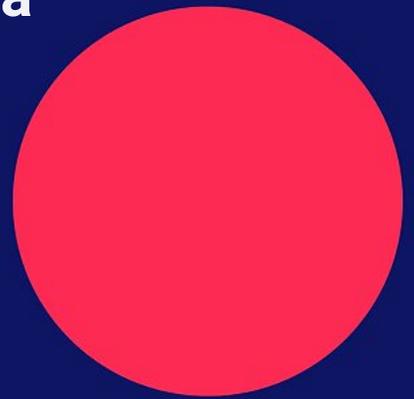
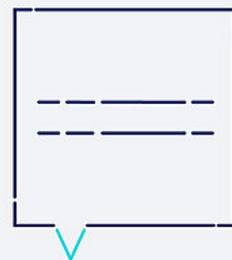

HOW TO BUILD A SOPHISTICATED CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

**20 steps to achieving
content marketing utopia**



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- Essential truths of an effective strategy
- The formula for content marketing success
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- The 20 steps to achieving content marketing utopia

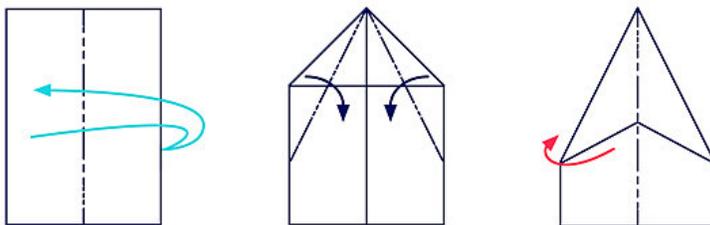


THE GREAT CONTENT SWINDLE

Contrary to popular belief, it's impossible to create content that delivers sustainable, tangible business returns without a sophisticated, data-led strategy.

Despite this, the [Content Marketing Institute](#) reports that only 41% of B2B and 33% of B2C marketers have a documented content strategy – a figure that continues to astound us!

To be clear, there's no one-size-fits-all approach that makes it fast and easy. It takes time, effort, data, stakeholder buy-in and the melding of multiple moving parts.



The most common question we get asked is what's the 'formula' to developing a content market strategy?



ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

While every strategy is different, there are truisms that we regularly encounter along the way to helping leading brands become content behemoths:

- Successful content marketing strategies accelerate business outcomes and deliver financial metrics.
- Securing internal buy-in is largely dependent on your ability to define the content lifecycle as a strategic business asset.
- While nuanced, the process to develop a B2C or B2B strategy is largely the same.
- Embedding a sophisticated, content-led ecosystem is typically about change management first, content second.
- Content won't deliver the maximum yield until it's seamlessly integrated into your paid, owned and earned environment – across both physical and digital assets.
- To succeed, you must intimately understand, and be relentlessly relevant to, a discrete target audience(s).
- While not sexy, governance and operating models are equally as important as content creation and distribution.

FORMULA FOR CONTENT MARKETING SUCCESS

We've developed and refined a robust methodology to help you formulate a content strategy, operationalise it, and embed it.

Given that more than half of all B2B and B2C marketers expect to increase their content budget this year, it's essential they have a robust strategy to optimise the spend and deliver maximum return on the investment.

