business Voices.*

For most businesses, this checkpoint is straightforward: the company website and social media channels are the standard promotion platforms. However, feel free to add in other channels like email marketing, blog syndication, or external publishers relevant to your industry.

Also, don't forget about distribution. Whereas promotion is about driving your audience to your content, the goal of distribution is to drive your content to your audience. Your content can live off your site on distribution channels like YouTube, Pinterest, or Tumblr.

The important thing about promotion and distribution is to go where your audience is and where you can realistically achieve traction. This ends up being a combination of your available time, budget, and current level of credibility.



Where will the content live and how will it be shared?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #7: Who will produce and publish **your** content?

Implementation: What is your budget for content? Who will produce, and publish, and promote your content?

Example: *We will hire an editorial manager who will be responsible for hiring 2 freelancer writers familiar with our industry, managing employees' written contributions, and publishing content to our site following a set schedule.*

Find out how much quality content you can produce within your budget and have at least one person in your company dedicated to content marketing success. Depending on your resources, this person may be responsible for overseeing your editorial efforts — like finding and managing freelance writers — or even writing the content in-house.

Both options are fine, but decide who is ultimately responsible for sourcing and publishing your content to ensure you stay on schedule and on strategy. If you have the budget, consider working with a reputable content marketing agency or consultant to amplify and streamline your efforts.

What is your budget for content? Who will produce, publish, and promote your content?

Write or type notes here.



Checkpoint #8: How will you measure success for your content?

Measurement: Set 1 realistic milestone for your content for the first 90 days.

Example: *By November 2016, we will generate 100 new contacts with email addresses and 5 quality leads.*

Effectively measuring your content is one of the most important parts to any strategy. Set metrics and KPIs that align with your strategic initiatives, content goals, and business goals during the strategy process to help make sure you analyze your results within the right context. A spike in organic traffic is great but if your goal was to drive 15% more leads, then you'll want to check to see if your increase in organic visibility translates into qualified visitors to site.

Measurement will evolve as you begin to produce and analyze content in a consistent cycle. For now, put in place one SMART goal for your content efforts and check in on your progress at least every 30 days.



Effectively measuring your content is one the most important parts to any strategy.

How will you measure success?

Write or type notes here.



Don't wait another day to finish your content strategy

It may seem overwhelming to start your content strategy but if you take it one step at a time and write just one sentence for each checkpoint above, you can have a realistic and actionable strategy to kick off your content production. A documented content strategy is the first step toward creating effective content but try not to let your desire for perfection keep you from getting that content production wheel going. You can always revisit your strategy later with new information or reflections on your recent content experiences. No matter how fantastic a strategy is on paper, execution will always be the most important part of any content marketing plan – so focus on using your strategy as a stepping stone toward pushing content live. The hardest part is just getting started and above all else, remember, done is better than perfect.



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Want to learn more about content marketing strategy?

We consistently publish useful content on our [blog](#) to help you accelerate your content strategy, so make sure to sign up for updates there. Also, we've pulled together all our [content resources and training materials](#) into one place where you'll find workbooks, templates, and other guides to help you be successful.

About Vertical Measures

Vertical Measures is a full-service Internet marketing agency dedicated to helping clients drive profitable growth through content marketing. Based on the principles outlined in Vertical Measures' proven 8 Step Process, VM produces integrated digital strategies, content pieces, and targeted SEO & PPC campaigns for organizations large and small. As an industry leader, VM publishes in outlets like Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Land, teaches educational content marketing workshops and seminars around the globe, and crafts personalized coaching programs and on demand training for organizations in need of a content kickstart.

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