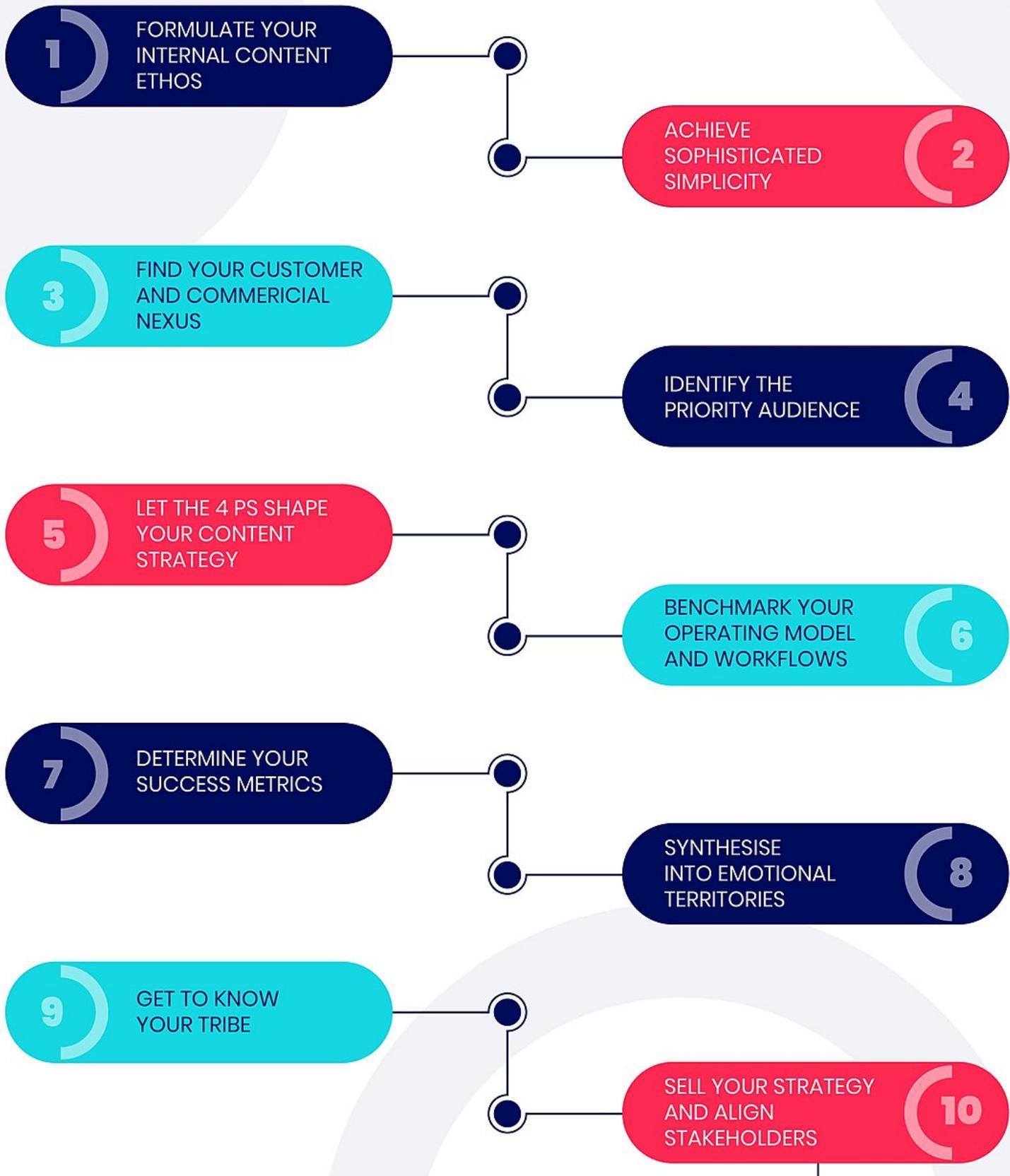
To help achieve this, we share the 20 steps that form the backbone of every strategy we create. In reality, a number of them happen in unison, and the process isn't linear.

However, the nucleus is a best practice approach for complex corporates to develop and integrate a cohesive strategy.

For smaller organisations, several steps can potentially be streamlined, but the essence of how to approach the strategy remains the same.

If you're setting off on a long drive, you don't just turn on the ignition and start driving aimlessly. You sit down with a map to work out which direction you'll go, how long it will take and where you'll end up. You need to have a plan from the outset. It's the same for content.

Hopefully, this guide will help you lay the strategic groundwork to draw people into your ecosystem, rather than yelling at them in an undifferentiated and irrelevant way.



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THE PROMISED LAND OF CONTENT MARKETING:

Winning hearts and wallets

A sophisticated content marketing strategy is a thing of beauty. Done well, it adds utility, guides, empowers, delights, and ultimately leads to sales.

It builds and engages a valuable tribe. And it's perpetually relevant to them – it doesn't interrupt.

Your tribe looks forward to engaging with your content, and willingly give you their data to power an integrated marketing ecosystem, enabling you to fuse push and pull marketing.

Content delivers tangible business outcomes, which are measured and understood across an organisation.

Content seamlessly integrates with paid activity – it fast tracks your ability to win hearts and minds, and to ultimately secure a greater share of wallet than those who sell on functional value alone.

The power of content to extend paid media effectiveness is reinforced by the 'godfathers of effectiveness', Les Binet and Peter Field, who state in [Marketing effectiveness in the digital era](#):

- Owned and earned media help you reach more people within your target market, increasing the effects on sales and profit.
- Campaigns that include owned online media are 13% more likely to report very large business effects than those that don't. Earned media appears to be even more powerful, boosting effectiveness by 26%.

Let us be clear: There's no dichotomy between paid, owned and earned. They're stronger together than apart, and we need to choreograph them appropriately to deliver the best short- and long-term results.

If TV is the 'reach nuclear bomb', and content is the delivery mechanism to drive a predetermined next step, then you need a unified strategy that assimilates all the levers at your disposal into a harmonious marketing ecosystem.



CONTENT CUTS THROUGH

The attention economy

Now more than ever, we live in an attention economy. We're bombarded with more stimuli than ever before, and attention is one of our scarcest commodities.

In 2007, a person living in a modernised city saw up to 5000 ad messages a day, compared with just 2000 a day in the late '70s. Today, that number has swelled to an estimated 10,000 ad messages a day.

Combine this with society's well-documented addiction to social media – and the fact these estimates don't include social – and it's clear we're living in an attention economy.

Now couple this with a study by the [Ehrenberg-Bass Institute](#) - quoted in *How Brands Grow* - that found 84% of advertising doesn't get noticed or remembered.

Unfortunately, many brands produce content that exacerbates these problems by focusing on itself, its products, and its services. Whether this is a conscious choice, unintended, or driven by internal pressures is debatable.



As Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute, puts it:
“Your customers don’t care about you, your products, or your services.
They care about themselves, their wants and their needs.”

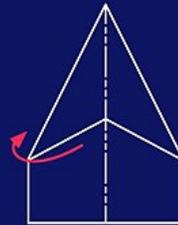
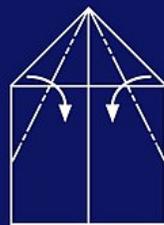
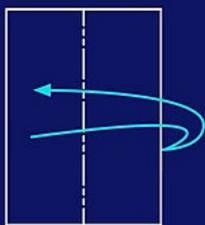
In contrast, the industry behemoths produce content that’s genuinely audience-centric. They view content as the glue – the linchpin of a broader engagement and acquisition strategy – that enables them to build and nurture a profitable audience.

Content marketing is the delivery mechanism to initially engage before driving a predetermined next step from a precise audience or segment.

*Content that doesn’t focus on your tribe is an advertisement.
It’s lazy and largely a waste of time, money and effort.*



THE 20 STEPS TO ACHIEVING CONTENT MARKETING UTOPIA





1. FORMULATE YOUR INTERNAL CONTENT ETHOS

Firstly, you need to develop a succinct internal content mission statement to help secure buy-in. It should articulate why the organisation will be 'doing' content, how it will deliver business goals, which customers will care, and how it will enhance their experience. This will inform everything you do from both a strategic and tactical perspective.

2. CONSOLIDATE TO ACHIEVE SOPHISTICATED SIMPLICITY

The abundance of marketing 'strategies' and inputs is something we see too regularly. Map all (often siloed) inputs, long-term strategic and short-term operational goals into one interconnected document. As a starting point, this should include key qualitative and quantitative insights, NPS, sales results and forecasts, customer segments, data and content performance.

3. FIND YOUR CUSTOMER AND COMMERCIAL NEXUS

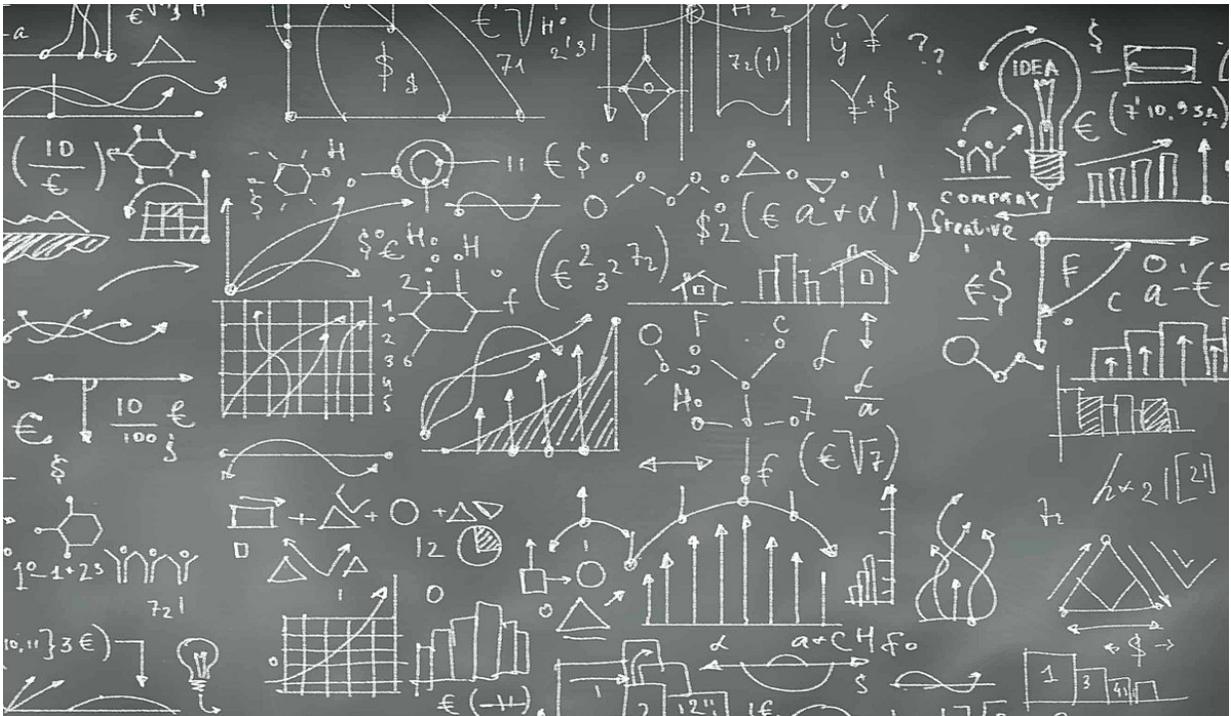


Be explicitly clear about what commercial outcomes your content strategy is designed to deliver. Typically, this includes outcomes like leads, acquisition, retention, cross-sell and salience. Next, weigh and prioritise each outcome. It's vital that you're crystal clear on the business objectives you're trying to achieve before you start work; otherwise, you're simply doing stuff for the sake of it.

4. IDENTIFY THE PRIORITY AUDIENCE



Determine whom you're going after, and why. Are you trying to nurture a discrete audience, target the segment that's most profitable in the short-term, or attract customers with the highest lifetime value? You need to be specific. Women aged 20-55 isn't a target audience, it's half the female population. Typically, a workshop is the most effective way to secure alignment.



5. LET THE 4 Ps SHAPE YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

It's imperative to understand your product's strengths and weaknesses, as well as how well it's placed against competitors – and their content. If a product's pricing or supply chain doesn't stack up against competitors, the content alone isn't the panacea. This should inform the emotional territories you target – promotion. It's also critically important to understand that competitors will often be outside of your category, particularly when competing for attention.

6. BENCHMARK YOUR OPERATING MODEL AND WORKFLOWS

Assess your current content marketing maturity and operating model against people (capability and team structures), platforms (martech, CRM, CMS etc), and processes (decision-making frameworks, governance). Organisations typically need to evolve how they operate – i.e. a new cross-functional planning and collaboration process at an enterprise level. Identify challenges upfront so you can solve them in the strategy.

7. DETERMINE YOUR SUCCESS METRICS



Once you're clear what success looks like, think about measurement. You don't need to solve how you'll measure it yet, but you need clarity on what the measures will be. Too often, this gets missed. Vanity metrics alone aren't worth the paper they're printed on. If you can't show how content impacts revenue, it's unlikely that you'll be able to have a robust conversation with the CFO and secure the buy-in to drive change and scale.

8. SYNTHESISE INFO INTO HYPOTHESIS EMOTIONAL TERRITORIES



Only now are you ready to start developing your hypothesis customer-led content (and broader marketing) territories. These pillars should synthesise all of the inputs above to build 'life moments' that enable you to change the conversation and lead with emotional connection or utility. They're fuelled by emotional and rational content that's strategically important to your business and your customers. Detail the proposed positioning for each territory, and the discrete tribes* they're targeting, and map these back to products, services and organisational proof points. You may include an overarching territory – product or category-led – that's embedded within each pillar.



9. GET TO KNOW YOUR TRIBE

Personas and demographics are ineffective. If you want to ‘win’ at content-led marketing, you need a much deeper understanding of your audience. Engage them based on their interests, wants and needs at various stages of the journey. To achieve this, you need to understand your tribe’s needs and pain points. And then tailor content, experiences and a journey whereby you connect on both an emotional and functional level.

10. SELL YOUR STRATEGY AND ALIGN STAKEHOLDERS

Prepare your ‘pre-strategy strategy’, and sell it to the business. Too many organisations try to talk to people without their permission, about stuff they don’t care about. You must ensure you’ve secured buy-in to deliver a customer-led strategy that engages via ‘intent/interest-based marketing’ – and has been activated through owned assets, and supported via an integrated ecosystem. The most important element is to secure buy-in to the hypothesis territories before you start crunching data.

11. GAIN INSIGHT INTO CUSTOMER INTENT



Stop guessing and instead understand the customer mindset – and their journey – through first-, second- and third-party data. Search data, in particular, provides a window into the true intent of what people are searching for, at different stages of the journey. This enables you to unlock trends, user behaviour and syntax of keywords to gain a better picture of who you should be targeting, as well as when and how. Synthesise all of these data points to evolve the hypothesis engagement territories, tribes and external positioning. These insights should be extended across all paid, owned and earned channels to fast-track acquisition and retention priorities.

12. MAP THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY AND ANALYSE YOUR COMPETITORS



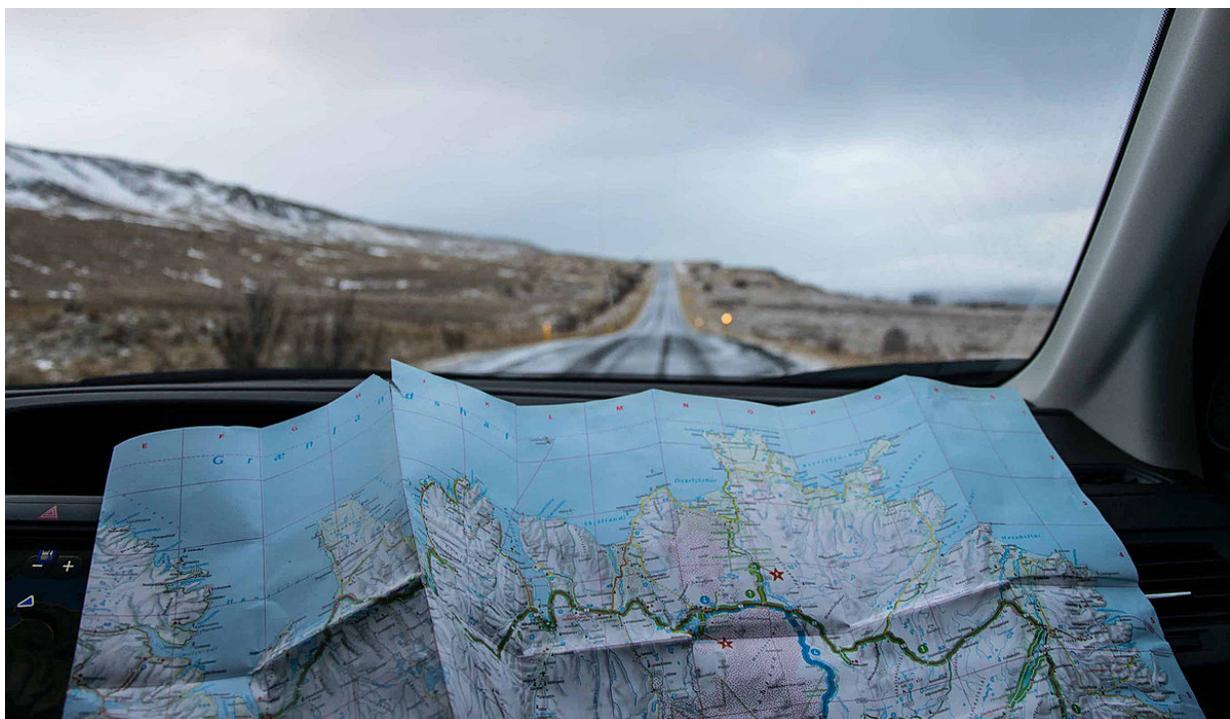
The next piece of the puzzle is to understand your competitors for attention – not just within your category. Dissect what you can and can't own from an organic perspective. This won't preclude you from targeting opportunities you can't rank for. Instead, it will let you make informed decisions around the media spend required, given that you won't generate free, qualified leads via search.

13. FORMULATE YOUR CONTENT HIERARCHY

Once you're clear where you're going, you can map out the best route to get you there, to stick with our car-trip analogy. This means developing a data-led landing page(s), content hierarchy, interdependency and user flow to ensure your audience engages with your content – and ultimately takes the action you want them to.

14. AUDIT YOUR EXISTING CONTENT

Before producing new content, it's imperative to audit your existing assets. This should include elements like goal achievement, alignment to consumer needs, quality, SEO and performance. Typically, an audit reveals giant swathes of content that don't match consumer intent, as well as unnecessary duplication. This fact base details what content could be repurposed, consolidated, optimised or removed, and helps to reduce production costs.

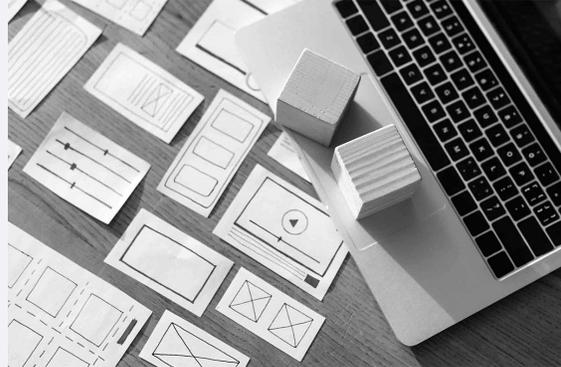


15. UNIFY YOUR SEARCH (SEO/M) STRATEGY



A broader SEO audit helps you to understand your website's performance and identify quick-win optimisations before new content goes live. This should focus on website structure, backlinks, analytics, on-page factors, and speed and response. This is essential to drive free, sustainable traffic to your website, and to make your performance marketing far more efficient and effective. Ultimately, you should leverage the data-led insights to unify your SEM and SEO.

16. GAUGE YOUR WEBSITE'S USABILITY



Ensure your site delivers what customers are looking for, and effectively matches usability to intent. This ensures you're not wasting money on marketing that doesn't deliver business and customer outcomes due to a poor onsite experience. Assess things like how traffic engages with each page, common user pathways, and any issues that are causing a loss in conversions. You need a coherent, modular and compelling content architecture – not dead ends.

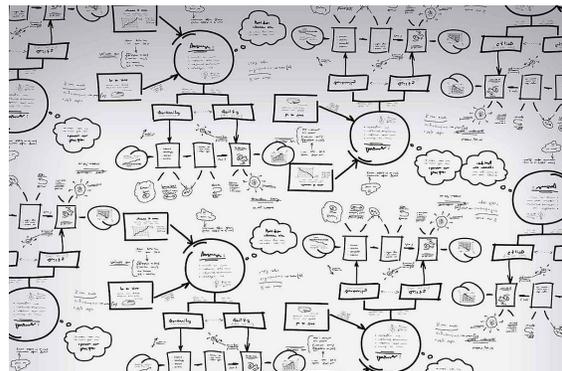
17. SET OUT YOUR CONTENT PLAN

First, lock down the content's tone of voice, and your editorial calendar and production cadence. Next, work with a journalist to 'consumerise' the SEO research and develop an editorial (written, visual and interactive) plan. This should include evergreen, innovative and high-risk (and potentially high-reward) content. It should also capture business initiatives or spikes in search behaviour throughout the year. Content should be developed across all stages of the customer journey. Don't deliver a great strategy and low-quality content – that makes both elements largely redundant.



18. SEEK CHANNELS TO DISTRIBUTE AND AMPLIFY

It's essential to consider distribution channels to attract and retain a clearly defined audience. This should include elements like social media, EDMs, third party, and earned media at a minimum. An amplification budget is required as these channels are pay to play. Ensure you have all relevant tags and pixels in place to drive results. In the mid-term, your goal should be to build a converged operating model that integrates paid, owned and earned across physical and digital, with content as the linchpin of this ecosystem.





19. EMBED THE STRATEGY

Deliver a sophisticated and actionable strategy that details the burning platform, customer insights, market diagnosis, future direction, and success indicators. Ensure that it articulates brand territories mapped to key target audiences, journeys and products; creates interconnectivity with the marketing strategy; and lays the foundations for mid-term scale and sophistication. Equally, be sure to detail the operating model evolution across people, processes and platforms.

20. EXECUTE YOUR ROADMAP TO MONETISATION

The data-led insights are a reference for everything you do – from briefing creative agencies, informing SEM, writing social copy and mapping customer journeys. Develop a clear execution roadmap to monetise emotional connection across paid, owned and earned channels. This should include a blueprint of how your brand can prime for acquisition and retention marketing across physical and digital channels. This document should be a living, breathing organism – measure, review and iterate.

What's with that 'ubiquity' thingamajig?

Customer-led marketing is at our core, and we believe that sophisticated marketing needs to be ever-present to cut through. You need to enable customers to engage with you when, where and how they want. This is 'ubiquity', and we believe in it –
it's not a catchphrase.

It's a heartbeat. It's a tattoo. It's the blood running through our veins.

Because we push the envelope and live and die by our results, **leading brands partner with us to turbocharge their marketing.** We're talking end-to-end, from strategy to execution.



ULab helped us build our content strategy and establish a solid foundation from which we're able to view the power and opportunity of content differently.

Identifying the areas where we could differentiate has enabled us to engage more deeply and meaningfully with our members, driving trust and delivering brand awareness to a wider audience.

We truly appreciated the way ULab got stuck in. They feel like a partner, equally invested in the end result, rather than an agency – one step removed.

I'm so glad they're who we chose to help us build a roadmap, set us on this journey and are still there to guide us on our way.



Emily Geier
Senior Content Marketing Manager
HCF



Want to become
a content marketing
powerhouse? Hit us
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